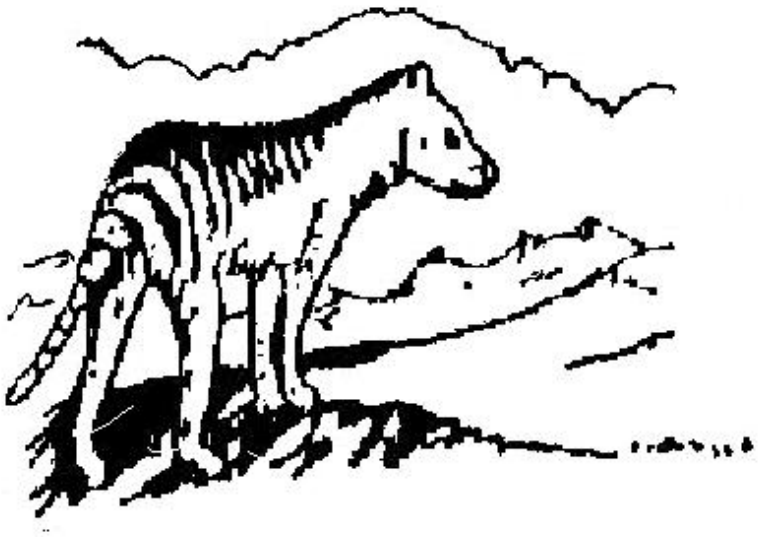
THE LAUNCESTON NATURALIST

Issued to members of the Launceston Field Naturalists Club as a contribution to club activities.



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

Volume XLIV No 2 December 2010/January 2011

Meetings 1st Tuesday of month, Feb-Dec at Scotch-Oakburn College, Penquite Rd Newstead

PROGRAM

FEBRUARY

Tuesday 1	**Speaker: Professor Nigel Forteath** - Biological Journey
Sunday 6	Field Trip: To be advised
Sunday 27	Skemp Day: Seed Collection

MARCH

Tuesday 1	Member's Night (see newsletter for more information)
Sunday 6	Field Trip: To be advised
Monday 21	Social Night for Members at Steve's Grill (see newsletter for more information)

APRIL

Tuesday 5	**Speaker: Debbie Searle** - Water Monitoring
Sunday 10	Skemp Day: Water Monitoring

MAY

Tuesday 3	**Skemp Memorial Lecture, Speaker Mark Holdsworth** - Orange Bellied Parrot Recovery Program
Sunday 22	Skemp Day: Fungi

JUNE

Tuesday 7	**Speaker: Karen Richards & Chris Spencer** - Leeches
Sunday 12	Field Trip: To be advised
Saturday 18	Skemp Day: Tree Planting

Above correct at time of printing. For short notice changes to program visit http://www.lfnc.org.au/meetings.htm

COMMITTEE/GENERAL MEETING

Skemp Report - A Conservation Volunteer Australia group were at Skemps between Christmas and New Year. They raised portions of the boardwalk and also replaced a section of boards on the Zig Zag Track. Thistle was removed from the Federation Corridor and the old homestead site and foxglove was removed from the new Tyre Track. Work continues on the barn and the shed behind the barn is almost complete.

Puggle - Roy Skabo asked members to identify a projected image. Prue Wright and John Elliott were partly correct in identifying a caterpillar and mites. The full answer was that it was larvae of a parasitic wasp emerging from the caterpillar and pupating.

Sightings - Peter Longman had seen Wedge-tailed Eagles harassed by a raven at Windermere. Daphne Longman reported seeing Pademelons mating in her garden.

Library Report - The books and dried Eucalypt specimens donated from the estate of Mary Page, have been received.

Constitution - Members were advised that Business and Consumer Affairs have accepted the new Constitution and also of the decision by the Committee that the new constitution would be adopted immediately. Office bearers and committee members elected at the last AGM would continue to hold their positions until the next AGM.

New Members - Peter and Daphne Longman were welcomed to the Club at the meeting in December.

GENERAL MEETING DECEMBER - SPEAKER Erik Wapstra

At the LFNC meeting on 7 December 2010 the speaker was Dr Erik Wapstra, a member of the Behavioural and Evolutionary Ecology Research Group, University of Tasmania, Hobart. He gave an information packed presentation about Tasmanian Skinks (Lizards of Family Scincidae).

Nineteen species of reptiles inhabit mainland Tasmania. Three of these are snakes:- Tiger snake, *Notechis ater*; lowland copperhead, *Austrelaps superbus*; white-lipped snake, *Drysdalia coronoides*. One lizard is the mountain dragon, *Tympanocryptis diemensis*. The other fifteen lizard species are skinks.

Largest of our skinks is the blotched bluetongue, *Tiliqua nigrolutea*. Next in size is the she-oak skink, *Cyclodomorphus casurinae*. Among the smaller Scincidae the metallic skink, *Niveoscincus metallicus*, is common in gardens.

At the other extreme is the Pedra Branca skink, *Niveoscincus palfreymani*. This offshore species is found only on Pedra Branca, a small rocky island located about 25 kilometres south of mainland Tasmania. Here a colony of about 400 lizards lives on food brought there by nesting sea birds.

Dr Wapstra and his team are especially interested in the effects of climate on Tasmanian skinks and on what might happen to them in the future.

Tasmanian reptiles are ectothermic. They depend on the surrounding temperature for body heat and they are not active in cold weather. Most species are viviparous. Young animals develop inside their mother's body and are born alive, not hatched from external eggs.

Among reptiles there are two ways by which the sex of offspring is determined. In some there is genetic control by X and Y chromosomes, as is typical of vertebrate animals. In others this genetic mechanism has been lost and external temperature influences the ratio of new males to females. Tasmanian skinks represent both methods.

Our skinks form two groups according to where they live. In highland sties, above about 1,000 metres in altitude, normal genetic control prevails and the numbers of males and females born are about equal.

In lowland sites temperature control of the sex ratio is an advantage. In these warmer places the active season for lizards is longer. Females born earlier than those in colder sites have time to grow larger and so to produce more young. Under warm conditions they breed more females than males. For these lowland lizards cold weather would cause a surplus of males.

Dr Wapstra and his team make detailed studies of lizards at two sites; at Lake Augusta (highland and cold) and near Orford (lowland and warmer). Every year, at each site, they catch about 100 females just before these give birth. The young which emerge are marked and their subsequent progress is recorded. Annual variations occur but the lowland females always start giving birth ahead of the highland females; ie before Christmas near Orford and in January-February at Lake Augusta. Information collected covers twelve years, so far.

The team has used modelling techniques to predict what might happen if Tasmania's climate becomes warmer. At present the lowland skinks, with their temperature-controlled proportions of males and females, can not compete with the highland skinks at altitudes above about 1,000 metres. Their ability to produce more and larger females is no advantage where the season for lizard activity is short. Snow skinks (*Niveoscincus greeni* and *N. Microlepidotus*) and other species which inhabit mountain country are

unchallenged at present. A warmer climate overall would enable lowland lizards to succeed at higher altitudes and so reduce the territory available for the several highland species of skinks.

Thank you to Dr Erik Wapstra for his very interesting and enlightening report of his work on Tasmanian Scincidae. Alison Green

CHRISTMAS AT SKEMPS - Saturday 11 December

Twenty eight members arrived at Skemps for the annual Christmas party. During the week the weather had been windy and raining, but today the sun was shining. Following a coffee and chat, the Christmas tree was erected and decorated. Fifteen members then headed off to the Tyre Track, a new track running through the recently purchased land. This track has been marked and cleared and meets up with the Fern Gully Track on the flat of the gully.

On our way down we found many colonies of a fungi with a dark red cap, gills and stem, possibly a species of *Dermocybe*.

The recent rain was still obvious in the gully with many new streams covering the walking track in some places. There were many foxgloves in flower and blackberry vines seen which will need to be removed. Once in the Fern Gully the group split into three smaller groups. Some headed through to the Bottom Falls and returned via the Scotch Oakburn Adopt-a-Patch and Skemp Road; another group left via the track which exits back to the Forest Track, and the last group retraced their steps and exited via the Spare Tyre Track to the paddock behind the Fire Station on the corner of the Club property.

We all returned to the Centre around the same time to find the barbecue ready for use. Following lunch a small group headed to the creek to check the health of trees and shrubs planted earlier in the year, stopping in to have a look at the Waratahs (*Telopea truncata*) planted by the late Jean Carins.

Santa had promised a visit prior to afternoon tea so we all joined at the Centre to await him. He arrived in the usual fashion and with helper Bayley handed out the gifts to members who had been good. In previous years Santa has provided a song and dance, but with a wardrobe malfunction his visit was cut short.

Afternoon tea was then served, we enjoyed a lovely variety of food that members had brought along for the occasion. Everyone headed home around 4.30pm with a group stopping at the Patersonia Church to tidy the Skemp family grave site. With the many helpers the triple plot was cleared

very quickly of weeds and small pebbles were put in place to keep the area a lot neater.

CONGRATULATIONS LYNNE MOCKRIDGE

In the Sustainable Communities Tasmania 2010 awards Lynne received an award in the Community Action and Partnership Category due to her "Highly valued and knowledgeable involvement in several environmental organisations", for her work with Friends of Machens Reserve and the Native Garden. Congratulations Lynne, a well deserved award.

FEDERATION WEEKEND - Ben Lomond - 21 to 23 January

Launceston Field Naturalists Club hosted this biannual get-together, Federation Weekend, which was attended by members from the North Eastern and Central North groups.

Our weekend was held earlier than usual to take advantage of the ideal season for the wildflowers in the alpine habitat of the Ben Lomond National Park. This time of year also provides better weather for walking and other outdoor activities including, our main focus for the weekend, the search for insects.

Those who arrived early on the Friday afternoon quickly settled in to their accommodation and took advantage of the mild weather to explore the area with short walks prior to evening meal. Two small groups met to the east of the Ski village at the high ground over the road to search for a rare alpine cushionplant, *Veronica ciliolata*, which is found only in the Hamilton Craggs area. We were lucky to find some excellent examples with flowers in bloom and yes this is no fisherman's tale as we have photographic proof. We also brought back our first insect, a 3 cm blue/black grasshopper with distinctive red legs.

Following a late dinner Elizabeth Daley the author of *Wings,* an excellent book on Tasmanian insects, gave a well received talk on insects supported by her husband Alan and son Anthony who is an entomologist.

Elizabeth started by telling us there are 30 million different species of insect worldwide, which makes up about 90% of all living things on the planet. In 2006, Australia had described 86,000 species into 661 families. Tasmania has 10,000 species of insects with new species

being discovered every year. An insect has six legs, three separate sections to their body and generally has wings.

Elizabeth explained that they can be caught in light nets, containers or using food or traps and described the insects that we could expect to find at Ben Lomond as follows;

Primitive Wingless insects - bristletails and silverfish would be found under bark, leaf litter and damp places. **Winged Insects** - earwigs, cockroaches, grasshopper (on ground), cricket (underground), katydids (higher vegetation) lacewings, hanging flies, scorpion flies, beetles, moths, butterflies, mosquitos, ants, bees, wasps and sawflies. **Winged insects found near water** - mayflies, dragonflies, damselflies, stoneflies, dobsonflies and caddisflies. **Winged insects found mainly on vegetation** - praying mantis, hoppers, aphids, scale insects, cicadas, bed bugs and water bugs.

Elizabeth suggested wearing light coloured clothing and not allowing our shadow to pass over the intended prey and not to wear strong scents as this may attract or repel insects. Knowledge and luck are unfortunately other elements to success for the insect hunter.

Remember you cannot collect and keep insects unless you have a permit. You may collect an insect and take it to your local museum for formal identification; otherwise they must be released, preferably where they were collected.

Saturday morning was warm and sunny and members, armed with collection jars, went foraging for insects in small groups returning for morning tea with their catch which was recorded and photographed. A further collection was done after morning tea and we returned for lunch and to again check the catch. The third foray into the wild after lunch had a late start and was cut short by cloud cover, an increase in the wind and a sharp drop in temperature. Those who had gone for walks late the previous afternoon noted that the abundance of insects on Friday was lacking on Saturday due the changed conditions.

Elizabeth will formally identify the species once she has received the recorded information and photographs from Ron and Sarah, and will provide a list when available. There has been no formal study of insects on Ben Lomond that Elizabeth is aware of so the information collected will be passed on to Parks and Wildlife.

The most collected insect was the grasshopper. There was a variety of species, in many colours and sizes; Ben Lomond was an ideal place for them, being vegetarians there is an abundance of food and plenty of

places for them to hide.

After the evening meal on Saturday microbiologist Erika Cox gave an animated and well received talk on the recently identified Flinders Island Spotted Fever, which proved to be a *Rickettsia* disease.

Erika started her talk with the history of *Rickettsia*. Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever was first identified in Montana in 1873, characterised by fever with rash and high mortality rate. In 1906 Howard Ricketts of the University of Chicago demonstrated it to be an infection picked up by ticks feeding on an infected animal and passed on to other animals, including humans. The disease was also discovered in New York and other places, and is now found from Canada to Argentina.

Ticks involved were different species and genera and the animals include a variety of native animals and the domestic dog. The disease can be passed on horizontally, by contact with infected animals, and vertically because the offspring of the infected tick are also carriers. Infected people produce antibodies to *Rickettsia* and if you recover from it you have immunity and would not get it again.

In Australia we have four Rickettsial diseases, Queensland tick typhus (*Rickettsia Australis*), Murine typhus (*R. typhi*) Scrub typhus (*R. tsutsugamushi*) and Flinders Island Spotted Fever (*R. honei*). The Murine and Scrub typhus are not spread by ticks. There has only been one person to die of a Rickettsial disease in Australia.

Flinders Island Spotted Fever (*R. honei*) was discovered fairly recently. The local GP on Flinders Island, Dr Rob Stewart, had many patients reporting with fever, rashes, headache and swelling of the lymph glands. A blood sample from a patient was sent to a laboratory in Geelong, where a *Rickettsia* was grown from the sample. A patient also brought in a tick which had bitten her before she became sick and it was eventually found to be the carrier.

This fever is not confined to Flinders Island, having been diagnosed in Northern Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia and south-eastern Australia generally. *R. honei* is unusual in that it is a disease of reptiles.

Erika then gave some information on the *Rickettsia* disease typhus which is believed to have first affected humans soon after colonisation of South America when an introduced tick spread the disease which had infected native animals.

Following supper, LFNC member Irmgard Rosenfeldt showed images from her recent trip to Salzberg, Austria, including imposing mountains behind village and rustic scenes. Other images included fields of wildflower, trees, domestic animals, quaint buildings with flower boxes in

the windows, fellow travellers and small shrines, particularly in remembrance of those who died in vehicle accidents.

Many thanks to Elizabeth, Alan, Tony, Erika and Irmgard for their presentations during the weekend and also to Ron and Sarah for their diligence with the camera and patience with the wayward bugs.

Plants identified during our stay:
Alpine Billybuttons (*Craspedia alpina*), Alpine Groundsel (*Senecio pectinatus*), Alpine Heathmyrtle (*Baeckea gunniana*), Alpine Strawsedge (*Carpha alpina*), Alpine Sundew (*Drosera arcturi*), Ben Lomond Cushion-plant (*Veronica ciliolata*), Ben Lomond Snowgentian (*Gentianella diemensis subsp. Plantaginea*), Diamond Cushionherb (*Ewartia catipes*), Heartleaf Daisybush (*Olearia obcorbata*), Heath Cushionplant (*Dracophyllum minimum*), Mountain Rocket (*Bellendena Montana*), Mountain Teatree (*Leptospermum rupestre*), Pineapple Grass (*Astelia alpine*), Revolute Orites (*Orites revolutus*), Rigid Candleheath (*Richea sprengelioides*), Scoparia (*R. scoparia*), Small Snowdaisy (*Celmisia saxifraga*), Snow Cushionplant (*Donatia novae-zelandiae*), Snow Peppermint (*Eucalyptus coccifera*) and the following :- Bennett's Wallaby (*Red-necked wallaby*), Flame Robin (*Petroica phoenicea*), Black Currawong (*Strepera fuliginosa*), White-lipped snake (*Drysdalia coronoides*), Tiger snake (*Notechis ater*) and many skinks which moved too quickly to be identify.

MEMBER'S NIGHT - 1 March

Members are invited to give presentations at the March meeting and are requested to give information on the subject to Noel, phone 6344 2277, by 24 February. All presentations should be on nature, preferably Tasmanian or Australian, and restricted to 15 minutes or 30 images. As a courtesy to your audience, all images should be in focus and presenters should be able to name any flora, fauna, groups of people, places or geographic features.

CLUB SOCIAL DINNER - 21 March

Our Club dinner will be at Steve's Grill on Monday 21 March, 6.00 pm for 6.30 pm. Steve's Grill certainly has a good grill menu but there is also a comprehensive general menu which caters for all tastes.
Entrees from $6.00 - $17.00 include soup, chicken and seafood dishes.
Mains from $14.00 - $30.00 include sausages, kebabs, pasta dishes, chicken, pork, duck, seafood and salads. Steve's steaks range from $22.00 - $44.00 depending on weight and a choice of five sauces is offered. Desserts

are $9.90 if you have any room left. Coffee and tea $3.50.

To get to Steve's go down the West Tamar Road past the Trevallyn Power Station and turn right past the apartment blocks. Keep in the right hand lane for about 100 metres then turn right in to the area in front of the apartments. There are a few parking places on your left but if these are occupied keep going under the archway and there is parking at the end of the building. If these are full keep going around the back of the building where there is plenty of parking space.

Members not at the March General Meeting are requested to RSVP to Noel or Karen on 6344 2277 or by e-mail family_manning@yahoo.com.au before Friday 18 March if they would like to attend the dinner

AUSTRALIAN NATURALISTS NETWORK
7th GET-TOGETHER
CANBERRA, 13 – 21 OCTOBER 2012

The next ANN get-together will be held in Canberra from Saturday 13 to Sunday 21 October 2012 and is being organised by the Field Naturalists Association of Canberra (FNAC).

This timing coincides with the local spring peak and there should be plenty of flora and fauna to see, as well as many interesting places to visit.

Canberra is a popular tourist and school excursion destination and accommodation can be tight. (Especially for the first weekend, which will be the last weekend of the popular Floriade Festival.) We shall be sending out accommodation recommendations and putting them on our website in the next couple of months and we advise you to book ASAP to ensure a place.

Much of the ACT is National Park or Nature Reserve. We hope to explore many of these areas during the Get-together. A large part of the ACT comprises Namadgi National Park, which forms part of the Alpine National Park complex stretching up from Victoria. Around Canberra itself the main ecosystems are threatened Natural Temperate Grasslands and Box-gum Grassy Woodlands, as well as Riparian areas. Canberra also hosts national collections of flora and of vertebrate and invertebrate fauna, which we hope to arrange access to, as well as a zoo and reptile park. There is also a major astronomical observatory and a geological display. As well as the FNAC, Canberra is large enough to have many other groups with an interest in nature. We plan to draw on their expertise to explain and show our fauna and flora and habitats.

While you are here you might like to take a bit of time to see some of the many cultural amenities and national institutions of the nation's

capital, such as the National Museum, National Gallery, National Library, War Memorial (and many others). Many of them have at least some natural history content. We will supply more information on them, including visiting times and any special exhibitions that are on at that time. You can also check out: http://www.visitcanberra.com.au .

The FNAC has a website (http://www.fieldnatscanberra.com). We will be putting all the material relating to ANNCanberra2012 on the website. It will contain useful information on what to see and where, field guides to the local fauna and flora, as well as material on accommodation and the program as it develops. We will also send out material to anyone who has expressed an interest in coming to ANN Canberra 2012 (preferably by email).

Contact us at the email address that we have created - anncanberra@gmail.com , or write to us at FNAC (ANN), GPO Box 249, Canberra, ACT 2601. You can also contact us by phone, Rosemary von Behrens (02) 6254 1763 or Tony Lawson (02) 61619430

(Information taken from FNAC website above)

AUSTRALIAN PLANT SOCIETY MEETINGS

A reminder that LFNC members are welcome to attend APS meetings held on a Tuesday at Max Fry Hall, Gorge Road Trevallyn at 7.30 pm. Their first meeting for 2011 will be on 15 February.

Additional Information

Club Outings:

1. 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 $3.00. Sunday parking free.
2. You need to provide your own food and drinks for the outing unless otherwise specified. Morning tea is normally provided by the bus company on bus outings.
3. When travelling by car in convoy, each driver is responsible to ensure that the vehicle behind is in sight immediately after passing each cross road or fork in the road.
4. When car pooling, 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: Name tags are to be worn at 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. Contact our booking manager, John Elliott on 6344 9303 regarding availability and keys.

Field Centre Phone Number - 6399 3361

Postal Address: PO Box 1072 Launceston 7250

Internet site : http://www.lfnc.org.au

E.mail : secretary@lfnc.org.au