

The Murrumbidgee Naturalist



June 2019 - Issue #271

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



Lichen covered bedded rock at Galore Hill and a couple of the flowering Eremophilas
Images by Rowena Whiting

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CONTRIBUTIONS

For the July issue by

Wednesday 3 July

To Rowena Whiting

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Phone: 6953 2612

*This month's outings:
Roadside vegetation survey in
Leeton shire
Mt Brogdon walk*

Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc. Office Bearers and Annual Subscriptions

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

Bank details for direct deposit: 062 564 account no. 10039396, a/c name: Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists Inc. Include your own name and description of payment in the reference box.

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

Welcome to another month.

I am back on deck and would like to thank Graham and Dione Russell for doing a great job last month. My time away went all too fast, it was a great experience with the photography workshop focusing on landscape we went to some lovely locations.

With copy a little on the light side this month I would like to share a few of the items in the inbox this month and also a couple of articles from the Threatened Species Recovery Hub, a National Environmental Science Program. Their web site has numerous reports of research from assessing the benefits of culling Noisy Miners to monitoring programs and damage by feral species as well as the plight of individual species.

Notice of a couple of photography competitions

BirdLife Australia Photography Awards 2019- invite entries There are a number of prizes across seven categories: Bird Portraits, Bird Behaviour, Human Impact, Birds in the Landscape, Creative, Youth, and this year's Special Theme: Honeyeaters. "Our aim is not just to showcase some of Australia's best nature and bird photographers, but also to highlight the need to improve conservation outcomes for Australia's bird species, encourage wider interest in all Australian birds and showcase the beauty of our exceptional wildlife."

For more information on our rules, how to enter, FAQs and more, check out the [BirdLife Australia Photography Awards website](#).

The other is a Eucalypt Photo Competition. The Threatened Species Recovery Hub is undertaking a nation-wide assessment of the conservation status of Australian eucalypt, which includes the genera Eucalyptus, Corymbia and Angophora. The assessment will help conservation managers to understand which species are at risk and will also underpin a national conservation action plan for Australian eucalypts.

To mark this significant milestone in eucalypt conservation the hub is holding a photo competition to celebrate the beauty and diversity of Australia's eucalypts. They are looking for submissions in three categories: 1. Trees, 2. Flowers and nuts, 3. Features (bark, foliage or anything else of artistic merit)

For details go to <http://www.nespthreatenedspecies.edu.au/news/eucalypt-photo-competition>



Our Outing to Galore Hill –

Galore Hill, like Taleeban and Stackpoole, is a little further away than our usual venues. All three are worthy of regular visits. Despite all the discussions on the best venue for the May excursion only nine turned up at the meeting place.



With a bit of car pooling three cars made the journey down, to stop first just inside the Reserve entrance at the Eremophila plantation. Eremophila means ‘desert lover’ and this genus of plants have excelled in arid and semi-arid regions of Australia. Several species were planted in this section and despite the millennium drought and then the recent awful summer most are thriving. In fact it appears most of the losses have been due to being overgrown by neighbouring plants.

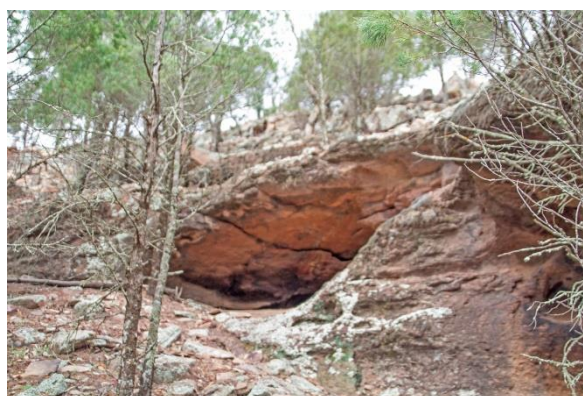
The flowers of Eremophilas have a basic tubular pattern which seems ideal for honeyeaters and other nectar feeding birds. Usually the plantation is a good spot for bird watching because there are always a number of bushes in flower at any one time. However we were not so lucky. In fact it was a quiet day for birds for some unknown reason.



Interest was not lost though as the range of colours of the different species is extraordinary – from deep red to pinks and purples through to a bright yellow. We spent some time wandering from bush to bush.

Nella had contacted someone from the Friends of Galore and was half

expecting to join us. Thinking that she was waiting for us at the summit Margrit took Nella and her other passengers up there. Meanwhile the rest of us eventually took the other road towards the saddle to inspect the Grevillea Plantation. This section has been fenced off in recent years. The Grevilleas have not done as well as the Eremophilas, and scarce a flower was to be seen. It was not long before we too backtracked and headed for the summit.



United once more (without a Friend of Galore alas), all except Susan took the track to Morgan’s Cave. According to local legend, the infamous bushranger, Daniel ‘Mad Dog’ Morgan, used the caves as a hideout. In the 1860s. This track has been benched into the steep hillside and has some loose rocky bits but is otherwise well graded. Being benched in means the up side is much nearer eye level, making it far easier to see the variety of ground flora. It also exposes many rock faces to observe the geology or the many coloured lichens that colonise bare rock.



By paying attention to these upside features we missed the hairpin turn-off to the cave(s) and followed the track towards the saddle for a little way before realising our error.

Back on track there were more geological features apparent, from differing rock types to dramatic effects of differential weathering. It is the latter that creates the caves – or giant overhangs as they really are.

Photos by Rowena Whiting, clockwise from top left: Walking track below the rock face, a Grevillea, Morgan’s Cave and colourful lichens on a boulder.

The track loops back to finally regain the plateau height for an easy walk back to the picnic area. Nicely in time for lunch.



Autumn Greenhood
Rowena Whiting

Rosette of another Greenhood
– Rowena Whiting

Male Mallee Mouse Spider
– Eric Whiting

After lunch we drove down the road a little way to a sort of track going a short way into the bush. The purpose of this stop was to look for orchids. At first we saw plenty of fresh Greenhood rosettes, then found some Autumn Greenhoods, *Pterostylis revoluta* in full flower. In the course of this search Margaret and I came across a Mallee Mouse Spider. So dedicated was this male to march to a female somewhere still in her burrow that it could not be stopped for an easy photo. It even walked backwards for some 20cm before turning round to continue its journey.

As Glenn had another commitment for the afternoon his carload (Margrit's) had to leave then, and the rest of us soon followed not before noticing a few chewed casuarina cones. We left on a high.

Eric Whiting

Satin Bowerbird Bower at Tumbarumba

On the recent ANZAC weekend camp at Laurel Hill there were many Satin Bowerbirds seen and Allan Richards discovered a bower at the Angel Track Head camp ground just out of Tumbarumba on the Hume and Hovel track. There were two interesting things about the bower – its position in the open but in the shadow of trees and, most interestingly, the content of its decorations. Usually, they decorate their bowers with blue items including blue feathers of Crimson Rosellas but also with various man made blue plastic bits and pieces like blue pegs, blue straws, blue bottle tops, blue tape etc. Often there are smaller additions of lichen or even yellow flowers. However, around the bower of this bird, there were all of the above but the surprising thing was the number of yellow crest feathers of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos!

By the number of feathers on display, there would have had to be the crest feathers of at least 4 or 5 cockatoos! So either there are a number of bald cockies flying around or the bird located a cache of dead birds to have collected so many.

My theory is that the area is an apple/pear growing area with many of the orchards covered in white mesh to protect the fruit from hail damage and/or cocky damage! I suspect that the orchardists might have taken the option of shooting some of the marauding birds to protect their crops and the male bowerbird discovered the carcasses and helped himself to the yellow crest feathers – maybe!



Satin Bower Bird's nest – Kathy Tenison

A review of the various field guides makes no mention of such yellow decorations, however, HANZAB makes reference to a report in Canberra of a bower containing the crest feathers of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos (Swift 1996). But I'm sure there would not have been the number seen at the bower we visited. (See Kathy Tenison's photo).

Max O'Sullivan

Cairns Birding – May/June 2019

I am just nearly over a quick 2 week trip to Cairns and Yungaburra to attend a friend's birthday and, as per usual, I have taken the opportunity to do some birding whilst here. When writing this at my friend's house at Machans Beach just north of Cairns airport, I am watching a pair of **Orange-footed Scrubfowl** scratching in the leaf litter just outside the window where I'm sitting.

I arrived here on 26 May to be greeted by a flock of 30+ **Red-tailed Black Cockatoos** which have moved from the drier inland and taken up residence on the coastal strip around Cairns in recent years. Twenty years ago you had to go well inland into the drier country before seeing them but the prolonged drought in the early 2000s has seen them coming closer to the coast and now they seem very at home here feeding at the moment on Beach Almond fruit – these trees are very common plantings right along the coast.

Prior to my arrival, there were reports in the Cairns Birders Newsletter of **Spotted Whistling Ducks** on the freshwater lake in the Cairns Botanic Gardens Centenary Lakes. A few trips there prior to last Sunday (2 June) proved fruitless until I joined the monthly bird walk there on Sunday – a monthly walk I started when in the local club in the 1990s that has been going ever since. This duck has spread from Papua New Guinea to Cape York over recent years and is now regularly seen in the Cairns area with breeding records locally. It is a self-introduced species and will be no doubt followed by more Papua New Guinea species over the coming years.

Machans Beach adjoins Redden Island, a good birding spot at the mouth of the Barron River just a walk away from where I am staying. The estuary, when the tide is right, can produce some good birds that feed on the sand bars and mud flats. At this time of year, there are few overwintering waders here but enough to keep you looking even if they are in just ones and twos. Birds such as **Eastern Curlew, Whimbrel, Greater and Lesser Sandplover, Bar-tailed Godwit, Terek Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint and Great Knot** were all seen on several visits. Best of all was a pair of **Beach Stone Curlew** and **Black-necked Stork (Jabiru)** on a couple of occasions.

Whilst on the Atherton Tablelands I visited Hastie Swamp where there were thousands of **Plumed Whistling-duck** and just one lonely **Freckled Duck**. I also visited Lake Barrine, Lake Eacham and the Curtain Fig in search of birds but they were few and far between at this time of year – even the locals were commenting on the paucity of birds about at the moment – a bit like everywhere down south!

On a visit to the Nerada Tea Estate, I had good views of two **Lumholtz's Tree Kangaroos**.

The weather here has been very changeable with overcast but warm days and cool nights. A trip to the reef is definitely off the list as the trip out to Michaelmas Cay would be most unenjoyable despite the possibility of some good birds once there.

Max O'Sullivan



Pictures are of Spotted Whistling-duck (Mark Jagusch), Beach Stone Curlew and Papuan Frogmouth (Mick Teeling).



In all I added nearly 70 birds to my annual bird list so it wasn't too disappointing despite missing a number of usually common species.

Apart from the birds mentioned above, some other birds of note are:

Helmeted Friarbird	Leaden Flycatcher	Rajah Shelduck	Fig Parrot
Black Butcherbird	Gull-billed Tern	Brahminy Kite	Sarus Crane
Bush Stone Curlew	Macleay's Honeyeater	Little Shrike-Thrush	Dusky Honeyeater
Forest Kingfisher	Fairy Gerygone	Spotted Catbird	Scarlet Honeyeater
White-throated Honeyeater	Scaly-breasted Lorikeet	Little Cuckoo-Shrike	Jacana
Topknot Pigeon	Bower's Shrike-Thrush	Victoria's Riflebird	Varied Honeyeater
Pale-yellow Robin	Spectacled Flycatcher	Barred Cuckoo-Shrike	Bush-hen
Papuan Frogmouth	Rufous Fantail	Yellow-spotted Honeyeater	

Max O'Sullivan

Cameleering in the Simpson Desert

With 17 camels, 11 trekkers, 7 cameleers and scientists I travelled for 10 days through the Simpson Desert in Queensland, north west of Birdsville. The Simpson Desert is the world's largest parallel sand ridge desert and Australia's driest area.

The Scientists are partnered with universities, state and national government land management organisations, conservation organisations (www.desertexpeditions.org) and document current conditions to understand the complex ebb and flow of the cyclic boom-bust dynamics of the desert.

A big part of the day involved travelling with the camels at a leisurely pace quietly through the desert savouring the liberating feeling only the vast desert can provide. We crossed gibber plains, clay pans sand ridges and stopped to record findings of artefacts, observed and recorded birds and plants.



Pictures: Leisurely we climbed ridges, descended and crossed the swells while our camels negotiated the landscape with a load of up to 250kg. (ridges are rising sharply on the eastern side and more gradually in the west)



Picture: Hobble, unload and shepherd the camels while they feed and then tie them to night trees was our daily routine. Know your Bowline

We set up camp where the camels can feed, one day under Coolabah trees (*Eucalyptus coolabah*), the next day in the middle of a Gidgee stand (*Acacia cambagei*).

Before sunset we assisted scientists in setting up pitfall traps on the sand ridges. (Preferably between Spinifex, a protective habitat for small mammals).



Picture: Pitfall Traps: 11 tubes (60cm long and 15 cm diameter) were buried 5m apart and connected with a mesh fence. Trapped species are measured, weighed and DNA sampled. From left *Wongai ningau* (weight 4.5g), *Lerista* (skinks, sliders) and a Scorpion (*Urodacus yaschenko*)



In the mornings we rolled up our swag, had breakfast at 7 am and then assisted in bringing in the camels and load them with saddles and equipment. This is a precision exercise: begin loading at the end of the camel string and balance every load evenly and secure.

After breaking camp we walked beside the camels at 3-4km/hour through the landscape attuned to the surroundings.

We encountered:

Wildlife:

Birds: Raven, Budgerigar, Black Kite (soaring in the upwind of high ridges), Whistling Kite, Wood Swallow, Willie Wagtail, Galah, Corella, Zebra Finch, Crested Pigeon

With very good eyes one snake was spotted: a banded Brown

Wild camels made an appearance: a herd of more than 20 animals

We observed many Tracks: Cattle, Camel, Emu, Cats, Dogs, small mammals and tiny beetles.

Artefacts: plenty of flaked stone artefacts and core stones were found mainly around the edges of clay pans. A well used grinding stone was documented as a significant find.

Pictures: Artefacts (grinding stone and flakes)



Vegetation:

Most common species: Spinifex (*Triodia*), Cane grass (*Zygochloa paradoxa*), Needlewood (*Hakea leucoptera*) Mulga (*Acacia aneura*), Coolabah (*Eucalyptus coolabah*), Gidgee (*Acacia cambagei*), Ruby Saltbush (*Enchylaema tomentosum*), Hopbush (*Dodonaea viscosa*), different Tribulus species and beautiful flowering Yellow Top (*Senecio gregorii*) and Poached daisy (*Polycalymma stuartii*).



My favourites: Portulaca (oleracea, pilosa and intraterranea), Whitewood (*Atalaya hemiglauca*), *Acacia ligulata* and Camelbush (*Trichodesma zeylanicum*).

Margrit Martin

Using the iNaturalist app

I wrote a little while ago about how the iNaturalist app/community helped me identify a Red River Gum Ghost Moth. I recently saw a colourful Caterpillar in my backyard, wondered what it was so gave the app another whirl.

This app is so easy to use, I would encourage anyone comfortable with a smartphone to try it. After submitting a photo, the app suggested some possible identifications. Red-rumped Caterpillar Moth was near the top of the list of possible matches and looked very similar, so I selected that. I was too hasty with that assumption and should have scrolled through the app's other possible species.

Later that night I was on my desktop computer and researched Red-rumped Caterpillar Moth and noted it's from North America. There seemed to be only one other sighting on iNaturalist in Australia, so I began to suspect I was following a red herring (the alternative was Australia has another introduced pest to contend with).



When I looked closely at my sighting and the American species, I noticed there are definite similarities but some very obvious differences.

Researching further I delved into The Australian Museum website which had a link to <http://lepidoptera.butterflyhouse.com.au/> This is a fantastic site where I've spent time before.

Most insect taxonomy is done by using their adult lifeforms, but as I only had the caterpillar (larvae) to work with I surfed the web till I came across images of *Phalaenoides glycinae*. This is the Australian Grapevine Moth. A common native species which is very partial to grapevines. It's a major pest in vineyards and was actually one of the problem pests the Indian Myna was introduced in 1862 in an attempt to control it.

What made me look more closely was when I read it also feeds on *Parthenocissus quinquefolia* (Virginia Creeper) which I have growing close to where I saw it. I changed my suggested identity on iNaturalist to Australian Grapevine Moth.

No-one on iNaturalist has confirmed my identification yet, possibly because I only have a photo of the caterpillar, but I've found the research it's led me to very interesting. Apart from learning about the origins of Indian Mynas in Australia, I also learnt about aposematic coloration which is the distinctive markings that warn predators something may be toxic to eat.

This moth is part of a group called "Day Moths" because they fly in daylight hours. In this way they differ from most other moths. See <https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/25540193>

Glenn Currie

ED – I couldn't find any reference to Glenn's identification of the Red River Gum Ghost Moth but I did locate an email he sent about Narrandera Landcare's Citizen Science project to record sightings of fauna and flora in the Narrandera area using iNaturalist:

"We're using the iNaturalist platform. It's very popular, used worldwide and was developed by The California Academy of Sciences and National Geographic.

"If you're interested in participating you first need to register on this website <https://www.inaturalist.org/>

"The next step is to download the iNaturalist app onto your phone. Its hopefully self-explanatory from there. To add your sighting to a project you'll have to search for "Narrandera Landcare's Fauna and Flora Observations" and click on that. The app will help you with identification and your sightings are verified by the iNaturalist community.

"Like most technology once you've used it a couple of times it gets very easy.

MEMBERS' SIGHTINGS

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

White-plumed Honeyeater [2]	Narrandera Wetlands	01/05/19	Susan Whitehead
Straw-necked Ibis [40]	Leeton Oval	02/05/19	Alan Whitehead
Major Mitchell's Cockatoo [9]	Griffith Golf Course	03/05/19	Carol Abbott
Australasian Bittern [1]	Fivebough Wetlands	04/05/19	Richard Murray
Brown Quail [4]	Fivebough Wetlands	04/05/19	Richard Murray
Caspian Tern [1]	Lake Wyangan (north lake)	05/05/19	Max O'Sullivan
Square-tailed Kite [1]	Cotton Gin on the Whitton Road	05/05/19	Central Coast Group
Superb Parrot [13]	Coleambally – Blocks 15 and 4	05/05/19	Central Coast Group
Plumed Whistling-duck [400]	Coleambally – Sewerage ponds	05/05/19	Central Coast Group
Spotted Harrier [1]	Yenda	05/05/19	Central Coast Group
Zebra Finch [20]	Fivebough Wetlands	09/05/19	Kathy Tenison
Brolga [9]	Brobenah Rd Leeton – flyover	09/05/19	Phil Tenison
Major Mitchell's Cockatoo	Mountain Dam via Leeton	Daily	Dionee Russell
Echnida	Narrandera Common	09/05/19	Dionee Russell
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	Causeway at Lake Wyangan	09/05/19	Max O'Sullivan
Crested Tern [1]	Lake Wyangan – north lake	09/05/19	Max O'Sullivan
White-fronted Honeyeater [2]	McCann Rd, Lake Wyangan	09/05/19	Max O'Sullivan
Yellow-plumed Honeyeater [4]	McCann Rd, Lake Wyangan	09/05/19	Max O'Sullivan
Mistletoebird [5]	Coles carpark Griffith	09/05/19	Virginia Tarr
Wedge-tailed Eagle [2]	Fivebough Wetlands	13/05/19	Max O'Sullivan
Button-Quail (Little?)	Peter's farm at Koonadan	15/05/19	Peter Draper
Yellow-rumped Thornbill [3]	Cutler Ave Griffith	22/05/19	Virginia Tarr
Western Gerygone	Campbell's Swamp car park	31/05/19	Neil Palframan
Spotless Crake [2]	Campbell's Swamp boardwalk	31/05/19	Neil Palframan

Virginia Tarr's list from her stay at the Sunshine Coast in early May:

Mooloobah National Park 03/05/19

- * Varied Triller (3+)
- * Noisy Minors (too many)
- * Pied Butcherbird (2)
- * Kookaburra (1)
- * Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos (2)
- * Noisy Friarbirds, many.
- * Peaceful Doves, many.
- * Spotted Dove, heard
- * New Holland H/eaters (many)
- * Scarlet H/eaters (2) magnificent bright red. A real find as they sat for good while.
- * Blue-faced H/eaters (2)
- * Grey Fantail (3)
- * Large-billed Scrubwrens, many
- * Rainbow Bee-eaters (4)
- * Crested Pigeons, many

Sue Chittick-Dalton's regulars at McNabb Crescent, Griffith:

Apostlebird	Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	Grey Shrike-Thrush
Red Wattlebird	Blue-faced Honeyeater	Mallee Ringneck
'28' Parrot	No Grey-crowned Babblers!	No flyovers of Pink Cockies

Max O'Sullivan

**** COMING EVENTS ****

Please note all outings are subject to weather conditions please email or phone if you intend to come.

SAVE THE DATE for the

Celebration of our 25th anniversary on the weekend of 18/19/20 October 2019 -

We are planning for an Anniversary Dinner, Outings and a Photographic Exhibition over this weekend.

- 13 June Thursday** **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7.30pm.
Topic: "Across the Simpson with 17 camels" with Margrit Martin.
Contact: Nella Smith 6959 1210 or murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.
- 15 June Saturday** **Roadside Vegetation Survey**
Meet at Leeton Post Office at 9am.
Bring morning tea and lunch.
Contact: Eric Whiting.
Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com Phone: 6953 2612.
- 29 June Saturday** **Outing to Mt Brogden**
Meet at crossroads Burley Griffen Hwy / Whitton Stock Route at 8:30am
Bring morning tea and lunch.
Contact: Graham Russell, Phone 0418 350 673 / 0428 536 290
Email: dioneerussell@gmail.com
- 3 July Wednesday** **Copy for the July newsletter is due. Please send to Rowena.**
Email: ericwhiting4@bigpond.com Phone: 6953 2612.
- 11 July Thursday** **Monthly Meeting** in the Yellow Room at the **Leeton Library**, Sycamore St., Leeton commencing at 7.30pm.
Topic: to be decided – bring along suggestions to the June meeting
Contact: Nella Smith 6959 1210 or murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.
- 13 July Saturday** **Geology Tour around Narrandera**
Meet at Narrandera Information Centre
Contact: Nella Smith 6959 1210 or murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.
- 27 July Saturday** **Outing to McCann Road, Lake Wyangan**
Meet at the Griffith Information Centre
Bring morning tea and lunch.
Contact: Phil Tenison, phone 02 6953 4869
- September** **Annual Koala Count at Narrandera Flora and Fauna Reserve.**
Postponed from May.
Date and details to come
Contact: Nella Smith 6959 1210 or murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.
- 4-7 October** **Spring Camp of South East Australian Naturalists' Association**
Friday to Monday **Hosted by Castlemaine Field Naturalist Club Inc.**
A great opportunity to explore natural history of the area with local naturalists.
For details contact Nella Smith 69591210 or email
murrumbidgeefieldnaturalists@gmail.com.