FRIENDS OF CHILTERN MT-PILOT NATIONAL PARK, Inc.

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October Field Day

After meeting at the Chiltern Post Office we headed along the Beechworth-Chiltern Road to McGuiness Road in the Mount Pilot section of the Park. Neil Blair met us there and explained the difference between the Green-comb Spider-orchid (*Caladenia parva*) and the Large Green-comb Spider-orchid (*Caladenia tentaculata*). C. tentaculata has longer green combs and curved lower petals as well as being generally larger and flowers a little later in the season. C. parva generally flowers earlier in the season but the two species flowering period overlaps, so there is opportunity for cross pollination and the creation of hybrids.

Left: *Caladenia parva* and Right: *Caladenia tentaculata*. Photos: Friends of Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park

Fortunately, once we searched around the area, we found many examples of each species although the number of flowers was down compared to the previous few seasons.

Following morning tea, one group of people went looking at one of the koala chewing sites (see the next article by Mick Webster) and another group checked the recent planting near the car park heading to the summit of Mt. Pilot. This planting is doing well and is aimed at reducing foot traffic in one particular area.

Koalas eat bark! – Mick Webster

If you ask anyone what koalas eat, they'll probably say 'eucalyptus leaves', and my 'Mammals of Victoria' (Menkhorst) says just that with no mention of anything else. But it's now become apparent that the koalas in the Park are broadening their diet to include eucalyptus bark. I was first told about this several months ago by a friend in Beechworth who said there were many trees that had been chewed by koalas in the Pilot section of CMPNP. When I had a look along Wardens Rd I found many more and since then I've made a rule - ' wherever there are Eucalyptus blakelyis (Blakely's Redgum) growing in the swampy areas below the

ridges, there will be some evidence of koala bark chewing'. Koalas will chew the top millimetre or so of the bark of a selected tree from ground level up to at least 5 metres. We know it's being chewed, not shredded by cockies, as there are very few chips on the ground (usually none), and often quite a bit of koala poo around the tree.

Two examples of affected trees. Photos: Mick Webster

What's the scientific evidence for this behaviour? The paper referenced below provides some answers. Researchers from ANU studied this in the Monaro and concluded in 2017 that the koalas are selecting specific trees (in the Monaro they were E. mannifera (Brittle Gum - similar to blakelyi as it has a smooth gum-type bark)) for the mineral sodium in the bark. They compared the sodium (Na) (and other mineral elements) in selected trees and found that chewed trees have up to 10 times as much Na as non-chewed ones, and the bark has up to 10 times as much Na as the leaves which are still the koalas main diet. Sodium (apart from giving humans heart attacks and strokes if over-consumed) is a vital element in any mammal's diet, ensuring nerve health and blood volume and balance. There was no variation in any other mineral nutrient between chewed and non-chewed trees. Strangely the Monaro koalas showed no interest in salt licks the researchers put out!

Is this new behaviour? We don't know, maybe we're just noticing it now. Certainly I can find no reference to it happening anywhere in Victoria in any reference work, or online. The fact that trees have been found chewed in at least six sites many kilometres apart, in both the Pilot and Chiltern sections of the Park, indicates it's not an isolated instance – koalas must feel a lack of sodium and somehow know how to get it from bark. For those interested to see a chewed tree there is one next to Pine Gap Rd, about 50m North of Honeysuckle Creek Rd.

Now we know that they chew blakelyis, I'm going to have a look at the manniferas along Old Coach Rd, and around Beechworth! And I'd be interested to know of any other cases that people find.
Mick Webster: websterm@netc.net.au

Reference:
https://academic.oup.com/jmammal/article-abstract/98/4/1185/3795753?redirectedFrom=fulltext&login=false

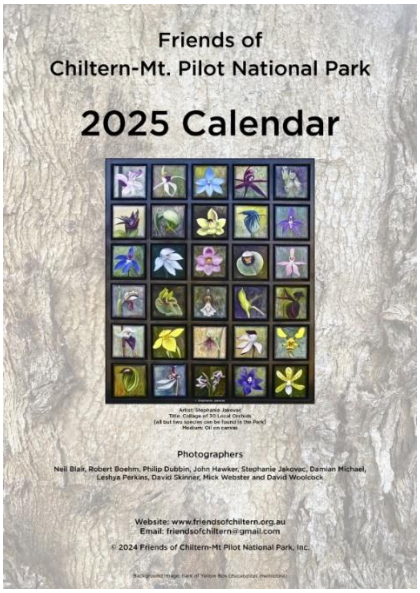
Rabbit-ears Sun-orchid (*Thelymitra antennifera*) – October image in the 2024 calendar

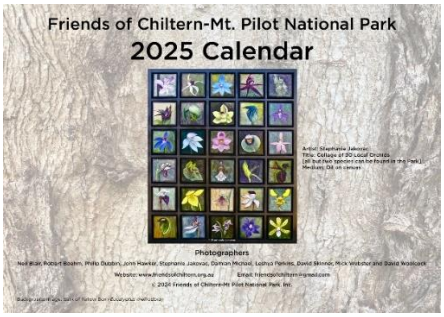
Rabbit-ears Sun-orchid (*Thelymitra antennifera*). Photo: Neville Bartlett

Anyone interested in finding out more about this species may like to investigate the following links:
Thelymitra antennifera - Wikipedia
VicFlora: Thelymitra antennifera (rbg.vic.gov.au)
Thelymitra antennifera : Lemon Sun-Orchid | Atlas of Living Australia (ala.org.au)

2025 Calendar

Our 2025 calendar in A3 and A4 format is currently being printed. Prices have risen due to the increased pressure of rising costs for the group.





See the attached flier for more details and an order form.

A special thank you to everyone who contributed images for the calendar: Neil Blair, Robert Boehm, Philip Dubbin, John Hawker, Stephanie Jakovac, Damian Michael, Leshya Perkins, David Skinner, Mick Webster and David Woolcock.

Rainfall: September 2024: 47 mm. Total for the year-to-date 2024: 369 mm. The corresponding total up to the end of September 2023 was 551 mm.

The average annual rainfall for Chiltern is 689 mm.

Data supplied by Mick Webster.

NEXT MEETING – SATURDAY 2nd NOVEMBER 2024

The plan is to carry out weeding at the Rutherglen Natural Features Reserve.

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

If you plan to go directly to the reserve, please meet at the Southern entrance off Research Station Lane at about 9:30am.

Remaining dates for 2024 and 2025

For 2024: 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.