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Friends of Morwell National Park Inc.

Newsletter – January 2008

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

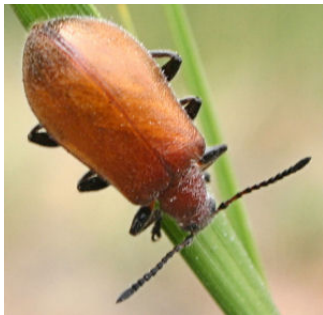
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G'day everyone, best of the New Year to you all and welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter. I hope you all received that nice drop of rain before Christmas; we scored about 3 inches in Boolarra to take our total for the year up to about 920mm, somewhere about average. It has certainly made the grass keep growing; my patch of weeds generally makes it to sheep paddock status before I get around to finding out if the mower still works. The sooner I convert the grassy areas to garden beds, the better. I expect the recent hot, dry spell will soon slow it all down, anyhow.

Roaming 'round the Ridge **December Activity Report**

Now that I've managed to make an appearance at an activity, the reporting duties have quickly come back to me. Ken has still done the right thing by me, though, and provided some photos to illustrate the findings on the day. Cathy and I arrived at Kerry Road at about the nominated time, to find a few members already there and a few more still to arrive. Formalities quickly over, Rob readied himself for the cooking duties while the rest of us wandered off for a stroll over to the western boundary and back along the near sections of Stringybark Ridge. There was no real agenda, although we hoped to spy some of the birds that frequent the transition area from woodland to farmland, and to see if any Elbow Orchids were in flower upon the Ridge.

We were off to a good start with Danny finding a Rufous Fantail at the top of the steps towards the base of the Ridge. As we approached the fence line along the boundary, Dusky Woodswallows were evident roosting in the bare branches of tall trees near the boundary, occasionally flying out over the grassland chasing insects. Further up the fence line we could see parrots in the paddock, but couldn't get close enough for a positive ID. We presume they were Blue-winged Parrots, as Ken explains in his article below. A couple of insects captured our attention for a bit, with Ken putting his camera in action. One was a beetle we had already seen before and featured in the November 2007 newsletter, the other, shown at left, is *Ecnolagria grandis*, the Honey-brown Beetle.



Leaving the fence line, we headed back to the Stringybark Ridge Track in search of orchids, hoping for some Elbow Orchids to show themselves. It wasn't to be however, as the only orchids we saw were a few budding Hyacinth Orchids and some Flying Ducks still in reasonable condition in the colony near the top of the Ridge. Some nice Fringe Lilies nearby caught the eye with their brilliant purple petals.

We made our way back to the picnic ground to find Rob had cooked up a storm and the party was in full swing. The weather was warm, the company good, the food tasty, the flies friendly and the scenery soothing. The Koala in the tree across the gully kept his eye on us and the Kookaburras and Thrushes were quick to spot any leftovers. It was a thoroughly pleasant way to spend our last afternoon in the Park for 2007.

January Activity

Our first activity for 2008 will be a return to the traditional Weir Walk. We will meet at the Junction Road gate at 10am on Sunday, January 20 for transport up to the weir area. The plan is to search for and destroy any weeds we might come across growing in the riparian zone alongside the creek. Likely culprits will be Tutsan, Willows, Teasel, thistles and Ragwort, although there are a number of others we might have to sort out as well. Be prepared with suitable clothing and footwear for walking in and beside the creek, bring your own lunch and refreshments and secateurs might be handy if you have some. A range of tools, weed killer and a limited number of waders will be available.

Birds and a new plant in the Park

by Ken Harris

On 1st December the Latrobe Valley Field Naturalists Club carries out an annual bird count, covering most of the important bird sites in the local area. I was part of a team surveying Mathison Park, Morwell National Park and the Brodribb Rd Wetlands. Our visit to Morwell NP was particularly good this year. We started in Fosters Gully but mostly surveyed up on Stringybark Ridge, particularly on the Western Boundary track.

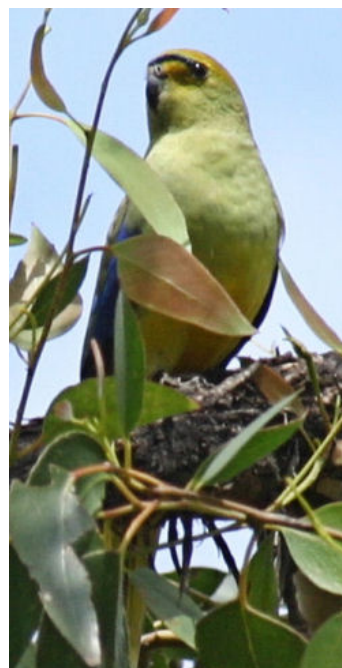
When crossing Fosters Gully, we found an Eastern Yellow Robin feeding young in a nest (only 5 metres from where we saw the same thing last year). Nearby we saw a newly fledged Fantail Cuckoo, begging for food and being obliged by a pair of Brown Thornbills. The thornbills are so tiny beside their foster child, each 'parent' being only about the size of the cuckoo's head.

Going on to the Western Boundary track, we found that the Dusky Woodswallows are in residence in that corner as they usually are, but then came the best sighting of the day. Back on 14th February 2006, I had seen a single Blue-winged Parrot in this corner of the park, flying up from the adjacent fields into a tree in the park. On Saturday we found at least 10 Blue-winged Parrots. We saw them feeding on the ground in the paddocks, but also in the trees in the park close to the boundary. We had a strong suspicion that this is a little nesting colony of these beautiful little parrots.

Another bird that is rarely seen in the Park was seen at the same spot. This was Richard's Pipit, a bird of flat open grassland, not a habitat available in the park. Two pipits were seen in the paddocks alongside the park boundary. We had also seen them in Mathison Park, where the picture below was taken. Other birds in the same vicinity included Jacky Winter (this is the only corner of the park we ever see Jackie Winter) and a small flock of Varied Sitellas.

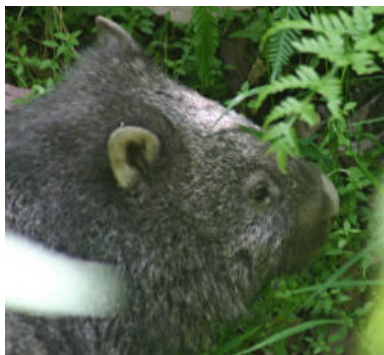


Walking back through the forest on the Stringybark Ridge Track, I spotted a small plant growing by the side of the track, which I recognised immediately as the Cut-leaf Xanthosia – *Xanthosia dissecta*. This is not perhaps the most exciting of plants, but it is the first time this species (which is a native species) has ever been seen in Morwell National Park. I was only able to locate a single plant, but will return and search the area to see if there are more of them.



Crossing back over Fosters Gully, we took the vehicle track which bypasses the steps and goes just outside the park and

along there we found a healthy young Wombat out of its burrow in daylight.



We extended our survey along Billys Creek. We didn't see anything very special, until we got right to the end of the track, where the steep ascent to Blue Gum Hill begins. We walked 30 metres up the track and sat on the grass



to watch for birds and here we had great success. A Satin Flycatcher was calling around us continuously, but it was overshadowed, when a lot of noise from other birds drew attention to a Peregrine Falcon, which dashed across the Billys Creek Valley, circled three times in the clear sky above and then flew out of sight. Attention was turned back to the Satin Flycatchers and to our delight their nest was spotted high in a Manna Gum. Satin Flycatchers share incubation and we were able to watch the female fly in to the nest and call the male off so that she could take her share at keeping the eggs warm!