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Friends of Morwell National Park Inc.

Newsletter – February 2010

Website: <http://morwellnp.pangaean.net>
A0016319X

Hello everyone and welcome to this month's newsletter. Hope the holiday period has been good for you and if you have had the opportunity you have enjoyed the holiday break. This month I got to travel to China and experience the beauty and culture of China. So I sadly missed the January activity and Ken has been good to me by writing a report about the activity. Thank you Ken.

I have also received correspondence from Martin O'Brien from the Department of Sustainability and Environment who is trying to locate the Brown Gerygone (as known as the Brown Warbler) within the park and the local area. Previously they were only located in Sale and the east Gippsland areas but they have been more recently been located into West Gippsland.

A description of the Brown Gerygone is given below:

Brown Gerygone (Brown Warbler)

General Appearance: A very small, brown bird, to 10 cm long. Plumage predominately brown on top of head, back and upper wings. Throat, breast and belly off-white with pale beige on the flanks. Head characterized by blue-grey on cheeks and face, a white chin, a white eyebrow stripe (extending to just above the eye), and a dark grey stripe from the eye to the beak.

Tail: Broad, about half as long as body, square tipped. Grey-brown, becoming black towards the white tip.

Eyes: Red.

Beak: Short and very narrow, more or less straight. Black

Legs: Dark brown.

Sexes: Similar.

Call: A melodic, warbling twitter.

Juveniles: Similar to adults but with a brown eye.

Eggs: Off-white to pink with darker speckles (Sept-Feb).

Nest: A dome made of bark, fallen leaves, grass and other plant material. Base has a long slender extension and side entrance has a pronounced hood.

Diet: Insects, generally gathered amongst leaves and branches of trees and larger shrubs.

Environment: Wet forests and rain forests.

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He is keen to hear the thoughts and advice of the relevant bird people in the friends group. In particular:

- What is the earliest record of BGs at Morwell National Park?
- Is the species now a permanent resident in Gippsland/the park?
- Have you any records from other Gippsland sites?
- Do you have any breeding records of the species for your area
- What do you consider is the 'typical' habitat for BGs in Gippsland (some examples of sites would be good) eg. The old Atlas of Victorian Birds (1987) says they are ' .. the only Victorian bird species dependent on Lilly Pilly-Kanooka rainforest gullies ... they are common in pockets of these lowland rainforests ...' (we suspect they also utilise other wet forest habitats).

Martin has recently visited the Uralla Nature Reserve at Trafalgar and parks around Balook, both these areas have Gerygone's as well (they observed an active nest at Uralla). If you have a birding contact for Uralla reserve that would be great (He is aware it is a Trust for Nature managed location).



He is also trying to find a contact for the La Trobe Valley Field Naturalists Club if you know anyone. He has previously spoken to Bon Thompson many years ago but does not have any details of current members.

He is also looking for tips of who to talk to for other areas of suitable habitat for Gerygone's in West Gippsland.

Martin's contact details are:

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January Activity report

We had two different tasks planned for our January activity and we divided them between morning and afternoon.

First we drove up to Reidy's Road and entered the park at its highest point. We left the vehicles half way across the paddocks and walked down to the saddle behind Blue Gum Hill. Our aim was to collect Blue Gum seeds and this has been a productive spot for us on previous occasions. This time I think we did better than ever before. Our favourite tree was less productive than previously, having shed several low growing branches that gave us access to the seed, but we found six or so other trees with accessible (or almost accessible) branches and several of them were laden with fruit. We found gum nuts from three seasons still on the trees. The most recent were too young, but there were lots of the previous year's fruit and some trees had quite a lot from the year before that. Mike and John spent most of the time hanging on hard to branches that threatened to lift them off the ground, while the rest of us gathered the gum nuts as fast as we could.

I think the fruits of our labours could have doubled the best we have achieved previously several bags of gum nuts were handed over to Jenny to spread in the sheds to dry and release their seed over the next weeks.

It was getting towards lunch time and we indicated that we would dine in the Junction Road carpark. Some decided to walk down via the Blue Gum Hill Track and we let them go thinking they had to walk right to Junction Road. We took pity on them however and drove in as far as the first creek crossing and while we spread out our lunches, Reg drove further in to meet and collect the walkers. Lunch started well, but the



heavens suddenly opened with a short but fierce rain squall. Here are most of the party sheltering under a Silver Wattle. Yes I do occasionally take photos that are not plants or animals!

The afternoon was devoted to completing our December task and checking the rest of the nest boxes along Billys Creek. The first few were quite empty and we continued to cover the entrances of half of them (the even numbered boxes) with boards with smaller holes (2.5 cm) in the hope of attracting Pardalotes or more Agile Antechinus. We began to find some with green leaves in just like some that we checked

in December and we hoped that meant that they were being visited by more Sugar Gliders. Otherwise all I found was some caterpillars and a few large huntsman spiders. Then one box that I opened looked a bit different. There wasn't much light, but it looked as if there was a lot of dark grey fur almost filling the bottom of the box. The ladder angle made photography difficult, so I had to guess the range and just aim and shoot. This is what I found. I thought it might have been another Sugar Glider, but the lack of any markings on the back led Mike to suggest that it was a Ringtail Possum. The ear which is all that we could see that had any form seemed to fit with it being a ringtail.

A few others climbed the ladder to look, including Jenny our new ranger (middle front of the picture above if you haven't



met her yet). Then we put the lid back and left the possum in peace for the rest of the day.

We located and checked all the remaining boxes, but no other special finds were made. We also found both the previously undiscovered boxes from the earlier placement. We now have all 6 of them located, although one of them was hanging on by only one nail. We had come prepared to re-fix it and I climbed the ladder and attempted to carry out the repairs. I thought I had the new top nail far enough in to hold it, but when I tried to adjust the base of the box, it came crashing down, fortunately missing, albeit narrowly, my supporters Mike and John who were holding the ladder. We moved the ladder and repositioned the box lower and to the right of the ladder to give me a good base for hammering the nails and eventually I got the box re-secured to its tree.

We also checked the two small boxes (1inch holes) one of which held the Agile Antechinus last year. Both were still packed full of old nest material, but nothing was fresh and no-one seemed to be in residence.

We now have the locations of all the boxes 41 in all, mapped and should be better able to find them and check them on future occasions. Between this year and last year, we have now found one box each being used by Agile Antechinus, Sugar Glider and probably Ringtail Possum, which makes the installation of the boxes a huge success and it is great to find all these animals living in an area that used to be paddocks and that we have revegetated over the last 20 years.



While checking the last box, Margaret discovered a rather strange-looking furry white caterpillar. When I examined it, I thought at first that it had a fungus growing out of it, but after photographing it, I realised that it was the caterpillar of the Common Anthelid – *Anthela acuta*, and it had been parasitised by a Braconid Wasp. These tiny wasps lay their eggs in various caterpillars and their larvae feed on the caterpillar from within. When they have finished growing, they make a cocoon outside their host and pupate inside the cocoons. What we were seeing was a mass of empty cocoons standing up all over the caterpillar (about 150 of them). They were all open, so the new brood of Braconid Wasps have flown off looking for another caterpillar to lay their eggs in.

That completed our work for the day, but I had been thinking about how to confirm that it was indeed a Ringtail Possum in the nest box. I had placed some sticks to mark the route to the nest-box with the possum in it (number 29) and I decided to return at sunset with my camera and hope to catch the possum emerging from its roost.

The weather wasn't very kind to me and there were showers on and off all afternoon, so I set out equipped with my camera with flash and tripod, a spotlight, a folding chair to sit on and a large umbrella (borrowed from my son). It was raining as I set all this up by the tree and I made quite a noise as I hurried to erect the tripod. I glanced at the nest-box and found there was a little face looking to see what I was doing. I got the binoculars on it and so knew that there was indeed a Ringtail in the box as I settled down to wait for darkness to encourage the possum out.

The rain eased after a time but water continued to drip from the trees, but I was able to put the umbrella down for a while and after about half-an-hour, that little face re-appeared at the box entrance and I was able to get a few photos. Then the rain came back. I had hoped to get pictures of the possum outside the box, but in that weather I decided to be content with what I had and I packed up my gear and retreated leaving the possum in peace. Here are a couple of pictures that prove that box 29 was indeed occupied by a Ringtail Possum:



Ken Harris

February Activity

10.00am Sunday 21th February

The group will meet at the Junction Road entrance to continue the battle against Tutsan in Billy's Creek.

You will need clothing and footwear suitable (waders or gumboots if you have them) for the terrain and weather conditions on the day.

