

Newsletter 304 April 2021

Description

Friends of Chiltern Mt Pilot NP Newsletter #304 April 2021

Dear Friends,

The April field day was postponed by a week due to Easter and the weather was particularly cold. Twenty-three people gathered at the Chiltern Post Office and then moved to the Donchi Hill area off the Rutherglen Road. The first mammal box featured a tuan snugly curled up in a nest box.



Tuan in nest – photo taken with pole camera/phone: Mick Webster

The new pole camera with a wide-angle lens proved highly effective for inspecting mammal boxes without needing a ladder. Having images available on phones enabled everyone to see what was inside without needing to be close to the tree.



Pole camera in action – photo: Neville Bartlett

Other boxes in the area were checked with one containing two Krefft's Gliders, *Petaurus notatus* (formerly known as Sugar Gliders) and two unoccupied boxes that clearly had been used by tuans.

Australian Bagmoth – *Cebysa leucotelus*, Family Psychidae – Eileen Collins

The caterpillars of this species of bag moth feed on lichen, hence the other common name of Lichen Moth. They can be found in a variety of sites that support lichen such as lichen covered tree trunks, rocks, fence posts. The caterpillar lives in a silken case which is about two centimetres long and is camouflaged with lichen fragments. Only the head and thorax emerge from the case as the caterpillar moves to feed.



Photo: female by Dick Andrews





Photo: male by Peter Marriot

Thanks to Ken Walker of Museum of Victoria for his guidance and to Peter Marriot for his photo of the male moth.

References: Atlas of Living Australia www.ala.org.au and Moths of Australia by Bernard D'Abrera F.R.E.S

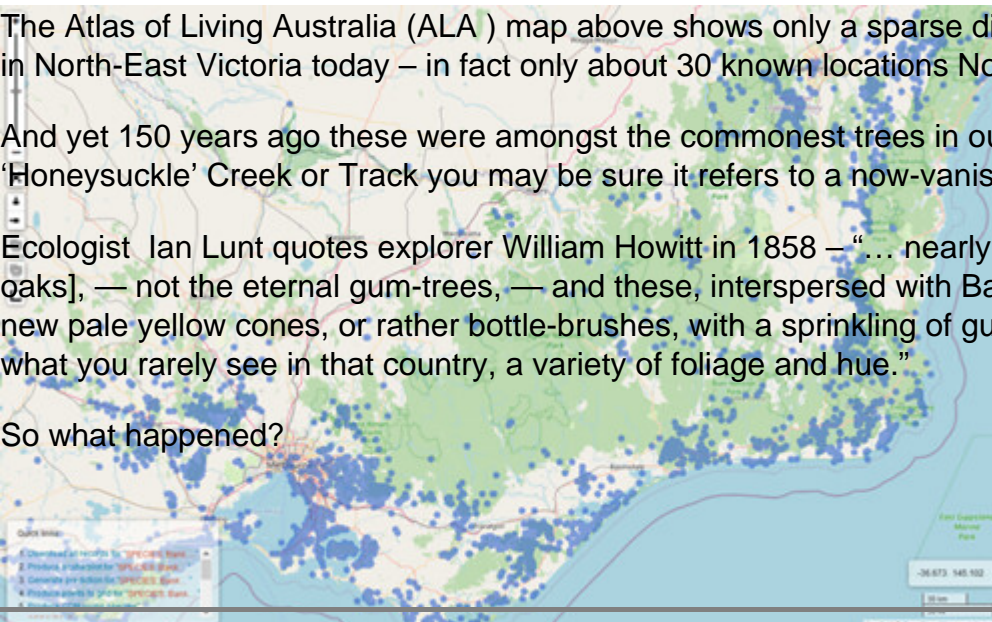
Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*) – a vital missing tree in our forests – Mick Webster

The Atlas of Living Australia (ALA) map above shows only a sparse distribution of *Banksia marginata* in North-East Victoria today – in fact only about 30 known locations North of the Divide.

And yet 150 years ago these were amongst the commonest trees in our forests – wherever you find a 'Honeysuckle' Creek or Track you may be sure it refers to a now-vanished Banksia woodland.

Ecologist Ian Lunt quotes explorer William Howitt in 1858 – "... nearly all the trees were shiacks [she oaks], — not the eternal gum-trees, — and these, interspersed with Banksias, now in fresh foliage, and new pale yellow cones, or rather bottle-brushes, with a sprinkling of gums and golden wattles, gave what you rarely see in that country, a variety of foliage and hue."

So what happened?



Well, according to Lunt, the Banksias disappeared not because they were useful, but because they were viewed as useless – seen as untidy, their timber too soft for construction purposes and not much better than kindling for the fire-place – so much better to let the multi-purpose Eucalypts take their place.

Unfortunately many people didn't realise that the Banksias provide plentiful food, both as nectar and seeds for a wide variety of birds and mammals which are also, (not coincidentally), vanishing from our forests –

Howitt again "...the dogs in continual excitement with the noises of vast numbers of parrots, paroquets, and wattle-birds, which were feasting on the honey of the Banksia flowers."



Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*) flowers Photo: Mick Webster



Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*) seed and pods – Photo: Mick Webster



Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*) deer damage to healthy tree Photo: Mick Webster



Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*) healthy seedling inside a guard – photo: Mick Webster

In our whole National Park, despite extensive expeditions to find more, we know of only about 20 mature Banksia trees and less than a dozen natural seedlings in two small areas on the Northern side of the Mt Pilot range.

So over the last few years a major project has developed with Friends, assisted by Trust for Nature and local Landcare groups, to increase the number of these iconic plants up to a level where they will become a sustainable population into the future. There have been setbacks (wombat incursions, drought, etc) but this year at least our 150 or so seedlings in the Park seem to be doing well, and the mature trees are flowering extremely well. We will be keeping an eye on them!

Ref – Ian Lunt <https://ianluntecology.com/2013/10/13/forgotten-woodlands-future-landscapes/>

Acoustic Monitoring – Simon Bennett

I have been evaluating several weatherproof sound recording devices that can be used to listen for animal vocalizations. These recorders, could for example be placed in the bush to record calls made by owl, gliders, honeyeaters or any species of interest.

The device can be programmed to listen at various times of the day and night, and in specific frequency ranges to target certain species. These devices can monitor sounds for a week, or in some cases up two months before requiring data downloads and fresh batteries.



One device is of particular interest: the AudioMoth <https://www.openacousticdevices.info/audiomoth> because of it's small size, reasonable price and that it can record in the normal hearing range of humans and birds and many other animals and was well in the ultrasonic range used by bats.

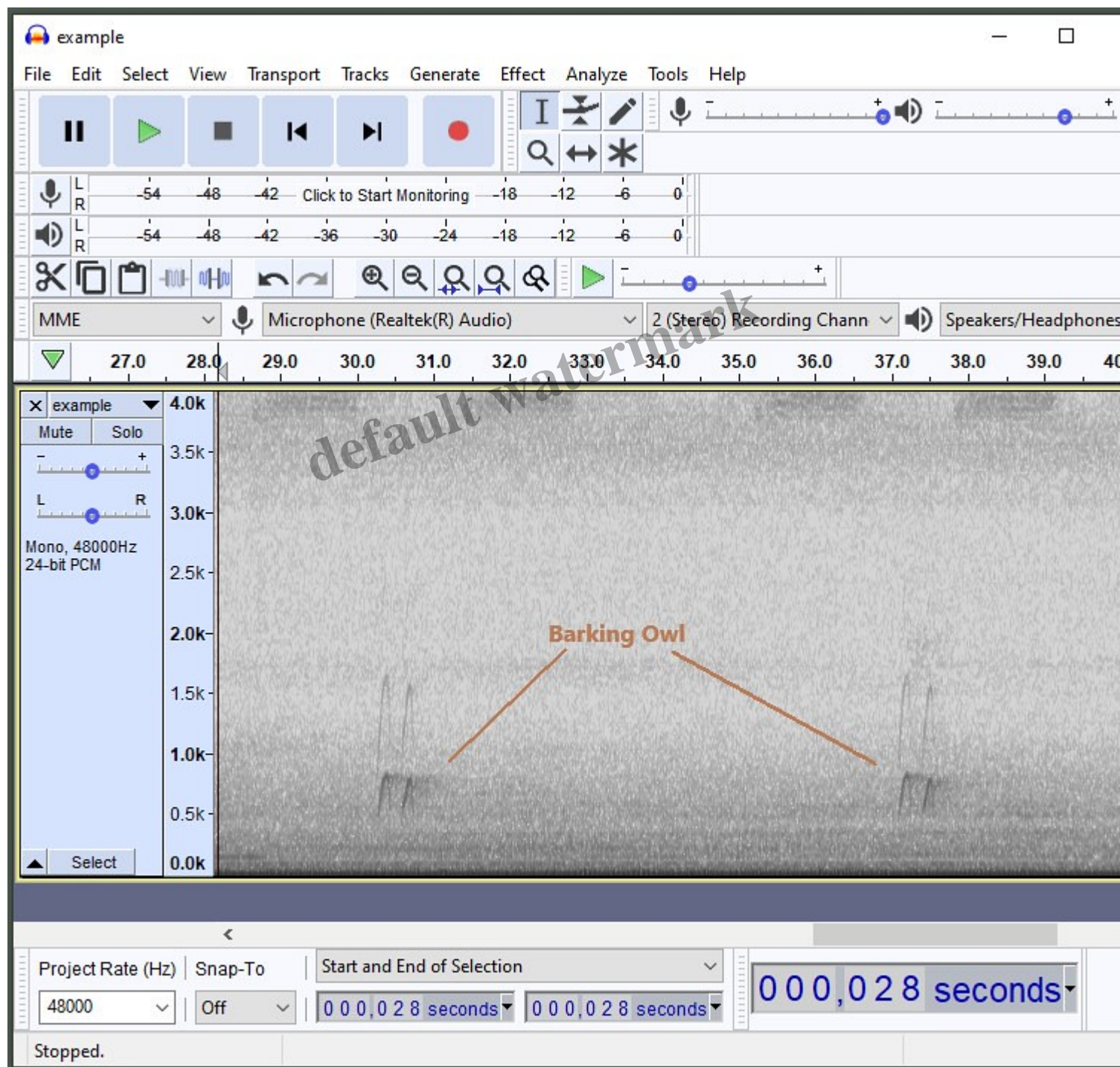
Above is a photograph of the AudioMoth with an AA battery for scale – photo: Simon Bennett.

A major issue with these devices is the amount of audio data that is captured, and the need for computers to scan the audio files and isolate the sounds of target species. This is a rapidly evolving

field, with some very sophisticated methodologies being used.

An initial assessment is that personal computers can undertake many of these tasks. A very simple method is to turn the sound into a spectrogram: a visual characterisation of an animal's call. This allows rapid visual scanning of say an hour-long sound file to see if a species of interest calls. There are examples of computer programs that automatically isolate these calls quite reliably.

Here is an example of a spectrogram of the wook-wook call of a Barking Owl recorded on private land.



Barking Owl wook-wook call – Simon Bennett

Around the Park

Recent visitors to the Park have reported seeing several species of birds at Bartley's Block.



Rose Robin (*Petroica rosea*) photo: Andris Niedra



Red capped Robin (*Petroica goodenovii*) photo: Andris Niedra



Speckled Warbler (*Pyrrholaemus sagittatus*) photo: Andris Niedra

There are still a lot of Noisy Friarbirds (*Philemon corniculatus*) in the park now and this is a sign of extensive eucalypt flowering. Please keep an eye out for blossom and Regent Honeyeaters (*Anthochaera phrygia*).

Early April is the traditional time for Regents to appear in the park. Extensive flowering will increase the likelihood that there will be some Regents about but finding them will be a challenge.

New Method of Surveying Swift Parrots and Regent Honeyeaters – Neville Bartlett

Birdlife Australia are implementing a new survey methodology for this year's Swift Parrot (*Lathamus discolor*) and Regent Honeyeater (*Anthochaera phrygia*) surveys. In previous years, there were two surveys with one in April/May and one in August.

The first targeted survey period for 2021 commences this Saturday 24th April and continues through to

Sunday 6th June. This is a six-week period roughly centred around the traditional third weekend in May. The second 2021 survey period is from Saturday 17th July to Sunday 29th August – also a six-week period, centred around the traditional first weekend in August.

Each search involves birdwatchers visiting permanent fixed sites on public land and undertaking 5 minute surveys for all bird species across a circular 50 metre radius search area – with a particular focus on detecting Swifties and Regents. It is also encouraged that the birdwatchers record the flowering intensity for trees and mistletoe, plus the availability of water. Each fixed site has a unique code name (e.g., ABC.002), but is not physically marked with a signpost, flagging tape or similar. There is a full description of the survey method on the newly established webpage <https://birdlife.org.au/swift-parrot>

The park around Chiltern has 40 such points already setup and these points include many where Regents and/or Swift Parrots have been sighted.

Ecoportal

The Ecoportal website is a useful local source of information about sustainability-related activities and is the result of a collaborative and committed effort by many representatives from various community groups working towards sustainability in and around Albury-Wodonga, North East Victoria and Southern New South Wales.

<http://ecoportal.net.au/>

Broadly speaking the website seeks to;

- Offer a central place for the promotion of upcoming sustainability events;
- Provide links, information and contact details of local sustainability groups;
- Encourage the sharing of skills, knowledge, and resources locally; and
- Add to opportunities to network with others.

Rainfall

March 2021: 46 mm. Total for year-to-date 2021: 239 mm. In 2020 we had 183 mm up to the end of March. The average annual rainfall for Chiltern is 689 mm.

So far this month we have only had 3mm, so we are highly likely to fall behind last year's total of 350mm at the end of April 2020.

NEXT MEETING – SATURDAY 1st MAY 2021

There will be a two main types of activity:

1. carrying out bird surveys using the new Birdlife methodology and
2. weeding at one of the nearby reserves (Mt Ochertyre, Mt Ophir or the Grasslands Block).

Meet at the Chiltern Post Office at 09:00am.

There will be a brief introduction to the day's activities and people will be able to join the activity of their choice.

People doing the bird counts will need a pair of binoculars and those doing weeding will need gloves, mattocks, or similar weed-removal tools.

Bun will be provided to all groups.

Contacts for the day: Neville – 0412 399 239 or Mick 0429 017 229.

Meeting Dates for 2021

- **Saturday 1st May**
- **Sunday 6th June**
- **Saturday 3rd July**
- **Sunday 1st August**
- **Saturday 4th September**
- **Sunday 3rd October**
- **Saturday 6th November**
- **Sunday 5th December 2021**

Rule of Thumb: For even months, the field day is held on the first Sunday of the month and for odd months, it is held on the first Saturday of the month.

Category

1. Newsletters

Date Created

2020/03/22

Author

neville