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Website: <http://morwellnp.pangaeon.net>

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Happy New Year! We hope everyone had an enjoyable Christmas and New Year and that Santa brought you lots of exciting goodies. Our new year wish for the Friends group is that we get a good increase in membership numbers and that a few more people will become part of the 'regulars' that turn up at the monthly activities.

CHRISTMAS BREAK-UP

Our Christmas break-up, for those that couldn't make it, was a great success. There were some retired members from the friends group that were able to make it as well as some people from the Friends at Baw Baw and the SGAP Group. Don't forget the 'regulars', plus some of the other members.

After an excellent spit roast (that had been prepared elsewhere) and salads, we went for a night walk to Lyndon's clearing. To the best of my knowledge, there wasn't a huge amount of wild life seen apart from some Brushtail possums, Ringtail possums and Sugar Gliders while some of the tail-enders spotted an owl tending a nest in a hollow in one of the big gums. There had been a koala in a gum tree near the car park earlier in the evening. We found it when it started testing it's vocal chords. An enjoyable evening was had by all.

DECEMBER & JANUARY ACTIVITIES

During the morning of our Christmas break-up, we had our monthly activity. The 'regulars' met at the seedling shed and potted up six hundred odd plants. These included Silver wattle and Blackwood. It was a very warm day and we were very happy when lunchtime arrived so that we could take a breather.

On the 7th January Dorothy, Danny, Wendy, Ken and Rob went back to the seedling shed and potted up some more plants. There are now 1680 plants potted up. These consist of Blackwood, Silver wattle, Swamp Gum and Messmate. The group also tidied up around the shed and managed to get the watering system working again. Well done to all of those that participated.

On January 21st, the activity will be seed collecting. We are to meet at Braniffs Rd at 10am. Everyone is welcome. Don't forget your food, drink and sunscreen.

Commonest Plants and Animals in Morwell National Park

by Ken Harris

10th January 2001

Over the last three years I have been building up a lot of detailed distribution information for the plants and animals in Morwell National Park. The information is recorded, by dividing each of the tracks through the park into sections and recording all species recorded within each section. The total number of sections for which I now have information is 120.

I have all this information recorded on the Morwell National Park Web Site, but in addition, I maintain all the data in a spreadsheet on the computer. It recently occurred to me that this spreadsheet gave me a simple means to extract a list of all the commonest species of both plants and animals and that is the basis of this article. Looking at the other end of the scale is not so productive. There are a large number of species with only single records, so that a list of the rarest species is not very meaningful.

The first list I prepared is of the plants. Please note the list does not represent numbers of plants. It is an index of how widespread each species is within the park boundaries. I have listed the top ten plants and I am not surprised to find two weeds Cat's Ear and Sweet Vernal Grass in the top three. Cat's Ear is one of the most widespread of all weeds in the state and Sweet Vernal Grass (to the detriment of hay fever sufferers) is far the commonest introduced grass in this area. The other plant in the top three is Austral Bracken, which many think of as a weed, although it is in fact a native species. Only one other weed figures in the top ten, and that is the little Yellow Wood-Sorrel.

It is interesting to see that two wattle, Blackwood and Varnish Wattle figure in the list, but that none of the Eucalypt species is there, despite the extent to which the park is dominated by Eucalypt forest. The Forest Clematis which brightens the park each spring, especially on the Clematis Track, figures high on the list and one inconspicuous little plant, the Ivy-Leaf Violet, which is common throughout the forested areas, is also in the list.

Commonest Flowering Plants and Ferns			
	Species	Common Name	Sections
1	#Hypochoeris radicata	Cat's Ear	109
2	Pteridium esculentum	Austral Bracken	106
3	#Anthoxanthum odoratum	Sweet Vernal Grass	100
4	Cassinia longifolia	Shiny Cassinia	94
5	Clematis glycinoides	Forest Clematis	86
6	Acacia melanoxylon	Blackwood	84
7	Acacia verniciflua	Varnish Wattle	75
8	Coprosma quadrifida	Prickly Currant-bush	73
9	Viola hederacea	Ivy-leaf Violet	73
10	#Oxalis corniculata	Yellow Wood-Sorrel	69

= Introduced Species

Noticing that no eucalypts and no orchids figured in the top ten, although both groups are important components of the park flora, I ran separate checks on these two groups.

It is not surprising to find that Messmate is our most widespread eucalypt. Here are the top five eucalypts in the park:

Commonest Eucalyptus Trees			
	Species	Common Name	Sections
1	<i>Eucalyptus obliqua</i>	Messmate	62
2	<i>Eucalyptus cypellocarpa</i>	Mountain Grey Gum	48
3	<i>Eucalyptus globulus</i>	Blue Gum	46
4	<i>Eucalyptus radiata</i>	Narrow-leaf Peppermint	39
5	<i>Eucalyptus bridgesiana</i>	But But	29

There were no surprises for me in the top five orchids. The Veined Helmet-orchid is a well hidden plant with its flower only 3cm high, but once familiar with the leaves it can be located in many forested parts of the park. The orchid you will see the most in this list is the Hyacinth Orchid, which is our most flamboyant and conspicuous orchid, flowering now (January) in most forested sections of the park.

Commonest Orchids			
	Species	Common Name	Sections
1	<i>Corybas diemenicus</i>	Veined Helmet-orchid	39
2	<i>Chiloglottis valida</i>	Common Bird-orchid	26
3	<i>Caladenia carnea</i>	Pink Fingers	25
4	<i>Dipodium roseum</i>	Hyacinth Orchid	25
5	<i>Pterostylis alpina</i>	Mountain Greenhood	22

I could include a list for fungi, but my recording is so incomplete here that there was little meaning in including this data. I did check for the commonest species, which is *Amanita umbrinella*, which I have recorded in 22 walk sections (in forested areas).

I then turned my attention to the animals. Here the recording is very far from complete, but the results are interesting nevertheless. Starting with the mammals, the Wombat comes out top of the list. This is not because they are seen that often, but I have recorded their presence based on fresh droppings. The others in the top five, are the four mammals most likely to be seen in the park in daytime. The Koala leads this group, followed by the Eastern Grey Kangaroo (only seen in the Billys Creek sector), the Echidna, which can turn up anywhere and the Swamp Wallaby, which is commonest in the Fosters Gully sector, but is also often found in the Billys Creek sector.

Commonest Mammals			
	Species	Common Name	Sections
1	<i>Vombatus ursinus</i>	Common wombat	49
2	<i>Phascolarctos cinereus</i>	Koala	33
3	<i>Macropus giganteus</i>	Grey kangaroo	16
4	<i>Tachyglossus aculeatus</i>	Short-beaked echidna	13
5	<i>Wallabia bicolor</i>	Swamp wallaby	12

The top ten birds range in size from the tiny little Brown Thornbill, to the Kookaburra and Crimson Rosella. Most of these species are the birds one most often sees in the Park. The Fan-Tailed Cuckoo is not so easy to see, but during the spring and early summer, it gives itself away with its distinctive call. This cuckoo is usually only present during the spring and summer, but all the others on the list are present the whole year round.

Commonest Birds			
	Species	Common Name	Sections
1	<i>Platycercus elegans</i>	Crimson Rosella	68
2	<i>Gymnorhina tibicen</i>	Australian magpie	51
3	<i>Colluricincla harmonica</i>	Grey shrike-thrush	51
4	<i>Rhipidura fuliginosa</i>	Grey fantail	48
5	<i>Dacelo novaeguineae</i>	Laughing kookaburra	48
6	<i>Malurus cyaneus</i>	Superb fairy-wren	48
7	<i>Cuculus pyrrhophanus</i>	Fan-tailed cuckoo	47
8	<i>Eopsaltria australis</i>	Eastern yellow robin	43
9	<i>Acanthus pusilla</i>	Brown thornbill	41
10	<i>Corvus mellori</i>	Little raven	28

Reptiles and Amphibians are hard to survey accurately, so that my information for these species is very limited. I have only listed the top three and the best is the Copperhead Snake, but this I have only recorded in 6 out of the 120 sections. I do not consider that these figures give any meaningful information as to which are really the commonest reptiles and frogs in the park.

Commonest Reptiles and Amphibians			
	Species	Common Name	Sections
1	<i>Austrelaps superbus</i>	Copperhead Snake	6
2	<i>Eulamprus tympanum</i>	Southern Water-skink	5
3	<i>Nannoscincus maccoyi</i>	Maccoy's Skink	3

Finally I looked at the butterflies and was pleased to find that one native species the Common Brown wins the top place despite the presence of the ubiquitous, introduced Small White. The Common Brown is usually found in forested areas, whereas the Small White is most often found among the introduced weeds, especially along Billys Creek.

Commonest Butterflies			
	Species	Common Name	Sections
1	<i>Heteronympha merope</i>	Common brown	66
2	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	Small white	48
3	<i>Geitoneura klugi</i>	Klug's xenica	25
4	<i>Zizinia otis</i>	Common grass blue	22
5	<i>Geitoneura acanthi</i>	Ringed xenica	14