

THE FIELD NATURALIST

NEWSLETTER NO. 128: April, 2017

ALBURY-WODONGA FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB INC.

Reg. No. A0023416K



A study in study – Field Nats at Falls Creek
(Drawing – S Jakovac)



Rainbow Bee-eater, Walla Walla
(Photo – R Andrews)



Little Black Ducks enjoying.....Duckweed
at West Albury Wetlands
(Photo – P Spencer)

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Inc.

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

Seven members participated in this year's trip which, to the delight of all, resulted in a positive identification of around 90 species of flowering plants found in Ian McCann's "The Alps in Flower" which served as our tick list. The bird list (22 species, see Page 5) was more sober as the alpine birds also appear to have scattered with the wet conditions and the abundant flowers kept most eyes on the ground.



'Homo sapiens sapiens var. alpestris'

Day 1. Morning walk around Lake Guy at the Bogong Village looking at montane vegetation. Highlights included finding a beautiful slime mould (*Stemonitus axifera*) and the Narrow Lobelia (*Lobelia simplicicaulis*). Afternoon exploration of the abundant flora of the Howman's Gap – Mt McKay road and included lovely stands of Royal Bluebell (*Wahlenbergia gloriosa*) the Silky Daisies (*Celmisia sericophylla*) along waterfalls or streams and Leek-orchids (*Prasophyllum alpestre*) amongst the summit vegetation.



Slime Mould



Narrow Lobelia



Royal Bluebell



Silky Daisies



Unidentified beetle on pea (D Andrews)
(Green scarab on *Oxylobium*?)



Mauve Leek-orchid

Day 2. Spent exploring the plains around Pretty Valley Dam and Ruined Castle. Largest number of species found on this day, with the daisy (Asteraceae) family predominating in number and variety with all genera represented, often with their full number of species. Other interesting species found at Ruined Castle included White Purslane (*Montia australasica*), Mountain Plum-pine (*Podocarpus lawrencei*) with male cones, the beardless Snow Beard-heath (*Acrothamnus montanus*) and a flowering Alpine Orites (*Orites lancifolius*).



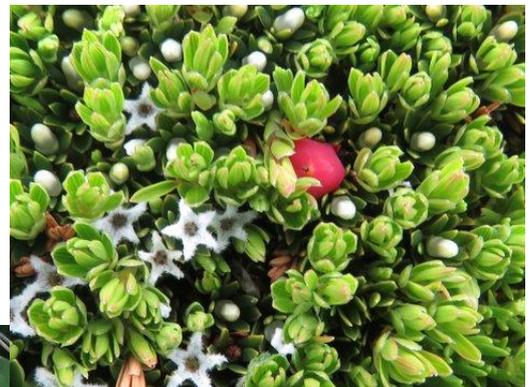
White Purslane



Mountain Plum-pine



Snow-beard Heath



Carpet Heath (D Andrews)



Alpine Tracymene (D Andrews)



Alpine Orites & flower



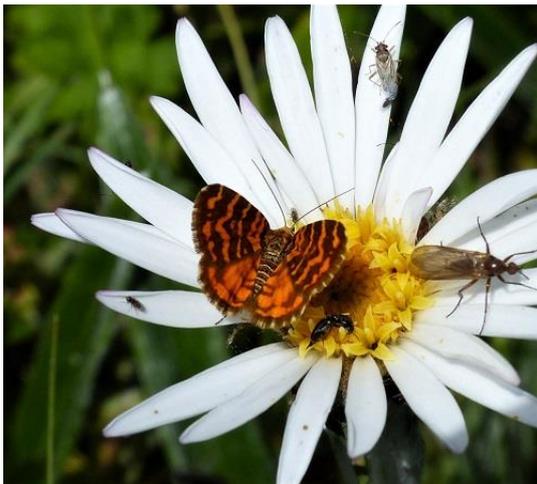
Day 3. Morning spent along the aqueduct to Roper's Lookout. Here the Olive Whistler was heard and the Yellow-faced Honeyeater seen. Other wildlife observed included the nymph stage of the Short-horned Grasshopper (*Monistria concinna*) which feeds on the Orange Everlasting (*Xerochrysum subundulatum*) and a daytime Moth (*Chrysolarentia chrysocyma*) feeding on a daisy with friends. The Veined Sun-orchid (*Thelymitra cyanea*) was in profusion. The afternoon was spent looking at the flora along the track to Wallace's Hut noting the fruiting Mountain Poranthera (*Poranthera oreophila*) with the Sky Lily (*Herpolirion novaezelandiae*) being a surprise finding in a couple of sites.



Nymph of Short horned Grasshopper



Orange Everlasting (D Andrews)



Daytime Moth



Veined Sun Orchid



Mountain Poranthera



Sky Lily

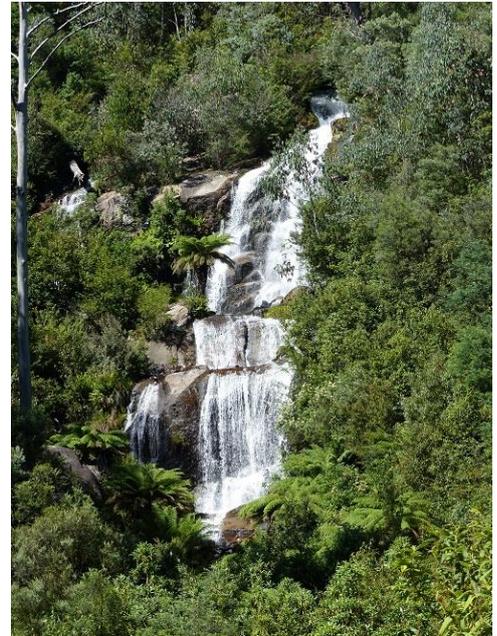
Day 4. On the way home we stopped and walked into Fainter Falls.

The montane vegetation included Blanket-leaf (*Bedfordia arborescens*), Hazel Pomaderris (*Pomaderris aspera*), flowering Tree Lomatia (*Lomatia fraseri*), Shiny Cassinia (*Cassinia longifolia*) and the Victorian Christmas-bush (*Prostanthera lasianthos*).



Stephanie found her own guide when she separated from the group – a Highland Copperhead (*Austrelaps ramsayi*, S Jakovak)

Lunch was had at the arboretum in the historic village site at Clover Dam giving an exotic and historical finish to a delightful alpine Camp.



Falls Creek, 16-19 Jan 2017;	
Birds:	
Brown Thornbill	Noisy Friarbird
Crimson Rosella	Olive Whistler
Eastern Whipbird	Pied Currawong
Flame Robin	Red Wattlebird
Gang-gang Cockatoo	Richard's Pipit
Goldfinch	Pardalote
Great Cormorant	Scarlet Robin
Grey Fantail	Silver-eye
Little Raven	Striated Thornbill
Laughing Kookaburra	White-throated Treecreeper
Nankeen Kestrel	Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Total: 22 species	

Neil Blair - Article, bird-list & photos (unless otherwise noted)

WONGA WETLANDS

28th January, 2017

Dick's photos suggest a sunny & pleasant day with diverse birdlife and plenty of water. Wetlands are definitely a visit of choice this time of year, especially following a wet Spring. We are lucky to have such good quality wetlands, and so easily accessed.



Golden-headed Cisticola (*C exilis*)
AWFN Newsletter



Crested Shrike-tit (*Falcunculis frontatus*)
Page 5 of 12



Orb –weaving Spider (*Nephila edulis*)
No. 128 April 2017

(Photos – R Andrews)

KREMUR ST/ WEST ALBURY WETLANDS

12th February, 2017

6 people attended this outing on a cool but fine evening after a showery start to the day.

We walked from the carpark to the ponds and then along the dirt path beside the ponds. The birdlife was plentiful on the ponds but very quiet in the associated River Redgum woodland.

Two of the ponds had a dense bloom of Duckweed and the Narrow-leaf Cumbungi (*Typha domingensis*), with its narrow flower spike, was noted.



Magpie Geese et al (P Spencer)



Narrow-leaf Cumbungi

As usual, water birds were plentiful, including a Large Egret - distinguished from the Intermediate Egret by having:

- bare facial skin extend behind and below the eye,
- a less yellow beak, &
- a neck longer than its body.

(P Spencer)

37 bird species were seen with the highlights being 3 Magpie Geese on one of the islands and a “Wedge-tailed” Whistling Kite !!!.



Kremur St, 12 Feb 2017	
Australian Raven	Masked Lapwing
Black Duck	Mudlark
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	Olive-backed Oriole
Black Swan	Pied Currawong
Brown Treecreeper	Rainbow Bee-eater
Clamorous Reed Warbler	Red-browed Finch
Coot	Sacred Kingfisher
Darter	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
Dollar Bird	Superb Blue Fairywren
Dusky Moorhen	Swamphen
Galah	Whistling Kite
Great Egret	White-faced Heron
Grey Teal	White-plumed Honeyeater
Hardhead	White Ibis
Little Friarbird	White-throated Treecreeper
Little Black Cormorant	White Breasted Woodswallow
Little Pied Cormorant	Welcome Swallow
Magpie	Yellow-billed Spoonbill
Magpie Geese	Yellow Rosella
Total: 38 species	



The Oriole gets its name from the Old World Orioles which are mainly yellow and black and the name derives from the old Latin names *Oryolus* and *aureus* meaning gold. (P Spencer)



At the end of the outing we were again entertained by a platypus feeding in the river in its usual stretch near the carpark. In view of the unexpected, but very welcome cold change the evening meal was abandoned.

Neil Blair - Article, bird-list & photos (unless otherwise noted)

NON-ALGAL BLOOMS

On recent outings in the warm/hot weather we have seen two common water blooms that are not algal. The first was a pink bloom seen at Wonga Wetlands. This is a free floating Fern, *Azolla rubra*, which currently doesn't have a common name. Until recently it was known as the Pacific Azolla (*A filiculoides*) which is an American plant but due to morphological and molecular differences is now thought to be an Australian species, *A. rubra*. The floating fronds are red/pink in the sun-exposed areas and green in shaded areas.

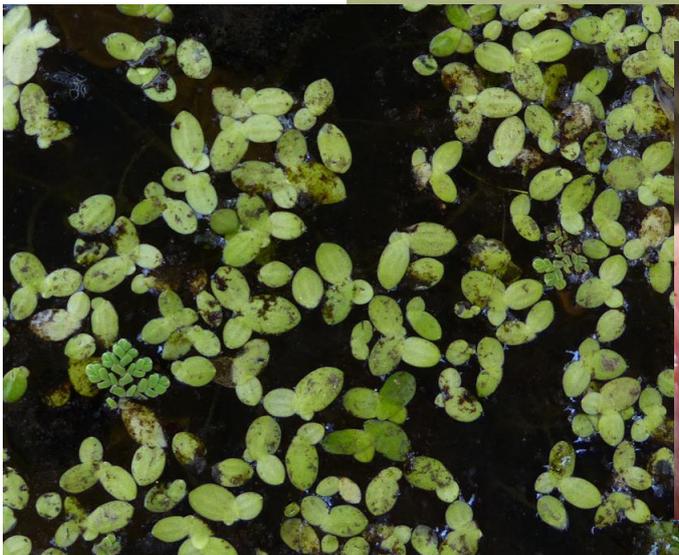
1. *Azolla rubra*



Photo – D Andrews



The second was a green bloom seen at the Kremur St ponds. This is a herb, Common Duckweed (*Lemna disperma*), whose thalli ('leaves') float unattached on the water, each thallus having a single root that hangs in the water. Thalli may be single or in groups of 2 – 10 and each thallus has a budding pouch on its margin from which new thalli grow.



2. Common Duckweed, *Lemna disperma*

Neil Blair - Article & photos (unless otherwise noted)

WALLA WALLA

25th February, 2017

A group of about a dozen headed north of Albury on a beautiful sunny day, via the Zion Lutheran Church & adjacent historical display. We were treated to a diverse wetland habitat at the Gum Swamp Reserve, as well as an interesting day from a historical perspective. The Reserve area incorporates a dam, trough and tank remnants, originally built to support the Travelling Stock Route system (see article page 10).



Peter captured a wonderful display from the abundance of Rainbow Bee-eaters at the dam, describing them as “appearing to be juvenile birds because they lacked the tail extensions that the adults have. They are also duller and greener than the adults (according to the books). The eye is a dull brownish colour compared with the bright orange adult and they lack the black patch on the throat.” [for comparison, he has included a photo of the adult bird taken previously at Lake Hume – Ed]

Gum Swamp consists of a River Red Gum swamp woodland surrounded by a Grassy Box woodland. The swamp fills regularly and once full, retains some water throughout the summer. The Grassy Box woodland above the flood line is made up of both Yellow Box and Grey Box and a wide variety of plant species, including various water plants.

The spectacular Rainbow Bee-eater is widespread in Australia and returns to summer breeding areas after over-wintering in the North. It is usually found near water, catches insects in flight and nests in sandy banks.



Rainbow Bee-eaters (P Spencer)



Fan-tailed Cuckoo (*C flabelliformis*)
(P Spencer)



Fly (Rhiniidae?)



Ranunculus inundatis



Floating Pondweed (*Potamogeton sulcatus*)



Upright Water Milfoil (*Myriophyllum crispatum*)

The bird count of 37 reflects the biodiversity value of this area.

Walla Walla outing, Sat 25/02/17; a fine, hot day. (P Seely)	
Species	
Australian Grebe	Peaceful Dove
Australian Raven	Pink & Grey Galah
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	Rainbow Bee-eater
Brown Tree-creeper	Restless Flycatcher
Crested Pigeon	Red-rumped Parrot
Dollar Bird	Royal Spoonbill
Eastern Rosella	Rufous Whistler
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	Straw-necked Ibis
Great Egret	Sacred Kingfisher
Grey Butcherbird	Striated Pardalote
Grey Shrike-thrush	Superb Blue Fairy-wren
Grey Teal	Wedge-tailed Eagle
Kookaburra	Western Warbler
Little Friarbird	White-faced Heron
Magpie	White-necked Heron
Mudlark (Magpie Lark)	White-plumed Honeyeater
Nankeen Night Heron (juvenile)	White Ibis
Noisy Miner	Willy Wagtail
	Yellow Thornbill
Total: 37 species	

TRAVELLING STOCK ROUTES & RESERVES

Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves (TSRs) are authorised networks of grazing routes and reserves established nearly 200 years ago. They are situated throughout much of south-eastern Australia and are thought to have originated from the informal tracks of early European explorers, pastoralists and settlers, and possibly indigenous pathways.

They were reserved under legislation for use by travelling stock en-route to market or for intermittent grazing. The 'Stock Route Network' stretches across 3 million ha in NSW and Queensland & is known collectively as "The Long Paddock". Bores, tanks and troughs are located at regular intervals and the strategically placed reserves are fenced to allow overnight watering and camping of stock.

In the 1870's, the travelling stock were charged per head, a permit with route & schedule was required and sheep were to travel at least six miles a day (cattle ten), to avoid all the roadside grass from being cleared in a particular area by an individual mob.

TSR networks are also present in other states and the NT but are not nearly as extensive. In Victoria, although TSRs were present in the past, they don't appear to have ever been officially gazetted and have now been overlaid with roads.

Today their original transport purpose has been mostly superseded but they may sustain non-pastoral industries, such as bee keeping, forestry, fossicking, mineral exploration and quarrying.

Travelling stock routes also provide crucial habitat and connectivity for many endangered species and ecosystems. Their length and density mean that they provide a comprehensive sample of the landscape and biodiversity of eastern Australia. Most predate the late Victorian gazetted of conservation reserves, and thus provide substantial protection to highly cleared ecosystems that were targeted for agricultural clearing in the preceding colonial period, and are therefore under-represented in the national park system (e.g., the flat land west of the Great Dividing Range). The entire network is publicly owned, and therefore represents the best remaining opportunity for conservationists to protect large amounts of threatened biodiversity. Further, the Travelling Stock Routes provide a serendipitous solution to the problem of biodiversity connectivity in the face of climate change. As temperature and rainfall patterns begin to change, the stock routes represent a set of corridors that organisms can safely transverse to reach appropriate climatic conditions.

Administration of TSRs is complex and varied, differing between states and even between geographic divisions within NSW, and is currently under review in both states. There is concern that in NSW, under proposed recommendations, the economic interpretation of TSR value will lead to fragmentation of the network and loss of protected corridors & biodiversity. The Stock Routes Coalition is a group of scientists, drovers & conservation organisations formed in 2008, with the aim of protecting the network resource from degradation.

Last month, at a presentation by Chris Tzaros, generously hosted by Corowa Land Care and Murray Local Land Services, the significance of habitat and TSR conservation was reinforced. He discussed results to date of his:

1. Bush Stone Curlew survey –

This a 10 year follow-up of 24 sites in three area – Barham, Moulamein & Buraja. The Bush Stone Curlew is listed as Endangered in NSW & Vic. Conservation programs which have been in place for 10 years have included captive breeding and release, to supplement native populations. The aim of the survey was to help assess native and bred populations, identify possible actions to prevent decline and further engage landholders. Overall, a decline in its SE range was noted. The species is “just hanging on” in a fragmented environment, and is being “topped up” with captive release birds as marginal agricultural land is being converted to productive.

2. Formal benchmark survey of Woodland bird populations of 80 TSR sites –

This have been done seasonally to capture migratory birds and his survey will be complete this Autumn. His data will help assess various management strategies (e.g. grazing management, direct seeding revegetation and Noisy Minor culling) and structural diversity on the biodiversity value of TSRs, as well as bird population movements. He also particularly noted the importance of ephemeral wetlands in biodiversity, as well as contiguous TSRs for woodland birds to move through the landscape. Examples Chris quoted included the mallee form of Pardalote, Yellow Gerygone, and Owlet Nightjars. A local TSR – Coreen, which has undertaken restoration work since 2004 - was found to have high average bird count. (all this accompanied by his stunning photographs and a brilliant BBQ tea!)

References:

1. National Parks Association, NSW (website, accessed March 2017)
2. O'Shannassy, P., Davidson, I (2016) Learning from the Coreen TSRS – and scaling up biodiversity recovery works at hundreds of sites in the Riverina, NSW.
3. Smiles, B. et al (2011) The NSW travelling stock routes and reserves network.
4. Wikipedia (accessed March 2017)

Gail Steed

Note – I have attempted to accurately collate information from the above sources; any errors or omissions are entirely mine.

Which reminds me – the Dragonflies captured on Page 8 of the last newsletter, were incorrectly labelled as Damselflies (my apologies; must have been my latent feminist streak?)

Upcoming Outings - Autumn

April 22nd: Bright –

7th May – Chiltern Mt Pilot NP

27th May – Baranduda area

11th June – Sugar Loaf Reserve

24th June – Jarvis and Georges Creeks

*Check the outing details published to end Aug 2017 on the Friends of Chiltern website, or via Ecoportal and confirm outing details in Saturday's Border Morning Mail.
Contact the outing leader in the week prior if you need a lift.*

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Finally, I recently saw this quote:

<<In every walk with Nature one receives more than he/she seeks>>

.....I don't suppose Swami Saraswati was looking for birds.....