



WHIRRAKEE

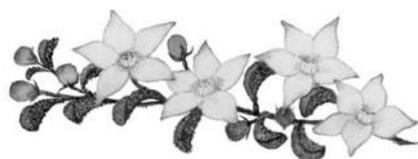
December 2020

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**MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE
BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB**



Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.

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Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Membership \$35 (Concession \$30). The membership includes an electronic copy of the *Whirrakee* (11 per year). *Printed colour Whirrakee* available with membership for an additional \$20.00. *Printed colour Whirrakee only* subscription available for \$40.00.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Hall, 9 Old High Street, Golden Square. The meeting starts with members sharing their recent natural history observations. The invited speaker starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper. The Annual General Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 6:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearers and other committee members listed above. *There are several vacancies for committee members.*

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee* and/or on the website. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Hall, unless otherwise specified. Several interclub field naturalist campouts are held every year.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is actively involved in local conservation issues. An **indigenous garden** has been established around the Golden Square Hall. Working bees are advertised on the *Whirrakee* diary page.

Bird Observing: Club members conduct regular bird surveys. Please contact Anne Bridley on 0474 467 661 or Glenise Moors 5439 6254 for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley on 0474 467 661. To propose bird excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club

Vol. 41, No. 11, December 2020

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*), which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club.

Editor's Note: If you have missed the enjoyment of club activities this year, December is when you can catch up with fellow naturalists. There will be an end-of-year get-together, and while it won't be the normal sit-down dinner event in the familiar surroundings of the club rooms with the convenience of the kitchen, it will be wonderful to meet and greet while picnicking in the open air of No. 7 Park; in addition to this, there is also an excursion planned, under 'a little closer to normal' conditions to Tang Tang Swamp; see notices for both events on page 3. Hopefully many of you can make it and wish each other, in person, a peaceful and quiet period over the summer. I am certain there will be quite a bit of reflection going on at the end of this year, and hopefully we can begin to come out of this strange time a little bit wiser and perhaps with some re-arranged priorities.

Front page photograph: Joy Clusker photographed this important moment in the life of a hanging fly. It shows a male offering a nuptial present to an (unseen) female, in exchange for a chance to mate. There are some amazing adaptations to minimise the energy spent when catching the present, and maximise the chance for successful mating. If the prey is too large for the female to finish by the time the male has completed his job, he will try and snatch it away, to offer it to another female for another chance to spread his genes. Often this is unsuccessful and it thus represents a certain amount of risk and wasted energy. If the prey is too small, the female is not interested, because she needs a certain amount of energy from this meal to give the eggs the best chance. So there is a sweet spot for the prey size, one which allows minimal energy expenditure for maximum benefit. How marvellous.

Short Notices

Covid-19 requirements for club gatherings
(see updated requirements under 'Committee notes' on page 14)

December General Meeting

Date: December 9th from 6:00pm

Venue: No. 7 Park (via Granter St)

BYO Picnic (food, cutlery, plate, drinks. No bbq facility available)

Members are invited to attend the club's end-of-year dinner to be held this year as an outdoor event at the Number 7 Park shelter. Due to the remaining restriction on indoor gatherings, an outdoor BYO picnic style dinner event will be more suitable. The Number 7 Park provides a beautiful setting for group gatherings with a large shelter available. The shelter has been booked for the club's use if required. Please bring all your own food, cutlery, plate, and drinks as preferred. Please note that there is no BBQ facility available.

To find No. 7 Park, travel south through Kangaroo Flat along High St and turn into Furness St (at Harvey Norman), then immediately turn south into Granter St. Continue to the end of Granter St and enter the park, follow ahead to the parking area adjacent to the shelter. Tables and chairs are available in the open shelter, please bring a chair if you would like to sit outside.

For energetic members, we could take a walk around the walking track after dinner, or stay on for a night walk? Given the difficulties in holding meeting this year, it would be great to see as many of our members come together as possible for a relaxed social evening.

December Excursion: Tang Tang Swamp

Date Saturday 12 December

Please note change from the usual Sunday.

Leader Malcolm Cousland

Meeting 8.30 at the clubrooms in Golden Square

Destination Tang Tang Swamp, 5 km east of Dingee, about 50 km from Bendigo.

Topic Waterbirds and other bushbirds
Activity We may walk to the northern end of the swamp and back, about 4 km.

Covid rules

1. We can now allow more than 10 people in a group that is outdoors.
2. You may be able to carpool.
3. Registration to attend:

- As per the information in all recent editions of *Whirrakee*, we are still asking you to register your participation.

- Simply post a note that you will be coming at info@bendigofieldnaturalists.asn.au

4. Usual guidelines apply - you will have to wear a mask if you share a car, social distancing will still be necessary, hygiene.

Please bring Lunch and refreshments, water, chair for use at lunch, hat and appropriate clothing, notebook, camera, binoculars, field guides, waterproof coat (in case of showers or cold wind). Good walking boots for the uneven ground.

Make sure you bring a pair of binoculars.

Although there is usually very limited use for a telescope and tripod, you may bring them if you like.

Snakes Since we are going to be walking through long grass near water, it is advisable for you to wear long pants, and perhaps even high gaiters, to protect against the possibility of snake encounters.

Wading Some of us may try a wade in the swamp, which does allow you to see the birds from a different perspective. The water level on 9 September was 0.6 metre (above your knees), but by mid-December it should be much lower. If you want to try this, you must bring the following:

- Firm-fitting sandals or sandshoes
- Shorts
- Walking poles (or pole) to give you a safety margin in case you stumble
- Perhaps a change of clothes in case it all goes pear-shaped

For a teaser of the Tang Tang environment ...see Malcolm's photos on page 7

NightLife – wandering in the bush after dark... starting up again

Explore, discover, observe, record and exchange. This has been the theme of a series of regular walks running since December 2017 with a focus on wandering in the bush at night. Participants have had an opportunity to see wild creatures in their natural habitat, and to experience the bush at a time that is utterly different to the usual daylight hours. Walks have been relatively short, with some off-track walking, and while we haven't travelled far, we have encountered many different species.

If you would like to come along, register via emailing info@bendigofieldnaturalists.asn.au After you register, you will be added to the e-mail list to receive walk notifications including dates, meeting places and other information. The walks will be held in all conditions except torrential rain. Times will vary but will usually be from about dusk for a few hours or so.

October Excursion report by John Lindner

Topic Acacias – their evolutionary adaptations for survival

Date Sunday 25 October 2020

Leader John Lindner

Locations Chinese Diggings Historic Reserve (White Hills), Salomon Gully Flora Reserve (Quarry Hill)

Participants Heather Clay, Nita and Aaron Hall, Simon Hay, Glenise Moors, Vanessa Richardson, John Robinson, Colin Thomas, Kathleen Thomson (visitor)

Introduction

Instead of embarking on a long car tour of the Whipstick, I decided to examine the acacias at two local reserves. There were a few flowers to see, but those were not our focus. The genus *Acacia* has over 900 species in Australasia and the Pacific islands. After a large taxonomic upheaval about twenty years ago, it was decided to leave the Australian genus as it was, and regroup the two African genera as *Vachellia* (161 species) and *Senegalia* (231 species). Originally the term “acacia” had included all the African species. *Acacia* is still part of the huge family Fabaceae, which are legumes producing seeds in pods.

Eucalyptus and *Acacia* are the two largest Australian plant groups, and they evolved their particular features about twenty million years ago as the continent was becoming drier.

Acacias are found in all Australian habitats (alpine, woodland, grassland, coastal dunes, rainforest, desert), and are dominant in some areas (eg. the Brigalow belt, *Acacia harpophylla*, of Queensland; the Mulga, *Acacia aneura*, woodlands of central and western Australia). Centred on Bendigo there are about 34 species within a 60 kilometre radius, but some detailed work would surely add more.

General points about adaptations in acacias

First we may look at some of the larger scale aspects of the way the plants grow.

1. Mounding or clumping growth habit

This is best exemplified by mature Whirrakee Wattles (*Acacia williamsonii*), which we would have seen on a Whipstick tour. The large enclosed domes formed by mature plants shade the soil, cover it with leaf litter which conserves moisture and nutrients, and prevent competition from other plants. Wind is deflected by the dome which further conserves moisture. Rough Wattle (*Acacia aspera*) and Mallee Wattle (*Acacia montana*) also share this growth habit.

2. Vase-shaped growth habit

This is repeated in every ecology textbook with reference to Mulga (*Acacia aneura*). It refers to the overall branching habit from the top of the main trunk and even the upward pointing phyllodes, both of which supposedly channel rainfall down the trunk to the root zone. I'm sure many of our local acacias share this outcome when in rain to a greater or lesser degree.

3. Open crown habit

The crowns of species like Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*) are open to allow maximum penetration of sunlight, but at the same time they must minimize some of its detrimental effects.

4. Root systems

Those of acacias may be far-ranging and deep. Many have nodules on the roots which contain nitrogen-fixing bacteria, able to convert free

nitrogen into nitrates which the plant can use.

Secondly we can examine the features of the phyllodes and branchlets which have these important functions:

1. Prevent collapse of tissues when under extreme moisture stress

The fibrous, tough, leathery nature of phyllodes, with additional strengthening through ribbing, is very important in this regard. Phyllodes generally have the functions of leaves, but have evolved from modified stems. Some look just like normal leaves and many do not.

The only true leaves amongst acacias are those which are pinnate (divided once) or bipinnate (divided twice). Cootamundra and Early Black Wattle are examples of the latter.

2. Minimise overheating and moisture loss

The way phyllodes project from the stems is the main point here. Hanging downwards, or projecting outwards but with one edge held upwards, means less direct exposure to light (and thus heat) than if the phyllodes were held with surfaces facing upwards. The amount of light and therefore heat being absorbed by the surface is reduced by reflecting it - this is done by resins, waxes and shiny hairs.

Many acacias have very small or long, thin leaves. The size of phyllodes is critical here, as small size means a greater surface area relative to mass. Such phyllodes gain and lose heat rapidly.

A covering of dense, short hairs reduces the speed at which wind passes over the surface, and therefore slows or prevents the loss of moisture in the tissues.

The specific adaptations in the acacias we observed

Nearly all of these features have to be appreciated by using a hand lens. We had the use of a binocular microscope which could let you see the same features at 20 or 30 times magnification. If and when I acquire a camera which can be fitted to this microscope, I'll be able to show you the details, which are just too small for ordinary macro-photography.

Chinese Diggings Historic Reserve

1. Rough Wattle (*Acacia aspera*)

Branchlets shiny with length-wise ridges and dense, pale hairs, some exuding resin. Phyllodes also shiny, with a raised midrib and thickened edges, and with a covering of stiff, pale hairs, some exuding resin.

2. Late Black Wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*)

Branchlets and leaf stems ribbed and angular, with a dense covering of silvery hairs and raised glands (extra floral nectaries) at irregular intervals. Tiny leaflets dark green and covered with either oil or wax dots (unsure which).

3. Cootamundra Wattle (*Acacia baileyana*)*

New South Wales. Branchlets and leaf stems angular and sparsely hairy. Very small bluish (glaucous) leaflets covered in tiny waxy scales, which can be removed by scraping.

4. Golden Wreath Wattle (*Acacia saligna*)*

Western Australia. Branchlets smooth with subtle lengthwise ridges. Phyllodes shiny with thickened central and edge veins and a dense network of other more obscure veins.

Salomon Gully Flora Reserve

1. Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*)

Branchlets and stems may be glaucous and waxy. Phyllodes shiny, large and leathery, with thickened central and edge veins and a dense network of other more obscure veins. Phyllodes can either hang down or be held outwards but with one edge pointing up.

2. Hedge Wattle (*Acacia armata/paradoxa*)

Branchlets have lengthwise ribbing and are obscured by dense hairs. Phyllodes have thickened central and marginal veins, are shiny and aligned along the stems with one edge pointing upwards. Very sharp thorns are solidly attached and have a role in reducing grazing, which reportedly does not appear to affect Black Wallabies.

3. Spreading Wattle (*Acacia genistifolia*)

Branchlets have lengthwise ribbing. Phyllodes are tapering and very tough, with supporting thickened veins.

Continued on page 10...

Acacias in and around the Chinese Diggings Historic Reserve (all photos by John Lindner)



Rough Wattle, with its sticky, bristly phyllodes and pods



Late Black Wattle with its tiny, dense, symmetrical leaflets.



Cootamundra Wattle with its wax-covered leaflets.



Golden Wreath Wattle with its tough, leathery phyllodes.

Acacias at Salomon Gully Flora Reserve



Wreath (left), Hedge Wattle (right) with its vicious thorns and stiff phyllodes, but also alike in the way they either droop or are held out in a vertical position



Spreading Wattle with its strong, needle-like phyllodes (left), Ausfeld's Wattle with its long, thin phyllodes and branchlets and numerous pods (right), with parallel lines of resin ribs.

Three images of **Tang-Tang Swamp** were taken by Malcolm Cousland in recent months. To see what it is like now, why not join the excursion this month? (see page 3 for details).



Below: see John Lindner's article about nature daries (page 13). 'It is hard to believe that this long, narrow pond once existed for many years in Ross Street, White Hills. It only filled after rain and lasted a short time after that. The construction of 2 driveways and a drying climate finally ended this scene.'





Animals in spring

Left: Eastern Bearded Dragon, *Pogona barbata*, encountered by John and Meg McCallum when driving along Raines Street, Axedale.

Below: Cone-head katydid, spotted by Joy Clusker

Below: A special moment not witnessed by many people: an emerging cicada (photo by Joy Clusker)

Below right: unknown ichneumid wasp (photo by Sigrid Wilkens). This female lays her eggs into caterpillars



Orchids galore...seen by Joy Clusker

but one is not an orchid... can you pick it?

Onion Orchids *Microtis unifolia*



Common duck orchid
Caleana major

Yellow Leek orchid
Prasophyllum aff. validum



Left: Horned orchid
Orthoceras strictum

Left below: Rusty hood *Pterostylis maxima*

These two species below are wet-year weeds, as described by Joy on the next page, *Disa bracteata* (left) and *Orobanche minor* (right).



...continued from page 5

4. Ausfeld's Wattle (*Acacia ausfeldii*)

Branchlets have parallel lines of resin ribs, small blocks of resin placed end to end. The function of resin ribs is to increase reflectance and give extra protection to the cuticle. This feature is also prominent in another Bendigo species, Bent-leaf Wattle (*Acacia flexifolia*) found in the Whipstick. Phyllodes are narrow and tapering to both ends, and are covered with tiny oil or wax dots (unsure which). Some phyllodes have many larger, spaced white dots, which can be removed under high magnification. Not really sure what these are.

5. Gold-dust Wattle (*Acacia acinacea*)

Branchlets have lengthwise ribbing. Phyllodes are small and covered with what may be flaky wax scales.

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 - Factsheet: Bent-leaf Wattle (*Acacia flexifolia*)

News about the Orange-bellied Parrot

For once, this is not a doom and gloom article: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/nov/11/orange-bellied-parrot-best-year-in-a-decade-for-critically-endangered-bird>

Two weeds of this wet year (by Joy Clusker)

This wet year has been wonderful for plants and fungi but also for weeds. The last very wet year was in 2016.

Disa bracteata is a South African weed orchid, it is self-pollinating and produces many seeds, found in many habitats but favouring disturbed sites. It is a perennial terrestrial orchid with underground (often 1-3) tubers.

Connectingcountry.org.au has a guide to identification and removal. I have found it in Mandurang and Junortoun.

The other weed is Lesser Broomrape *Orobanche minor*, a parasitic herbaceous annual. It is a Federal Noxious weed, has small dust like seeds that remain viable for 10 years or more. There is a native Orobanche, *Orobanche cernua* var. *australiana* but this is rare and has glabrous (hairless) petals, whereas the introduced has glandular (hairy) petals on the flowers. I have found this at Mandurang and Pioneer Drive, One Tree Hill.

Both species are illustrated on page 9. Vic Flora provides good descriptions.

When the Builders Came

by Keith Graham

It is now 65 years since Phyllis and I shifted to our house on the banks of the Loddon River. This was only two years after the first wave of Myxo had decimated the rabbit population. The river frontage was bare, denuded and scoured by the unimpeded run-off. Few trees were less than 70 years old, each new generation eaten off as it emerged. Given a chance the natural environment will fight back so now a generation of trees, wattles and grasses have repaired much of the past damage.

I spent six years of my childhood during the social lockdown of WWII so my leisure time was spent wandering the creeks, paddling in the swamps, exploring the grasslands and watching the birdlife.

Since I have lived here I have added several species to my bird list. First the Long-billed Corellas arrived in the spring of 1967 when severe drought in their south western Victoria heartland forced them north. About this time,

the first dribs and drabs of Crested Pigeons began to establish in our district. Peaceful Doves found spilled grain around the farm silos and took up residence in the early 2000s. Diamond Firetails have arrived in recent times and are a regular visitor to the garden. The latest to arrive is a flock of 200+ Little Corellas from inland.

So, imagine my delight when last August a family of four White Browed Babblers suddenly appeared in the garden, bouncing around, scattering the dry grass and turning the leaf litter. Within days the building began. The first nest was in a Paperbark just outside my bedroom window. The next in an adjacent Callistemon in front of the house. The Paperbark was chosen as the nursery and I watched as they brought food to the brooding bird and later the chicks. The youngsters were soon learning to forage and just as well, as two new nests were built in a plum tree and an olive tree on the riverbank. The hatching only brought a single chick, bringing the family to seven.

I have always been doubtful that Babblers would use a nest for roosting so in early May as the weather became cold and wet, I waited in the garden to check. They finally settled for a young apricot tree with dense autumn foliage. A few days later they began collecting building materials. On inspection, two more nests in the olive tree. One evening armed with a torch I crept up to the olive trees. When I flashed the light on a nest, out flapped two very startled Babblers. The next week was very windy and the fruit trees were stripped of most of their foliage and in the apricot tree was a starkly exposed Babbler's nest. The garden then had a grand total of 10 nests.

So, what did I learn? First, Babblers build extra nests at breeding time, probably as a decoy for predators. Secondly, they build nests in the autumn expressly for roosting. Thirdly, their inherent knowledge does not include that deciduous trees lose their leaves!

As I write this story the Babblers are still bouncing around the garden and guess what? They have already built a new nest.

Observations – December 2020

Collated by Richard Goonan

11/10/2020 – Colin Thomas, Kamarooka: White Tailed Warbler (*Gerygone fusca*) [Western Warbler] nesting in Golden Wattle. The nest is bag shaped with a side entrance. The northwest corner of the park is always a good place to hear them. Pussy-tails (*Ptilotus spathulatus*) and Grey Sunray (*Rhodanthe corymbiflora*) flowering.

13/10/2020 – Colin Thomas, Marong: *Eurema smilax* (Small Grass Yellow Butterfly), 2.

25/10/2020 – Ben Goonan, Mandurang South: Leaden Flycatcher (2) male and female observed.

1/11/2020 – Ben Goonan, North-East, (Sanderson Road, Springhurst): *Eucalyptus blakelyi* (many) widespread mass flowering. *Eucalyptus bridgesiana* (few) material collected. I had seen this species at Tarrawingee Bushland Reserve on the 17/10/2020 but not been able to collect sufficient material for identification.

01/11/2020 – Ben Goonan, Barambogi 12 (Sugarloaf) Bushland Reserve, Site 1 southern end off Sanderson Road: Common Brushtail Possum (2), Koala (3) one with a young on its back. Tawny Frogmouth (1) observed sitting on nest.

Barambogi 12 (Sugarloaf) Bushland Reserve, Site 2 eastern edge off Sanderson Road: Common Brushtail Possum (4), Krefft's (Sugar) Glider (1), Koala (1) heard calling, Kangaroo (1) observed, Wallaby (1) observed. Southern Boobook (1) heard calling.

Barambogi 12 (Sugarloaf) Bushland Reserve, Site 3 north-eastern corner off Sanderson Road: Common Brushtail Possum (3).

01/11/2020 – Ben Goonan, Rocky Creek Highway Park, Common Brushtail Possum (2), Koala (1) observed and heard calling.

2/11/2020 – Ben Goonan, Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park, Chiltern north Block: Many wildflowers but hillsides of Diggers Speedwell *Veronica perfoliata* was a standout.

02/11/2020 – Ben Goonan and John Goonan, Lake Weeroona: Eastern Snake-necked Turtle (2) observed feeding. The two turtles were moving opposite one another in a spiral, each in-turn making sharp striking movements after recoiling their neck. They took large mouthfuls of water. After observing this behaviour for a time, it became clear they had corralled a dense aggregation of microcrustaceans, Cladocerans/ Copepods(?), and were feeding on them.

05/11/2020 – Ben Goonan, John Robinson, Simon Hay, Kong Yong and John Bird BFNC NightLife walk #39, Campaspe at Barnadown: Common Brushtail Possum (11), Krefft's (Sugar) Glider (2). Microbat (few) not calling, White-striped Freetail Bat (few) heard calling occasionally. Tawny Frogmouth (1) observed, Boobook Owl (1) heard calling, two different occasions, Barking Owl (1) heard calling, Musk Lorikeet (4) chicks heard calling from hollows, Brown Treecreeper (1) observed roosting on trunk of large Red Gum, White-winged Chough (8) roosting together in a large Yellow Box, Kookaburra (1) heard calling at dusk. Plains Froglet (few), Common Froglet (few), Peron's Tree Frog (1), Poppelbonk (1) all heard calling from backwater ponds along a secondary river channel.

06/11/2020 – John McCallum, Strathdale: *Tiliqua scincoides* (Common Blue-tongue Lizard), in a suburban garden.

08/11/2020 – John McCallum, Raines Street Axedale: *Pogona barbata* (Eastern Bearded Dragon), see photo on page 8.

09/11/2020 – Ben Goonan, Kennington Reservoir: Eurasian Coot (5) one adult with four young. Southern end.

11/11/2020 – Ben Goonan, Mandurang South: *Liopholis whitii* (Lacepède, 1804), White's Skink (1) less common plain/uniform dorsal patterned morph. Observed moving around rock outcrop. Ornately spotted, large skink.

13/11/2020 – Ben Goonan, Epsom Treatment Plant (highlights from November survey): Australian Spotted Crake (1), Hardhead (21), Musk Duck (4) one male observed displaying courtship behaviour, Australasian Shoveler (3), Little Grassbird (3), Hoary-headed Grebe (>100), Spotless Crake (2), Blue-billed Duck

(1) and White-bellied Sea Eagle (1), Rainbow Bee-eater (many) some nest sites found. An interesting observation was a juvenile Fan-tailed Cuckoo being fed by a White-browed Scrubwren.

13/11/2020 – Ben Goonan, Zekie Goonan and John Goonan, Lake Weeroona: Water Rat (1) observed swimming along waters edge around southern side of the peninsula, eastern edge, evening.

15/11/2020 – Ben Goonan and John Goonan, Lake Weeroona: Water Rat (2). Eastern Snake-necked Turtle (1) feeding on microcrustaceans. Individual taking strikes as it moved through the water. Nankeen Night-Heron (2) observed flying north from southern end. Grey-headed Flying-fox (few) 'drinking', observed dipping into lake and then flying to a tree on the edge. First time this has been observed this spring.

21/11/2020 – Richard Goonan, Ravenswood: Sulphur-crested Cockatoo (about 20) feeding on green Cootamundra Wattle seed.

24/11/2020 – John McCallum, Kennington Reservoir: Australian Grebe with two chicks. We saw them again today (24 Nov) as well as a pair of Coots with three chicks.

22/11/2020 – Ben Goonan, East Bendigo: Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo (6) flying north, last seen heading towards the Chinese Diggings Reserve.

22/11/2020 – Ben Goonan and John Goonan, Lake Weeroona: Water Rat (1). one observed along western edge, looked small, female(?). Nankeen Night-Heron (1) western edge, southern end.

25/11/2020 – Ben Goonan, Kennington Reservoir: Eurasian Coot (5) one adult with two young. Southern end.

26/11/2020 – Richard Goonan, Spring Gully: White-throated Nightjar, two adults disturbed from the ground while I was walking, located on the south facing end of a high spur near a rocky outcrop.

26/11/2020 – Richard Goonan, Spring Gully: Pied Currawong heard calling. A large group of Magpies, several Grey Currawong, and what sounded like one (possibly two?) Pied

Currawong were loosely congregated around a hilltop while all vigorously calling. It was late in the evening about 30min before sunset.

Toiling over nature diaries (1983-2020)

Part 1 (to be continued in 2021)

by John Lindner

Introduction

After being a member of the club for a few years from 1979, and starting to keep records of field observations in little notebooks, I somehow moved to the idea of keeping similar notes for the area around where I lived. Now I have a small pile of seven large books. Five of them have notes for one or two years, but the last couple of big thick volumes have records for the one date over several years on the same page, so they are fairly crammed (9 years in one case and 17 years in the other). On any page devoted to a particular date, there could be several entries, each varying with respect to the actual day and year.

There is one important thing to make clear however. There is by no means an observation for every day of 1983 to 2020 (38 years), and just as well, or I would by now be storing a heap of Bible-sized tomes. For a start, there are five scattered years in which for reasons I cannot recall, I did not keep any records, rather strange. So the total years of recording is actually 33. That makes 11,748 days, and I have observations for only 1259 of them, but there can be multiple observations for the same day. Some records are one or two liners, but a considerable number are half a page or more, making for an entry that is very detailed. These are the valuable ones.

What I saw, and then decided to record, is rather random. I think it depended a lot on my mood and inspiration at the time, and having a few moments to jot down the stuff on the correct page. You tend to be biased towards highlight events – savage weather, the appearance of a new bird in the garden, particular flowers. You don't record something just to fill in a gap. Reading all this material is like a condensed version of the years, with all the interesting bits highlighted, similar to charac-

terizing a whole slow-moving cricket match in 20 seconds of critical action on the ABC television news.

If you keep up this kind of endeavor, you don't just end up with nature notes. You also have a history of the houses you have lived in, with their gardens and surroundings, a record of some key moments in your life and some notion of how the environment in general has been changing. In a strange kind of way, it is about yourself as much as anything. Besides the diaries, for this account I have also made use of images from many photo albums and hard drive picture files, and other recollections recorded elsewhere. (*Editor's note: only one accompanying photo is shown in this edition, but more will follow with the subsequent parts*)

The places where I lived over this period are:

- 62 Simpsons Road, Eaglehawk (1980 to 1983, but diared only for 1983)
- 10 Burns Street, Axedale (July 1983 to September 1992)
- 5 Ross Street, White Hills (1993 to 1999, and again from 2010 to now)
- 10 Goldleaf Court, Huntly (1999 to 2010, but diared only 2004 to 2010)

Records about the weather

A key obsession about living in Bendigo is how much rain we are getting. At Axedale, I kept detailed daily rainfall records for 6 years (1984 – 1988 inclusive and 1991), which is a very tedious thing to do, but quite rewarding when you have tallied it all up at the end of the year. Even then the rainfall was on the way down. Bendigo's long-accepted annual average was 520 mm (21 inches), but by 2019 it was down to 390 mm (15.6 inches) (Bendigo Weekly 11/1/2019).

So now, we have a far more erratic rainfall regime than the seventies and eighties. The "ideal" successive seasons of the past - summer thunderstorms, long dry summer-autumn, dependable autumn break of gentle rains, regular winter rains, spring showers and storms – no longer hold sway. For example, the first part of 2016 was intensely dry up until May, whereupon the tap came on and stayed on for the rest of the year, with a very wet

result (677 mm). In February 2020, we had 3 very heavy thunderstorm-driven falls, at least in White Hills, followed by a huge amount in early April. These early falls set up the bush to be able to flower so well this spring. At the other extreme is the Millenium Drought (1996-2009), a period of well below average rainfall. This culminated first in the Black Saturday bushfires (7 February 2009), and secondly in a very wet period at the end of 2010 extending into 2011, resulting in the huge inundation of the entire Loddon River plain.

Recently we had a whole day of more or less continuous rain (7 October 2020), and this was pretty unusual. But my diaries tell me that in the past it has not been all that unusual to have up to 3 or 4 days of continuous light rain (eg. four days in early June 1995 which filled the pond - see picture on page 7).

Some extreme weather events

Duststorms

- Early January 1983, one day.
- On 8 February 1983, the great dust storm from the Mallee which went on to engulf Melbourne.
- Mid-February 1983 for 3 days.

Fire

- Ash Wednesday, 16 February 1983, the worst day out of a bad fire period.
- Very hot and destructive fire in the One Eye Forest, near Heathcote, in January 1987. The club excursion in October of that year recorded impressive displays of wildflowers, particularly orchids.

Bushfire smoke

- Almost a week of smoke hung around Bendigo in early December 2006.

Heatwaves

- Particularly at the end of 2019 (21 November, 16-20 and 26-30 December).

Twisting winds

- 'Tornado', 9 August 1984, in which trees on the McIvor Highway between Axedale and Knowsley, were reduced to matchwood.

Muddy rain

- 26 March 1984

To be continued in 2021...

Committee Notes: November

Secretary Richard Goonan

Members are reminded that *all current memberships have been extended until after the AGM*. Please do not send any payment until you receive the renewal notice (after the February AGM).

Without doubt, everyone will be pleased to see COVID-19 restrictions continuing to be eased in Victoria, this is good news for club meetings, although some limitations remain. It will be great to see members come together for the end-of-year gathering, to be held this year at the lovely shelter at No.7 Park (BYO picnic style). Please note the change of format and see the notice on page 3 for details.

COVID-19 requirements for meetings and excursions:

- Limits remain on the number of attendees, especially indoors (Hall remains limited to 20). Limits for outdoor gatherings should allow all club activities to proceed without the need for pre-registration. All attendees must sign the registration sheet as per normal, leaders must ensure this is done.
- Attendees at all events must carry a face mask, to be used if needed.
- Please follow all other general health advice that has been issued
 - do not attend if you have any general symptoms (even if only mild) of respiratory illness,
 - maintain social distancing of 1.5m,
 - continue to apply regular hygiene practices such as frequent hand washing,
 - wearing a face mask remains in place where social distancing is not possible eg when standing in a crowded area.

The committee considers it will be feasible and practical to hold the AGM in February 2021. Members are encouraged to see the notice and attend, and as is always the case, more members are sought to take on committee, executive and other roles.

Continued over the page...

...Committee notes continued

The committee is continuing to examine the proposed Section 17 Lease agreement for the management of the Hall.

The Hall Caretaker role has been advertised externally on the Aust Gov Jobsearch website.

Concern has been raised with the committee about the loss of mature Ironbarks planted on the old foundry site opposite Eaglehawk/Marong Rd intersection where a planning permit application has been submitted to council for a childcare centre.

Any member who would consider taking on the role of newsletter editor is encouraged to speak to the committee as soon as possible.

Club members can now access Nearmap imagery through an agreement with the Bendigo Sustainability Group (data limits apply). Contact the committee for further details if you would like access.

Opportunities remain for members to obtain free First-aid training. Simply email the secretary to find out more and register your interest.

Diary

Meetings and Excursions

General meetings are not happening at the club house yet, but a December end-of-year get-together has been organised as a picnic:

December General Meeting

Wednesday, December 9, from 6:00pm

Venue: No. 7 Park (access via Granter St)

BYO Picnic (food, cutlery, plate, drinks. No bbq facility available)

Please see page 3 for details.

December Excursion: Tang Tang Swamp

Date Saturday 12 December

Please note change from the usual Sunday.

Leader Malcolm Cousland

Meeting 8.30 at the clubrooms in Golden Square

Destination Tang Tang Swamp, 5 km east

of Dingee, about 50 km from Bendigo.

Topic

Waterbirds and other bushbirds

Activity

We may walk to the northern end of the swamp and back, about 4 km.

For special condition to run this excursion safely in a COVID environment, see page 3 and 14.

NightLife – wandering in the bush after dark... starting again

If you would like to come along, register via emailing info@bendigofieldnaturalists.asn.au After you register, you will be added to the e-mail list to receive walk notifications including dates, meeting places and other information. The walks will be held in all conditions except torrential rain. Times will vary but will usually be from about dusk for a few hours or so. (See page 4 for detail)

WHIRRAKEE available for naturalists

The BFNC has decided to make our newsletter *Whirrakee* available directly to any members of other field naturalists clubs. To take up this free offer simply email info@bendigofieldnaturalists.asn.au asking to receive *Whirrakee* and let us know what club you're a member of. You will then be added to our mailing list and receive the newsletter directly.

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.

W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment. Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433. WRIN meetings held on the 1st Saturday of February, April, June, August, October and December at 1pm the Golden Square Hall (check if held first).

Submission deadline for the next (February) *Whirrakee* is Monday the 25th of January.
