

The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



December 2014 - Issue #222
Journal of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc.
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Objects of the Club

To facilitate and promote the knowledge of natural history, and to encourage the preservation and protection of the Australian natural environment, especially that of the Murrumbidgee River Valley

Christmas
Picture by
Melanie
Baulch



Seasons Greetings

*Wishing you all
a very happy and
safe time at
Christmas and for
the New Year*

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CONTRIBUTIONS

For the next issue by
Wednesday 4 February
To Rowena Whiting
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December get together
(in place of meeting)
is at McCaughey Lagoon
on Thursday 11 December at 6pm.
Details on page 9

Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc. Office Bearers and Annual Subscriptions

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Treasurer:	Phil Tenison	6953 4869			

MEETINGS ARE HELD ON THE SECOND THURSDAY EACH MONTH, EXCEPT JANUARY, AT THE Yellow Room, Leeton Library, Sycamore Street at 7.30 PM

FIELD TRIPS NORMALLY TAKE PLACE ON THE FOLLOWING WEEKEND.

INTENDING NEW MEMBERS, GUESTS AND VISITORS WELCOME.

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Annual Subscriptions:	Family	\$45.00	Adult/Single	\$35.00	Journal only/Concession	\$25.00

Opinions expressed by authors are their own and do not necessarily represent the policies or views of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc.

Welcome to the last issue for the year and I would like to thank all contributors for their copy and photographs throughout the year. Every month has been full of activities, observations and information about species. Enjoy your Christmas New Year break (no issue in January – yeh!) and return with many more stories to tell and pictures to show. Rowena.

Members' News

Bill Draper will be celebrating a special birthday this month, his 90th. Whenever Bill comes along on an outing our knowledge of the natural history and local history is enhanced; his interesting tales are always appreciated. Our warm thoughts and happy wishes are with you as you celebrate this special milestone. Many Happy Returns, Bill.

Eric Whiting has had his paper on the flora of the Cocoparras published in October edition of *The Victorian Naturalist* (Journal of The Field Naturalist Club of Victoria). Entitled *A limited vegetation survey of Cocoparra National Park and Cocoparra Nature Reserve*, it details the results of his surveys in 1992-1996.

We are all pleased to hear that **Max O'Sullivan** is well on the road to recovery following surgery. Great to have you back on deck, along with the 'Sightings' and your other contributions.

Black Honeyeater (below)
Black-eared Cuckoo Juv (right)
Mistletoebird female (below right)
Tawny Frogmouth (far right)



Photos taken by
Phillip Williams on
the Twitchathon



Celebrating 20 Years at Fivebough Wetlands and the Colinroobie Hills



20 years ago Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists ran its first excursion in October 1994. To celebrate the event the November excursion was a repeat of the first excursion of the Club. There were two venues Fivebough Wetlands (then known as Fivebough Swamp) in the morning followed by Yarrabimbi, Andrew Thompson's property, in Colinroobie Hills in the afternoon.

As is now our custom we met at the Petersham Road carpark. We were fortunate enough to be guided by and receive expert knowledge from Keith Hutton who led the original walk around the Wetlands. We were also pleased to welcome back for the weekend Dot and Phil Green from their current home

Photos anti-clockwise from above:
 Group on the track at Fivebough –Dot Green.
 Australasian Bittern in flight – Phillip Williams
 Group at the sausage sizzle – Dot Green
 Group pause for a rest on the rocks at
 Yarrabimbi – Dot Green

on the South Coast. Both were members at the very start of the Club and Dot was on the first outing to Fivebough.

The morning walk followed past the Interpretative Centre and round the main walking track loop to the bird hide overlooking the settling ponds and back through the planted area. This seems to be the standard walk now and although the Club has visited Fivebough many times over the years it is still enjoyable to see the changes in vegetation and water coverage as well as observing the different birds as the seasons come and go.



Overnight rain had made the tracks a little bit sticky with a few puddles but the gravel topping along most of the way assisted in an easy progress. The strong winds experienced were expected to hamper the observation of birds, but resulted in the greatest thrill of the day. Four Australasian Bitterns took to the sky and flew in clear view for a considerable distance before dropping out of sight in the Cumbungi. Usually if they are seen it is a quick glimpse of one as it skims across the top of the Cumbungi for a short distance only. We later saw two other

individuals but they could possibly have been two of the four earlier ones. We also saw a Little Bittern. It is so satisfying to now have these endangered birds finding the conditions suitable habitat at the right time of the year for them at Fivebough.

Other threatened bird species seen in the morning were two Freckled Ducks (from the bird hide overlooking the settling ponds). Also seen were Wood Sandpiper and Marsh Sandpiper. A Black Falcon just made it to the species list for the morning being sighted as we made our way back to the car park.

We went back to the Interpretive Centre for morning tea that was rather prolonged with many conversations; before we headed off to the Colinroobie Hills. Here we proceeded to have a sausage sizzle lunch in commemoration of the event. We were joined there by other members who were unfortunately not able to take part in the morning.



To complete the day Andrew Thompson led us around part of his property taking a new circular route up to his lookout areas. During the walk we were pleased to see the extent of regeneration of shrubs including Oval-leaf Mintbush, Platysace and Dampiera since being decimated by the prolonged drought of the last decade. As we were heading back we were treated to another thrill, seeing three Glossy Black Cockatoos (male, female and juvenile) perching in a Hill She-oak.

Everyone agreed that it had been a very enjoyable and rewarding day with 65 bird species seen at Fivebough and 25 at Colinroobie.

Eric Whiting

**Group at the lookout spot, Yarrabimbi - Dot Green.
Glossy Black Cockatoo taking off – Phillip Williams**



Birdlist - Fivebough Wetlands 16 November 2014 morning

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| Galah | Whistling Kite | Great Egret [7] |
| Magpie-lark (Pee Wee) | Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike | Yellow-throated Miner |
| Black Duck | Yellow Spoonbill [16] | Little Friarbird |
| Black Kite | White Ibis | Little Bittern (heard) |
| White-necked Heron | Goldfinch | Reed Warbler |
| Zebra Finch | Swamp Harrier | Australasian Bittern 4 |
| Silver Gull (first for a while) | Grey Teal | Little Pied Cormorant |
| Welcome Swallow | Black-winged Stilt | Great Cormorant |
| Hardhead | Red-kneed Doterill with young | Black-shouldered Kite |
| Australian Hobby | Eurasian Coot | Golden-headed Cisticola |
| Whiskered Tern | Purple Swamphen | Dusky Moorhen |
| Wood Sandpiper | Red-capped Plover | Sharp-tailed Sandpiper |
| White-fronted Chat | Fairy Martin | Intermediate Egret |
| Royal Spoonbill [2] | Australasian Spotted Crake (mound) call | Marsh Sandpiper |
| Straw-necked Ibis | Baillions Crake [3] | Pelican |
| Double-bar Finch | Black-tailed Native-hen | Chestnut Teal |
| Little Black Cormorant | Hoary-headed Grebe | Variegated Fairy-wren |
| Freckled Duck [2] | Black-tailed Native-hen [4] | Weebill |
| Glossy Ibis [3] | Superb Fairy-wren | Nankeen Kestrel |
| Willie Wagtail | White-plumed Honeyeater | Crested Pigeon |
| Blackbird | Starling | |
| Black Falcon | | |

Birdlist - "Yarrabimbi" 16 November 2014 afternoon

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| Diamond Firetail | Double-barred Finch | White-plumed Honeyeater |
| Southern Whiteface | Peaceful Dove | Mallee Ringneck |
| Black Duck | Galah | Willie Wagtail breeding |
| Australian Raven | Chestnut-rumped Thornbill | Rufous Whistler |
| Grey Shrike-thrush | Grey Butcherbird | Magpie |
| Magpie Lark | White-winged Chough | Striped Honeyeater |
| Glossy Black Cockatoo [2 + juv] | Apostlebird | Western Gerygone |
| Brown Treecreeper | Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike | Kookaburra |
| Grey Fantail | | |

The Red-lored Whistler 'Save Our Species' Project

The Red-lored Whistler is a threatened bird species listed as Critically Endangered at the NSW state level (TSC Act, 1995) and Vulnerable at a national level (EPBC Act, 1999). It exclusively occurs in mallee vegetation, with the core population in north-western Victoria and south-eastern South Australia.

The species was first discovered in New South Wales in 1963 at Pulletop Nature Reserve, just north of Griffith. The species was later found at Round Hill Nature Reserve (1968), and in the Scotia mallee in south-western NSW. The whistler has not been recorded for many years at Pulletop or SW NSW, so the only currently known population is found in Nombinnie, Round Hill and Yathong Nature Reserves.

The Red-lored Whistler is considered threatened due to the historical loss of mallee habitat and the ongoing threats of large bushfires and habitat degradation by introduced grazing mammals, especially feral goats and rabbits.

The NSW Government has committed to investing in threatened species conservation under the *Saving our Species* (SOS) conservation program. This initiative aims to maximise the number of threatened species that can be secured in the wild in NSW for 100 years. Under the SOS program, a 3 year allocation has been provided to the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) for actions benefiting the conservation of the Red-lored Whistler.

Funding towards Red-lored Whistler conservation consists of three components: monitoring, fire and feral animal management. This funding enables NPWS to –

- enhance our efforts to conduct hazard reduction, aiming to reduce impact of landscape-sized fires,
- conduct works to reduce access to open water by feral goats, thereby limiting the extent that goats can forage on the reserves,
- improve our understanding of species distribution and status on the mallee reserves.

At this stage we are halfway through our allocated funding. To date, we have been able to use the services of a helicopter with a helitorch (an aerial driptorch) to undertake hazard reduction along trails and within the mallee blocks, treating 2267 hectares. NPWS has also modified 21 ground tanks and 1 quarry to reduce the amount of, and duration of time, water is held in these storages.

Our survey work has been valuable in understanding the species distribution across the mallee reserves. It has been particularly encouraging to discover the species is more widespread than previously thought. Until we began these recent surveys, we thought Red-lored Whistlers occurred in two main areas – in eastern Nombinnie / Round Hill Nature Reserves, and in the Nombinnie Nature Reserve /State Conservation Area west of Mount Hope. Our surveys indicate the species potentially occurs (more or less) contiguously across the reserves from Round Hill Nature Reserve to the south-eastern corner of Yathong Nature Reserve, and extending down into the south-western area of Nombinnie Nature Reserve, west of the Kidman Way. Furthermore, the species also occurs in a range of fire age classes, ranging from 12 to 57 years since fire. This information greatly assists in understanding the habitat needs and potential management requirements of the species.

David Egan

[David was our speaker at the November meeting, giving a very informative presentation about the work he is doing of this species in his role as a national park ranger. Many thanks, David, and we look forward to hearing more in the future. Ed]



Red-lored Whistler (Photo courtesy of Graeme Chapman)

Christmas Breakup at Yarrabimbi - 29 November

Again the location for this year's Christmas celebration was Yarrabimbi, a delightful property in the Colimroobie Hills; with Ana and Andrew as our hosts.

Members began to assemble in the late afternoon and were soon partaking of drinks and nibbles.

With the heat of the sun abating, some went for a walk along the track towards the quarry area passing a couple dams, one of which was dry. Again it was good to see the vegetation recovering. There are some old Green Mallee trees along this route which stood out to first timers. Their occurrence marks a change in the underlying geology.

The highlight was seeing a number of Glossy Black Cockatoos, 11 in all, as we were returning to the house.

Others were content to observe the various small birds from the terrace around the dam and in the fruit trees close to the house.

It was then time to enjoy the main meal of cold meats and salads prepared by Ana and Nella. This was followed by a variety of deserts supplied by members. As usual, all most delicious. It was also a chance to catch up on news and other happenings with old and new along members alike. We extend our grateful thanks to Ana and Andrew, along with Nella for their hospitality.



Enid and Max at the party
Photo: Virginia O'Brien

Rowena Whiting

Tracking Bunyip Birds Pozible Project

Murrumbidgee Field Naturalist Club have given great support from day one of the Bitterns in Rice Project, with the total level of support received to date from individual club members plus the clubs naming right pledge being quite overwhelming. Matt Herring and I on behalf of Team Tracking Bunyip Birds take this opportunity to thank the club and its members for this wonderful support.

Matt and I will be working with the club to arrange a presentation as part of the club's first meeting in 2015. We look forward to catching up with members at this time.

The total amount raised from our Tracking Bunyip Birds crowd funding campaign is in the order of \$66,000.00

The support for our campaign has been remarkable, with 320 supporters directly pledging or sending cheques directly to the RGA ECP for deposit into our special account. Even in recent days we have spoken with people who would like to donate more money to our project.

Several of the larger pledges have come from Field Naturalist-Bird Observer clubs like MFNC so when you include club member numbers in our total of supporters it is around 800 individuals. I find this level of support heart-warming as it demonstrates that many in our community want to do something positive for the environment, in this case support the recovery of this elusive water bird.

We have had preliminary discussions regarding where to go from here with the project, at this stage we aim to purchase trackers for at least 9 birds. As we have to organise ethics approval we have said we would start tracking during the 2015-16 rice season. It is possible, if we can get early approval that we will start tracking at rice harvest in 2015. We plan to set up a Bitterns in Rice Web Site in the first months of 2015 so people can keep up to date with this year's survey work and watch our progress with the Tracking Bunyip Birds Project.

In relation to this season, thanks to Riverina LLS we have secured a grant of \$50,000 to do surveys in the Murrumbidgee and Coleambally areas. The aim of this will be to establish the populations of Australasian Bitterns in these regions during the rice season.

We look forward to keeping the club up to date with the project.

Neil Bull

President's Report 2014

After my election to the position at the Annual General Meeting in November 2013, the Club continued on its merry way with many activities already in the pipeline for the coming year.

Firstly the Christmas function was held at "Yarrabimbi" with Andrew and Ana playing generous hosts to the MFN yet again. The next major event that was already beyond the planning stage was the January Campout at "Laurel Hill" near Tumberumba. The bulk of the planning and worry fell on Penny's shoulders and she had many a stressful time worrying about getting the required minimum number of participants to 20 in order to have the weekend well catered for. This was finally achieved and a great time was had by all, thanks to Penny's efforts and frequent emails of encouragement to members.

The annual cocky count was held in March despite knowing that by this late stage into the year some of the Glossies would have already gone to nest. As expected the count was down but next time we will aim for the Spring of 2015 to check numbers. March also saw a number of members joining Alan McLean's National Parks Tagalong to Willandra on the 8th-9th March, which was excellent and enjoyed by everyone. Next came a very eventful, well for me anyway, weekend at Round Hill at Easter (18th-21st April) in search of the Holly-leaf Grevillea.

After discussion at Club meetings, it was decided to do a reprint of the bird route brochures but instead of three separate ones, they would be combined into one, just highlighting the major birding spots in the area and removing duplication of sites. This is close to going to print.

The Bittern in Rice Project is a major ongoing club activity and this year was even busier once Matt Herring had positive proof of breeding in rice crops. So now the next phase of the project will continue with more intensity to try and find out where the birds go in the off-season. See further details below of the club's commitment and future involvement.

Many club members took part in the Annual Koala Count in Narrandera on the 18th May. With regard to the regular monthly outings many of them were cancelled because of poor weather during the winter months.

After receiving a complaint on the club email about poor access to Campbell's Swamp in July, Terry Smith offered some replacement planks for the boardwalk that he had milled from old pine trees that had been cut down at the DPI in Griffith. I organised Neil with his tools to do the repairs and whilst he was doing that job, I managed to clip away the overhanging reeds (Phragmites) that made access to the hide difficult.

Other activities organised by Joanne Tarbit at the Griffith City Council that club members were involved with were the tree planting at Wyangan Picnic Area (recently inspected at the end of the Twitchathon growing well) and removal of rubbish at Nericon Swamp Car Park. Eric and I were invited to address the CWA meeting about our club activities. Eric spoke about Wilga and I spoke about Wedge-tailed Eagles. Nella and I attended the Bush-stone Curlew Summit in Albury on the 20th August which was hugely attended by various government and non-government organisations from the Murray, Murrumbidgee and the ACT.

Another very successful club campout was held at Hunthawang National Park from the 12th to 14th September. Thanks again for the overall organisation to Penny, Neil, Ana and Andrew and others for their wonderful support, catering and organisation of the outings that they were involved with. Next was a well-attended biodiversity weekend in the Ivanhoe area on 20-21 September.

A fun time was had by members of three teams who entered the ACT & NSW Twitchathon on the 25th-26th October. Birds were extremely difficult to locate so our totals were down on previous years.

Nella organised several extra outings during late Winter/early Spring to search for orchids. Unfortunately what turned out to be a promising Autumn didn't translate into a good flowering season this year.

In September we welcomed Martin Odino to Leeton where he gave a talk to the Club on the 18th September. He spoke about his work in Bunyala Rice Fields in Western Kenya and expressed his appreciation for MFN's one off donation to support his efforts there.

Eric and Keith are still active on the Advisory Committee for Fivebough and Tuckerbil Wetlands. The Lands Department has accepted the latest Draft Plan of management of the Wetlands and intend to press for funds to fulfil the recommendations.

The recent establishment of MFN's Environmental Grants Committee to review and approve funding for environmental proposals, is the first time the committee has been needed to look at applications from those seeking funding from the Environmental Fund. Neil, Eric, Phil T, Ralph and Virginia made up the committee and I am grateful to them for their efforts in reaching their decisions this year. MFN also takes on board the recommendation that the guidelines be looked into closely and changes made by March 15th.

Max O'Sullivan

Martin Odino's visit to Australia – Part 1.

After much planning, Martin flew into Sydney late on Thursday evening 11th September after the 20+ hour flight from Nairobi via Dubai. We stayed in Sydney with Allan Richards in Glebe for the first 5 days and spent everyday at various birding sites there. Martin's first major excitement was to have dozens of **Rainbow Lorikeets** at close range on Allan's next door neighbour's balcony.

The first day was planned as a combined sight-seeing/birding day with a trip into the city and the Royal Botanic Gardens to show Martin the sights. Allan knew where a **Powerful Owl** was roosting and despite it being perched high up in a tree, it was a good bird to see so soon. Martin was also taken with the confiding nature of most birds in the gardens, particularly the **Sulphur-crested Cockatoos** and allowed for some close-up photos for him.

We headed for the Opera House and Circular Quay to catch a ferry to Manly and had a **Kookaburra** sitting on top of the sail on the Opera House. The trip to Manly was chilly to say the least but we had a few hours there before returning home to Allan's and then driving to Centennial Park late in the afternoon. Another **Powerful Owl** and a pair of **Tawny Frogmouths** were a highlight and there were plenty of waterbirds and cockatoos as well.



Next day, Saturday, was spent at various locations in the eastern suburbs looking for reported **Swift Parrots**. We missed the Swifts but got good views of both **Little** and **Musk Lorikeets**. Sunday was spent in the Royal National Park trying to track down **Superb Lyrebirds**. We heard one calling on the other side of the river and it was visible but only from a distance.

On the Monday we drove to the Blue Mountains but it was an extremely disappointing day as birds were difficult to locate – a story repeated on the whole trip as it turned out! At one lookout, we did get close views of a **Rock Warbler** as well as a quick glimpse of a

Beautiful Firetail.

We left Sydney on the Tuesday on the Melbourne XPT for Wagga and then a coach home to Leeton.

Martin couldn't get over how few people there were in the country and the trip through Coolamon and Ganmain only confirmed this view – lots of houses and cars but no people! Nothing changed this view on the rest of our travels all the way to Cairns except to add that there was a marked absence of young people in country areas.

In Leeton, we had the interview with the Editor of The Irrigator at Fivebough organised so we fitted in our birdwatching around that. Again it was difficult to locate birds that are usually about at this time of year. We located a heavily flowering eucalypt at the entrance to Ski-Beach where there were many **Superb Parrots, Blue-faced Honeyeaters, Little** and **Noisy Friarbirds** for Martin to photograph.

Over the next few days we did the usual local points of interest – a day at Binya and Griffith, a morning at Narrandera searching for and seeing a couple of **Koalas** along the channel bank and several visits to



Andrew Thompson's place to try to get good shots of the **Glossy Black Cockatoos** there. Disappointment again as we only managed seeing a pair fly over us late one evening. Martin made his presentation to club members on the Thursday evening and we then spent the next day preparing for the long trip north.

On the Saturday, we managed to get to Tamworth where we stayed overnight with my brother and sister-in-law before leaving next morning for the north coast to Maclean where my other brother has a bushland property. Again birds were difficult but at the Iluka World Heritage Forest Reserve, we did see

Photos by Martin Odino – from top
Southern Whiteface,
Red-backed Fairywren,
Musk Lorikeet (next page)

a number of good birds including **Regent Bowerbird, Black-faced Monarch, Spectacled Monarch** and **Pale Yellow Robin**.

On the Tuesday, we headed north via Casino for the Gold Coast where my sister lives on acreage in the foothills of Mount Tambourine. They have a feeder which attracts a lot of birds as well as Pretty-faced Wallabies which Martin enjoyed photographing. My sister's partner had a long lens that fitted Martin's camera and he was delighted to have it for the 3 days we were there.

The first trip was to O'Reilly's where we had excellent views of many good birds – **Noisy Pitta, Australian Logrunner, Regent and Satin Bowerbirds, King Parrots** and **Crimson Rosellas** and a close encounter with a female **Albert's Lyrebird** feeding in the picnic area. The second day was spent in the Brisbane Eastern suburbs around Manly looking for waders and sea birds.



Max O'Sullivan

Native Fish Breeding Seminar at Narrandera from Nella Smith (Details from Narrandera Argus)

Members interested in native fish are invited to attend a community seminar on Wednesday December 10 to learn more about the NSW Government's fish breeding and stocking program.

The seminar "Breeding fish, do we just add water?" will be presented by DPI Hatchery Manager Matthew McLellan at the Narrandera Fisheries Centre. DPI Narrandera Fisheries Centre is one of the State's biggest producers of native fish with over a million fingerlings of Golden Perch, Murray Cod and Silver Perch stocked into impoundments and rivers across the state in 2014.

The seminar will explain the history of fish production at Narrandera over the last 50 years, the techniques they use to breed native fish and how the stocking program works.

Participants will be able to tour the facilities at the John Lake Centre, featuring a Native fish aquarium, which will open from 6pm to 8.30pm. The seminar is free and there will be a barbecue meal and light refreshments after the presentation.

RSVP Due to limited seating and for catering purposes, please register your attendance with the Narrandera Fisheries Centre (02 69588200) by Tuesday December 12. You must be registered to attend

McCaughey Lagoon - this Thursday 11th December, our normal meeting date. Information from Nella

We have decided to meet at McCaughey Lagoon to the left of the entrance to the Yanco Agricultural High School at 6pm. Here there is a picnic shelter and some interpretive signage that NPWS have erected.

As Bill and Patty Moller will be in town we have decided to have some form of repast there.

I have some food left over from the Christmas party and will supplement appropriately. If you are coming please bring something savoury or sweet to share, preferably finger food. Also bring something to drink, a glass, a chair, your binoculars and a head torch. .

I will bring an additional table, thermoses filled with hot water, tea, coffee and milk as well as some mugs. All weather entrance if it rains (dreaming) but plenty of water in the lagoon.

An Atlas of the Birds of NSW and the ACT: Volume 1

Has recently been published by the New South Wales Bird Atlassers Inc. This Atlas draws on ~5.6 million records. It includes the waters of western Tasman Sea and the Lord Howe group. This Volume, the first of three, contains 736 pages of detailed information on 183 birds (breeding and/or regular migrants) from the Emu to the Plains-Wanderer. Volumes 2 and 3 will cover all other species.

For each bird, there are maps, graphs, tables and text on current distribution, breeding, seasonal and historical change and assessment of current status. This information thus provides a better understanding of the status and needs of each species and where to best concentrate conservation management efforts as well as a baseline against which future studies, environmental trends and conservation efforts can be measured.

Copies can be obtained from Dick Cooper [PO Box 717, Woolgoolga, NSW, 2456, Email: origma505@yahoo.com.au The recommended retail price is \$135 (plus postage and packaging).

Ferns of the Northern Riverina – Part 2: Blankets and Necklaces

It takes a bit of dedicated searching to find Blanket Fern *Pleurosorus rutifolius*. Although fairly widespread it confines itself to sheltered rock crevices and ledges typically at the base of cliffs, rock overhangs or similar and outcrops. Unsurprisingly for a plant in such demanding situations, Blanket Fern plants are small. Fronds are only up to 10 centimetres long and arise from a small rhizome. Rhizomes, stipes and the lower surface of the fronds are all covered with brown hairs. The upper surface is also hairy but appear dark green.

The fronds are pinnate with fan-shaped pinnae with incised margins. (If the plant was a pea or a rose, the pinnae would be called leaflets. When pinnae are further divided in bi-pinnate or tri-pinnate fronds those segments are called pinnules.) Spores are produced in linear sori on the under surface of the pinnae along the veins. The sori are not covered by any protective tissue.

Suitable sites where Blanket Fern can grow are not common in any of the Ranges; however the distribution is wide with records from all States and from New Zealand. I have seen it growing in the really dry hills of the northern Flinders Ranges.

Flora references also give another species of *Pleurosorus*, the Clubbed Blanket Fern *P. subglandulosus*. This species only differs in that the hairs are gland tipped and perhaps a little bit larger. The glandular tips can easily break off so most plants have a mixture of hairs with and without the tips. The distribution and habitat requirements are stated to be the same as the Blanket Fern but with fewer records. The latter may be of course that

Clubbed Blanket Fern has often been recorded as the usual Blanket Fern. With so little difference between them some

botanists will argue that they are the same species.



From top: Blanket Fern, Blanket Fern showing spores, Necklace Fern (left)



Blanket Ferns are all members of the family Aspleniaceae. The main genus of that family is *Asplenium* most species of which are called Spleenworts. In general *Asplenium* species only grow in wetter situations than we get here, even to being in rainforests like *A. australasicum*, the Bird's Nest Fern commonly grown as an indoor pot plant here.

There is one *Asplenium* species that does occur in the northern Riverina all-be-it rarely and that is the Necklace Fern, *A. flabellifolium*. It has been found in rock crevices in a few well-sheltered gullies within the Cocoparra Ranges. Otherwise we need to travel to The Rock or Table Top Reserve to see it.

Necklace Fern also has pinnate fronds with fan-shaped pinnae but they are spaced apart much more than in Blanket Fern. The sori are also linear along the nerves (a characteristic of the family) but are partly covered by a membranous flap of tissue – an indusium to give it its proper name. The ends of the fronds can also produce bulbils as a further means of propagation. Another member of the genus *A. bulbiferum* is called Mother Spleenwort for the propensity of bulbils produced.

Eric Whiting

MEMBERS' SIGHTINGS

These sightings are from members' observations. Please check with the relevant person before quoting any record.

Little Bittern [H]	The Basin dam at Tuckerbil Swamp	25/10/14	Nella Smith
Dollarbird	Euroly Bridge. Yanco	25/10/14	Twitch teams
Black-eared Cuckoo [juv]	Whitton Stock Route Rd	26/10/14	Silly Galahs team
Banded Lapwing	Goolgowi Rd, Griffith	26/10/14	Neil Palframan
Orange Chat [5]	Barren Box Swamp	26/10/14	Nella and Neil
Caspian Tern	Barren Box Swamp	26/10/14	Neil Palframan
Blue-billed Duck	Griffith Sewerage Ponds	26/10/14	Nella Smith
Magpie Goose	Riverina Beef, Yanco	October	Ben Kschenka
Baillon's Crake	Narrandera Wetlands	29/10/14	Neville James
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	Five Mile, Narrandera	05/11/14	Nella Smith

The old nest has fallen down but the pair have built a new nest in the same vicinity at Five Mile.

Major Mitchell Cockatoo	McNabb Cres Griffith	18/11/14	Sue Chittick-Dalton
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At the recent club Xmas Party, Graham and Dione Russell reported that the cockies have also returned to their property on Colinroobie Rd via Leeton.

Singing Honeyeater	McNabb Cres Griffith	18/11/14	Sue Chittick-Dalton
Mistletoebird	Wattle Hill Leeton	24/11/14	Max O'Sullivan
Black-tailed Godwit	Fivebough Wetlands	28/11/14	Keith Hutton
Australasian Bittern [3+]	Fivebough Wetlands	28/11/14	Keith Hutton
Australian Little Bittern [2+]	Fivebough Wetlands	28/11/14	Keith Hutton

There has been both bitterns calling at dusk over the past weeks and Keith feels there could be more of both species. It is difficult to isolate individual calls to know for sure just how many birds are actually calling. Certainly a first for Fivebough to have so many at the one time and possibly breeding there.

Collared Sparrowhawk [male]	Wattle Hill Leeton	28/11/14	Max O'Sullivan
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Keith recorded another male bird at Fivebough on 29th.

Glossy Black Cockatoo [11]	'Yarrabimbi' via Leeton	29/11/14	Xmas party group
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This is quite a promising sign that the cockies have had a successful year this season.

Crested Shrike-tit	Melbourne St, Narrandera	29/11/14	Betty Bradney
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The bird was in a tree in Betty's yard and she identified it as a Shrike-tit from the crest and its black and white head and yellow body.

Whiskered Tern [1000+]	Fivebough Wetlands	30/11/14	Keith Hutton
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Birds were roosting just off the T-intersection in a huge flock.

Glossy Ibis [100s]	Fivebough Wetlands	30/11/14	Keith Hutton
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Red-necked Avocet [38+]	Fivebough Wetlands	30/11/14	Keith Hutton
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Marsh Sandpiper [8+]	Fivebough Wetlands	30/11/14	Max O'Sullivan
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Plumed Whistling-duck [500]	Kidman Way, Coleambally	03/12/14	Neil Palframan
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Superb Parrots are being seen everywhere in Leeton and Narrandera. Large flocks are feeding on oat crops at Bill Draper's place with large numbers of juvenile birds in the group. Anything from 80 to 100 birds are seen at any one time.

Corellas have also returned to the area. Normally they are here by the Twitchathon at the end of October but didn't arrive in numbers until late November this year. Both **Little** and **Long-billed Corellas** are being seen.

Environmental water has been put into both Fivebough and Tuckerbil in recent months as well as Turkey Flat and McCaughey's Swamps at Yanco. Keith Hutton has done two counts one on 30 October after the first 200Megalitres went into Fivebough and Tuckerbil and then just prior to the recent addition of another 100ML. He did the second count on 19 November. Some birds liked the added water and turned up in numbers but when the water level started disappearing, so did the birds. However, since the second lot went in the birds have returned. It is planned to have a further input early in the New Year as it is hoped the bitterns are nesting there this season.

Sightings continued

Below are some of Keith's counts for the two dates he did his surveys.

Australian Shelduck 107 versus 1 **Grey Teal** 1706 versus 725

Glossy Ibis 1710 versus just 1

Black-winged Stilt >2000 v 161

Eurasian Coot 114 v 16

Red-capped Plover 5 v 37

Masked Lapwing 42 v 4

Whiskered Tern >2850 v 200

Chestnut Teal 12 versus 24

Red-necked Avocet 116 v 11

Red-kneed Dotterel 20 v 59

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper 700 v 0

There were some dramatic variations in numbers and it seemed some birds preferred the drier aspect of the wetland whilst others voted with their wings and went elsewhere!

**** COMING EVENTS ****

- 10 December Wednesday Native Fish Breeding Seminar at Narrandera**
At the John Lake Centre, Narrandera Fisheries Centre, Buckingham Rd, Narrandera.
Time: 6:30pm (sharp) followed by a BBQ and light refreshments.
Contact: the Centre on 6958 8200 between 9am, to 4:30pm Monday –Friday.
Booking required. See page 9 for more detail.
- 11 December Thursday Evening get together with meal at McCaughey Lagoon, Euroley Road, in the Red Gum National Park**
Meet at the lagoon at 6pm. It is to the left of the entrance to the Yanco Agricultural High School. Bring food, preferably finger, to share.
See page 9 for more detail from Nella
This will replace the December meeting.
Contact: Nella Smith 6959 1210

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- 16-18 January Friday to Sunday Summer Campout at the Scout Hall at Cabramurra**
We will leave on Friday morning and return on Sunday afternoon.
The campout will be for 2 nights and will be at a cost of \$70 per head which will include accommodation and food. You will need to bring your own bedding i.e. sleeping bag or linen, blanket, pillow and towels. The accommodation is at the Scout Hall. Own transport is required, but we will car pool where possible.
Please contact Penny Williams if you are going, and final numbers will be required by Sunday 11th January.
Phone: 6953 3524 Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com
- 2 February Monday World Wetlands Day**
- 4 February Wednesday Copy for the February newsletter is due. Please send to Rowena.**
Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com. Phone: 6953 2612.
- 12 February Thursday Monthly Meeting in the Yellow Room at the Leeton Library, Sycamore St., Leeton, commencing at 7:30pm**
Topic: TBA
Contact: Penny Williams 6953 3524
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com
- 15 February Sunday Rocky Waterholes, Narrandera**
A twilight meeting for a walk along the channel bank followed by nibbles at the new picnic area by the bridge.
Meet at the Rocky Waterholes Bridge (off the Old Wagga Road) at 5pm.
Contact: Max O'Sullivan 6953 4726
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com