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TASMANIAN FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

EASTER CAMP REVIEW

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GENERAL ACCOUNT

The bucolic peace that had been enjoyed by the native fauna resident on Charlie Shaw's property at Swansen was rudely shattered a week before Easter 1961 by the arrival of a large truck carrying a mountain of goods: cups and cabbages, stools and stoves, forks and frypans, and general what-have-you.

A possum from his vantage point in the tree-tops yelled "See the shape of things to come!" The Advance Party had arrived. From then on all the creatures of the bush were intensely interested in watching the strange, restless activities of these human beings. Fortunately Prof. Arachnide, the noted humanologist, was present and explained to the local population of lizards, ants, frogs and others the meaning, if any, of the human activities. He explained that humans were the most destructive animals on earth, but the variety "Naturaloids" now under observation were not quite as bad as others.

The following observations were made :- The male humans of the advance party struggled round with many huge bundles from which they dragged a type of cocoon called a "tent", two of which were very large.

One human female was observed in this advance group: this interesting creature was most restless, she kept dashing in and out of a hole from a fire, around which she had placed strange black objects. From time to time the males gathered round her and she placed food before them. Having speedily devoured this they made a curious chirrup "Thank you, Mrs. Fleming."

There seemed to be a special chirrup for each type of activity.

On the Thursday before Easter the stillness of the night was shattered by the arrival of many smelly and noisy contraptions

from which many more means emerged. Then followed a babel of chirrups as they rushed to the big tent and consumed some hot brown liquid. Afterwards they crept away to sleep in the smaller cocoons that the advance party had prepared for them.

The next day they settled to a behaviour pattern that was followed for the rest of the stay. They emerged each morning from their sleeping places to assemble in the big tent for food, and this feeding process was repeated three or four times each day. The female food dispenser had now been replaced by a male called Andre, who was most popular.

After feeding, some showed amphibian tendencies and rolled in the water, others displayed curiosity about plant and animal objects cast up on the beach or in other nearby habitats.

One morning they gathered together and a swarm rushed in an erratic manner through the water that was then breaking over the sand at the mouth of the Meredith River. Then they plunged into the bush, stopping often to gaze at the numerous spiders that had spun their webs in the herbage. A copperhead snake was disturbed by them and sought greater peace in the long grass. After more feeding the swarm then proceeded to the mouth of the Swan River and were most inquisitive regarding the habits and species of starfish there.

Another day they followed the Meredith River up to where other murans had built an obstruction to the flow of water.

Each day, as they tramped about, they picked up flowers and other specimens which they did not eat. These they brought back to the big tent where they were placed on a board. After the evening feeding one of them would pick up one of these objects and chirrup about it - one called Dr. Nicholas picked up a dead fish and did much chirruping about it while the others kept silent. A Dr.

Sullivan did the same about some jaw bones, and a third spoke about birds. The Professor was puzzled by this one's name, which, according to his lexicon, means "the side of a house". Yet another about the leg of a wallaby and some shells, another about plants. The Professor was puzzled by these names too, as both appeared to be bird names but they appeared to have definite human characteristics.

In the latter part of each evening a restless excitement was not ceable: then one Pritchett seemed to take control and direct others in strange antics, and a chirruping which Prof. Arachnida called laughter occurred at frequent intervals. A human governing council was mimicked, a court scene was palyed, and another group showed early behaviour pa terms of the "Naturaloids". Many helped in this playtime activity, both males and females.

The Professor noticed one strange thing. Many times one human would meet another and chirrup, "Where are Sargie and Sherland?" The reply was "Not here", and the faces of each would lengthen. These two appeared to be chiefs who for many years had been with the tribe, and their absence caused much disappointment.

On Tuesday great activity marked the folding and gathering of all the gear, such use was made of the items called cameras, and then the humans departed as they had arrived, and peace once more came to this part of the land.

LONG THE ROAD!

How many of the car drivers homeward bound stopped between Orford and Buckland to examine the Tiger Cat which had just fallen victim to a passing car?

NOTES ON THE FLORA - by Kelsey Aves

There were two main habitats within the area of official excursions - the sandhills and sandy soil immediately behind them where the camp was situated, and the fairly dense gully forest of the walk up the Meredith River.

On the sandhills were the Coast Fuchsia (*Correa alba*), Boobyalla (*Acacia sophorae*) and Coast Whitebeard (*Leucopogon richel*). These are quite characteristic of practically all sand-dunes around our coasts. The flower of *Correa alba*, as its name suggests, is normally white, but a bush of quite pink flowers was found near the camp. On and behind the dunes were found also Bluebell (*Wahlenbergia gracilis*), Running Postman (*Kennedyia prostrata*) and *Banksia marginata*. On the very dry pasture flats Sorrel (*Oxalis corniculata*), Mask (*Mimulus repens*), Guinea Flower (*Hibbertia fasciculata*) and Cranberry (*Astroloma humifusum*) were noted in flower. White Gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*) was the dominant eucalypt around the camp, with She-oak (*Casuarina quadrivalvis*) on the banks of the river.

On the walk up the Meredith River to the gum stands of Silver and Black Wattle (*Acacia dealbata* and *nollinsiana*), and also *A. ripens* and *A. mucronata* were seen, also some specimens on the river bank of Kangaroo Apple (*Solanum aviculare*) reminding us of the beautiful flower paintings done by Mrs. Meredith in this area some hundred years ago.

An exceptionally dry summer and a ring no doubt accounted for a scarcity of herbs against shrubs, though it is surprising how plants do manage to survive such extreme conditions.

MARINE BIOLOGY - by F.J.W. Swann

The sea beach adjacent to the camp was very popular for bathing, walking and for "hunters" interested in Marine life.

An extraordinary number of sea cucumbers had been thrown up on the sand. These sausage-like creatures, 7 - 9 inches long and up to 2 inches in diameter, belong to the great animal group, the Echinodermata, therefore are in the same phylum as the sea stars (starfish) (Class Asteroidea) and the sea urchins (Class Echinoidea). Specimens of both these classes were also found. The sea cucumbers form the Class Holothuroidea, some species of which are prized in parts of the East as a basis for soup. These species, known as trepang or bech-de mer, are much sought after elsewhere but none of our campers tried soup-making from the abundant material available: perhaps they missed a treat!

Sponges (Porifera) were common, and finger sponges, Chalinopilla, and others were represented. In size they were smaller than the bigger genera of sponges such as Hippespongia, often found on the Stanley and other far Northwest Coast beaches.

A number of canjevoi (Tunicates) had been washed up and finger pressure on the top of them caused a jet of water to escape, explaining a common name for this type of animal, "sea squirt".

The phylum Mollusca was well represented, most noticeable being the large numbers of the fragile shell *Electrona georgiana* found attached to clumps of seaweed washed up on the beach.

Pear Helmet shells (*Xenogalea pyrum*) were found, as well as the seaweed shell *Phacianotrochus* and many bivalves - *Dorcina*, *Tamera*, *Cardium*, and other genera.

Of great interest was the finding of King Prawns in the mouth of the Meredith River. These are generally associated with the warmer waters of the East Coast of the Australian mainland, but two years ago they were recorded from St. Helens, and since then from several other places on the East Coast of Tasmania.

BIRD NOTES - by L. S. Wall

The area covered by observers during the camp provided limited habitats, yet the list compiled was well up to the standard set at previous Easter Camps.

The largest habitat was of open savannah country typical of that part of the East Coast, and this provided a wide variety of birds. Next in order of importance was a strip of coastal scrub which extends for a short distance behind the beach from Waterloo Pt. to the mouth of Great Swanport, a distance of about nine miles, but not completely covered during the camp. Between these two habitats most of the species were seen.

The beach itself and the adjacent Oyster Bay also provided their share of bird life, including a few waders, and the lower reaches of the Swan and Meredith Rivers and a lagoon about half a mile north of the campsite produced a few water birds, though not as many as had been anticipated.

The remaining habitat visited was a strip of scrub lining the Meredith River in the vicinity of the dam which provides Swansea with its domestic water supply. This is situated about 2 miles from the mouth of the river, where our camp was pitched. It is a delightful area, which in other seasons of the year might be expected to contain a wide variety of birds. During our visit 7 birds were added to our list. As we sat eating a picnic lunch by the dam a Brown Noddy was observed flying high overhead, and with the aid of binoculars it was possible to watch it being harried by several Dusky Wood Swallows. The latter were apparently making their way northward in search of warmer climes during our winter months and were not readily discernible with the naked eye. These birds do not usually fly high except on their migrations.

Few migrants were seen, a rather surprising fact in view of the comparatively early Easter. Perhaps this was

have been caused in part by the drought conditions which had prevailed for some months past, driving the birds out in search of better conditions. Migratory waders, which are only with us during the warmer months of the year, were entirely absent, except of course the Double-banded Dotterel which provides a contrast by coming to us for the colder months only. This bird migrates from New Zealand, where it breeds, to Australia. A solitary specimen was seen on the beach on several occasions.

There were no surprises in our observations, except by the absence of several birds which we could reasonably have expected to see, and which have in fact been seen there on other occasions. Our list totalled 64 species, with at least one other doubtful, which must be considered satisfactory bearing in mind that the coastal scrub we encountered was sparse only and included very little of the luxuriant flowering species more generally found in other parts, with a corresponding increase in the bird population. Added to that there was no forest area included in our search.

The complete list is :-

Fairy Penguin, Brown Quail, Native Hen, Bald Coot, Black Cormorant, Black-faced Cormorant, Little Pied Cormorant, Gannet, Crested Tern, Silver Gull, Pacific Gull, Pied Oystercatcher, Spur-winged Plover, Banded Plover, Hooded Dotterel, Red-capped Dotterel, White-faced Heron, Brown Bittern, Black Swan, Swamp Hawk, Goshawk, Sea Eagle, Black-necked Falcon, Brown Hawk, Mask Lorikeet, Black Cockatoo, Green Rosella, Eastern Rosella, Kookaburra, Spine-tailed Swift, House Swallow, Tree Martin, Grey Fantail, Scarlet Robin, Flame Robin, Dusky Robin, Golden Whistler, Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike, White-fronted Chat, Brown Thornbill, Yellow-tailed Thornbill, Striated Field Wren, Blue Wren, Dusky Wood Swallow, Spotted Pardalote, Striated Pardalote, Silver-eye, Black-headed Honeyeater, Spine-billed Honeyeater, Yellow-throated Honeyeater, Crescent Honeyeater, New Holland Honeyeater, Noisy Miner, Bush Wattle Bird, Pipit, Skylark, Kavan, Black Magpie, Butcher Bird, White-backed Magpie, Goldfinch, House Sparrow, European Starling.

On Monday a few campers travelled to Sichenon by car, and just north of that town a skeleton of a small seabird was picked up and brought back to camp for identification. It was a Diving Petrel, a species which is fairly common round our coasts but seldom seen from the shore. It breeds in Bass Strait.

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS - by A. M. D. Hewer

Due to the prolonged drought frogs were very scarce and lizards were common only along the banks of rivers and near marshy areas.

The lizard most frequently seen during the camp was the Smooth Rock Lizard (*Egernia whitii*). This species was very common along the banks of the Meredith River in the vicinity of the dam, about two miles upstream from the campsite, and several were seen behind the beach on the northern side of the Meredith. Two other species were common near the dam - *Leio epixus ocellatum* and *L. trilineatum*. *L. metallicum*, the common lizard in home gardens, was only seen occasionally.

Although no specimens of *L. entrecasteurnii* were sighted it is reasonable to assume that they exist in the area as their habit is similar to that of *L. trilineatum*. The latter is interesting in that it is the only skink lizard in Tasmania which regularly breeds by laying eggs (usually 5) under stones or logs, whereas all other Tasmanian skinks are ovo-viviparous - that is, the eggs develop inside the female so that the young are born alive.

Several snakes were seen, and at least one eaten by camp members. The meal enjoyed by several of the younger campers was a specimen of the White-lipped Whip Snake (*Demisonia coronoides*). At least one each of the other Tasmanian snakes, the Copperhead and the Tiger Snake, were also seen.

Had it been a normal autumn no doubt many frogs would have been recorded. However, only one species was actually seen - the Brown Tree Frog (*Hyla swingii*). Other species known to occur in the area but not recorded on this occasion are :- Bibron's Toadlet, Brown Froglet, Green & Gold Tree Frog, Banjo Frog (also known as Bull Frog) and the Yellow-striped Frog.

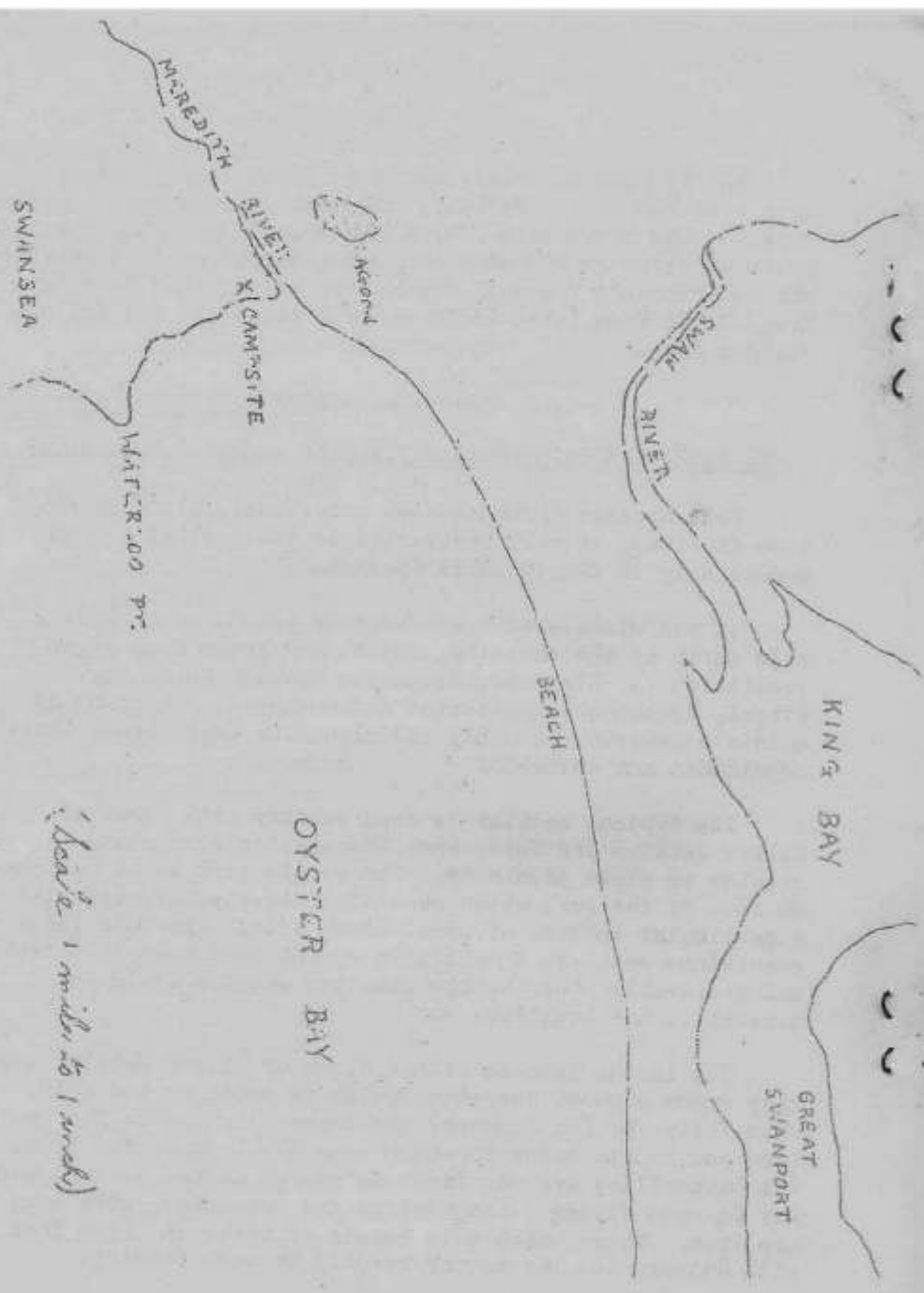
THE TASMANIAN HAIRSTREAK BUTTERFLY - by A.M.D. Hewer

This species (*Pseudalmona chlorinda*), although not rare at times, is very restricted in its habitat and so occurs only in fairly small "pockets".

It was discovered again at this year's camp about a mile north of the campsite, and is now known from eight localities - Richmond, Kingston, Rheban, Coles Bay, Fingal, Seamaner, Launceston and Swansea. No doubt it exists elsewhere, possibly all along the East Coast, where conditions are suitable.

Its typical habitat is open country with Black or Silver Wattles and White Gums (*Eucalyptus viminalis*) growing in close proximity. The wattle must be within about 20 feet of the gum, which should be heavily infested with a particular species of small black ants. Provided these conditions exist at an altitude of not more than 1000 feet, and preferably close to the sea, the species could be present in the locality.

The larvae feed on either Black or Silver Wattle, and they exude a sweet secretion which is eaten by the ants. When fully fed (in January) the larvae migrate to the gum tree and pupate under the bark near the base of the tree. The butterflies are the first to emerge in the spring, and may be seen flying during August and September, when eggs are laid. These hatch in a couple of weeks and from then till January the larvae may readily be seen feeding.



(Swan's 1 mile to 1 mark)