The Natural News

Central North Field Naturalists Inc.

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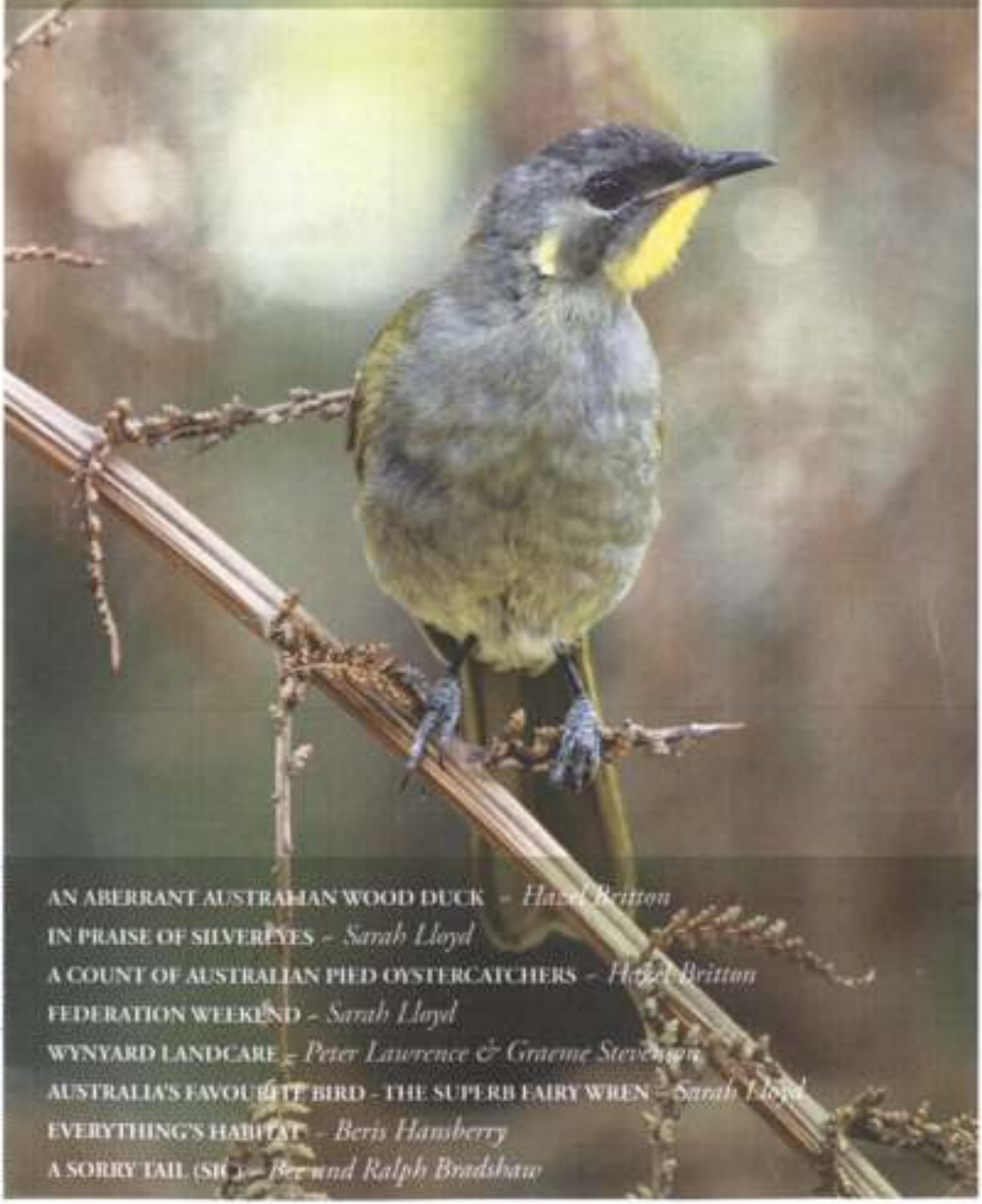

An Aberrant Australian Wood Duck *Chenonetta jubata*

by Hazel Britton

For the past two years Alison Parks and I have been conducting monthly bird surveys in northwest Tasmania. We first saw the 'white' Australian Wood Duck on 26th September 2012 at a small dam on a dairy farm at Gawler, south of Ulverstone.

As can be seen from the photograph, the plumage of this bird is entirely white, but the eye, bill and legs are the normal colours for this species. The bird is therefore not an albino, but a leucistic bird.

Since the first sighting we have seen it on several occasions on the same farm, always with a small group of typical Australian Wood Duck, and sometimes at a larger dam close by. On one occasion we saw single white wood ducks at different dams within 30 minutes. We believe that two different birds were involved, as we had not seen any duck in flight and the first bird seen was still present when we returned to the first dam visited.

At the small dam there are several tall white gum *Eucalyptus viminalis*, both alive and dead, some of which can be in the water, depending on the water level of the dam. There are several holes which appear to be suitable nest sites for Australian Wood Duck, as well as for other species such as Chestnut Teal, Galahs and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos. On 17th August 2013 both Australian Wood Ducks (including the white bird) and Chestnut Teals were seen flying in amongst the trees and landing on branches close to holes. Some appeared to disappear into holes out of sight. Four weeks later, on 15th September, the Australian Wood Ducks were still flying into the trees and sitting on branches. The white bird, which was observed feeding on the ground, had a distinct mane making it a male bird. It was also seen outside the entrance to a cavity where it performed a short head-pumping display. When seen on 22nd September, there was no activity noticed in the trees although one hole was stained indicating recent use. Four Australian Wood Ducks (2 pairs including the white male) were resting and later feeding nearby. We were hoping to see some ducklings, but this now seems unlikely.

I have seen other birds with aberrant plumage in North West Tasmania in recent years including a Blue-winged Parrot *Neophema chrysostoma* with entirely pale yellow plumage (presumably an example of xanthochroism) and a Superb Fairy-wren *Malurus cyaneus* with a white tail.

References

Van Grouw, H. (2012). Plumage aberrations in Australian birds: A comment on Guay *et al.* (2012) and Frith & Murphy (2012). *Australian Field Ornithology* 29, 210-214.

Marchant, S. & Higgins, P.J. (Eds) (1990). *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand & Antarctic Birds. Volume 1, Part B: Australian Pelicans to Ducks.* OUP, Melbourne.

A Note on Aberrant Plumages in Birds

Aberrant plumages (changes in pigmentation and melanin composition) can be the result of many factors, including genetics, diet, disease, age etc and can be enhanced by fading caused by sunlight or even salt. Birds with aberrant plumage usually fall into the following categories:-

Albinism: The complete lack of pigment even from soft parts and irides.

Leucism (paleness) resulting from varying degrees of dilution of normal pigmentation.

Melanism: due to an excess of the dark pigment melanin.

Erythrism (reddishness) This sometimes occurs as an abnormal colour variant in some species.

Xanthochroism: the occurrence of yellow colour variants.

However, there are many other terms used to describe abnormal plumage such as 'cinnamon', 'isabella' etc. Recent articles and discussion in Australian Field Ornithology suggests that there is still confusion, that colour aberrations are poorly known amongst ornithologists and that terms are inconsistently applied.

Anyone interested in gaining a better understanding of the subject can consult the following books and references:

HANZAB Aberrant Plumages section under individual species.

Campbell, B. & Lack, E. (Eds) (1985). *A Dictionary of Birds*. T. & D. Poyser Ltd, London.

Guay, P.-J. & Potvin, D.A. (2010) A schizochroistic Australian Wood Duck *Chenonetta jubata*. Canberra Bird Notes 35, 153-157.

Guay, P.-J., Potvin, D.A. & Robinson, R.W. (2012). Aberrations in plumage coloration in birds. *Australian Field Ornithology 29, 23-30.*

Hosken, G. (2011). Albinism in birds. Melbirdian 76, 9.

van Grouw H. (2006). Not every white bird is an albino: Sense and nonsense about colour aberrations in birds. Dutch Birding 28, 79-89.

My thanks to Dr Richard Donaghey for checking a draft of this article.

Australia's favourite bird - Superb Fairy-wren wins by a rictal bristle!

by Sarah Lloyd

Recently fledged Superb Fairy-wrens

Birdlife Australia recently ran a competition to determine Australia's favourite bird. The winner, the Superb Fairy-wren, is one of the most common bush birds in southeastern Australia because it copes with the changes in the landscape. Pasture or lawn for foraging next to dense shrubs for shelter and nesting sites are all this bird needs to breed and maintain stable populations. In early spring one or more bright blue males with an entourage of brown birds (young males and females) forage on the ground for invertebrates. They build a messy side-entrance nest in understorey vegetation (even in pot plants!) and raise two or three chicks. Young birds are vulnerable to attack by cats, snakes and predatory birds such as shrike-thrush, butcherbirds and raptors. (Continued on p.13)

In Praise of Silvereyes

by Sarah Lloyd

Many people are aware of the wondrous mimicry of the Superb Lyrebird whose repertoire can include sounds ranging from the songs of other birds to the mechanical clicks and whirrs of cameras and chainsaws. But few people know that this skill is shared by other, less spectacular birds.

Silvereyes (*Zosterops lateralis*), much maligned because of their propensity for taking or damaging fruit, are accomplished mimics. In early spring as they prepare to breed they will alternate their own distinctive song with snatches of sounds of other birds including those of the Swift Parrot, Grey Goshawk, Green Rosella and Tasmanian Scrubwren – to name a few. In autumn recently fledged birds sing a whisper song, also known as subsong. This quiet warbling, sung from the cover of dense shrubbery, is a practice song akin to a baby's babbling. It is a continuous stream of imitation interspersed with silvereye notes.

Silvereyes belong to a large family (Zosteropidae) of approximately 90 species that are found throughout Africa, Asia and the islands of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Many are called 'white eye', a name that alludes to the distinctive ring of white feathers that encircles the eyes of most members of the family. Some species are widespread, highly mobile and have the ability to colonise distant lands, but some are endangered because they are restricted to small islands. For example, the extinct robust white-eye (*Z. strenuous*) of Lord Howe Island befell the fate of many island endemics by succumbing to predation by introduced rats.

The subspecies of silvereye that occurs in Tasmania, *lateralis*, is part of a large complex of several distinct races that occurs in the well vegetated areas that fringe the Australian continent. Some of the Tasmanian silvereyes are year round residents in warmer coastal regions; others undertake regular migrations and spend winter in southern Queensland. In the early 1900s the Tasmanian subspecies colonised New Zealand. The Maori name for silvereye 'tauhou' means 'stranger'.

While vignerons and orchardists may think that the appearance of this 'pest' in New Zealand was cause for concern, the opposite occurred. Silvereyes were greeted warmly and won the positive appellation 'blightbirds' for almost eliminating the woolly aphids that caused American Blight on apple crops.

Silvereyes are beautifully camouflaged in

A silvereye feeds on ripe fruit of native cherry (*Exocarpos cupressiformis*)

sombre tones of browns and greens, colours that enable them to hide and nest where trees and shrubs provide dense cover. In Tasmania small flocks return to their breeding areas just as plants begin to flower in spring. Pollen from understorey trees and shrubs supplemented with protein from tiny insects gleaned from foliage or hawked from the air provide enough nutrients to get breeding underway. They lay two to four blue green eggs in a loosely woven cup-shaped nest placed in dense shrubbery.

In late summer, when spring flowering has ceased, silvereyes lick the nectar of banksias with their brush tipped tongues. They also consume voraciously the fruits of native cherry (*Exocarpos cupressiformis*) and native currant (*Coprosma quadrifida*) and in so doing spread seeds away from parent plants; they are among the few frugivorous (i.e. fruit eating) birds in Tasmania.

Silvereye on waratah

Before they begin their migration north, silvereyes rid many plants of the countless aphids that have proliferated in the warm summer weather. Then they turn their attention to grapes and other cultivated fruits; surely a well deserved reward for providing the important ecological services of controlling insects, pollinating plants and dispersing seeds.

Reference:
Higgins, P.J., Peter, J.M. & Cowling, S.J. (eds), 2006 *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds. Volume 7 Part B: Dunnock to Starlings*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Results of a Coordinated Count of Australian Pied Oystercatchers *Haematopus longirostris* at the Rubicon Estuary IBA in Tasmania

by Hazel Britton

A coordinated count of Australian Pied Oystercatchers (POC) took place on 26th July 2013. It is the second count that has taken place in the Rubicon Estuary since the area was proposed as an Important Bird Area (IBA) in 2007. (IBAs are sites of international importance for bird conservation. The Rubicon Estuary fits the criteria because it supports more than 1% (110) of the world population of Australian Pied Oystercatchers and smaller numbers of other wader species. Details of all Australian IBAs can be found on BirdLife Australia's website.)

The first count, which took place on 19th September 2012, was very successful and resulted in a total of 261 POC noted within the IBA. However, it was felt that by September some of the birds would already be breeding and therefore in territories outside the mapped IBA. A count earlier in the year would give a more accurate picture of the maximum number of birds using the area.

Method

High Tide was 3.54 metres at 1424 hours

Nine volunteers were involved, seven of whom covered the three roost sites. The other two used a boat to monitor birds that did not go to the roost areas along the main channel of the Rubicon Estuary from the southern boundary to the northern boundary of the IBA. This included birds seen on Rabbit Island in the north. Thus, the whole of the designated IBA was covered. Counters remained at the roosts from 1345 to 1445 hrs and the boat was on the water from 1330 to 1500 hrs.

Notes

1. We chose a high tide so that most POC would be pushed up to the roosts; and a week day to minimize on recreational disturbance. We believe that by holding the count at this time of year we will have the maximum number of birds within the IBA area.

2. Since 2007 Port Sorell on the west side of

Rubicon Estuary (Photo: Hazel Britton)

the estuary has experienced considerable residential development resulting in increased recreational activity and use of the boat ramp adjacent to Roost 2. Because of the disturbance counts at this roost vary considerably. However, numbers seem to be highest when the high tide is particularly high. On this occasion 80 (later 108) birds were at the traditional site, another 34 were approximately 50 m north of the boat ramp.

3. At Roost 3 there were 122 birds until 1415 hrs, when the very high tide covered most of the roost site, pushing birds right up to the tea trees. 69 birds flew off in a flock to the north. These were not seen again, but as the birds at Roost 2 increased between 1400 and 1445 hrs by 28 individuals (arriving in small numbers) these have not been included in the total to avoid possible double counting.

4. This time the whole of NE Arm was surveyed as well as the area between Bakers Point and Griffiths Point.

5. 40 birds were seen outside the roosts from the boat and 5 birds were seen flying from paddocks near Roost 3 after the count.

It is recommended that any counts in future should be undertaken in June/July when we would expect the maximum number of birds to be using the estuary, and also for comparison with this year's count.

Volunteers participating were: Peter Atkinson, John Bowden, Hazel Britton, Tony Britz, Patricia Ellison, Jim Hunter, Alison Parks and Julie and Michael Serafin.

Map of Rabbiton Estuary showing roost sites and extent of IBA

Pied Oystercatcher (Photo: S. Lloyd)

Results

Roost 1 – Springlawn		
At the roost:	90	
Extra birds in NE Arm (mostly pairs)	30	
Roost 2 - Boat Ramp		
At traditional Roost Site (note 2)	80 (108 at 1420 hrs)	
Extra birds in vicinity	34	
Roost 3 – South of Sqeaking Point	122 (69 flew off at 1415 hrs)	
Extra birds in vicinity (note 5)	5	
Birds within IBA that did not go to the roosts	40 (note 5)	TOTAL 401

The Federation Weekend

by Sarah Lloyd

Once or twice each year one of the five field naturalists groups in Tasmania (North East, Tasmanian, Burnie, Launceston, Central North and King Island) take it in turns to host a Federation Weekend, when members from other groups gather for field trips, talks and socialising. At the Federation Weekend at Mt Cameron, strong interest was shown in a field trip to Rubicon Sanctuary, the property of Phil Collier and Robin Garnett and, although not strictly CNFN's turn, Phil and Robin kindly offered to organize the event with a focus on the threatened plants in the Port Sorell region.

Our first stop was at Rubicon Sanctuary located on busy Parkers Ford Road, one of the main roads leading to the townships of Port Sorell and Hawley. Most of the land in the vicinity has been cleared for farming, and the remaining native vegetation, especially closer to the towns, continues to be cleared for new developments.

Rubicon Sanctuary is well named. It has 50 orchid species making it one of the richest sites for orchids in Tasmania. Many of the species are rare or threatened and in some cases, Rubicon Sanctuary is the only place in Tasmania where they occur.

Phil and Robin described their use of fire as a management tool to stimulate the growth of the orchids. We also learnt about the extensive monitoring regimes they undertake to assess the impact of the fires on threatened orchids and other species and to determine the optimal interval between successive fires. This explained the reason for the multitude of different coloured ribbons scattered through the wetlands - they mark the location of the threatened plants.

Our second outing was to Hawley Nature Reserve where there are several rare and threatened plants including *Spyridium obcordatum* and *Lepidosperma viscidum*.

One adult and at least two nestling Forest Ravens watch proceedings from their nest high in a black peppermint at Rubicon Sanctuary.

In 2011 Phil proposed an experiment to monitor the *Spyridium obcordatum* to determine reason(s) for their apparent decline. After getting support from the Latrobe Council, Phil enlisted several CNFN members to assist with the caging and monitoring of selected seedling plants in a paired experiment. Since the project began there has been evidence of a significant reduction in size and flowering of uncaged plants and an overall decline in population of mature plants. As we learnt during the weekend when Phil took advantage of the large group of field nats and had us on hands and knees counting plants of all ages, there is currently a very large population of tiny seedlings.

Plants growing in the *Lepidosperma viscidum* seem to get some natural protection from the tussocks and are doing much better than those exposed on the rock plate.

(For full details of the results of the experiment see "latest additions" at http://www.disjunctnaturalists.com/articles)

Snail

When we arrived at the rock plate, malicologist (i.e. snail expert) Kevin Bonham started searching for a species of snail that was collected around Port Sorell in the 19th century. He describes his find:

> The Hawley snail is a member of a genus called *Scelidoropa* (this includes most of the Tasmanian species that were once called *Pernagera*). It is very similar to *S. tamarensis*, which was originally described from Launceston (where it is now apparently extinct) but also occurs on King Island and in southern Victoria. A few specimens of the Hawley snail were collected around Port Sorell in the 19th century. On looking at the specimens very closely it is not clear to me whether they are *S. tamarensis* or not - there are slight but quite consistent differences. So for now I am just calling them *Scelidoropa* sp. "Hawley".

The target of our Sunday outing was the sun orchid *Thelymitra antennifera*, a threatened orchid found at nearby Narawntapu National Park. This involved an uphill walk where numerous spring flowers kept the photographers well occupied.

Narawntapu NP has a range of different habitats including extensive cleared areas where wombats and forester kangaroo browse, a large lagoon with plenty of waterbirds, and beaches for resident and migratory shorebirds.

The extensive area of tall paperbark on the way to Springlawn Lagoon was flooded after exceptionally high winter and spring rain and the water surface had turned green - possibly caused by *Azolla* sp. (see photo page 10).

The other important aspect of Federation weekends is the chance to catch up with members from other groups. Knowing that several German speakers would be attending, I took along Volume 3 of *Die Myxomyceten*, in the hope that someone would be able to translate a passage about *Lamproderma* species, a particularly beautiful group of iridescent slime moulds.

Part of the group of field naturalists counting *Spyridium* shrubs/trees at Hawley Nature Reserve.

Many thanks to Robin and Phil for organising the weekend, Mariamma Hunter (assisted by husband Jim) for providing the sumptuous Indian Feast, and to fellow field naturalists from other groups for helping to ensure that an enjoyable time was had by all. Thanks also to Kevin Bonham for supplying information about the snail and to Ellen Naef for translating a passage in the German slime mould book.

Lichen on dolerite at Hawley Nature Reserve

Forester Kangaroos at Narawntapu NP

Lamprodorma sp.

Paperbark *Melaleuca ericifolia* swamp near Springlawn Lagoon, Narawntapu National Park (Photo: Rod McQueen)

Wynyard Landcare

by Peter Lawrence & Graeme Stevenson

The 1979 "big flood" raised concerns among residents along Big Creek (a small creek that flows through Wynyard) that willow infestation caused the Inglis River to flood much higher than would normally be expected.

In 1989 the residents took action and started removing the willows. So started the Wynyard Landcare – a bottom up initiative. Interestingly, the national Landcare movement officially began in 1989 with the National Farmers Federation and the Australian Conservation Foundation successfully lobbying the Federal Government to commit $320 million to a National Landcare Program to support the many local groups emerging all round Australia.

Other local groups including Oldina Landcare, Sisters Creek Rural Youth, Tayatea (freshwater lobster), Elliot Landcare, NW Water Watch, Friends of Frenchs Road Reserve, Calder Bush and Rivercare, Friends of Sisters Creek soon emerged. They initiated their own projects and became affiliated under the Wynyard Landcare Group umbrella. Together, these projects have successfully rehabilitated riparian zones along creeks and rivers, restored stream water quality, stabilized soil slumps through re-vegetation, and controlled invasive weeds. These successes are best seen by a self-drive ecotour with a guide booklet available from Wynyard Landcare.

Willow removal from streams

Prior to 1998 the lower sections of the Flowerdale and the mid sections of the Inglis Rivers were totally dominated by crack willow. Willows choke small streams by slowing stream flow and depositing excess sediment on the stream bed which reduces native micro-fauna – the food source for platypus, fresh-water lobsters, crayfish and other native aquatic animals. In addition water quality is reduced affecting domestic water supplies to residents. Rehabilitation of the riparian zone was a major task involving, (i) injection of the herbicide Glyphosate into the tree, (ii) after 6 months removal of top-part of tree, leaving stump in ground to reduce bank erosion, (iii) burning dried piles of tree tops, (iv) fencing off stream bank to prevent livestock entering stream, (v) replanting with native species, (vi) follow-up spraying for at least two years. The Group planted over 100,000 native trees in the riparian zones along the banks of the Flowerdale and Inglis Rivers.

Conservation of indigenous flora and fauna

Thanks to the foresight of local residents, a unique piece of remnant vegetation in the fertile agricultural north-west region has been conserved at Frenchs Road Nature Reserve. This 34 ha area is home to a wide range of flora and fauna including vulnerable species - giant freshwater lobster, burrowing crayfish, and swift parrot. Ten of Tasmania's 12 endemic birds are found in the reserve. Over the past two decades "friends" of the reserve have removed willows, pine trees, blackberries and other invasive weeds; re-vegetated the riparian zone and degraded areas; erected boundary fences to keep out stock; and constructed tracks, bridges and amenity facilities for recreation visitors. Ironically, removing blackberries along the creek has made it easier for crayfish poachers. Wynyard Landcare, in association with Waratah-Wynyard Council, are currently developing a Management Plan to outline strategies to ensure indigenous flora and fauna are conserved, weeds and feral animals are controlled, and the reserve is open for recreational use without compromising biodiversity conservation. Future activities could focus on monitoring changes in flora and fauna.

Future activities

In recent years Government funding for landcare activities has shrunk considerably and volunteer numbers have dwindled as the founding members age and less young people take up the challenge. Whilst weed control and revegetation activities need to continue, climate change presents new challenges and offers citizen scientists new opportunities. Citizens can now collect information on biodiversity events (presence of species, nesting dates of birds, flowering times of plants) and record this information via the web on large databases (Atlas of Living Australia, ClimateWatch, bowerbird, Fungimap, frog log, FeralScan, etc). Many smart phone applications are now available to help identify species (Australian Wildflowers, bird in the hand, frog log); or recording observations at particularly places (Sightings, Love this beach, Frog Log, Bird in the hand, presence of invasive weeds).

Field naturalists and landcare volunteers share many common interests.

Frenchs Road Nature Reserve after 20 years of revegetation works (Photo: Peter Lawrence)

Giant Centipede *Ethmostigmus rubripes*

This Giant Centipede *Ethmostigmus rubripes*, was found under tin by Rod McQueen at Cook, South Australia, on the Nullubor Plain. It is the largest centipede in Australia The largest centipede in the world is found in Peru and can grow to more than 30 cm long.

Centipedes have one pair of legs per body segment; the first pair behind the head is modified into fangs which contain a poison gland. They always have an uneven number of pairs of legs, the number ranges from 15 to 191.

Centipedes prey on insects and other invertebrates. They are preyed on by small mammals, birds and reptiles.

Ref: Perth Zoo Fact Sheet

Giant centipede *Ethmostigmus rubripes* (Photo: Rod McQueen)

Superb Fairy-wren - the least faithful bird (Continued from page 3)

University campus grounds provide plenty of suitable habitat for superb fairy-wrens and consequently their habits are well documented. During long term studies some intriguing facts have come to light.

About one-third of Australian land birds, including the Superb Fairy-wren, breed cooperatively. Typically, one or more males share their father's territory and help rear the young. But superb fairy-wrens are becoming as well known for their adulterous lifestyle as they are for their cooperative breeding efforts.

In the breeding season family groups occupy defined territories, but males often visit females from adjoining territories. During these encounters, courting males display their bright plumage and sometimes even present gifts of brightly coloured flower petals. However, these visits never result in copulation.

DNA testing and radio tracking have shown that in the hours before sunrise fertile females leave their territories to mate with the bluest bird in the neighbourhood. They have good reason for their philandering! The male they seek is the most brightly coloured bird who has moulted into his breeding plumage months before the beginning of the breeding season and before most of the other males have acquired their bright plumage.

Superb Fairy-wren female

Superb Fairy-wren male

Male fairy-wrens that attain their blue plumage earlier than other males risk being taken by predators because their bright colour makes them more conspicuous. In addition, early blue plumage indicates high levels of testosterone, which suppress the immune system and make them more susceptible to infection. Males that become blue early and survive winter (the harshest time of the year) in robust health must have better genetic material than other males. Therefore, they are the most desirable birds to father offspring.

Reference:
Peters, A. (2002) The burden of beauty. In *Nature Australia*, Spring 2002.

Everything's habitat - fauna from northeast Tasmania

Photos by Beris Hansberry

This bat was disturbed from hibernation when an old sheepskin coat was removed from a shed wall.

A chrysalis found in a grass clump removed for vegetable planting

northeast forest snail (*Anoglypta launcestonensis*) on a bryophyte-covered log

This tawny frogmouth is a frequent visitor to the Gould's Country garden

A Sorry Tail (sic)

by Ralph and Bee Bradshaw

In early October, Ralph and I noticed a pair of Yellow-throated Honeyeaters flying about in the garden. They flew back and forth with full beaks and we realised they were building a nest in the branches of the Hydrangea bush. It was well camouflaged but only about half a metre above the ground. We did not know if it was just the male who built the nest or both male and female as we could not differentiate the birds. It took two or three days to complete the cup-shaped nest.

Despite our mowing and weeding activities, they continued to flit in and out of the Hydrangea. We kept an eye on the nest and lo and behold, about a week later, we found three speckled eggs. The female would vacate the nest for a short while to catch insects from the Ceanothus tree above the Hydrangea. The male would keep watch from the plum tree and chase away other birds; they were determined not to share the garden. We don't know if they took turns to sit on the eggs or if just the female sat while the male did the hunter-gathering to supply the female with food. We had such a wonderful time watching the birds and they provided us with many hours of entertainment.

Two weeks later, Bee noticed that both birds were flying back and forth with food in their beaks. While they were away, we peered into the nest and saw an upturned yellow mouth agape. We hurriedly retreated. Both parents took turns feeding the young - we've never seen such dedicated parenting. All went well until one lunchtime we heard the parents having what we thought was a domestic! They were flitting about the nest and making a lot of shrill noises. Whereas before when they approached the nest they took a circuitous route so as not to draw attention to the nest's location, now they darted about in close proximity. We wondered what was going on but didn't want to frighten the birds by investigating too closely. We kept our distance but they seemed oblivious to us. We had a closer look and to our dismay found a copperhead snake over the nest. Bee instructed me to "*Poke the snake with a stick*" and, as I always obey my wife, the snake was poked gently. It turned and looked at me questioningly before returning to its lunch of nestlings. The poor parents showed little concern for themselves but tried to scare the snake away with frantic calls.

It was really sad to see that all the hard work the birds had put in to raise their family was being wiped out in minutes. On reflection we wondered why we hadn't felt compassion for the insects the birds had been feeding on but felt upset about the snake feeding on the nestlings.

One of the birds stayed for a while calling and darting about by the nest but eventually both birds flew away. By this time Bee was in tears.

The next day, one of the pair returned to look at the scene of the crime. While we were still grieving, we realised that the bird, being far more sensible than we were, was building a second nest. This was accomplished in a day and most importantly high enough above the ground to thwart the snake. Despite being built with such frenetic activity it was beautifully formed and several days later an egg appeared. Although this seemed a hopeful sight, we haven't seen much evidence of the birds.

There are many thoughts that this incident has raised in our minds. For example, how the life of one creature depends on the death of another and how the survival instinct can overcome fear. But the greatest lesson we have taken from this little episode is the pointlessness of living in the past.

Walks and other events

For more details see http://www.disjunctnaturalists.com/events.htm.

Sunday 5 January February Plains: Meet at O'Neil's Picnic Ground, Gowrie Park (clearly sign posted on the Mt Roland side of Claude Rd, with toilets) at 9.00am to pool transport. A 4 km return walk (with 200 m gentle climb) to the edge of February Plains and the recently restored Basil Steer's trappers hut at 1050 m altitude. This is west of the Mersey River and south of Borradaile Plains. The road is steep in places but OK for 2WD drive with care.

Sunday 2 February Surrey Hills Estate: A presentation/workshop on "Grassland ecology and management" at Guildford Lodge, followed by a field trip to sub-alpine grassland. The covenanted grasslands are owned by Gunns and are actively managed for the Prunarra brown butterfly and threatened plant species including the crowded leek orchid. Meet at Guildford Lodge at 10:00 am for morning tea. Access is via Guildford Rd. off the Ridgley Highway. See website for map.

Sunday 2 March North Motton: A visit to the property of Matt and Karina Rose: 20 Ha of bush on the banks of the Leven River. Bring bathers if you wish to swim! Take the B17 from the Bass Highway and head towards Gunns Plains. Meet at the North Motton Hall at 10:00 am to pool transport as there is limited parking at the property. See website for map and species list.

Sunday 6 April Quoiba and Spreyton: Meet at the carpark at the top end of Durkins Road, Quoiba for a walk at the Allison Track, Kelcey Tier led by Peter Sims. After lunch we will meet Phil Murray, Devonport City Council's Biodiversity Officer, who will show us the project to translocate a population of the north-coast burrowing crayfish, *Engaeus granulatus*, from Sheffield Road to an offset site at Clayton Drive, Spreyton.

Sunday 4 May Barrington: A fungi foray at the property of Philip Milner with Dr Genevieve Gates with the aim of providing a list of fungi species on the property. Meet at 10:00 am at Philip's property at the end of Allisons Road, Lower Barrington. Allisons Road turn off is about 1 km south of the Lower Barrington township on Sheffield Main Road. Genevieve will bring copies of the forthcoming book "A field guide to Tasmanian Fungi" for sale at the special price of $35. See http://www.disjunctnaturalists.com/events.htm for more details about the book.

The Australian Naturalists' Network get together is on 17th – 27th October 2014 hosted by the Tasmanian Field Naturalists. Accommodation will be at The Lea, 7 km south of Hobart.
For more information please send your email address to the TFNC events email address: ANN2014@tasfieldnats.org.au or postal address: GPO Box 68, Hobart 7001

At the CNFN AGM it was decided to increase membership fees. A membership renewal form is enclosed with this newsletter. Prompt payment is appreciated. We thank Lynn and John Hayward for providing the venue for the AGM and wish all members all the best for 2014.

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