



No. 72  
FEBRUARY, 1983

# The Tasmanian Naturalist

Registered by Australia Post – Publication No. TBH0495

Postal Address: G.P.O. Box 68A, Hobart, 7001

Editor: L.E. Wall

Annual Subscription: \$5.00

Each author is responsible for the opinions and facts expressed in his article.

Editor.

## WOOD-WASTE POWER PLAN

In the midst of all the controversy about the proposed Gordon below Franklin hydro-electric power scheme a Launceston businessman and a Melbourne-based engineering company have proposed the establishment of a number of power stations fired by wood-waste. They claim that nine such stations could produce as much power as the hydro-electric scheme at a greatly reduced cost, at the same time making use of wood which is at present being wasted. This proposal would have the additional advantage of providing permanent employment for a large number of people.

The amount of firewood lying round the State and at present unused or providing fuel for bushfires has been causing increasing concern to many thinking people. This new proposal would put the waste to good use and at the same time tidy up many country areas. For those of us who persist in heating our homes with wood fires, and many people are reverting to this form of heating because of the higher costs of other fuels, "waste" timber windrowed after land clearing and subsequently burned in situ to dispose of it is not wise use of our natural resources.

Such a scheme, based on Swedish experience, should receive very full and careful consideration by the State Government before proceeding with further hydro-electric projects, as it is claimed that sufficient waste wood is created each year to provide almost four times the amount of power which will be produced by the Gordon below Franklin scheme.

## PARDALOTES IN AND NEAR HOBART

By Michael Sharland  
2 Erina Place, Hobart

Of the three species of Pardalotes occurring in Tasmania undoubtedly the most common is the Yellow-Tipped Pardalote *Pardalotus striatus*. Next comes the Spotted *P. punctatus*, with the Forty-spotted *P. quadragintus* a good last. They are among the smallest of birds, ranging from about 90 to 100mm from tip of blunt bill to end of abbreviated tail. The generic name is coming into greater use, replacing the earlier vernacular, "Diamond bird", though it must be admitted that this once common name had justifiable application to the Spotted species on account of the male's well marked, colourful plumage.

Hobart each year sees both the Spotted and Yellow-Tipped Pardalotes. Each is fairly widespread, however, through the country, the Yellow-Tipped (also called Striated) in sheep grazing areas mostly, the Spotted in light woodlands and forests. Vocally there are few better "spring harbingers" than the Yellow-Tipped, its call unceasing from dawn to dark between August and December. It is rare to hear it during winter months, possibly because the birds are away or lack breeding incentive. In addition to the loud "pick-it-up" call of the breeding season, the Yellow-Tipped utters a soft trill, which continues through the summer, replacing the one that is best known.

August is the time when the Yellow-Tipped is first heard in eucalypt trees in my garden, which fringes the city centre on the northern edge of Sandy Bay. There a pair may stay through the summer, with one or two young ones, which they bring down to an acacia close to my sitting room window, with a bird bath nearby. Adults frequently drink in the hollowed stone bath.

They are known to nest down unused chimneys and apertures in buildings. A house owner at Collinsvale, a night worker, complained that in the mornings his sleep was disturbed by the persistent call of a Yellow-Tipped Pardalote just outside his window, and he told me he had gone out looking in bushes "hopefully to find the bird's nest." However, his troubles ended when he called me to look. In the timbered wall there was a small hole that builders had left at the top of the window, and beside it was a vine, in which he said the bird sat. Obviously the nest was inside the wall, and with the hole covered up the birds disappeared.

The Yellow-Tipped Pardalote sometimes nests in small colonies. They are occasionally found in sandstone caves, half a dozen or more occupying small wind-blown cavities in which they build nests.

As far as my garden is concerned — and this probably applies State-wide — the Yellow-Tipped Pardalote is a seasonal migrant. A few do remain for winter, but migration occurs with the majority, and in this respect I have reports of the species being seen in the Sydney (N.S.W.) region. They leave Hobart about March.

They constitute a Tasmanian race, distinguished from the mainland Striated Pardalotes by so minor a feature as a yellow wing spot, and, I would say, by voice, for though living on the mainland for several years, I cannot recall having heard the distinctive call from any other form of Pardalote.

The less common Spotted Pardalote visits the same trees at Sandy Bay, though it has been recorded only during winter, when the Yellow-Tipped has been away. Observations suggest that this particular species is dwindling in numbers, overall, town and country. The reason for this is obscure. It generally nests in the ground, and many times I have been told by boys they have discovered a nest of the "bank diamond." There is possibly disturbance from this, or else some predation by small ground animals.

As for the Forty-spotted Pardalote, several years ago the late A.L. Butler, a keen observer, found it at Long Beach, Lower Sandy Bay. This could have been one of a number of early reports indicating the presence of the species in localities where it is not known to occur at present. On the other hand the bird is known to move round after breeding, and Long Beach, with its several eucalypts, may have been one of the places visited during this wandering. I have no reports of its being any closer to Hobart than this.

To be fairly certain of seeing the Forty-spotted Pardalote now it is usually necessary to visit Tinderbox, some 20 km south of Hobart, where an area of dry sclerophyll forest faces the Derwent River estuary opposite the top end of Bruny Island. It breeds there, nesting in tree cavities, and sometimes, oddly enough, in the ground. The other two species are there too, and without a clear view the rather plain-coloured Yellow-Tipped Pardalote could be mistaken for it. The bird, however, approaches its nest without much fear, even though an observer be close, and the soft little call is distinctive. There is another colony at Coningham, just out of Snug.

The Forty-spotted species is thought to be diminishing. Reports however indicate it was always uncommon, and when found was generally nesting in small colonies rather than in well separated pairs.

The Forty-spotted Pardalote has interest in being a Tasmanian endemic, probably a biological forerunner of other more colourful Pardalotes.

## REVIEWS

**TASMANIAN BIRD REPORT No. 11. Published by the Bird Observers Assn. of Tas. Price \$3.**

This annual publication contains ten papers by members of the Association covering a wide range of subjects connected with our birdlife, ranging from "Reasons for size differences in Tasmanian hawks", by N. Mooney, to new and rare visitors to our State and "Birds of Cape Portland", by R. Cooper.

In addition, there is a systematic list of bird observations by members and others during the year 1981, which follows the pattern of previous years' publications in summarising unusual or interesting observations, each of which is attributed to the observer who is identified by his/her initials. An appendix shows the names so identified. It is unfortunate that the appendix has not been carefully checked, resulting in at least two observers not being included so that the reader is left to guess at their identity.

Some other errors have also crept in. On page 31 *Pachyptila vittata* is named Lesser Broad-billed Prion instead of Broad-billed Prion, while on page 32 *P. salvini* is named Medium-billed Prion instead of Lesser Broad-billed Prion. On page 36 the records of the Banded Stilt at Ravensdale and Okehampton have been attributed to the observers in the reverse order. On page 41 the record of the Southern Emu-wren at Cuckoo was not reported by L.W. The reported observation of the European Greenfinch at Port Davey (page 42) is noted as the first record for the south-west: this is incorrect, it was seen there in November 1951 — see Emu 52:62. On page 43 the Little Raven is mentioned but no details given. If the name is correct, and not Forest Raven as is suspected, further information is warranted as in this State it has been recorded up to the present from King Island only.

Notwithstanding the errors mentioned above this journal contains a wealth of good reading and is very good value for its price.

**AN OCCASIONAL STINT, BULLETIN No. 1.** Published by the Tasmanian Shorebird Study Group. Price \$3, plus 75 cents postage.

As the name suggests this is not proposed as a regular publication but one which will be produced when circumstances permit. As the Group and its activities become firmly established the issue of a bulletin may become a regular feature.

In Bulletin No. 1 emphasis is placed on the past history of studies of wading birds, particularly in the south-east of the State, including studies in recent years and the potential for more detailed studies in the future. It contains maps and descriptions of many of the areas (including some in the north and north-east) at present being studied and the results of recent banding activities.

Reference to current studies of gulls and terns is included and much more will be produced concerning this section in future issues.

Both these publications are available from the Bird Observers Assn. of Tas., G.P.O. Box 68A, Hobart, 7001.

## CLUB EXCURSIONS

### Nieka to St. Crispins Well. 7 August 1982

The outing was along the pipeline track from Nieka, on Mt. Wellington, to St. Crispins Well with the aim of comparing the vegetation on the side of the hill at the beginning of the track with that on the south and south-western sides. The east side receives more sun and is drier while the south-westerly aspect is shaded and wetter. The soil is derived from dolerite. Large boulders of this rock are present at the beginning of the track, but towards the Well there were some outcrops of sandstone.

On the easterly aspect *Eucalyptus pulchella* was dominant and the native cherry *Exocarpus cupressiformis* and *Beyeria viscosa* were the principal shrubs. *Acacia riceana* was in bud giving promise of a good display in 3-4 weeks' time. Although expecting to find the rock fern *Cheilanthes tenuifolia* we were unsuccessful in this. The cranberry *Astroloma humifusum* was a prostrate shrub on this warmer drier aspect. Two sun orchids *Thelymitra* sp. were seen.

Along the track on the shaded south-western side buzzies *Acaena novae-zelandiae* occurred, with *Haloragis teucroides* scrambling in the depressions at the side of the track. Blueberries *Billardiera longifolia* and heartberries *Aristotelia peduncularis* were common. The Compositae were well represented with *Olearia argophylla*, *O. viscosa* and *Bedfordia salicina* as the predominant shrubs in many places. The dominant eucalypt was now *E. obliqua* with occasional *E. delegatensis*. Ferns beside the track were the hard water fern *Blechnum watsii* and *Polystichum proliferum*. As the track took a more westerly direction *Dianella tasmanica* tended to replace *B. watsii*. Several patches of greenhoods *Pterostylis longifolia* were found, a few in flower but most still in bud.

As the track took on a more exposed south-westerly aspect *E. delegatensis* became the dominant eucalypt, *Acacia riceana* was still present and there were clumps of *Gahnia grandis*. Further on *Banksia marginata* was prolific above the track.

At the Well site were several ferns and a club-moss, probably *Lycopodium australianum*, was found among the dry rocks beside the track.

It proved interesting to compare the dominant eucalypts as well as the other trees and shrubs on the warmer and drier easterly aspect with those on the shaded cooler south and south-westerly aspects.

The following lists of other plants seen is not exhaustive.

S.E. aspect.

*Drymophylla cyanocarpa*, *Senecio linearifolius*, *Pittosporum bicolor*, *Coprosma quadrifida*, *Leptospermum lanigerum*, *Correa lawrenciana*.

S.W. aspect.

*Gaultheria hispida*, *Nothofagus cunninghamii*, *Pomaderris apetala*, *Atherosperma moschatum*, *Asterotrichion discolor*, *Richea procera*, *Oxylobium ellipticum*, *Phebalium squameum*, *Orites diversifolia*, *Anopterus glandulosus*, and ferns *Histiopteris incisa*, *Asplenium bulbiferum*, *Blechnum nudum*, *Blechnum fluviatile*.

M. Mollison.

**Ida Bay — Hastings. 6 - 7 November, 1982.**

Entomological Notes.

A fine but windy Saturday was spent studying the buttongrass — heath vegetation which occurs at virtually sealevel at Ida Bay. Many of the native shrubs were in full bloom with *Papilionatae*, *Myrtaceae* and *Epacridaceae* particularly prevalent. The opportunity was taken to collect native bees and record the species of flower they visited to gain some idea of their relationship.

Unlike the introduced honey bee (family *Apidae*), with its highly developed social structure and ability to collect nectar and pollen from almost any flower, many of our native bees are small, solitary or only weakly social insects which may successfully gather pollen from only a single genus or family of native plants. Needless to say they are indispensable as pollinators of much of our flora. Particularly common were small reddish bees of the family *Anthophoridae* with various species visiting *Melaleuca*, *Aotus*, *Sprengelia* and other flowers. The female bee excavates a burrow in pithy stems or utilises old insect burrows and rears her young on pollen. Some anthophorids show the rudiments of a social system with a queen and a few non-breeding females forming a small colony.

Also collected were small blackish bees of the family *Halictidae* which commonly occur on flowers of the sub-family *Papilionatae*. Pea-like flowers are thought to be especially suited to pollination by bees which have the strength and long tongue necessary to reach the nectar as well as specially pollen-collecting hairs. Some halictids collect pollen on the underside of the abdomen, unlike honey bees which collect it on the tibia of the hindlegs. Halictid bees, which are generally solitary, excavate a burrow in the soil in which they rear their young.

Many people noticed the small black and yellow banded hover flies (family *Syrphidae*) which also play an important role as pollinators. Because they have a relatively short tongue they are generally found on flowers with rather shallow nectaries such as *Leptospermum*. The larvae of these insects are predacious on small insects such as aphids.

The unusual longicorn beetle, *Enchoptera apicalis*, is extremely slender with the mouthparts very elongated; it may possibly mimic a wasp or scorpionfly. Several specimens were noticed on *Melaleuca* flowers and close observation showed them to be feeding on the pollen. No doubt, *Melaleuca*, like many other *Myrtaceae*, is pollinated by a wide variety of insects and vertebrates in contrast to some plants, such as certain orchids, which may be visited by a single highly specialised pollinator.

Of special interest were two insects which usually occur at much higher altitudes further north in the State. The endemic, alpine grasshopper *Russalpia albertisi* was found in association with the ubiquitous grasshopper *Tasmaniocris tasmaniensis* which is also flightless. A specimen of the mountain blue butterfly *Neolucia hobartensis* was captured while settled on *Epacris* which is the foodplant of the larva.

In spring many small moths are on the wing after spending the earlier part of the year as caterpillars feeding on leaf litter on the ground. A particularly attractive and common example was the maroon epitymbia moth *Epitymbia isoselana*. Also common at this time of the year are larger moths of the genus *Dichromodes* whose stick-like caterpillars, called loopers, feed mostly on Myrtaceae other than *Eucalyptus*; the beautiful *D. confluaria* with boldly black and white striped wings was readily seen.

Hopes of collecting insects at a mercury vapour light at night were dashed with the advent of a cold wet change.

Next day, in indifferent weather, several carloads of people proceeded to the wet sclerophyll forests around Hastings Caves. A highlight here was the large number of Macleay's Swallowtail butterfly, *Graphium macleayanum*, which feeds on sassafras in the larval stage. An afternoon forage along a logging track revealed a variety of ground-dwelling beetles under stones and logs. Noteworthy was a flightless stag beetle *Lissotes* sp. a member of an interesting genus of beetles best developed in this State. The larvae feed in rotting timber.

P.B. McQuillan.

## THE DEATH OF A PADEMELON

H.D. Barker

Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery, Hobart

Whilst on a field trip during the first week in November, 1982, on properties at Boobyalla, Cape Portland and the Eddystone Point area, I observed the attack on a Tasmanian Pademelon (*Thylogale billardierii*), probably a sub-adult or an ailing specimen, by a Forest Raven (*Corvus tasmanicus*). It was my first recording of such an event in 40 years of field observations.

The incident occurred whilst conducting a bird species count on an open pasture sheltered by the lower slopes of Mt. Cameron on one side and dry sclerophyll and low scrub on two other sides. It was observed at a distance of some 250 metres and for a duration of 10 seconds, eliminating any assistance from us. The raven dropped straight from a gum tree of 15 metres in height, hit the pademelon about the head with its claws and beak probably picking its eyes out, and then continued its attack with a succession of short dives and the same physical contact. The aggression was such that the pademelon was rolled and tumbled by the raven with its claws and beak and vigorous wing beats over 20 metres or so into final submission; they both then disappeared into the low scrub. When we reached the area, blood traces indicated the point of entry into the scrub, however, we were unable to find the pademelon nor did we see the raven fly out, it was assumed that the raven had killed the pademelon and was still somewhere in the scrub with it and was lying low until we had left.

## THE STRANGE STANCE OF A YOUNG STARLING

*Marjorie Wall*

63 Elphinstone Rd., North Hobart

One morning in early November we had the sprinkler on our lawn trying to flood out corby grubs for the birds to eat.

A family of Starlings came to the party. Both parents fed the baby bird and after they had taken all the grubs they could find they flew off leaving the baby behind. It must have thought it was raining while it stood under the sprinkler for about ten minutes waiting for its next meal.

What interested us was that it stood erect and with its bill pointing up, like a bittern when danger threatens. Was this so that the water would run off more quickly, or was it for camouflage?

## BIRDS AROUND LAGOON BAY, EAST OF DUNALLEY

*L.E. Wall*

63 Elphinstone Rd., North Hobart

On a visit to Lagoon Bay and northwards towards The Narrows on 14 October 1982 the following birds were seen —

Aust. Gannet, Black Cormorant, Little Egret, White-faced Heron, Black Swan, Black Duck, Chestnut Teal, White-breasted Sea Eagle, Swamp Harrier, Pied Oystercatcher, Spurwinged Plover, Hooded Dotterel, Red-capped Dotterel, Red-necked Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Pacific Gull, Southern Black-backed Gull, Silver Gull, Caspian Tern, Crested Tern, Swift Parrot, Green Rosella, Eastern Rosella, Pallid Cuckoo, Welcome Swallow, Tree Martin, Aust. Pipit, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Superb Blue Wren, Brown Thornbill, White-fronted Chat, Scarlet Robin, Grey Fantail, Grey Shrike-thrush, Yellow-tipped Pardalote, Yellow-throated Honeyeater, Crescent Honeyeater, New Holland Honeyeater, Noisy Miner, Yellow Wattlebird, Beautiful Firetail, Goldfinch, Starling, Dusky Wood-swallow, Black Currawong, Grey Butcherbird, White-backed Magpie, Forest Raven.

Total, 47 species.

It is interesting to compare this list with that obtained at the Club's Easter Camp at Wilmot Harbour (an alternative name for Lagoon Bay) in 1948, published in *The Tasmanian Naturalist* for that year. It should, however, be noted that the recent visit was primarily to count Hooded Dotterels and Pied Oystercatchers on the beaches so that little time was spent in other habitats and birds well offshore would not have been seen.

In 1948 the total of species seen throughout the long weekend was only 50 although being an early Easter most of the migratory birds were still present.

The Shy Albatross was the only species seen offshore, and of the cormorants only White-breasted (Black-faced is the current name) and Little Pied were recorded. It is surprising that the Black Cormorant was missing. No terns were seen and only one Pacific Gull. The latter now has to compete with the Southern Black-backed Gull which 30 years ago was unknown in Tasmania but now is well established and nests on nearby Visscher Is.

Birds of prey don't seem to do well in the area: in 1948 one each of the Sea Eagle, Peregrine Falcon and an unidentified owl were seen, while on the recent visit we saw one Sea Eagle and one Swamp Harrier.

Of the wading birds Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers and Double-banded, Hooded and Red-capped Dotterels were seen in 1948, but the Sooty Oystercatcher and Double-banded Dotterel were not recorded this year (the latter should be in New Zealand in October). However, on the edge of the lagoon behind Two Mile Beach we found 5 Red-necked Stints and 2 Curlew Sandpipers (both Northern Hemisphere migrants) in October.

Birds of the forest and scrubs recorded in 1948 but not in 1982 were:- Tas. Native Hen, Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo, Fantailed Cuckoo, Flame Robin, Dusky Robin, Golden Whistler, Spotted Quail-thrush, White-browed Scrubwren, Spotted Pardalote, Black-headed Honeyeater, Eastern Spinebill, Brush Wattlebird, Clinking Currawong, and Field Wren. Those seen in 1982 but not in 1948 were:- Swift Parrot, Eastern Rosella, Pallid Cuckoo, Beautiful Firetail.