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President:
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Friends of Morwell National Park Inc.

Newsletter – December 2007

Website: <http://morwellnp.pangaean.net>

A0016319X

G'day everyone and welcome to the latest edition of your newsletter. Once again, my job this month has been made very easy, with the bulk of this issue provided by Ken Harris. Who knows what sort of rubbish you would have to put up with if I had to make it all up on my own!

December Activity

The remnants of the 2007 calendar reckon that our activity on Sunday, December 16, at 10am is to be advised! We normally do a few odd jobs around the place followed by a BBQ lunch with some seasonal cheer thrown in, but by all accounts most of the odd jobs have been done, so I think we'll settle on a gentle perambulation of adjacent environs (i.e. an easy walk thereabouts) before getting stuck into the goodies. The Kerry Road picnic ground sounds like the most likely spot, so bring along some salads and desserts to share and we'll make a party of it. A variety of meats will be provided, but you'll need to bring along your own drinks and a comfortable chair might be handy.

Latrobe Valley Field Naturalists Club Spotlight Walk in Morwell National Park by Ken Harris

On Saturday 27th October the LVFNC field outing was a spotlight walk in Morwell National Park. Some 12 or so members and guests, including Narelle Weston (the speaker from the previous night) and her friend, gathered in the Kerry Road picnic area at 6 pm for a barbecue. The barbecue is now working well (as long as you remember to restart it every 7 minutes), so we all had a good feast as the darkness closed in. A few more walkers arrived just as it got dark bringing our numbers to about 16. The weather was perfect for us. It was an almost clear night with stars visible above and through the trees, there was little or no wind in the gully, although the tree-tops were moving high above us. The temperature remained warm throughout the walk.

We started well! Just as we were gathering to start walking an Eastern Boobook – *Ninox novaeseelandiae*, started its familiar “more pork” call in the corner of the picnic area. Narelle got a brief glimpse of it flying between the trees and there was a suggestion that there was at least one young owl there as well as the adult. Most of us had to just enjoy the sound of it calling from so close. That sound was with us for the outer half of our walk through Fosters Gully. We were almost never out of earshot of one Boobook or another until we climbed out of Fosters Gully to walk back through the messmate forest. There may have been as many as 4 birds, but it could have been just the one bird all the time.

Getting started on the walk, we found the scene to be very quiet (except for the Boobooks). Moths were plentiful in the spotlights, and at least one bat was seen. We broke off spotlighting for a short time, when I found a Butterfly Orchid – *Sarcochilus australis*, plant growing on a Coprosma bush beside the track. The plant had two spikes of well-developed buds on it, and will flower nicely in a couple of weeks. Some of our guests had not seen the butterfly orchid before. The first clear sighting was of a Crimson Rosella caught in his night time roost. He never stirred at all despite the bright spotlights. As far as I could tell he never even opened an eye. Shortly after, we caught another roosting bird in the spotlights, but this one flew off with a clatter of wings and we couldn't even guess at the species.

We had almost reached Lyndon's Clearing when we hit the jackpot. Almost simultaneously, I caught animal eyes in the light on one side of the track and Rob de Sousa-Daw caught other eyes on the other side. At first I misidentified my sighting as a Mountain Possum or Bobuck (often seen in the park previously), but a second improved view of it after we had all looked at Rob's find, showed that it was in fact a Greater Glider – *Petauroides volans*. It was a dark glider, and at the second view, we saw its long black tail hanging down and its white chest showed clearly. Rob's sighting across the track was hard to get a clear view of, but was eventually confirmed as a Koala, the only one we found on this excursion.

Nothing was seen in Lyndon's Clearing and we continued on up around the Fosters Gully Nature Walk. We had another quiet spell (except that the boobook was still boobooking) and I paused to admire the young new fronds of the Gristle Fern, which were growing beside the track. All the new fronds were a gorgeous bronze colour. Even at night I can't quite stop looking at all the plants!

The next discovery was a surprising one for a spotlight walk on such a dry warm night. After once (many years ago) finding an Owlet Nightjar on the ground on a spotlight walk in the park, I make a point of examining the ground in the spotlight as well as the trees and shrubs around us. Sitting right in the middle of the track, was an Eastern Pobblebonk or Eastern Banjo Frog – *Limnodynastes dumerlii*. The track was bone dry and it seemed a most unlikely spot to encounter this frog. It was a fairly large frog as frogs in this area go, but was nevertheless small for a Pobblebonk and was only an immature frog. This frog is a burrowing animal and I sometimes encounter them in my garden when turning over the soil. While we were all looking at the frog, Rob spotted a spider walking across the track. He quickly picked it up and was able to identify it as a Badge Huntsman – *Neosparrasus praecinctus*.

As we ascended out of Fosters Gully, another distant pair of eyes was picked out in the spotlight. This proved to be our second Greater Glider, but it was in such a tangle of leaves and branches that it was hard to get a clear view. It was even possible that there were two animals present. For most of us that completed the successful spotlighting, although I of course kept looking at plants and saw lots of Milkmaids and Sundews, Button Everlastings, one Sun Orchid and a couple of Pink Fingers. Rob reported that he heard the Common Froglet's call, but that could have been from a farm dam outside the park.

Back at the car park, we found that 3 of our number were further back and had additional sightings to report. When they eventually arrived we learned that one more Greater Glider had been seen and that this one was much closer than the other two and gave really clear views to the privileged few. Overall it was not the most successful of spotlight walks, but enough was seen to make the walk worth the effort and the evening was enjoyed by all. We thank the Boobook(s) for their vocal accompaniment to our walk!

Working Bee - November Activity Report

By Ken Harris

Our November working bee is headed Orchid Survey, but that involves me and one helper (scribe). The rest were pencilled in to do 'Odd Jobs'. The 'Odd Job' Rob had selected for today was a search along Fosters Gully for weeds. We have been aware over the years of Douglas Nightshade *Solanum douglasii* being fairly common in Fosters Gully and on a few occasions have attempted to get rid of it. It is several years since our last 'weed pull' in the gully, so that was the main target for the day, with Thistles as a secondary target.

We were a small party, only 4 friends and Rob, so Darren volunteered as my helper and Wendy and Reg joined Rob removing weeds. It seems that previous nightshade removal has been fairly successful, as only a small number of plants were found and none of these had flowers or fruit. Thistles were commoner with plenty of Spear Thistles *Cirsium vulgare* and quite a number of Shore Thistles *Carduus tenuiflorus* being found and eliminated. The weed searchers went a little astray at one point. Just after they had passed us as they worked along the gully, I noticed some plantain plants, freshly pulled and lying on a log. These were the native Shade Plantain *Plantago debilis*, which had been mistaken for the introduced Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*. I was able to catch them up and show Rob, who took the blame and said that they would pull no more plantains. It was just as well, because *Plantago debilis* is very common in Fosters Gully, and they would have been there for a very long time if they tried to get rid of them all.

The Orchid survey kept Darren and I very busy, but the results were disappointing. The extra rain did not mean a good year for the Butterfly Orchids *Sarcochilus australis* in Fosters Gully. It may be the next years flowering is determined nearly a year earlier and last year's drought determined this year's poor flowering. It was one of the worst years for Butterfly Orchid flowers and in addition quite a number of the plants had disappeared, either they had died or the branch they were on or even the whole host plant had died and fallen to the forest floor where the orchids rarely survive for long.

I spotted a couple of weevils while looking for orchid plants, one of them on a stinging nettle. The wet season may not have benefited the orchids yet, but the stinging nettles were at their very best (worst) and quite a formidable barrier in some places. The White Elderberry *Sambucus gaudichaudianus* has also benefited from the rain and is commoner than I have ever seen it, often being the dominant plant in the shade along the gully. The weevils were both the same species and proved to be the Fruit-tree Root Weevil *Leptopius robustus*, which despite its rather threatening name for orchardists, is a native species.



Darren and I finished 4 of the 5 orchid plots before lunch and emerged on the track at just the right moment to get a lift from Rob back to the picnic area for lunch. As usual there were birds about to pick up any crumbs we left, but this was the first time I have seen a Common Bronzewing walking around while we were eating, presumably finding crumbs to eat! I had a quick scan around the picnic area looking for Plantains and was able to find all four species that grow in the Park. The native Shade Plantain and also the three weed species, the Ribwort Plantain, together with the Buck's Horn Plantain *Plantago coronopus* and the

Greater Plantain *Plantago major*. So a brief lesson was given on recognising the native and therefore welcome species from the weeds.

After lunch Darren and I completed the orchid survey by surveying the last plot, which we had difficulty finding, because I thought I knew where to leave the track. I had to backtrack and pace out the distance from the earlier plots, to find we had left the track 20 metres too soon. I saw that a large *Pittosporum undulatum* had fallen across the creek and feared it was the one on the plot which is festooned with orchid plants, but the plot when we finally located it was a few metres upstream of the fallen tree and the *Pittosporum* with the orchids on was still as healthy as ever. The others pulled a few more weeds, but had packed and gone by the time Darren and I finished the survey.

I made one interesting find during that last plot survey. I saw a small animal swimming in the creek and scooping it out found it to be a baby yabby about 3-4 cm long. It is the smallest yabby that I have ever seen. It appeared to be an Engaeus species (*Engaeus hemicirratulus* is the burrowing yabby that is common throughout the Park and builds little mud volcanoes), but I had no hope of identifying it exactly. This picture is close to life size.



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Calendar 2008

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Activities are scheduled for the third Sunday of each month, with extra days scheduled as required.

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Activity:</u>	<u>Venue and Time:</u>
January 20	Weir Walk Weed Removal	Junction Road, 10.00am
February 17	Weir Walk Weed Removal	Junction Road, 10.00am
March 16	Tree Guard Removal- Lodge Tk	Junction Road, 10.00am
April 20	To Be Advised	10.00am
May 18	To Be Advised	10.00am
June 15	Track Maintenance	To be advised, 10.00am
July 20	Track Maintenance	To be advised, 10.00am
August 3	AGM	To be advised, 1.30pm
August 17	Spring Excursion	To be advised, 10.00am
September 21	Weed Removal	To be advised, 10.00am
October 19	Koala Count	Kerry Road, 1.30pm
November 16	Orchid Survey / Odd Jobs	Kerry Road, 10.00am
December 21	Christmas Function	To be advised.

For all activities, it is BYO food, drinks, suitable clothing and footwear, and other personal items, unless otherwise indicated in the newsletter. Up to date details of each forthcoming activity are provided in the monthly newsletter, which is mailed to members and available to the public on the website.