The Natural News

Central North Field Naturalist inc.
(CNFN)

Patron: Dr. Peter McQuillan No. 41 Summer 2008/09

The "extinct" *Hibbertia rufa* (brown guinea flower) was rediscovered by Roy Skabo in buttongrass heath near St Helens. See p. 4

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Walks Program (see insert for more details)

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Fire, Crayfish and Stone Truffles

by Jim Nelson

This past August Steve Cronin and I visited a property near Bellingham to look at the impacts of a severe fire that went through the area last summer (January 2008). There were some signs of animal life, with wombats, devils, wallabies and small mammals providing a few tracks and scats in areas with sandy soil. Frogs were in full chorus in an ephemeral wetland and a few birds were starting to make their way back to the property.

The most impressive survivors of the fire were the burrowing crayfish which occupied numerous niches at the lower end of the property which slopes down to the Little Pipers River. The species turned out to be *Engaeus tayatea*, which is endemic to northeast Tasmania. The property carries the finest population of the species I have seen, and occurs in the NE corner of the known distribution.

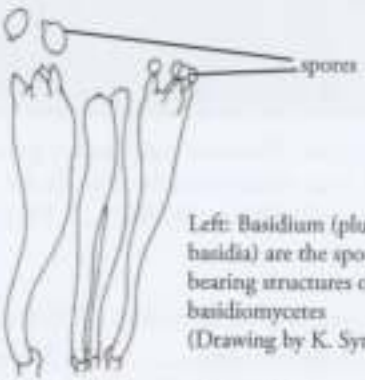
While looking at a runway being used by mammals, we came across some diggings and the remains of some strange truffles. Presumably the animal had found the truffles, consumed the insides while leaving the hard, shell-like exterior. We bagged up these remains to seek further information.

Sarah provided me with the contacts for mycologist, Dr Teresa Lebel, President of the Australasian Mycological Society, who works at the National Herbarium of Victoria at the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne. Since I was about to trip off to the mainland to see the wonders of SW West Australia, and would have a couple of days in Melbourne, I made arrangements to take my little bag of truffle "shells" to her and see what I could find out about them.

Dr Lebel was able to inform me that my samples were commonly called "stone truffles" in the genus *Mesophellia*, with the species likely to be *M. glauca*. This truffle-like fungi group can be found below the soil surface or under litter. They can be an important food for animals, especially after a fire. The ones we found had all been dug up and were lying on the surface with their interiors eaten leaving a hard exterior shell. She said that they most likely had a fungal association with the Eucalypts at the site (which were black peppermints, *E. amygdalina*). She thought a likely suspect for the digging and eating the insides might be a swamp rat (*Rattus lutreolus*).

Steve Cronin decided to set up a camera trap to try and photograph the animal digging the truffles. He has now succeeded in identifying the culprit as a bettong.

Bruce Fuhrer's book, A field guide to Australian fungi (2005), has a picture and description of *Mesophellia glauca* in the Basidiomycota section. Being a basidiomycota, they produce their spores on the microscopic club-shaped cells called basidia. These basidia can be on gills, in pores or on the outer surface of the fruiting body depending upon the genus. A spore print is obtained by cutting a ripe truffle in half and putting it on paper.



Left: Basidium (plural: basidia) are the spore-bearing structures of basidiomycetes (Drawing by K. Syme)

Mesophellia glauca is described by Fuhrer as growing to 30 mm in diameter, and occurring in clusters below the soil surface where they are associated with tree roots. The brittle outer layer is cemented with sand grains and encases the spore-bearing tissue mass called the gleba. The firm inner core has a strong garlic-like odour which attracts small animals. After ingesting the spores they are carried to new areas and deposited. The spores can be found in their faeces, and presumably they would carry them also on their fur.

Dr Lebel is always keen to get fresh specimens of truffles. In collecting such specimens, she specifies the more immature ones are the best for her purposes. None of the many Australian species of truffles are known for their culinary qualities, and sampling them could prove quite dangerous.

Right: The bettong was 'caught' by a laser triggered digital camera trap set up by Steve Cronin.

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Steve has been using cameras for identifying wildlife since 1984. The early cameras he used were 8mm movie cameras run by car batteries and triggered by pressure mats. In the past year or so commercial cameras have become available at a reasonable price. These new cameras have a wide range of functions making them an easy and comprehensive tool to use for monitoring animals.

For more on the use of the latest technology for wildlife monitoring see 'A Sound idea' p. 10.

References:

Fuhrer, B. (2005) *A field guide to Australian Fungi*. Blooming Books, Melbourne.
Drawings by Katrina Syme from: Bougher, N. & Syme, K. (1998) *Fungi of southern Australia*. UWA Press, Nedlands. (Used with permission)

Orchids in flower after the Bellingham fire
Above: *Leptoceras menziesii* (hares ears)
Left: *Pyrorchis nigricans* (fire orchid or red beaks)

Rediscovering *Hibbertia rufa* by Roy Skabo

One of my favourite places for botanising (i.e. having a nice walk and looking at flowers) is a wet buttongrass heath a few kilometres west of The Gardens and about 2 km east of the Ansons Bay Rd, north of St Helens. This wet buttongrass heathland is part of the Doctors Peak Forest Reserve.

It is rather like an archipelago with the "sea" being the low-lying swampy areas and the "islands" being very low rises covered in dry sclerophyll woodland. The whole area is dissected by small creeks which drain into either the Ansons Bay River or the Georges River.

My wife, Louise, and I first stopped there about eight or nine years ago when we noticed a wonderful display of white paper daisies (*Argentipallium dealbatum*) as we drove past. The area had been burnt off perhaps a year before this visit and we could wander around the area quite easily, marvelling at the varied and abundant flora which included a number of orchids, lilies, several pea-flower species and *Drosera binata* in full flower along the creek banks.

Since then we have been back several times per year and each time it is harder to cross the creeks because of the heavy regrowth of woolly tea tree and other shrubs. There are still open areas but they are fewer and further between. Smaller plants struggle to compete with the taller sedges and shrubs, so the floral display is dominated by the shrubs. Still, it is a very interesting place to visit and almost every time I go there I find something I have not seen before. Because it is wet, the flowers last longer than they do in other areas and many of the species are not found in drier heaths.

On December 1st 2008, during yet another visit to the area, I noticed a tiny-flowered (1cm diameter) prostrate *Hibbertia* which I could not put a name to. Because a storm was approaching, I took a small sample and a GPS reading and did not bother with any other details.

On returning to Launceston I tried to key out the *Hibbertia*, and found that the only species to match my specimen was the "extinct" *Hibbertia rufa* (brown guinea flower). Not quite believing my tentative identification, I sent the specimen to Alex Buchanan at the Tasmanian Herbarium and awaited his verdict. Within 24 hours I had an email from Alex saying that he thought I was correct. By coincidence, however, the only Tasmanian Herbarium record for *H. rufa* (from the collection of Leonard Rodway and dating from 1892) was on loan to the South Australian Herbarium where Dr Hellmut Toelken is making a study of *Hibbertia* species, including some found in Tasmania. I sent Hellmut a specimen of my plant and within a couple of days he emailed that he agreed with the identification too.

The next step was to register my find on the Natural Values Atlas, the Tasmanian database for information on all species (flora and fauna) which have been found in Tasmania. Within a few hours I had an email from the Threatened Species Unit in Hobart (the custodians of the NVA) congratulating me and alerting other interested people to the "resurrection" of the brown guinea flower.

Over the next couple of weeks a number of people asked to see the brown guinea flower. With their help we have found many more plants and determined that they are growing in patches over an area of about 1km by a couple of hundred metres. This sounds like a pretty healthy situation, but if it is the only population in the state then the plant is very much at risk. Furthermore, it is difficult to count populations of this species because it suckers extensively and

what appears to be a patch of several plants may turn out to be just the one plant.

To find a species which had not been seen in Tasmania for nearly 120 years and was thought to be extinct in this state (although it occurs near the NSW/Victoria border) has been a huge pleasure for me. It was also nice to be the first to photograph it in Tasmania.

I wonder exactly where Leonard Rodway found his specimen, which he annotated as being in the Georges Bay area. This was in the days before GPS and botanists at that time did not seem to worry too much about providing details for the locations of their discoveries.

The area around the Bay of Fires and Georges Bay contains a large number of rare and threatened plant species. The most notable of these is the Davies waxflower (*Phebalium daviesii*) which grows only in Tasmania. With only thirty or so plants in the wild and all of these on the banks of the Georges River, it must be one of the rarest plants in the world (although it is easy to propagate and grows well in the garden). I am pleased to have added to the number of these precious species known to exist in this wonderful part of Tasmania.

The rediscovery of the brown guinea flower reminds us of the need to protect our natural heritage. We do not have a complete knowledge of what is out there and it would be a great shame if we lost something before we even knew it existed.

Guinea Flowers

Tasmania has fourteen species of guinea flowers, the common name for members of the genus *Hibbertia*. They are easy to identify as a group because all but one of the Tasmanian species have five showy yellow petals which are slightly indented at the rounded tips. Some species have large flowers and make very good garden plants. They are not so suitable for the vase as they lose their petals quite readily. Many of the species are very common and several of them, including a number of rare species, grow in the Break O Day municipality.

Hibbertia rufa's common name comes from the reddish-brown colour of its branches. Its petals, though small, are similar to those of other Tasmanian species.

Wet heath habitat of *H. rufa* (Photo J. Skabo) Inset: *Hibbertia rufa* (Photo: R. Skabo)

In her response (Spring 2008) to my article on value of pine plantations for native litter invertebrates (Winter 2008), Sarah Lloyd has taken liberties with both what I wrote and what Lindenmayer and Hobbs (2007) wrote. Here is Lloyd's text:

"I have not conducted bird surveys in pine plantations, but as Mesibov does not name any species other than litter invertebrates, I doubt his assertion that 'they (pine plantations) provide good-quality forest habitat for many birds, mammals and insects in an otherwise open landscape.' Quite the contrary. In the summary by Lindenmayer and Hobbs (2007) cited by Mesibov it is stated that: 'Particular sorts of vertebrates such as hollow-using birds and arboreal marsupials as well as nectivorous, frugivorous, foliage-gleaning and canopy-feeding birds were found to be absent or greatly reduced in abundance from radiata pine plantations.'"

In the quote from my article, Lloyd has deleted the introductory clause. Here is the full sentence:

"While pine plantations don't support the diversity of wildlife found in native forest, they provide good-quality forest habitat for many birds, mammals and insects in otherwise open, farmed landscapes."

Lloyd's quote from Lindenmayer and Hobbs is also selective. Later in the same chapter Lindenmayer and Hobbs write:

"In summary, key outcomes of the work undertaken on the biota of conifer plantations is that some sorts of species are uncommon or absent from these areas (e.g. the majority of species of arboreal marsupials). Nevertheless, while the biota of conifer plantations is depauperate, these areas are not "biological deserts" because they provide foraging habitat, nesting habitat or both for a range of birds (Friend, 1982b; Smith, 1982; Lindenmayer et al., 2002a), small mammals (Suckling and Heislers, 1978) and invertebrates (Neumann, 1978)."

It's unfortunate that Lloyd has allowed her biases to get the better of her otherwise admirable judgement as a writer and editor. It's also unfortunate that she favours a wildly unrealistic strategy for biodiversity conservation:

"If the money invested in plantation establishment was instead expended on meaningful conservation activities such as the rehabilitation of 'scrappy bush remnants', as Mesibov calls them, the outcome for our native ecosystems might look more hopeful."

Leaving aside the issue of why people invest money, let me restate what I advocated in my article. If you plant pines on cleared ground next to a remnant, you will not only get a financial benefit, you will also greatly reduce the risk of local extinction of litter invertebrates in that remnant. These are positive financial and conservation outcomes for land currently carrying grass.

And in case Lloyd has forgotten, I remind her that there is a very important difference between birds and spore-bearing fungi on the one hand, and litter invertebrates such as millipedes, snails and velvet worms on the other. Birds and fungi are highly mobile and can pick and choose habitats across a landscape. Forest and woodland litter invertebrates don't have that option. In a fragmented landscape, they're stuck on remnant islands surrounded by uncrossable barriers of pasture. They need all the help they can get.

Dr Robert Mesibov
Honorary Research Associate
Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery &
School of Zoology, University of Tasmania

EDITOR'S RESPONSE:

I did not intend to misrepresent Dr Mesibov, nor am I intending to get into claims and counter claims about who is quoting selectively. Lindenmeyer and Hobbs's journal is available online and people can make their own judgements. (Lindenmayer, D.B. & Hobbs, R.J. 2007 http://www.rirdc.gov.au/reports/AFT/05-128.pdf) I will simply comment on several points made in Mesibov's letter.

I am well aware that birds are mobile species. But they are not as randomly occurring as their high mobility might suggest. Although to most people it may seem that they can "pick and choose habitats across a landscape", they don't. To survive and breed most birds have very particular foraging and breeding requirements. Many are sedentary and spend their lives in a particular location; most (if not all) migratory species return to the same location year after year. Take Dusky Woodswallows and Striated Pardalotes, for example.

Dusky Woodswallows are migratory and thus extremely mobile. The birds that breed in Tasmanian spend winter on the Australian mainland where they move in response to the availability of food. They return to their breeding sites in Tasmania in early spring. But they don't pick just any habitat. They return to exactly the same location year after year; that's if it hasn't been removed in the interim.

Dusky Woodswallow numbers have decreased markedly in the last several decades. Habitat destruction (they have a particular fondness for nesting in so called 'degraded' trees) and fragmentation and the increase in invasive species are the likely causes of their decline, as they are for many other terrestrial birds in Tasmania, Australia, indeed throughout the world.

Striated Pardalotes are also faithful to a particular breeding location. Soon after arriving at Black Sugarloaf in 1988 a shed was built. Striated Pardalotes started nesting in the ceiling cavity (their nesting tree presumably having been cut down during the forestry operations that preceded our purchase of the land) and they or subsequent generations have returned to the some ceiling cavity for the twenty years we have been here.

As for fungi: my point about pine plantations was not only that they are depauperate in native fungi but that they are a continuing source of 'infection' of an introduced species *Amanita muscaria*. I have spoken to several mycologists about Mesibov's suggestion to plant more pines. Not surprisingly they were horrified that anyone could advocate not only the planting of a non native species but one that is a constant source of re-invasion by an extremely vigorous fungal weed.

Dr Mesibov is probably right when he states that I'm being 'wildly unrealistic' to suggest that money invested in pine plantations should be spent on the rehabilitation of 'scrappy bush remnants'. Sadly, it would seem that most investors are more passionate about making money than the restoration of the environment and Governments seem reluctant to fund really worthwhile projects. Unfortunately most people are blissfully unaware of the tragic decline in biodiversity (whether plants, millipedes, velvet worms, snails or birds – to name but a few), the parlous state of our environment and its vital importance to the long term future of humanity.

All native species need as much help as they can get, but not to the detriment of the whole biota.

Crescent Honeyeaters

Eastern Spinebill

Shining Bronze-cuckoo

Most young birds leave their nests before they are competent flyers. This leaves them vulnerable to predation by snakes, cats or birds such as Grey Shrike-thrushes. They usually hide quietly in dense shrubbery and only emit soft chirping sounds when their food-bearing parents approach.

Nestlings and recently fledged passerines, cuckoos and woodpeckers have brightly coloured oral flanges on both sides of their mouths. The youngsters' gaping mouths are a highly visible target that stimulate the parent birds to feed. The flanges are equipped with sensitive nerve endings that, when touched, spring open to accept parental offerings.

In the case of Crescent Honeyeaters, food may be either regurgitated liquids or insects.

Young cuckoos are much more vociferous than their passerine counterparts. This young Fan-tailed Cuckoo cheeped repeatedly while waiting for its Tasmanian Scrubwren foster parent to bring food. The Shining Bronze-cuckoo (page 8) was also demanding and, like the Fan-tailed, was twice the size of its Tasmanian Thornbill surrogate parents.

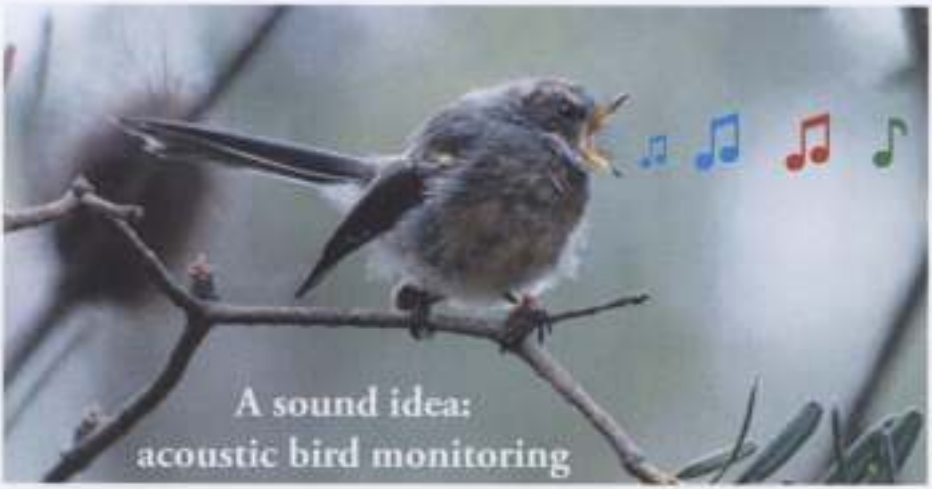
Thiomia rodwayi

The November field outing to Black Sugarloaf was a memorable occasion. Insect ecologist, Dr Peter McQuillan, shared with us his extensive knowledge and we thank both Peter and his son, David, for increasing our understanding of Tasmania's invertebrate fauna.

We were also witness to a good flowering of the rarely seen fairy lanterns *Thiomia rodwayi*.

Macleay's Swallowtail (*Graphium macleayanum*) can be frustratingly difficult to photograph. They flutter high in the canopy of sassafras, the food plant of their larvae, or only momentarily alight to feed.

The insect (right) was feeding on *Richea acerosa* during a weekend stay at Iris Farm in early January 2009. Many thanks to Peter Sims and John Wilson for their kind hospitality.



A sound idea: acoustic bird monitoring

The tropical rainforests of South America have more bird species than anywhere else in the world. They are remote, cover vast areas and any one location may have more bird species than Tasmania's entire bird fauna. Not only do these factors make bird monitoring difficult but there are very few researchers with the necessary skills (i.e. the ability to identify birds by their calls) to conduct meaningful surveys.

American ornithologist, the late Theodore (Ted) A. Parker III was a legend! He was able to identify 4,000 tropical bird species by their calls and, based on their vocalisation, he discovered several species new to science and recognised numerous species previously considered subspecies. He pioneered the use of tape recorders to survey birds in tropical forests and concluded that not only is acoustic monitoring a more effective way to monitor birds in some cases but that the use of recording devices should be *required* when surveying birds.

Tasmania does not have the species richness of tropical rainforests, nor does it cover a vast area. Nevertheless, there are difficulties in monitoring bird populations here. There are relatively few people with the necessary skills to monitor bush and forest birds effectively and governments seem reluctant to fund monitoring projects. If funding is received much of it goes on travelling to and from the survey sites. In these days of rising petrol costs and a growing awareness of carbon footprints, making the most of the latest technology is a way to overcome these difficulties.

A sound idea is a project that uses the latest in digital sound recording devices to monitoring bush and forest birds. These devices (e.g. Zoom H2) are to sound recordists what compact digital cameras are to home photographers. They are relatively inexpensive, small, robust and have good quality inbuilt microphones. They require very little technical expertise to operate.

With a network of willing participants I have begun to compile an aural archive of different habitats in Tasmania. Birds, frogs, crickets, cicadas and a very loud Tasmanian Devil - amongst other things - have been recorded thus far.

Anyone wanting to participate in the project will receive by registered post the

Zoom H2 recorder and sheet of instructions. (Birds Tasmania has purchased 3 Zoom H2 recorders and two external hard drives to store the sound files.) The recorder should be placed outside away from mechanical sounds (e.g. mowers, chainsaws), noisy water and wind chimes and left to record for 20 minutes.

Fortunately, for people interested in helping with the project but who have an aversion to very early mornings I have decided, after listening to several sound files, that the peak of the spring dawn chorus (which starts at around 0330 eastern standard time) is not the best time to record for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the simultaneous singing of many different birds - i.e. the dawn chorus - means that differentiating the species at a particularly rich site can be extremely difficult. Secondly, the presence of some birds, most notably Silvereyes and Blackbirds, exacerbates the problem. Silvereyes sing relentlessly at dawn and have a tendency to imitate other species. Blackbirds can also dominate the dawn singing and are also accomplished mimics. With this in mind the recordings should be done between 0600 and 1000 depending on prevailing weather conditions.

The endemic Yellow-throated Honeyeater

Silvereye

Back at 'the lab' (i.e. my home at Black Sugarloaf) I listen to the recordings, and make an audio CD and locality list for each participant.

Acoustic monitoring has several advantages over conventional bird surveys. Firstly, there is a permanent record of the survey site. If needs be the recording can be listened to repeatedly; this is valuable if there's a quiet bird or one that only vocalises once. Secondly, more than one person can listen to the recordings to verify species identification and thirdly there is no need for skilled observers to be in the field. Anyone can be involved.

Another advantage is that with no human presence the birds go about their usual activities undisturbed.

Ideally all sound files will be available to anyone who wants to do further studies on bird distribution or vocalisations. Already I've found it interesting to hear the dialects of birds from different locations (The Yellow-throated Honeyeater at St Helens, for example, sounds quite different to the one at Birralee). The study of dialects (or regional variations in songs) is little studied in Australia, but is a growing area of interest overseas.

Several trial recordings have been done at the Blue Tier in northeast Tasmania and at Bagdad in the southern midlands. Vocal species (e.g. Grey Shrike-thrushes and Golden Whistlers) can dominate the recordings but birds with quieter songs such as Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes and Beautiful Firetails are also detected. Apart from some very distant sounds, the Zoom H2 will record everything that we can hear.

This is a really exciting new project that has the potential to involve many people keen to find out what birds occur in their area and to assist in bird monitoring. Already several stories indicate that this project is about much more than just birds. When two women were moving the recorder away from dogs and mowers to a quieter location they found a colony of the exquisite Gunn's tree orchid (*Sarcochilus australis*) growing on a blanketleaf (*Bedfordia salicina*) unfortunately just inside the boundary of an area destined for logging. Another woman, who apparently never gets out of bed before 9 am, has at last discovered that dawn is the best time of the day – she was up at 6 am to place the recorder outside!

This project will result in an aural record of Tasmania's environment. Now that it has started I lament the fact that it didn't happen years ago. How wonderful it would

Gunn's tree orchid *Sarcochilus australis*

be to have an aural record of Tasmania from years, decades or even centuries ago. Unfortunately the technology was not available then. Now that it is, let's make the most of it!

Anyone wishing to participate please contact Sarah Lloyd.

Phone: (03) 6396 1380
Email: sarahlloyd@iprimus.com.au

References:

Haselmayer, J. & Quinn, J.S. (2000) *A comparison of point counts and sound recording as bird survey methods in Amazonian Southeast Peru*. The Condor 102:887-893. The Cooper Ornithological Society 2000

Parker, T. A. III (1991) *On the use of tape recorders in avifaunal surveys*. Auk, Vol.108

Angus and I agreed to be the volunteer caretakers for winter 2008 and suggested to the Parks & Wildlife service that we rebuild the vegetable garden as our project over the three months. With alacrity Parks agreed to Angus' comprehensively drawn plans and so on June 1st we flew out of Launceston and headed for Whitemark, (Flinders Island) laden with a brand new laptop, aerials to connect to the outside world, a sparse but practical wardrobe and the essentials: wetsuit, cameras, field guides, beanies and sheepskin lined sleeveless jackets (without which we would not have survived!)

We were greeted by Wayne Dick, the Ranger on Flinders Island, who left us with his vehicle after showing us to our accommodation with the brief instruction, "Enjoy the island, see you tomorrow and if the weather is good we will be leaving for Deal Island around 11am".

The weather was brilliant the next day, perfect for my kind of 'sailing' – flat dead calm, like a mirror. After loading our gear on board the *Strait Lady* we headed out across a glassy bay, the only difference between our experience on One Tree Island, on the Tropic of Capricorn, was the air temperature, the clean, clear waters looked very similar.

Deal Isle loomed up out of the distance, about 3 hours after leaving Whitemark. First impressions were; "it's quite big", "can't wait to explore" and "thank goodness we've arrived". Angus is an "old sea dog", a merchant seaman since 15 years of age and had visited Deal Island many times as Skipper of the *M.V. Bluefin* (the Australian Maritime College's training vessel). I am the original "landlubber" hence my relief at the calm conditions.

Angus Moore on Deal Island, Bass Strait

We were introduced to Dave and Mary, the autumn caretakers, who showed us the ropes: the all important generator, workshop, water tank pumps, batteries, house radios, keys etc, and then it was time for a BBQ down at the jetty, a traditional first meal for the changeover of caretakers. The night was gloriously bright and calm, a possum jumped up onto the BBQ plate and helped him/herself to a sausage and the stars filled the sky – an excellent start for the next 3 months.

The next day saw us farewelling Wayne, Richard Koch, Jim Luddington (*Strait Lady*), Dave & Mary and then we drove 'Herbie' (our yellow 6 wheeler Cub Cadet) back up the road to our new home and thought, OK, weather's great, let's explore.....and so we set off to Garden Cove, a beautiful sandy beach on the north east of the island and site of a former pump station to bring freshwater to the Lighthouse superintendent's house, which is now a Museum.

our first week, the wind was around 56kmh (force 6/7) and building in these winds was exceedingly trying at times and required a very healthy sense of humour. On one occasion I had my arms full of old fence palings and was transporting them to the fire pile when the wind caught one end and twirled me around several turns of 360° - what can you do but laugh and roar into the wind – very good stress buster I find.

The lighthouse superintendant's house is now a museum open to the public.

Expectations:

An adventure, hard work (building a vege garden after demolishing the old one which had seen better days), new plants to see and photograph, my first "lighthouse" island, lots of bushwalking, to bring a personal project to fruition and enjoy this wonderful opportunity, a "once in a lifetime" experience.

Surprises:

The ferocity and duration of the wind and the continual noise in the house during these storms was hard to bear. It was a very windy winter and we experienced Gale Force 12 or hurricane winds (102-120 kmh) on two to three occasions. Quite often, apart from

Good things to remember:

The opportunity to observe the wildlife at close quarters – Cape Barren Geese chicks hatching, Bennett's wallabies with their pink new born joeys peering out of the pouch, seeing the Sea Eagle on bushwalks flying above us, almost accompanying us as we set out on yet another track, traversing forested gullies, full of ferns and small creeks, before climbing another gentle slope of granite, or not so gentle(!), to be delighted by the vista unfolding before us of wild seas, Australasian gannets and pacific gulls wheeling and diving for fish and steep cliffs covered in bonsaied coastal ground covers and shrubs, amazed at the tenuous hold on life they have on these

Cape Barren Geese with newly hatched chicks

wild islands. Watching sunsets of course, through the swashway, looking through to the mainland of Oz, and the outline of Wilson's Promontory.

The occurrence of visitors: fishermen sheltering from the fierce storms in Murray Passage or tucked into West Cove of Erith Island; the AMC vessel, *Bluefin*, called in twice with relieved students who were happy to get off the boat and have a quick guided tour of the museum or Barn Hill before returning to the ship and their marine studies. A yacht called in from Eden for the night and invited us to join them for dinner onboard – a night out! It was great, someone else's cooking, fine wine and good company.

The best times on the island were setting out for a bushwalk, pack filled with tasty cheeses, fruit and cake and the obligatory thermos of peppermint tea, cameras hanging off our belts to ensure that quick photo could be taken and coming back at the end of the day: tired, happy and with a full photo card of images of orchids, birds, plants, views to transfer to the computer that night.

I would encourage anyone who is thinking about being a volunteer on a remote island to do it, trials and tribulations excepting, it was a fantastic experience which we will remember a long time after our return to 'civilisation'.

Le Jardin fini!

Looking north from Deal Island to the Australian mainland and the outline of Wilson's Promontory. Photograph: Alison Moore

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In early December members of the Central North Field Naturalists gathered at Weegena for the annual general meeting. The president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer were re-elected unopposed. Many thanks to John and Lynn Hayward for hosting us at their beautiful property.

Members and non members are invited to submit articles and photographs for inclusion in the newsletter. The articles should be submitted electronically as unformatted word documents and preferably less than 1,000 words. Longer articles are considered.

CNFN membership is due in March. A subscription form is included with this edition of "The Natural News". **Prompt payment is appreciated.**

We wish all members and friends a wonderful and fulfilling 2009.

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CNFN CONTACTS:

PRESIDENT: Jim Nelson 68 Dynans Bridge Rd, Weegena 7304 Ph (03) 6368 1313 nlester@tassie.net.au

VICE-PRESIDENT: Lisa Clarkson 8 Andrea Place, Riverside 7250 Ph: (03) 6327 2945 lclkson@bigpond.net.au

SECRETARY: Ron Nagorcka 999 Denmans Rd, Birralee, 7303 Ph: (03) 6396 1380 ron@ronnagorcka.id.au

TREASURER & EDITOR: Sarah Lloyd 999 Denmans Rd, Birralee, 7303 sarahlloyd@primus.com.au