

HFNC Excursion to Warrnambool coastline & Kelly Swamp, 23 July 2016

Rod Bird, Diane Luhrs & Dave Munro

Participants: Predictions of wet and wild weather caused some members to stay at home but John & Glenys Cayley, Lyn & Dave Munro, Ken Grimes and Janeen Samuel, Rod Bird & Diane Luhrs attended and we all had a satisfying day, finding it quite easy to dodge the odd shower and associated cold blasts.

Logan's Beach. Most of the group left Hamilton at 9.30 am and assembled at Logan's Beach, Warrnambool, at about 11 am, hoping to see Right Whales in the bay. While it had been sunny for much of the early morning, a gale hit us as we arrived. However, a few minutes later the rain passed and we looked out to sea from the boardwalk. No whales were to be seen, although a veteran watcher that we met informed us that whales had been seen on previous days and were also seen in the Portland Harbour.

Very few birds were noted here – Great Cormorant, Pacific Gull and Chestnut Teals were seen flying.



Thunder Point. We drove through town to the car park at Thunder Point, to be met there by another gale front. Ken & Janeen kindly offered to make space for us in their VW Van, so all 8 managed to squeeze in and we sat out the showers and the wind, while enjoying our picnic lunch. Very soon the rain stopped and the sun emerged again and we walked west along the Coastal Trail to a lookout on the cliff. The track ran through Melaleuca and other native shrubs and was quite sheltered. Still no whales to be seen and there were no flowers along the way. The photos below show the view east from Thunder Point and the view east to Thunder Point from the lookout along the trail to the west.



Kellys Swamp. Diane and Rod had driven from Pt Fairy in the morning and had called at the Visitor Centre to get a local map and information as to the best way of finding Kelly Swamp. From Thunder Point, our easiest way was from Macdonale Lane to Wellington St, then left to find Merrivale Drive, connecting then with Swinton St.

The track along the south side of Kelly Swamp continues for several km on the edge of Belfast Coastal Reserve, the former position of the railway line to Koroit and now the Rail Trail. Our objective was to find the 'boardwalk' across the swamp, something that we had heard about but had never visited.

The swamp is very extensive. It derives water from the Merri River, which may once have had its course west behind the dunes and exit to the west at Rutledges Cutting. Maps shows a canal from the eastern end of the swamp that now directs most of the river water eastwards and then south to sea near Pickering Point. On our visit much of the floodplain was under water. It seems that most of that area is farmland, with fences along and across the swamp. The photos below (looking west) show the eastern end of the swamp and, 2 km to the west, the swamp near the boardwalk. A farm fence is seen in the middle.



We found the small car park opposite a sign and a gate that led to the road (the “boardwalk”) across the swamp. A 4WD track from the car park continues west towards Saltwater Swamp and Rutledge Cutting. We did not find whether the road across the swamp was for public use or whether there was public access to the boardwalk from the northern side. The photos below show the boardwalk site and the approach.



A beautiful Flame Robin was seen on a fence, with a Williwagtail nearby. Dave found a fungus.



Photos above show views across the swamp to the north and south of the boardwalk

Birds seen at the swamp included a raft of about 600 Eurasian Coots and 10 Red-rumped Parrots.

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| 1. Swamp Harrier | 6. Little Pied Cormorant | 11. Red-rumped Parrot |
| 2. Whistling Kite | 7. Welcome Swallow | 12. Singing Honeyeater |
| 3. Eurasian Coot | 8. Williewagtail | 13. Common Blackbird |
| 4. Black Swan | 9. Flame Robin | 14. Common Starling |
| 5. Dusky Moorhen | 10. Australasian pipit | |

Rutledge Cutting. We found the farmland adjacent to the Belfast Coastal Reserve was partially flooded as we drove along the track to Rutledge Cutting, a site last visited by HFNC in March 2009. On that occasion we had also walked along the adjacent Saltwater Lake and the Killarney Beach. We had seen a few Double-banded Plover at Saltwater Swamp at that time, but they were not in breeding plumage.

Diane & Rod had seen 32 Double-band Plovers, many in breeding plumage, in July 2008 when conducting a Shorebirds Survey. We were hopeful of seeing some again this time. It did not look promising, for no birds could be seen from the dunes. The area of the cutting, between Saltwater Swamp and the ocean, was covered with little sand hummocks and there was a thin, shallow band of water running into the middle from Saltwater Swamp. There had not yet been an opening into the sea for some time, judging by the scant vegetation growing on the sand humps. Diane walked across to the sea and found the Double-banded Plovers there – at least 50, mostly showing full or partial bands, with about 200 Red-capped Plovers in another group some distance away. Other birds seen at the western tip of Saltwater Swamp were 3 Hooded Plover and 6 Ruddy Turnstones.



The photos above show the Rutledge Cutting surface water, hummocks and vegetation. Diane is at ‘Rainbow’s End’ in one scene where she is looking for Double-banded Plovers near the sea. Glenys, Janeen, John & Rod are looking across the cutting and considering where to go.



The three photos below show Double-banded Plovers. Some birds are not in full breeding plumage.

Birds seen at Rutledge Cutting:

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| 1. Double-banded Plover | 3. Hooded Plover | 5. Pacific Gull |
| 2. Red-capped Plover | 4. Ruddy Turnstone | 6. Silver Gull |



A Red-capped Plover, Hooded Plovers and Ruddy Turnstones are shown below.



Lunch time in Ken & Janeen's van, out of the rain! (view through the window at Thunder Point).



We ended in Port Fairy, looking for whales off East beach, then afternoon tea at Diane's house.