

FRIENDS OF CHILTERN MT-PILOT NATIONAL PARK, Inc.

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Website: <http://www.friendsofchiltern.org.au/>

May Field Day – Jennifer Davidson

We had a very pleasant morning, with a good turnout including members John and Alison from Melbourne/Mt Tambourine. As Richard, Mick and Tony had previously removed or marked the major weeds in the area planted in 2018, it was suggested that we move on to the most recently planted section.

Our work session was well spent removing guards and stakes from the most recent plantings (2023) at Grasslands. It was great to see how well most of the plants have fared despite the recent severely dry conditions, with most of the guards needing to be removed. On the way we drove through the 2018 plantings at the southern section of Grasslands, where the growth is generally very impressive indeed. We enjoyed morning tea and bun under the big Ironbark there.



Photos: Mick Webster

As we sat under the mistletoe-festooned Ironbark there was some discussion about mistletoe. Jenny recalled a few gems from a presentation the previous night by Dr Dave Watson from Charles Sturt University. He has been studying mistletoe for 30 years. The leaves of parasitic plants such as Quandongs, Cherry Ballart and mistletoe are rich in nutrients and minerals. Wildlife tends to congregate underneath, feeding among the fallen leaves. Because the leaves have a high moisture content, the temperature can be several degrees lower in summer than under surrounding vegetation. Neil noted that there are five species of mistletoe in the Park.

We then moved on to Turquoise Track and the Cryptandra site. This is the only known site in the Park where Bitter Cryptandra (*Cryptandra amara*) occurs. Several areas and individual plants have had guards erected by Friends to protect them from browsing herbivores, particularly wallabies. In the current dry conditions where resources are scarce these guards are definitely doing their job. It was interesting to see that despite the dry, the little shrubs were producing lots of flower buds. Tucked away inside one plant which was completely covered by chicken wire mesh, there was a wren's nest, used fairly recently..



Wren nest in a Bitter Cryptandra (*Cryptandra amara*).
Photo: Jennifer Davidson

Mistletoes in the Park – Neil Blair

There are currently 97 known species of mistletoe in Australia, 47 of which are in Southern Australia and 5 of which are in the Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park. These five are all from the same family (Loranthaceae) and are represented in two genus (four in the genus *Amyema* and one in the genus *Muellerina*). All five species are aerial shrubby species, living entirely above and independent from the ground.

Box Mistletoe (*Amyema miquelii*) is common in the eucalypts of the Park and if exposed to strong, hot sunlight may turn from green to a yellow-orange, frequently seen along roadsides and other exposed sites. Shaded plants remain green in colour.



Box Mistletoe (*Amyema miquelii*). Photos: Neil Blair

Drooping Mistletoe (*Amyema pendula*) is less common but of similar appearance to the casual eye. Identification of either of these two mistletoes requires closer examination of plant form, flower length and stalk, leaves and coating of the young tips.



Drooping Mistletoe (*Amyema pendula*) and haustorium. Photos: Neil Blair

Fleshy Mistletoe (*Amyema mirabilis*) is notable as it grows on other mistletoes and hemiparasitic plants. It is found in the Park growing on top of the two mistletoes described above and also on Cherry Ballart (*Exocarpos cupressiformis*). It can be conspicuous with its bright red flowers appearing in mid-summer.



Fleshy Mistletoe (*Amyema mirabilis*). Photos: Neil Blair

Grey Mistletoe (*Amyema quandang*). Whilst the above mistletoes are generally found on eucalypts this mistletoe is seen on acacias especially Silver Wattle (*Acacia dealbata*).



Grey Mistletoe (*Amyema quandang*) and exposed seed. Photos: Neil Blair

Creeping Mistletoe (*Muellerina eucalytoides*). Whilst the above mistletoes attach to their host via a single attachment (haustorium) this mistletoe has multiple small attachment as it creeps along the trunk and branches of its eucalypt host.



Creeping Mistletoe (*Muellerina eucalytoides*). Photos: Neil Blair

Mistletoes are a fascinating plant group that play an important role in the ecology of the Park. Interested members are referred to David Watson's excellent book "Mistletoes of Southern Australia" published by CSIRO. Photo features of the above mistletoes can be found in the Flora section of the FOCMP website.

Ranger's Report – Scott Cunningham

Recruitment for the ongoing ranger position is being finalised and we hope to have a new ranger in place by the end of June. Brian is taking some leave until July, with myself filling in and Patrick continuing in the ranger role.

With minimal staff our focus has been on visitor management although we have managed to repair the picnic table at the Magenta visitor site.

Planned burning has been in full swing with the recently completed Beechworth Gorge burn the closest in our area.

We are continuing to respond to continued waste dumping, off-road vehicle access and firewood theft with numerous infringement penalties and warnings issued over the past month. This past week we have removed over 200 dumped tyres, thanks to all that have provided information, this helps us to respond..

White-headed Digger Bees (*Amegilla albiceps*) – May image in the 2024 calendar – Simon Bennett

White-headed Digger Bees (*Amegilla albiceps*) are a little known species of Australian native bee. The males roost together like this each night, while the females sleep in their underground solitary nesting burrows. Photographed at 7:46am early in May in the Chiltern Valley, Victoria, Australia.



White-headed Digger Bees (*Amegilla albiceps*). Photo: Simon Bennett

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Rainfall: April 2024: 24 mm. Total for the year-to-date 2024: 154 mm. The corresponding total up to the end of April 2023 was 260 mm. Driest start to Autumn since 2018.

The average annual rainfall for Chiltern is 689 mm.

Data supplied by Mick Webster.

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NEXT MEETING – SUNDAY 2nd June 2024

We will be following up last year's audit of the interpretive signage on the White Box Walk.

Meet at the Chiltern Post Office at 9:00am.

Please bring suitable footwear, sun protection and morning tea.

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Remaining dates for 2024 and 2025

For 2024: Saturday 6th July, Sunday 4th August, Saturday 7th September, Sunday 6th October, Saturday 2nd November and Sunday 1st December 2024.

For 2025: Sunday 2nd February, Saturday 1st March, Sunday 6th April, Saturday 3rd May, Sunday 1st June, Saturday 5th July, Sunday 3rd August, Saturday 6th September, Sunday 5th October, Saturday 1st November and Sunday 7th December 2025.

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.

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