

## THE LAUNCESTON NATURALIST

Volume LVIII No.2 December 24 – January 25

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 : Andrew Smith, 0402 893 378  
Hon. Secretary : Noel Manning, 0458 030 767  
Hon. Treasurer : Karen Manning

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

### Program:

#### April-

Tuesday 1 – General Meeting - Guest speaker Arachnologist John Douglas – *Spiders*

Thursday 3 - Monthly Short Walk – Perth Riverbank Walk

Sat 12/Sun 13 - Wood splitting and moving to stack in woodsheds

Sat26/Sun 27 - Macroinvertebrate Monitoring on Skemps Creek

#### May –

Tuesday 6 - John Skemp Memorial Lecture – Guest Speaker Biologist Dr Lisa Gershwin  
her talk on *Bioluminescence in Nature*

Wednesday 7 -

Thursday 8 - Monthly Short Walk – Lilydale Falls

Saturday 31 - Fungi Hunt on the property

For further program details visit [www.lfnc.org.au/meetings.htm](http://www.lfnc.org.au/meetings.htm)

## Skemps Report: December 24/January25

Further cutting of eucalypts along the Power Track by member Ian (Pictured below KM) has given us a large stack of rounds ready to split when we hire a petrol splitter. We hope the splitter will be hired no more than once every two years to keep up with the demand for firewood. Volunteer Amber is a great help with moving the firewood as she is so much stronger than us oldies. The rounds are moved to Skemps Road and loaded onto a trailer, and some are so heavy we are rolling them up a ramp to get onto the trailer.



On Christmas Day our family did a lot of weeding along the roads bordering Skemps and at some time all volunteers have been involved in weeding. As predicted, the spear thistle in the NW corner of Skemps is making a comeback and I have been there twice in the last month with the spray backpack. An invasive strap weed, we call it cumbungi, is clogging the western side of the top pond causing serious silting in that area. It is confined to that pond as John (E) removed it from the island of the middle pond some years ago. There is also considerable silting on the inflow side of the middle pond, and we may need to do something as the ponds may disappear in a few years. Not every high rain event brings silt, and I am not sure what does cause it.

There was a memorial service for Mary Cameron in 2001 and Karen found pictures of the large gathering to show her son Ian, a new member. She pointed out that there were no *Dicksonia antarctica* behind the Centre at that time. These have grown quite a lot and need frequent trimming as these reduce light in the bedrooms and are a fire hazard. When volunteering, Ian uses a quality black mug with the name Mary on it, probably his mothers.

Along with various small maintenance jobs, new member Steve Greig decided to rehing the front door as it had warped, quite a task with the metal covering. It was fascinating to watch how little he could remove with his sharp chisel, seemingly much less than a millimeter, while my efforts always seem to be the wrong way to the grain and my chisels are never nearly as sharp.

Jeff found the tap partially open on the tap at the drinking water tank and all had leaked out. Was it an error on our part, mischief by someone or have possums figured out how to get a drink during these dry months? In the Australian desert camels have learnt to turn taps on with their tongues. Luckily it rained the following Sunday, and the tank filled to a third and we can only hope for more in the coming weeks.

We still need more volunteers, especially to monitor our nature trails, help on a Tuesday and hopefully turn up on the weekend we hire the splitter. If you can help email the secretary and I will add your name to the text message list.

Noel Manning

Louise at Spring clean (KM)



## Skemps Day – December Sunday 1 - Spring clean at the John Skemp Field Centre

Thank you to the five members who attended Skemps for the end of year spring clean at the Field Centre. As usual, all the rooms were de-cobwebbed, dusted and vacuumed, and mattress covers removed for washing and light fittings cleaned. Bathrooms cleaned and all items in the kitchen, checked for cleanliness, and damaged or stained items removed from use. Windows were all dusted and washed inside and out. The carbon monoxide and smoke detectors in the main room were tested, the spill container above the sink emptied, and the sky light checked to see why it leaks. Plants on the Acacia Walk were weeded and the bird netting in the gutter on the west side of the Centre checked. We saw a wallaby with joey on the way in, though from there on we were too busy to note birds other than the obvious and no eagle or echidna seen. As stated, we did achieve a lot and did not get in each other's way, although a few jobs went begging. A clean start for 2025. **Image above Andrew cleaning cobwebs from bunk area (KM)** Karen Manning



## General Meeting – December 3 - Members night presentations

President Andrew introduced the four member presentations for the evening

**First Aid for Snake Bite.** Phil Bumby started by noting that a typical snake bite is not the two puncture marks we imagine, and people may be bitten and not realise it. Also, that the Tasmanian Tiger snake is the fifth most venomous snake in Australia, the copperhead is number nine and the white lip comes in at 20, though no one is recorded as having died from a white lip bite.

While between 3,000 to 5,000 people are bitten annually the average death rate is only 3.2 per year and this is due to modern first aid practices. Australian researcher Struan Sutherland had noted that first nations people rarely died of snake bite, and it was related to not moving. Research has shown that venom moves through the lymphatic system not the blood stream.

Phil then moved on to a demonstration of the modern first aid treatment with Karen as the victim with a bite on her lower leg. First the patient is laid down, made comfortable and an elasticised roller bandage (10-15 cm wide) is applied to the immediate wound site. The limb is then bandaged upward from just above the toes (or fingers), again with an elasticised roller bandage (10-15 cm wide), and going as far as possible. In the demonstration a snake bite bandage was used that had noticeable oblong shapes along its length. If the correct stretch is applied during the bandaging, these oblong shapes should become squares.

Further measures are used to immobilize the patient such as tying the limbs together using something rigid and straight, such as a walking pole. The wound site should not be cleaned as it may provide proof of envenomation and information on the snake species.

On another subject he told us that one in five Australians who have a fall after the age of 60 will die. There are around 5,000 falls deaths in Australia each year, while around 225,000 are hospitalized from falls. He finished by telling us about Good SAM, a partnership with

Ambulance Tasmania, where first aid trained community members act as first responders after being contacted through their smart phone.



Members showed their appreciation, then Andrew thanked Phil and introduced our next presenter, Daphne Longman, who was to talk about and show us, her **Nature-based embroidery**.

Daphne started by telling us how her, and Peter's interest in orchids began with walking the English countryside and seeing many orchids. On returning home they attended a talk at the Australia Plant Society on native orchids not realizing Tasmania was home to many species and she has since found there are three native orchids in her garden. On a campervan trip to southwest Western Australia, they found many orchids and were lucky enough to see the rare Queen of Sheeba orchids, a one up on Jeff.

Daphne has combined her love of nature with her other great passion, embroidery, to create the beautiful, and sometimes large, works she had brought along to show us. In Malta she photographed a Swallowtail butterfly feeding on a thistle and from a friend's nature book she first saw the Madagascan Star-of-Bethlehem Orchid, *Angraecum sesquipedale*, both of which featured in her displayed works.

From the Embroiderers Guild of Tasmania, she learnt about, and how to do, stumpwork embroidery, a three-dimensional form, that she employed in the works shown to us, including the Star-of-Bethlehem orchid.

While researching this orchid she found some interesting facts, including that Darwin had seen it during his five-year journey on the Beagle, and that he had wondered what could possibly pollinate it as the nectar was nearly a foot from the top of the flower. He predicted an insect would be found with a large proboscis. Some 20 years later the giant hawkmoth, *Xanthopan morgani*, was found and it did indeed have a large proboscis of between 9 to 14 inches long.

After a few minutes of Q & A with Daphne, Andrew led the acclamation and introduced me and my presentation on **Endangered freshwater fish in Australia**.

I started by showing a graph from the biodiversity Council of Australia, based in Canberra and supported by various organizations and universities, and explained how it was set out. Down the left-hand side were the events that were an issue, at the end of each line the total number affected with the line divided into colours showing the severity of the threat. The colours were Black = Extinct, red = Critically Endangered, orange = Endangered, yellow = Vulnerable and green = Data Deficient.

There was one fish in the first category, Geological events, and I looked more closely at the last and largest category (99 species), *Invasive and other problematic species*, which featured the only one thought to be extinct, the Kangaroo River Perch, followed by 28, 36, 18 and 16 in other categories.

While the study showed that conservation efforts work, where the investment and hard

work is put in, with the Murray Cod being recommended to be taken off the threatened species list, I then noted the following sobering facts.

- One-third of native freshwater fish are now threatened with extinction
- One species, the Kangaroo River perch, is believed to be extinct
- 35 species should be added to the threatened species list
- Invasive fish are the biggest threat and impact 92% of at-risk species
- Man-made changes to flows and habitats threaten 82%

During the comments and Q & A session I read the various threat categories, explained the level of threats and promised to send a copy of the report to all members. Andrew thanked me and introduced Geoff (S) and his bird talk.

While technical difficulties meant that Geoff's **Bird Quiz** did not happen, we did learn some interesting facts and interconnections about Australian birds. A few of the interesting facts are as follows:

- The Bassian thrush is the closest Australian relative to the European robin.
- The Australian Shelduck and Australian Wood duck frequently lay eggs in trees.
- Of the three pardalotes found in Tasmania the striated is the only migrant.
- There are 19 birds mentioned the 12 days of Christmas poem and that of those mentioned the partridge is from the palearctic and UK, turtle doves Europe, hens India, geese northern hemisphere and swans (white) are from the palearctic, a region comprising Eurasia north of the Himalayas, north Africa and the temperate parts of the Arabian Peninsula.
- There was an Australian version of this poem ending 'and an emu up a gum tree'. The North American bald eagle is also a sea eagle and like our sea eagle is in the genus *Haliaeetus*. Both are kites rather than eagles.
- There are four endemic honey eaters in Tasmania, with the yellow wattle bird having the highest percentage of nectar in its diet. This bird was also shot for sport and the pot. The strong-billed honeyeater fills the niche occupied by the treecreepers on the mainland.

Noel Manning

## Monthly short walk - December Thursday 5 – Windsor Garden Precinct

Seven members and a four-legged friend enjoyed our leisurely stroll in the sunshine around a level trail of approximately 2km in length at the Riverside Garden, whilst admiring the native plants, the placement of rock works, the birds and native wildlife. Flying above us, we saw pigeons, goldfinches, lapwings, and a raptor. On the ground a Wallaby, Pademelon, 2 Native hens with 4 chicks and a Blotched blue-tongue lizard. Following a coffee and chat at the Windsor Centre coffee shop we headed home.

Karen Manning





Right: *Banksia marginata* silver banksia and

Left: *Mycena* sp. in leaf litter



## Skemps Day – December Sunday 8 - Members Christmas get-together, walk and talk day

Nine members and a visitor who attended the Christmas get-together at Skemps were met by great weather. Walks were taken during the day, and we were also shown some of longtime former member Dianne Pegler's artwork where her techniques led to her being awarded a Bachelor of Fine Arts with Honours in 2020. Noel later drove Dianne up to the site on the property where Blackwood's had been planted in memory of her late husband, life member Al Pegler in 2019.

Tina, Irmgard and I walked along the paddock and on our return along the creek to check for platypus, unfortunately none today. Members saw a wombat and heard the following birds: a Kookaburra, Bassian thrush, Pallid cuckoo and a Sulphur crested cockatoo.

Karen Manning

## Community Volunteering – Wednesday January 22 – Ragwort Raid Nunamara

Why did the copperhead snake cross Hunting Field Road? Answer at the end of the write up.

Three members (Roy, Karen & I) joined Bruce and Kirstin for the 2025 Tamar NRM sponsored ragwort raid in the area around Nunamara, with Karen and I choosing Hunting Field Road as our collection area. We had dropped in a couple of times over the last few weeks and knew that it was looking better than we could imagine and hoped just two of us could finish the job. Alas it was not to be. Starting at the far end, we worked our way back to where we finished last year and after our exertions at Skemps the previous day gave up with more to do. As I was preparing to leave, I spotted something shining and on examination it turned out to be a tool we had lost, probably two years ago when removing ragwort. A small bonus from a tiring two hours in the heat of mid-morning. There are still many plants in the forest and paddocks along the road so we assume these will soon return. Also, I noticed that the plants were at different stages of development and those with flowers starting to wilt more likely to drop seeds.

Back at the hall we unloaded our two stuffed bags, showed Kirstin what we consider to be a superior tool for this task and said our goodbyes, being reluctant to wait for the barbecue. It turned out the barbecue had been replaced with precooked sausages heating up in the



oven, a sensible change to reduce the workload, and yes, I did have something to eat before leaving.

We also took a few bags as we would be removing the small number of ragwort plants we had seen along the highway. Something to do after our volunteering at Skemps next Tuesday.

And the answer to that question. To get away from Karen. She had seen what we assumed was a copper head, a little over a metre long and less than two metres from where she was standing. The snake headed into the bush on the far side of the road and Karen was not venturing into that long grass again.

Noel Manning

## The European Wool Carder Bee, *Anthidium manicatum* Article by Professor Nigel Forteath

While strolling along the riverbank below the Silo Hotel in Launceston, I was drawn to the presence of what I thought must be yellow and black striped hover flies (syrphids) or the German Paper Wasp, *Vespula germanica*. These insects were settling on the flowers of Hedgenettles, *Betonica officianlis*, and Greater Birds's Foot, *Lotus pedunculatus* but flew off when I approached for a closer look. Still curious, I returned the following day with my butterfly net and some collecting jars!

After several attempts, I finally managed to catch one of these insects and quickly realized I had never seen this insect species before. Furthermore, my books on the Insects of Australia were of no help whatsoever. However, I did manage to find a computer match from my photographs of the insect. The match proved correct. It was a male European Wool Carder Bee. I organised for the specimen to be delivered to Tasmanian Biosecurity Entomologist who confirmed the insects I.D. They belong to the family Megachilidae, the leaf cutter bees or mason bees.

I have returned several times to photograph this beautiful bee and observe its behaviour. The male is territorial and guards a patch of Hedgenettles or Greater Bird's Foot. Should another male enter his territory the resident male attacks the intruder using three spikes on the tip of his abdomen to good effect. Even bumble bees were seen off by males guarding territories.

The female does not have any spikes on the tip of her abdomen but has an extraordinary nest making habit. Her mandibles are sharp and toothed and remove *trichomes* or hairs from the stems or leaves of plants. These are rolled up into a ball and stored in a crevice or hole. Eggs are laid into the ball of wool which is provided with pollen and nectar. A nesting hole may have several balls of wool deposited therein before the female Wool Carder Bee seals the hole with a mud plug. Most nests are built well above ground level. Some nests contain stones, resin and leaves.

Since observing this bee here in Tasmania, I have discovered the bee now is present in New Zealand and Victoria. Time will tell if it has an impact on our native bee populations.

Wool Carder Bee,  
*Anthidium manicatum* female (pictured below)



German European Wasp (pictured above)

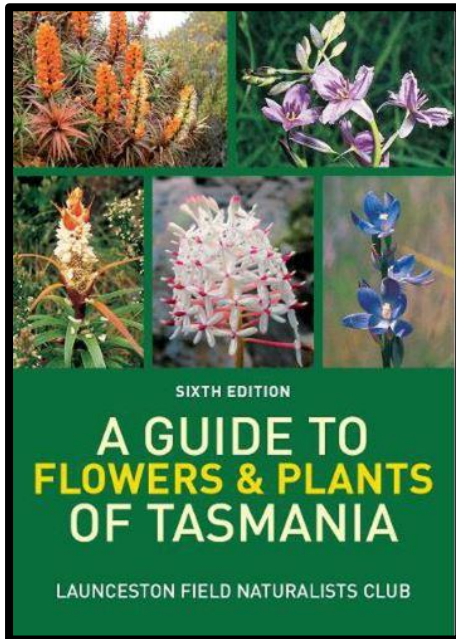
*Anthidium manicatum* male (pictured below)



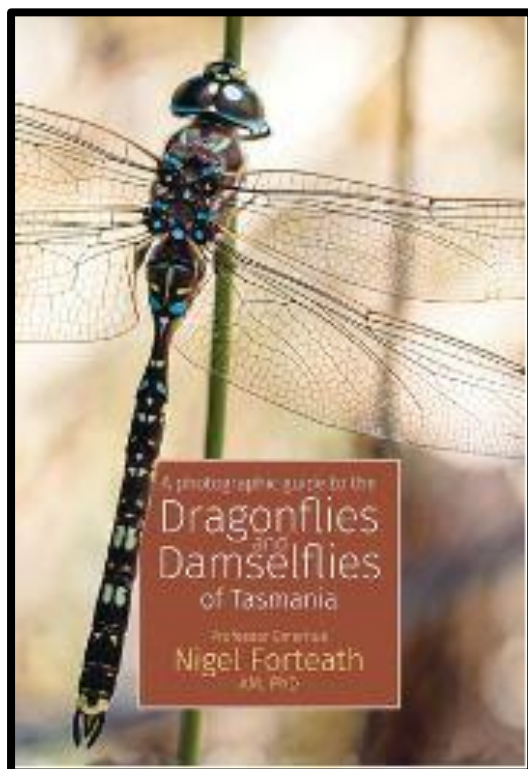
*Anthidium manicatum* male with three  
spines on tip of abdomen (pictured  
above)



## PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE



Copies of the club's publication ***A Guide to Flowers & Plants of Tasmania*** (6th Edn) are available for \$30, from the Treasurer



Copies of Professor Nigel Forteach's publication ***A Photographic Guide to the Dragonflies and Damselflies of Tasmania*** is now available in local bookstores for \$45 or, see the Treasurer for your copy at \$35.

## Additional Information

### Club Outings:

- Are held during a weekend following the General Meeting. Members should make their own travel arrangement to participate, contact the Program Coordinator if you require further details or wish to share a lift.
- Provide your own food and drinks for the outing and wear/take clothing/footwear suitable for all weather types.
- The program is subject to alternation at short notice. Notification of changes to field trips will be advised at the General Meeting prior to the event. Please contact the Program Coordinator to confirm details if you are unable to attend the meeting.

**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 the [secretary@lfnc.org.au](mailto:secretary@lfnc.org.au) regarding availability and keys.

**Field Centre Phone Number:** (03) 6399 3361

**Postal Address:** 23 Skemps Road, Myrtle Bank

Internet site: <https://www.lfnc.org.au>

Facebook site: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/527797787360157/>

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