



A pair of striking bird photos:
Top – Immature Red-rumped Parrot 'caught' by Jan Palmer at Anderson's Track:
Bottom - Male Red-browed Finch demonstrating his home-making skills – Peter Spencer

Spring / summer 'Lockdown' Issue, 2020/21:

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Make cheques payable to: Albury-Wodonga Field Naturalists' Club Inc.

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

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It is membership renewal time and changes have been approved to simplify things. It is now \$15 annually per person. This is the previous concession rate and creates a simple, one tier system. Thank you David – a great idea.

Please see details below for subscription payment. An outing schedule is included in this newsletter for the coming 2 months (a 6 month plan will soon be available upon request or via Friends of Chiltern website, so stay tuned).

**Direct Transfer details for electronic subscription payments -**

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

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AWFNC Presidents Report 2021

In previous years the President's Report has largely been a report on the year's activities. As COVID has resulted in little or no club activity and this is my last report as President, I thought I might share with you some of my thoughts on the club and the future.

When FNCs were first established they were often the only organization for people who were interested in the natural environment and as such attracted a more diverse membership in interests, qualifications and age groups. That was a long time ago – the FNCV was established in 1880.

Today a quick glance at Ecoportal Albury/Wodonga reveals more than 100 local organizations and clubs relating in some way to the natural environment. Universities and TAFEs for the academic and career-minded; government departments such as DELWP and Parks for management; citizen science for those wanting to contribute to database information and get assistance with identification of findings; Bushwalking Clubs for the more adventurous; Landcare and Friends groups for those wanting 'hands on' participation in revegetation and planting; special interest groups such as Birdlife, Entomological Society, Australian Plant Society and the list goes on and on.

So what happens to the AWFNC especially given the number of smaller FNCs that have folded in recent times in Victoria and elsewhere?

This Club has remained remarkably stable in both its membership and outing attendances over the years. The numbers are not only large enough for the club to be economically sustainable but are also close to being optimal i.e. especially at outings there is a 'Goldilocks number', not too small and not too big.

This suggests to me that despite the plethora of new clubs and organizations there is still a need for a FNC for people who look forward to an outing in the bush, to wander and see what's there and enjoy the friendship and support of like-minded people.

I believe the club can identify its member base and in working to meet their needs will enjoy a prosperous future.

My most grateful thanks to all members of the AWFNC who have provided wonderful support and friendship during my times as President.

I wish the incoming President and Committee all the best and I look forward to enjoying the fruits of their labour as a backbencher.

Neil Blair.

[I think our early meetings in 2021 demonstrated Neil's sentiments perfectly. We are an 'easy', generalist group (with some very knowledgeable 'specialist' members), keen to learn about our natural, regional environment with like-minded companions. On behalf of the group I want to sincerely thank Neil for his insights, support and selfless efforts for both the group and newsletter. I know that his new pursuits will hold many learnings and much pleasure. I personally look forward to hearing more. Thank you Neil; we will miss your knowledge and patience.

Some new members were elected at our AGM and their details are noted on page one. Our 'newbies' are Robbie Robertson as President and Ruth Trémont as Assistant Editor. A huge thank you to them both for nominating to assist the club. 2021 is looking good!] Ed

WONGA WETLANDS

5th Dec 2020 & 20th Feb 2021

About 15 of us, including a visitor from Swan Hill, enjoyed a very social outing on a warm, still morning. Initially nature took a bit of a leisurely 'back-seat', as we randomly grouped and did 6 months' worth of cross-border catching up. Gradually the wetlands came properly to the fore and I was reminded of what a reliable and remarkable environment it is. The birdlist was compiled collectively & provided by Bernie.

Wonga Wetlands, am, 20/02/21.	
Australian Raven	Magpie
Azure Kingfisher	Magpie-lark
Blackbird	Pelican
Black Cormorant	Pink and Grey Galah
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	Purple Swamphen
Black Duck	Reed Warbler
Black Swan	Sacred Kingfisher
Brown Thornbill	Spotted Pardalote
Brown Treecreeper	Superb Blue Wren
Dusky Moorhen	Welcome Swallow
Great Egret	Whistling Kite
Grey Fantail	White-plumed Honeyeater
Grey Shrike-thrush	White-browed Scrubwren
Grey Teal	White-throated Treecreeper
Hardhead	Willy Wagtail
Kookaburra	Yellow-crested Cockatoo
Little Friar Bird	Yellow Robin
Little Pied Cormorant	Yellow Rosella
Total = 36	



Sacred Kingfisher with dinner



Empty Cicada nymphal skin

Photos – P Seely, (5/12/20)



Dusky Moorhen (immature)



Red Water Fern, from near bridge at wetland

Photos – P Spencer, (20/02/21)

The moorhen appears to be happily moving amongst a common aquatic fern, Red Water Fern (*Azolla sp.*). These are small, free-floating plants, with branched stems and tiny, overlapping leaves. Roots grow from the stems into the water.

Spore-cases are of 2 kinds and occur in the angles of the leaves. Plants can't be 'wetted' & if submerged will pop up again quite dry. *Azolla filiculoides* and *A. rubra* are treated as synonyms, but according to Vicflora, "there is morphological and molecular evidence to support the distinction of the American native *A. filiculoides* Lam. in which Victorian examples were formerly included, and *A. rubra*, an Australasian species (Reid et al., 2006)" found in all mainland states. It grows in freshwater swamps, wetlands, drainage channels, lakes, ponds and slow-moving waterways, where large populations can take over. Hence it is invasive but *A. filiculoides* has been successfully used for compost and mosquito control in rice paddies.

Plants can change colour from green to brown and red as a result of changes in sunlight intensity (and shade), as well as ambient temperature.



Note the red colouration in the more exposed areas of the lagoon.

Gail Steed

MEMBER OBSERVATIONS

A. SOME SPRING FUNGI

- 1 *Aseroe rubra* (Anemone Stinkhorn / Starfish Fungus – Phallaceae)
Found growing on woodchip mulch in Phillip's garden over October/November.
They attracted many flies and up to 15 fungi appeared over 7 days.



- 2 *Fuligo septica* (Dog Vomit Slime Mould – Physaraceae)
Appeared overnight early in October during mild humid conditions in Gail's back yard and remained visible over a 2 week period until the spore mass had matured. The fruiting body seen here is an aethalium which was ultimately about 40 cm long. As it aged and the sporangia formed it became brittle and darkened. Eventually the dry, dusty mature spore mass was chocolate brown. It will be interesting to see if it reappears in the right conditions...



The first view, along with a slightly closer look.



...drying out, the maturation of sporangia and final spore mass.

3 *Podostroma cordu-damae* (Poison Fire Coral Fungus – Hypocreaceae)

This interesting and deadly find in Cairns was brought to our attention by David Coleman, via SBS. It is native to Korea & Japan but has been found for the first time in Australia. Dr Matt Barrett, a mycologist at JCU's Australian Tropical Herbarium in Cairns, warned people to avoid touching the eye-catching mushroom, which is the only fungus known to have toxins that can be absorbed through the skin. "It has a suite of chemicals in it that are particularly toxic to most forms of life."



<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/deadly-fungus-native-to-japan-and-korea-found-in-cairns>

B. THE MAD BIRD ATLASSERS OF 2020

THE MAD BIRD ATLASSERS OF 2020

Despite restrictions, lockdowns and border closures, Jenny and I stepped up our bird atlassing to keep ourselves sane. As well as visiting numerous sites, mainly in NSW and away from the pesky border, we and a few Birdlife members carried out the winter, spring and summer Birds on Farms surveys within the prescribed timeslots of 6 weeks. We started off with 31 surveys to do, but with the most welcome assistance of Neville Bartlett and John Saw, this number has been reduced to 20 - quite enough for oldies.

This southern NSW woodland birds project run by Ben Humphries got away to a flier and on this basis he and Chris Timewell (Birdlife Melbourne) have secured an amazingly long-running grant for up to 10 years duration from private benefactors to keep the project running. It had been due to finish in June this year. You can imagine how pleased we are that our atlassing, which started back in May 2016, has led to this. In addition to Ben's employment. Birdlife has now sufficient funds to employ another part-time officer and have appointed Rhonda Vile. Some new farms are being added, making the local total over 25, most of them with 4 atlassing sites each. The area now covers, from north to south, the Murray River almost to Wagga Wagga, and east-west from Savernake across through Holbrook and Culcairn, almost to Jingellic.

The bad news is that the three target bird species, Little Lorikeet, Black-chinned Honeyeater and Dusky Woodswallow, all listed as vulnerable to extinction, are now very hard to find in our area. However we record all the species so more attention will now be paid to these.

All our Atlas records north of the Murray River point to the summer of 2019-20 as a period resulting in marked declines in the small passerine species, especially the Thornbills and Weebills. The thinking at Birdlife, and our very experienced John Saw, is that the combination of dust, smoke and disastrous fires to the east, together with the severe 2 year drought, has depleted the insect populations on which the small birds rely for food. However, this wetter summer seems to have been a good breeding season and there are some signs of recovery. This is going to take some time and let us hope the drought does not return quickly.

John and Jenny Shepherd

[Some of John & Jenny's photos follow next page...]



Golden-headed Cisticola



Koala with joey



Black Prince Cicada



Peron's Tree frog

[Another regional bird survey project of interest has been coordinated by the Swamps, Rivers & Ranges group (<http://swampsriversandranges.org>)

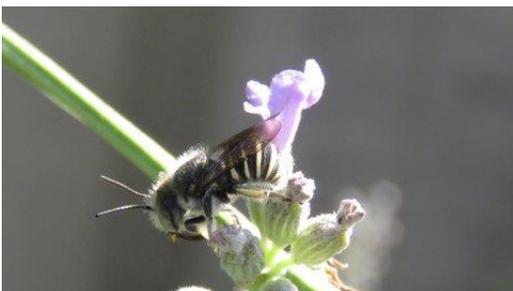
The survey is within NE Victoria and has been funded by The Wettenhall Environment Trust. This long-term project was designed to provide data, especially landscape restoration data and has involved many local volunteers. It has been operating seasonally since 2016 and results will be presented by President, Richard Loyn at the AGM to be held, 4:30 pm, at Lake Mokoan Hub and Café, 652 Lake Mokoan Rd, Chesney Vale. For more information about the group or its AGM, contact the coordinator (Sophie Enders) via the website above.

Note: if interested in attending the AGM, an RSVP to (swampsriversranges@gmail.com) is needed by March 24th] Ed

C. GARDEN INSECTS

Some of what has been found in our own back yards this summer: some garden sightings provided by observant members with patience and photographic skill.

1) Richard Andrews:



Carder Bee (*Pseudoanthidium repitum*)
[An African import (ID - Karen Retra)]

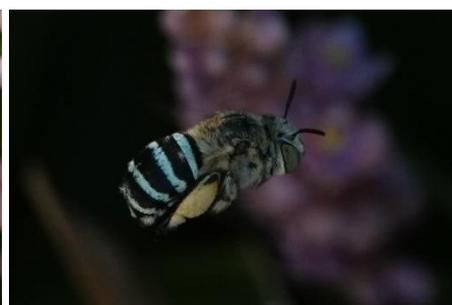


Wandering Percher Dragonfly (*Diplacodes bipunctata*)

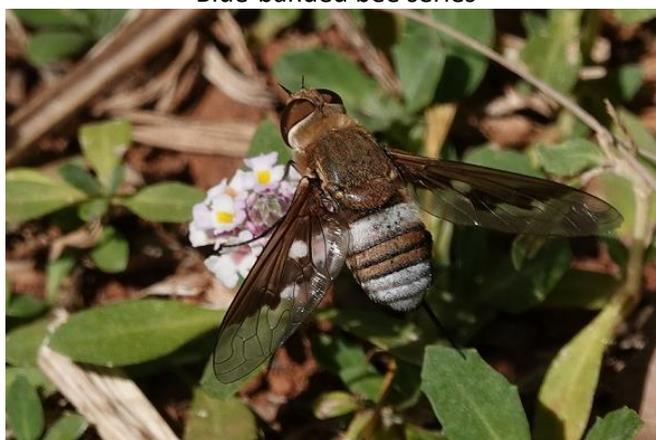


Australian Emerald Damselfly (*Hemicordulia australiae*)

2) Peter Spencer



Blue-banded bee series



Bee Fly (ID G Steed)

3) Phillip Seely



Crane Fly



Unidentified Fly



And another unidentified beetle



Carcass Beetle?

[Now we just have to hone our insect identification skills, so Neil's article below is timely!]

D. BEETLE ANTENNAE

Whilst looking at my beetle photos, I had "A Guide to the Beetles of Australia - Hangay and Zborowski" open to help me with some identifications.

I became interested in their section on beetle antennae, the function of which I quote "Their primary function is to smell and probe, providing the beetle with important information about its environment, the shape of objects within its reach, the whereabouts of its mate, food, possible enemies and so on. The beetle's antennae can also perceive electromagnetic waves, infra-red radiation and can gauge the humidity of air"

But what interested me most at the time was their photos of seven different types of beetle antennae and how each type can point to specific families, helping greatly with identification.

On checking through my photos I found six of the seven types taken in areas visited by the AWFNs on their outings (see photos to follow).

1. Filiform (thread-like)



Leaf Beetle (*Paropsisterna fastidiosa*, Chrysomelidae)



2. Lamellate (nested plates)



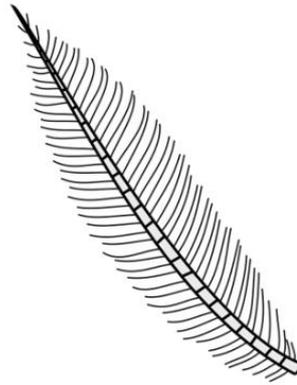
Swarming Scarab (*Liparetrus sp.*, Scarabaeidae)



3. Clavate (clubbed)



4. Plumose (long hairs, feather-like)



Feather-or Fan-horned Beetle (*Rhipicera* sp., Rhipiceridae)

5. Serrate (saw-toothed)

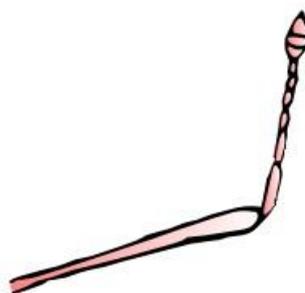


Net-winged (Lycid) Beetle (*Porrostoma rhipium*, Lycidae)

6. Elbow (sharply bent)

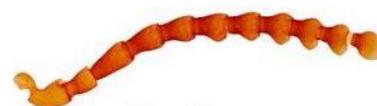


Wattle Pig Weevil (*Leptopius sp.*, Curcuionidae)



The other type is Moniliform antennae - beaded (Passandridae).

Has anyone got a photo of a beetle with moniliform antennae for the next newsletter???



Moniliform

Neil Blair

E. SOME SUMMER SNIPPETS

My usual routes on Nail Can Hill were among the scent of summer sun on the drying spring grasses, lilies and Sticky Everlastings going to seed.

But sights so different to last summer, with a carpet of green continuing in many places thanks to summer grasses such as Kangaroo Grass, Native Wheat Grass and Hedgehog Grasses.

Exploring further afield, I returned from Canberra (in early January) via Tharwa – Adaminaby – Tumut – Batlow -Tumbarumba – Albury, to see what was happening after the fires of last summer. The forests were mostly standing burnt tree skeletons with skirts of grey-green foliage resprouting from basal lignotubers. In the high Snow Gum woodlands and high country herfields some trees were resprouting at their base and many were ringed with mounds of Prickly Starwort. There were cascades of Waxy Bluebells in places and Billy Buttons (*Craspedia*) in others;



clusters of Silver Daisies, Bulbine Lilies, Trigger Flowers, Rosetted Cranesbill (*Geranium antrorsum*) Sorrel and miniature violets; as well as scatterings of Alpine Leek Orchids (*Prasophyllum*), Brachyscomes and other daisies. In the rural areas between Tumut and Tumbarumba many trees showed the signs of fire while regenerating grasses were going to seed across many paddocks. New rows of apple trees on outer edges of many orchards were growing well with this year's summer rains and I marvelled at the huge effort that must have gone into saving so many orchards, packing sheds, homes, farm infrastructure and villages.





A first trip to Mt Buffalo was totally inspiring. The scents and sounds of the bush were a balm to my being and the herbfields of the alpine frost hollows divine with their flowering Copper-wire Daisies, Scaly Ozothamnus, Mint Bushes, assortment of other daisies and occasional late Trigger Flowers. Highlights were my first Gentians (my guess being *Chionogentias polysperes*) and the call of what I thought was probably a pair of Olive Whistlers (although John tells me the Whipbirds mimic the Whistlers quite well!!).



Ruth Trémont

Upcoming Outings – Autumn 2021

- ~ **14th March** – Chiltern Dams; 9 am Acacia Carpark Wodonga; contact John Shepherd or Robbie Robinson.
- ~ **27th March** – Corowa Ponds; 9 am SS&A Carpark Wilson St. Albury; contact Phillip Seely.
- ~ **11th April** – Woomargama (joint outing with Birdlife); 9 am Woomargama Village toilet block); contact John Shepherd. [Note: We will not be meeting in Albury this outing so please arrange shared travel separately.]
- ~ **24th April** – Gum Swamp Reserve Walla Walla & Morgan’s Lookout; 9 am SS&A Carpark Wilson St. Albury; contact Peter Spencer

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

PS Don’t forget the Chris Tzaros photographic exhibition – ‘Wild Encounters’ – at the Wangaratta Tourism Information Centre. It is inspiring and concludes after Easter.



And to close, a beautifully restful shot - the moon behind Monument Hill, West Albury – P Seely

Sweet dreams!