



NEWSLETTER: MARCH 2023

Mt St Helens - Then and Now, Heather Ducat, Feb 8, 2023

This was Heather's 21st talk to us, all of them have been fascinating and informative.

Heather and Robert and their young children went to the USA and Canada for the first time in 1984. Mt St Helens had erupted only 4 years earlier, so Heather was very interested to see it. Mt St Helens is one of 12 active or dormant volcanoes in the Cascade Range in the NW of the USA. In the last 250 years 7 peaks in the range have been active. It was named by George Vancouver in 1792, but its indigenous name of Smoky Mountain is more fitting.

The range is part of the 'Pacific Ring of Fire' with volcanic activity and earthquakes in countries bordering the ocean. An almost complete ring of volcanoes exists parallel to the subduction zones around the Pacific margin, along the west coasts of South & North America, curving through the Aleutian Islands, Kamchatka Peninsula, Japan, Philippines, islands of western Pacific and New Zealand.

Cascade volcanoes are steep-sided, composite cones with alternating layers of ash, pumice, lava and rock, forming unstable slopes. Thick magma with dissolved gases makes eruptions very explosive.

Mt St Helens was a snow-covered symmetrical cone 2950m high, before it erupted on May 18, 1980. It had been monitored since 1969, along with other mountains in the range, such as Mt Rainier. For the 2 months before there had been tremors, and the authorities directed residents and visitors to evacuate the area the day before. If it hadn't been for that, a lot more would have died than the 57 who did.

A 5.1 mag earthquake triggered the partial collapse and landslide of the upper slopes, followed by the explosive eruption with a pyroclastic cloud of rock, gas and ash. The eruption only took 27 seconds, but reduced the height of the mountain by 401m. Heather had astonishing photos from a Time Life book, showing the sequence second by second. It was the equivalent of 500 Hiroshima bombs.

The blast was directed to the north and damaged or destroyed forest for an area of 40 km by 25 km. Trees were ripped out of the ground or snapped off, leaving tree trunks scattered like matchsticks. An ashcloud rose 24 km into the atmosphere before collapsing, dropping huge quantities of rocks and ash. It continued for 12 hours; the NE wind carried fine ash to the East coast in 3 days, and around the world in 17 days. This was followed by a mudflow of debris, which was channelled into rivers leaving hummocky debris of rocks, trees, ash, ice from shattered glaciers, destroyed roads, bridges and cabins up to 140m deep.



Mt St Helens Before the Eruption



The Eruption – Photo by Gary Rosenquist, Time-Life



Windy Ridge 5 km away 1984. Photo by Heather Ducat

Most of the damaged area is preserved in the Mt St Helens National Volcanic Monument, leaving it to natural regeneration. When they visited in 1984 it was freezing cold and totally silent, with the trees still scattered as they fell. The wider area of national forest was replanted by hand- 18.5 million trees.

Heather and Robert returned in 2011, 31 years after the eruption. Gopher tunnelling and returning elk and deer had helped to mix ash and soil, aiding in regeneration. Wildlife observed included Beaver, Least Chipmunk, Ground Squirrel, Calliope Hummingbird and Spruce Goose. Wildflowers were spectacular—Foxgloves, Lupins, Tigerlily, Daisies, Penstemon, Indian Paintbrush and wild strawberries.—**Judy Smart**



Penstemon, 9 km. Away, 2011. Photo by Heather Ducat

Cannons Creek Excursion December 17th 2022

Mild & sunny, with a light south-east breeze. Attending - William, Leeanne, Roger, Velimir, Heather.

A few of us escaped the social whirl before Christmas and enjoyed a morning at Cannons Creek, near Warneet on the northern coast of Western Port.

(*Leptospermum mysinoides*). The track ends at a bluff of orange, iron-rich Warneet Sand which overlooks Rutherford Inlet and Warneet.



Photo by Heather Ducat



Photo by Heather Ducat

From the end of the road a boardwalk, built by the local residents, gives access between the saltmarsh and mangrove fringe and ends at Watsons Point, with a jetty and a few relics of fishing activity. The falling tide gave Velimir access to the muddy shore with crabs and a variety of shells of interest. Also of interest on the saltmarsh were clumps of Creeping Brookweed (*Samolus repens*) with its little white flowers. To the west, the track is through a narrow strip of woodland, with Gippsland Manna Gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis* ssp *pryoriana*) which is a species favoured by koalas, Black Sheoak (*Allocasuarina littoralis*), Cherry Ballart (*Exocarpus cupressiformis*), Prickly Tea-tree (*Leptospermum continentale*) and Heath Tea-tree

The highlight of our modest birdlist was a delightful view of a Sacred Kingfisher and surprisingly few waterbirds - only 5.

Bird List: Little Pied Cormorant, White-faced Heron, White Ibis, Chestnut Teal, Silver Gull, Swamp Harrier, Crested Pigeon, Common Bronzewing, Spotted Turtledove, Eastern Rosella, Rainbow Lorikeet, Galah, Sacred Kingfisher, Welcome Swallow, Grey Fantail, Grey Shrike-thrush, Brown Thornbill, Noisy Miner, Red Wattlebird, Brush Wattlebird, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, White-eared Honeyeater, Spotted Pardalote, Striated Pardalote, European Goldfinch, Magpie-lark, Aust. Magpie, Starling.
—**Heather Ducat.**

Western Treatment Plant 11th February 2023

Although this was scheduled as a general excursion, it was always going to be about birds. The vegetation is as you would expect after more than a century as an industrial and agricultural site—trees are pretty much confined to fenced windbreaks, while paddock vegetation is mostly composed of pasture grasses and weeds—not that the birds mind. The shelter belts are attractive enough for a variety of raptors, while many smaller birds enjoy the cover of the shrubby weeds and the seeds of the pasture grasses.



Australian Hobby. Photo by Lee Denis

It is nearer the water that a variety of indigenous reeds and rushes thickly line the edges of the channels and lagoons.

The word on the street was that birds were scarce at the Treatment Plant, because the wet end to the previous year has provided a great many options elsewhere. Certainly it was true that wader numbers were well down on their usual level, but there were still plenty of birds to see.

We were hosted for the day by our member Rog, who has a permit and knows the area well. Forecasts of 30 degree heat turned out to be a false alarm; the day was mild, mostly sunny, but with a blustery wind. There were a couple of other groups touring around in convoys, as well as a few individuals intent on bird photography. A certain amount of exchange of intelligence occurred when we met these groups.

Our first good sighting didn't require us to leave the car—a good view of an Australian Hobby perched on a tree leaning over the road. Raptors were not much in evidence on the day, others seen being Swamp Harrier, Black Kite and Brown Falcon.



Brolgas. Photo by Lee Denis

The only migratory waders seen were Red-necked Stint, Curlew Sandpiper and Greenshank, but there were quite a few other water birds including an abundance of Black-winged Stilts, the usual Coots and Purple Swamphens, and ducks—mostly Chestnut Teal, with some Grey Teal and Shelducks, and a very few Black Ducks, Australasian Shoveller and a single Pink-eared Duck seen. Four of the five Cormorants found around the Bay were present, the exception being Black-faced. Both Royal and Yellow-billed Spoonbills were common.

Bush birds included an abundance of White-fronted Chats, Superb Fairy-wrens, Welcome Swallows, quite a few Australian Pipits, along with Willie Wagtails, Magpie-larks and Magpies. Little Grassbirds were heard in the reeds all day but only fleeting glimpses were obtained; similar for Australian Reed-warblers. Golden-headed Cisticolas were more common. The only honeyeater seen was Singing Honeyeater.



Golden-headed Cisticola. Photo by Lee Denis

Highlights for the day for our group: a group of five Brolgas, rarely seen on our side of the Bay; a Spotted Crake; a pair of Red-capped Plovers; a group of Banded Stilts; and two Terns, White-winged Black and Fairy. Cape Barren Geese were seen in numbers. Final bird tally was 61.—**Lee Denis**

Imperial Jezebel

Finding the pupae of Imperial Jezebel (*Delias harpalyce*) butterflies enabled me to see the completion of their lifecycle. I had seen the larvae on a low hanging drooping mistletoe (*Amyema pendula*) found on a silver-leaf stringybark (*Eucalyptus cephalocarpa*), in Langwarrin a few years ago, but had not come across their pupal stage before.



A newly hatched Imperial Jezebel propped on garden lavender.

It seems that the pupal cases are black in the winter and orange in the summer. This is likely to be due to heat management and it was interesting that the cluster of pupae that I found (on October 10) had both colours attached to the web curtain that they all hang from. The skin from the last larval instar is left just outside the pupal case, a bit like leaving the shoes at the door!

Shortly after the adult butterflies leave the pupal case, they deposit a red liquid from their abdomen, something I was not aware of having not hatched butterflies before. This is called meconium and is what is left of the caterpillar that was not needed in forming the adult. It is stored in the intestine during the metamorphosis and then expelled after they emerge.

Females are darker in the colour of their upper wings, which I guess is why they often seem to be black when seen flitting around mistletoe, their larval foodplant, in the tops of trees. As Lee has mentioned, these butterflies seem to have been around in large numbers this year. The pupae I found were also in drooping mistletoe (*Amyema pendula*). All of the pupae had adult butterflies emerge.

Whilst a common butterfly, they are stunning looking and interesting to see and understand their lifecycle.—**Text & photos: Rog Standen**



The pupae of an Imperial Jezebel butterfly, showing both black (winter) and orange (summer) forms.



Imperial Jezebel larvae feeding on drooping mistletoe in Langwarrin FFR.

Birding Reports

December 2022 – Langwarrin Flora & Fauna Reserve:

Our regular December visit always serves as a combined birding and orchid excursion. Birds can be a bit hit and miss—if you’re in the right place at the right time it can be good. On this day the weather was a bit threatening to start (the threat was realised at lunchtime) but the birds were about.

We began on the Warrandyte Rd end of the SEC Track, where our first objective was looking for the Tongue and Horned orchids that are generally found there; they were late, with only a few in bud. We had to make do with the carpet of Fairies Aprons (*Utrichularia dichotoma*) in the flooded ground beside the track. For once the birds were more abundant, though pretty much standard—Rufous Whistler and Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike still around, the usual honeyeaters: White-eared, New Holland, Red and Little Wattlebirds, Eastern Spinebill. No Yellow-faced Honeyeaters were seen. Pied Currawongs seem to have settled in over the last few years, joining their Grey cousins. Magpie-lark and Eastern Rosella are usually seen on the edges of the Reserve, and Eastern Yellow Robins are always a welcome sight.



Duck Orchid

After looking in vain for Mistletoebirds at Mistletoe Junction we did manage to find a couple of Large Duck Orchids (*Caleana major*) on the Military Track; these also were late, usually being in flower in October. A few Common Bird Orchids (*Chiloglottis valida*) were still in flower on the same track. Birds were spotted sporadically, including Brown Thornbill, Spotted Pardalote, a pair of Common Bronzewing on the track, Sulphur-crested Cockatoos and Rainbow Lorikeets. Our final count was 28 birds, and, with the addition of a couple of Rosy Hyacinth Orchids (*Dipodium roseum*) in bud, 5 orchids.

February 2023: Frankston NCR

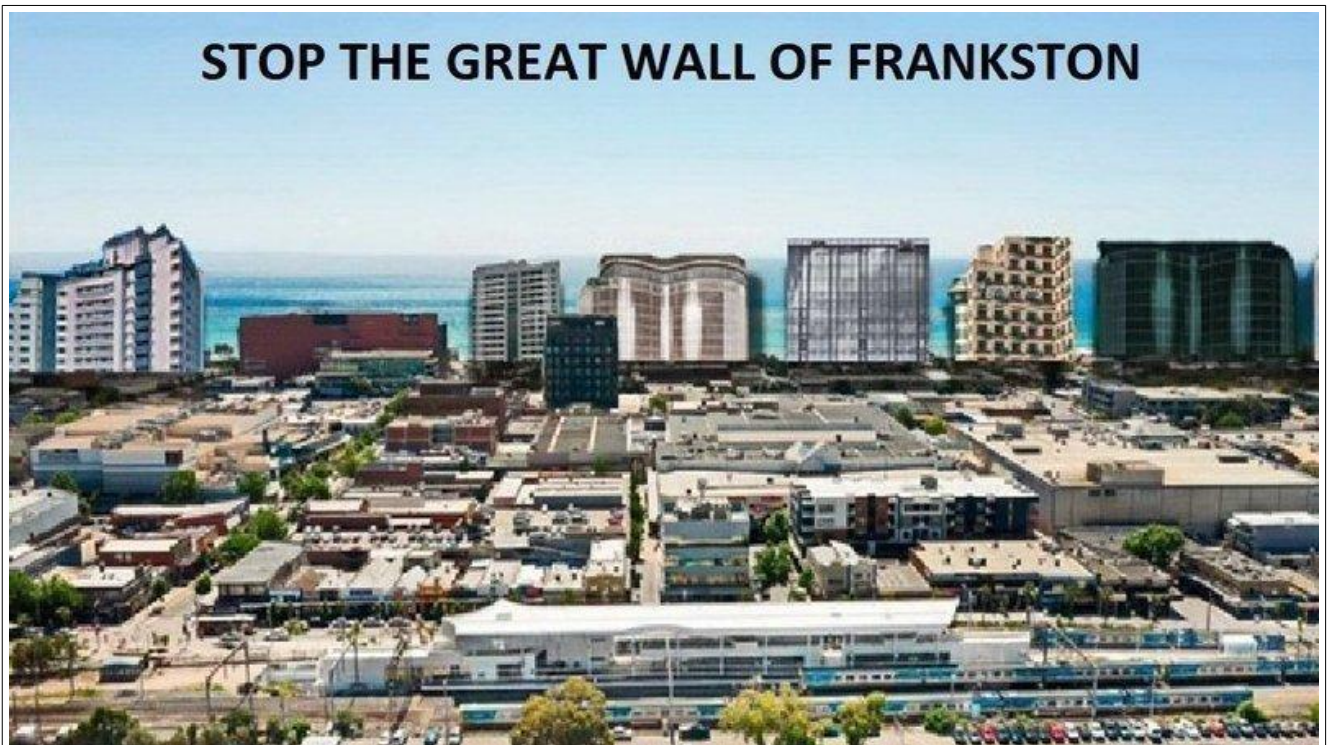
Nine members enjoyed this excursion at the Frankston Nature Conservation Reserve, otherwise known as Frankston Reservoir—a reserve of two halves, the western side (Heathland Circuit) being mostly indigenous heathland, albeit with a lot of exotic species, particularly Bluebell Creeper (*Billardiera heterophylla*, formerly *Sollya*). The eastern side (Kookaburra Circuit) is largely exotics including Cedar Wattle, Radiata Pine and a variety of other introduced wattles including Acacia prominens.

We began on the Heathland Circuit where there were the usual bush birds, plus the colony of Bell Miners that took up residence there some time ago. Very few birds on the water, only a Black Duck and some Dusky Moorhens. All up 29 for this circuit.

Later on the Kookaburra Circuit there were very few birds, but eventually we added Yellow-faced Honeyeater and Red-browed Finch to the list. On returning across the dam wall a few more birds had arrived on the water—Great and Little Pied Cormorants, and Silver Gulls—to take our tally for the day to 34.

Also observed were numerous butterflies, mostly Common Brown and Shouldered Brown, a very large Wood Moth, and a Garden Skink.

Bird List For FNCR 6th February 2023	
Pacific Black Duck	Bell Miner
Little Pied Cormorant	Noisy Miner
Great Cormorant	Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Dusky Moorhen	New Holland Honeyeater
Silver Gull	Eastern Spinebill
Spotted Dove	Eastern Yellow Robin
Common Bronzewing	Rufous Whistler
Crested Pigeon	Grey Shrike-thrush
Little Corella	Magpie-Lark
Rainbow Lorikeet	Grey Fantail
Eastern Rosella	Grey Butcherbird
Laughing Kookaburra	Australian Magpie
Superb Fairy-wren	Pied Currawong
Spotted Pardalote	Red-browed Finch
Brown Thornbill	Welcome Swallow
Red Wattlebird	Common Blackbird
Little Wattlebird	Common Myna



Frankston City Council wants to revitalise the Nepean Highway in our CBD, as part of their 20 year vision for Frankston. So far we have the unloved South East Water building/ monolith, between Kananook Creek and the Highway, as promoted by Frankston City Council. It is a mere 6 stories high. What is being proposed and endorsed by FCC councillors, is 14 story office or apartment buildings, between Nepean Highway and Kananook Creek. One is already approved but being taken to VCAT.

The residents of the towers will have nice views of our beloved beach. The residents of Frankston will have an eyesore, with wind tunnels and shadowing of the foreshore parkland. They will cut the rest of Frankston off from the beach visually. It will be a down market version of the Gold Coast.

Please sign this petition, join Frankston Beach Association, and consider contacting your Councillors.

<https://www.change.org/p/stop-the-great-wall-of-frankston>

Peninsula Field Naturalists Club Inc

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month with a field trip the following Saturday. Further information and current Programme of Activities can be found at our website.

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Annual Subs due July

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Newsletter edited by Lee Denis

www.peninsulafieldnaturalists.org.au