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Friends of Morwell National Park Inc.

Newsletter – June 2005

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

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Welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter. My thanks go out to Ken Harris for submitting the following article on some recent walks in the Park. Apart from being an interesting read, it also saves me from having to fill in all the blank spaces myself, a time consuming exercise which lately I have had trouble finding the time and inspiration for. A quick and very enjoyable trip to the Grampians last weekend was followed by work commitments in Portland, a long and boring (at night and in the rain) 7 hour drive each way, that I have to look forward to again next week.

Spotlight Walking in the Park by Ken Harris

The Latrobe Valley Field Naturalists Club asked me lead a spotlight walk through Fosters Gully on April 23rd. I borrowed the Park spotlight from Rob Howell, and I wanted to be sure that it would last the complete walk on a full charge, so I did a trial run last Wednesday. Fay and I walked the same route with the spotlight after dark on Wednesday evening and it was a bit disappointing, but we did manage to spot one pair of Greater Gliders, *Petauroides volans*, which are a very special inhabitant of the park. They are a dark possum with a white throat and under parts and a long bushy tail that usually hangs down. They have a gliding membrane between their fore and hind legs and can glide quite a distance between trees although I have never been lucky enough to see one glide. We did establish that the spotlight battery lasted well through the complete Fosters Gully Walk.

On the Saturday evening a good size party from the Field Nats turned up for a barbecue followed by a spotlight walk. The barbecue was a disaster, the gas barbecue in the picnic area must have been low on gas, and there was barely enough heat to cook anything and most had a very scanty meal. Then we started on the walk. There were several spotlights in the party besides mine and it was just as well, because I did not manage to spot anything. The first sighting was of perhaps the commonest nocturnal mammal in the park, the Common Ring-tailed Possum *Pseudochirus peregrinus*. This is a smallish possum with a slender prehensile tail, with a white outer-half to the tail. The party spotted four different ringtails, one of them very close and we all got a good look at it.

I took the lead again and hadn't walked a hundred metres before I was called back again and this time someone had spotted a pair of Greater Gliders. They vanished before I could see them, but most of the party did get a sighting and I at least had seen a pair a few days earlier.

The rest of the walk was disappointing and I got back to the picnic area without seeing anything. Some of the party were quite a long way back by this time and when two of them finally arrived, they said that the rest were looking at a large owl just a little back along the track. I grabbed the spotlight and hurried back to where I could see the spotlights and this time was in time to see and identify through binoculars a beautiful Powerful Owl, *Ninox strenua*, perched on a branch high in a Eucalyptus tree. Apparently the bird had first been seen flying and landing in the tree. Most of the party got a good look at this, the largest Australian Owl (which apparently rate Greater Glider as its favourite prey). This one had its prey on the branch with it but it was hard to identify. I think it could have been a Common Brush-tailed Possum *Trichosorus vulpecula*. Eventually it flew off while still lit by the spotlights and it looked enormous and very white in flight.

The Powerful Owl turned a moderate spotlight walk into something special, but it wasn't over yet. Most of us were standing around the picnic area talking, but Fay walked around the edge listening carefully and carrying a spotlight and hearing some movement, she found a Bobuck or Mountain Possum

Trichosorus caninus in the bushes very close to the picnic area. This one may have been scavenging for scraps left from the abortive barbecue earlier. Most of the party got to see it and after it had disappeared into the bush, Fay heard and located a second one nearby and the rest of the party got even better views of this one.



The spotlight walk was finally declared a great success, even though the leader never actually spotted anything until it was pointed out to him.

Since I still had the spotlight in my possession, I made the opportunity for a couple more forays into the park. My next sortie was to Silvertop Hill. Exploring the track with the spotlight was a bit disappointing, but I did get to see one Brush-tailed Possum and along the eastern boundary there were about three rabbits on the track.

Soon after this Rob rang me to arrange the return of the spotlight, so that night I used it one last time. This time I parked in Braniff's Road and walked the Weir Track. I walked the whole way past the weir, to the foot of Blue Gum Hill, but the walk was disappointing as far as nocturnal mammals were concerned. I didn't even spot a Koala. The mammals I did see were Eastern Grey Kangaroos *Macropus giganteus*, 3 on the way in and 4 on the way back (perhaps some overlap there) and 2 Swamp Wallabies *Wallabia bicolor* on the Potato Flats. The mammals may have been disappointing, but there was one very special sighting. Just as I got onto the Pipeline Track on the way in, I spotted a Tawny Frogmouth *Podargus strigoides*, sitting on a low branch of a large Eucalypt. It stayed very still in the spotlight and I managed (with

difficulty) to hold camera and spotlight on the bird and got this picture.

June Activity

Our activity this month is a track maintenance exercise on the Muttonwood Creek Track, in the south-west corner of the Park. This will involve a little bit of overgrowth removal and a little bit of clearing and a little bit of earthworks using hand tools and a little bit of whatever else we find that needs a little bit of work. Nothing too strenuous, hopefully. We will meet at 10am on Sunday, June 19 in the Kerry Road (Foster's Gully) picnic area to arrange some transport to the site. Don't forget to bring along lunch and refreshments, and suitable clothing and footwear for the weather conditions on the day and the type of work we are undertaking.

What's Going On?

- ❖ A nice drop of rain over the last couple of days (13mm), though not nearly as much as Western Victoria which had double that on Wednesday night alone and much more on Friday. Some follow up over the next couple of days would be excellent.
- ❖ Good to see some recognition for one of our long-time members and treasurer, Wendy Steenberg, featuring on the cover of the Churchill News as the Wattle Club's Volunteer of the Year.
- ❖ Thanks to all those who helped out at our last activity, dispatching some ivy on the Zig Zag Track and removing heaps of tree guards from above, below and on Potato Flat.
- ❖ Apologies for the lateness of the paper copies of last months newsletter. An unrecognised electronic glitch at Parks Victoria prevented the email copy being received by Rob in time for posting before last months activity.
- ❖ Fingers crossed that Parks Victoria will be successful in gaining funding for tree planting in steep country. Blue Gum Hill may yet be on our agenda again in the near future.
- ❖ Hopefully, residents along Jumbuk Road will come to an agreement with Grand Ridge Plantations re log trucks, so that the area of pines we are awaiting clearance of can proceed this season.