

HFNC Mt Napier State Park excursion – report for 21 March 2015

Rod Bird

Saturday 21 March 2015 was devoted to the setting up of 10 “remote” cameras at those sites, with Rod, Reto & Yvonne, Dave & Lyn, Ken & Janeen, John & Glenys and Hillary in the party. Rod had scouted the route in the previous weekend. The main area was the forest in the NW corner, east of Menzel’s track at Murroa Corner and along Cole Track as far as the E-W stone fence. The sites varied from tall Manna Gum (*E. viminalis*)/Blackwood (*A. melanoxylon*) forest to deep bracken and grassy woodland.

The forest contains Manna Gum as the sole eucalypt, with Blackwood, Tree Everlasting (*Ozothamnus ferrugineus*) and Cherry Ballart (*Exocarpos cupressiformis*) as the dominant tall vegetation. There are some Sweet Bursaria (*Bursaria spinosa*) and (in only a few places), Black Wattles (*A. mearnsii*) as the only other taller vegetation. Austral Bracken (*Pteridium esculentum*) is the principal understorey flora, with Silver Tussock (*Poa labillardierei*) in rocky barriers.

Members of HFNC have undertaken fauna studies in the park in years past. The studies from 1974-1995 (*The Victorian Naturalist* 1997) employed cage traps, pit-fall traps, harp bat traps, predator scat analysis, spotlight surveys and daylight observations. The study in 2004 employed hair-tube samplers.

Recent availability and application of remote cameras for fauna survey work has allowed trap-shy animals to be more readily detected and surveys to be extended over a longer period, also increasing the chance of detecting more species. Members of HFNC conducted camera-surveys in the Bear SF in 2012 & 2014, and also installed 10 fauna nest boxes in trees (see report on the HFNC website).

We are interested in establishing whether species such as Feather-tailed Glider (last seen from the Wannon Flora Reserve in 1977), Yellow-footed Antechinus, Southern Brown Bandicoot and Yellow-bellied Glider occur in the Mt Napier SP. We have had a chance sighting of Brush-tailed Phascogale (Tuan) in the Mt Napier SP at night in 1977 and a cat-captured Tuan in adjacent areas in 1989, but we have no knowledge of any recent sightings in the SW region.

The camera equipment and set-up

Five ScoutGuard IR Model SG550V and 5 Model SG550V-31B infra-red cameras were available. These were installed on a suitable tree and aimed at a lure placed on a tree adjacent.

The lures are of 2 types, both placed together in separate containers.

1. An odourous mixture of oils (linseed 79%, pistachio 20% and vanilla essence 1%) placed in plastic containers with holes in the sides to release the odour.
2. A 50/50 mixture of peanut butter and honey – placed in a metal tea-strainer

Site 1.

Track stop – 0.3 km from Murroa Corner

Camera site – Camera set at 1.3 m height and lure near the foot of an opposite tree.

Habitat – Manna Gum & Cherry Ballart with bracken amongst lava stone.

Site 2.

Track stop – 0.5 km from Murroa Corner, at intersection with an E-W track back to Menzels Track.

Camera site – Camera set at 1.3 m and lure near the foot of a tree 2 m distant.

Habitat – Dense bracken and Manna Gum

Site 3.

Track stop – 0.5 km and 100 m east along track to a cut log, then north ~100 m to tall Manna Gums.

Camera site – Camera set at 1.5 m on a small tree and lure set at 2.3 m on a Manna Gum 3 m distant.

Habitat – open, almost bare ground and very large, tall Manna Gum and some Blackwood.

Site 4.

Track stop – 0.7 km from Murroa Cnr on E-W track to Menzels Track, near a very large old log,

Camera site – Camera set 1.5 m on a small tree and the lure set at 2.3 m on a larger tree 1.5 m distant.

Habitat – open bracken, Manna Gum, Cherry Ballart and stone.

Site 5.

Track stop – 1.5 km on Cole Tk, just before the jump up.

Camera site – Camera set at 0.6 m on one tree and the lure near the base of a tree 2 m distant.

Habitat – open, almost bare understorey and very large, tall Manna Gum and some Blackwood.

Site 6.

Track stop – 2.0 km on Cole Tk, near trail in to old quarry.

Camera site – Camera set at 1.5 m on one tree and the lure set at 2.3 m on a large tree 2.5 m distant.

Habitat – Big trees and moderately dense bracken and stone.

Site 7

Track stop – 3.1 km on Cole Tk.

Camera site – Camera set at 1.5 m on one tree and the lure set near the base of another tree 2 m distant

Habitat – Tall Manna Gum and moderately dense bracken

Site 8.

Track stop – 3.5 km on Cole Tk, off a fire parking bay.

Camera site – Camera set at 1.5 m on one tree and the lure set near the base of another tree 2 m distant.

Habitat – Tall Manna Gum and moderately dense bracken

Site 9.

Track stop – 3.9 km on Cole Tk, off a fire parking bay.

Camera site – Camera set at 1.3 m on one tree and the lure set up at the base of another tree 2 m distant.

Habitat – medium sized Manna Gum and dense, tall bracken near barrier stone

Site 10.

Track stop – 4.4 km on Cole Tk just past the E-W stone fence, in open ground

Camera site – Camera set up at 1.5 m on one tree and lure set at 2.3 m on another tree 2.5 m distant.

Habitat – medium sized Manna Gum and dense, tall bracken near barrier stone

Observations

The weather was fine, warm and calm. The forest floor was very dry and no leeches were seen.

We had morning tea near Site 6, the old quarry. That was an interesting volcanic feature, for it reveals the remnant of a dome, with a layer of bluestone perhaps 70 cm thick and scoria over and perhaps under.

The layers above the bluestone seem to have been mostly removed. Rubbish had been dumped there but PV had removed most of that about 12 years ago. We removed bottles from near the Cole Track.

We observed 8 or 9 Koalas along the way. They have had a detrimental impact on the Manna Gums, with many dead and others stripped of leaves.

Our lunch spot was in a clear spot near the old stone fence (Site 10).

Our day concluded at 3 pm, after we stopped on the way back to Murroa Corner to investigate a small 'blister-like' cave on the edge of Cole Track, some 500 m north of the old stone wall. This cave seems to extend for about 5 m and has a clearance of less than a metre between floor and ceiling. This cave does not appear to have been noted by Lionel Elmore when he surveyed the geological features of the area in the early 1970s.



Photo: Shallow Cave on Cole Track.



Photo: Camera and lure set up at Site 10.