

Castlemaine Naturalist

December 2013

Vol. 38.11 #416

Monthly newsletter of the
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Long billed Corella - Chewton Photo – Noel Young

Bird Count 1/12/13 Southern Team Rita Mills

A little re-sorting before we left, and four teams left the Octopus not long after 8.30. This was only my second time with the Southern team, and the first with four in the team, which worked very well I thought. Our first stop was Chinamans Point, where the plantings done some years ago make a very dense cover for birds, but we did quite well there nevertheless, and with four of us, it was usually possible to record birds heard, as there was usually the needed three recorders to confirm a call. Birds in greatest numbers here were Little Ravens, which were flying across to some obviously interesting destination.

We went on to Expedition pass Reservoir next, but saw few birds except Clamorous Reed- warblers – and we heard them, too! From there to another dam - the railway dam out at Tunnel Hill. Here the Rufous Whistlers, which were in great voice at almost every stop, were in full cry. We added a few more birds, and were starting to drive off, as we'd recorded a good number of species, and the trail bikes were arriving, but as we drove away slowly Noel thought he heard a Grey Fantail, and stopped again. We all got out again, and after a few minutes someone realized that the Fuscous Honeyeater that was being watched, was actually nest building, and getting in to the nest, wriggling around to shape it and adding material at the same time it seemed. We'd been hearing Orioles calling, and while I was still looking for the Fantail I spotted a different bird, and realized it was an Oriole with something in its beak, and a bit anxious about us being there. One of the others finally spotted it quickly feed a youngster and fly away, so that really made my day.

We stopped bird-watching for a few minutes when we got onto the Ridge Road, as the wildflowers there just could not be ignored, and Noel's camera was needed to record a beautiful flowering of Common Fringe-lilies. George commented that he'd never before seen them in such profusion in the district. There were even a few of the lovely Dwarf Bush-pea *Pultenaea humilis* still in flower, as well as Native Primrose *Goodenia blackiana*, Grass Trigger-plants *Stylidium ameria*, Karala *Gompholobium huegelii*, Tall Bluebells *Wahlenbergia stricta*, Grey Everlasting *Ozothamnus obcordatus*, and Black-anther Flax-lily *Dianella admixta*. And as we drove all though this bush we passed masses of Sticky Everlastings *Xerochrysium viscosum*.

Next stop Fryerstown Cemetery, and at least two pairs of White-winged Trillers, one of which was nest building, too, as was a pair of Jacky Winters, and for botanical interest, a lovely patch of Magenta Storks-bills *Pelargonium rodneyanum*. From there to Glenluce Springs for lunch, and more Rufous Whistlers, some Prickley Starwort and Kangaroo Apple *Solanum lacinatum*, then to Warburtons Bridge, where we found a number of camps, including two complete with horses, but the birds didn't seem to mind much, and there were lots of Brown Treecreepers and a few White throated, too. While George and Noel wandered off to see what they could find further along the creek Kit and I sat at the picnic table and watched three or four little bobbing forms among the grass, which we had realised were Brown Treecreepers, and as we watched, the numbers grew, there were 9 or 10, possibly more, but they had been hidden in the short grass. Three worked their way towards us as we sat there, and one found something very tasty, which attracted the one behind, which went to investigate, and both settled down to a great feed while the third one continued towards us. What a delightful way to spend an after-lunch rest time!



Fringe-lilies *Thysanotus tuberosus* - Noel Young

We made just one last brief stop in Spring Gully, and added Shining Bronze-cuckoo and Scarlet Robins to our species list there, but a highlight was again as Kit had found a veritable garden of Bluebells just off the parking spot. I have certainly never seen them in such numbers before, and they were flowering at their best, too. I'm sure it gave us the extra energy badly needed to get back into Castlemaine!

A Reptilian Encounter

George Broadway

As I was walking down the garden path recently I noticed an object ahead of me consisting of both white and dark portions. On closer inspection this writhing object resolved itself into seven red-headed skinks, three of which were on their backs, exposing their white underbellies, while the other four were right way up. The three inverted lizards seemed to be engaged in mortal combat, two of them had their jaws clamped on the underside of the third which seemed to be making every effort to extricate itself. The way in which they were attempting to roll each other over reminded me very much of the way their larger relatives, namely crocodiles wrestle with their prey. The other four appeared to be acting as audience, watching very closely but not becoming involved.

After I had watched this spectacle for some time, some of the audience appeared to become tired of the sport and headed for the shrubbery, leaving the antagonists to continue the struggle by themselves, which they did for some time. Eventually however they seemed to realize that the fight was going nowhere, so they broke it up and went their separate ways, seemingly none the worse for the experience. After a brief rest however, two of them decided that honour was not yet satisfied and so they returned to the arena and resumed the struggle. Again one succeeded in clamping its jaws on the other and the two proceeded as before to roll around trying to achieve mastery (my anthropomorphic interpretation), till the members of the audience decided that the show was not to be missed and returned to resume their roles as spectators.

This time the struggle was short-lived, apparently realizing that no progress was being made, as the two antagonists were too evenly matched. So by mutual agreement the clinch was broken and combatants and spectators went their separate ways, no-one limping or seemingly affected. I was left wondering as to the reason for the encounter; was it a territorial dispute or maybe males fighting over females. Perhaps the fight spectators were females awaiting the outcome; they certainly appeared to be very interested. And it is (was) Spring after all.



Photo Gallery - Joy Weatherill



In the previous edition of CN, Joy's photo of freckled ducks mysteriously disappeared in the printing process. So she has come up with a better one above - a close up portrait, close enough to clearly see its 'freckles'. Note also the odd shaped bill and the characteristic crest. Below - a White-winged Chough on its neatly rounded mud nest - Conglomerate Gully Oct 18





Left - **Richards Pipit**

Breamlea Flora and Fauna reserve, November 6

Pied Oystercatcher

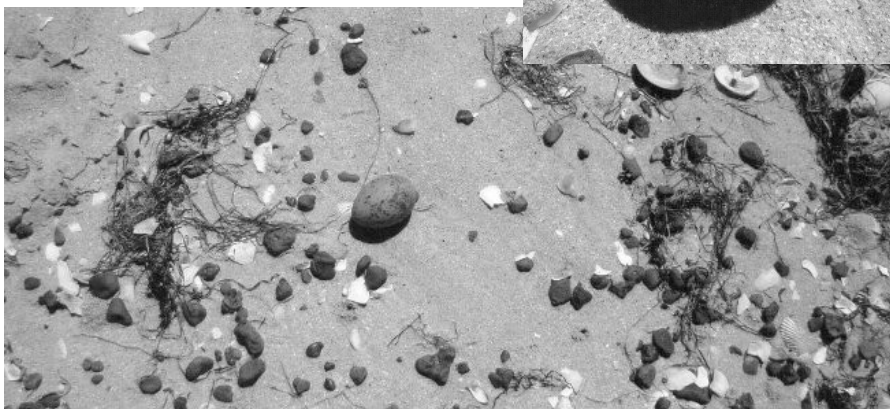
Point Lonsdale, November 5



Below -

Mystery egg - on - the - sand at St Leonards, November 5
- looks like a lazy Silver Gull, but a single egg without a nest is characteristic of a Tern.

All photos by Joy Weatherill



The year has almost evaporated and this issue completes my sixth year as editor of the CN. It has been an interesting experience, and usually rewarding to produce a durable record of the clubs' activities every month, though too often the deadline looms with little or no material in sight! Somehow it all works out in the end, largely thanks to a few regular contributors. Needless to say, the task would be easier if more members sent in observations, photos, or dare I say articles, of which we always say, if it is of interest to you, it is sure to be of interest to others.

During the year, Chris Timewell put a lot of effort into renewing the clubs' web site, and updating the info on it on a regular basis. An active web site has great potential for many purposes, and is the clubs window to the world. It is also a commitment that requires the support of members.

Chris was also responsible for arranging some excellent speakers this year, the last being no exception. (If you missed Ross William's talk, chase up the excellent ABC documentary called 'The Hobbit Enigma') Your committee is currently working on a speaker list for next year. If you have a contact or suggestion please let George know.

After our December breakup the next meeting is our AGM on February 14. Please give thought to helping out on the committee, and let our Sec. or Pres. know for nomination before that date. Have a great Xmas break.

Noel Young - editor

Club excursion to Newstead (cemetery + Rise n shine)

Noel Young

The outing produced a couple of highlights, both of which were captured by Joy Weatherill's camera. A pity we can't reproduce them in colour here, as both were very colourful subjects. At the cemetery Rainbow Bee-eaters were nesting in the



creek bank, and at the Rise and Shine reserve, we came across a tiny blue-green moth which was also noted on the fobif web site around that time. They had Tony Morton identify it as the 'Satin Green Forester' *Pollanisia viridipulverulenta*



Observations from the November meeting

- ◆ Chris Timewell has seen six **Glossy Ibis** on Bells Swamp, and an Echidna on the western Reserve
- ◆ Max Schlachter reported two or three **Painted Honeyeaters** in mistletoe in Yellow Box trees next to the Railway dam, and the occurrence of **White-browed Babblers** in the grounds of the Steiner school
- ◆ Four to six Masked Lapwings seen in the town - Kit Morris
- ◆ Two or three members commented on concentrated flocks of Little Ravens apparently feeding on Cup moth larvae, and some indications that the plague of the latter is waning

Observations since the November meeting

Over the past week **fruit bats** have been feeding on the Doveton Street loquat trees. Each night, hundreds of extra loquat seeds are added to those already on the ground. A rather blurry photo is attached.

November 18 - Ern Perkins

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Geoff and I were woken at 5.30am this morning by an unusual bird call. We recorded the call but were unable to locate the culprit until it became light enough to see a large black bird high up in the large Yellow Box in front of our house. It turned out to be an immature **Common Koel**.

The Melbourne Museum website tells us that they are members of the cuckoo family found in tall forests and are common in suburban areas. They migrate from Australia to New Guinea and probably eastern Indonesia and further north. During the breeding season, they are found in northern and eastern Australia, south to about Nowra, NSW, with occasional birds moving further south.

The Common Koel is a brood parasite, that is, it lays its eggs in the nests of other bird species. Common hosts are the Red Wattlebird, friarbirds, the Magpie-lark, and figbirds. A single egg is laid in the host's nest and once hatched the chick forces the other eggs and hatchlings out of the nest. When the chick leaves the nest it roosts in the outer branches of a tree, cheeping incessantly while the significantly smaller parents desperately search for sufficient food to satisfy the nagging youngster. Adults are rather shy and are heard much more often than they are seen.

November 25 - Geraldine Harris

**Disclaimer:** The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

# Castlemaine Field Naturalists

## Coming events

### **Fri December 13 meeting: Members night**

Members' "show and tell"; Share a few photos, a nature experience, a poem - be as creative as you like. And bring a plate for a shared supper. The clubs' computer and projector will be available.

### **Sat December 14 field trip: Bells Swamp**

### **Fri February 14 meeting: AGM Speaker to be confirmed**

## **VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES**

**General meetings** - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

**Field Trips** - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

**Business meetings** - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 7.30 pm. Members are invited to attend.

**Club website** - <http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/>

### **Subscriptions for 2013**

Ordinary membership: Single \$30, Family \$40

Pensioner or student: Single \$25, Family \$30

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

### **2013 Committee**

|                                 |                                                                            |                             |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Rita Mills (President)          |                                                                            | 5472 4553                   |
| Chris Timewell (vice President) |                                                                            | 5472 1553                   |
| George Broadway (Secretary)     | <a href="mailto:georgebroadway@bigpond.com">georgebroadway@bigpond.com</a> | 5472 2513                   |
| Nigel Harland (Treasurer)       | 5474 8246                                                                  | Barbara Guerin 5472 1994    |
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