

THE LAUNCESTON NATURALIST

Volume LII No. 3 February/March 2019

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 Forteach
President : Mr Tom Treloggen, 0408 341 397
Hon. Secretary : Mr Phillip Brumby, 0407 664 554
Hon. Treasurer : Mrs Karen Manning, 0363 442 277

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

Program:

April – Tuesday 4

**General Meeting Guest Speakers – David Maynard & Simon Fearn
– *King Island insect collecting expedition***

April – Sunday 6

Fundraising with BBQ at Bunnings

April – Sunday 14

Field Trip –Launceston Historical Society lecture on *Louisa Anne Meredith* who was an artist, naturalist and botanist @ 2pm QV Museum at Inveresk

April – Sunday 28

Skemps Day – Macroinvertebrate Monitoring

April – Tuesday 30

**Where Where Wedgie Workshop at Briggs House, Scotch Oakburn College,
Penquite Campus 6 to 8 pm**

May – Tuesday 7

John Skemp Memorial Lecture - Guest Speaker – Sarah Lloyd – *My Life in Slime*

May – TBC

Where Where Wedgie survey

May – Sunday 26

Skemps Day – Slime Moulds with Sarah Lloyd

For further program details visit <https://www.lfnc.org.au/meetings.htm>

Skemps Report:

A new year and ever more problems with Skemps plumbing. For weeks I could get a good flow from the settling tank to the Federation Corridor although nothing was going into the main storage tanks. After trying a few things to back flush the pipe John noticed a disconnected joint in the line to the barn. Fixing this has been difficult as the pipes are stretched. At least the tanks are filling again.

Big Bertha has been given a new lease of life with another barrel thanks to member Tony. Philip, of the metal works where it was fixed, suggested a baffle plate be inserted to increase efficiency and to reduce the stress on the flue. All we need is to have the flue checked, paint it black and burn it outside to cure the paint and it will be as good as new. After the work done by Peter to make the doors fit better it is probably better than new.

There is a major blockage in the fern gully with a large limb fallen out of a sassafras tree, thankfully past the end of Roy's fern foray, and this will be dealt with soon.

John and Grant have been stripping and painting the steel fence around the Centre which is looking good after so many years of neglect.

John has been working hard with the spray pack dealing with thistle and foxglove (which seems to be worse than usual this year). This is an arduous task as the pack ways over 10 kg when full and the thin straps dig into the shoulders and are not comfortable.

We have plenty of fire wood ready for winter, the grass growth has slowed as well as the ferns and bracken so that we need to mow and slash less.

We still need more volunteers. If you are able to help out give me a call and remember to report any issues when you walk the nature trails.

Noel Manning

General Meeting - Tuesday 5 February

Guest Speaker - Andy Taylor - *Life of Eels*

Tom introduced Andy who would be talking on the eels in Lake Trevallyn and the elver ladder.

After some technical difficulties Andy explained that he had only recently joined the Hydro and that the presentation had been put together by someone else with him stepping in at the last minute. The talk started with the problems faced by eels to complete their life cycle throughout the world including the hydro barriers and infrastructure, modified habitat and power generation, including the turbines. While the European, American and Japanese eels are considered endangered the Hydro is being proactive in sustaining the populations in Tasmania.

The talk moved to the life of the eels found in Lake Trevallyn, including their amazing migration between the lakes where they grow to maturity to New Caledonia where they spawn, although the exact location is unknown. After spawning the mature eels die and the eggs hatch into transparent larvae called *Leptocephali* which drift on the Australian current returning to the Tasmanian rivers where they mature. After five or six months of travel they metamorphose into glass eels and when they enter the fresh water rivers get pigmentation and functional teeth to become elvers.

Negotiating the natural and man-made barriers to get to these waterways to feed and grow is a major issue for the elvers and there is an elver ladder in the gallery of the Trevallyn Dam to assist them to get into the lake. This consists of a Colorbond guttering channel lined with a Geotec drainage material, originally designed to slow flow and reduce erosion. In this application the plastic liner of the guttering is used by the elvers for extra grip or to rest on a rise of around 26 metres over the 160 metres of the ladder. The Geotec plastic matting has small raised lugs, around five mm across, about the same distance spaced apart and about two or three mm high.

The elvers end up in a tank the size of a washing machine bowl which automatically empties into the lake every six hours and Andy can keep an eye on this tank from his Hobart office. Before the ladder was introduced elvers were collected at the power station outlet and trucked up to the lake.

With the ladder explained and the issue of entering the lake dealt with the talk moved onto how the mature eels leave the lake, the problems encountered and the efforts of the Hydro to study their behavior and reduce the losses from the infrastructure. When the eels reach sexual maturity, they put on weight, the skin pigment becomes silvery and they have a desire to leave the lake and head for New Caledonia to breed and this has risks. The turbines pose an obvious risk to the eels and the environmental riparian outlet puts too much stress on them.

A sonar was used at the outlet screen to monitor eel behavior and we saw movies of the eels crossing near the outlet screen and it was noted that they preferred to avoid the high flows here. In another part of the study of eel behavior, 105 eels were tagged and 12 autonomous recorders, distributed in the forebay area, monitored their movements. A video showed them moving all over the forebay area in what we considered to be fast, strange patterns until it was explained that these involved time lapse with the short presentation speeded up 75 times.

Andy noted that compared to the low level of flow through the riparian outlet compared to the large flow at the power outlet a disproportionate number of the tagged eels chose the riparian outlet.

Hydro is planning to divert some of the riparian flow to a by-pass planned for the western side of the dam wall near the cascading steps. This will consist of a 500 mm wide cored hole through the dam wall at 2.5 metres depth where flow can be managed. Andy will have the job of catching eels that choose this passage for health checks.

The talk moved to the Derwent River system which presents other problems as there are four barriers to the elvers upstream migration. They are trapped at the first barrier, Meadowbank, and taken upstream daily by inland fisheries to be released in the lake.

As well as questions during the talk there was nearly 15 minutes of questions and answers before Peter Ralph gave the thanks and led the acclamation.

Noel Manning

Field Trip - 6 February 2019 - Trevallyn Dam

Eleven members, including junior Monty, and a visitor from New Caledonia met our guest speaker at the top of the Trevallyn Dam to look at the elver ladder.

After a short introduction and safety talk Andy opened up the gate to the steps at the side of the dam and went to the entrance to the gallery. The gallery is a large space in the centre of dam which we all had always assumed to be a solid structure. After the alarm was deactivated we joined him, about one floor down, to a door into the side of the dam with a small landing at the top. The stairs descended another floor before turning left to access the gallery and I think we all wanted to see this open space though we were not permitted due to safety concerns.

Just inside the door was a tub the size of a washing machine tub, this was where the elvers gathered before being flushed into Lake Trevallyn. We could see the guttering which formed the ladder which was lined with a plastic base covered in nobs around five mm across, about the same distance spaced apart and about two or three mm high. This is a commercial product used to line drains to slow the flow and used here to allow the elvers extra grip as well as a place to rest on their long journey from the river below, a climb of over 27 metres.

Rod eventually caught one and with some difficulty held the writhing, slippery creature in his hand for us to photograph before Andy manually opened the valve in the tub to flush the elvers into the lake. We learnt that prior to the completion of the ladder the elvers were caught at the Tailrace and moved to the lake.

Tom thanked Andy on behalf of the members who showed their appreciation with the usual acclamation and, while some stayed to look for insects, I headed home.

After lunch most of us at the morning field trip, travelled to Nunamara to join with Australian Plant Society Northern Group colleges at the Tamar Natural Resource Management Ragwort Roundup on Mount Barrow. A very successful and tiring two plus hours moving in groups of three down the mountain pulling and bagging ragwort. Next year we will know how successful it was. Noel Manning

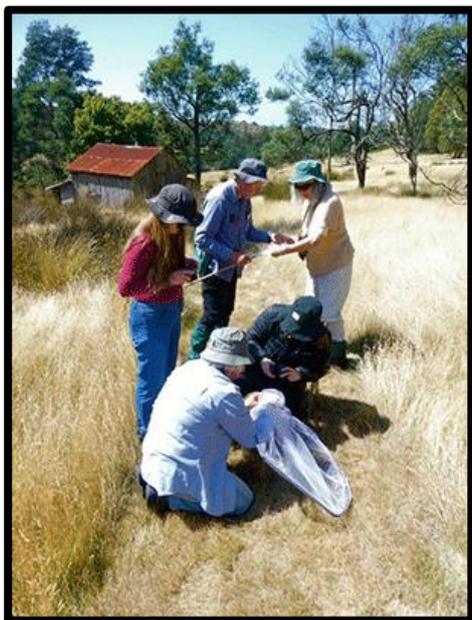
Skemps Day - 24 February 2019 - Insect Hunt

Members arrived at Skemps to a warm morning, hoping to find some interesting insects. Following a coffee and chat while walking boots were put on, we headed off to the long grassy area between the Centre and the old barn. Here we could see lots of flying insects, which we tried to catch with both a small and large net. The insects were onto us and made the catching a laugh to those looking on as we ducked and dived with the nets to no avail for some time.

Our first catch was a large wasp with black and red legs, of the *Ichneumon* species, which was followed by yellow winged grasshoppers and shouldered brown butterflies.

We then walked down to the wetland area to look for dragonflies. As Claire waved the net on the edge of the water, our main concern was that she would overbalance and fall in, because the dragonflies were dodging the net, however a blue spotted hawker dragonfly was finally caught and then sat on Tina's fingers, unfazed by the attention we were giving it, while photos were taken.

After lunch we looked through our photos and Prue came up with the list below. Tina also reported that a very long copperhead snake brought her to a screeching halt on the driveway as she left. Karen Manning



Recorded on the day: *Adversaeschna brevistyla*, blue spotted hawker (dragonfly); *Altica pagana*, blue metallic flea beetle; *Bobilla* sp., grassland pygmy cricket; *Echthromorpha intricatoina*, cream-spotted Ichneumon; *Eriborius* sp., wasp; *Gastrimargus musicus*, yellow winged locust; *Heteronympha penelope*, shouldered brown; *Ichneumon* sp., large wasp black-red legs; *Onthophagus auritis*, dung beetle; *Phaulacridium vittatum*, wingless grasshopper; *Pieris rapae*, cabbage white (i); Small mudwasps collecting mud at edge of dam; *Austrelaps superbus*, lowland copperhead snake; *Corvus tasmanicus*, forest raven; *Malurus cyaneus*, superb fairy-wren, pellets from a Pied Currawong (contained seeds and tiny black beetle wings)

Image supplied by Tom McGlynn

Field Trip - 5 March 2019 - Bird Watching with Ralph Cooper at the Tamar Wetlands

Twenty members and visitors Annie, Megan and Vera trickled into the Tamar Wetlands carpark from just before 5:30 pm till after 6 pm. With many of us being retired, travelling in heavy traffic times is unknown and we were not prepared for the slow driving and delays.

After a bite to eat and a drink we set off for the visitor centre with our guest and guide for the evening, Ralph Cooper (the northern representative of Birds Tasmania), who gave us a brief introduction to the wetlands and handed out A4 sheets with pictures of the main birds we could expect to encounter. He also explained that the wetlands are a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) and that two species, the spotless crane and the chestnut teal, which are in the wetlands in significant numbers, would each qualify the wetlands for KBA status.

Moving past the visitor centre, to the stretch of board walk before the bird hide, Ralph pointed out the small Spotless Crane on the far bank just outside the reeds, our first significant sighting for the evening. The best place to see the birds was the bridges between islands and this was also where we were most exposed to a lazy, cold wind from the north making conditions uncomfortable for a few of us. We soldiered on with Ralph naming the species seen which included; Australian wood duck, black fronted dotterel, black swans, brown thornbill, chestnut teal, great egret, grey teal, juvenile swamp harrier, pacific gull, pied oyster catcher, purple swamp hen, sea eagle, silver gull, spotless crane, welcome swallow and white faced heron.



Egrets and ducks (TMcG)



Mud flats at the wetlands (TMcG)

On the return walk the cold quickened the pace of many and warm cars were too inviting so that less than half of our group gathered near the visitor centre to thank Ralph.

Ralph also explained that we had after-hours access to the wetlands as the gate was no longer locked and that this had not resulted in vandalism. It was decided to cease the security as it was expensive and not working as the gate was not opened or closed in a timely manner. Ralph's last words were that depending on the tide, season and time of day the species to be seen would vary and that a keen birder would be wise to visit frequently. We had already noted that many people accessed the wetlands after hours including a group doing Tai Chi, dancers from Stomping, bird enthusiasts and walkers. Noel Manning



Members on walk and talk with Ralph Cooper (TMcG)

**Tuesday 30 April ~ *Where? Where? Wedgie!* Workshop at Briggs House,
Scotch Oakburn College, Penquite Campus 6 to 8 pm**

The Club is hosting one of many community workshops currently being held around Tasmania, in relation to the *Where? Where? Wedgie!* Surveys which are over the weekends of 10 to 12 May and 24 to 26 May.

The aims of these workshops are to:

- help everyone understand the survey aims, the information we expect to get and how we might interpret it
- make sure we have a consistent, well understood, survey method used all across Tasmania
- support everyone to continually improve and share their skills in identifying birds of prey and other species.
- form and build on networks to inspire and assist participants to have an interesting and enjoyable time with the survey, and to contribute ideas and feedback to make it work really well.

Source: <https://naturetrackers.com.au/news2.php> accessed 15 April 19

Please forward this information to anyone you think would be interested in participating and for further information visit the above webpage.

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 \$3.00. 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 0403 845 000 or bookings@lfnc.org.au regarding availability and keys.

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