

# **THE FIELD NATURALIST**

**NEWSLETTER NO. 121: May, 2015**

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



White-plumed Honeyeater (Photo: Peter Spencer)



Australian Emerald Dragonfly  
(Photo: Dick Andrews)

## This Issue:

	Page
President's Report	2
Upcoming Outings	2
"Hawksview" Wirlinga	3
Red-bellied, Black Snake	5
Corowa Sewage Ponds	7
Ewarts Rd, Baranduda	10
Black Rock Scorpion	11
Pheasant Creek, Shelley	12

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Contributions to this newsletter are welcome and should be emailed as above, or posted to the Editor, PO Box 251, Albury, 2640.

## President's Report

There has not been a committee meeting since the last Newsletter but two previous items have been followed up.

The first item concerned the investigation into the Club buying a Birding Telescope. The recommended Telescopes were beyond the Club's finances. As the Club has access to two telescopes, within its membership, it was decided to use these on outings this year and not go ahead with any fundraising to purchase one for the club.

The second item was the updating of the Ecoportal and Friends of Chiltern Mt. Pilot NP websites. Our future outings and Club profile can be found on Ecoportal and our 6 month outings schedule and recent and past Newsletters are available on the Friends site. A BIG thankyou to Veronica and Gail.

Whilst on the Friends of Chiltern Mt. Pilot NP website I would strongly recommend members to have a look/browse through the Biodiversity section. Eileen Collins has created a wonderful resource which is available to all and covers much of the Flora and Fauna we find locally. Eileen has access to a wide range of generous and supportive experts, so most photos are identified and labelled, often with interesting and helpful comments. The Flora of Chiltern List has over 700 species with photo identification in 75% and the Galleries have many photos of species in the fields of Mammals, Birds, Reptiles, Frogs, Orchids, Fungi, Mosses and Lichens, Spiders, Moths, Insects and Scats – truly something for everyone: a remarkable LOCAL resource. The site was created, and is maintained by, Tony Marsh and is very user friendly.

Neil Blair

## Upcoming Outings

~ 9<sup>th</sup> May ~

### **Bright**

– a trip to Bright in the autumn, one of Australia's top 10 destinations, should make this a popular outing. A recent Birdlife trip saw a pair of Satin Flycatchers among an impressive list of over 50 bird species. The fungi, mosses and lichens should provide plenty of interest.

~24<sup>th</sup> May ~

### **Nail Can Hill**

–Late autumn flora and fauna in Albury's bushland. This date has been chosen because it will be a different season to our usual visits and it will be interesting to see what differences we find.

~13<sup>th</sup> June ~

### **Chiltern / Mt Pilot National Park**

– A chance to see the Regent Honeyeater and the winter migrants that include Swift Parrots and Flame and Rose Robins. The fungi, mosses and lichens of Chiltern will be on show.

~28<sup>th</sup> June ~

### **Baranduda area**

– Another outing to a local familiar environment in a different season. Will be of interest to see this bush in winter and perhaps compare with what was found a month earlier on Nail Can Hill.

*Please confirm outing details in Saturday's Border Morning Mail and contact the outing leader in the week prior if you need a lift*

## **Note: Electronic Payments -**

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

**BSB:** 803 070

**Account No.** 61019

**Account Name:** ALB WOD FIELD NATURALISTS INC

*(Please note, the account name should be written in its abbreviated form as shown, and don't forget to include **your** name)*



(Photo –N. Blair)

In warm weather, a group of ten members visited the private property “Hawksview” on the Riverina Highway at Wirlinga, for a half day outing. Due to the leader’s bad directions we initially missed the crossing over the billabong nearest to the homestead. Nevertheless, thanks to Glenda’s sharp eyes we were able to advise of a sheep bogged in a dam which we understand was rescued by the owner.

Our original walk took us across open paddocks to the billabong closest to the Murray River where we were confronted by a red bellied black snake which became confused by the many people watching and taking photographs. Eventually it gathered up its senses and went down the bank into the billabong and disappeared. The red bellied black snake (*Pseudechis porphyriacus*) is a species of elapid snake native to Eastern Australia. Though its venom is capable of causing significant morbidity, a bite from it is not generally fatal and is less venomous than other deadly Australian snakes. (See article page 5)

Top story vegetation consisted mainly of River Red Gum – *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* and on the far bank we sighted Basket Willow (\**Salix X rubens*) and Weeping Willow (\**Salix babylonica*). River bank vegetation consisted of Giant Rush (*Juncus ingens*), Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and Red – Ink Weed (\**Phytolacca octandra*)



Basket Willow and Weeping Willow (Photo – N. Blair)



Giant Rush and Common Reed (Photo – G. Steed)

From the southern billabong we made our way across open paddocks again to view the birdlife on the first billabong. Major sighting was a Darter crèche with what appeared to be two nests and two sets of young.



Darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*) crèche (Photo –N. Blair)

The bank along this billabong has been planted with River Bottlebrush (*Callistemon sieberi*), Silver Wattle (*Acacia dealbata*) and Drooping She Oak (*Allocasuarina verticillata*). It was noted by Neil that the River Red Gums planted in this area carried a different growth habit to those occurring naturally.

On our way back to the vehicles Bernie spotted an Australian Pipit (*Anthus novaeseelandiae*).

The Australian Pipit is a small passerine bird of open country. It is a slender bird 16 – 19 cm long, pale brown above with dark streaks. The long tail has white outer feathers and is often wagged up and down. The legs are long and pinkish brown. The breeding season begins in August with the cup shaped nest placed at the base of vegetation. Two to five eggs are laid and the young birds are fed by both parents and are able to fly after 14 to 16 days.



Australian (Richard's) Pipit (Photo –P.Spencer)

David Coleman

A list of other fauna observed on the day was compiled by Bernard Datson (see next page)

<b>Species</b>			
<b>Common name</b>		<b>Common name</b>	
Bee-eater	Rainbow	Kite	Whistling
Cockatoo	Sulphur-crested	Kookaburra	Laughing
Coot	Eurasian	Magpie	Australian
Corella	Short-billed	Magpie-lark	
Cormorant	Little Black	Moorhen	Dusky
Cormorant	Little Pied	Parrot	Red-rumped
Cormorant	Great	Pelican	Australian
Cuckoo-shrike	Black-faced	Pipit	Australian
Darter	Australian	Plover	Spur-wing
Duck	Wood	Reed Warbler	Clamorous
Duck	Pacific Black	Rosella	Crimson (Yellow form)
Egret	Great	Shrike-tit	Eastern
Egret	Intermediate	Starling*	European
Fantail	Grey	Swallow	Welcome
Flycatcher	Restless	Swamphen	Purple
Galah		Swan	Black
Heron	White-faced	Teal	Grey
Heron	White-necked	Tree-creeper	White-throated
Honeyeater	White-plumed	Wagtail	Willy
Ibis	White	Woodswallow	White-breasted
		Wren	Superb Blue
		Snake	Red-bellied
		<b>Total Australian Bird species</b>	<b>40</b>

### **“A SURPRISE AT HAWKSVIEW”**

On a calm but reasonably rewarding meander along a billabong at “Hawkesview” the peace was suddenly broken by a short but definite call of alarm. IT WAS A SNAKE! What sort?

#### **A Red Bellied Black**



Photo: Neil Blair

Using information provided by the Australian Museum and Wikipedia the following is presented, as a follow up, to members about the Red Bellied Black.

*Scientific name: Pseudechris porphyriacus.*

*Common names:* Common Black Snake, Red Belly, RBBS.

*General:* This snake shares our love of sunshine and water and attitudes towards this largely inoffensive snake are slowly changing. Sadly to some they are seen as a dangerous menace and one unjustly persecuted.

*Features:* The RBBS among Australian snakes is medium sized (1.5-2 m; 2.54 m max; males slightly larger). It has a moderate to robust build with a head barely distinguishable from the body. From above it is uniformly black apart from a snout that is often pale brown. The belly is bright crimson fading to duller red, orange or pink in the middle of the body. The underside of its tail is black. (In the north of its range the belly can actually be greyish pink to white.) The eyes are medium size and shadowed by an obvious brow ridge and have a round pupil with a very dark iris.

*Distribution:* This is disjunct in North Queensland but more continuous in South Eastern Queensland, Eastern NSW and Victoria. Another disjunct population occurs in the Southern Mt Lofty Ranges of S.A. Its presence on Kangaroo Island is debated but unlikely.

*Habitat:* The RBBS is usually, but not always, associated with a moist habitat – streams, swamps, lagoons, drainage canals and farm dams. They shelter in thick grass clumps, logs, mammal burrows and dreys or under large rocks. It is said a snake has a number of preferred shelter sites. In Spring males can move more than 1 km a day looking for females.

*Feeding and other behaviour:* The RBBS feeds on vertebrates such as fish, tadpoles, frogs, lizards, snakes (including its own species) and mammals on land (where they can climb several metres) and in water where they might stir up sediments to flush out prey. If they themselves are prey they can remain submerged for (a recorded) 23 minutes.

RBBS don't lay eggs but give birth to live young in individual membranous sacs. They number 8-40 and are about 12 cm long but few survive to reproduce. Like all snakes the RBBS is deaf, has a forked tongue and has no eyelids.

*Bites:* RBS antivenom can be used but Tiger snake venom can be used at a lower dose. Special care needs to be taken of young children and pets – they are most vulnerable.

The accompanying photographs by Neil Blair show that we had ample time to observe the key features of this snake which was probably not quite a metre long. On leaving us, its gracious movement over the ground, down an embankment and then in the water was quiet rapid. More so its disappearance below the water. If it then felt safer, so did we.



Glenda Datson

On a fine warm day with a light breeze, we braved a slight odour and the opening day of the Victorian duck hunting season to meander between the various treatment ponds.



Pink-eared Ducks in front of Reed Bank - Common Reed - *Phragmites australis* (Photo – Neil Blair)

Again this location provided great views of a range of ducks and other water birds with which to test Neil’s new scope. Other pond life – verdant green algae, carp and an ever mobile Sentry Dragonfly (see page 1) added interest. Peter also managed to photograph a male Feather-horned Beetle (*Rhipicerca femorata*) as it rested on his knee. We observed a black-fronted dotterel well-camouflaged among the reeds before we moved to the open water of the ponds and Neil’s scope enabled good viewing, especially of the Pink-eared Ducks, Little & Great Cormorants and the ‘straw-neck’ for which the Straw-necked Ibis is named. This visit was also noteworthy for the large numbers of Pink-eared ducks as well as the Magpie goose pair.



Black-fronted Dotterel (*Elseyornis melanops*)



Feather-horned Beetle



Pink-eared Duck (Photos Peter Spencer)



Little & Great Black Cormorants



Australian Shelduck, male in front



Magpie Goose (Photos Peter Spencer)

The back settling pond was occupied by a significant number of black swans, tranquilly moving amongst a mat of red water weed.



*Photo: Neil Blair*



Corowa’s Sewerage Treatment Plant is aging but still services the reticulated, urban-zoned land of Corowa. According to my enquiries (pers comm) in the late ‘70’s / early 80’s, the then Corowa branch (Upper Murray) of the Bird Observers Club, in conjunction with Landcare and the Corowa Council, established the pondage as a ‘bird sanctuary’. The local community has been involved in tree plantings at the site and one (unconfirmed) local source noted tree plantings in 2011 “...on the sewage pond where broilgas used to nest.”

We then headed south across the border to Lake Moodemere and the adjacent Moodemere Nature Conservation Reserve (MNCR).



Near the Murray Valley Highway entrance to Lake Moodemere, overlooking a panorama of River Red Gums & Giant Rushes, we were entertained by an aerial battle between a White-bellied Sea Eagle & two Whistling Kites. The Kites swooped the eagle individually with no apparent effect, but when the pair attacked in close sequence from the same angle, the Eagle chose to retreat after being hit by the second Kite. I'm not sure if the contact was intentional or a result of the Eagle attempting to evade the first Kite, but it was plainly audible!



Peaceful Dove – *Geopelia placida* (Photo Peter Spencer)

The MNCR was purchased 2001-2003 as part of a strategic assessment of high quality sites containing grassy ecosystems in the Victorian Riverina Bioregion. It has been managed in conjunction with the adjoining LM Lake Reserve in a cooperative arrangement between Parks Victoria and the Friends of LM Reserve. The total bird count for the day was over 50 & is listed on the next page.

<b>Species</b>			
<b>Common name</b>		<b>Common name</b>	
Cockatoo	Sulphur-crested		
Coot	Eurasian	Lapwing	Masked
Corella	Little	Magpie	Australian
Cormorant	Little Black	Magpie-lark	
Cormorant	Little Pied	Moorhen	Dusky
Cormorant	Great	Pardalote	Striated
Darter	Australian	Pelican	Australian
Dove	Peaceful	Pigeon	Crested
Duck	Pacific Black	Raven	Australian
Duck	Pink-eared	Rosella	Crimson (Yellow form)
Duck	Hardhead	Sea Eagle	White-bellied
Duck	Wood	Shelduck	Australian
Eagle	Wedge-tailed	Shrike-thrush	Grey
Egret	Great	Shoveler	Australasian
Finch	Red-browed	Silver-eye	
Flycatcher	Restless	Swallow	Welcome
Goose	Magpie	Swamphen	Purple
Grebe	Australian	Swan	Black
Grebe	Hoary-headed	Teal	Grey
Heron	White-faced	Thornbill	Yellow-rumped
Honeyeater	White-plumed	Tree-creeper	Brown
Ibis	White	Tree-creeper	White-throated
Ibis	Straw-necked	Wagtail	Willy
Kite	Whistling	Weebill	
Kite	Black	Whistler	Rufous
Kookaburra	Laughing	Wren	Superb Blue
<b>Total Australian Bird species</b>			<b>52</b>

**BARANDUDA NIGHT OUTING**

**Wednesday, April 15<sup>th</sup>**

On a mild April evening 16 of us including 4 prospective new members ascended 500 m up the Baranduda Range and were struck by the silence. We had a purpose - to see nocturnal creatures. Unidentified bats and an Eastern Banjo (Pobblebonk) frog—*Limnodynastes durmerilii*—were seen and scorpions were collected for identification (see separate article, page 11). We eventually encountered a Greater Glider. This article has been written to widen members’ knowledge.

**The Greater Glider (*Petauroides volans*)**



*Identification and other characteristics*

Head and body length: 35-40cm and tail length 45-60cm; Weight 900-1700g. This glider is whitish below but can be dark grey, cream or mottled cream and grey or brown above. It has a short snout and very long ears and very noticeable eyes in the spotlight.

The Greater Glider, as we experienced on our outing to Ewarts Road, is silent. It can glide up to 100m and change course direction by nearly 90 degrees. Before reaching a target its flight is directed upward so it uses speed and lands with all four feet on the trunk. Breeding occurs between March and June; only one young

is born and emerges from the pouch in 3-4 months and for the next 3 months, if not left in the nest, may be carried on the mother’s back.

### Distribution and special needs

High density populations are known from Narrow-leaf Peppermint (*Eucalyptus radiata*) forest at Koetong and also from the Strathbogie Ranges. Distribution is heavily influenced by the presence of eucalypts with foliage rich in nutrient especially nitrogen and phosphorous. They also need trees with larger hollows to den and raise young. These resources are rarely available from a single eucalyptus species so the gliders require a variety of species and this produces a patch distribution especially in foothill forests where the required resources occur on the moister slopes and gullies. These areas support large trees such as Mountain Grey Gum (*E. cypellocarpa*) and Messmate Stringybark (*E. obliqua*) that readily form hollows, mixed with species preferred for food such as *E. radiata* and White Stringybark (*E. globoidea*). On the Baranduda Range the key feed species is *E. radiata* in association with Red Stringybark (*E. macrorhyncha*), Brittle Gum (*E. mannifera*), Long-leaved Box (*E. goniocalyx*), Candlebark (*E. rubida*) and Victorian Blue Gum (*E. bicostata*).

Bernard Datson

### SCORPIONS BY ULTRAVIOLET LIGHT

My name is Cameron Butcher I'm a university student in my second year studying my Bachelor of Environmental Science and Management at Charles Sturt Thurgooona.

As it is mid semester break I decided to search for something to fill in my spare time. I looked on Ecoportal (a local environmental website) I found that there was a night walk in Baranduda on Wednesday. It was being conducted by the Albury Wodonga Field Naturalists Club. Figuring this would be an interesting use of my time, I called up and reserved my position for the event.

One of the main outcomes of the night was to spot the Greater Glider *Petauroides Volans*. As I was conducting an arthropod (bug) collection, I had a second objective for the night. Some species of arthropods are rarely seen during the day, but are plentiful at night, so this was the ideal time to target a well-known arachnid, the Scorpion.

Having recently purchased an Ultraviolet light (UV) light I was ready for the hunt (all scorpions worldwide light up under UV Light). After stating headed off on their night vigil. first scorpion was found, in quite elastic band and started searching spotting a Greater Glider in the spotted with the UV light and was last scorpion for the night was vehicles.



Scorpions under UV light  
Source Cameron Butcher

that I was looking for scorpions the group Within 10 minutes of the walk commencing, our a bizarre way: one of the members dropped an for it, and instead found a scorpion. After trees, another slightly larger scorpion was also collected for the assignment. And finally the spotted hiding directly behind one of the parked

The three scorpions found were the Black Rock Scorpion, *Urodacus manicatus*, from the Urodacidae Family. These scorpions have a wide distribution, and are found in Victoria, the ACT, NSW as well as in South Australia and Queensland. The size of the two captured scorpions is approximately 30, and 35mm, with their species being able to grow up to 55mm. This species of scorpion is known to live in burrows under leaf litter or under fallen trees. Black Rock scorpions live for up to 10 years, their diet typically consists of other arthropods such as cockroaches, beetles, millipedes and even other scorpions. They can deliver a painful sting which lasts for few hours and can be associated with moderate swelling.

Some of you asked me how you can tell the difference of male and female scorpions. Females tend to be larger and wider than the males. When the specimens are deceased it's easier to distinguish their gender by the size of their pectines (a comb shaped organ on their abdomen) - males have a longer pectine. In other words, it's difficult to determine sex, but I believe I have both a female and a male from that night.

I look forward to bringing in my whole collection to show the group in the near future. Thanks for your help.



Black Rock Scorpions  
Source Cameron Butcher

Cameron Butcher

**Postscript** (Eileen Collins): From the photographs below, by Peter Spencer, the scorpion was also identified by Museum Victoria, and was noted as carrying mites (the orange ovals on its side). The little bug in the dish is an immature (& unfortunate) leaf-hopper—Cicadellidae . (Thanks Eileen, for this information)



[Thank you Cameron, for your informative article introducing us to the fluorescent underworld of scorpions & we look forward to more!]

#### **PHEASANT CREEK FLORA RESERVE**

**Shelley. 26<sup>th</sup> April 2015.**

9 members attended the outing on a cool, cloudy day with welcome patches of warm sunshine. 3 main sites, of differing ecology, were visited – Shrubby Foothill Forest, Sub-alpine Wet Heathland and the banks of the creek. A highlight was being greeted by 30+ noisy Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoos who stayed with us for the day allowing many close sightings that enabled identification of male (red eye-ring) and female (blue eye-ring) birds.



At the same time a Lyrebird was calling but as usual, we couldn't get a sighting. A total of 22 birds were seen (See following list, page 15).

Botanically there was little flowering, with an ageing Parson's Bands the only orchid seen. Shrubs were identified by their habit and leaves and there was some flowering of the Alpine Bottlebrush – *Callistemon pityoides*. The Peppermint Eucalypts (Lichen colonized fibrous bark) were also identified and the variety of Smooth-barked Eucalypts "Gums" was noted. (See list at end of article, page 15).



Alpine Bottle brush



Bark of Peppermint Eucalypt

The fruiting bodies of fungi were “popping up” following recent rains and the classification of fungi as per Bruce Fuhrer’s Field Guide was discussed. The commonest type were “Fungi with Simple Gills” and two specimens, *Hypholoma* and *Macrolepiota*, were collected for spore prints. Others in this classification included *Amanita*, *Gymnopilus* and *Rhodocollybia*. In addition we found a “Jelly Fungus”, *Calocera*, and a “Leathery Shelf-fungus”, *Merulius*.

Fungi with simple gills:



*Hypholoma fasciculare* and its purple-brown sporeprint



*Macrolepiota clelandii* (Parasol mushroom) with white sporeprint on black paper



*Amanita muscaria* (Fly Agaric)



*Rhodocollybia butyracea*



*Gymnopilus junonius*  
- Spectacular Rustgill

Other fungi:



*Calocera* sp. (Jelly Fungus)



*Merulius tremellosus* (Leathery Shelf-fungi)

Down by the creek it was noted that the Water-ferns had fertile fronds as well as the usual sterile fronds. The fertile fronds are erect with the leaflets being much narrower and more numerous, the sterile fronds bending with the broader, green leaflets.



*Blechnum nudum* (Fishbone Water-fern) -



*Blechnum minus* (Soft Water-fern)

On the way home we visited the Tressle Bridge at Koetong. On the track the protruding head of the Pupal Skin of the Goat Moth was noted and the full skin was easily extracted.



It was a most enjoyable and interesting day and our thanks to Glenda, who has great knowledge of the reserve, for leading the outing.

List of Smooth-barked Eucalypts in the Reserve

- Eucalyptus camphora* – Mountain Swamp Gum
- Eucalyptus globulus ssp. bicostata* – Victorian Blue Gum
- Eucalyptus mannifera* – Brittle Gum
- Eucalyptus rubida* – Candlebark
- Eucalyptus viminalis* – Manna Gum
- Eucalyptus stellulata* – Black Sallee

**Observations at Pheasant Creek (near Shelley) 26/4/15**

Cockatoo, Yellow-tailed Black	<b>At Dam</b>
Cockatoo, Gang-gang	Coot
Cockatoo, Sulphur-crested	Cormorant, Little Pied
Currawong, Pied	Fairy-wren, Superb
Honeyeater, Yellow-faced	Honeyeater, White-cheeked
Kookaburra, Laughing	Magpie
Lyrebird	Shrike-thrush, Grey
Pardalote, Spotted	Silvereye
Parrot, King	Swallow, Welcome
Rosella, Crimson	Teal, Grey
Scrubwren, White-browed	
Thornbill, Brown	<b>Also:</b> Eastern Grey Kangaroo & Deer
Treecreeper, White-throated	

Photos and article – Neil Blair, with contributions to species lists by Glenda Datson