

The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



July 2017 - Issue #250

Journal of the Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc.

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Objectives

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



Members on the peak of Mt Caley, Cocoparra National Park on 4th June

State Survey Mark (below)

Photos by Rowena Whiting



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CONTRIBUTIONS

For the August issue by
Wednesday 2 August

To Rowena Whiting

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**Fivebough Wetlands
Community Tree Planting Day
is on 30 July**

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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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Book Review

***Planet of the Bugs* by Scott Richard Shaw,**
University of Chicago Press

The title sounds like a science fiction title, but the sub-title is more explicit – Evolution and Rise of Insects.

Scott Shaw is Professor of Entomology (study of insects) at the University of Wyoming so is probably biased in favour of six-legged creatures rather than the anthropic-centric view that evolution primarily progresses to Homo sapiens.

He has a strong case. Right from the start of world dominance by multi-celled animals, externally skeletoned animals have been the most abundant and diverse. They still completely out number vertebrates. There are probably over a million beetles alone.

Shaw starts with the Cambrian period 570 to 500 million years ago with the rise of Trilobites. These ruled marine waters for around 250 million years until the great freeze of the Permian nearly brought total extinction. Even in Cambrian times other arthropods (= joint-legged) leading to millipedes and crustaceans had begun to evolve. It was these groups that exploded in numbers after the freeze.

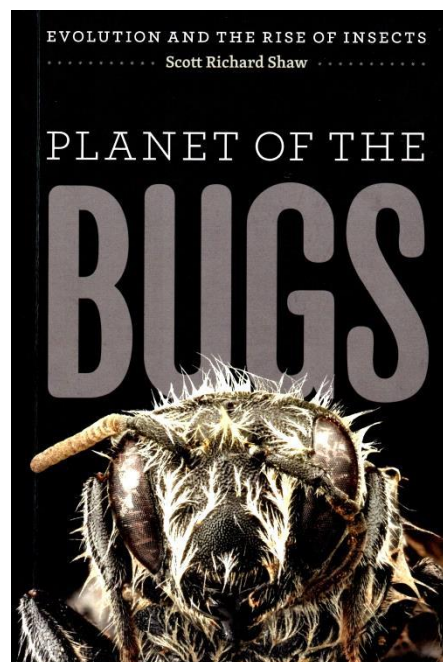
It was arthropods that began to invade dry land after simple plants like mosses began to be established, and it was early insects that first took to the air in the Carboniferous coal-forming swamps.

In later chapters Shaw describes the evolution of some of the major groups of insects, highlighting the inter-dependence with the rise and evolution of plant groups.

The writing style is rather chatty and the examples are predominantly American. The free use of scientific names is also a bit confronting. Nevertheless the content justifies the reading, and re-reading of this book.

Eric Whiting

A little note about the names of the Bird of the Month in the last issue if you were confused. Sue called it a Red-browed **Fantail** but the photo caption said Red-Browed **Finch**. Max had confirmed this for Phillip and it was not picked up until the newsletter had been emailed. Apparently it was originally called Finch then became Firetail now it is back to Red-browed Finch says Max. So it depends on which version of the book you use or how you remember it. Rowena.



Oxley-Cunningham Bicentenary Walk – Mt Caley

3 June 2017

When Alan Cunningham climbed Mt Caley he started walking from near Flowerdale on the Erigolia Road. We chose to drive from our meeting place at the junction of the Burley Griffin Way and Whitton Stock Route to the Spring Hill Picnic Ground and walk from there.

The route to the summit promises a steady climb without any tracks to follow. Consequently six elected to stay around the picnic ground or take the formed track to Falcon Falls. The other seven crossed the road and headed into the bush. There is a gap in the fence to allow walking access to that part of the National Park and a small path goes through some 100 metres of Cypress Pine regrowth before petering out just short of more open country.

Out in the clearing we began to hear some bird song but the singers were rather elusive. Even the Yellow Eastern Robin took several minutes before getting a positive identification. It never got any better for the bird watchers despite being sunny if rather cool day. I believe those that stayed around the picnic ground had better success.



It was not long before the climbing started. The intention was to head diagonally up the eastern flank making sure we were above any of the many near vertical bluffs and not to head straight up to the ridge line so as to avoid excessive steepness.

With hardly any birds around to stop and look at, the party took to identifying the plants they passed. It is surprising how hard it is to recognise even the common plants when they are not in flower. It is so easy to look only at the showy blooms and not the rest of the plant. Anyway the frequent pauses had the desired effect of easing the exertion of the relentless over generally uneven ground. In addition several bands of harder sandstone required picking our way through steeper outcrops.

The seeking out of the various native plants gave us the first highlight of the trip – a lone Autumn Greenhood, *Pterostylis revoluta* in full flower.

We eventually made the ridge and for the last couple of hundred metres the way became more open and at much gentler slope. Just beforehand though was the second highlight. Several small plants of the threatened endemic species *Pomaderris Cocoparrana* barely 30cm high were spotted tucked in amongst the rocks.

The summit is marked by a large stone cairn. Alongside is a small brass plate – the location of the official trig point. However a few paces further brings you out onto a rock platform with excellent views to Mt. Narriah to the east, all the peaks of the Narrandera and Brobenah Hills round to the nearby Mt. Brogden blocking the view to the south and south west.

After soaking in the views it was time to make our way back sort of but not quite retracing our steps. But first there was a diversion to the southern approach to the summit. It seems somebody has marked a route with tape up from the saddle between Caley and Brogden (a track leads there from Wattle Dam). At the head of this track Rowena and I had seen several *Pomaderris* plants

**Walking up Mt Caley – Virginia Tarr
View from the top –Mt Brogden, Binya Forest and
Narrandera Ranges beyond, and three *Pomaderris*
plants – Rowena Whiting**



some as high as 60cm (native plants can get to 2 metres but drought and goats have wiped them out). The party was keen to see these plants for themselves.

For the route down we chose to keep more to the ridge line. This paid off as the way was generally a steady decline. It was punctuated at intervals whenever we dropped down to the bands of harder sandstone. These formed boulder bluffs across the ridge. However each one was easy to pass around or through a break and so no serious clambering was involved.

Despite numerous stops to look at plants or lower down in order to try to see those still elusive birds we soon reached the lower slopes and the short walk across the flats to the road. The gentle pace down was just right to get back to the picnic ground in time to join the rest for lunch.

In addition to being a celebration of the bicentenary of Oxley and Cunningham's exploration of the area, we were also able to celebrate Enid's 90th birthday (a little late). It was Enid who first led MFN up Mt Caley, in particular to the cave in the eastern bluff. We were all pleased to have Enid present with us and hear her recollections of her times in the Cocoparras and in Yenda. Fittingly a birthday cake was produced for Enid to ceremoniously cut and whilst all were partaking to listen to extracts of Oxley's report and Cunningham's diary for the relevant days.



Enid with her birthday cake – Penny Williams

Eric Whiting

Bird list for Spring Hill, Falcon Falls, Mt Caley 4 June 2017

Crested Pigeon	Galah	Common Starling
Red-capped robin	Mulga Parrot	Willie Wagtail
Grey Strike-thrush	White-plumed Honeyeater	Spiny-checked Honeyeater
Mallee Ringneck	Eastern Yellow Robin	Peaceful Dove
Bar-shouldered Dove	Peregrine Falcon	Striated Pardalote
Chestnut-rumped Thornbill	White-eared Honeyeater	Pallid Cuckoo
Australian Raven	Dusky Woodswallow	Grey Woodswallow
Kookaburra	Pied Butcherbird	Grey Fantail

Store Creek Walk –

17 June 2017

This was to have been from MacGregors Creek to celebrate the Oxley-Cunningham bicentenary of their exploratory visit to the area. They first camped around 2 miles south east of MacGregors Creek on 6 June after skirting around the southern end of the Cocoparra Ranges. The night of June 7 and 8 were spent near the Macpherson Range approximately near Quarry Road. Lack of water and the prospect of endless scrub along their intended north west route forced them to return to MacGregors Creek this time camping at a waterhole at the end of the creek. They stayed there for two nights. On the intervening day Cunningham explored up MacGregors and back down the western flank.

The intention was to retrace as far as possible Cunningham's route. Except we were not able to get to the starting point – a deep washout at Shingle Hut Creek blocked the Whitton Stock Route.

As a proxy the nine of us that met at Yenda Post Office proceeded to Store Creek for the walk up that ravine. The day was rather cool and misty but not frosty. Usually the carpark area and the first part of the walk offers good birding but on this occasion not much was heard and very elusive to view.

The lower parts of the walk are along a formed path over remnant river terraces. All rather easy going even though the creek (no water to be seen) is crossed several times.

Streams coming down from the heights are highly energetic and cut deep V-shaped valleys. As they approach the level of the surrounding plains they slow down and begin dropping their sediment load. They also begin to wind from side to side cutting into the sides of their valleys which thereby become wider and more flat bottomed.

From time to (geological) time the whole countryside is subjected to lateral pressures arising from the continual drifting of the continents. This pressure causes folding to occur rather like ripples spreading out from a stone dropped in water. Hills are raised and valleys deepened. With the resultant increase in difference streams are re-energised and cut a deeper V-shaped valley into their sediments and drop it further down-stream. This process can be repeated several times leaving flatter areas perched at different levels – river terraces. I have recognised at least three levels in Store Creek.

Not far past the end of the formed track, the gorge narrows to a small amphitheatre and the walking gets harder. In particular there is one very high step to get up. Jan and Wilma elected not to do this but bide their time in the amphitheatre, Wilma getting out her sketchbook.

Above this point the track makes its way round a number of large fallen boulders – I believe one has fallen relatively recently causing a deviation in the track. Sometimes it is a guessing game as to whether one takes the Creekside or rises up the side of the valley.

Finally there is a bit of a bend in the gorge where the creek branches. The left branch carries on in a deep declivity up towards the southern slopes of Mt. Bingar. The right-hand branch however marks the foot of the waterfall.

At the base the water falls over a series of low wide ledges. As it was dry we were able to wind our way up a couple of these. The slightest bit of wet makes the highly polished slopes between the steps extremely dangerous and flowing water makes progress impossible.

It is possible by deviating a short way up the left hand branch, to climb up to the top of the waterfall, including to step out onto a natural viewing platform. We elected to stay at the bottom and view



Group at the base of the waterfall; precarious rock with Wonga Vine below; inset shows the flower. Photos by Rowena Whiting

just how far out that platform juts unsupported from the side.

After a few photos it was time to retrace our steps (with occasional deviations especially into the amphitheatre where a convenient wedged log made an alternative to the big step). Back on the terraces birdsong was a bit more evident, though not the birds themselves. It was a somewhat slow for a return journey. Still no one was in a hurry to have lunch – we still had the picnic tables to ourselves.

Having seen a very large fungus by the track on the way down, we all decided to go to Duncans Creek after lunch where other specimens had been seen in the past. Despite the drier conditions this year there were still four to be seen.

Finally we took the drive up to the towers for a quick look around before departing for home.

Eric Whiting



***Phelopus marginatus* fungus, probably Australia's largest terrestrial fungus. This one was around 50cm in diameter.**

A few impressions of Vietnam, Siem Reap (Cambodia) and Singapore April 2017

Our trip was not one where we focussed on visiting the natural environments. The places we went to were buzzing with people.

The main mode of transport was scooters and tuk tuks in Vietnam and Siem Reap, and they were plentiful. Crossing a road in the urban areas seemed a risky business, but if pedestrians walked at a constant pace across the road in a straight line the scooters avoided them. It paid not to cross the road when buses or cars were coming. A lot of people create a lot of rubbish. Piles of plastic bags containing rubbish were a

common sight in Vietnam appearing to await collection. Recycling of some things like plastic bottles was evident.

We visited Lao Cai In the north of Vietnam a town which is on the border with China. People who have the right papers can walk across the bridge over the river which forms the border and into China during daylight hours. China had flattened this town in 1979 during a war and it was then rebuilt. Conflict with other countries is part of Vietnamese history. When in the south of Vietnam we went to the Cu Chi Tunnels. These are a network of tunnels first used by the Viet Minh against the French and then by the Viet Cong in the Vietnam War.

Halong Bay in the north of Vietnam is an area of limestone islands and rocky outcrops describe as Karst

formations. We found the Bay a beautiful place to visit. A haze hung over the landscape and as we cruised at sunset gave the bay an eerie feeling. Our boat was not the only vessel to cruise during daylight and then to anchor overnight, but rather one of many. The hawkers, women in their small row boats came up to the larger tourist boats to sell their goods. Within the Karst formations are a number of limestone caves. We visited a large one of these which was lit with coloured lights and visited by large numbers of people.



Vietnam terracing near Sapa (above), Halong Bay (below), Angkor Wat at sunrise (bottom), Singapore Botanic Gardens (next page), Photos by Penny & Phillip Williams



Out in the countryside of northern Vietnam farming of the land is very intense. We saw very steep hills terraced and sown to crops. Buffaloes were seen in the paddocks and bring good prices when bought and sold at markets. Some smaller machinery is being used. We travelled overnight by train to Sapa and found the train clean and our carriage air-conditioned. It left and arrived on time. The people we encountered were friendly and seemed happy. We enjoyed Vietnam and felt safe wherever we went.

In Cambodia we visited Siem Reap and the famous



Angkor Temples. One of the temples Angkor Wat was built between AD 1113 and 1150 and covers about 200 hectares. There are several large temples. These are visited by thousands of people every year. Our impression of Angkor Wat is that of a large number of people everywhere with the same ideas as we had.

Singapore also has lots of people but is a complete contrast with Siem Reap and Vietnam. It was very clean and modern. The tourist attractions were carefully constructed and well maintained to delight visitors. The botanic gardens contained a large orchid garden full of beautiful orchids that thrive in the hot humid climate. All of them rather larger than the native orchids we see.



As I headed home I asked myself about the impact that tourists in such large numbers have on such places I have visited. (I still want to travel.) I think of the rubbish problems humans create and of how many people there are to create it. How lucky am I in Australia that I can still travel to places and be on my own in a natural environment?

Penny Williams

Biodiversity Day at Galore Hill

To celebrate the completion of biodiversity surveys at Galore Hill we were treated with a biodiversity field day which was run by Tracy Geppert.

This really is a biodiverse hotspot in a largely cleared landscape, a true refuge for reptiles, bats birds and plants.



At the entrance to Galore Hill Reserve –
Rowena Whiting

Threatened birds found here include Dusky Woodswallow, Brown Treecreeper, Grey-crowned Babbler, Diamond Finch, Glossy Black Cockatoo, Speckled Warbler and Superb Parrot.

Reptiles recorded at this survey were *Varanus varius* Lace Monitor, *Pogona barbata* Eastern Bearded Dragon, *Lampropholis guichenoti* Grass Sun Skink, *Lampropholis delicata* Garden Sun Skink, *Pseudonaja textilis* Eastern Brown Snake, *Gehyra variegata* Tree Dтеля, *Amphibolurus nobbi* Nobbi Dragon.

Five species of Microbat were recorded and these were: *Vespadelus vulturnus* Little Forest Bat, *Chalinolobus gouldii* Gould's Wattle Bat, *Austronomus australis* White Striped Freetail Bat, *Scotorepens balstoni* Inland Broadnosed Bat and *Mormopterus planiceps* Southern Freetail Bat.

In addition to the wonderful plantings by an enthusiastic local grower of Grevillea, Hakea, Acacia, Eremophila and Eucalyptus Galore Hill has some wonderful locally native herbs and shrubs. Amongst these are the orchids which include species of *Caladenia*, *Diuris*, *Pterostylis* and *Cyrtostylis* as well as the ones I'm familiar with: *Calochilus robertsonii*, *Cyanicula caerulea*, *Eriochilus cucullatus*, *Glossodia major* and *Pheladenia deformis*. We will have to pay another visit to check out exactly what species are found there. Good work to Tracy for doing the biodiversity work, putting up a good display and for supplying the sustenance.



Bearded Dragon - Eric Whiting

Nella Smith

Winter on the Atherton Tableland 2017

By coming north to escape the winter in Leeton didn't seem to be all that successful as the weather the whole time I was house-sitting just outside of Yungaburra was cold and wet most of the time. Fortunately the days were fine enough to go birding between the drizzle so characteristic of winter on the Atherton Tableland with just a few fine sunny days. The nights were often very chilly with a doona necessary most nights. Despite this, I have managed to fit in a lot of birding between feeding chooks and watering the veggie garden. The rain helped ease the latter chore so I had more time away from the house than last time I was there in September last year.

The best local spot was the Curtain Fig Tree which happened to be full of fruit but very neck-breaking to see the birds feeding in it. Lots of **Figbirds** were there but also **Spotted Catbird** and **Barred Cuckoo-Shrike**. **Victoria's Riflebird** was also very vocal and easily seen digging into the bark on trees for grubs.

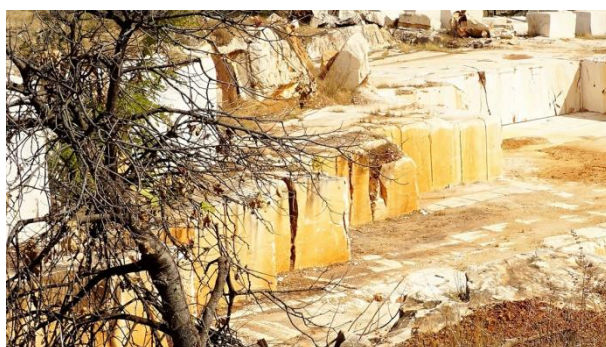
Another very reliable spot was along Peterson Creek at Yungaburra where platypus are easily seen if you wait long enough for them to surface. I saw a **Lumholtz Tree-kangaroo** there along with **Fairy Gerygone**, **Pied Monarch**, **Spectacled Monarch** and **Lemon-bellied Flycatcher**.

My sister and her partner came to stay and we made an overnight trip to The Daintree and Cape Tribulation. On the road to Cape Tribulation we came across a male **Southern Cassowary** with 4 half-sized juveniles in tow. We stopped to get a closer look and were shocked to find 3 of the young birds had been caught in a wild pig trap. They had been enticed in by the fruit scattered on the floor of the trap. The male and sole juvenile hung around and we reported the incident to the Daintree Boatman, Murray Hunt who followed it up and found the birds had been released not long after they were caught – thank goodness.

We did the early morning boat trip on the Daintree River the next morning and saw some good birds – **Great-billed Heron**, **Papuan Frogmouth**, **Shining Flycatcher** and a very large male crocodile sunning itself on the bank.

We also did a day trip to Chillagoe which is 170km west into beautiful stark limestone ridge country. Chillagoe is famous for its marble and has been an exporter of marble blocks to Italy where they are cut and polished into marble slabs and tiles that are sold in Australia as Italian marble!!

My sojourn on the tableland produced nearly 70 birds for my year list so it was well worth the visit. I am now back in Cairns with more wet weather and leaving tomorrow 1 July for a week trip to Iron Range.



Photos by Mike Teeling

Max O'Sullivan

CAMEO

I have noticed in the past few early sunny mornings while sitting on my front porch a great deal of activity by the Little Ravens in Scenic Hill just over the road from my home. They were to-ing and fro-ing and calling incessantly. It was impossible to estimate the numbers as the movement was constant.

This sight took me back many, many years when I took regular early morning walks through this hill. On a wintry morning, I left the main track and walked into a denser area when I stopped in absolute amazement at the sight before me. I thought I had entered a page of one of Grimm's Fairy Tales! There before me on every branch of every shrub of that copse, appeared like a Coven of Silent Tiny Witches in black shrouds. Once they sensed my presence, the spell was broken and they made a very noisy exit. I estimated there was around 100 birds.

I am still amazed how or why my approaching hadn't alerted them earlier, but it was an experience I shall never forget.

Sue Chittick-Dalton

MEMBERS' SIGHTINGS

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

Red-rumped Parrots [30+]	Lake Talbot, Narrandera	01/06/17	Alan Whitehead
Little Black Cormorant [40+]	Lake Talbot, Narrandera	08/06/17	Alan Whitehead
With 11 Pelicans			
Grey Shrike-thrush	Narrandera near wetlands	05/06/17	Susan Whitehead
Crested Pigeons	Mathison Oval, Narrandera	24/05/17	Warwick Bradney
Red-capped Robin	Rocky Waterholes Bridge, Narrandera	08/06/17	Warwick Bradney
Indian Ringneck [aviary escapee]	Karri Road, Leeton	25/06/17	Barry Allen
Golden Whistler [fem]	Binya State Forest	12/06/17	Keith Hutton
Golden Whistler [male]	Evans Smyles Rd, via Leeton	12/06/17	Keith Hutton
White-bellied Sea-Eagle [Imm]	Fivebough Wetlands	12/06/17	Keith Hutton
Wedge-tailed Eagle [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	12/06/17	Keith Hutton
Spotless Crake [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	12/06/17	Keith Hutton
Black-tailed Native-hen [10]	Fivebough Wetlands	12/06/17	Keith Hutton
Swamp Harrier [2]	Fivebough Wetlands	12/06/17	Keith Hutton
Spotless Crake [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/06/17	Keith Hutton
Australian Spotted Crake [5]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/06/17	Keith Hutton
Restless Flycatcher [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/06/17	Keith Hutton
White-fronted Chat [10]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/06/17	Keith Hutton
Black-winged Stilt [10]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/06/17	Keith Hutton
Red-kneed Dotterel [20]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/06/17	Keith Hutton
Red-capped Plover [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/06/17	Keith Hutton
Masked Lapwing [30+]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/06/17	Keith Hutton
Black-fronted Dotterel [15]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/06/17	Keith Hutton
Australasian Shoveller [40+]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/06/17	Keith Hutton
Double-barred Finch [17]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/06/17	Keith Hutton
Swamp Harrier [2]	Fivebough Wetlands	25/06/17	Keith Hutton
Blue-faced Honeyeater [10]	Palla Street, Griffith	24/06/17	Virginia Tarr
Variegated Fairy Wren [2]	Palla Street, Griffith	24/06/17	Virginia Tarr
<i>Pterostylis striata</i>	Galore Hill	30/06/17	Nella Smith
<i>Pterostylis rubescens</i>	Bogolong, Narrandera Ranges	02/07/17	Nella Smith
Glossy black Cockatoo [4]	Bogolong, Narrandera Ranges	02/07/17	Nella Smith
Grey-crowned babbler	McNabb Cres, Griffith	04/07/17	Sue Chittick-Dalton
Major Mitchell	McNabb Cres, Griffith	04/07/17	Sue Chittick-Dalton
Blue-faced Honeyeater	McNabb Cres, Griffith	04/07/17	Sue Chittick-Dalton
Mistletoebird	McNabb Cres, Griffith	04/07/17	Sue Chittick-Dalton



Pterostylis striata –
Nella Smith

**Indian Ringneck –
Possibly a pastel blue
mutation -
Barry Allen**



**** COMING EVENTS ****

- 13 July Thursday** **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7.30pm.
Topic: Flinders Ranges presentation by Eric Whiting
Contact: Penny Williams 6953 3524.
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.
- 15 or 16 July** At the June meeting it was decided to cancel this outing as no leader was available.
- 30 July Sunday** **National Tree Day** **Community Tree Planting Day at Fivebough Wetlands**
7:30 to 10 am
Free BBQ breakfast (Leeton Lions Club) & morning tea (Leeton CWA) provided
Parking is available at the site, off Gibbs Road, Leeton (Follow the signs from the Brobenah Road/Fivebough Road intersection)
Please register your interest to attend, by contacting Bec Byrne:(02) 6960 1343 or 0447 167 637 by Sunday 23rd July 2017
- 2 August Wednesday** **Copy for the August newsletter is due. Please send to Rowena.**
Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com. Phone: 6953 2612.
- 10 August Wednesday** **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7.30pm.
Topic: to be decided
Contact: Penny Williams 6953 3524.
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.
- 12 August Saturday** **Taleeban Reserve and Weethalle Silo in the afternoon**
Whilst a mining reserve of around 575 ha, 18km east of Rankins Springs, and 4 km south of the Mid-Western highway it is a significant sample of mallee vegetation.
Meet at the Cnr Erigola Rd and Burley Griffin Rd near Binya at 8.30am.
Bring morning tea to carry and lunch back at the cars.
Contact: Penny Williams 6953 3524.
Email: murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.
- Make a note in your diary for the **MFN Spring campout** –
22- 24 September **Yathong Nature Reserve**
Friday to Sunday **Staying in the shearers quarters.**
Organisers: Graham & Dione Russell. Details later.
- 9 October – Monday onwards - A biodiversity survey at Yathong of the reserve is planned.**
Please contact Nella Smith 6059 1210 if you are interested in participating.
- Other events**
- 13-15 October** **South-east Australian Naturalists' Association Spring Camp**
Little Desert area, Western Victoria.
Program is of half & full day excursions with speakers in the evenings
Further information from Penny Williams Email:
murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com. Or their Website – rfnc.org.au
Email – rfncseana@gmail.com