THE LAUNCESTON NATURALIST

Volume LVII No.3 Feb-Mar 2024

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 1st Tuesday of month, February-December at Scotch-Oakburn College, Senior Campus, Penquite Rd Newstead. Daytime meetings will be held during the month of July and August at a venue to be advised

Program:

April

Tuesday 2

Meeting – Guest Speaker, Entomologist Simon Fearn from QVMAG

Fri12 to Sat13

Field Trip – An opportunity to see a project monitoring the environmental health of Mt Roland and a visit to Erriba to discuss land under private conservation covenant

May

Saturday 4

Skemps Day – Macroinvertebrate monitoring to assess the water quality in Skemps Creek

Tuesday 7

John Skemp Memorial Lecture – Member Speaker Geoff Shannon – *"From observation to conservation, how we use our hobby to protect the things we love without spoiling our time in nature"*

Saturday 25

Skemps Day – Visit and review the Conservation Covenant areas on the property

June

Tuesday 4

Meeting – Member Speaker- Roy Skabo – "*Secrets of the LFNC*"

Thursday 6

Monthly Morning Walk – Hollybank Forest Reserve

Saturday 29

Skemps Day – Ferns and Bryophytes

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

SKEMPS REPORT – February/March 2024

These two months started badly with the ride on mower becoming unrideable out near the boom gate. A split pin must have fallen off then a part holding the blades up fell off and was badly bent as the moving mower pushed it into the ground. It took two walks back to the container before I could get the blades to stay up so I could ride the mower back to the Centre. I then went home to get our trailer to bring the mower to town for repairs and we all mucked in to get it onto the trailer, not an easy task without proper ramps. Rob used his impressive pump to sort a slow leak in one tyre of our trailer. The mower was back at Skemps in two weeks for immediate use.

Then the Gravograph played up and I brought it home for Andrew to check. He bought a new belt to replace the worn one and it is working fine.

Jeff, Karen and Rob have been working on Marion's Acacia Walk, adding more trees as we obtain them, watering them regularly and adding bigger cages to the earlier planting that are growing so well. Once we know that all trees are doing well we will sort out quality signs and this short walk will remind people of Marion and at the same time inform them about Tasmanian acacias.

February ended with another problem. A water leak had emptied two tanks during a dry spell so I isolated the pipe to the outside toilet and 3/4 filled the main tank from the others. It took two weeks to find the leak as there were no big wet patches to explain where about 7,000 litres had gone. Jeff found a broken pipe behind the outside toilet and the water had all gone into the hole under this building. I found a replacement part at the tip shop then luckily the mini drought broke, just long enough to get all the tanks refilled. There does seem to be a leak in the header tank in the barn and this will not be an easy fix.

Five of us went to the Federation Corridor (x3 images KM) for the last Tuesday determined that the remaining pickets would not defeat us. The trick seemed to be lots of wriggling, a good soaking and then make sure the picket puller was lifting straight up. This worked and the others were removed with one left to mark the bleed taps on the water lines from the settling tank. All the ones that gave us trouble were in a few inches of clay at the bottom and this seemed to cause the issue somehow.

After removing the pickets we were still left with the chicken wire on the ground and tangled in grass making it difficult to remove. While Jeff suggested leaving much of it on the ground Rob had a better idea. He tied a tow rope to the wire and pulled it out with his 4WD Prado. What a sight as the longest strand came out easily over half the fence in one go. With Rob's help I used the grinder to cut this large section into more manageable pieces and

we moved them together so they would be easy to see and avoid if these are still there when the next visitors are about.

Geoff and Karen did an impressive job on a section of the wire held down firmly by grasses tangled through the wire.

Weed spraying and weed pulling, cleaning, fire wood splitting, raking drains along driveway, cutting back tree ferns near roof water tank and various minor repairs have been done as usual and as predicted the small patch of slender thistle on the NW boundary is proving to be an issue.

With all these dramas we have neglected the trails so if you can help by walking a trail please contact me and I will add your name to my Tuesday text message list. Noel Manning

FIELD TRIP – Saturday 3 February – Dragonflies & Damselflies at Four Springs Lake

7 members joined Nigel on this warm day to hunt for the 16 species of dragonflies and damselflies known to inhabit the area with Nigel wondering if the strong wind would deter our quarry. In the end there was plenty to find though he chose not to put his tinny in the water to take us to the far side of the lake. Nigel showed us the coiled flower stem of a water weed that is able to rise and fall with the tide keeping the flower on the water surface.

As well as a lone fisherman, whose luck was out, four workers were making an impressive walking track to the right of the car park heading north, also our chosen path. A backhoe sat atop one of two pile of gravel, each of different coarseness, which was loaded into small, noisy motorized carts. The workers then guided these by walking behind them dumping the gravel at the end of the track and two workers then spread it onto the track while the small cart returned for another load.

Despite the wind 10 species were found while we also noted 15 birds, the larger waders on the water while the smaller ones flitted about perhaps hoping for something from us.

With the water trip cancelled we left early satisfied with another great field trip. Noel Manning

Below is Nigel's talk on the formation of Four Springs Lake given before we set off on our hunt.

Prior to flooding and the formation of Four Springs some 25 years ago, the area was marshy with several small farm dams scattered therein. The present lake is fed by springs and is for the most part only 2-3 metres deep. The deepest part is 5m in depth near the dam. Much of the southern part of the lake is only 1-2 metres in depth.

The shallow nature of the lake has resulted in dense beds of *Vallisneria australis*, eel grass; *Elodea canadensis,* pondweed. The littoral zone supports stands of *Eleocharis sphacelata*, tall spikerush; and Eleocharis acuta, common spike-rush; and *Myriophyllum spp*., water milfoils, are becoming more common.

The beds of pond weeds provide habitats for many species of still water invertebrates including predators such as dragonflies and damselflies. Indeed, 16 species of odonates have been

recorded here (only 28 species are known from Tasmania). The spike-rushes provide excellent oviposition sites for the damselflies and some species of dragonflies.

The pond weeds likewise provide a food supply for waterfowl while the fish (trout, cucumber smelt and eels) are a food source for several piscivorous birds including the White bellied sea-eagle.

Dragonflies Seen

Scientific Name	Common Name
Orthetrum caledonicum	blue skimmer
Austrogomphus guerini	yellow striped hunter
Hermianax papuensis	australian emperor
Hermicordulia tau	tau emerald
Hermicordulia australiae	australian emerald

Mayflies Seen

Scientific Name	Common Name
Ischnura heterosticta tasmanica	common bluetail
Austragrion watsoni	billabongfly
Xanthagrion erythroneurum	red and blue
Austrolestes annulosis	blue ringtail
Austrolestis analis	slender ringtail

Birds Seen

Scientific Name	Common Name
Hirundo neoxena	welcome swallow
Porphyria melanotus	swamphen
Fulica atra	coot
Pelicanus conspicillatus	pelican
Vanellus sp	lapwing
Cygnus atratus	black swan
Coturnix ypsilophera	brown quail
Trachybaptus novaeholandiae, or Poliocephalus poliocephalus	grebe
	domestic fowl
Cractitus torquatus	butcherbird
Anas superciliosa	black duck
Anas gracilis	chestnut teal
Corvus tasmanicus?	Forest ? raven
Calyptorhynchus funereus	yellow-tailed black cockatoo
Platycercus elegans	green rosella

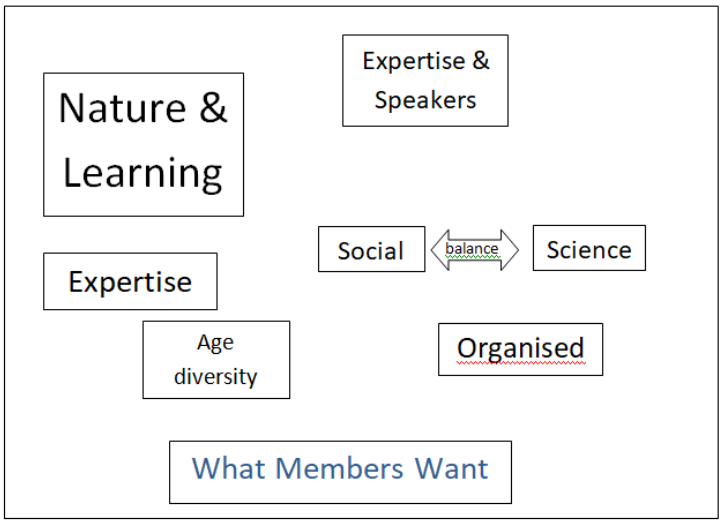
Photo from Nigel Forteath – approved to appear in newsletter taken on a Tuesday at Skemps Top Pond

GENERAL MEETING – Tuesday 6 February - Future Planning for the Club

Initial Workshop

After several weeks of committee discussion, we conducted a Strategic Planning (SP) Workshop at the ordinary general meeting on the 6th Feb 24, where 17 members proposed many good ideas and suggestions. This member participation is essential and we asked for club members to form a Strategic Planning Subcommittee. Seven people volunteered and have been working on plans to realise the proposals identified.

All the detailed ideas from the workshop have been recorded and are guiding the subcommittee; here is a very high-level summary of the workshop outcomes:



Sub-committee

The following people volunteered and joined the subcommittee:

- Katie Fuller (chair)
- Roy Skabo
- Geoff Shannon
- Helen Tait
- Karen Manning
- Andrew Smith
- Rowan Eisner was (unfortunately Rowan has since left Tasmania for an overseas job)

The committee have met twice to date, brainstorming and discussing the workshop ideas to identify the following strategic goals.

1. Maximise the scientific value of the club's activities and collected data.
2. Retain the social strengths of the club and build on these.
3. Renew and increase the club's membership base and engagement of members.
4. Rebrand the club's image whilst retaining its philosophy and values.
5. Update the club's external-facing and internal member communication methods.
6. Maximise Skemp's value as a scientific, social and financial club resource.
7. Improve and modernise Governance and Management processes and practices.

For each of these, the committee have identified a list of tactics to achieve the strategic goals. These come from committee brainstorming and from the members' workshop.
It quickly became clear that each strategic goal depends on the others, so implementing the plans will be an iterative process.
To start, the committee considered that items 4 and 5 should be addressed first, as no 4 gives us the broad direction to follow and 5 will give effective means to tell members what we are doing. Currently actions have been identified and the committee members are working to complete them – for example to investigate how to access the Tasmanian Government's Digital Ready program and to get expert advice on club branding.

What Next

The SP committee will continue the planning, and will communicate with and enlist help from members from time to time. It is essential that the strategies are the members' strategies and also that the members get behind them to make them work – for example by giving feedback, but also by participating in club activities, embracing the changes, being encouraging and positive with comments. The club belongs to all of us, it will take all of us to make it relevant, fun and rewarding.

Andrew Smith

MONTHLY SHORT WALK – Thursday 8 February - Perth Riverwalk

Four members were joined by a former member living nearby on this lovely late summer day. Christine had given me much information about the South Esk River walk below Eskleigh Estate suggesting it was an overgrown fishermen's track with snakes an issue at this time of the year. While awaiting other arrivals Karen and I chatted with two men having a break there and they seemed knowledgeable about the water fowl inhabiting this part of the river and river bank.

Tom and Tina arrived and we continued to chat before taking off along the driveway to Eskleigh Estate with Karen and Tom picking up rubbish as we went.

We soon came to a stile allowing us easy access to the paddocks and I assumed the river also. We walked in short grass and I soon noticed a peacock in the trees along the bank and not long after a number of peacocks with juveniles about the size of forest ravens. While waiting for the others we had seen ducks, geese, welcome swallows, wrens and native hens.

Access to the river was not as easy as I had thought as there was thick riparian vegetation, including crack willow. Fallen trees made it difficult to continue the walk close to the river and a man-made channel also added to the difficulty and we were also dodging large thistles.

Eventually we found a clear path to the water where only two people could stand together comfortably to fish and by the time we had walked as far as the buildings of Eskleigh only one other similar sized easy access place was found. No doubt keen fishermen would have their favourite spots to enter the thick vegetation to wet a line.

Wanting the easy road way we walked up the rise towards the buildings to find there were no gates through the fence near where we chose to end our walk. We did eventually find gates and casually walked the driveway back to the cars.

We said our farewells to the others and thanked Christine for the information and her company on this rather ordinary Thursday walk. Noel Manning

SKEMPS DAY – Sunday 25 February – Walk and talk – Insect Hunt

Ten members attended our walk and talk insect hunt on the property. The day was sunny but very windy which was not helpful when hoping to net a dragonfly or damselfly. We walked to the lower ponds and although we disturbed the grasses to get the insects airborne, we had no luck. Brian located a stonefly and a black badge spider, Nigel found a 16 spotted ladybird, Andrew found a juvenile huntsmen, known as a Tasmanian Football Spider (*Neosparassus patellatus*), Jeff a Tasmanian inchmen/bullant (*Myrmecia esuriens*),

I found a weevil (*Othorhinus cylindrirostris*) pictured above and red slug pictured right (images KM). Also collected were a Whirligig beetle and a katydid. The only birds recorded as seen or heard during our walk were the yellow-tailed black cockatoo and a kookaburra. K Manning

CLEAN-UP AUSTRALIA DAY – Sunday 3 March

Two members of the LFNC joined with nine local residents and members of Litter Free Launnie to participate in the Clean-Up Australia Day event at Newnham Creek. In total over 2 hours, 31 kilograms of litter, 5 supermarket trolleys, 3 upholstered chairs and a bike were removed from the creek. A very successful event. K Manning

GENERAL MEETING –Tuesday 5 March – Dave Allan and Katie Fuller – *Travels Around the Sun*

Andrew introduced members Dave and Kate, both merchant mariners, and their talk on the movement of the earth in relation to the sun and celestial navigation.

Kate introduced herself and Dave who started by asking how many days it took for the earth to travel around the sun with Jeff suggesting 365 and a quarter. The next question was how many times the earth revolved in a year with Andrew suggesting it must be one extra or one less than 365.25.

Dave confirmed there was one extra spin and described why with an average of nearly four minutes each day contributing to the extra. As everyone with a sun dial knows, the time on the dial does not match our watch and we learnt there are four days annually when it does match. So far so good, then barely five minutes into the talk and we start to see the complexity of the earth's movements and why the regular rotation of the earth did not result in a predictable outcome for the novice.

Although four minutes is an average difference in the sundial/watch it can be up to 16 minutes and at midday by our watch the sun will not always be due north. This is known as the equation of time, the difference between our watch and the sun. Next, we heard that a composite picture of the sun taken at the same time and place each day would show the sun forming a tilted figure eight, called an analemma. In the northern hemisphere the small circle of the eight is uppermost while in the south it is at the bottom. Only two or three pictures taken each month are needed to get an image of the analemma.

Dave asked if we knew of the large Tasmanian sundials in public places. Accompanied by pictures, we learnt one is in the Central Highlands, another at Campbell Town made out of old farm machinery and the other at UTAS Hobart with the last two having the figure eight shape etched into the metal to correct the time and these use a beam of light rather than a shadow.

The solar declination is the difference in height of the sun during the year, while the width of the analemma gives us the minutes ahead or behind the sundial will be to our watch. These anomalies in the time are caused by the tilt of the earth, secondly that the rotation around the sun is elliptical rather than circular and thirdly that our solstices, our shortest and longest days, are not on the same day as our nearest and furthest approach to the sun.

After a brief Q & A session in which we learnt the earth is 147M Km from the sun at the closest to 152M Km at the furthest, Dave handed over to Kate who was to explain celestial navigation.

She started by noting that knowing your location is relatively easy if you can see fixed points such as mountains or a lighthouse, while at sea you only had the stars before satellite navigation.

European navigators developed the sextant and later during the talk she passed her beautiful instrument around for us to look at.

The sextant is used to measure the angle from the horizon to a celestial body and while it can be used at any time of the day the calculations are much easier at noon. You can fix a sight on the sun, a star or planet and you can use the moon, though nobody does because it moves too fast.

Holding a sextant Kate showed us the main working parts starting with a telescope, two mirrors, the half mirror half glass and the semicircular index arm with the graduations for getting the angle. When using this instrument there are also filters to protect the eye from the sun.

When taking readings there are various factors affecting the accuracy of the calculations, some in the build and use of the instrument and also the atmosphere. There are screws for adjustment and variations to make when doing the calculations. While the distance from sea level to Kate's eyes, at about 1.7 metres, does not seem much, a sextant used on the deck of a ship is a long way above sea level and an accurate reading, making for another factor to account for in the calculations.

Using the arm of the sextant to move the top mirror you line up the celestial object with the horizon with the bottom of the sun used in the sextant though the data is taken from the center of the sun, another calculation correction. A yearly almanac is used in the final calculations and from a member question this document needs to be updated annually though data for stars changes less year to year.

After a few more member questions Kate asked permission to continue with the more complicated aspects of using a sextant and the enthralled audience easily agreed.

While this was too complicated for me to fully detail here, I will note a few important points. Firstly, the almanac has the declination for the sun, moon, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn and 57 of the brightest stars, with the declination for each celestial body for each hour with corrections for each minute and second within the hour. Another interesting and unexpected factor was to get an accurate position you need to know your approximate location and you get this by dead reckoning. The most important thing I learnt from this very interesting talk is that if ever I go to sea beyond sight of land that beside my almanac and the most expensive sextant I can afford, will be a spare GPS.

After a few more questions, Andrew gave thanks for this wonderful talk and led the acclamation.

Noel Manning

MONTHLY SHORT WALK - Birds in the Gorge - Thursday 7 March

On a pretty, blue-sky, mild, and very still morning eight of us walked high on the tracks south west from the northern side of the Gorge Reserve, and eventually down to the gully track and back to the Gorge Cafe where we spent some further time chatting in that idyllic setting.

The bush was pretty in sparkly autumn light but the 10 am - 12 midday time slot was not conducive to much bird activity.

However we did see a small number of the birds common to the area, blue wrens, grey fantails, scarlet robin, green rosella, eastern spine-bill, owlet-night jar, striated pardalote, currawong and forest raven. Swimming in the basin we saw black duck, and in the gorge picnic grounds, peacocks with

young, blackbirds and sparrows.

We also heard, even if we did not see, an olive whistler, yellow-throated honeyeater, butcher bird, shrike-thrush and brown thornbill.

Geoff identified an old nest of a raptor and had seen a grey (white) goshawk over-head before the beginning of our walk, and he also caught a glimpse of a fire-tail finch on the south east slope of the gully.

I knew of the site of the grey goshawk previously nesting in the high trees in the gully, and noted where the topography of the track offers good viewing positions into the nests.

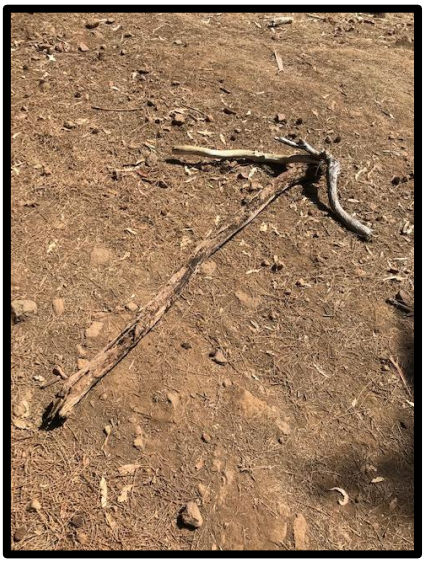
Katie F says that she has heard the call of an owlet-night jar here, and has seen tawny frog-mouths nearby.

Paralysis tick -> ->

The bush was summer-dry, and also reduced in diversity of plants from frequent firing.

I pointed out native raspberry bushes, and Roy identified other common plants of the area.

Helen Tait



Birds identified: Black cockatoo, Butcherbird, Eastern Spinebill, Fantail, Forest Raven, Green Rosella, Grey currawong, Grey goshawk, Grey Shrike-thrush, Olive whistler, Pardalote (yellow throat) Scarlet robin, Thornbill, Yellow throated honeyeater

Also seen were a Brown butterfly and Tina found what she thought was a tick on the ground during our walk, which was identified later as a Paralysis tick (Images KM).

← ← ← Thanks Roy for guiding us back to the carpark

SKEMPS DAY – Sunday 24 March – Removal of remaining fence and plant guards

A small group of dedicated members turned up on this wonderful late March Skemps Day to finishing dismantling the Federation Corridor fence. A huge effort on one particular star picket saw it mangled and still firmly in the ground at lunch. Before lunch we poured water into the growing hole around this most difficult picket hoping to lubricate it.

After lunch it still refused to budge and the water sat in the hole not even flowing away. Four other pickets were

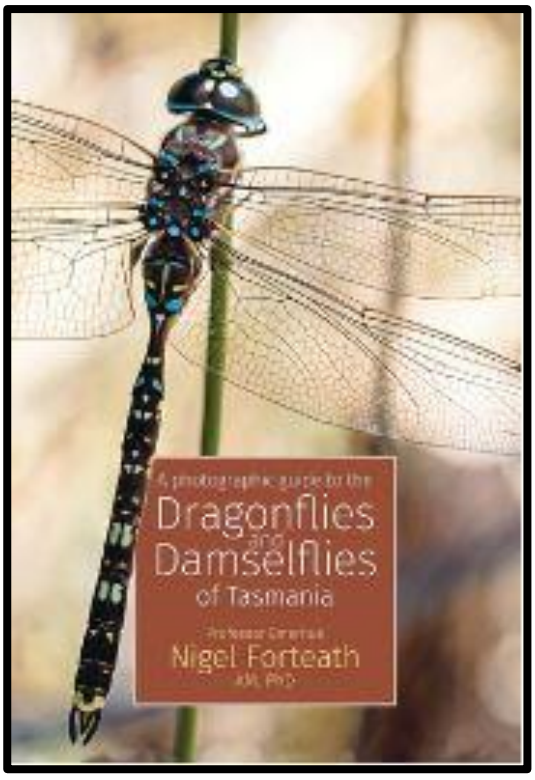
beyond our best effort and remained stubbornly in the ground at knock off time. Some wire strands were removed and wound up and some of the chicken wire also wrapped ready for the tip and these were moved to a growing heap.

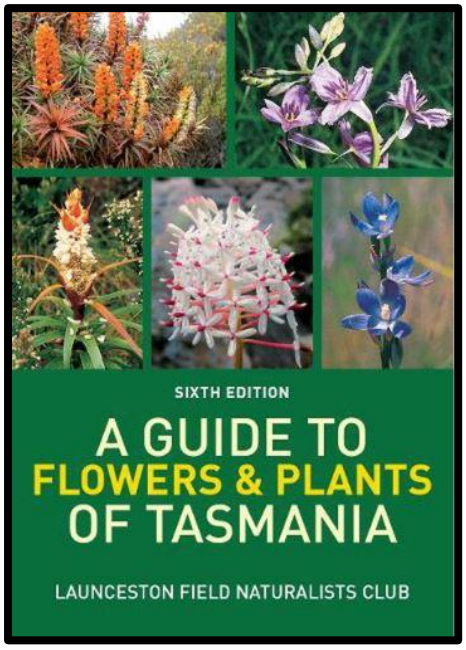
Disappointed to have so many posts still standing and so much wire still tangled in the grass we had a last drink, said our goodbyes then gave ourselves an early mark determined to finish the job on Tuesday. **(Images TMcG)** Noel Manning

Pickets all gone and in storage, chicken wire fencing rolled for reuse and scrappy pieces separated for disposal.

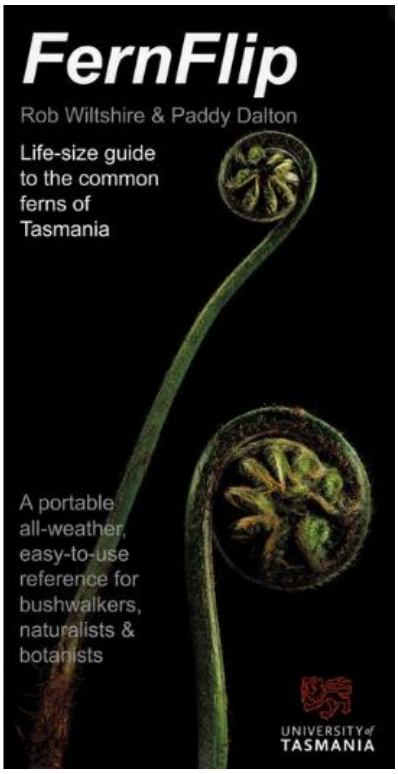
PUBLICATIONS FOR SALE

Copies of Professor Nigel Forteath'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.





Copies of the club's publication ***A Guide to Flowers & Plants of Tasmania*** (6th Edn) are also available for sale for $30 each.



There is also one copy of the ***FernFlip*** available for sale at $8, published by the University of Tasmania, Biological Sciences Department.

Please contact Karen (Club Treasurer) on 0419 596 261 if you are interested in making a purchase.

Additional Information

Club Outings:

- Are held during a weekend following the General Meeting. Until further notice, members should make their own travel arrangement to participate, please contact the Program Coordinator (Helen Tait) 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. Email notification will also be sent.

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. Please contact our Booking Officer, Noel Manning bookings@lfnc.org.au or by phone on 0458 030 767 regarding availability and keys.

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