



## Outing Reports

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Trip Report : Skemp's Weekend 8-10 December 1995.

Report by Kevin Bonham.

The weekend at the Launceston Naturalists' property Skemps at Myrtle Bank with 22 Hobart members and guests being present at various stages. Once again it is pleasing to note that distance was no obstacle to a good turnout.

The main outing on the weekend was led by Phil Collier to Hamilton Crag on Ben Lomond. Surprisingly many had never been Ben Lomond before. We all survived the remarkable Jacobs Ladder road and only had a short walk of about a kilometre to reach the top of the Crag. The area is the only Tasmanian habitat for the otherwise New Zealand *Chionohebe ciliolata*, which has a cushion-like form but grows on rocks, unlike the other "cushion plants". We found this species to be quite common on the slopes and saw many good examples. The area otherwise seemed like a fairly standard Tasmanian alpine habitat and it is curious that the plant is not more widespread.

Vertebrates also put in a good showing with several large Bennett's wallabies seen bounding along the ridge line. Two wedge tailed eagles were also seen and at least one frog was found. The most common invertebrate seen was the spider *Nicodamus sp.*, the small red-legged black species sometimes mistaken for a redback. Another interesting spider which looked like the common white-tailed spider was found, as were various centipedes, beetles and earwigs.

Plans to walk to the summit were abandoned due to windy and unstable weather. Some of us then returned via the Ben Nevis area where we were able to see another rare plant - *Acacia pataczekii*. This small tree is endemic to a few hills and mountains in the southern parts of the north-east.

Skemps itself proved highly a worthwhile natural history locality. The property contains a range of habitats from dryish eucalypt forest through to rainforest gullies. Despite the long history of introduced plants in the area much of the block is in very good condition and exploring it thoroughly would take longer than we had. Among the orchids, pink fingers *Caladenia* were abundant and some of us attempted to fit different specimens existing for the old *Caladenia carnea*. Many other orchids were seen including an unusual "*Thelymitra aff. cyanea*" type.

Skemps is one of the best snail localities I have visited - in the first two hours of searching I found 13 species, many present in abundance. A 14th was found later. One species common at the base of the rainforest gullies was initially thought to be the very rare *Discocharopa bassii* but turned out to be a previously unrecognised species. The Skemps specimen will be compared with a few museum specimens from nearby to see if this species has even been found before. the treeclimbing *Discocharopa mimosa* confirmed its FieldNats junkie status by appearing for the third trip this year. Other invertebrates included spiders, millepedes, a solitary velvetworm, and several large click beetles.

With several dozen Launceston members showing up on the Saturday especially, the Skemps house was slightly crowded at times but the facilities stood up remarkably well. In fact, the facility compares very well with other similar accommodation and is a great credit to the Launceston club.

We enjoyed the chance to meet Launceston members and a number of social activities were enjoyed. I am, however, unable to report on the dubious delights of the Dress Up As A Wallaby "competition" which coincided with a break in the weather and hence my evening walk ! I thank the Launceston club for hosting the weekend and Sue and Phil Collier for organising it. It is fantastic that another Tasmanian naturalists club has the good fortune to own such an area and we look forward to another visit at some time in the future.

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## General News.

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**Reminder:** 1996 Subs may be overdue. Rates are \$15-00 / 20-00 / 25-00 for Junior or Concession / Adult / Family respectively.

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## AGM Reminder

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Time again to appoint a committee to run Tas FieldNats (well at the March monthly meeting). A nomination form appears on page 1 of this Bulletin. We may particularly need a treasurer and at least one general committee member. None of these positions are too onerous if we have a full complement on our committee.

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## Brief Trip Report : Marion Bay Weekend 4-5 November 1995; Don Hird.

Our contribution to Tasmania Day was to invite the public along to view the Little Penguins changing nest roster duties, with expert shorebird commentary and interpretation by Priscilla Park.

Around 20 visitors supplemented the 30 or so members in attendance, of whom around 20 stayed overnight.

We were fortunate with a mild evening with only a slight breeze. Small mammal and insect traps were deployed both to obtain survey data for the area and to demonstrate our activities in this regard. After a late evening BBQ penguins were observed coming ashore in the gathering dusk and emerging moonlight. Hooded plover and pied oyster catchers had earlier been observed.

Light traps for insects deployed on the margins of grassy areas behind the dunes and close to swampy areas yielded a variety of moths and other taxa. Peter McQuillan gave an impressive account of their status and ecology, several were uncommon or restricted to this habitat type, which is often encroached by coastal strip development.

Small mammal traps set along the dunes overnight were aimed at finding the small mammal responsible for tiny tracks observed on other occasions. Unfortunately no candidates were evident. Other mammal results were somewhat surprising and interesting though. Brown bandicoots foraged in the pasture behind the dunes, retreating to the cover of the scrub when alarmed. Rob Taylor observed a potoroo in the same general area. Both of these habitat types are marginal to or outside the typically described habitats for the species concerned. Pademelons were the most evident mammals, with many individuals around the pasture area and trackways on the beach.

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## Howrah Hills Care Group

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A landcare group has formed to advocate conservation and sympathetic planning to remnant bushland in this area of Hobart's eastern suburbs.

Contact their secretary, Jean Smith, PO Box 385 Sandy Bay 7005.

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## Christmas Observations, *Phil Collier.*

We have found an answer to a question that has confounded bush walkers for many years: why is scoparia so prickly? In fact, the answer raises a further question: why isn't scoparia more prickly? More of that later.

At Christmas Sue and I walked from Meander Forest near Deloraine to the Lyell Highway near Derwent Bridge. A more leisurely trip than usual, in deference to our advancing years, allowed more time to sit and watch.

At Rim Lake we had a perfect rocky ledge. While contemplating the meaning of life and morning tea, we were under surveillance by a skink. It turned out that the skink was also interested in its morning tea as it climbed onto my foot and started feasting on mosquitoes that were buzzing around in alarming numbers. Even flying mozzies were not safe from a fast moving tongue and quick chomp. We counted at least fifteen disappear in quick time. After moving away to start packing our tent, the skink was seen cleaning up at least ten more of the buzzing parasites in bushes nearby to our rocky perch, where they were undoubtedly hoping to ambush us on our return to slovenly behaviour. Unfortunately the skink made no noticeable difference to the local mozzie population.

I hesitate to mention our next sighting as I'm sure someone can trump it easily. We briefly sighted a white-lipped snake at 1470m on the West Wall, Walls of Jerusalem. High, exposed, and hostile (except when we were there).

Scoparia flower spikes are full of aromatic nectar, which is nearly enough for bush walkers to excuse its otherwise uncivilised habits. The prickly ambience of the whole plant doesn't worry skinks or white-lipped snakes. Should it worry a red-necked wallaby? A wallaby that we saw at the Walls liked the flower spikes so much it was draped horizontal on top of a scoparia bush eating the flower spikes whole. Perhaps scoparia needs to be more prickly.

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# **Maria Island Federation of Field Naturalists Meeting**

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## **Friday 22 March 1996**

Ferry from Eastcoaster Resort at Louisville Point (just north of Orford). Scheduled ferries run at 9am, 10.30, 1pm and 3.30pm. We are hoping to arrange a special charter at 6pm but we need 20 people for this service to be possible.

9pm Spotlighting around Darlington for the "night owls"

## **Saturday 23 March 1996**

There is a ferry at 9am for those who can't make it across on Friday.

10am Depart from Penitentiary at Darlington settlement, Maria Island. Following choice of excursions:

1. Whole day trip to Bishop & Clerk Mountain for those wanting a longer walk. (Sue/Phil Collier)
2. Geology walk to Fossil Cliffs and Quarry with geologist Bert Moore.
3. Seashore walk to Painted Cliffs with National Park Ranger.

8pm Evening slide show—Maria Island Geology—Bert Moore.

## **Sunday 24 March 1996**

8–9.45am Morning bird walk to Bernacchis Creek. This is a very good area for bush birds particularly in the early morning. We may be lucky enough to see pink robins. Leader Hobart bird expert.

10am–12 noon Federation meeting.

10am Various excursions for people not attending the meeting. There are lots of interesting areas within a short distance of Darlington.

12 noon BYO everything for BBQ—there are gas BBQ's provided.

Return ferry at 1.30pm or 4pm

## **Further details**

The return ferry fare is \$19.00. Accommodation has been booked in the Penitentiary. Costs are approximately \$6–\$8 for adults per night with half price concession for children. This is basic accommodation with no heating or lighting. There are laundry troughs but no showers (unless you bring a bush shower). Apart from a BBQ, the only cooking facilities are wood stoves. You may wish to bring a camping stove for convenience.

There is plenty of camping for a small charge.

Bring bedding, warm clothing, good footwear, bathers, torch and all food for the weekend. There are no shops on the Island.

National Park fees apply. Because of the spread of *Phytophthora* (die-back) we are asked to wash boots, tents etc before travelling to the Park.

Please book with Sue Collier on 002 296597 (evenings) by 8 March 1996. (Including times of the ferry you wish to catch). Earlier bookings would be appreciated if possible.

# Draft Conservation Policy

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## Conservation Policy Development : Please consider.

The following is the previously foreshadowed draft policy. It is primarily the work of Kevin Bonham and Don Hird, aided by discussions with others and the encouragement of the club committee.

Much of its rationale is embodied in the various paragraphs of the draft. A more tangible recent example of our perceived need for a concise conservation statement was the 1995 "debate" surrounding the proposal to drain (restore) Lake Pedder. The commonwealth enquiry expressed its surprise at the heat of the local debate, and concluded that the proposal, while having merit, was of insufficient current priority or public support to justify the imputed costs. This was essentially the essence of our submission. The heated debate involved was largely an unfortunate distraction from more important conservation issues, in our view, and probably achieved very little in convincing the wider public of the need for careful conservation.

A widely propounded view is that because we have magnificent examples of our natural heritage intact in reserves we don't need to extend our reserve system or make other conservation efforts. We differ from this view and thus advocate a more comprehensive and representative reserve system and a similar approach to conservation planning and assessment. Tasmania is shortly to release a "State of the Environment" report, as its contribution to a National program. It will be interesting to see how forthright and comprehensive it is.

We seek critical appraisal of this draft from members or other readers. Indeed another rationale for this policy proposal is to encourage a full examination of the issues by all interested people, all too often responsibilities have been avoided because of the (legitimately) "political" issues involved, and people who should contribute to the debate haven't.

Conservation is not an easy set of issues; but it has emerged as an important item on our cultural agenda. We hope this policy development process will be a positive contribution and benchmark in the debate.

Please suggest amendments, additions or endorsement to any committee member. At a later meeting the committee will recommend formal adoption of a policy.

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## Tas FieldNats Conservation Policy - January 1996 Draft.

### I. Purpose

1. The purpose of this policy is to more clearly define the support for conservation embodied in the club's constitution; both to enable the club's position to be more easily recognised and to help members in representing club views.

### II. General

2. The natural world, encompassing flora, fauna, other biota and landforms, is highly valuable and provides inspiration, scientific interest and beauty, as well as providing an important source of human resources.

3. Tas FieldNats encourage the protection of all native species and other taxa in sustainable natural populations.

4. Tas FieldNats also encourages the retention of areas of all natural ecosystem-types and representative examples of significant landforms.

5. Tas FieldNats are committed to increasing and disseminating knowledge of the natural world through the study, recording and discussion of natural history information.

6. Tas FieldNats encourages the pursuit of other conservation goals where these do not interfere with biodiversity-type conservation and research.

7. Tas FieldNats also does not necessarily object to resource extraction provided that it is clearly demonstrated that this does not interfere with biodiversity-type conservation.

## **(more) Draft Conservation Policy**

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### **III. Historical**

8. Tasmania's conservation reserve system has developed in a piecemeal fashion. While extremely valuable, it is neither comprehensive nor representative.
9. Tasmania's knowledge base with respect to biodiversity and the biology of recognised biotas is manifestly inadequate.
10. Colonial land distribution practices have resulted in some habitat types occurring largely or entirely on private land. This distribution also includes sensitive streamside and near-coastal habitats in many places.
11. The rate of potentially harmful habitat change, currently most notably land clearance, has continued to increase throughout Tasmania's European history; some habitat types have already been entirely lost in this way.
12. Conservation debates have been extensively corrupted by extreme misstatement, polarisation and poor identification and prioritisation of issues by both "sides".

### **IV. Proposals**

13. Noting the demonstrable public demand for effective conservation, Tas FieldNats encourage governments to act energetically as trustees of the interested public in adequately protecting wildlife and habitats.
  14. Tas FieldNats advocates a sustainable, comprehensive and representative biodiversity-based reserve system as fundamental to meaningful long-term conservation.
  15. Tas FieldNats advocates clear, publicly stated and affirmative government conservation strategies, accompanied by stated responsibilities, targets, timetables and audit mechanisms.
  16. Tas FieldNats encourage sponsorship of adequate studies of a professional standard of native biota, distributed throughout the different taxa.
  17. Tas FieldNats discourage complacency in regard to habitat loss on the grounds that this will unquestionably result in the loss of species, whether currently recognised or not.
  18. Tas FieldNats encourages groups and individuals advocating conservation to restrict themselves to considered and responsible public statements.
  19. Tas FieldNats encourages resolution of conservation conflicts through dialogue between stakeholders. Ultimately, however, Tas FieldNats believe that adequate conservation measures must have priority over resource extraction in such circumstances.
  20. Tas FieldNats does not recognise State policies and practices as innately superior. Tas FieldNats encourage the use of national and international standards where these will result in more comprehensive, efficient and integrated approaches to biodiversity conservation.
  21. Tas FieldNats advocates efficient, strategic and appropriate deployment of conservation resources, aided by thorough public consultation.
  22. Tas FieldNats are committed to consultative, forthright and fully reciprocal discussion of conservation issues.
  23. Tas FieldNats encourages thorough analysis of environmental impacts in a biodiversity context, as a superior alternative to emotive, ad hoc, area-based decision making.
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# Bulletin of the Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club Inc.

April 1996 Number 282.

The Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club encourages the study of natural history and supports conservation. We issue our journal, the *Tasmanian Naturalist*, annually in October. People with a range of interests and knowledge are welcome as members.

Contact Don Hird (344 293) for more information, or write to GPO Box 68A Hobart, 7001.

## Program

General meetings start at 7.45pm on the first Thursday of the month in the Life Science Building at the University of Tasmania. Outings are usually held the following Saturday or Sunday, meeting at 10am outside the main entrance to the Museum in MacQuarie Street. If you don't attend the monthly meeting but wish to catch the excursion, it is advisable to check with a club contact as details are sometimes varied at the meeting.

- 2 May           **Macrofungi of Mount Wellington:** David and Ann Ratkowsky will give an overview, and present some of their recent findings among this poorly documented group
- 4 May           9 a.m.: Meet at the Museum or at Jackson's Bend, Ferntree at 9.15 (park at Chimney Pot Hill Road corner). Some walking is involved, bring mountain winter gear and lunch.
- 6 June           **Principles of Plant Taxonomy:** Alan Grey will give a general talk, with an emphasis on practical field application of identification techniques.
- 9 June           10 a.m.: Alan will lead an excursion to Snug Tiers.
- 4 July           **Antarctic Ice Cores and Drilling:** Sue Nor Woon will explain how bubbles trapped in ice can be used to reconstruct historical atmospheric conditions. This technique can be used with other evidence to explain some current distributions of habitats, particularly in higher latitude areas like Tasmania.
- 6 July           We will visit the Antarctic Division to be shown some practical aspects of ice core analysis. If time and conditions are suitable, a visit to the Coffee Creek Landcare Project (near Howden) may follow.
- 01 August       **Natural History of North America:** Bob Rose, a visiting zoologist, will give an overview of his home turf, including some comparisons with Tasmanian environments.

**New Members** A special welcome to Les Rubenach, Bob and Aileen Rose, and Tom Terry.

## !!! CLEARANCE SALE / GIVEAWAY !!!

Following recent rationalisation in our library, the following are available :

|              |   |       |
|--------------|---|-------|
| For Purchase | <i>Australian Wildlife</i> (long series)              | \$50; |
|              | <i>South Australian Ornithologist</i> (1924; 1933-57) | \$15; |
|              | <i>Wildlife in Australia</i>                          | \$50, |

prices are initial suggestions, all offers considered.

**Giveaways** Various issues of *Langana* (Launceston Walking Club), *Ecos*, *Natural History*, *North-West Walker*, *Birds of South Africa*, *Birds* (RSPB) and *The Ring*.

**Also Available** A book about **Swan Island** in Tasmania's northeast, and visited by club members two years ago, has recently been published. Check at a meeting, or contact Judy Sprent, for details.

## General News and Reports

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The 1996 Committee is unchanged from last year with the exception that John Reid is our new treasurer; the committee thanks Starola Jacka as outgoing treasurer.

Please remember that if you have any suggestions or requests (or offers) regarding club activities, please contact any member of the committee or drop us a note.

### February Excursion Notes : Hartz Mountains National Park.

On yet another bleak summer's day, only seven members arrived to venture to the Hartz plateau. Despite fierce, cold winds and regular sleet we undertook the short walk to Lake Osborne. The track has been upgraded and corduroyed, avoiding almost continuous boggy conditions otherwise. We observed occasional Bennett's wallaby and wombat droppings on the exposed plateau. For wombats finding burrow sites must be quite difficult, perhaps the old moraines offer some friable less-waterlogged soil conditions. At the lake we observed the small (3 mm diameter) freshwater cockle *Pisidium casternum* in the shallows. Another observation was an isopod crustacean about 10 mm long with jointed antennae and tail spines. We had hoped to see, or at least hear the recently described Tasmanian Moss Froglet on the plateau (it is recorded calling even at near-zero centigrade temperatures) but the chill factor must have subdued it on the day.

After lunch we retreated to the Arve valley where sheltered conditions prevailed. On the short walk from the picnic shelter the epiphytic fork-fern *Tmesipteris* sp. was observed on soft tree ferns. Beech orange (a fungal sporocarp) was also observed on along the track. Closer to Geeveston, we were bemused by the "balanced account of the Tasmanian forestry debate" presented near the roadside. Also here, Macleay's swallowtail butterfly was evident, with the large deep-green males patrolling territories along the road edge. The larvae of this species feed on sassafras which was much in evidence locally. Brown Froglets were heard calling. A significant landsnail find was an undescribed *Stenacarpha* sp., having no umbilicus.

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### Conservation Progress

Two issues have been prominent.

The Wellington Park Trust released its latest recommendations early this year. Submissions from the public are available for viewing at the Trust. Remarkably few were received, including none from the most prominent conservation groups, despite their earlier headline-seeking on the issue. The Trust seems intent on separate management, our view was that National Park status and management should be considered in view of the natural values present and the proximity to (and susceptibility to impact from) Hobart. A disturbing element was the invitation by the Trust to "recreational vehicle" (i.e. 4wds) to endorse suggested access to some fragile fire trails in areas of conservation significance. This populist approach is risky; one only needs to view the damage at Cloudy Head or Southport Lagoon to see that "mud-bashing" is hardly a legitimate or responsible recreation. Most of the recorded biodiversity values of the Wellington Range are from the Hobart end (Mountain Park); the considerable expense of the Trust thus far hasn't extended to exploring these values further, even though recent finds of club members indicate values under-represented elsewhere.

Late in 1995, the Public Land Use Commission made significant recommendations including six new National Parks for Tasmania. In January State government agreed to two of these (largely as consolidations of existing coastal reserves), but made no public comment on the others. Several months later there has been no explanation of or reasons for these decisions, despite further submissions been solicited for the next topic of enquiry. Some of the impetus for the latter was from the former federal government's *Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative* (CAR) Reserve program, which already seems subject to dilution with a new government in place. A problem with these processes is that despite considerable habitat change continuing, we don't know our biotas well enough (recall the talk last year on earthworms where many new species have been discovered recently.) We are nonetheless bombarded by hype suggesting that because we have magnificent wilderness we need do no more. The resolution of the CAR process (including its genuine public consultation) may well become a benchmark in sustainable conservation, even though it is not in itself a new concept.

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MARIA ISLAND FEDERATION OF FIELD NATURALISTS  
MEETING, FRIDAY 22ND MARCH, 1996.

by  
Sue & Melanie Lovell

We arrived at Louisville Point to catch the 6pm ferry to Maria Island. All boarded the ferry and were seated comfortably in time to watch Don and family hurried their luggage onto the jetty, park the car and sprint along to the ferry with seconds to spare. The ferry was escorted to Maria Island by a few curious gannets.

On arrival we set up our tent alongside Bernacchi's Creek amidst Cape Barren Geese, Native Hens rattling their bracelets and a few Forester Kangaroos out for their evening graze. After tea a large group gathered to go spotlighting and saw many Bennetts wallabies, brushtail possums, Forester Kangaroos, a large wolf spider on the road and the glow of Dons bicycle reflector lights, mimicking red eyes in the distance. During the night the wildlife came to us, we had possums mangling our bananas trying to extract them through the side of the tent wall and our alarm call was the raucous cries of foraging Native Hens.

*Saturday* - The choice of activities was a day walk to Bishop and Clerk Mountain with Phil Collier, geology walk to Fossil Cliffs and quarry with geologist, Bert Moore, or a seashore walk to Painted Cliffs. We took the latter and received a very informative talk on seaweed decomposition and its effect on the atmosphere given by Harry Burton. Some unusual pieces of seaweed, which had grown in a zig-zag formation were found on the shore, swimming crabs, egg sacs of the sea snail *Polynices sordida* and a New Holland Spindle shell were also found washed upon the beach. We had lunch at the Painted Cliffs where Harry talked to us on various seals and tracking devices used to trace their habits. A swim finished the afternoon for Melanie. We then attended a well presented evening talk on Maria Island geology given by Bert Moore.

*Sunday* - A great morning for the bird walk to Bernacchi's Creek, Priscilla Park took half of the group, while we went with Sue & Phil Collier. Assorted fungi were found, also an Emperor Gum moth caterpillar that appeared to have been parasitised, the native currant bushes were heavy with fruit. Among the various birds we heard, Kookaburras, Golden whistlers, Yellow wattle birds, black faced cuckoo shrikes, silver eyes and a good sighting of a Satin fly catcher, male & two females. Around the reservoir we saw & heard Tasmanian morn bills, a black duck was seen among reeds on the dam. We hurried back so members could attend the federation meeting.

While the meeting was in progress, Melanie & I walked to Fossil Cliffs inspired by Berts talk. Great views out to Scrouten Island & Freycinet Peninsular, we saw some unusual skinks on the rocks. The amount of fossilized shells in the cliffs was amazing. We came back via the airstrip occupied by many pairs of Cape Barren Geese, past the cemetery where a maori chief is buried among the early settlers and back through Darlington. Most people had already left to go home.

While waiting for the ferry it was remarked, how kind the weather had been to us, and how all had enjoyed their stay on Maria.

My trip to Maria Island  
by  
Alex Frusher

We had to drive for 1 hour to get to the ferry. At the ferry we loaded our luggage onto the ferry. The man wanted to put my toy leopard Pipa on, but I said no. When we got to the island we put our luggage into big trolleys - some of the adults felt like convicts. The Cabins were very dusty and a rat was in the cabin and possums were everywhere. A poor little pademelon came into the place where the parents were talking. It came right in and did a couple of circles and went out. Later that night we went on a spotlighting walk. We went to look for possums and wallabies and kangaroos. We saw some Brushtails with babies on their backs and one of them was near the toilets.

When we went to sleep we shut the door to the cabin because the possums would get in. We slept in queen bunks. Kim and I slept in the middle. It was fun. On Saturday we went to the convict buildings. One of the buildings used to be a hotel. I cut my finger on cutting grass. We saw geese with green beaks and wild hens and a poor little paddy that had got stuck in the creek.

Then we went on a fossil walk but we didn't go on the beach walk or the mountain walk. The fossil walk was EXHAUSTING !!

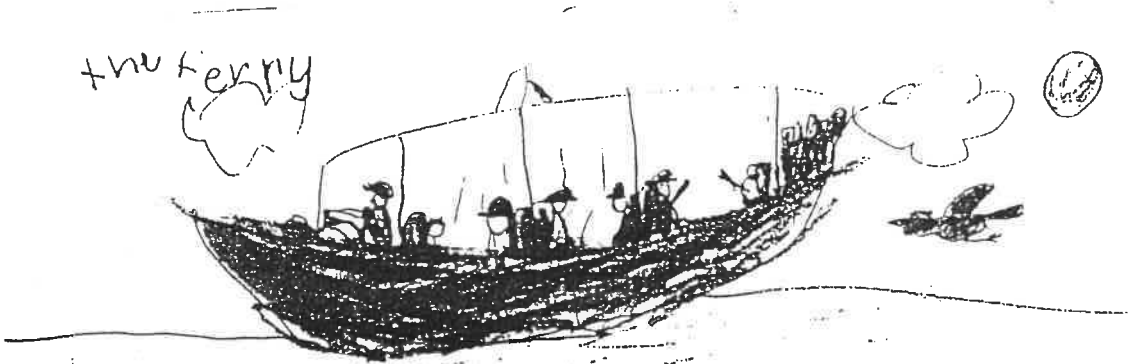
Next morning we went on a bird walk and then went back to have pancakes for breakfast. Then we went on a history walk and after lunch we went home on the ferry. On the way back we saw a little wombat sleeping on a person's lap.

THE END

the fossil cliffs



the ferry



## P. Fieldtrip to Maria Island

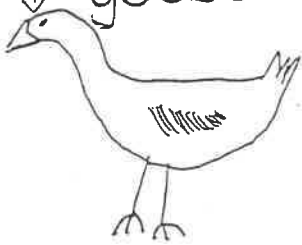
by Kimberley Frusher

When we got to the ferry we put our luggage on the ferry. While we were waiting to get on, daddy helped a girl get a hook out of a fish's mouth. Mummy and daddy were a bit embarrassed because we had so much luggage but when the last family came on they felt a little better because they had a lot of luggage too. On the ferry I saw a cormorant on a little jetty and a yellow headed gannet following the ferry. Because it was a clear day we could see some of the buildings from the ferry. I saw a white square and mummy thought it was a grave yard and she was right because the next

Editor's Note: This is abridged - read the full epic at the Meeting!

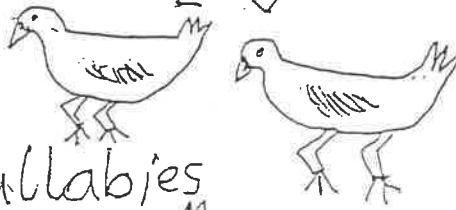
yet more From the Younger Members

Cape Baron  
goose



Something  
on Maria  
Island\*

native hens



wallabies



munched  
plant



Scarlett breasted  
robin



fossil  
shells



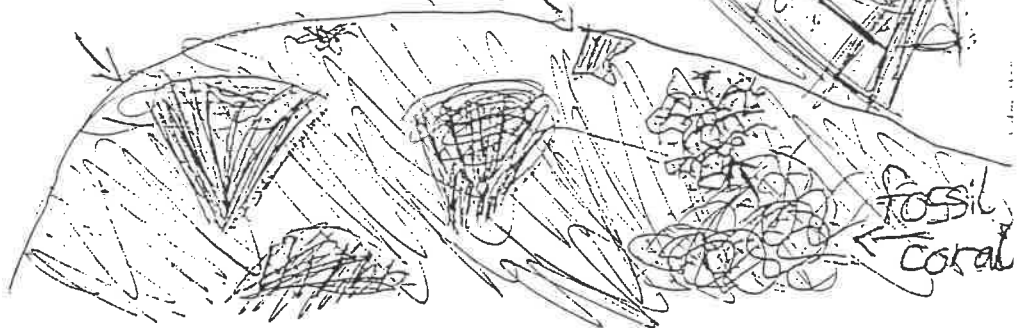
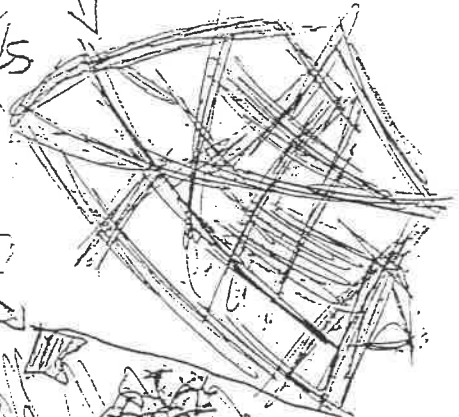
coral



fossil  
shells



Algae



fossil  
coral

# Bulletin of the Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club Inc.

July 1996 Number 283

The Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club encourages the study of natural history and supports conservation. We issue our journal, the *Tasmanian Naturalist*, annually in October. People with a range of interests and knowledge are welcome as members.

Contact Don Hird (344 293) for more information, or write to GPO Box 68A Hobart, 7001.

**Program :** General meetings start at 7.45pm on the first Thursday of the month in the Life Science Building at the University of Tasmania. Outings are usually held the following Saturday or Sunday, meeting at 10am outside the main entrance to the Museum in MacQuarie Street. If you don't attend the meeting prior, check for excursion details as they sometimes need to be changed at a late stage.

- 01 August **Muttonbirds or Yolla;** Irynej Skira from Parks and Wildlife will speak about these harbingers of the Tasmanian spring and summer. The birds arrive from their annual north-Pacific migration in late September, so this talk will foreshadow the arrival of longer (and warmer?) days ahead!
- 09-11 August This excursion is in conjunction with our Survey Group's program. We are conducting a mammal survey of Denne's Hill on north Bruny Island for Parks and Wildlife which will be extended to cover much of north Bruny in coming months. People are welcome to attend for the weekend (overnight camping or local hostel accommodation), or for the day on either the Saturday or Sunday. Meet at the gate to the Quarantine Station (follow the signs from the Denne's Point Road) at 10.30 a.m. (ex the 09.30 a.m. ferry from Kettering; n.b. it will be necessary to leave from Hobart at around 0830 to catch this ferry, this should be prearranged by anybody needing transport). As well as Denne's Hill, a recently declared Forty Spotted Pardalote Reserve, there is the Quarantine peninsula, also a Forty Spot location, and many coastal features to investigate. People intending to camp please phone Don Hird (344 293 (H), 350 722 (W)) beforehand.
- 05 September **Whales;** Hans Wapstra from Parks and Wildlife, will speak on the current status of whale populations, with particular emphasis on species from around Tasmania.
- 07 September This is a Saturday excursion of a general nature to Whalers' Lookout; south of Orford. The feature is named for its early use although it's a pity that this has declined in intervening times. The area is nonetheless a worthwhile walk of moderate standard. Meet outside the Museum at 0900 a.m. or by arrangement on the eastern shore.
- 03 October **Orphaned Wildlife; Care and Rehabilitation.** Robyn Gates has considerable local experience in this area which assists not only with the individual animals assisted but also with the biology and behaviour of the species concerned.
- 06 October 10 a.m.: Meet at the Museum. We will visit Robyn's orphanage and its current occupants.
- 07 November We have been invited to an illustrated public lecture arranged by ANZAAS on the **Marine Biota of Port Davey.**
- 09-10 November A weekend excursion to Lune River at the height of the orchid season. Accommodation will be available at the Youth Hostel and perhaps a nearby cottage. Plenty of camping is available in the YHA grounds (small charge). A trip on the Ida Bay Railway and possibly Southport Lagoon are definite possibilities. Pencil in your diary; further details next Bulletin. Contact is Sue Collier; 296 597.

## SGAP Flower Show, October ; Can You Help ???

We will be exhibiting at this popular event again this year. Some willing helpers have come forward but any more are welcome. Please phone Sue Collier (296 597) by mid August.

## Peter Rankin Trust Fund for Herpetology : Awards.

This Fund has assisted both Tertiary students and others interested in studying reptiles and amphibians with grants towards specific projects. The deadline for this year's applications is August 12. Don Hird (344 293) has a copy of the application form for anybody interested.

## Creative Answers to Conservation Dilemmas

A change of Federal government introducing the winds of change is upon us. Despite promises of little change to programs and directions during the campaign, the new government is already cutting program budgets and loosening prior restrictions on industries based on extraction of natural resources. Perhaps the biggest concern is in the "big -sell" approach to conservation and environmental issues. One example is the proposed Telstra partial sale; if you're not for the sale you're not for the environment, so it is said. The link between these issues, if indeed there is one, is often repeated but never explained. Australia's record is not all bad; there have been some local world class initiatives and the systematic National programs developed over the last decade did seem to have real promise and may yet be partly realised. A glib top-down approach with a return to States' rights and industry self-regulation hardly seems more than an exercise in subterfuge.

The response of the strident conservation lobby also seems less than edifying. Their response to the recent woodchip decision as the "stupidest ever" is repetitious and naive given the new government's policy platform. The insistent assertion that there is only one conservation movement (themselves, of course) is not only similarly naive but counterproductive. Everybody with a genuine interest in nature conservation recognises the plurality of the conservation constituency and thus the need for dialogue. Campaigns like "Ban 1080 Poison" have largely failed; 1080 use has been liberalised and increased in Tasmania in recent years.

The woodchip lobby, frequently masquerading as a community interest group, asserts that since there have not yet been extinctions proven to be caused by their activity there is no need for concern. While apparently true so far, this message is simplistic and irrelevant.

Lobbyists like us won't foreseeably be able to match the volume of advertising and publicity of the big players. How, then, to best advocate conservation and persuade the average voter of the urgency of action, especially in view of the voracious appetite of modern consumerism and the rapidity of habitat destruction? In other words, how can popular culture be more meaningfully linked to careful conservation?

Wildlife documentaries, often of considerable quality and depth, have become extremely popular with global audiences in the last decade or two. Often the species or habitat in prime focus is exotic to Australia, e.g. one can obtain a fine overview of the natural history and biology of U.S. "prairie dogs" (actually ground squirrels) or Scottish Otters from popular documentaries. The information provided includes information on the "vital statistics" of the population that not only make an intriguing part of the story but also enable important decisions about the conservation requirements of the species. There have been occasional Australian analogues, e.g. the Faces in the Mob documentary on population and behavioural biology of Eastern Grey Kangaroos. The bottom line for effective conservation is that knowledge of the biology of species is essential. It's not enough to rely on the "no extinctions yet" principle if the processes of rapid habitat change are condemning vulnerable species to a predictable future demise.

The Bettong and Eastern Barred Bandicoot are two marsupials having Tasmania as their last stronghold. They occupy habitats which are amongst the most heavily impacted by land clearance and forestry. Although they occur in good numbers and over a wide area in Tasmania, the shame is that their biology is so poorly known that only a shadow of a quality natural history documentary could be compiled on existing information. We know that the habitat of these species is inadequately reserved but we know almost nothing of what constitutes a minimum viable population, or how for how long the animals live. This sort of information will be of even higher importance as habitat fragmentation and disturbance continues. Given that these two species are known to suffer as "collateral damage" from 1080 poison, the users of the poison should at the very least collectively sponsor the necessary research.

Distracting gimmicks from environmental marketeers like Dick Smith or more platitudes from the industry won't substantively help, nor will heavily publicised tree-planting and weed abatement programs. The agents of habitat degradation should pay for the necessary independent research. Landcare programs are usually worthwhile in their own right, but they fall well short of representing adequate wildlife conservation. Effective consultation is also a necessity, especially when the same governments and industries that regulate exploitation of the habitats also claim to manage the conservation agenda. Consultation on offer at a State level is primarily one-way; we are expected to make submissions and supply information we collect, but obtaining full disclosure and answers to the more difficult questions, let alone round-table discussion, seem nigh on impossible. The issues are often technical and can be confusing, but more creative solutions rather than ongoing denial and acrimony are

## Excursion Reports:

Eaglehawk Neck; May 1996

Marine Algae was the principle focus of this excursion. Eaglehawk Neck offers many opportunities to view intertidal rocky shore biotas as Fossil Island, just beyond the Blowhole Carpark, offers both protected shore platforms and rocks exposed to the full force of the Tasman Sea. Substrates include shore platforms with incised gulches and rockpools, steeper rock faces in the intertidal zone and nearby muddy and sandy shores.

Algae first observed included larger forms such as Bull Kelp, *Durvillaea potatorum*, and *Macrocystis angustifolia* with its characteristic air bladders, washed ashore near the jetty. Red algae are most often subtidal forms and *Callophyllis* sp. and *Plocamium* sp. were amongst the drift.

On the rock platforms and in rockpools were *Dictyopteris* sp., Neptune's Necklace, *Hormosira banksii*, and *Ecklonia radiata*. Individual rockpools were like miniature marine gardens, with each having a diversity of algae and distinctive appearance. An elegant green alga, *Chaetomorpha darwinii*, tasted rather like pickled cucumber. Animals observed included the abundant and ubiquitous half crab of southeastern Tasmanian intertidal shores, *Petrolisthes elongatus*. More closely related to hermit crabs than true crabs, half crabs have only three pairs of walking legs and distinctive chelae (nippers). This species is also found in New Zealand but apparently is uncommon or absent from Victorian coasts. Club members have reported this species in abundance on many rocky beaches from Orford and Maria Island to Margate in the last year, and on the day of the excursion they were observed on both sheltered coasts along Norfolk Bay and on protected areas of the exposed coast at Stinking Bay. They are primarily filter feeders but aquarium observations indicate that they also take other food such as mussel opportunistically. Another member of the half crab group (anomura) is the hairy stone crab, *Lomis hirta*. This poorly-known crab has the shape of a typical half crab, but with a hairy texture over all of its dorsal surface. True crabs (brachyura) observed included shore crabs amongst the boulders and a large red-bait or cleft-fronted crab, *Plagusia chabrus*, a fast-moving crab which browses algae of crevices on exposed rock faces. A pycnogonid or sea-spider was observed in a rockpool, as were several large octopus.

After lunch, and with an advancing cold front bringing in squally rain, some of the 15 attendees returned to Hobart while several ventured further south to view a Sea Eagle nest near Stinking Bay. Tom Terry has located most if not all of the Sea Eagle nests on Forrestier and Tasman Peninsulas, no small feat. As part of the project he is recording details of their size and positions in relation to each other local coastal morphology. The nest visited was at around 25 metres in a stringybark and will probably be used again next summer.

## Brown Mountain, via Campania; June 1996

The main aim of this excursion was to view the "HairTube" method of mammal survey. Our leader was one of our newer members, Dr Bob Rose, who is normally a resident of the eastern U.S. Bob has made Tasmania home with several visits in recent years and is currently undertaking a survey primarily of quolls and devils using hair tubes. This method employs baited lengths of PVC tube which are deployed for up to a month in suitable habitat. Rather than acting as traps, they sample hairs from visiting mammals by means of adhesive tape on the walls of the tube.

We looked at several of the many tubes deployed in this area of mixed eucalypt forest over sandstone substrates. Several exhibited hairs which were collected for later microscopic examination. The hair tubes are to be given to the Club after the current project for use by the Survey Group.

# Bulletin of the Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club Inc.

October 1996,  
Editor; Don Hird.

Number 284

The Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club encourages the study of natural history and supports conservation. We issue our journal, the *Tasmanian Naturalist*, annually in October. People with a range of backgrounds and knowledge are welcome as members.

Contact Don Hird (344 293) for further excursion details or more information, or write to GPO Box 68A Hobart, 7001.

## Program

General meetings start at 7.45pm on the first Thursday of the month in the Life Science Building at the University of Tasmania. Outings are usually held the following Saturday or Sunday, meeting at 10am outside the main entrance to the Museum in MacQuarie Street. If you're attending an outing but not the meeting prior, check as to the timing of the excursion; sometimes unforeseen late changes may occur.

- 07 November **Members' Night : Orchids;** Several speakers will give short talks around this theme. Bring any orchid observations or exhibits and wear your favourite orchid T-shirt etc. (The ANZAAS Public Lecture scheduled for this timeslot in the last Bulletin has been postponed until March '97)
- 08-10 November **Lune River & Southeast Weekend:** see page three for details.
- 05 December Phil Collier (Author of *Alpine Plants of Tasmania- a Plant Identikit*) will present an illustrated talk entitled 'Continents Apart- the Differences Between Alpine Plants of Europe and Australia.  
According to our tradition, please bring a plate of Christmas supper to the December meeting.
- 07 December 9 a.m. Meet at the Museum for a Saturday excursion to Hartz Mountains. This will be an alpine outing to look at the wildflowers [and frogs, ed.] of the South. Bring all-weather gear and strong footwear. Leader Phil Collier (62 296 597).
- 22-24 November **Survey Weekend on Betsy Island;** see page two for details.
- December TBA **Survey on King Island;** see page three for details.
- January **No meeting in January (as usual).**

New Members: A special welcome to Kerry Sackett, and to Yvonne Hill and Lyndon Brown.

Subs. Due Now. Details page three.



## Outing Reports

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### Federation Report: St Helens 20-22 September 1996.

This Federation meeting was hosted by the North-East Field Naturalists at the recommended Queechy Cottages. An outing I attended to Rayner's Hill resulted in some significant millipede finds, a mountain funnelweb and giant velvetworms. Two landsnail range extensions were *Discocharopa mimosa* by 28km and *Roblinella curacaoe* by 95km.

Other excursions were to Humbug Point and the Winifred Curtis Reserve at Scamander. Orchids were scarce but a grand display of several thousand *Diurus lanceolata* and some *D. pardina* with many intriguing hybrids was much admired by the 20 delegates.

A lively evening discussion on the PLUC RFA process was followed by slides of Mt. Chappell Island. The overlong business meeting approved a new constitution, and the Marine Nats as members. The yellow-throated honeyeater was nominated as the "bird emblem" despite light-hearted claims of "vertebratism" (!). Burnie Field Nats reported on a crayfish endemic to three degraded streams in the city.

The next meeting (AGM) will be at "Carnacoo" Scout Camp, West Tamar 7-9 March 1997. Kevin Bonham, Delegate.

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### Excursion Report: Whalers' Lookout via Rheban, 07 September 1996.

John Reid led this walk on the east coast north of Hellfire Bluff. Much of the coast is on the Earlham property, from whom permission was obtained.

An early sighting was of large grey birds not usually associated with this area; Cape Barren Geese that have colonised the area following their introduction to nearby Maria Island in the 1970s. Two adults and a younger bird were seen. Initially we walked through pasture. Coastal vegetation was reduced to a narrow fringe of trees, mostly blue gums and boobyalla, often in a state of dieback and subsidence from coastal erosion. Earlham tier, a kilometre or so west, is still treed as was our target some seven kilometres to the south. Fine views of Maria Island across Mercury Passage were obtained and gannets and terns were observed fishing. Sea eagles were also seen on several occasions as was a wedge-tail.

Lunch was taken on a small headland above a 10 metre dolerite cliff. By this time our target of Whaler's Lookout was clearly out of reach for the day and a decision was taken to fossick in the area and save the lookout for another day. Slightly to the south a patch of much lighter coloured rock on the cliffs proved to be a small sandstone outcrop on consultation with a geomap. Middens were eroding into the sea on the cliff edge. Flame robins were active around the lunch sight and nearer to Rheban both noisy miners and swift parrots (perhaps newly returned from their mainland winter) were seen foraging in occasional blue gum blossoms. Priscilla Park and Mary Beadle reported Hooded Plover from beaches around Orford.

This excursion was enjoyed by about 15 people, in four cars. The area closer to Whalers' Lookout appears to be of more natural history interest than that visited, and includes a coastal lagoon at Cackle Bay, but needs at least a full day's walk.

A disappointing aspect was that on checking the 1:25 000 map on our return, a Coastal Reserve of some 100 metres width is marked, but there is no evidence of this unproclaimed reserve on the ground. This sort of situation is all too frequent around our coast.

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## General News.

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**Betsy Island Excursion:** this is a supplementary excursion to run from Friday November 22-24 (afternoon and evening departures ex South Arm Jetty, timed by arrangement; returning afternoon of 24th.). It is to be a survey weekend, looking at mammals and other vertebrates, and inverts, plants, comets and more.

Bring all-weather gear, strong footwear and all food and water for 2-3 days. This is a close but isolated venue, self-sufficiency is a must. Physical ability to disembark in shallows is required. Leader Don Hird (62 344 293). If somebody can bring a mobile phone (strictly for emergency use only) this would be very useful.

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**Reminder: 1997 Subs Due Now !** Membership fees are due in advance by the end of the Calendar Year. Our modest rates are Adults \$20, Families \$25, Concession / Junior \$15. Members receive four *Bulletins* per year and the *Tasmanian Naturalist* journal annually in October.

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### **Lune River Weekend: November 8-10 1996**

Accommodation is available at Lune River Youth Hostel. Cost is \$12 per night for non-members; members \$10, with concessions for children. You will need a Youth Hostels sheet liner-: these can be hired from the hostel for \$2-50 per night. There is plenty of camping in the hostel grounds; cost is \$7 per night for non-members; members \$5. Bring all food for weekend including BYO BBQ on Saturday evening.

**Saturday:** meet at Lune River YHA at 10 a.m. We will catch the Ida Bay train to The Deep Hole (\$11 return, concession for families). The heathland should be alive with orchids and other wildflowers. Possibly swimming for the hardy.

**Sunday:** weather permitting we drive to Cockle Creek (the road may be a little rough) and walk to South Cape Bay. The walk is about 16km return and fairly flat. For members not going on the walk there are some areas of seashore to explore at Cockle Creek. Bring all-weather gear and strong footwear.

Members and visitors are welcome to join us either for the whole weekend or for either day. Anyone coming for the Sunday only please check with the leader for starting time from Lune River. Car pooling will need to be arranged prior to the weekend; no rendezvous in Hobart but transport will be available by arrangement. Bookings for accommodation or camping to Sue Collier (62 296 597) by Thurs 07 November.

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### **King Island December Excursion.**

This is another supplementary excursion, in December. In conjunction with Lyn Forster and family of Cygnet, who are visiting King Island for the month, we are organising mammal and other survey activities. Participants would need to make their own arrangements regarding travel and accommodation, but some help with camping and/or limited transport may be available.

King Island has suffered from massive deforestation but, despite 1080 campaigns against browsing and grazing marsupials, still probably holds potoroo populations. Identification of such populations with a view to their conservation is a principal aim of the exercise. There is also a valuable isolated platypus population on the island, as noted in the 1995 *Naturalist*. Losses to the King Island fauna include its unique wombat and emu (early in the nineteenth century) and, almost certainly, quolls in recent decades. The water rat appears to be naturally absent from King island.

Don Hird (62 344 293) will coordinate this survey program, in consultation with Lyn Forster. Exact dates are yet to be finalised and probably flexible. We are organising the project with Tasmanian Museum and Parks and Wildlife.

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### **Timelines Australia Project:**

Compilation of seasonal calendars for local natural events is the aim of this project, coordinated by Alan Reid and the Gould League of Victoria. Such calendars are important in the oral tradition of Aboriginal Australians in parts of northern Australia, but they are generally lost to our natural heritage elsewhere. Tasmania seems especially conducive to this sort of documentation, with its insular nature in relatively high latitudes and many migrant species.

Alan Reid will be conducting a workshop on Timelines in Hobart in January in conjunction with the conference of the Aust. Assoc. for Environmental Education. For preliminary information please phone Susanna van Essen or Anna March (002) 345 566 at the Tas Environment Centre.

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## Conservation Angle.

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Recent months have seen some conservation concerns resurface. The Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) process has been to the fore, and is due to be completed by later this year. Initially we applauded the RFA concept as at last acknowledging that comprehensive and adequate reservation of species is appropriate, even though the concept has been late in officially arriving here. We don't wish to condemn the process out of hand, but from our point of view RFA seems to be making some tired old mistakes and creating some new ones.

As with other conservation issues in Tasmania we have long advocated, including to RFA administration, a Conservation Council that would represent the diversity of stakeholders including committed conservation groups. Current processes seem intent on calling for submissions or organising "discussion groups" but both of these often turn out to be black holes from which our views, let alone answers or solutions, don't emerge. There is no substitute for real dialogue. Conservation issues have for too long had a sorry local history of strident ongoing disagreement.

Conservation can be achieved in many different ways. Some traditional and obvious methods don't work, or at least not with reasonable efficiency. For example, it's no longer enough to declare a species "protected" if its habitat is disappearing. Having many fine National Parks, as we do, doesn't in itself guarantee comprehensive and adequate conservation if many important species and habitats are not represented in them (as they aren't). Dialogue on these sorts of issue are badly needed and without them denial becomes too easy.

From the conservation angle there is a disappointing lack of solidarity. A recent example was a meeting I attended organised by the Tas. Conservation Trust entitled "Why Are There So Many Conservation Groups?". The problem was that only satellites of the Trust were invited to address the worthwhile question, that is, it wasn't an inclusive discussion. This sort of sectarianism gives conservation a bad name. Nobody looking at the record of this club could dismiss us as a community group with a strong conservation focus. Nonetheless we consistently hear, more often in headlines than in considered discussion, that there is "a conservation movement" in Tasmania. This is apparently the same group that boycotted the last round of forestry discussions in the early 1990s. We don't disagree with all of their views, but plurality of outlook is essential.

Some say we don't need more conservation. I have written, as an individual, to the Forest Protection Society asking about their membership, rules, and mode of operation. I received only a wad of hype about how much the forests will be improved by more woodchipping, but nothing about the democratic processes of what masquerades as a community group. Their meetings are apparently BBQs! This contrived, flimsy and fraudulent "Society" is heavily industry-funded and appears to act only as an industry PR mouthpiece.

Recently I received two invitations to attend RFA "Community Workshops". Both were at Campbelltown, at short notice, of some hours length, and in the middle of the day (one on a weekend). Neither had a written agenda. In both cases we were earnestly urged to attend but when pressed as to the content and substance of the sessions detail was lacking. At first I demurred on the grounds that we have expressed our views often enough in writing (they hadn't looked at any of this), although I succumbed to the first invitation. The session was obviously part of a very expensive process, with expense-account consultants leading the discussion, but my overall impression was that it was extraordinarily naive. The leaders seemed to know little about strategic biological conservation, questions were of the "How would you feel if there was more / less clearfelling?" nature. Nothing in these issues is that simple.

The independence of the administration of RFA is also of real concern. Our natural heritage should be managed in full consultation with its community of interest, not just by those managing or apologising for its usual threatening processes. The documentation of strategic conservation for Tasmania is patchy and often sparse. It appears that lip service will be paid to public consultation by RFA, but predominantly on an simplistic and anecdotal basis and with people who haven't demonstrated a long-standing commitment to the issues.

The whole process seems out of balance. Money is poured into PR exercises that won't resolve the deeper issues. Does this sound like history revisited?

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