

Report on HFNC excursion to Saltwater Swamp & Killarney beach, 14 March 2009

Rod Bird

This excursion was attended by Diane & Rod, Yvonne & Reto, Ken & Janeen, and Prue Leeming.

We travelled in 2 vehicles through Penshurst (Black Swan and Ibis, but no Brolga, were seen on the flats west of the town). The day was cool and overcast, with heavy rain clouds to the west and a strong westerly breeze.

Our first stop was at Rutledges Cutting. This is found by travelling down a road south from the Princes Highway, adjacent to Tower Hill, and then turning east along a track that runs along the back of the coastal dune. After about 2 km a small parking area signals the arrival at Rutledge Cutting.

Rutledge Cutting – we walked over the low dune to the cutting. This is the natural outlet of Saltwater Swamp into the ocean. There is a steep dune on the SW corner of Saltwater Swamp and an open sand flat about 200 m long and wide constitutes the cutting to the sea. In winter, the level of water rises in Saltwater Swamp until the tide and waves breach the sand bar and allows an outflow of fresh water and an inflow of salt water.

Saltwater Swamp – we walked along the southern edge and the highlights there were Double-banded Plovers (about 100 birds) and Red-capped Plovers (several hundred birds) feeding on the wide expanse of damp, exposed flats. The Double-banded Plovers (see photo) are migrants from New Zealand where they breed. Among the other species seen (see list) were 18 Blue-winged Parrots, feeding in the vegetation fringing the swamp.

Killarney Beach east from the Cutting – after about 2 hours we walked across the dune to the beach and then back (west) along it to Rutledge Cutting and our vehicles. We saw 3 Hooded Plovers on that 1 km of beach.

Killarney Beach east from the Boat Ramp car park – after our picnic lunch at the Cutting we drove back to the Killarney Beach, sighting 3 Wedge-tailed Eagles on the way.

We walked east along the beach for about 1.5 km and then returned. On that section we saw 3 Hooded Plovers and about 200 Sanderling, 100 Red-capped Plover and 20 Red-necked Stint. The Sanderling was 'new' to some of our party. These are about 25% larger than the Stint, which they resemble. They have a clean white front and face, grey back feathers fringed with white (Stints have darker, streaked backs and a stooping habit), black marks on the shoulder and a very wide white bar on the upper surface of each wing, seen in flight.

Sanderlings are usually seen in a small flock, often with Stints, foraging for insects and sandhoppers on the beach, following the retreating water from the last wave and then scurrying back as the next wash approaches.

About 50 Crested Terns were roosting on off-shore rocks. We found a dead Little Penguin and saw 15 White-faced Herons along the coast (see list).

Port Fairy – we had coffee and cake at The Hub in Port Fairy – to celebrate Reto's birthday.

Bird List for Saltwater Swamp:

| | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| Australian Magpie | Hoary-headed Grebe (22) |
| Australian Shelduck (~10) | Hooded Plover (6) |
| Australian Pelican (3) | Masked Lapwing (20) |
| Black Swan (6) | Musk Duck (3) |
| Blue-winged Parrot (18) | Pacific Black Duck (20) |
| Brown Falcon (1) | Rd-capped Plover (100s) |
| Caspian Tern (7) | Silver Gull (10) |
| Crested Tern (~200) | Straw-necked Ibis (60) |
| Double-band Plover (~100) | White-fronted Chat (1) |

Bird List for Killarney Beach 1.5 km east from Killarney Boat Ramp:

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Crested Tern (~50) | Raven (many) |
| Fairy Penguin (1 dead) | Sanderling (~200) |
| Hooded Plover (3) | Silver Gull (many) |
| Red-capped Plover (~100) | White-faced Heron (~15) |
| Red-necked Stint (~20) | Willie Wagtail |

Photos from Saltwater swamp and Killarney Beach:

- Double-banded Plover, partial breeding plumage.
- Killarney Beach east of the Cutting, looking east.
- A small group of Sanderling on Killarney Beach.
- A larger group of Sanderling on Killarney Beach.
- Double-banded Plover, non-breeding plumage.
- Hooded Plovers at Killarney Beach.
- Red-necked Stint on Killarney Beach.

