



Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club Inc.

BULLETIN

Editor: Geoff Fenton EMAIL fenton@southcom.com.au

Quarterly Bulletin

No 330

Apr 2008

The Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club encourages the study of natural history and supports conservation. People of any age and background are welcome as members.

For further information, visit our website <http://www.tasfieldnats.org.au>; write to GPO Box 68, Hobart, 7001; or phone our president, Janet Fenton, on (03) 6239 6443.

Program

General Meetings start at 7:45pm on the first Thursday of the month, in the Life Science Building at the University of Tasmania. Outings are usually held the following weekend, meeting outside the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery entrance in Macquarie Street. Bring lunch and all-weather outdoor gear.

If you are planning to attend an outing but have not been to the prior meeting, please check details. Phone Janet Fenton (03) 6239 6443 as unforeseen changes sometimes occur.

Thu, 1 May	Meeting 7.45pm in Life Sciences building, University of Tas. Speakers will be Bill Wakefield & Els Hayward , who are compiling a book on Tasmanian birds. Their talk is <i>Birds at sea</i> .
Sat, 3 May	Pelagic bird spotting excursion by boat from Tasman Peninsula, led by Bill Wakefield. If you are on the list for this trip and can't make it to the meeting, phone Bill for details (62 280 990). There will also be a shore-based excursion nearby for those who are not going to sea. We will discuss details at the meeting.
Thu, 5 Jun	Meeting 7.45pm in Life Sciences building, University of Tas. Speakers will be Kevin Bonham & Abbey Throssell on <i>The natural history of the southern islands of Japan</i> .
Sun, 8 Jun	Excursion to the <i>Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens</i> .
Thu, 3 Jul	Meeting 7.45pm in Life Sciences building, University of Tas.
Thu, 7 Aug	Meeting 7.45pm in Life Sciences building, University of Tas. University entomologist Peter McQuillan will speak on <i>Insects associated with native plants</i> .
Thu, 4 Sep	Meeting 7.45pm in Life Sciences building, University of Tas. Sarah Lloyd and Ron Nagorecka from Central North Field Nats will present " <i>Dialect, repertoire and imitation: The language of birds</i> ".

Lost orchid rediscovered!

—Kevin Bonham

The midge orchids (*Corunastylis*) are a group of very small, multi-flowered orchids similar to smaller versions of the leek orchids (*Prasophyllum*). There are nine known Tasmanian species.

In August 2007 I had found a small colony of these orchids near a bush track on the outskirts of South Hobart. The plants had finished flowering some months before, so I decided I would go back this autumn and hopefully find out which species they were.

On 1 April 2008 I revisited the colony and soon found five plants that had passed the peak of their flowering season, but were still okay for identification purposes. I took several quick photos and collected a single flower.

Trying to identify the tiny flower at home, I noticed prominent globe-like glands on the petals, and smaller glands on the end of the lateral sepals. This was odd because the species that most closely matched that pattern was *Corunastylis nudiscapa*, a species listed as extinct in Tasmania. I read the description of this species more carefully and found that in *C. nudiscapa* the leaf protrudes within the flowering head, whereas on the other Tasmanian species it ends well below it. Checking my photos I was very excited to find that they showed the leaf protruding within the flowering head too!

After looking at the specimens carefully I could see no reason why they were not the long-lost *C. nudiscapa*, so I emailed Mark Wapstra and Matthew Larcombe to report the find. By midday the next day Hans and Annie Wapstra had visited the site, found more specimens and confirmed my identification. A few days later Hans and Annie found a second small colony about 60 metres from mine.



First collected by J.D. Hooker from a "hill east of Mt Wellington" in 1840, and not collected by anyone since 1852, the Tasmanian population of this orchid (and probably the species full stop, since it is not at all clear whether records of it from Victoria are actually the same thing) was back from the dead!

[**Editor**— Congratulations from TFNC to Kevin for this exciting botanical discovery! The find is featured in *The Mercury*, Friday 18 April, p. 5.]

Jack Thwaites: pioneer bushwalker and conservationist

—a new book by *Simon Kleinig*

The name Jack Thwaites is almost synonymous with the Hobart Walking Club - however this legendary bushman, early environmentalist, lover of maps, moors and mountains, long remembered for his campfire yarns, was also a TFNC member. He served on our committee from the mid 1940s to early 1950s and often spoke to the club about Tasmanian places, history and conservation. Along with the author Simon Kleinig, Jack's daughter Anne has put a lot of effort into this book - as daughters do! You can obtain your copy by phoning Anne on (03) 6227 9363. RRP: \$55.00 paperback, \$65.00 hardback.

Federation Weekend, 17-18-19 October 2008, Weymouth

—to be hosted by **Tasmanian Herpetological Society**

Weymouth is between Georgetown and Bridport, at the mouth of Pipers River.

The leader will be geologist and local shack owner Henry Shannon— apart from studying the geology of the Weymouth/Pipers River area, there will be plenty of opportunity for botanizing and birding. On Sunday we will inspect re-growth nine months after the Bellingham fires of Jan 2008, and compare effects on coastal heath, eucalypt forest and pine plantation.

There will be basic accommodation in the Salvation Army camp at Weymouth. The usual facilities – bunkrooms with mattresses, bring own bedding; male and female ablution block; kitchen facilities and fridge. Bring Friday night meal, and breakfasts & lunches. There is space for tents & campervans. Accommodation costs \$8/person/night.

Saturday night meal will be at *Tam-O-Shanter Golf Club* — two course meal for \$17/person.

Bookings: Sue Woinarski 6382 6280, or zics@bigpond.com

Unfortunately this weekend clashes with this year's *APS Flower Show*!

Australian Plants Society *Wildflower Spectacular* – 17-18-19 Oct 2008

With many of our number heading north for the Federation weekend in October, do we have enough volunteers staying in Hobart to person our usual stand at the Flower Show?

Two volunteers are needed at a time for two hour shifts covering Friday through Sunday, plus setting up and taking down the display. If you can help out, please phone Janet 6239 6443 by 20 May.

The theme this year is '*Native plants for every garden style*'. This presents a fairly open slate for our field nats display. Microscopes are our usual number-one attraction. Insects and flower parts are good under a microscope, so start collecting insects that kamikaze into your windows!

The City Hall is open for setting up on Wed 15 and Thu 16 Oct. The show itself is open to the public on Fri 17, Sat 18, and Sun 19. The display will be taken down late afternoon on Sunday.

Eaglehawk Neck excursion, Feb 2008

—trip report by Kevin Bonham

The advertised "cowry walk" was actually a fizzer as far as the intended stars of the show were concerned. On some trips to Eaglehawk Neck I have found dozens of cowries, and five of Tasmania's six species are recorded from the region, but this time hours of diligent (read: desperate) searching yielded only a mediocre specimen of *Notocypraea angustata* and three very sorry ones of *N. declivis*. However, this mattered little as the many naturalists (and a few overseas visitors) present found an abundance of exciting and often photogenic marine life on the rock platforms.

The first highlight was a wonderful decorator crab that had an attentive crowd gathered around it for perhaps half an hour. Another species of much interest was the common shore eel (*Alabes dorsalis*), which was frequently found alive under rocks in damp shellgrit. Despite the name, this little orange-brown fish is not actually an eel at all, but related to the clingfishes. Among the molluscs, at least three species of sea slug were seen (one of them a very large black one) as well as elephant snails (better known to me as "scooter shells") and a live keyhole limpet, the animal of which is actually several times larger than the shell (making the "limpet" part of its name a severe misnomer).

At lunch, members watched an adult pacific gull trying to educate a sub-adult of similar size concerning what to do when a large live wrasse is flapping around on the rock in front of you. Both gulls were eventually scared away by an otherwise friendly dog but I think by this stage the fish had been devoured.

The following list of finds was compiled by members:-

Molluscs (selected): cowries as above, *Scutus antipodes* (elephant snail), *Waimatea obscura* (volutomitrid), *Chiton pelliserpentis*, *Cryptoplax striata*, *Plaxiphora albida* (all chitons), *Aplysia sydneyensis* (sea slug), helmet *Phalium pyrum*.

Starfish: *Astrostele scabra* (large, multi-armed), sea stars *Patiriella calcar* and *P. exigua*, brittle star *Ophionereis schayeri*, *Coscinasterias muricata*

Sea cucumber: *Chiridota gigas*

Swimming anemone: *Phlyctenactis tuberculosa* and bubble anemone *P. australis*

Sea tulip: *Pyura gibbosa*

Crabs: Decorator crab, NZ half crab *Petrolisthes elongatus*, Hairy stone crab *Lomis hirta*, carapace of red bait crab *Plagusia chabrus*, *Halicarcinus sp.*

Birds: 15 sooty oystercatchers in flock, 2 hooded plovers (?), 2 white faced herons, pacific gulls

Fish: little blenny *Parablennius tasmanianus*, shore eel *Alabes dorsalis*

Some failing cowry-hunters went terrestrial:-

Mike Driessen found the cricket *Bobilla tasmani*, the wingless grasshopper *Phaulacridum vittatum* and the metallic skink *Niveoscincus metallicus*.

I searched for snails on the path down to the Pavement for the first time in about twenty years, and quickly found *Thryasona diemenensis*, *Trocholaoma parvissima*, *Paralaoma mucoides*, *Laomavix collisi* and *Magliaoma "tasmanica"*. Of these, only the first featured in the five species I collected there in the late 1980's.

***Lomis hirta*, the Hairy Stone Crab**

—notes by Don Hird

This species is the only member of its family, Lomisidae, which is endemic to southern Australia. We found that they were common under rocks in the intertidal zone at Eaglehawk Neck in February 2008.

The species was named by Jean-Baptiste Lamarck in 1818, presumably from specimens taken to Europe by early French naturalists.

Most textbooks regarded this species as belonging to the crustacean group Anomura; “half crabs” which also includes hermit crabs, porcelain crabs (in eastern Tasmania this includes the common species introduced from NZ, *Petrolisthes elongatus*), squat lobsters and mole crabs. Their common feature is 3 pairs of walking legs rather than 4 pairs in “true crabs” (Brachyura).

A websearch reveals that recent research suggests separating Lomisidae from the Anomura on the basis of sperm morphology, leaving it in an even more unique taxonomic and biogeographical position. This suggestion was not taken up by the authors of the most recent edition of *A Field Guide to the Crustaceans of Australian Waters*, though.

The only information provided on the ecology of *Lomis* speculated that it filter feeds using its prominent blue mouthparts. Observation of *Petrolisthes* in an aquarium reveals the sweeping movements of comblike mouthparts as filter feeding occurs, an exercise worth repeating with *Lomis*. That Hairy Stone Crabs have little mobility supports the filter feeding hypothesis, and they have good camouflage.

No source I could find made any comment on breeding in *Lomis*.

While I am only an dabbler in marine ecology, there seem to be interesting questions around “does *Lomis* compete with *Petrolisthes* and/or other members of the filter feeding guild?”. At Eaglehawk Neck on relatively exposed shore platforms, I saw none of the latter where *Lomis* could be found under most stones. *Petrolisthes* was found higher up the beach. These results are less than rigorous but seem worthy of follow-up.

Tasmanian Land Conservancy

—from Joanne Naylor, TLC

We are pleased to let you know our latest newsletter is now available on our updated web-site at www.tasland.org.au

This issue features our substantially expanded *Revolving Funds* property programme and updates on our activities in our permanent reserves. On the web-site you will also find further details of protected properties we now have for sale. All properties have outstanding ecological values and are protected with covenants.

From everyone at the TLC we thank you for your support. Should you wish to make a donation to our work, you can do so via the web-site or by calling us on (03) 6225 1399.

***The Tasmanian Naturalist* - first call for articles**

—by Mark Wapstra, Editor

The Tasmanian Naturalist is the Club's annual publication. It includes a range of articles around the general theme of the natural history of Tasmania. Articles can be peer-reviewed scientific manuscripts, short survey reports, naturalist observations and notes, philosophical pieces, book reviews and web site listings.

Last year's volume was delivered late (it was my first edition so I beg readers' forgiveness) but this year I intend for it to go out with the last *Bulletin*. This means I need articles by about July (in case they need review by an expert) so I can do all the fiddly layout. Authors should refer to previous issues (see the Club's web site) for examples of style and content. I'm here to help - contact me if you have an idea for submission. Also contact me if you know of someone who might need encouraging to contribute: I'm happy to follow up.

We are exploring the possibility of a special edition on Tasmanian orchids (as we already have a few articles in preparation) to complement the usual volume so if anyone has ideas on that theme, please get in touch with me: mark@ecotas.com.au, mob 0407 008 685, home (03) 6228 3220.

Liawenee federation weekend, 14~16 March 2008

—report by Janet Fenton

How often have you heard weather reports announcing that Liawenee scored the state's lowest minimum temperature? What a lucky bunch of naturalists we were in mid-March, treated to two days of perfect (even hot), conditions on the Central Plateau. Thirty-nine naturalists from around the state participated in the federation weekend. On Friday evening we congregated at Tiger Hut to hear Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens Seed Bank Coordinator James Wood's enthusiastic presentation about parasitic plants.

Saturday's excursion to Lakes Ada and Augusta took us into a Jurassic dolerite-dominated landscape shaped by a glacial past. Although the area is little over 1150m altitude, the vegetation is largely alpine, with cushion plants and *Astelia* (pineapple grass) abounding. Tasmanian Devil scats and tracks were seen near both lakes, and wombats had made use of the easy digging in the parabolic dunes, - prime wombat real estate including lake-shore views. The dunes formed from glacial outwash which worked its way to the lee side of both these shallow glacio-fluvial lakes (Pharo and Kirkpatrick, 1994). A White-lipped snake, a Tiger snake and a Macleay's Swallowtail Butterfly seen by various members of the party caused some excitement.

At our lunch spot near Lake Augusta, James spotted something shiny on the ground. It was a dead Jewel beetle that turned out to be the piece de resistance of the trip - later confirmed as the Miena Jewel Beetle, *Castiarina insculpta*. The species was rediscovered when a couple of specimens were found in 2004. This is only the fifth known specimen!

The lakeshore was graced with a few clumps of Pencil Pine. Mary was the only adult who took to the water, but she had to paddle out a long way to really get wet. The children managed it with lots of splashing. A Mountain Katydid, looking truly prehistoric as it plodded across a sandblow, caused a flurry of camera clicking. Another star was a golden cockroach, a magnificent beast with 'armour-plating' of a bronzy hue. A dead specimen was almost iridescent emerald underneath. Clusters of flatworms (planarians) were seen under rocks in the lake, and small ostracods and bivalves were also in the shallows.

An Ichneumon wasp was observed having a hard time with a small and very determined black ant, which had grasped the wasp firmly by the antenna and would not let go. Another Ichneumon was seen on a black ants' nest. Are these wasps raiding ants' nests and soldier ants defending?

Leaving the lake behind, the next spot of interest was one of a number of rocky ridges where dolerite columns outcrop to the east of the road. Many species of plants clung in the cliff crevices and flourished in the shelter afforded by the ridge. A large Swamp Darner dragonfly posed on a rock-face for eager

cameras. An unusual Brown Tree Frog (*Litoria ewingii*) was found with the usual markings, but bright green!

After a barbeque on Saturday evening at Tiger Hut, World Heritage Area Zoologist Michael Driessen enlarged on his 'Animals that hop and sing' presentation with an emphasis on adaptations to high altitude. He also recounted something of the history of the naturalists, eccentric and otherwise, who have studied grasshoppers in the past. Later in the evening, a Hairy Cicada at the window at Tiger Hut interrupted scrutiny and speculation about the Jewel beetle. Much clicking of digital cameras ensued.

On Sunday we drove north to Pine Lake, a picturesque shallow lake fringed by ancient Pencil Pines. We wandered down the boardwalk admiring an echidna on the way. Michael explained that the dieback which caused concern around the lake resulting in temporary closure of the track, is now thought to be attributable to various causes including drought stress. Two species of *Phytophthora* were isolated in the vicinity but occurrences were too scarce to account for all of the dieback.

Anaspides were found in ponds around the lake and in an inflowing stream. Brook Trout in the Lake itself made the presence of *Anaspides* unlikely. Many small and seedling Celery-top Pines were coming up around the lake, and a larger specimen was absolutely plastered with fruit. The fruit are interesting. The red fleshy parts are bracts of the cone, while the white bits are areas of the stem swollen around the seed as protection.

If you haven't yet come across a 'FLAB', go to the excursion photos on the TFNC website to see Abbey's pictures. These Furry Legged Assassin Bugs look as though they have brooms on their hind legs! Kevin found a cluster of immatures and an adult under a rock near Tiger Hut. The usual occupation of these creatures is climbing trees in pursuit of ants.

With several excursion sites and so many ardent naturalists, there were many species observations. A collated list will appear on our website

Excursion photos can be seen at <http://www.tasfieldnats.org.au/ExcnPhotos/ExcnPhotos.htm>.

