

HFNC Excursion to Cooks Rd, Southern Grampians on 19th April, 2026

Diane Luhrs

Participants: Albert Turner, Sue Henry, Virginia Keiller, Joanne Logan, Janeen Samuel, Yvonne Ingeme, Reto Zollinger, Rod Bird, Diane Luhrs.

The idea for this excursion was put forward by Neil Doran who thought HFNC Inc members should visit this place before the notified planned burn occurred. The aim was to examine and record the vegetation before the burn and then revisit the area in the following year to observe the impact of the burn. As it turned out, we managed to visit this site one day before the planned burn was listed to occur (as shown by the notice pinned to one of the trees at the start of Cooks Road from the Victoria Valley Rd). We also noted that this burn was to be a private burn.

We started the excursion by meeting most attendees at the Hamilton Visitor Centre and then departing by 9.30 am for Dunkeld where we were to meet up with Neil, Jo and Virginia before travelling to Cooks Rd. We waited for ten minutes. Unfortunately, Neil was not able to attend and was unable to get a message to us. So, those present travelled in convoy to the intersection of Cooks Rd and the Victoria Valley Rd where we parked along the Victoria Valley Rd.

Cooks Rd crosses the Victoria Valley Rd not far south of the old Rifle Range (a reliable spot for spotting native orchids). We chose to walk west along Cooks Rd and thoroughly enjoyed our time here. We turned south along an intersecting path and then turned east when we met the Grampians Peaks Trail. This then took us back to Victoria Valley Rd along which we walked back to our vehicles. We made our lunch stop near here.

The following photographs show the upper canopy trees of *Eucalyptus baxteri*, and *Callitris rhomboidea* and tall shrubs *Banksia marginata*. We also saw one splendid *E. camaldulensis* and a number of Cherry Ballart – *Exocarpus cupressiformis*.



Cooks Rd looking westwards – the starting point for our HFNC excursion with Stringybark – *Eucalyptus baxteri*



Oyster Bay Pine – *Callitris rhomboidea*



Silver Banksia – *Banksia marginata*

We were delighted to see a number of low heathy bushes in flower after what has been a very dry summer and autumn. Flowering shrubs included: *Leucopogon* sp., *Styphelia* sp., *Epacris* sp., *Correa* sp. and *Hibbertia* sp. Four different orchids were spotted and identified by Jo.



Leucopogon sp.



Cranberry Heath – *Styphelia humifusa*



Flame Heath – *Astroloma conostephioides*



Common Correa – *Correa reflexa*



Common Heath – *Epacris impressa*



Epacris impressa buds



Allocasuarina female cone forming



Bundled Guinea-flower – *Hibbertia fasciculata*



Fringed Hare Orchid – *Leporella fimbriatum*, the first of many



More Fringed Hare Orchids X3





Sharp Midge Orchid – *Corunastylis despectens* X3



Corunastylis morrisii – Bearded Midge Orchid X2 (from above)



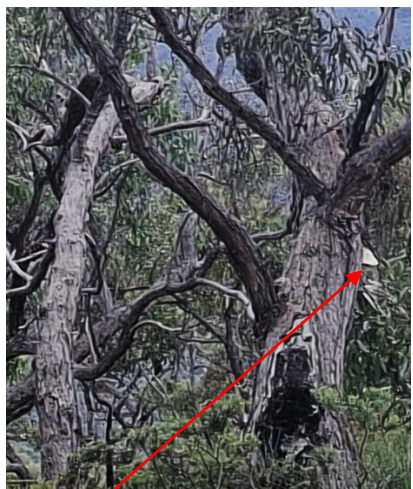
(from the side)



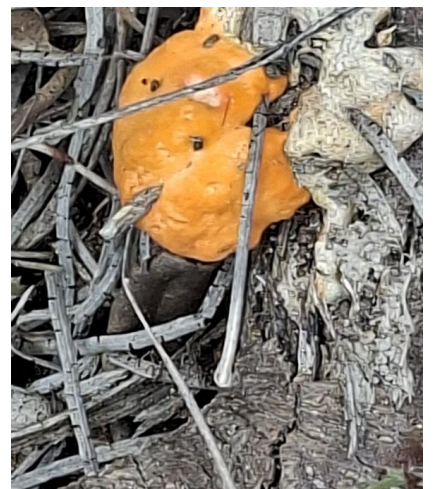
Small Mosquito Orchid leaf and short bud – *Acianthus pusillus*



Red-tipped Greenhood – *Pterostylis rubescens*



Conk/Punk fungus on Stringybark



Orange fungus on *Allocasuarina*



Yvonne inspects the raked base of the habitat tree – some work to protect the tree during the burn-off – but is it enough?



A many-hollowed habitat tree – without any protective clearing around its base



Walking south along Cooks Rd



View south

After lunch we followed Virginia and Jo onto the eastern section of Cooks Rd – a section they know well from their many orchid forays in the past. In this section of the walk, we saw more Fringed Hare Orchids and fungi.

We didn't see many birds on our walks but to finish our walk, a pair of Gang Gang Cockatoos sat beautifully on a branch for us to photograph them. We had seen them on the morning walk, but those were on the move. Other birds seen (and/or heard) included Wedge-tailed Eagles, Superb Fairy-wrens, New Holland Honeyeaters, Pied Currawong, Grey Shrike Thrush, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, Grey Fantail and Eastern Spinebill.



Walking east towards Mt Abrupt





An interesting *Lichenomphalina*



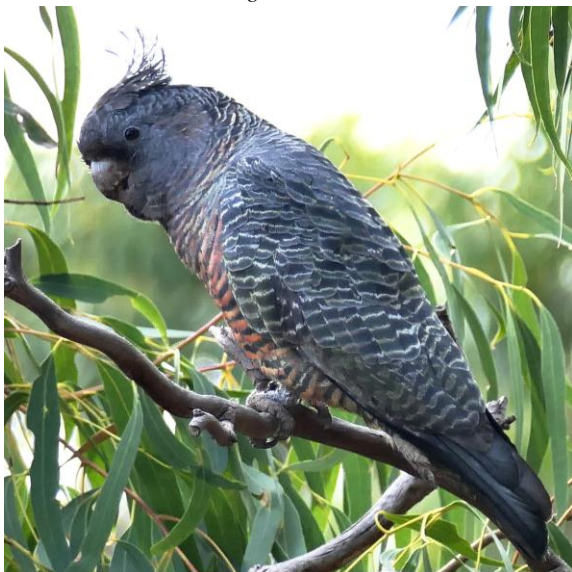
Horse-dung Fungus *Pisolithus arrhizus*
(produces a good brown dye for textiles)



A Puffball



Tall Bluebells – *Wahlenbergia stricta*



A pair of Gang Gang Cockatoos on the Rifle Range
Left: Female Gang Gang Cockatoo