

# HFNC Excursion to Lake Muirhead, Mt William Swamp and nearby wetlands, and home through the Grampians NP via Yarram Gap and Mirranatwa Gap.

Sunday 14 August 2011

**Leader:** Rod Bird

**Attendees** (13) : Rod Bird & Diane Luhrs, David & Lyn Munro, Meri Macpherson, Shirley Gregory, Sally Purnell, Steve Clark, Yvonne Ingeme & Reto Zollinger, Hilary Turner, Ivor & Ruth Graney (PFNC).

The day started at 9 am at the Hamilton Visitor Centre. David and Lyn Munro joined the convoy at Dunkeld. The route travelled was along Burnside Rd, Red Hill Rd, Toora Rd, Parrie Yallock Rd, Helens Rd, Yarram Gap Rd, Sandhills Rd, back to Mt Elliot Rd, Yarram Gap Rd. Our tour took us through the farming country on the east and west of the southern Grampians with views over the inundated farmlands, crops under water and dams overflowing. Wetlands that, for years dry, were now full and supporting vast numbers of waterbirds.

Wetland straddling Parrie Yallock Rd – our first stop was about 0.5 km from Helens Rd. We spent an hour looking with binoculars and scopes for the Painted Snipe that Rod and Diane had seen on Friday. Ivor Graney identified the presence of the Common Froglet and the Spotted Marsh Frogs by their calls.

Birds seen here included 20 or more Blue-winged Parrots, a few Red-kneed Dotterels lurking in the swamp vegetation and a Swamp Harrier repeatedly harrying a flock of about 100 Eurasian Coot – purely for fun, we thought. We had perhaps a brief look at a shape among the water plants that may have been a resting Painted Snipe (see the attached table for species sighted) – Rod & Diane had seen a pair here 2 days previously.

Mt William Swamp – we entered a farm property on Sandhills Rd (with the owner's permission) and enjoyed extended views over the swamp across to Mt William. The high ridge of the sand dune was a perfect place for our picnic lunch on this warm, calm, sunny, late-winter's day. The landholder – Ken – had informed Rod on Friday 12th that the lake's water level this year was the highest he had seen in 60 years. He also said we should have been here 2 months ago to see the huge flocks of duck! We wandered along the edge of the lake, among the old River Red Gums that fringe the original edge of the Big Swamp. There were relatively few waterbirds today but we did sight a Brolga and a Great Egret among the Black Swans and ducks. Birds seen on Mt William Swamp are shown in the table.

Lake Muirhead – our stop was an elevated spot on the northern end fronting Yarram Gap Rd. The water level was high, 40 m from the road, flooding quite a lot of lake bed that, by the appearance of fence lines, is not usually flooded. As with Mt William Swamp, the actual public reserve is located in the middle of the lake and the edges have all been sold off. Public access is, therefore, very difficult.

Grampians NP, Yarram Gap – we stopped at two places along the Yarram Gap Rd in the Grampians. A rich variety of spring flowers kept us busy. Some of the plants seen:

Varnish Wattle (*A. verniciflua*), Ploughshare Wattle (*A. gunnii*) Dagger Hakea (*Hakea teretifolia*), Showy Bossia (*Bosseae cinerea*), Flame Heath (*Astroloma conostephioides*), Tall Sundew (*Drosera* sp.), Pink Heath (*Epacris impressa*), Bundled Guinea-flower (*Hibbertia* sp.), Pink Bells (*Tetratheca ciliata*), Correa (*C. reflexa*) Flame Grevillea (*Grevillea dimorpha*), Hovea (*H. linearis*), Dusty Miller (*Spyridium vexilliferum*), Beard Heath (*Leucopogon virgatus*) and the Tall Greenhood (*Pterostylis diminuta*) and Dwarf Greenhood (*P. nana*). Many Red Beak Orchid (*Pyrorchis nigricans*) leaves covered the ground.

The bush had been burned in the 2006 wildfire. Oddly, the vegetation was more dense on the northern side than the south side of the road, perhaps due to previous fire history (perhaps more severe on the southern side?). Five years post-fire, the vegetation was not old or dense enough to provide effective habitat for many fauna species.

Our last stop was at Yarram Gap – a walk to the summit through Stringybark., with partial views back over the wetlands that we had visited during our day. A White-eared honeyeater was seen at the summit. Other birds seen or heard included: Scarlet Robin, Yellow Robin, Pied Currawong, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters. As the Dunkeld-Halls Gap Rd was still closed we returned to Hamilton via the Mirranatwa Gap Rd.

Scenes from Mt William Swamp



Lake Muirhead (right) – from Yarram Gap Rd, looking towards Mt Abrupt.



Grampians NP, Yarram Gap – wildflowers and Showy Bosseae (below)



HFNC Bird lists for Mt William Swamp, Lake Muirhead & wetland adjacent to Parrie-Yalloak Rd										
Wetland	Mt William Swamp				Lake Muirhead			Parrie-Yalloak Swamp		
Observer	RB	JH	HFNC		RB	JH	HFNC		HFNC	
Survey day date	2	22	12&14		2	22	12& 14		12-14	
Survey month & year	Feb11	Feb11	Aug11		Feb11	Feb11	Aug11		Aug11	
Water depth	M	M	M		H	H	H		M	
Water % cover	60	90	80		90	95	95		90	
<b>WATERBIRDS</b>										
Australasian Grebe			P				P		P	
Hoary-headed Grebe					7B					
Little Pied Cormorant							1			
White-necked Heron			P						P	
White-faced Heron		1	P						P	
Great Egret			1							
Australian White Ibis	P	4	P							
Straw-necked Ibis	P	50	P		2	1				
Black Swan	P	45B	PB		6	10	PB		P	
Australian Shelduck	P	195	P		70	84	P		P	
Australian Wood Duck	P		P		20	68	P			
Musk Duck			1							
Pacific Black Duck	P		P		5	23	P		P	
Grey Teal	P		P		20	104B	P		P	
Chestnut Teal	P		P		50	15	P		P	
Australasian Shoveler			P			2	P		P	
Pink-eared Duck					10B					
Hardhead			P				P		P	
Purple Swamphen			P						P	
Dusky Moorhen							P			
Eurasian Coot									~100	
Brolga			1							
Australian Spotted Crake									1	
Masked Lapwing		6	P		4		P		P	
Painted Snipe									2	
Red-kneed Dotterel									30	
Black-winged Stilt		48	20						20	
Silver Gull			P		20	10	P		P	
<b>BIRDS OF PREY</b>										
Black-shouldered Kite			1						1	
Whistling Kite			2							
Swamp Harrier									1	
Brown Falcon			2				P		2	
Nankeen Kestrel			1							
Collared Sparrowhawk			2							
<b>OTHER SPECIES</b>										
Crested Pigeon									1	
Galah			P				P			
Long-billed Corella			P				P		P	
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo			P				P			
Crimson Rosella			P				P			
Eastern Rosella							P			
Red-rumped Parrot							P			
Blue-winged Parrot									~60	
Superb Fairy-wren			P				P		P	
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike			P							
Australian Magpie			P						P	
Willy Wagtail							P		P	
Little Raven							P		P	
Magpie-lark			P				P		P	
Yellow-rumped Thornbill			P				P			
Spotted Pardalote			P							
Striated Pardalote			P							
White-plumed Honeyeater			P				P			
White-fronted Chat							P		P	
Golden-headed Cisticola			P							
Little Grassbird							P		P	
Welcome Swallow			P				P		P	
Australasian Pipit			P						P	
<b>INTRODUCED SPECIES</b>										
Common Skylark			P						P	
Common Blackbird			P							
European Goldfinch			P						P	

P = present, B = breeding, RB = Rod Bird, JH = Jane Hayes