

HFNC Excursion to Lower Glenelg National Park 19-20 April 2008

Rod Bird

Members met at **Pritchard's Landing** at around 9.30 am. Reto & Yvonne had camped overnight at **Forest Camp South**, and had organised the hiring on canoes, but others could not get there on Friday evening. At around 10 am, after a little mix-up with some waiting at different parts of the large Pritchard's campground, unaware of where the others were, we started to canoe down river to Forest Camp South (distance 11 km). There were only 4 canoes, with Rod & Diane, John & Glenys, Reto & Yvonne, and Mark (from DPI). We planned to meet walkers (Sam Greiner, Jenny and 2 others) at lunch time at Skipworth Springs but our late start meant we missed them. The walkers were starting from Forest Camp and walking to Pritchard's on the Great SW Walk.

One objective was to make a survey of numbers of Azure Kingfishers as we passed along the banks. We had a tally of 16 at the end of the day, and had some fine views of these beautiful little birds. They roost near the water under cover of overhanging bushes and, unless one travels quite close to the river's edge, one is unlikely to see them. They will not fly until one gets quite close. We often were warned of their presence by the 'plop' as they dived into the water behind us, sometimes to obtain a small fish or insect but sometimes just to bathe.

We were lucky to have glorious fine weather. After 3.7 km we reached Skipworth Springs and had lunch there. As usual, there were Gang Gang cockatoos in this area. We reached Forest Camp South after a further 7.1 km paddle – some of us were a little soft and welcomed the sight of the landing. The drivers were then ferried back to Pritchards to collect the cars. While some of us were doing that others were observing birds at the camp. One good sighting was White-bellied Cuckoo-Shrike. Back at Forest Camp South we set up camp for the night and had a meal on the lower camp area by the river. Gang Gang Cockatoos settled down to roost nearby.

After dinner we did a spotlight walk for an hour or so, walking out to the east. We saw 8 Brushtail Possums and heard quite close what we believe to have been Yellow-bellied Gliders calling. No night birds seen. However, away in the distance was heard the call of Powerful Owls – both male and female, by the sound of the calls.

Early next morning Rod went fishing for an hour or so but caught only small bream and returned them to the river. A pair of Azure Kingfishers was of more interest, as they performed a courtship routine on a log near the waterside. Jane Hayes drove down early from Hamilton to meet us at Forest Camp, and members of Portland FNC also arrived early (incl. Max & Lois Phillips). They enjoyed birdwatching along the forest walks while we packed up the camp and made a leisurely start to the next leg of the canoe trip – down to **Sapling Creek**.

This morning's paddle saw more interest in counting kingfishers, with the result that by the time we reached Sapling Creek (5.1 km distant) our total for the weekend was 30 Azure Kingfishers, including at least one juvenile bird. The total distance travelled was 16 km but we did not monitor both sides all of the time (perhaps 70%), nor could we be sure that we saw all the birds on the banks we surveyed (one needs to paddle quite close to the banks to observe the birds, and be concentrating only on that task, which we were not) so the actual numbers would have been more, and probably around 50 per 16 km. We saw nearly 2 birds per km paddled and that means there is a healthy population here.

Yvonne & Reto saw a Nankeen Night Heron on this stage. This section is notable for the appearance of *E. leucolxon* ssp. *megalocarpa* on the limestone cliffs. There is a bend of the river, west bank, about 2 km up river from Sapling creek, where the trees overhang the water. The capsules of this tree are very large and the trunks are characteristically Yellow Gum (white with yellowish parts).

We encountered a few fishermen along the way but the fishing was slow and the river traffic quiet.

At Sapling Springs Max Phillips gave some of us a lift back to our vehicles at Forest Camp South. The canoes were put on the trailer and taken back to Forest Camp South and one loaded onto a vehicle to go back to Hamilton while the others on the trailer were returned to the hire centre.

This was a very enjoyable weekend and the weather was superb.