

# THE FIELD NATURALIST

NEWSLETTER NO. 125: May, 2016

ALBURY-WODONGA FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB INC.  
Reg. No. A0023416K



### ***Bird-dung Spider (Celaenia excavata).***

*The female lays several hundred eggs on a silken sheet, then bundles them up in large quantities of fluffy silk. She then ties the bundle up with a different type of silk. Finally, she coats the ball with a special body fluid to form a waterproof coat, then dangles the ball by a thread among foliage.*

*Up to 10 or more balls may be made.*

*(Information from Green Guide to Australian Spiders)*



### **Black-fronted Dotteral**

(Photo – P Spencer)

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Contributions to this newsletter are welcome and should be emailed as above.

[Note: Correction to last newsletter (Issue 124, p4) – Currawang (*Acacia doratoxylon*) misspelt as *Acacia doratoxylin*- Oops! Ed]

The proposed Saturday morning walk from the Kremur Street car park was brought forward to the Friday evening before, due to a bicycle fun-run coinciding with our time slot. Veronica handed over the reins to Neil who promised us sightings of platypuses and fruit bats. On a very warm evening before sunset, 15 of us set out to meander upstream along the path towards Albury. Almost immediately a platypus was sighted swimming and diving in the river and Phillip managed to obtain a good photo of it. As we watched it a number of Azure Kingfishers were seen perching and flitting across the river. Further on we observed a colony of grey-headed fruit bats (listed as a Threatened Species) which later took off and flew downstream to feed. A pair of Barking Owls were heard in the distance on the far side of the river. As we made our way back to the cars in the fading light, a number of small insectivorous bats skimmed overhead. Other birds heard or seen along the river bank included a Silvereye, Scrub-wren & Reed Warbler.



Reed Warbler

[Speaking of Reed Warblers.....As the old adage goes, "Practice makes perfect". It was reported in New Scientist (6 Feb, 2016) that a recent Cambridge University study of complex song-birds has shown that, even in migration, these birds are still singing. In Africa, despite not being territorial or breeding, European Reed Warblers use energy reserves and risk predation by continuing to warble. The theory is that the birds are expanding their repertoire or honing their skills in readiness for the next mating season - Ed]

The schedule change was an interesting & welcome change, venturing into a familiar environment at an unfamiliar time.



Azure Kingfisher

**Article & Photos – Peter Spencer**

**CHILTERN VALLEY DAMS 1 & 2**

**13<sup>th</sup> March, 2016**

Water levels were low and the dams and surrounds provided good viewing of waders, forest woodland birds and other freshwater inhabitants. Yellow-billed Spoonbills (possibly juvenile) kept the group entertained – were they playing or practising a courting ritual? Welcome Swallows made a lovely scene on a fallen tree root system as they displayed their beautifully hued feather colourations in the sunlight. A disappearing woodland bird - a Black-chinned Honeyeater – was heard calling. And finally, Diamond Firetails farewelled us at the gate of No 2 Dam...

**Glenda Datson**



Welcome Swallows – (P Spencer)

### Freshwater Mussels

- are bivalve molluscs that are invertebrates. Thought to be one family in Australia with 18 or so species.
- adults walk across sedimentary material using a muscular tongue known as a “foot” and leave a trail behind them. Their elliptic, smooth shell makes it easier for them to bury into the muddy/sandy base leaving only a part of the upper surface exposed. From this two syphons can protrude to take in and to expel water.
- they are natural water filters, cleaning water by removing particulate matter, algae and zoo plankton as well as taking in heavy metals, pesticides and other pollutants.
- the males release sperm into the water which is filtered by the females. Eggs in a specialized part of the gills get fertilized and develop into larvae (glochidia). The larvae are released and taken up by native fish where they encyst onto the gills and parasitize until they develop into juvenile mussels, at which stage they release from the fish and lay in the sediments until they mature into adults.
- they rely on healthy streams and are threatened by habitat degradation, cattle treading on them and predation of larvae and immatures by exotic fish (especially carp). Overall numbers are rapidly diminishing and a number of species are now threatened and vulnerable with conservation plans in place.
- life span is uncertain but some species are thought to live for 20 or so years. When water recedes they can dig deeper into the mud or try and retreat with the water. It is thought they can only survive for a very short time exposed.



Predated mussel shell left exposed on muddy shore by receding water level

**Article & Photos - Neil Blair**

On a sunny, still day eight of us revisited this delightful section of the Wagirra Trail at a later time of year than last year's visit (Feb). We shared the path with families, pets, cyclists and skate-boarders, all moving at a much faster pace. Passing company included a pair of tricycle riders who proclaimed us loudly to be "old farts" as we chatted & ate lunch with the European Wasps!

As always, there were numerous turtles and water birds, particularly Pelicans & Cormorants. In general it was noted that there were fewer ducks on the ponds and more "bush-birds" along the track. A Reed Warbler appeared quite determined to be seen, alerting us as we turned to leave & an elegant Great Eastern Egret stayed close at the water's edge for photos.



Great Eastern Egret (Photo – P Spencer)

After lunch we moved on to Horseshoe lagoon and were lucky enough to see a Pied Cormorant. Phillip explained they have historically been reported in this area but are no longer often seen, unlike the Little Pied Cormorant, which is commonly found in the wetlands (well spotted as always, Phillip!)



Pied Cormorant



Little Pied Cormorant

Apart from its larger size, the Pied Cormorant can be distinguished from the Little Pied by its long grey hooked bill, orange eye patch, blue eye-ring and black stripes on its thighs. It is seen mainly in southern Australia and along the coast of south-western Australia where it is found exclusively in marine environments. In eastern Australia it is also found in mangroves and on large inland wetlands. **(Photos and information – Bird Australia)**

Further along the lagoon, we watched a Whistling Kite successfully catch a fish, which it then took to the privacy of an adjacent paddock to consume, before moving on.

**Gail Steed**

## SEANA Autumn Camp, Bellarine Peninsula.

April 8 – 11, 2016

The SEANA camp held at Queenscliff was a well organised, friendly camp hosted by Geelong FNC at Camp Wyuna.

The first day we were thrust into the geology of Barwon Heads and North Bellarine Peninsula, ably led by Deborah Evans (SEANA president). Looking from The Bluff gave great views over the sea (tidal lakes, estuary and sand bar) and land (You Yangs and Mt Duneed). On the beach we saw eroded calcite formations which trace the impact of Ice Ages. Portarlington beach showed fossiliferous Pliocene sedimentary rocks and at the pier, the basalt rock platform had plenty of gulls and cormorants.



In the afternoon a visit to the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve was rather disappointing due to the dry conditions. The area of 143 hectares is under threat from planned new housing around it. The next day's visit to Barwon Heads' rock pools was dependent on the tides which failed to cooperate but the Lobster Pot Museum and Information centre showed us which birds and sea creatures were to be found. The afternoon trip to Lake Lorne provided plenty of birds: Black-winged Stilts, Pelicans and Ibis, ducks galore (including many Pink-eared and Freckled) and Black-fronted Plover (Dotterel). One outstanding event was a fly-past of up to 100 Masked Lapwings, as raucous as ever.



Black-winged Stilts



Pink-eared Ducks

The evening sessions with guest speakers gave more insight into the area, which was new to us and deserves another visit. Queenscliff Fort, Maritime and Historical Museums still need to be explored. The catering arrangements for the weekend were excellent; congratulations to all involved. There was also the SEANA AGM.

*Note: There is no Spring camp this year due to ANN in Perth. Autumn 2017 is in Sale, Spring 2017 Ringwood and Autumn 2018 FNCV: Spring 2018 may be in NSW?*

### Article & photos - Dick Andrews

So, mark your diaries for 2017.

17 – 20 March, 2017

SEANA Autumn Camp – Sale Region (Sale & District FNC and Latrobe Valley FNC)

Includes the Gippsland Lakes systems with wetlands habitats, the Sale common & State Game Refuge, the Ninety Mile beach, Avon- Mt Hedrick Wilderness, Holey Plains State Park and possibly a Lakes boat trip. Further information in October...

As always, Bright was a busy and popular place on a pleasant autumn morning. We headed just out of town to Barkers Gully Rd and wandered alongside the gully. It proved to be ‘productive’, with highlights of the morning’s bird sightings being the Olive Whistler and a group of Yellow-tailed Cockatoos, possibly at a nesting hollow. Also, see Neil’s article below, describing Liverworts along this track.

After lunch, a short walk along a much drier Cherry Track did not yield the diversity of fungi found last year.



Yellow-tailed Cockatoo (Photo – D Andrews)

**Liverworts**

On a bank along Baker’s Gully Rd, both Maidenhair and Necklace Ferns were noted. On closer examination there were two Liverworts also present – one fleshy and one leafy.

Liverworts, along with Mosses and Hornworts, are Bryophytes i.e. small, spore-producing plants that lack true vascular tissue.

The Liverworts are generally classified as:

- 1. Fleshy – with thick, spongy thalli
- 2. Filmy – one cell thick, central midrib and repeated forking
- 3. Leafy – with a stem and 2-3 rows of leaves that lack veins.



Fleshy Liverwort



Leafy Liverwort

**Article & photos - Neil Blair**

## 'The Fungi: an introduction to a curious kingdom'

Recently a couple of us attended a workshop run by Alison Pouliot.

She has a keen scientific & personal interest in fungi – especially poisonous ones and apparently lives in a permanent Autumn, dividing her time between Europe and Australia. She is engaging & passionate, with an ability to relate basic scientific understanding to a broad audience. Alison provided an historical and ecological perspective of their value and status, along with classification theory and identification tools. We then headed out for a short foray into surrounding grounds to test our skills e.g. *Stropharia aurantiaca*, *Calvatia cyathiformis*.

She also provided an extensive display and comparisons of the various reference books available – if anyone would like further information, please see Gail.

### HENTY AREA

28<sup>th</sup> May, 2016

Quite a large group braved potentially poor weather to venture in a new direction to different neighbouring area. We were rewarded by a near perfect, almost-winter day as we moved from swamp beside the Henty golf course, to reserve land alongside the Henty Government Dam, then on to the Henty cemetery and TSR site, the Pleasant Hills Esplanade site, and finally to our last stop at Morgan's Lookout (just in time for sunset). Fungi were plentiful (if a bit water-logged), flora ranged from the River Red Gum-dominated swamp to grassy box woodland and revegetated areas and the bird list grew over the day to more than 34.



Enlargement of spore-bearing surface (flattish 'teeth')

*Steccherinum* aff.sp (adhering mass on underside of damp log in Government Dam Nature Reserve)  
(Photo – N Blair)



Unidentified fungus (*Crepidotus* sp?) growing on Eucalypt.  
Note the caterpillar stick-case above – possibly *Clania* sp



Grey-crowned Babbler  
(Photo P Spencer)

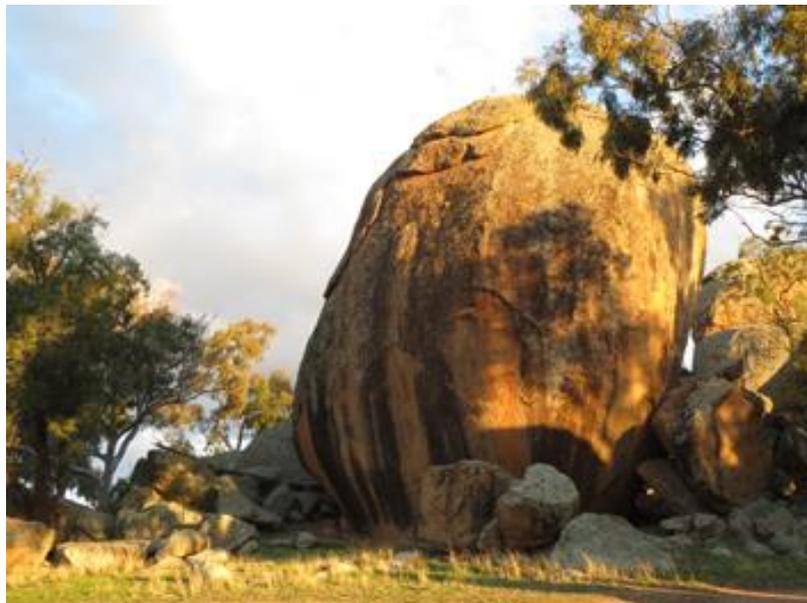
Grey-crowned babbler, whose numbers are generally in decline, were plentiful at both the swamp and Pleasant Hills project site. A solitary Apostlebird studiously ignored our presence as it characteristically foraged at ground level.

### **Apostlebird (*Struthidea cinerea*)**

The Apostlebird earned its name because it is highly gregarious, usually seen in groups of up to 30 birds. Early settlers believed that these groups always comprised 12 birds, and likened them to the apostles of Jesus Christ. It is native to inland eastern Australia and is also known as the Grey Jumper. They have plenty of nicknames, not all of which are complimentary. Sometimes called Lousy Jacks (due to heavy louse infestations), Happy Jacks, Happy Families and CWA Birds (i.e. very chatty)



When an Apostlebird builds its deep, cup-shaped nest made from dried grasses held together with mud and manure, it will share the experience with around nine other Apostlebirds. This 'breeding unit' comprises a single dominant male and adult female, plus several juvenile birds from a previous breeding season that stuck around to help out. Another female may also lay eggs in the same nest but usually only 4 eggs survive to fledge. Once the eggs are hatched, all members of the group help feed the chicks and keep the nest clean. The young birds will remain with their parents for an incredible 200 days (even Seagulls - known to shadow their parents for a long time - eventually break loose after 90 days or so). They are not listed as Threatened in the Australian Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.



White granite at Morgan's Lookout, in last light of day

This was an interesting mid-year trip, balanced nicely with some local German & bushranging history. Perhaps next time we will locate the wattle & daub Lutheran Church in Pleasant Hills?

### **Gail Steed**

**Upcoming Outings**

~12<sup>th</sup> June – Wonga Wetlands, including back ponds

~25<sup>th</sup> June – George Creek & Jervis Creek

~10<sup>th</sup> July – Mitta Mitta Pub –Mid-year lunch

~23<sup>rd</sup> July – Chiltern Mt Pilot NP

*Full outing details published in separate list (contact Secretary for a copy)  
Please confirm outing details in Saturday's Border Morning Mail and contact the outing leader in the week prior if you need a lift.*

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**Thanks to Glenda, Neil & Phillip, we now have an up-to-date, electronic list of our bird sightings. This listing can also be published in the newsletter for each outing, or compiled as a total listing for the newsletter period and, where visited previously, be provided as a check-list for an upcoming outing. Please let us know your preference and we can try to arrange it!**

Also, for anyone not yet 'paid up' subs are due & remain same cost as last year (see page 1)

**Note: Electronic Payments -**

Payments to the club can be made via Internet banking using details below.

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