THE LAUNCESTON NATURALIST

Volume LIV No.4 April/May 2021

The aim of the Launceston Field Naturalists Club is to encourage the study of all aspects of natural history and to support the conservation of our natural heritage

Patron : Prof. Nigel Forteath

President : Mrs Prue Wright, 0438 410 192

Hon. Secretary : Ms Bernadette Willey, 0487 755 085

Hon. Treasurer : Mrs Karen Manning, 0363 442 277

Meetings 1st Tuesday of month, February-December (except Jul & Aug) at Scotch-Oakburn College, Senior Campus, Penquite Rd Newstead

Program:

June

Tuesday 1

Speaker Angela Hansen - Birds

Sat 19

Field Trip - Ralphs Falls

Sunday 27

Skemps Day - Birdwatching with Angela Hansen

July

Sunday 18

Field Trip – Liffey Falls, meet at top carpark at 10am

Saturday 31

Skemps Day – Instruction in use of GPS and Apps

August

Sunday 1

Field Trip – Beachcombing – location TBA

Saturday 14

Field Trip - Trevallyn Reserve

Saturday 21

Threatened Plants Tasmania – Eucalypt ID at Skemps (registration is REQUIRED, numbers limited, Information page 2)

Sunday 29

Skemps Day - Follow up to Instruction in use of GPS and Apps

Eucalypt ID Training: Northern workshop

North: Saturday, 21 August, John Skemps Field Centre, Myrtle Bank

Places still available! Threatened Plants Tasmania is running plant identification workshops with trainer Mark Wapstra from EcoTas for TPT members and other interested people. These workshops will focus on the identification of Tasmanian Eucalypts, with a morning lab session followed by an afternoon in the field.

To register for this session contact Magali on magaliwright1@gmail.com as soon as possible

Skemps Report - April/May 2021

In early April we had a visit from former member Rod Johnstone who showed Rob Soward around the property and the field centre. Rob is an alderman and was a candidate for the upper house seat of Windermere.

Jeff is still working on grubbing out or burning the tussock grass out from the main door of the Centre as well as in the old dairy site. Prue has installed new direction markers on the Fern Gully Track. The usual tasks have been attended to including moving fire wood to the Centre, various cleaning tasks, direct weeding of foxglove or thistle, clearing of tracks with the slasher, treating of wasp nests and as well we are slowly removing the fencing hardware from the Federation Corridor.

The old fashioned tank taps in the Centre have been replaced with taps found amongst the tools in the container, not pretty, though functional second hand brass taps.

In late May, Jeff and I stayed overnight at the Centre in preparation for the tagging and testing of electrical equipment at Skemps. Considering that most of the electrical items were donated by members many years ago, and some are very old, I was surprised that all passed the test. The items included power boards, extension cords, various power saws, an all metal drill, toasters and a kettle. One fixed power point failed as mice had chewed through the connections.

Contributions to this work during this period have been made by Bernadette, Caitlin, Grant, Jeff, Karen, Matthew, Prue, Rob and Roy.

If you are able to help out at Skemps get in contact and I will find you some tasks.

Noel Manning

Meeting - Tuesday 6 April – Speaker Jeff Campbell – Bibbulmun Track

Jeff Campbell, a Life Member of the club, gave a presentation on his natural history trip on a section of the 1000 kilometre Bibbulmun Track extending from Albany in the west to Kalamunda in the foothills east of Perth, Western Australia. In October 2000, Jeff and his brother Lester walked nearly 400 kilometres of the track, starting at Peaceful Bay and finishing at the Donnelly River trailhead. The walk came about through our nephew-in-law Andrew who hoped his new found father would also do the walk. As it transpired, his father reneged and Andrew could only get one week off work.

With well-equipped backpacks and enough food to get them to the next shop, they headed off from the Peaceful Bay carpark along several long beaches with soft and steep sand dunes. It took them 4 to 5 hours in windy weather and light rain to complete the 10.5 kilometres to Rame Head,



to their first overnight hut, which they shared with a couple heading east. The following day they were up early to complete the steep climb from the South Coast Highway to arrive late-afternoon at the Valley of the Giants campsite.

Next morning they waited for the Tree Top Walk to open and spent some time walking amongst the ancient trees with Jeff showing images of the Karri and Tingle trees. They stayed overnight in a backpackers in Walpole where they did laundry, restocked their food and

lightened their packs by leaving a tent and other gear there to pick up later.

They stopped at the Walpole Tourist Bureau to look at an impressive display of native orchids, many of which Jeff had not seen before. Later at the John Rate Lookout they met two walkers who advised that the bridge on the track ahead was out and were re-routed to avoid the coastal Nuyts Wilderness Track, which added extra kilometres to their walk.

At the Mt Claire hut they met a cyclist who was travelling Australia. He had been to Ayers Rock, the Oodnadatta track and had spent 3 months in Tasmania and he can't have liked snoring as by morning he had pitched a tent well away from the hut. Leaving early that day they arrived at Long Point early afternoon to a fantastic display of wildflowers in the coastal belt, mainly pink *Pimelea* (pictured below), yellow *Senecio* and *Hibbertia* and white *Leucopogon*.

Departing Long Point very early next day, they saw golden whistlers and two tiger snakes and encountered the first boggy sections on the track. At Mt. Chance, they saw two blue tongue lizards and a native mouse. They climbed a granite outcrop behind the hut, where they had a full 360 degree view. It was too overcast for photos on this climb and they climbed the outcrop again later to watch the sun set.



Headed to Dog Pool the next morning,

arriving early afternoon to what Jeff felt was the 'best hut yet', they were a different design from previous huts and split level, and right on the river with wood chip floors and a fireplace. It was here that Jeff discovered that chocolate carries better in the middle of a pack rather than on top as it tends to stay cooler and not melt. They saw several eels in the river and Jeff indicated that this stop had probably been the coldest overnight so far.

Heading for Maringup, one of their longest day walks, they encountered a fanged legless lizard (probably Dugite) and were detoured around 3 kilometres. At this time they were having to carry additional water as the tank levels at the next camp were low. This day they saw their first Robin Redbreast and have seen more Golden Whistlers, White breasted Robins, New Holland Honeyeaters, Western Rosellas, White tailed black cockatoos, Fantails, Scrub wrens, Red browed firetail, Tree martins and Wattle birds. They had also heard Spotted pardalotes, Bronze Wing pigeon, Fantail cuckoo, Southern boobook, Grey shrike thrush, and seen a few lizards, skinks,

snakes, 2 kangaroos and a bird later identified as a Western Warbler, which they nick-named Happy. They had heard but not seen the warbler but its call is quite melodious and consists of several notes he whistles in apparent random order.

Next morning as they walked away from their hut, they saw a Kangaroo Paw which stood well over 2 metres tall and was about 2.5 cm thick as well as two snakes, one decent sized skink and a



large number of flying ants seen during the afternoon as the hot conditions inspire them to take wing. They spent the afternoon in a cooling tub in Gardner River avoiding the heat.

During the walk from Gardner to Northcliffe, they encountered a rain storm. It was here that Andrew arrived from Perth to join them for the rest of the walk. They had a rest day, returning to Peaceful Bay, collecting Jeff's car and also collecting the gear left at the backpackers in Walpole. From

Northcliffe both cars were driven to Pemberton, one left there and they returned to Northcliffe.

On the track between Northcliffe and Warren, they saw plenty of orchids and on investigating some noisy honeyeaters at the next hut, found a medium sized tiger snake intent on plundering their nest. The birds had remained frantic for some time afterwards, even though Jeff had moved the snake on with a stick.

They headed off very early for a side trip to the Cascades and climbed the Gloucester Tree near Pemberton, which at 72 metres in height is the world's tallest fire-lookout tree. They replenished provisions at Pemberton then returned to Northcliffe to collect the other car and left it at Donnelly River Trail Head.

Jeff saw his first marron, the local fresh water crayfish, in the creek at the hut. They shared the

accommodation with one person while three others tented. On the track between Beedelup and Beavis they did an extensive check of a burnt area looking for orchids and did see one snake. Beavis to Boarding House is recognised as the toughest section of the Bibbulmun Track. Jeff said that some of the hills were quite steep but the fitness gained from previous days had held them in good stead as they had arrived in a reasonable time. They had a swim in the Donnelly River at the campsite which was refreshing. There had also been an extensive burn around the hut so he spent time looking for orchids. A group of nine people from Perth arrived that night, some of them had tents and the rest stayed in the hut.

On the last days walk they were up very early and reached the Donnelly River by 10am and returned to Pemberton to collect the car and revisited the Gloucester Tree for more photographs. They went to the local pub for a counter meal but found that like Tasmania at the time,



were not open on Sundays. Tried again in Manjimup as they headed north, same story.

The walk was taken over 21 days, with a total walk distance of 365 km. This did not include the extra off track when searching for orchids. They averaged approximately 19.2 km per day.

NB: They did a lot of extra walking during the day, whenever they came to a granite outcrop or where a fire had been through, Jeff would down pack, grab the camera and go looking for wildflowers, especially orchids, which he mainly found in moss crevices on large granite boulders. Even though the images of the huts they overnighted in showed them as open shelters with raised areas for sleeping and storing equipment, they were not disturbed by insects or animals.

Jeff showed images of a *Caladenia latifolia*, which is a common orchid on the trail and also found in Tasmania. It appears our State shares some orchids all the way across to WA and up to Queensland. Jeff also saw a *Caladenia cairnsiana*, which is a wheat belt species. He found this north of Perth in a recently burnt area. Jeff had met a member of the WA Orchids Society near the site and he told her of it.

Images supplied by Jeff – Long Point, *Pimelea rosea*, Frankland River Hut, *Caladenia xspectabilis* (hybrid between *Caladenia flava* ssp *sylvestris* and *Caladenia latifolia*)

Skemps Day - Sunday 25 April – Water Monitoring

Members arrived early at Skemps this morning to set up for water monitoring. Noel collected the sample from Skemps Creek not far into the forest below Bob's Bog. This was done by standing in the stream bed and disturbing the water with his feet to dislodge critters that he hoped would wash into the net placed downstream. He also rubbed rocks and submerged pieces of wood in an attempt to dislodge more animals into the sample as well as sweeping the net under overhanging ferns and under the bank to add to the sample of the area. There was little water flowing in the creek which would possibly affecting the outcome.

Back at the centre Tom and Tina had set up the sorting containers and the sample trays to which our sample water was added and left to settle while we chatted and finished our drinks.

Around lunchtime the day became colder as the sky clouded over. Members collected the

animals hiding in the water sample and sorted them into containers. The sample contents were identified as side swimmers (Amphipoda), mayfly larvae (Ephemeroptera), water strider and water boatman (Hemiptera), dragonfly larvae (pictured 2 & 3) (Odonata), stonefly larvae (Plecoptera) and cased caddis (pictured 1) and free-living caddis (Trichoptera)

The Signal 2 score was 5.8 which is considered fair. Thank you to those who assisted on the day.

Karen Manning



Field Trip - Friday 30 April - Tasmanian Arboretum at Eugenana

Not everyone was feeling adventurous enough to travel to Cradle just on the chance of seeing Fagus in colour, so 5 of us headed to the Arboretum at Eugenana instead. Not mentioning who, one of us took a wrong turning on the way there and almost finished up at Cradle Mt anyway.

We joined two members of the APST at the Arboretum, and had a relaxing time wandering about, chatting lots and taking photographs. No Fagus of course, but lots of really good autumn colour in the European trees. We particularly enjoyed looking for Platypus in the lake and were happy to spy a total of three over different areas, one particular one putting on quite a performance for us.

Prue Wright



Brave Tom Image Prue Wright



There is a platypus in there Image Prue Wright

Field Trip - Saturday 1 May - Cradle Mountain in search of the elusive turning leaves of the fagus

Four members met at the Cradle Mountain Visitors Centre after driving in thick fog for the first half of the journey and arrived at the national park to a warm sunny day with few clouds. Staff at

the visitors centre told us a recent cold snap had caused many fagus to drop their leaves before turning. After discussing with them where we should go to see the *Nothofagus gunnii*, tickets in hand, we queued up with other visitors having only a short wait for our bus trip to Ronny Creek.

At Ronny Creek, we took the overland track boardwalk to Waldheim Chalet noting a few wombats grazing on the grassy plain with one burrow seen and their calling cards along the boardwalk. We also saw the very picturesque giant grass tree, *Richea pandanifolia*.



We entered the Chalet for a glimpse into the lives of Gustav and Kate Weindorfer, before walking the Weindorfer Forest Walk behind the chalet in search of the fagus. We had a pleasant walk through a very high canopy of gnarly old trees, observing the mosses, lichens, ferns and fungi along the way. We could see a sprinkling of leaves on the ground of the elusive fagus, myrtle beech, and high above us the leaves in the yellow stages, though not close enough to photograph.

Exiting the walk we took in the sight across the valley to Cradle Mountain, we could see many visitors walking the boardwalks along the grassy plain below us and those climbing the stairway up to Crater Lake.

Walking back to the Chalet we noticed a few fagus trees near the roadway with mostly yellow leaves, but on closer inspection found some red leaves and took a few photos as proof of our sighting. This was a particularly boggy area of sphagnum moss and two members attracted leeches.



Heading back to Ronny Creek we took the track to Dove Lake, finding a friendly wombat on the way. Most of this track is the original stone track, very rough and wet, with very little of the easier going board walk. Just before Lake Lilla we came across a large tarn (not on the map) and decided to lunch there, chatting amongst ourselves and greeting the many walkers who passed by also enjoying the wonderful day.

From here it was a short walk to Lake Lilla where Tony and Christine headed up to Wombat Pool, while Noel and I checked out all the fagus in the area and photographed

some other flowering plants, *Banksia marginata*, silver banksia; *Coprosma hirtella*, coffeeberry; *Gaultheria hispida*, copperleaf snowberry and *Trochocarpa cunninghamii*, straggling purpleberry.

The last leg of the walk into Dove Lake was very green, there were lush ferns, mosses and lichens growing alongside the track. On a side trip to the boat shed, a currawong was adding an

extra element to the pictures of the many photographers in attendance.

With the construction near the lake leaving nothing of interest to see we took the next available bus to the visitor centre with this driver entertaining us with jokes and very tall stories.

After a look around the visitor centre and shops we headed to Deloraine and a meal at one of the pubs, tired but happy to have seen some colour in the fagus.

Images and words by Karen Manning





Other plants seen include: Allocasuarina zephyrea, western sheoak; Anemone crassifolia, mountain anemone; Bauera rubioides, wiry bauera; Coprosma nitida, mountain currant (pictured left); Leptecophylla parvifolia, mountain pinkberry; Nothofagus gunnii, deciduous beech; Nothofagus cunninghamii, myrtle beech; Phyllocladus aspleniifolius, Celerytop pine.

Meeting - Tuesday 4 May – Guest speaker Lauren Bird – Getting to know Astacopsis gouldi the giant freshwater crayfish

Prue introduced Lauren Bird (NRM North) who was to talk on her favourite subject, *Astacopsis gouldi*, the giant freshwater crayfish which is the largest freshwater crustacean on the planet.

Lauren told us of the project to expand the distribution of this crayfish in the north east through some on ground habitat recovery work. Since 2018 it is officially known as the Tasmanian Giant Freshwater Crayfish project when funding was provided by the Federal Government through the National Landcare Program.

She told us that the crayfish are only found in the north of the state in river systems flowing into Bass Strait, as well as the Arthur River, though not the Tamar Estuary catchments, and at less than 400 metres above sea level. Animals have been introduced into the St Patrick River (North Esk catchment) and the Clyde River (Derwent catchment) and these translocated populations are thriving.

The animals are slow growing leaving them vulnerable to predation by both native and introduced species in their juvenile years and it was legal to fish them into the 1990s which is why they are now considered to be threatened and are protected under state and Federal threatened species laws.

It is estimated the crayfish have been around for about 20 million years and traditionally could grow to 6 kilograms and 80 centimetres in length and live for over 60 years. Colours can vary from dark brown-green to black or blue. They can be confused with other similar species with the medium size *A. tricornis* found in western Tasmania including some habitat overlap and the smaller *A. franklinii* has a southern distribution. There are also around 36 species of Engaeus species, the very small land burrowing crayfish with their familiar chimneys.

Lauren then described the animals telling us that males are larger for any age group, have larger pincers and a narrower abdomen and tail fan. Females mate from around 13 years (~550g) and males at 9 years (~300g) though the males may wait as they need to be bigger than the female to mate.

Females mate every two years in autumn after a summer moult (shedding of their shell) and eggs are carried under the tail for a long gestation period of 9 months, hatching the next summer, with the juveniles remaining attached to the tail for a further three months. The number of eggs is proportional to size (224 to 1,300) though survival rate is low at around 1%.

The talk then moved onto the habitat requirements starting with a quote from Todd Walsh, known as the lobster man, 'The canopy of the bush provides the food, the shelter and the shade'. Habitat requirements vary with age with juveniles preferring shallow, faster flowing riffle with rocks, stones and logs to hide. Adults prefer deeper, slower flowing streams with large boulders, logs and undercut banks for shelter. Crayfish prefer streams with a stable temperature, as provided by a canopy, ideally between 4c and 20c. The substrate should consist of different size rocks (pebbles, cobble and boulders) and be free from accumulated sediment and sand. Food is provided by woody debris such as decaying leaves, rotting wood and moss although crayfish will also eat animal flesh and small fish when available.

Lauren then spoke of the threats to the animals starting with habitat loss. Removal of native woody vegetation reduces food sources, alters water temperature extremes and reduces the system's ability to filter runoff. Sediment is a major threat as it infills the small hollows favoured by the juveniles as well as covering stones and woody debris where they might also hide, thus reducing juvenile recruitment. Habitat disturbance through the removal of vegetation and allowing stock access to streams can increase turbidity and the ability of crayfish to intake oxygen through the very fine feathery gills.

Climate change has the potential to reduce the flow during drought and increase flow during flood events with Lauren noting that the 2016 flood had an impact on numbers as did the drought preceding the floods. Although protected by state and national threatened species laws the crayfish are being poached and we were told of an illegal trap being found recently and reminded that with the already low numbers the removal of a few breeding females can seriously reduce numbers. Introduced species are another threat with predation from red fin perch and trout and habitat loss from invasive plants such as hawthorn, willow and blackberry with the deciduous trees losing their leaves in such a short time it stresses the oxygen carrying capacity of the streams.

Lauren told us of population trends with localised extinctions thought to have occurred in the Welcome, Montagu, Rubicon, Don, Brid, Ringarooma, Duck and Little and Great Forester Catchments while the afore mentioned introduced populations are thriving.

As part of recovery project NRM North undertakes fauna surveys within the Pipers, Brid and Boobyalla catchments, the area from Lilydale to Winnaleah, and is attempting to expand the existing populations in these catchments. This is done by excluding stock from streams and providing the animals with off-stream water supplies as well as protecting or enhancing riparian vegetation and removing the weeds. Community volunteers are trained to undertake habitat assessments and water quality monitoring and organisations have attempted captive rearing, the female drops the young which are raised to a suitable age to be released. The program involves a lot of paper work to take a protected animal from the wild and to then release the juveniles into new catchments and there are disease management issues. This idea is still being pushed to reestablish populations in areas where the habitat is still good though a past event has wiped out the animals. Areas adjacent to good habitat are rehabilitated so that there is no more than one kilometre between good habitats to create corridors to assist the animals to move around to increase breeding potential.

Since 2018 the project has conducted four successful citizen science training days and engaged 63 community members and NRM North is available for further training if needed. We saw a copy of the form the volunteers use to assess habitats and learnt that 7.4 kilometres of high priority river catchment has been restored with another 3.5 under contract and that 15 land holders are undertaking restoration activities on their properties.

Lauren finished her talk by inviting us to join the next citizen science training day at Scottsdale.

After around 16 minutes of questions and answers Helen thanked Lauren on behalf of the members, presented her with a copy of the Club's book and led the acclamation.

Noel Manning

Sunday 16 May – Where! Where! Wedgie project and Removal of tree Guards at Cheswick

Helen and I went to Cheswick at Ross to do a Where! Where! Wedgie survey and to help with tree guard removal. A moderate and cold wind greeted us on arrival at the meeting point making conditions unpleasant. Once everyone had turned up and introductions all round were made the main group headed off to work on tree guards. Helen and I decided that this spot would do as the first site but nothing much was seen, mainly a few ravens. We continued down the road and missed where the others had turned off so continued any to our next site. Here Helen saw two white goshawks some way to the east. What we took to be a falcon, flew along the crest of the nearby hill to the south, scattering small birds as it went. Shortly afterwards we saw a pair of them circling overhead. We headed back towards the meet point and stopped at a spot where we saw a large dam a short way off. When we arrived at the fence we started counting ducks. About 60 Australian shell ducks, some Pacific black ducks and some other water birds were in residence. We did another two sites before finally finding the right track and headed up to join the others, guided by smoke when we were closer. Julian and Annabel were preparing lunch, hot veggie soup, bread, jaffals, fruit and cake. The billy was on to boil. The others were still removing tree guards so Kerry took us to the next paddock on the hillside where we unloaded the tree guards then Helen and I went into the adjoining paddock to look for young self-sown Eucalypts. We failed to find any but did find a few young gorse bushes. We returned to the fire for a very welcome lunch following which the main group went to put tree guards in the paddock where we dumped the removed guards. I went off with a shovel and dug up 27 young gorse. Later on Helen told me she found another one. Helen did the final survey from the western end of the hillside while I helped two others remove more tree guards. Just after 3 o'clock everyone returned to the fire for a cuppa before packing up and heading home after our hosts thanked us for our efforts and we thanked them for their efforts on our behalf. Helen reported seeing two wedgies during the day, one far to the south and one on the ground a bit closer.

Image below and words Jeff Campbell



Friday 28 May - Somerset property for Where! Where! Wedgie Project

Helen and I went to Somerset to do the second Where! Where! Wedgie at the property. Not far inside the gate off Barton Road at the northern end of the property were two ponds, one either side of the road. One had a pied cormorant in residence, the other what we took to be a Grebe which disappeared underwater not to be seen again. We continued along the road and saw Scarlet robins at the next stop. On top of the hill with the tower the main interest was the prolific tree violet, *Melicytus sp.* On the next leg we turned a corner and disturbed two wedgies on the side of the road which flew off across the paddock and disappeared in forest on the other side. We continued on to the end of the road and had lunch in the shelter of the shearing shed. On our way back a bit past the wedgies site we came across what we took to be a young wedgie standing beside a dead wallaby. It was very nervous at our presence as we sat in the car observing it for 45 minutes. We continued on to the next stop where we saw a flock of Green rosellas and a few other birds then headed for home.

Jeff Campbell

Saturday 29 and Sunday 30 May - Skemps Day - Fungi Foray and Moths with Genevieve and David

We were privileged to have Genevieve and David at the property over the weekend. They arrived on the Friday looking to catch some moths in the evening, by erecting a white sheet and blue (ultraviolet) light to trap the moths for identification, however it was too cold and the moths stayed away.

On Saturday morning members arrived for a fungi foray with them, walking along the Forest Track. Even though the weather had been dry, there were still many fungus seen and specimens were collected for the after lunch activity.

We viewed spore prints under the microscope, after which we each picked a fungus, making a sketch of it and coloured them with the water colour pencils supplied.

We then described the cap (Pileus), the gills (Lamellae), stem (Stipe) and noted whether the fungus had an odour, while a taste test was optional though definitely not recommended. We later cut our fungus in half to get a better look at how the gills attached to the stem and made a sketch of this as well.



We all had lots of fun and probably surprised ourselves with the outcome of our sketches and in most cases were able to identify our fungus to species level. A big thankyou to Genevieve and David for an informative and entertaining day.

On Sunday morning after our visitors left and the heavy frost had cleared, more members arrived and went on walks looking at the fungus.

Helen, Prue and Noel sketching their fungus - Image Karen Manning

Additional Information

Club Outings:

- All outings depart from Inveresk carpark (near Museum entrance) at 9 am unless otherwise specified. Internet site updated regularly to reflect short notice changes. Saturday all-day parking cost is \$4.00. Sunday parking free.
- Provide your own food and drinks for the outing and wear/take clothing/footwear suitable for all weather types.
- When travelling by car in convoy, each driver is responsible to ensure that the vehicle behind is in sight immediately after passing a cross road or fork in the road.
- When carpooling, petrol costs should be shared between all the passengers, including family of the driver, and based on other clubs the Committee suggested \$11 per 100 km. This is a guideline only.

Name Tags: Please wear your name tags to meetings and on outings.

Tea/Coffee: A levy of 50c is currently charged for supper provided at meetings.

Field Centre: All members have access to the John Skemp Field Centre, but should contact our booking manager, Phil Brumby on 0407 664 554 or bookings@lfnc.org.au regarding availability and keys.

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