

Newsletter 305 May 2021

Description

Friends of Chiltern Mt Pilot NP Newsletter #305 May 2021

Dear Friends,

The May field day was split into three groups with one group tackling weeds at Mt Ochertyre Reserve and the other two groups conducting bird surveys. The Mt Ochertyre group drove sheep out, repaired the fence and killed many weeds (mostly olives but also figs, boxthorns, a Silky Oak and hawthorns).

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Mt Ochertyre weed removal and well-earned break – photos: Mick Webster

After working at Mt Ochertyre, the group called into the Grasslands Block and removed 20 or so Bathurst Burr plants. The Grasslands Block is one of the special parts of the park at the moment and is well worth a visit.

The bird survey group that tackled the Southern section of the park found that many sites very extremely quiet. This is partly due to the recent phenomenon where large groups of birds gather in a location for a while and then move on. It is common for people to comment that a particular location had very few birds present but other sites are busy with many species present. The group that visited Bartley's Block found quite an extensive collection of species.

Convolvulus Hawk Moth – *Agrius convolvuli* – Eileen Collins

Flight period : November to April.

This Hawk Moth can be found anywhere in Australia where there are suitable food plants....

As the name suggests its food plants come from a variety of Convolvulus species such as Sweet Potatoes, Morning Glory and various Bindweeds. The series pictured below were reared on Sweet Potato (*Ipomoea batatas*).

The moth of this species sucks nectar from the host plant by means of a special long retractable tube called a haustellum. The tiny white eggs are laid singly on a separate leaf. On hatching the tiny caterpillar eats the egg casing.





Photos: Brian Pritchard

The young caterpillar is green and as it grows its body becomes striped. When fully grown it develops a backward curving horn on its tail.





Photos: Brian Pritchard

When the caterpillar is ready to pupate, it can walk quite some distance before pupating in an underground cell.

After overwintering underground, the life cycle begins again in springtime.



Photo: Brian Pritchard

Brian Pritchard found the caterpillars on his Sweet Potatoes and took the opportunity to obtain this life history record.

Well done and thankyou Brian.

Ranger's Report

Our focus at the moment is on our roading program. We will be grading our priority access roads over the next month and have recently obtained a new excavator which will help with maintaining our roads and culverts.

We are also replacing the deck on the viewing platform at Woolshed Falls with a new non-slip surface. Our fox and pig control programs will finish in the next few week as funding is expended.

Swift Parrot survey day was well attended and even though weather was unkind and bird numbers low. Several interesting bird species are being noted in the park.

Around the Park

A planned burn has been carried out in the section west of Mt Pleasant Road in the Northern section of the park.

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A burnt area near the corner of Mr Pleasant Road and Depot Road

– photo: Neville Bartlett

Early flowering of Golden Wattles (*Acacia pycnantha*) is underway.



A Golden Wattle near the Chiltern-Yackandandah Road

– photo: Neville Bartlett

The park is very dry at the moment and nothing reminds us of this more than the state of Cyanide Dam.





Cyanide Dam in May 2021 – photos: Neville Bartlett

Bartley's Block is a popular spot for visitors, and they have been rewarded with regular sightings of Speckled Warblers, various species of robin, Turquoise Parrots and Scarlet Honeyeaters.

Bird surveys conducted in the park over the last month or so have shown that birds are gathering in mixed flocks and then moving on. The list of honeyeater species present is often impressive, but no Regent Honeyeaters have been found yet.

A Singing Honeyeater (*Lichenostomus virescens*) was observed recently on Andersons Track.

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

In the previous newsletter, I outlined the new method of surveying Swift Parrots (*Lathamus discolor*) across Australia. Over 1,000 sites are listed in south-eastern Australia with about 40 of them located

with the Chiltern section of the park. Instead of two weekends each year (in May and August), the new method involves checking the 40 sites in the park over two six week periods (also in May and August). The new approach has attracted quite a bit of comment from experienced bird watchers.

At the Regent Honeyeater survey day on 15th May, Dean Ingwersen explained logic behind the new Swift Parrot survey approach and it certainly makes a lot of sense as these parrots have changed their behaviour over the few years. Having existing survey points is an advantage because the vegetation types present have been mapped and it is quick and easy to use the Birddata app to record flowering and the bird species observed over a five minute period. All 40 of the Swift Parrot sites have been surveyed as part of this survey day. Simon Bennett and I have conducted some Swift Parrot surveys in the last few weeks and the approach works reasonably well because Swifties call fairly often. One of the sites on Glider Track featured about 15 Swift Parrots but when we returned an hour or so later, they had gone.

The strategy for finding Regent Honeyeaters (*Anthochaera phrygia*) is a little different. All sites with flowering are checked and limiting the search to just five minutes is not appropriate. Many of us who have been tracking Regents during the releases in past years will know that much more patience is required. Regents will often be feeding in blossom at the tops of trees and not show themselves for quite some time.

Rainfall April 2021: 4 mm the driest month since April 2019. Total for year-to-date 2021: 243 mm. In 2020 we had 350 mm up to the end of April. The average annual rainfall for Chiltern is 689 mm.

NEXT MEETING – SUNDAY 6th JUNE 2021

We will be tackling a variety of weeds at Bartley's Block. Please bring gloves, mattocks, or similar weed-removal tools.

Bun will be provided as usual.

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

Contact for the day: Neville – 0412 399 239.

Dates for 2021

Sunday 6th June, Saturday 3rd July, Sunday 1st August, Saturday 4th September, Sunday 3rd October, Saturday 6th November, and 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

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