

Newsletter 136 December 2005

Description

Dear Friends,

Well, December may be the first month of summer but the rain keeps falling and the storms keep rolling through. However it was dry and partly cloudy for our Christmas ramble around Donchi Hill. The wind kept the flies and mossies away so it was very pleasant. We found some late flowering Leek Orchids, lots of Onion Orchids, Blue Pincushions, in various shades from sky blue to pink, abundant Finger Flower, Sweet Bursaria and huge stands of Plume Grass swaying in the breeze on a block which was burnt this year. The eucalypts were crowned with new growth and some White Box branchlets on the ground had small buds, hopefully a promise of a good flowering. The bird list was impressive for our walk around the Peake's Track loop. Highlights being White-winged Trillers, Hooded Robins, Turquoise Parrots, many of them young ones, White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike, Bee-eater, Tree Martins hawkng insects over Lappin's Dam, screeching Little lorikeets and most exciting of all two Barking Owls. A single very active Yellow-footed Antechinus, a hare and Kangaroos made up the mammal list, and a couple of skinks made the reptile list.

Lappins Dam was the tea venue. Jennifer had a pot of delicious soup which she kindly shared with everyone. As it was quite cold by six o'clock and several members could not stay we abandoned the spotlight walk. Oddly enough we have not had good weather for our Christmas meeting for several years - maybe it's climate change - or just bad luck.

The next day: This was the challenge bird count for 2005 and the two days birding could not have been different. No wind and a warmer day produced many smaller birds which were lacking on Saturday. Among the gems were Sitellas, White-throated and Western Gerygone, Weebills, Little Thornbills, Speckled Warbler, a female Red-capped Robin, a single vocal Speckled Warbler and a Leaden Flycatcher to complete the list. An enjoyable encounter with a family of Yellow-footed Antechinus was a highlight of the afternoon. A keen spotter focused on a dead tree with a good looking hollow in it only to see an Antechinus sunning itself in the entrance, while we watched from a distance another was spotted running down the trunk to the hollow and soon there were three or four small animals with a larger one presumed to be the mother. This sight was one to be treasured.

Cuckoos: many remarked how scarce cuckoos are this season and we thought this was probably due to the scarcity of smaller birds.

Around the Park:

Dollarbirds have returned and are breeding in the red gums along Black Dog Creek. Only a few Bee-eaters and Woodswallows have been reported but Sacred Kingfishers seem to be doing well judging by the calling. An interesting specimen of a Little Red Flying Fox was brought to me. Unfortunately it had been caught on a barbed wire fence so had a lingering death. The last record of this species in Chiltern

was on a Friends spotlight walk in April 1995 on Battery Hill Road. Apparently a colony of them has been recorded recently near Wangaratta.

Breeding birds have had a tough time through the storms. One clutch of Restless Flycatchers was blown from the nest in a wild south westerly wind. Fortunately they were almost ready to fledge and the parents fed them as they hid in the long roadside grass (thank goodness for that patch of protective Phalaris!) A couple of days later they were all together high up out of harm's way. Young Turquoise Parrots are out and about, the Rufous Songlarks are vocal and hopefully their ground nests will be spared flooding as the rain continues to fall.

Golden Everlastings and Finger Flowers are the big show at present and along Tuan Track and Bull Ant Track there are some delightful cobalt blue Tall Lobelia, *Lobelia gibbosa*, in flower. Grasses are seeding and the tall Silver Top Wallaby-Grass, *Joycea pallida*, is particularly attractive with its showy red anthers hanging from the flowers.

The Woodland Leek Orchid, *Prasophyllum validum*, (it now has name of its own) was in good numbers this year. Statewide, Chiltern has the largest population of this uncommon orchid.

Rainfall: November: 102.2 mm over 6 days. Year to date: 810.6 mm over 104 days. Yes, Chiltern suffered quite a lot of flood damage as 75mm of the rain fell in less than two hours causing drains to be at capacity plus. I am grateful to Paul at the post office who has provided these monthly rainfall records for the information of Friends.

NOTE: THE NEXT NEWSLETTER WILL BE ISSUED IN FEBRUARY AND WILL BE ACCOMPANIED BY THE 2006 PROGRAMME. The committee will meet in mid-January to arrange the programme. If you have suggestions for activities please let me have them in writing/email.

Thank you to everyone who has given time to Friends this year. Although we are only a small working group much has been achieved. Wishing you all the compliments of the season, be safe in whatever you do. Eileen

NEXT MEETING SUNDAY FEBRUARY 5TH MEET AT CHILTERN POST OFFICE 9.00AM. We will be putting up nest boxes. BYO lunch, chair, binocs, sunscreen, hat etc. Contact: Eileen 57 261 484

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