

G E E L O N G
NATURALIST



Quarterly magazine of the Geelong Field Naturalists Club

In this issue...

**Life Membership and
Distinguished Service Awards
Long Forest Project in iNat**

**Multi-day trip to Little Desert
Drama at Lake Hindmarsh**

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The GFNC respects, studies and explores the land, skies, waterways, plants and wildlife of our region, Wadawurrung Country.

G E E L O N G
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The magazine provides a channel for Club members and others to share and communicate their knowledge and research on natural history.

SUBMISSIONS

Submissions of a scientific nature or as informal contributions are welcome and will be due on **2 March** for the March issue. Email to naturalist@gfnc.org.au

Guidelines for contributors can be downloaded from www.gfnc.org.au/about-us/publications

COVER IMAGE

The front cover image by George Appleby is of Eastern Cattle-Egrets observed at Blue Waters Lake, Ocean Grove on 29/10/24.

GFNC Awards presented at the 3 December General meeting

It was very pleasing that the club awarded **Lorraine Phelan** with a well-deserved appointment as Honorary Life Member for her substantial contributions to the GFNC over more than 20 years. Lorraine first joined the club in 1988 and later served for 11 years as a committee member, taking on various roles including Secretary. She was Editor of the *Geelong Naturalist* for more than 10 years and later began the project to digitise the early editions of the club journal. Over a 20-year period, she led club excursions and gave many presentations on natural history to a wide range of organisations. Her botanical illustrations and photographs have significantly contributed to the recording of Australian plants in the Geelong region. Lorraine willingly shares her deep knowledge and expertise, and her dedication and enthusiasm have greatly benefited the club and our members.

Earlier this year, the club introduced a new award to recognise long-term contributions and valuable service to the GFNC. The award is made by the Committee and issued to members who significantly aided the club and the study of natural history over a 10-year period or more. Distinguished Service Awards were presented to members **Rob Beardsley, Rod Lowther, Graham Possingham and Alison Watson**.

We extend our heartfelt congratulations to all the award recipients and express our gratitude for their invaluable service.

Please see **pages 2–6** for further details of the contributions and achievements of our award recipients.

Meeting Times

The recent survey showed very strong support for moving to a 7.30 p.m. start for meetings held at the Botanic Gardens, which is the same as the starting time for online meetings. Of those who planned to attend meetings 63 % prefer 7.30 p.m., 11 % prefer 8.00 p.m. and 26 % are happy with either time.

The Committee therefore agreed at our November meeting to change the start time from 8.00 p.m. to 7.30 p.m. from 2025. Thank you to the 75 members who completed the survey. It does mean the room needs to be opened at 7.00 p.m., so we will be seeking extra volunteers prepared to open the room on time. We may also need to adjust the meeting agenda for some meetings to accommodate speakers with the main presentation still starting at 8.00 p.m. and general club business taking place at the start, not the end, of the meeting.

A few members asked why we could not make meetings accessible via Zoom for those who cannot attend meetings in person. With the current meeting room that is not possible, as it would

need improved audio facilities, plus a camera. The City of Greater Geelong has plans to update the room to allow this; other council rooms have this feature, but the design of the building makes it difficult. We will continue to have a mix of 'room and Zoom', with in person meetings scheduled for warmer months where possible.

2025 Membership fees

At the December general meeting the club agreed to keep fees unchanged for 2025. Membership runs from January to December. For those who joined after 1 September 2024, membership for 2025 is already included. Watch out for personalised emails (or letters) in January that detail how much to pay and payment methods. We will also be asking all members (even if they do not need to pay) to review and if necessary update their contact details and membership type. Fees are due on receipt of the email, with the last date to pay being 31 March, in time for the 2025 AGM.

2025 program of club activities and events

Dates for 2025 club events are in **our calendar** with details of many events already available. Add the dates to your diary now!

Graham Possingham

Lorraine Phelan awarded GFNC Life Membership

Lorraine Phelan's substantial and valuable contributions to the GFNC over more than 20 years have been recognised through her well-deserved appointment as an Honorary Life Member. This testimonial details her dedicated service to the club and her activities promoting the study of our local natural history.

Contribution to club management and activities

Lorraine first joined the GFNC around 1988 to foster her interest in birds and plants. After a short hiatus, she rejoined the club in 2000 and became a committee member in 2003. She quickly became active in several roles, including Minutes Secretary and then Secretary, serving on the committee for 11 years.

Lorraine's knowledge, literary, and artistic skills were put to good use when she took on the role of Editor of the *Geelong Naturalist* in 2005, a role she held for almost 11 years, producing 115 issues. In addition to compiling the monthly editions, Lorraine regularly contributed small articles or excursion reports and took many of the photographs that accompanied publication items. In 2009, Lorraine became the GFNC Librarian, a role she still holds.

Lorraine's interest in books with an ecological theme led her to form the Eco-book Group, which met four times per year between 2006–2017 to discuss and review selected books. The group also helped select potential book purchases for the library. Lorraine

led the GFNC Publications Subcommittee from 2005–2014 and was the GFNC liaison representative with the Geelong Botanic Gardens from 2008–2015.

To make permanent and accessible copies of the *Geelong Naturalist* available to the public, Lorraine began a project to digitise the early print editions of the club journal. This time-consuming task involved scanning and deciphering text to create digital copies that could be stored and shared online. In recent years, *Geelong Naturalist* copies were scanned and uploaded by the Biodiversity Heritage Library, where they are now available for download.

Contributions to excursions, campouts and presentations

Lorraine was a keen birdwatcher and led many Bird Group excursions between 2009–2016, as well as several General Excursions. The club held regular campouts, and Lorraine organised multi-day activities and accommodation for trips to Heywood, Barmah Forest, Mt. Buller and Kerang.

Lorraine gave several presentations to the Bird Group and General meetings on topics, such as changes in the taxonomy of Australian avifauna and her trip visiting national parks in the USA in 2012. She has also given multiple presentations about birds or flora to Landcare Groups, Rotary Clubs, Gardening Clubs, and is a contributor to the Nature Stewards Program.



Lorraine Phelan receiving her Life Membership award, presented by club President Graham Possingham (right), following a testimonial outlining Lorraine's achievements and contributions by Barry Lingham, GFNC Life Member (left)

As a regular attendee on club excursions, Lorraine has engaged with members to assist in identifying plant species, birds, butterflies and other invertebrates. Not only is she a highly competent naturalist, but her patience and enthusiasm have been greatly appreciated by both beginners and more experienced club members.

Other natural history contributions

Over many decades, Lorraine has increased her skills as a botanist and has made significant contributions to the recording of Australian plants through her creative and accurate photographs of flora and fauna. Initially, these were uploaded to Flickr and Viridans, but her photographic observations are now submitted to iNaturalist. Her extraordinary efforts on iNaturalist include over 11,300 observations of more than 2,600 species. Additionally, she has assisted in identifying over 5,000 submissions from other iNaturalist users.

Lorraine has also contributed extensive records of bird

observations to the *Geelong Bird Report*, BirdLife Australia surveys and via eBird.

In addition to photographing nature, Lorraine has used her drawing and painting skills to create detailed botanical illustrations. Her photographs and artwork have been used to

accompany her many articles in the *Geelong Naturalist* and talks to the GFNC Plant Group. Her work has been included in many other publications and booklets on local plant species. Her elaborate ongoing project to illustrate a 10-metre scroll of paper with botanical artwork and notations has been shown to the GFNC and

several other environmental groups.

Through her many activities within the GFNC, Lorraine has successfully upheld and promoted the aims and purposes of the club in an exemplary manner, and it is fitting that she is acknowledged with Honorary Life Membership.



Lorraine Phelan (centre) pictured with club Life Members (from left) Diana Primrose, Deborah Evans, Barry Lingham, John Newman and Marilyn Hewish

GFNC honours four members with Distinguished Service Awards



Rob Beardsley presented with a Distinguished Service Award by Graham Possingham

Rob Beardsley

After joining the club in 1988, Rob quickly began contributing

to a range of GFNC activities.

Rob made valuable contributions to the running of the club while serving as a committee member from 1990 – 1996.

As a very new club member in 1988, Rob helped at club bi-annual working days to remove invasive Boneseed from the 16.7 ha treatment site managed by the GFNC. The zone is located at the northern end of the East-West Walk in the You Yangs Regional Park. In 1990 Rob took on the role of team leader and coordinator of the club's Boneseed

removal program. Rob has continued to capably and effectively coordinate program activities for the past 34 years, only recently stepping down from the role.

In his role as coordinator Rob liaised with rangers from Parks Victoria; undertook on-site risk assessments and completed OHS paperwork; regularly recruited GFNC members and other volunteers to assist in Boneseed removal activities; ensured coordination back-up by other club members as required; stored and maintained tools and equipment;

supervised volunteers on-site; organised for the outcomes from Boneseed control days to be reported in the *Geelong Naturalist*. Rob willingly undertook all these tasks, contributing his time, energy and enthusiasm to ensure working days were both safe and successful. We recognise and thank Rob for this valuable and noteworthy individual achievement.

The sustained and long-term effort by Rob and the club's volunteer teams over many years has resulted in the control of Boneseed across our site. Indigenous plants have regenerated, helping to restore and maintain the biodiversity values of this zone. The program directly supports the aims of the GFNC to preserve and protect native flora and fauna, and to promote the conservation of

natural resources and the protection of endangered species and habitats.

The value of this work and Rob's significant and long-term contribution to the program was also recognised in 2020 through the awarding of a Certificate of Commendation by the Victorian Environment Friends Network (VEFN).



Graham Possingham presented with a Distinguished Service Award by Barry Lingham

Graham Possingham

Graham joined the club for a four-year period from 1983–1986 before leaving Geelong, later rejoining as a member in 2005.

He has significantly contributed to the GFNC across a range of areas, with major contributions focused on the development and oversight of effective organisational leadership and governance, communications management and community engagement.

As a key member of the committee from 2014–2024, Graham has held various roles including General Committee member 2014–2016, Secretary 2017–2024, Treasurer

2018–2021 and President 2022–2024, with many of these roles held concurrently.

During 2019–2021 with the roles of President and Vice-President vacant, Graham chaired committee meetings and in several other matters acted as President.

From its inception in 2017, Graham took on the role of one of the Trustees of the GFNC Environment Fund. He is an active member of the Publications and Communications Subcommittee.

Graham has capably and efficiently monitored all aspects of the GFNC as an organisation, implementing and managing important improvements to club governance. Improvements include the redesign of membership and financial spreadsheets, and the setup of MailChimp (email and marketing software platform) for membership reminders and bi-monthly newsletter dissemination.

Since 2021, Graham has acted as club website administrator, and he also has oversight of our social media channels. This involves

management of club Facebook pages (one for members only and one focused on community engagement), as well as our Instagram page. Over the past three years Graham has implemented website structural changes, restructured and improved areas of website content. Further, Graham has enhanced the club's online newsletter and since 2020 has compiled, edited and disseminated this important member communication tool.

Graham is active in club and community education, often acting as a liaison for community groups seeking information and presentations from club members. Graham has led several club excursions and given presentations at club meetings, as well as presenting to a variety of external organisations. Graham is an active and regular participant in GFNC excursions, often creating the eBird observation lists that are used in excursion reports published in the *Geelong Naturalist*.



Rod Lowther presented with a Distinguished Service Award by Graham Possingham

Rod Lowther

Rod has made significant contributions to the GFNC since joining in 2013, holding various leadership roles and developing numerous initiatives.

Rod served on the committee from 2014–2019, including four years either as President or Secretary 2016 and 2017. During 2016 and 2017 with the roles of President and Vice-President vacant, Rod chaired committee meetings, acted as Minutes Secretary, communicated committee reports to members via the *Geelong Naturalist* and in all other matters acted as President.

During his term as President and/or Secretary, Rod developed several important initiatives, including the re-establishment of two key Subcommittees to increase member involvement in decision making roles within the club. He

also formed a Senior Advisor Group of club Life Members to review future nominations for Life Membership awards.

Rod has assisted the club to develop strong ties with local organisations, such as the City of Greater Geelong (CoGG), Major Roads Victoria (as liaison for the club on a road project impacting on Jerringot Wetlands), and with local educational institutions.

For example, Rod coordinated and was an active member of the Conservation Subcommittee during 2018–19, fostering a productive relationship with DELWP. He was instrumental in developing the club relationship with The Gordon (TAFE), implementing a student grant program, and for several years presenting to students about club activities and attending students' end of year project presentations. His engagement with The Gordon's nature course coordinator led to student participation in the inaugural Geelong Nature Forum.

Other significant initiatives, include Rod's role as the driving force behind the Geelong Nature Forum/Festival since its inception in 2019. Rod was one of a small team who coordinated the joint GFNC and CoGG event. Later forums/festivals were expanded to include other environment groups in planning and running the events.

Rod has been instrumental in the club's involvement with iNaturalist and various Bioblitzes. He is a community educator on the use of iNaturalist and the club's key contact and coordinator of GFNC involvement in iNaturalist Bioblitzes. As part of the first City Nature Challenge Bioblitz in 2020, Rod ran a series of online (Zoom) sessions conducted by external interstate presenters to build interest in the event and the use of iNaturalist. This was the first time Zoom software was used by the club and it is now in regular use for some club meetings.

Rod is active in club and community education, presenting on a range of topics to members and a variety of external organisations. He is the club's coordinator for the Nature Stewards program, which involves presenting to course participants. Rod has also led many club excursions.

In 2017 he initiated a weekly club email newsletter to enhance communication with members. This newsletter, now produced by current club President Graham Possingham, has become an important member communication tool.



Alison Watson presented with a Distinguished Service Award by Graham Possingham

Alison Watson

Since joining the club in 1989, Alison has significantly contributed to the GFNC.

Serving on the committee from 1999–2003, Alison took on the Secretary role for three of those years.

As a keen naturalist with particular knowledge of the birds and flora of the Surf Coast Shire, Alison has led many club General excursions and Bird Group excursions since 1999. She has given a variety of presentations to club members, particularly to the GFNC Plant

Group. She is a trained Fauna Group co-investigator, actively participating in, or helping to plan and coordinate fauna surveys.

Over many years, Alison has made a valuable and sustained contribution to support the aims of the club with a focus on communication, and community engagement and education. She was an active contributor to the Publications and Communications Subcommittee from 2017–2023 and is the club’s liaison contact with the Angair organisation.

In the late 1990s, Alison was instrumental in producing the club pamphlet about Jerringot Wetlands, covering all aspects of production from writing text and creating images, to liaising with the committee and organising printing. From 1999 through to project completion several years later, Alison contributed to the development of the Ted Errey Nature Circuit, (Brisbane Ranges National Park), assisting in the compilation and design of interpretive trail signage with Parks Victoria and other partners.

Alison has participated in a range of community focused activities and events over many years. Activities include volunteering during the early 2000s at the club’s regular Environment Expos held at Deakin University and the annual ‘Snipefest’ at Jerringot Wetlands, helping local school children to understand and appreciate this special place for Latham’s Snipe.

Alison’s relationship with the club’s flagship publication, *Geelong Naturalist*, is a long-standing one. Initially Alison took on the role of back-up editor when the editor was unavailable. She then joined a small team of three joint editors and took on the formal Editor’s position from 2014-2023. The role encompassed all aspects of production including editing, design and formatting of issues. In 2023, Alison made a valuable contribution to the major redesign of the publication into its new style and quarterly format. She is also a regular contributor of articles and excursion reports for the publication.



2024 Distinguished Service Award recipients (from left) Rob Beardsley, Alison Watson, Graham Possingham and Rod Lowther
Photos: Jenny Possingham

Great Southern BioBlitz

September 2024—results and highlights

Rod Lowther

The Great Southern BioBlitz (GSB) is finished for another year. As far as the overall event goes, and to partially quote the words of Juan Antonio Samaranch, ‘the Bioblitz was the best ever’. One hundred and ninety areas participated in the GSB, with over 250,000 observations and 8,552 observers involved in uploading photos and sound bites.

Greater Melbourne won the event overall with a mammoth 20,652 observations, upsetting South African groups from Cape Town and Overstrand who, between them, had come first on all previous occasions.

Based on total observations submitted, Greater Geelong ranked 31st, while Surf Coast and

Otways ranked a respectable 53rd. As GFNC members are involved with both projects, combining the two areas would have seen us achieve a status of being in the top 20 (18th overall) on the same criteria.

Combined, the two areas recorded 3,907 observations, better than last year’s GSB but lower than our best of 6,188 in 2022 (the second year the GSB was run). While observation numbers and species found were down from previous years, it was very encouraging to see that the number of people who submitted observations continues to grow. This year’s GSB saw the highest participation of any of our previous bioblitzes.

You can see and examine comparisons across the years by looking at [GFNC BioBlitz Events Projects](#).

The top five observers for the Greater Geelong Region were Rod Lowther, Lorraine Phelan, Susan Kruss, Graham Possingham and Chris Walker-Cook. In the Surf Coast and Otways, major contributors were Deirdre Houlden, Susan Kruss, Adam Fly and ‘carolynmr’.

Stats for the combined areas project are shown in Figure 1. The middle circle shows the breakdown of species observed: plants 51%, insects 16.5% and birds 14.5% make up the major taxonomic groups.

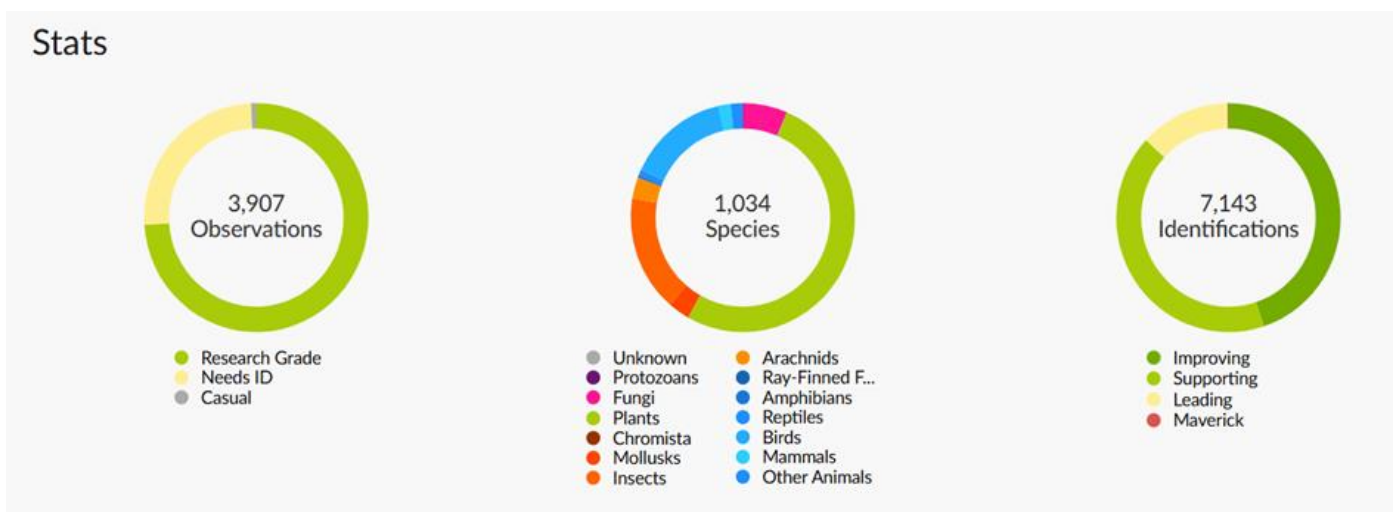
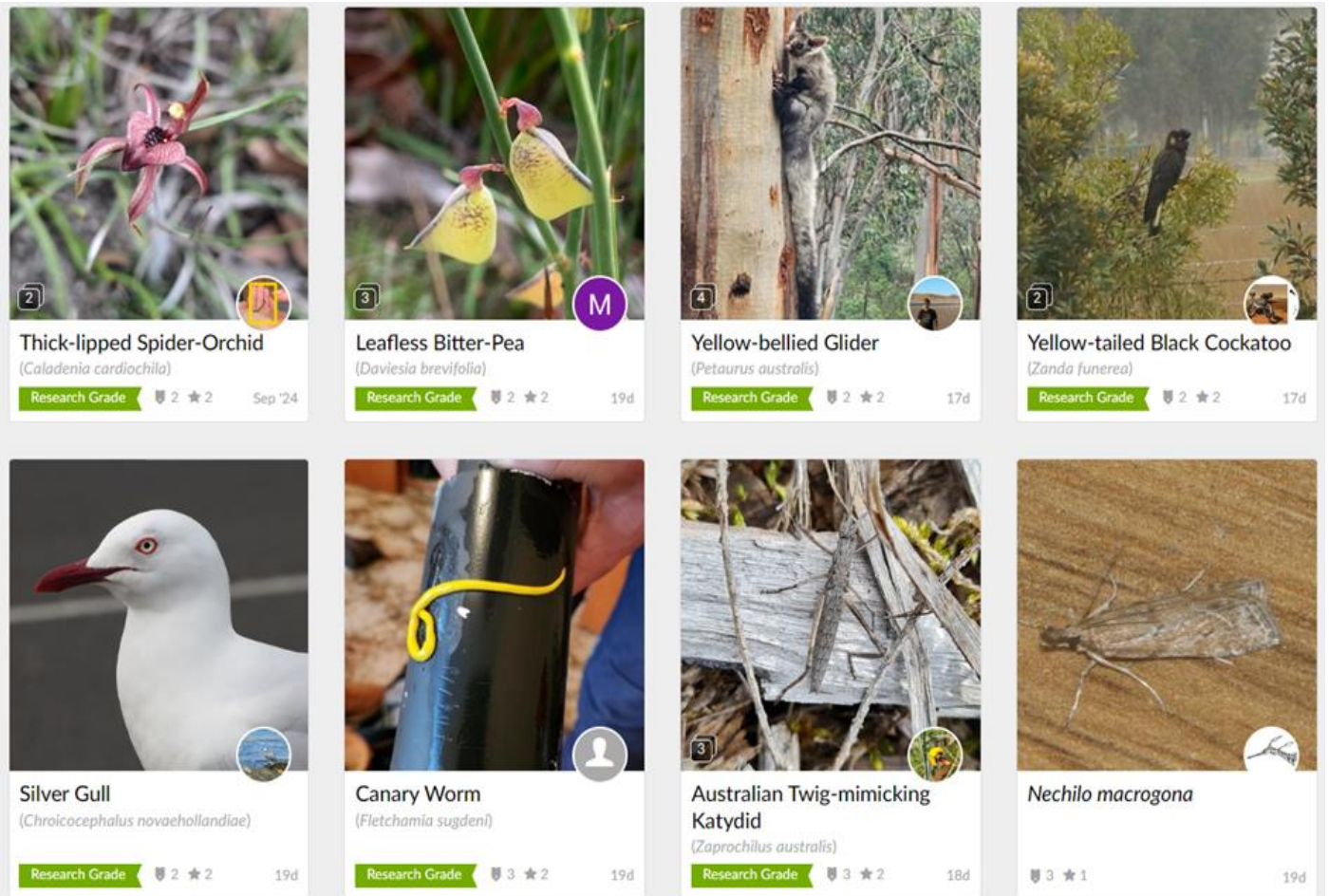


Figure 1. GSB 2024 statistics for combined areas of Greater Geelong, and Surf Coast and Otways

For birds, joint winners for most species observed were Graham Possingham and Rod Lowther, both recording 74 species during the 4-day event. Susan Kruss was

a clear winner for plants observing 141 species. A Melbourne based, but regular visitor to Geelong, Adam Edmonds observed the most insect species.

The most popular photos from the BioBlitz in our region are shown on the next page. A full list of popular (‘liked’) observations can be found [here](#).



Next BioBlitz—Victorian Summer BioBlitz 2025

The next Bioblitz is planned for February 14–17 and will follow the same 4-day observation period format as per the City Nature Challenge (CNC) and GSB. Rather than participating in the CNC in 2025 to be held in late April, this event will be our focus.

Given the February date, we should see more invertebrates, including some different species,

as well as catching sight of visiting summer birds. There will also be different plants flowering.

February is more likely to provide favourable weather conditions to encourage greater participation.

iNaturalist AI identifications are based on what has been seen in an area and over a plus/minus 45-day period from the observation date. So, conducting

a BioBlitz in mid-February will help fill the time gap between the database of observations arising from the late November GSB and late April CNC.

Further details on specific Bioblitz activities you can get involved with will follow in future GFNC Newsletters.

The Long Forest project in iNaturalist: a learning curve

Marilyn Hewish

When the COVID lockdowns began in 2020, I needed a new nature-based interest. My moth research was on hold as it required access to the Melbourne Museum collection.

Other avenues closer to home opened up. The website iNaturalist, a global database for natural history observations, was becoming a hot topic of conversation. I had a long-standing interest in Long Forest Nature Conservation Reserve, a unique mallee remnant between Melton and Bacchus Marsh. These two ideas naturally came together and I joined iNaturalist, concentrating on Long Forest as a study area.

I looked on this as a learning experience. Previously I'd focused on birds and moths. iNaturalist would allow me to explore a wider range of living things. Long Forest was already known to support isolated communities of plants, birds and moths more commonly found in north-west Victoria (Friends of Werribee Gorge and Long Forest Mallee, 2002; Hewish et al., 2006; Hewish, 2010). Who knew what else was there? I could update natural history lists from 2002 (Friends of Werribee Gorge and Long Forest Mallee Inc., 2002) and possibly find new species. Plants were a foreign country to me but I could make use of identification help from other participants.

I put my first record on the site on 20 April 2020: a Meadow Argus butterfly *Junonia villida* in a park near our house. The first large entry was during the City Nature Challenge

beginning on 24 April. On 13 May, I photographed my first plant in Long Forest. I chose what I thought was an easy one and entered it under the name *Cassinia arcuata*. My friend Cathy Powers from the Brisbane Ranges alerted me to a recent taxonomic split. The local species is now *C. sifton* with *C. arcuata* considered rare in Victoria and confined to the north-west (VICFLORA website). This plant caper wasn't proving to be easy.

From 17 May, I started seriously exploring Long Forest plants. I discovered a big problem with being a plant-beginner studying Long Forest. As a dry mallee remnant it has an unusual set of plants for the district with some even unique to the reserve. Dry-country species are over-represented. Sometimes my botanist friends from the Geelong region couldn't help with identification. But the joy of iNaturalist is that people all over Australia can see your records and assist. Now when I get stuck I know the people to call on.

A breakthrough occurred when I was told about the website, VICFLORA (Royal Botanic Gardens). It's a treasure! This has detailed descriptions and some keys for Victorian plants. It's written in technical botanical language ('botanese') which I find hard to learn, but when I really need help it's worth the effort. Why can I remember more than 1,000 scientific names of moths but still sometimes confuse petioles, pedicels and peduncles (to say nothing of petiolules)?

By the end of 2020, I saw a need to draw the Long Forest information together—all records, not just mine—for use by naturalists, researchers and conservationists. That's when Cathy Powers taught me how to set up an iNaturalist project. In December 2020, we created the 'Biodiversity of Long Forest area, Victoria' project for Long Forest Nature Conservation Reserve with a buffer zone including roadsides, council reserves, surrounding grassland and accessible areas on private land and the Merrimu Reservoir reserve—all continuations of the nature reserve woodland and grassland. The project sweeps up all records from within that area, past and present.

I check entries on most mornings. I help contributors with identifications and further information. I've encouraged new contributors, especially the 'ant people', as I knew studies in the 1970s revealed a diverse and unusual set of ant species (Friends of Werribee Gorge and Long Forest Mallee Inc., 1993). I now go into Long Forest two or three times a week.

I'm now so committed to iNaturalist that I take my cameras whenever I go bush. But though I'm ranging more widely, Long Forest is still my second home, or maybe even my first home.

A second article on the results of the iNaturalist Long Forest project will follow in the next *Geelong Naturalist* issue. The Acknowledgements and References will be found there.

Birding in the Barmah National Park

Cheryl West Lau

I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the Barmah land, the Yorta Yorta people, and pay my respects to Elders past and present. The Barmah National Park is co-managed by the Yorta Yorta people and Parks Victoria under a Joint Management Plan.

After hearing over the years people mentioning the Barmah National Park, I decided I would do a trip in early September and explore it myself. I stayed in a cabin right beside the Murray River in Moama and had three lovely sunny days. In the first hour after I arrived at the cabin, I was visited by a Laughing Kookaburra, Noisy Miner, a few Maned Ducks and six Pacific Black Ducks, all perched on or standing around the verandah.

The Barmah Forest is situated 28 km north-east of the twin towns Echuca (Vic)-Moama (NSW) and is part of the largest River Red Gum forest in the world. You can download the Barmah National Park visitor guide from the park webpage. You can also download free geo-referenced maps of the park.

The township of Barmah is right on the edge of the National Park. I drove a few kilometres out of Barmah up the Moira Lakes Rd; I had my window opened and could hear bird sounds from an area near Racecourse Rd. I spent the next couple of hours around here. There was a bird making a loud raucous sound and I have heard the call before, so I knew it was a Noisy Friarbird. It looked like it could

have been a juvenile. The bird was constantly calling. The head of the Friarbird has the look of a miniature vulture, quite prehistoric. Also around this area were a pair of Jacky Winters flying down from the trees and feeding on the ground. I was very pleased to see these and other Jacky Winters over my visit as I haven't been seeing them as often as I used to when travelling around the state. Two Rufous Whistlers were calling to each other and I sighted the male. I could hear Australian Ravens calling and eventually sighted one with his long hackles on show. A Yellow Thornbill was flying around, and two Grey Fantails were weaving about in the air catching insects. Around this time a pair of Crimson Rosellas, yellow type (subsp. *flaveolus*) flew into the trees near me. I went for a walk in the forest opposite Racecourse Road and could hear Shining Bronze-Cuckoos and Fan-tailed Cuckoos calling, saw White-Plumed Honeyeaters, White-throated Treecreepers, Kookaburras, as well as the usual forest birds: Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, Galahs, Little Corellas flying overhead in groups, and White-winged Choughs and Eastern Rosellas feeding on the side of the road.

I drove further along the road and stopped after hearing the unmistakable sounds of a Restless Flycatcher. I was rewarded with a sighting and heard three Restless Flycatchers overall during my visit to Barmah. At

another stop I sighted a Pied Butcherbird preening and sunning itself in the branches at the top of a tree. There were, of course, the usual suspects: Red Wattlebirds, Pied Currawongs, Grey Shrikethrushes, Willie Wagtails and Australian Magpies (with black backs rather than white backs). As you go further north in Victoria the magpies start having black backs, subsp. *tibicen*; the white-backed magpies are subsp. *leuconota*. There has been some interbreeding between the two, producing hybrids.

The strong winds that caused damage over Victoria had also been present around the Barmah area and many roads in the National Park had signs warning not to drive down them because of tree damage. I wanted to get to the Murray River, which runs through the Barmah Forest, and found two roads that accessed camping areas beside the river. Some of the roads in the forest have large holes and are really only suitable for serious four-wheel drive vehicles. I had lunch beside the river and I saw a large brown raptor fly in and land in a nest in the top of a tree on the opposite bank of the river. The bird was feeding young from something it had in its beak and was soon joined by its partner. They became aware I was watching them and one of the adults slowly flew over the river and came around behind me before landing in a tree nearby, where it could keep an eye on the nest, and probably me. My knowledge of

raptors is not strong, but I think it may have been a Whistling Kite, or perhaps another kite species. I did think of a Swamp Harrier but the wings weren't up at the tips. Both birds were a rich rufous brown.

There was a Little Pied Cormorant diving into the river, a Little Black Cormorant flying down the river and 12 Pelicans were sitting on an island sunning themselves.

Martins were flying above me and, as they had a buff white throat and

the rump was a dirty white, I believe they were Tree Martins. There were sightings of a Great Egret and nine Spoonbills (six Royal and three Yellow-billed) sitting on a branch over the river having an afternoon nap.

My mission had been to see Azure Kingfishers, which I thought I had a good chance of seeing along the Murray River, but although I walked along the river in the Barmah Forest and also in Echuca-Moama,

the only Kingfisher I saw was the Laughing Kookaburra. I would have seen around 15 in total during my visit.

I had also contemplated visiting the Gunbower National Park along the Murray River, which is situated west of Echuca, but I found myself going back to the Barmah National Park. Gunbower will have to wait for another trip.



Honeyeater Migration—a story

Wendy Cook

An insistent call is heard from near my garden. 'Chip, chip, chip, chip, chip, chip, chip'. An answer comes from further away. I recognise those voices. It means that the Yellow-faced Honeyeaters are back. It is late July and they have been gone for at least two months. Often, they stay here all year round, but this winter was different. Possibly it was too cold for them, or they couldn't find enough food. I watched them closely all summer. First, they built a nest in the Irish Strawberry bush, only about one metre above the ground. Two chicks hatched, but after a few days they were gone. The next nest was higher up, well hidden in the leafy wisteria that lines the veranda. Here they successfully reared three chicks. Once they were independent, the parents built a third nest, also in

the wisteria. They didn't use it, and it hangs from a branch of the now leafless vine, a small cup of green moss and slender dry grass stalks, and a reminder of their presence.

Yellow-faced Honeyeaters are one of the less colourful birds in my garden. Their feathers are dull grey-brown, paler on the undersides of their bodies than above. A yellow stripe, sandwiched between lines of black, runs from their beak, under their eye and across their face. Although they are not brightly coloured, I often see them flying from tree to tree or perched on a branch watching the world, and their calls are a part of life in my garden. I missed them and wondered where they had gone. The usual answer to questions about where honeyeaters migrate in winter is that they have flown north. After a

little research, I can imagine where the birds from my garden may have been during the last two months or more.

Perhaps they left on a cold wet morning when they could find no nectar or fruits and few insects. They began their journey in an easterly direction, meeting other Yellow-faced Honeyeaters and forming a small flock. They were joined by a few White-naped Honeyeaters, slightly smaller birds with olive backs, white fronts and black heads. They flew north of Melbourne and its suburbs, preferring to stay in areas with trees, moving during the day and resting at night. At sunrise, they became active, each bird hopping from shrub to shrub, looking for food. An hour later, the flock came together and began their day's travel, flying among the treetops,

calling to each other. Their direction was now north-easterly following the Great Divide, flying across mountain slopes as their journey took them into New South Wales. Here, the birds from my garden rested, joining a group of honeyeaters feeding among vegetation beside a small river in a sheltered area of the foothills.

These birds were not travelling this year. After a few days here, the resting pair felt an urge to travel further and joined a different flock. This flock included hundreds of birds, mainly Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, but also honeyeaters of other species and pardalotes. As they flew through the Blue Mountains, flocks combined until there were thousands of birds.

One sunny morning, their flight path followed a deep valley, lined by high ridges and plateaus. As the valley became narrower, the birds were forced closer together, until there was a continual stream of honeyeaters passing the mountain ridges. This huge flock of birds had been expected. Patient eyes and ears were watching for grey specks of many birds in the distance and listening for the combined calls of thousands of birds approaching. A

Peregrine Falcon perched on a narrow ledge on a cliff face, launched its typical high-speed attack. It swooped down towards the flock, snatched a bird from the air and carried its dead prey back to its ledge. Above, a goshawk circled, also seeking a feed. The honeyeaters scattered, perching in trees and waiting until the threatening bird above them had gone. On the cliff top were other observers. A group of birdwatchers with their binoculars and cameras had also arrived to watch the passing of thousands of honeyeaters. They spent the morning watching and listening to the flow of birds flying by, and saw them pause their flight and perch in trees and bushes when a cloud or a predator passed overhead.

The birds from my garden may not have flown much further north, although many others continued into south-eastern Queensland or beyond. Perhaps they found a valley with flowering indigenous trees and bushy gardens, where the climate was warmer and there was plenty of food; or maybe they continued travelling, but only over short distances, until it was time to return to Victoria. Yellow-faced

Honeyeaters don't form such large flocks when they are migrating south, so human observers are less familiar with their movements. I do not know why the birds choose to come back here to breed, or if they are the same birds that left in May, but their presence assures me that it is a place where they feel comfortable, and I look forward to watching them rear their chicks again this summer.

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First published in Meredith and District News, September 2023.



Yellow-faced Honeyeater,
Bannockburn Bushland Nature Reserve,
23/9/24

Photo: Graham Possingham

Bird Notes

Craig Morley and John Newman

As we move towards the summer solstice and the days get warmer and drier we continue to enjoy our regional birdlife. Building on the theme from last issue, expectations are high amongst the birders of the region for what avian treats may visit us in the months ahead.

As we prepare this article news is arriving of four **Australian Pratincoles** on the drier expanses around the south-west corner of **Lake Murdeduke**. A vagrant to the Geelong region, well out of its normal range, the **Australian Pratincole** *Glareola isabella* usually inhabits dry grasslands and agricultural land. You can find the eBird **Australian Pratincole** species description [here](#).

Writing of vagrant species, a species that until as recently as 2012 was classified as a vagrant, the **Pacific Koel** *Eudynamys orientalis* was reclassified as rare (GBR 2012) with more frequent and regular records in preceding years. In November 2024 *at least one* has been calling frequently and regularly in our area with records from Bell Post Hill, Hamlyn Heights, Corio, Highton and Newtown. It would be very interesting to confirm if we have more than one calling bird.

One way to ensure that we have the best possible 'picture' of the species in our region is to submit every record of sight and sound to enable us to delve and determine if there are birds calling from different

locations at the same/similar times. The eBird **Pacific Koel** species description can be found [here](#).

N.B. here you'll also find links to videos including a juvenile **Pacific Koel** fed by a **Red Wattlebird** presumably the host parent. A map of recent records can be found [here](#).

We encourage everyone to visit and search these links in **eBird** (remember to log-in): <https://ebird.org/explore> and then use the tabs to:

- **Explore Regions:**
Add one of the Local Government Areas of the Geelong Reporting region to see what species have been reported recently. These regions are Greater Geelong; Queenscliffe; Surf Coast; Colac Otway; Corangamite; Moorabool; Golden Plains; Wyndham and Melton.
- **Explore Species maps:**
Add the name of the species you're interested in and remember to limit the date range e.g. July 2024 or a broader search 2020–2023 to narrow down the *recent* records.
- **Search species:**
If you'd simply like to learn more about a particular species in general.

Using eBird workshops

Craig Morley



These online workshops will re-commence in the new year (week of Monday 10 Feb).

If you wish to:

- make sure you receive the link to be included
- raise a topic for discussion
- ask a question

please send an email with your request to craigmorley5@bigpond.com

Bird Group excursion report

Anglesea Heath

26 September 2024

Pete Sullivan

The weather leading up to this excursion had been wet, cold and windy, and the forecast for the excursion day was 12 degrees with showers. Consequently, I was not expecting a big turnout but was very pleased when 17 participants turned up and the weather was in our favour.

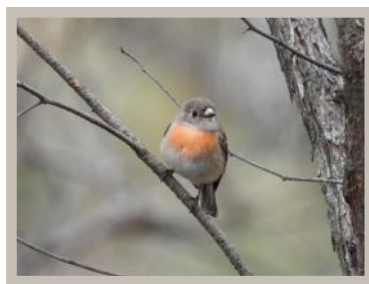
The meeting point for the day was the corner of Gum Flats Rd and

Bald Hills Rd at Anglesea Heath. While the group began to arrive, a Fan-tailed Cuckoo was seen perched on a dead branch and a Shining Bronze-Cuckoo was heard calling from nearby.

We commenced the excursion by walking along Bald Hills Rd for approximately 2.5 km. Along this section of the route, we sighted a Sulphur-crested Cockatoo sitting

very snugly in the entrance of a hollow, and a little further along the track we saw a Galah also looking snug at a hollow entrance.

A highlight for me was seeing both a male and female Scarlet Robin that allowed us an uninterrupted view for several minutes as they went about their business.



Male (left) and female Scarlet Robins



Olive-backed Oriole

Photos: Karyn Brown

A loose flock of at least 15 Black-faced Cuckooshrikes moved along low in the vegetation ahead of us for several minutes. Brown-headed Honeyeaters, White-naped Honeyeaters, Buff-rumped and Brown Thornbills were all seen. Numerous White-throated Treecreepers were both seen and heard. Two Wedged-tailed Eagles soared above us.

We took about two hours to walk this section of Bald Hills Tk, then we took a left turn along an unnamed walking track for 2 km to Haggarts Tk. This section of the track had a few water ruts, wash outs, a couple of large puddles to

negotiate, and an uphill walk. With a bit of care and a few rest stops we put this section of the track behind us. At one point we heard a Grey Currawong and a Pied Currawong both calling at the same time. It was a great opportunity to hear and compare the distinct calls of each species.

At Haggarts Tk we turned left and followed the track to Gum Flats Rd. Here we saw a puddle in the middle of the track containing some foamy frog spawn and some very young tadpoles. We wondered if that puddle would hold the water long enough for them to grow into frogs. Or perhaps they will be lunch for

another species trying to make its way in this world.

From Gum Flats Rd it was another 3 km back to our cars. Even though some of us had lunch and coffee in our sights, this section of the walk delivered some rewarding sightings. A Wedge-tailed Eagle, Crimson Rosella, Crescent Honeyeater, White-eared Honeyeater, Striated Thornbill, Black-faced Cuckooshrike, Olive-backed Oriole, Scarlet Robin and Forest Raven to mention a few.

It was a very enjoyable and rewarding birding day, shared with good company. We walked a total of 8.5 km and recorded 33 species

of birds. A big thank you to Brad Ferrier for doing all the pre-excursion planning and to

Phil Watson for co-leading on the day.

The complete bird list can be viewed using this link: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/279223>.



Bird Group excursion report Hovells Creek, Woolloomanata 24 October 2024

Brad Ferrier

A moderate westerly wind greeted 20 keen bird observers for a 9.00 a.m. start. Craig Morley led the group at this restricted access site west of the You Yangs and adjacent to a Sugar Gum *Eucalyptus cladocalyx* plantation. We welcomed a few visitors and a new member.

Our slow pedestrian pace took us southwards towards an area of the property where Rainbow Bee-eaters were seen a few days prior. Here the creek is narrow and flows in a southeasterly direction. Some parts of the embankment present a marked stratigraphy of sands and gravel, which is encouraging geology for the bee-eaters. We were pleased to see four later in the morning.

The first birds we saw were both Musk and Purple-crowned Lorikeets, flying briskly overhead. Later Rainbow Lorikeets made their presence well known with their usual raucous calls. It wasn't long

before thornbills were seen, Brown in some wattles and a group of Buff-rumped in another group of shrubs— always a delight to see. Other Thornbills such as Striated, Yellow-rumped and Yellow were also observed. These are active birds with different little vagaries in their behaviours and preferred habitat. A real treat was seeing Jacky Winters with a nest of young birds being fed by an adult.

Kingfishers were prevalent, four Laughing Kookaburras were seen as well as two pairs of Sacred Kingfishers. It was a real treat to see the latter, especially in what is usually such a dry location, perhaps the ephemeral bodies of water attract them. A White-winged Triller was a novel observation, these birds have not been seen for a few seasons around the greater Balliang area. It was so nice to see and hear a group of White-winged Choughs on the ground in their usual socially arranged

congregation. Both Rufous and Golden Whistlers presented themselves with the former offering up their beautiful calls.

Raptors seen on the day were a Little Eagle (light morph), a Wedge-tailed Eagle, a Whistling Kite and two Brown Goshawks. Honeyeaters and pardalotes were also observed, and on the Lascelles dam a handful of regular water birds were observed including a Yellow-billed Spoonbill.

Lunch was enjoyed by most of the group after an interesting morning of bird observing.

Thanks to Craig for leading the group and for imparting his knowledge gained from decades of observing birds. Thanks also to the property owner for allowing our ongoing access to this site.

The complete bird list can be viewed using this link: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S200149461>

Excursion report

You Yangs Regional Park

15 September 2024

Barry Lingham



Necklace Fern *Asplenium flabellifolium*
Photo: Jenny Possingham



Scarlet Robin
Photo: Graham Possingham



Snowy Mint-bush *Prostanthera nivea*
var. *nivea*
Photo: Jenny Possingham

Introduction

After the rain, hail and cold wind of the previous day, our small group that gathered at the You Yangs near The Saddle carpark appreciated the cold but dry conditions. A beautiful male Scarlet Robin greeted us as it sang and foraged in the Black Wattles *Acacia mearnsii* looking for invertebrates.

Rob Beardsley has a detailed knowledge of the site gained after many decades coordinating the Boneseed pulling project. He provided us with lots of information about how the habitat had been improved by the project. Most of the excursion participants were also regular Boneseed pulling volunteers who were keen to find out more about the flora and fauna of the site.

Investigating the GFNC

Boneseed management site

Rob noted that The Saddle area was an important Wadawurrung artefact site with many stone flakes and tools found nearby. We walked slowly uphill along the East-West Walk toward Flinders Peak, stopping to admire wildflowers, scenery and birdlife. Flowering Snowy Mint-bush *Prostanthera nivea* var. *nivea* was profuse, and the white tubular flowers of the Austral Tobacco *Nicotiana suaveolens* drew our attention. This plant is listed as Endangered under the Victorian Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988, but there are now a number of plants growing at the site.

Brown Thornbills, Silvereyes, Superb Fairywrens and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters were noted along the track. Trees

included Red Stringybark *Eucalyptus macrorhyncha*, Red Ironbark *Eucalyptus tricarpa*, Drooping Sheoak *Allocasuarina verticillata* and Golden Wattle *Acacia pycnantha*.

We diverged from the track and ascended 'our hill', pleasantly surprised that the grassy open slopes were almost devoid of Boneseed. A few emerging plants were quickly pulled. The benefits of the GFNC control program were plainly evident, with sapling trees and many smaller plants growing where previously they had no chance due to the choking mass of Boneseed. Some fern species were thriving in a fissure within a large rock—a tiny trickle of water passing along the crack allowed their survival.

The dominant tree noted at the upper peak of the hill was the

Victorian Blue-gum *Eucalyptus globulus*. This tree of the rocky granite slopes survives exposure to very dry summers and freezing winter conditions. Some old large-diameter dead tree stags still showed blackening from the 1985 bushfires. New growth had sprouted from the base of one dead trunk, creating a spreading multi-trunked tree. From the peak, panoramic views of Melbourne city, the Anakies, the Brisbane Ranges and Mt Blackwood were seen.

Rob showed us the area where Brittle Greenhoods *Pterostylis*

truncata had flowered earlier in the year. This Endangered species has a stronghold in the You Yangs. Nearby, drying flowers of Dwarf Greenhoods *Pterostylis nana* were noted.

We followed the southern limit of the GFNC site. Plants noted along this section of the track included Cherry Ballart *Exocarpos cupressiformis* and Lightwood *Acacia implexa*. A *Correa* that was not in flower could not be positively identified but was most likely the Rock *Correa* *Correa glabra*. Birds seen included Buff-rumped Thornbills, Grey

Fantails and Red-browed Finch. Later, an Australian Boobook was noted below the track.

A large, displaced rock had smashed a destructive path through vegetation, reminding us that the hill is always changing as rocks weather or are displaced by undermining from rainfall.

The day concluded with lunch before we headed home, very proud of the efforts of the many volunteer 'Boneseed pullers' over several decades. Their dedication has allowed nature to regain some of the habitat that had previously been lost to this invasive species.

A condensed history of Boneseed control at the You Yangs

The African Boneseed *Chrysanthemoides monilifera* subsp. *monilifera* was brought to the Melbourne Botanic Gardens in 1858. It was established in some bushland areas by 1925 but appears to have arrived in the You Yangs around 1950 through an unknown carrier. By the 1960s, it was widespread and causing serious alarm.

In 1963, the GFNC began the first of our on-going Boneseed removal activities. Several other groups, including the Bird Observers Club, also cleared some areas. After an area was cleared, 'native species' rather than local indigenous plants were planted to try and crowd out regrowth. Pulling regenerating Boneseed plants was initially effective, but many thousands of new plants soon emerged.

The intense wildfire that swept through the You Yangs in 1985 caused a major germination of seeds. Chemical control spread by crop-dusting aircraft was

attempted. Spraying Boneseed from the tracks in the park has also been attempted over the years. In each case, after an initial period of die-off from the poison, the Boneseed returned to blanket the understorey.

Some biological controls were investigated in the 1990s. After laboratory trials of many potential natural control species from South Africa, several insects were released at the You Yangs. They include the Black Boneseed Beetle *Chrysolina* sp., Blotched Boneseed Beetle *Chrysolina fasciata* and the Bijou Tip Moth *Comostolopsis germana*. Despite some initial success, none of the species has become established or proven to be a useful control method.

Manually pulling plants was a successful control method, but it needed to be done systematically. The GFNC initially pulled plants by moving to a new section of our allocated area each year. However, the downhill movement

of seeds by water or gravity meant that any cleared lower slope sites were quickly repopulated by Boneseed. A more successful approach involved clearing all the high zones first and then gradually working downhill.

After more than 60 years, the GFNC control area remains relatively free of Boneseed. Many of the indigenous You Yangs plants have regrown. These plants attract invertebrate fauna and the return of the birds and reptiles that feed upon them. Slowly, the biodiversity of the habitat is being regained.

References

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- Pescott, T. (1995) *The You Yangs Range*. Yaughar Print, Belmont.
- Wheeler, J. R. (1964) 'The Spread and Control of South African Bone-seed', *Geelong Naturalist*, 2(3):66-68.

Excursion report

Bamganie State Forest (SF) and Meredith Police Paddocks

17 November 2024

Bernie Lingham

Introduction

A fire had started near Dereel, 40 km to the west of the Bamganie State Forest, on the day prior to the excursion. The fire was brought under control later that day, but we were alert to the weather conditions. We also monitored a weather front which was expected to travel through the state bringing stronger winds on the morning of the excursion.

Bamganie SF

After meeting in the nearby township of Meredith, we travelled via the Meredith-Mt Mercer Rd., Deans Rd. and then Mc Colls Rd. to enter Bamganie SF from the eastern side. Some deep puddles across the inner zone roads presented a bogging hazard to vehicles, so we did not visit the lower areas along Woodbourne Creek. We commenced our first walk of the day from the far eastern side.

A check of old copies of the *Geelong Naturalist*, revealed that this was the club's 9th excursion to this secluded SF. Several of those previous visits focused on the western side and Woodbourne Creek, accessed via Bamganie Rd.

The eastern zone we explored was sandy and, as reported after our last visit back in 2017, 'supports bracken and Grassy Dry Forest' (Schillier p. 11). In the landscape dominated by Manna Gum *Eucalyptus viminalis* and Messmate Stringybark *E. obliqua*, we quickly noted a variety of birds, including Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, White-eared Honeyeaters, both Spotted and Striated Pardalotes, Grey Shrikethrush and a Black-faced Cuckooshrike.

Early summer flowering plants seen included (probable) Small Chocolate Lily *Arthropodium* sp. 3 (with two flowers per node), Chocolate Lily *Arthropodium strictum*, Bent Goodenia *Goodenia geniculata* and Bluebell *Wahlenbergia* spp. We heard Eastern Banjo Frogs (Pobblebonks) and saw Eastern Grey Kangaroos, Black Wallabies and one Blotched Bluetongue.

Strong winds ahead of the front reached us before 10.00 a.m., dropping the temperature by several degrees and sending the birds for cover. It was time to move on to our next scheduled stop along an unnamed road further within the SF, diverging south from Mc Colls Rd.

We were fortunate in our timing and enjoyed a quick cuppa before heavy



Poison Lobelia *Lobelia pratioides*
Photo: Susan Kruss



Fringed Brachyloma *Brachyloma ciliatum*
Photo: Marilyn Hewish



Common Rice-flower *Pimelea humilis*
Photo: Bernie Lingham

rainfall sent us back to our cars to shelter for a short while. Few sightings were added to the list of birds for the morning, but a trip highlight was seen—an Australian Boobook, flushed from one tree to another tree nearby.

In this zone the flora was varied, and we recorded several plant species, such as Fringed Brachyloma *Brachyloma ciliatum*, Common Rice-flower *Pimelea humilis*, Running Postman *Kennedia prostrata* (not in flower), Small Poranthera *Poranthera microphylla* and the Erect Guinea-flower *Hibbertia australis*.

Bamgania SF select plant list from 17/11/24 excursion and pre-excursion reconnoitre 1/11/24

<i>Acacia mearnsii</i>	Black Wattle	<i>Hypericum gramminium</i>	Small St John's Wort
<i>Acacia paradoxa</i>	Hedge Wattle	<i>Juncus pallidus</i>	Great Soft-rush
<i>Arthropodium</i> sp. 3	Small Chocolate Lily	<i>Kennedia prostrata</i>	Running Postman
<i>Arthropodium strictum</i>	Chocolate Lily	<i>Lissanthe strigosa</i>	Peach Heath
<i>Brachyloma ciliatum</i>	Fringed Brachyloma	<i>Lobelia pratioides</i>	Poison Lobelia
<i>Carex appressa</i>	Tall Sedge	<i>Lomandra filiformis</i>	Wattle Mat-rush
<i>Dichondra repens</i>	Kidney Weed	<i>Lomandra longifolia</i>	Spiny-headed Mat-rush
<i>Dinaella revoluta</i> var. <i>revoluta</i>	Black-anther Flax-lily	<i>Pimelea humilis</i>	Common Rice-flower
<i>Diuris sulphurea</i>	Tiger Orchid	<i>Poranthera microphylla</i>	Small Poranthera
<i>Eucalyptus obliqua</i>	Messmate	<i>Pteridium esculentum</i>	Bracken
<i>Eucalyptus viminalis</i>	Manna Gum	<i>Senecio</i> sp.	Fireweed
<i>Eutaxia microphylla</i>	Eutaxia	<i>Styphelia humifusa</i>	Cranberry Heath
<i>Ghania radula</i>	Thatch Saw-sedge	<i>Thelymitra</i> spp.	Sun Orchids
<i>Gonocarpus</i> sp.	Raspwort	<i>Thysanotus patersonii</i>	Twining Fringe-lily
<i>Goodenia geniculata</i>	Bent Goodenia	<i>Viola cleistogamoides</i>	Hidden Violet
<i>Hibbertia australis</i>	Erect Guinea-flower	<i>Wahlenbergia</i> sp.	Bluebell

Meredith Police Paddocks

The Police Paddocks consist of 20 ha of bushland and natural grasslands. The area is managed by the Western Region Ecological Network (WREN). The volunteer Meredith Police Paddocks Support Group assist in management of the site.

Upon arrival we admired the views out over the valley of the Coolebarghurk Creek, which revealed itself to be a haven for birdlife. The heavily flowering Drooping Mistletoe *Amyema pendula* subsp. *pendula*, was present on most of the wattles and eucalypts we passed walking down toward the creek. It provided a rich feeding ground, attracting a multitude of birds. Despite strong winds, we spotted a variety of birds including Sacred Kingfishers with their striking blue plumage; Fan-tailed Cuckoos filling the air with their distinctive calls; Crimson Rosellas adding flashes of red and blue as they flew; and one Rufous Whistler making its presence known with its tuneful call.

Our combined bird tally for the two areas was **35 species**. We had a great day exploring Bamganie SF and the Police Paddocks and plan return visits in the future.

Reference

Schillier, P. et al. (2017) 'Boonderoo NCR and Bamganie SF excursion report, 17 November 2017', *Geelong Naturalist*, 53:8 (11–13).



Blotched Buetongue *Tiliqua nigrolutea*
Photo: David Boyle



Black-scaped Bullant *Myrmecia nigriscapa*
Photo: Graham Possingham

Excursion report

Multi-day trip to Little Desert National Park

18–20 October 2024

Barry Lingham

Introduction

Following on from the successful GFNC weekend excursion to the Stawell area in 2023, the club decided to hold another multi-day excursion in October, this time based at Dimboola with easy access to the Little Desert National Park (LDNP) and surrounding areas.

The LDNP is located in a sandy zone in the West Wimmera Shire. It runs from the township of Dimboola to the South Australian border, about 100 km, with an average north-south distance of about 15 km. A variety of Ecological Vegetation Classes exist in the LDNP and surrounding areas, inhabited by a wide range of fauna species that are not found in the Geelong region. During our trip, we were able to explore many of the more accessible regions, but it would require a fortnight to visit the more remote sections of the national park.

October 18, Day 1–Friday late afternoon at the Wimmera River

Twenty-nine participants gathered at the Dimboola Riverside Holiday Park on Friday afternoon for our first activity which was a slow amble along the banks of the Wimmera River. We traversed a foot bridge over the river and returned via the Dimboola Common.

Interesting birds seen included Blue-faced Honeyeaters, White-browed Babblers, Nesting Fairy Martins and White-breasted Woodswallows. A flock of more than 80 Little Corellas decorated bushes and trees along the river area. In total, **38 species were recorded.**

The manager at the Holiday Park looked after those of us camped there well, providing a pile of wood for the large fire pit plus a portable BBQ. We had a section of the park allocated for our stay.

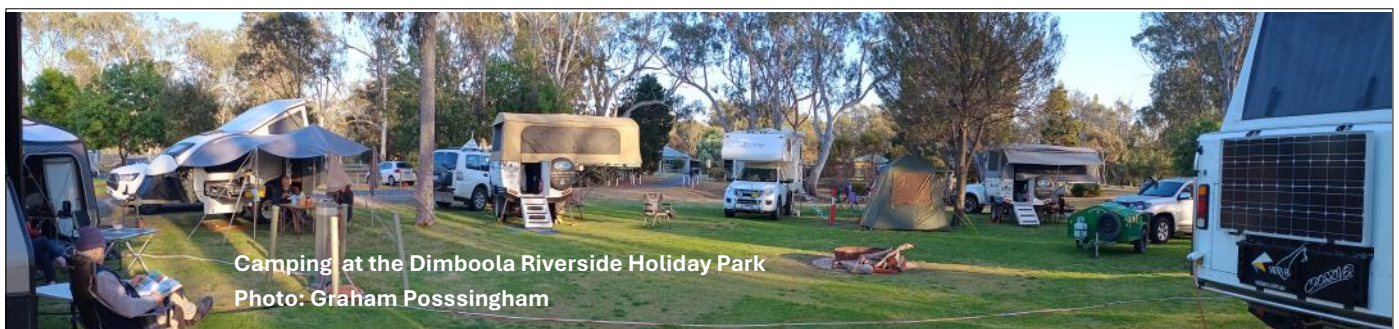
October 19, Day 2–Saturday Morning at Snape Reserve

Snape Reserve is an 846-ha property adjacent to the LDNP. It

was purchased by Trust for Nature in 2002 and is run by a Committee of Management. GFNC member Jeff Dagg had contacted the Committee to gain permission to access the reserve and we were pleased to have Committee members Sharyn and Ian host our visit and show us around. The club donated to the reserve by way of thanks. After a briefing on the history of the reserve and the volunteer work undertaken to improve the habitat, we split into two groups. The birding group completed a circuit walk near the administrative area with Ian while the plant group drove along 4WD tracks with Sharyn to visit two sites where significant local plant species grew.

A total of **37 bird species** were sighted included Australian Owllet-nightjar, Rainbow Bee-eater, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, Southern Whiteface, Red-capped Robin, Varied Sittella and Diamond Firetail.

Those interested in plants explored two different zones of the reserve.



Our first stop was at a section of sandy heath. Many flowering plants could be seen here, from the vibrant splashes of pink of the Common Fringe-myrtle *Calytrix tetragona*, to the striking red of the Flame Heath *Stenanthera conostephioides*, and the yellow hues of various Guinea-flower species, particularly the Long-hair Guinea-flower *Hibbertia crinita*.

At our second stop near a low-lying ephemeral wetland zone, as soon as we exited our

vehicles we encountered a variety of plants of interest—many of which were tiny and required careful steps to avoid trampling. In this zone we found flowering Round-leaf Wilsonsia *Wilsonia rotundifolia*, Frosted Goosefoot *Chenopodium desertorum* and widespread New Holland Daisy *Vittadinia* spp. We recorded **33 plant species**.

In the same area, **26 insect species were recorded**. The Caper White population appeared

to be in plague proportion across all sites and was the most common butterfly seen throughout the trip. The Predatory Stink Bug *Jalloides rubricosus* was an exciting find with only five previous iNaturalist observations noted and it had not been seen in western Victoria before. Another interesting observation was an undescribed grasshopper from Subtribe Macrazelotina, found at the southernmost part of its range.



Common Fringe-myrtle
Calytrix tetragona,
Snape Reserve
Photo: Courtney Jennings



Long-hair Guinea-flower
Hibbertia crinita,
Snape Reserve
Photo: Bernie Lingham



Predatory Stink Bug
Jalloides rubricosus,
Snape Reserve
Photo: Rod Lowther



Undescribed grasshopper
Subtribe Macrazelotina,
Snape Reserve
Photo: Rod Lowther

Day 2—Lunch at Pink Lake (Loch Iel)

Pink Lake is just off the Western Highway about 8 km from Dimboola. It is named after the coloured saline water produced by pigments secreted from microscopic algae which give impressions of various shades of pink depending upon the time of day, cloud cover and lake salinity.

The picturesque lake is a favourite site for photographers, but we were also interested in the saltmarsh plants and habitat on the shoreline. A few lucky (?) people also sighted a Brown Snake near the path leading to the shoreline.

Day 2—Exploring Gerang Gerung (South) Bushland

The 57 ha Gerang Gerung

Bushland reserve is a further 8 km west of Pink Lake.

This reserve offers a change of habitat, comprising grassy woodland dominated by Yellow Gums *Eucalyptus leucoxyton*, Grey Box *E. macrocarpa* and Buloke *Allocasuarina leuhmannii*. Interesting flowering plants included Nodding Chocolate Lily *Arthropodium fimbriatum*, a local



Pink Lake
Photo: Bernie Lingham

type of Bluebush *Maireana* sp., Cut-leaf Goodenia *Goodenia pinnatifida*, Pussy Tails *Ptilotus spathulatus* and Silver Cassia *Senna artemisioides*. **Birds recorded** included Yellow-plumed Honeyeaters and Dusky Woodswallows.

Day 2—Exploring the Kiata Flora and Fauna Reserve

This reserve showcased a more typical Mallee bush environment featuring a variety of flowering understory plants, Mallee eucalypts and Cypress Pines *Callitris*. We arrived around mid-afternoon, so bird life was scarce, but we did spot a fast-moving Australian Hobby and a Collared Sparrowhawk patrolling the area. The identification of a juvenile Eastern Yellow Robin was the cause of some conjecture for a while. Although many of the plants had finished flowering, we were still able to see a few in bloom, such as the Tiny Rustyhood *Pterostylis pusilla*, the Small Spider-Orchid *Caladenia parva* and the Spur Goodenia *Goodenia paradoxa*.

In these open woodlands, **10 insect species** were recorded. The beautiful and rapidly flying Small Grass-Yellow butterfly proved to be a challenge to photograph, while

the equally attractive Vine Hawkmoth was a delight to see. The area, with its good coverage of grass, provided ideal habitat for Australian Plague Locust, and the larger Spur-throated Locust was an unexpected find. The Common Bandwing grasshopper was seen in the sandy section of the reserve.

October 20, Day 3—Sunday morning at the Keith Hateley Nature Walk

This Walk is part of the northern area of the LDNP and is named after one of the original park rangers. The interesting circular trail meanders through a range of Mallee habitats with many plants observed and bird species recorded. While this section of the LDNP is likely at its peak in early spring, there was still much to enjoy. A highlight was spotting a large Lace Monitor *Varanus varius* sunning itself high on the trunk of a Yellow Gum *E. leucoxyton*. We had great views of this impressive reptile which measured around 1.8 m from nose to tail. Another local reptile we encountered was the Ragged Snake-eyed Skink *Cryptoblepharus pannosus*.

As the morning temperature increased and the sun shone brightly, we were delighted to see several beautiful blue Sun Orchids

Thelymitra sp. for the first time on our trip. **A total of 28 bird species** were noted on the main list, including Purple-backed Fairywrens and an Inland Thornbill—a trip highlight.

In this area we observed 18 insect species, eight from the Orthoptera Order containing Grasshoppers, Katydid and Crickets. Other insect Orders were represented with two Ant species, three Butterfly and three Dragonfly species, as well as two from the True Bug Hemiptera Order. The latter comprised a Spittle bug from the Aphrophorinae subfamily and the other was a Wattle Tick Scale, both feeding of the sap of their host plants.

See **the full list of flora and fauna**.

Day 3—Sunday lunch at Nhill Swamp Wildlife Reserve

This reserve is located on the outskirts of the township of Nhill. An elevated boardwalk beginning at Jaypex Park traverses the River Red-gum *E. camaldulensis* swampy area, leading to the Nhill Lake. Although the swamp was dry, **many birds were noted**, including Nankeen Night-Herons, White-winged Choughs and a nesting Tawny Frogmouth with one fluffy chick.



Inland Thornbill,
Keith Hateley Nature Walk
Photo: Rod Lowther



Lace Monitor *Varanus varius*,
Keith Hateley Nature Walk
Photo: Rod Lowther



Azure Sun Orchid *Thelymitra azurea*, Stringybark Walk
Photo: Lorraine Phelan



Tawny Frogmouth and chick,
Nhill Swamp Wildlife Reserve
Photo: Graham Possingham

Day 3–Stringybark Walk

Located in the LDNP about 16 km south of Nhill off the Nhill-Harrow Rd, this circuit walk passes through a range of habitats including some areas with heathy understory. eBird records 123 species at this site.

Our visit in the warm early afternoon was not ideal for birds but **12 species were observed** including six honeyeater species and White-winged Trillers.

While time of day and warm weather may have kept the birdlife quiet, these factors posed little problem for flowering plants. Here we **recorded 23 plants**. Species seen included the beautiful blue Azure Sun Orchid *Thelymitra azurea*, the striking Violet-myrtle *Melaleuca wilsonii*, the vibrant orange and red of the Red Parrot-pea *Dillwynia hispida*, and the delicate hues of the Blue-spike Milkwort *Comesperma calymega* and Native Flax *Linum marginale*.

At this location, **27 invertebrate observations** were recorded with 13 identified to species level. The site had many flowering plants which attracted several pollinators. Among them were Tyde's Sand Wasp moving from plant to plant, the striking and ubiquitous Beefly commonly known as Go-striped Beefly due to its distinctive wing pattern, and the Plasterer Bee *Antipodes callomelitta*.

Day 3–Disused gravel pit off the Nhill-Harrow Road

Further south along the Nhill-Harrow Road, 1.64 km south of Jungkum Tk, a short track leads to an old gravel pit that often holds some water after rain events. The nearby vegetation includes eucalypts and extensive heathland,

some of which had been burned earlier in the year. This area is known to be the habitat of rarer birds such as the Rufous Fieldwren and Slender-billed Thornbills. We did not observe those birds, but we did see **10 species**, with two standing out as special finds: Tawny-crowned Honeyeaters and a Black-eared Cuckoo.

Although this area was the last location we visited on our trip, it stood out as one of the most interesting for the plant enthusiasts. Regrowth from the environmental burn was both thick and prolific. Of the **26 plant species** we recorded, many had not been seen at our other weekend visit sites. Particularly notable were Purple Eyebright *Euphrasia collina*, Pink Zieria *Zieria veronicea* subsp. *veronicea*, Velvet Spyridium *Spyridium subochreatum*, Fringed Heath Myrtle *Micromyrtus ciliata* and a stunning patch of Blue Tinsel-lily *Calectasia intermedia*.

Eleven invertebrate observations were recorded at this site with three notable ones. The Large Brown Skipper *Hesperilla trimaculata* which is endemic to the area, was a rewarding find. Additionally, another Beefly *Oncodosia triangularis* was photographed, a rare sighting given the dominance of the Go-striped Beefly at most sites visited. An unknown local species of Badge Huntsman spider was recorded.

Day 3–Dimboola campground night moth and invertebrate sheet-light survey

As night approached, three insect and moth sheet set-ups were put up at the camp area. Each set-up

had distinctive features, prompting a discussion on what makes for the best design. However, in common each used a UV lamp emitting light to attract insects. On and off over the next couple of hours, we gathered around the light set-ups to observe a variety of flying and crawling invertebrates.

We recorded **54 observations**, finding 28 species (18 moths and five beetles). Early in the evening, an exceptionally large ant (25–30 mm) wandered about the sheet. The size suggested it was an Inch Ant *Myrmecia pyriformis*, an ID later confirmed by experts in iNaturalist.

Conclusion

For our group of 29 participants, our visit to this fascinating area of Victoria was a huge success. We explored Mallee habitats, observing a wide range of flora and fauna and gained an appreciation for many new species. A **total bird list of 93 species** from 10 eBird checklists were recorded for our visit. Overall, trip participants **uploaded 676 observations** to iNaturalist covering all taxa. Additionally, we enjoyed the camaraderie of sharing the experience with friendly and like-minded GFNC companions.

Special thanks go to Graham Possingham who recorded eBird lists for each visit site, Jeff Dagg for making a preliminary visit and organising access to Snape Reserve, and all those who helped in numerous ways over the weekend.

Thank you also to those who contributed to this report, including Bernie Lingham (plants), Rod Lowther (invertebrates) and Graham Possingham (birds).

Drama at Lake Hindmarsh

Graham Possingham

After the October club campout several members spent the following Monday in Jeparit and around the shores of Lake Hindmarsh. We split into several groups, Jenny and I decided to explore the shore of Lake Hindmarsh to the east of Four Mile Beach.

We were focused on a Sacred Kingfisher and heard Galahs and Sulphur Crested Cockatoos making a 'racket' in a large River Red-gum. We assumed they were disputing a nest hollow, or just advertising our presence, but we went closer and saw that there was a Lace Monitor *Varanus varius* about to enter a hole in the tree that was the cause (Figs 1,2).



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

The monitor entered the hole, with the tail hanging out, and the birds continued to squawk. They did not attack the monitor in any way, they just made a lot of noise. It would have been interesting to see the behaviour if they'd been miners, Willie Wagtails or Magpies which do attack predators.

We wondered at the time whether the noise alerted the monitor to the nest. In fact, it was likely the smell that let it know which hollow to enter. It's their primary means of detecting prey and an occupied nest hollow will smell.

We waited and started to record a video. After about a minute the monitor emerged. It had a juvenile, but full size Galah in its jaws (Figs 3,4).



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

It then carried the Galah down the tree (Fig. 5) and took it into another hollow (Fig. 6). As soon as it was out of sight the other birds were silent: clearly, they reacted to the sight of a predator not any ‘sorrow’. The level of noise was similar between the Galahs and cockatoos.



Fig. 5



Fig.6

Several minutes later (it’s possible that the bird was being subdued by the monitor’s venom) the monitor emerged and continued to eat the Galah, headfirst (Figs 7,8). We had a very close view as the hollow was not very high and we could see that the Galah was close to being fully fledged. We left the monitor to enjoy lunch in peace.

You can watch a video of most of the action on YouTube [here](#) and can find information on Lace Monitors [here](#), which has further interesting references.



Fig.7



Fig. 8

As a postscript to this chance observation, the area around Lake Hindmarsh and the Wimmera River at Jeparit is worth exploring for birds. You can see species such as Regent Parrots and Splendid Fairywrens that are rarely seen south of the Western Highway, and otherwise only seen near Wyperfeld or further north. It’s an easy day trip from Nhill or Dimboola. The track along the eastern shore of the lake (you’ll want a 4WD) warrants more exploration, however we ran out of time. Our bird list for the day included 75 species, but the water birds you see will depend a lot on water levels in the Lake.

See <https://ebird.org/tripreport/291778> for the list and the places we visited and select ‘Show all details’ for pictures.

Invertebrates observation highlights

July–September 2024

Rod Lowther

Consistent with previous years, observations for the third quarter of the year were down due to the cooler weather. 388 observations were submitted to the GFNC Invertebrates Collection during the July to September 2024 period, and 157 species identified of which about 40% are moth species. Spiders and other non-insect arthropods were represented.

Full list of observations for the quarter.

The seasonal distribution within the Geelong BioBlitz region can be seen in the two graphs below. The left-hand chart accumulates all insect observations while only the species Australian Emperor dragonflies is displayed in the right-hand graph. Total number of observations made each month is shown by the higher light-coloured line while the solid green line

represents Research Grade Observations. This type of information is available for all species in iNaturalist and is a good tool to use when making identifications. A quick check can be made to see if the species you are considering is indeed around at the time of the year for the observation made. Some species can have very narrow seasonal distributions.



Insect observations



Australian Emperor observations

There are other tools or features of iNaturalist that can be explored to get more enjoyment or learning out of your use of the system.

One is the **Subscription** feature, a way of being alerted to what other users might be seeing. When I first joined iNaturalist, I used to 'Follow' others, so I would be notified via a nightly email of what others in the club or other friends were seeing. I used it as a sort of 'Facebook' for iNaturalist. After some experience in using the system, I then changed to no

longer following people but following species. I see what I am most interested in and use it to be alerted to species that I know might be turning up. Dragonflies in the first three months of spring is an example, particular species of flies is another. The subscription can be changed at any time. To access the feature, go to your dashboard and click on 'Subscribe to a Place'. Choose a place, and I would suggest 'Geelong Bioblitz Region', but you could refine to a small area if you wish. Then complete the taxon using the

dropdown field. This is a much better option that using 'Subscribe to Taxon' directly, otherwise you end up with far too much information as the place by default is the world! That might be OK if you are the worldwide expert on a particular genus or family of animals!

Many people use the 'Fav' function when looking at other observations either because it is a really good photo or an interesting feature like a spider attacking another, for example. Over the last three years,

we have had many outstanding photos that people have 'Faved'. There is a way to view these in order of the most 'Faves' and I have included a link to two searches, one related to all invertebrate observations in our region and another just showing those observations made by our

project members. What do you think? They're great, and you can add your 'fave' vote to any observation in this list or indeed any observation in the GFNC Invertebrates Collection.

Find great photos from our Geelong BioBlitz Region [here](#) and

from our project [here](#). Here are my six 'Faves' for the quarter. While we may have highlighted some of these species previously in our reports, they are just nice creatures as they signal that spring is almost upon us!



Pergid Sawflies
Eurys sp.

An interesting observation of a sawfly resting on a Large White Spider Orchid. Is it about to pollinate the flower or just collecting nectar? Many orchids have specific strategies to attract pollinators, and, in some cases, a specific species is attached to a specific orchid species. The identification of this sawfly is yet to be resolved. These types of observations are very important, even if the significance might only be evident sometime later.



Australian Emperor
Anax papuensis

After a short spell of warm weather in early September, we suddenly saw dragonfly nymphs emerged from the ponds in numbers. Transforming into adults, the sky was full of individuals looking for a partner to begin the seasonal process of starting another generation. This observation catches a pair of Australian Emperors mating before the female would go to lay her eggs into the nearby Avalon lagoons.



Spur-throated Locust
Austracris guttulosa

This is the only Bird Grasshopper that has been found in Victoria. Bird Grasshoppers are a tribe of seven large-sized species that are more common in northern Australia. Prior to this year only 40 had been observed in Victoria, yet for this year alone over 150 have been seen with a peak occurring around March/ April. Numbers persisted throughout winter. This suggests there may have been a plague in NSW/QLD with significant numbers being blown down south. The species does not breed in Victoria but maybe this could change with warmer climatic conditions expected in the future.



Twig Looper (larva)
Ectropis excursaria



Stiletto Fly
Ectinorhynchus



Common Halfband
Melangyna viridiceps

A relatively common moth that lives in southeastern Australia. The caterpillars feed on a range of plants. While the adult moths are more likely to be seen in the warmer months, surprisingly the caterpillar observations seem steady throughout the year, based on Victorian observations. To identify moth species from their caterpillar is not always easy, but you can use the Life Stage – Larva filter when examining the species database for comparisons.

A very beautiful, interesting photo showing the details of the wing vein pattern. Is it a case of the hunter now being the hunted, now trapped in a spider's web? Little is known about this genus other than that the larvae are predators that hunt insects residing in soil. The adults seem to emerge in late August and abundance occurs in October with no observation notes in Victoria outside this very narrow period.

One of my favourite species, as its appearance each year signs the start of spring. The adults feed on nectar and pollen so are readily seen in house gardens. The guides state that the larvae feed on aphids. Unfortunately, there are no photos of the larvae in iNaturalist, surprising, given that the adults can be in significant numbers in the August to December period and to a lesser degree in the autumn.

Thanks to the 27 observers who contributed during this reporting period. If you are still not a member of the project, don't miss out on the opportunity to have your observations and photos included in our Collection— sign up now on iNaturalist by clicking on the **[GFNC Collection page](#)**.

References

- Farrow, R. (2018) *Insects of South-Eastern Australia, An Ecological and Behavioural Guide*. CSIRO Publishing.
- Zborowski, P. and Storey, R. (2017) *A Field Guide to Insects of Australia*, New Holland Publishers.



Some recent observations by club members



Small Duck Orchid
Caledea minor,
Anglesea, 10/11/24
Photo: Alison Watson



Fallen Bark Looper,
Anglesea, 25/10/24
Photo: Pete Crowcroft



Australian Reed Warbler,
Lake Colac, 28/11/24
Photo: Karyn Brown

Butterfly observation highlights

September–November 2024

Valda Dedman

October is the month we expect to see Caper Whites and this year the first arrived on the fifth. It is a mystery as to why they fly south to Geelong as their caterpillar food plants do not grow naturally here. Australian Painted Ladies, a migratory species, have been the most abundant species observed. Common Browns should become more numerous as the season progresses. For more details on any species please consult the [GFNC butterfly observation pages](#) and the club [iNaturalist collection](#).

Australian Painted Lady

Hundreds have been reported over the past three months from all parts of the region.

Blotched Dusky-Blue

Just two, both from Anglesea.

Bright Copper

One at Anglesea, one in the Brisbane Ranges National Park.

Cabbage White

Eighteen reported from a wide range of areas.

Caper White

About 75 reported, from 5 October onwards, from all areas.

Chequered Copper

Three were seen at Wandana Heights on 10 October.

Common Brown

Twelve sightings, from the Long Forest southwards.

Common Grass-Blue

Ten records, many of them in Geelong or Drysdale.

Forest Brown

One at Blackwood, one at Wensleydale, one at Yaughar.

Fringed Heath-Blue

One record from Lerderderg.

Green Grass-Dart

Eighteen records, mostly in Geelong.

Heath Sand-Skipper

Three records, all from Anglesea.

Imperial Jezebel

Twelve records, from Steiglitz to Skenes Creek.

Long-tailed Pea-Blue

Six records, from Lal Lal, Lorne, Steiglitz, Geelong, Staughton Vale.

Meadow Argus

Four records, from Pt Wilson, Portarlington, Belmont and Pt Lonsdale.

Montane Ochre

Eight records, one from Wensleydale, the rest from north of Geelong.

Rayed Blue

Four records. Two records from Little River, one from Rowsley and one from Geelong.

Saltbush Blue

One from Little River.

Two-spotted Grass-Skipper

Two in the Brisbane Ranges.

Varied Dusky-Blue

Seven records from Blackwood and Anglesea.

Varied Sword-grass Brown

One from Barkstead, one from Geelong.

White-banded Grass-dart

Seven records, mostly from Elaine.

Yellow Admiral

Forty-six records, from the Otways, the Bellarine Peninsula, Geelong, the Long Forest, the Brisbane Ranges and further north.



Common Brown, Wallington, 1/12/24

Photo: Margaret Alcorn

Fauna observations highlights

September–November 2024

Barry Lingham

Listed below are selected observations and comments about unusual species, species out of normal range or exhibiting interesting behaviour, selected from observations made during spring 2024.

Observations were sourced from the GFNC [Observations page](#) or the GFNC [iNaturalist Fauna Project](#).

MAMMAL SPECIES	LOCATION AND NUMBER OF ANIMALS
Platypus	Barwon River at Red Gum Island (1) and upstream of the Ring Road (1)
Eastern Short-beaked Echidna	Morrison's area (1), (1) and (1); Ocean Grove Nature Reserve (OGNR) (1); Pt Richards (1) and (1); Long Forest (1)
Feathertail Glider	Wombat State Forest (1)
Greater Glider	Wombat State Forest (1) and (3)
Koala	Staughton Vale (1); Wombat State Forest (2)
Grey-headed Flying-Fox	Indented Head (many); Eastern Park (many)
Long-eared Bat <i>Nyctophylis</i> sp.	Yaughar (several), calls detected via GFNC bat recorder
Rakali (Water Rat)	Mannerim (1) seen during fauna survey at Yarram Creek
Baleen Whale sp.	Beach-cast at Barwon Heads

REPTILE SPECIES	LOCATION AND NUMBER OF ANIMALS
Macquarie Turtle	Barwon River at Ceres (4)
Eastern Long-necked Turtle	Blue Waters Lake (1), Begola Wetland (1), Wallington (1), Lara (1)
Southern Marbled Gecko	Belmont (1)
Eastern Three-lined Skink	Belmont (1)
Metallic Skink	Portarlinton (1); Mannerim on GFNC survey (8)
Pale-flecked Garden Sun-skink	Many seen across the region
White's Skink	Anglesea Heath (1); OGNR (1) and (1)
Blotched Bluetongue	Teesdale (1); Meredith (1); Bamganie (1); Wallington (1)
Shingleback Lizard	You Yangs (1) and (1)
Common Bluetongue	Lara (1, very dark colour); Belmont (1); Highton (1); Morrison's (1) and (1)
Lowland Copperhead	Edwards Point (1); Barunah Plains (1); Morrison's (1), (1) and (1); Newtown (1)
Eastern Brown Snake	Ripley Reserve, Little River (1)

FROG SPECIES	LOCATION AND NUMBER OF ANIMALS
Brown Tree Frog, Common Eastern Froglet, Eastern Banjo Frog (Pobblebonk), Spotted Marsh Frog	The warmer spring weather has spurred these more common local frogs to begin calling from a range of wetlands, especially after rain events. Many records from across the region.
Growling Grass Frog (Southern Bell Frog)	Many records from the Point Richards Reserve which is a local stronghold of this threatened species.

Comments on fauna observations

- The mammal sighting that garnered the most public interest was the 14 m **whale carcass that washed up on Thirteenth Beach at Barwon Heads**. Despite many posts to iNaturalist and inspection by DEECA personnel, the exact species remained uncertain. The identification was challenging because the tail, dorsal fin and flippers were missing, and the remaining skin was pale over most of the body. However, the presence of baleen plates in the mouth and large grooves along the belly confirmed that it was a Baleen Whale. It was not a Humpback Whale, as there were no tubercles around the head or lump at the tip of the lower jaw. DEECA believed it to be a Fin Whale *Baleonoptera physalus* but most identifications from iNaturalist suggest a Sei Whale (pronounced ‘say’) *Baleonoptera borealis*. Fin Whales can grow to 22 m and weigh up to 90 t, so if it was a Fin Whale the specimen must have been young. A definitive identification characteristic separating the two species is how far the underbelly grooves reach along the belly—in a Fin Whale, they extend past the navel while in a Sei Whale they do not reach the navel. All the photos seem to confirm it as a Sei Whale.



Baleen Whale sp. 14 m carcass washed up on Thirteenth Beach, Barwon Heads 13/9/24
Photos: Susan Kruss

- Two of Victoria’s rarer mammals have again been recorded this spring during surveys by Ross Auchettl in the Wombat State Forest. The **Greater Glider** inhabits eucalypt forests and has suffered greatly from the impacts of logging. These large, cute gliders with large fluffy ears weigh up to 1.7 kg and can glide over 100 m. In contrast, the **Feathertail Glider** weighs less than 15 g and can glide about 25 m. Hopefully, the proposed Lerederg-Wombat National Park will protect these two amazing mammals.
- A group of **Grey-headed Flying-Foxes** was observed roosting in pines at Indented Heads. It will be interesting to see if this becomes a permanent roost site.
- Several **Eastern Long-necked Turtles** were observed walking on land. They were probably looking for a nesting site to lay eggs. Females lay clutches of 8–24 eggs in sandy or soft soil. A population of **Macquarie Turtles** still exists in the Barwon River. In Victoria, they are normally found in the Murray River region but are also kept as pets. Released or escaped pets are probably the origin of the local Barwon River population.
- The GFNC has purchased a bat recorder. Additional software (Kaleidoscope) can analyse the audio file and create a sonogram to help identify bats. A **sonogram from a call recorded at Yaughar** was uploaded to iNaturalist. The downward, almost linear shape; lowest frequency around 33 kHz, upper frequency around 70 kHz, delay between calls of about 110 mSec and peak power of the call around 38 kHz matches to the Long-eared Bats, possibly the **Lesser Long-eared Bat**. With practice, we may be able to identify more species from the thousands of calls already recorded.

Fauna survey report

Yarram Creek, Mannerim and Hardings Road, Wallington

5 October 2024

Barry Lingham

Part 1, Yarram Creek, Mannerim

We were pleased to return to Jim and Lynne Masons' property at Mannerim which spans the Bellarine Rail Trail and incorporates a section of Yarram Creek. The Yarram Creek riparian zone has been revegetated, creating about 14 ha of maturing woodland. A tile grid with 20 roof tiles was established at the property during a previous visit.

Weather

A cool morning with some showers cleared to a fine but overcast afternoon when we checked the tile grid.

Fauna seen beneath the tiles

Metallic Skink *Carinascincus metallicus* (8): these skinks seem to be well established at the site and readily utilise the tiles for shelter.

Invertebrates: Wolf Spider sp.; Slater sp.; Slug sp.; Darkling Beetle sp.; small ants; Pony Ant sp.; Millipede sp.

Mammals

Rakali (Water Rat) *Hydromys chrysogaster*: one seen foraging in reeds and swimming in Yarram Creek. There are few records of this species recorded on the Bellarine Peninsula.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*: one observed.

Birds

A highlight was a group of five Blue-billed Ducks on Yarram Creek.

Sincere thanks to Lynne and Jim Mason for again allowing us access to their delightful property.

Part 2, Hardings Road, Wallington

Richard and Jenny Weatherly own a property of approx. 8 ha located 400 m west of the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve. A valley runs from the central area towards Lake Connewarre; a dam across the valley provides semi-permanent water. Sections of the valley contain many mature Bellarine Yellow Gums and the boundary zone has large old Monterey Pine trees. The northeastern zone is slightly sandy and has Manna Gums, Swamp Gums, Sweet Bursaria, Black Wattle, Golden Wattle and Cherry Ballart present, with some indigenous understorey. Previously, that area carried stock but a 2 ha paddock is currently being allowed to naturally regenerate and weeds are being controlled.

Survey Methods

The GFNC Fauna Group were invited to survey the fauna of the

property. We used a roof tile grid, bat survey, bird survey and UV light invertebrates survey.

The tile grid was set at three locations:

- 10 tiles around the dam in the valley
- 10 tiles in the Bellarine Yellow Gum zone
- 10 tiles in the Manna Gum zone.

Some logs and old roofing iron were lifted to check for fauna.

A harp trap to capture bats was set in the valley near the dam for several hours and the club's newly purchased bat-call recorder was placed beside the harp trap to try and match any captured bats to their calls. The harp trap was closed after five hours but the bat recorder was allowed to continue recording for four days.

A bird survey was conducted by walking the perimeter of the paddocks and noting all species present. Frogs calling near the dam were recorded using the Frog ID App. A moth sheet with UV light was set to attract invertebrates.

The survey was conducted between 3.30–10.00 p.m.

Results

Roof Tile Grids

The roof tiles in the paddocks had been in place for over one month,

but no vertebrate fauna were observed.

Invertebrates: Slater sp.; Slug sp.; Darkling Beetle sp.; ant sp. and Millipede sp. A large Mountain Huntsman *Isopeda montana* was also noted.

The roof tiles around the dam had only been placed on the previous day, but a Brown Tree Frog *Litoria ewingii* was located beneath a tile. A second check on the next day located two Eastern Banjo Frogs *Limnodynastes dumerilii*. During the evening, a cacophony of frog calls from the dam included Common Eastern Froglet *Crinia signifera*, Eastern Banjo Frogs and

Brown Tree Frogs. A Common Bluetongue *Tiliqua scincoides* was found beneath a sheet of roofing iron. It seemed to be in semi torpor and was left undisturbed. Richard reported a Metallic Skink *Carinascincus metallicus* under a tile a few days after the survey.

Birds

A range of birds were seen, with the highlights being Wedge-tailed Eagles and nesting Brown Goshawks.

Bats

The harp trap had no captures (the temperature may have been a little cool). However, a check of the bat recorder showed more than 3,000

bat calls over four days. It will take some time and expertise for the full analysis to species level, but we appear to have recorded species of Forest Bat, Long-eared Bat and some other species.

Spotlighting in the Bellarine Yellow Gums did not find any mammals. The cold winds deterred most invertebrates from visiting the moth sheet (except for the ever-present mosquitoes).

Permits: the fauna survey was carried out under the conditions set out in our WSIAEC project approval 32.18, DELWP permit 10009049 and SPFL no. 20072.



Many club members would have seen the **Aurora australis** lighting up our skies over the last few months.

This photo was taken by Catherine Hewish on 10/10/24 in Darley near Bacchus Marsh.

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