

HFNC excursion to Portland, 18 September 2006

Dave Munro

The meeting place was the Cape Nelson Lighthouse. The Field Nats came in two-by-two. Janeen and Ken were followed by Lyn and Dave. They were just about to start exploring when along came Yvonne and Reto.

These six walked round the cottages and along the cliff walks for a short distance. The sea, which can be very wild and energetic on this headland was today unusually flat. Nonetheless the cliff scenes were attractive subjects for the photographers. We remarked on the sturdy architecture and the obviously recent paint job; the blobs of paint on all the pathways were evidence of this.

A Singing Honeyeater was heard and sighted from the car park. The only plant in flower and recognised was the tiny white flowered Matted Pratia.

When Di and Rod appeared lunchtime was declared. We found a quiet clearing in the Cape Nelson Picnic Area where we ate under a Soap Mallee (*Euc. diversifolia*). (Why "Soap" Mallee?). A couple of Xanthorrhoea flower spikes seemed to have been influenced by Mr. Curly.

We witnessed a Brown Falcon being harassed by a smaller hawk, possibly an Australian Hobby.

After lunch we started to make our way back to Portland stopping to view the "Volcanic Isles" where we had a great viewing of a pair of Australian Hobbies gliding along the cliff face.

We had a walk to the "Enchanted Forest", a wonderful entanglement of mature Moonah (*Melaleuca lanceolata*) under a much eroded and dissected cliff face.

On a small patch of sand in a tiny bay we spotted a rather large greyish seal. It was alive but not moving very much. As none of us could see an ear it was decided that it was neither a Fur Seal nor a Sea-lion. It did not have the slim "reptilian" look of a Leopard Seal. The true identity was unresolved. (Subsequently identified as a young Elephant Seal).

A list of some of the plants seen in flower is attached. There were many more that eluded us. We so seldom go down to the sea!

At 4 o'clock we met Andy Govanstone and family in Portland and drove out to the Gannet Rookery at Point Danger. (We were also joined by two more from Hamilton, Liz and another).

Andy gave us run-down of the history of this, the only Gannet Rookery on mainland Australia. Nearby Laurence Rocks have long been used by breeding Gannets but became overcrowded about 1998. Some 30 young birds landed on Pt. Danger and attempted to breed but were unsuccessful. Subsequently their numbers have increased to about 10 000 pairs. Successful breeding has been achieved in most years.

On the day of our visit only a couple of hundred birds were on the nesting site. Andy had expected more. Sometimes Foxes or White Breasted Sea-eagles disturb the birds and take some eggs. Fox baiting inside the enclosure will start soon.

We were very fortunate to be able to get close to the birds and to be able to see their subtle light tan colouring and unusual geometrical facial markings. A few of the couples demonstrated how the term "necking" came into being. Just watching them flying around and landing was quite absorbing so it was with some reluctance that we decided it was time to head for home.