



# FOFI News



The newsletter of the Friends of French Island National Park Inc.

April 2015

## FRIENDS OF FRENCH ISLAND NATIONAL PARK

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### PROJECT DAYS

The ferry leaves **Stony Point** at **10.00 am**. If you plan to come, **please contact Murray Bouchier** on 9876 1410 at least 7 days before the project day.

**May 16 & June 20:** To be advised.

**July 18:** Western Port wader survey.

**Aug 22:** Planting with FI Landcare (to be confirmed).



Caspian Tern

Wal Mitchell

### ACTIVITIES REPORTS

#### February 21: Western Port Wader Count

It was an extremely hot day for the February wader count. The forecast of 36 degrees was reached by mid afternoon.

Three groups covered the high tide roosts at Tortoise Head, Blue Gum Point, Rams Island and the west coast. Our group covered the last two areas.

A late high tide meant that our first site, **Rams Island**, produced very few waders. We observed one Eastern Curlew on the Island; 11 Masked Lapwing, 3 Crested Tern, 7 White Ibis and 7 Pacific Gull along the shoreline; and 187 Black Swan offshore. On Bird Rock, a small offshore island, 23 Pacific Gull and 9 Pelican were seen.

We then went to **Mini Inlet**, north of Fairhaven and had lunch in the shade overlooking the beach and saltmarsh. We observed 70 Chestnut Teal, 46 White Ibis, 50 White-faced Heron, 2 Royal Spoonbill and 15 Greenshank.

We arrived at the **Chilcott Rocks** roost at high tide and the waders were present in small numbers. We counted 30 Curlew Sandpiper, 35 Eastern Curlew, 10

Red-capped Plover, 2 Double-banded Plover, 38 Red-necked Stint, 2 Caspian Tern and 180 Black Swan offshore.

Meanwhile, the **Tortoise Head** group's count included 110 Eastern Curlew, 1 Whimbrel, 285 Red-necked Stint and 2 Red Knot. The Knots are rarely seen at that site.

Our thanks to Dave for providing the transport on the day.

*Bett Mitchell*



Red Bluff

Geoff Lacey

#### April 18: Red Bluff: photo point and bird count

Present: Murray, Geoff, Scott, Meg, Suzy, Chris, Anna & Rob.

**Photo Point.** The major thrust of the day was to find the Red Bluff photo point site on the south coast, to observe and record any changes. This site had last been visited in 2011. This is part of a long-term project begun by Geoff, Murray & Mick Douglas in 2007. Twenty-eight sites were chosen across the Island as examples of a range of local ecological habitats. Changes of species types, recruitment, community stability, and other factors were observed. A few examples: forest, woodland, grasslands, wetlands, and post-fire-burnt areas. Each site is precisely located by its GPS coordinates, and each point chosen is photographically documented from exactly the same position and in the same compass direction at each visit, even if visits are years apart.

I note dryly, finding the Red Bluff site after four years was not a cake walk. We came up off the beach: Geoff, Chris, Scott, Suzy and I. A lot of bush bashing, a lot of consultation of GPD's coordinates, a lot of back tracking but, like good hunting dogs, we found the steel star dropper with its painted fading top marking 'point X'.

**Birds.** A day when many were heard but not seen. Confirmed (not all in the Red Bluff area): Butcherbird, Black-shouldered Kite, Eastern Spinebill, Golden Whistler, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Welcome Swallow, Cape Barren Goose, and Wood Duck. Heard but not seen: Yellow Robin, White-eared Honeyeater, Crescent Honeyeater, Brown Thornbill, Grey Shrike-thrush. And—the most important, needing 2 visits to check roosting tree—2 Sea Eagles (only one confirmed).

**Plants.** In what follows I am totally indebted to both Chris and Suzy. As ‘tail-end Charley’, I listened in quiet fascination to a detailed running botanical commentary as we walked through the bush. The main interests were climbers or creepers. Suzy who hadn’t been on the island since she was 16 as a visual artist went for small detail; Chris travelling in his French Island childhood country of lizards and frogs; Scott as ranger a quiet odd comment here and there; Geoff used as arbiter of last resort if he could be torn away from his beloved GPS. Some plants: Common Appleberry, Mountain Clematis, Forest Clematis (Chris says he is unsure as this is a Wet Forest plant normally found in the Dandenong Ranges and Gippsland), 4 species of Flax-lily. Pea species: Twining Glycine, Large-leaf Bush-pea, Rough Bush-pea. Suzy found Hop Bitter-pea and a small prostrate pea which, on looking it up after the trip, she decided was Southern Tick-trefoil.

There is a great deal more: Murray still determined, still indefatigable, quietly bringing up the rear walking over the rough beach with a fishing rod staff. The beauty of the red ochre flagstone rocks, the marbled sandstone, the 50-million year old basalt, the red lichens, the cliffs, lunch on the seagrass and two old good friends still coming to explore, still working together. At the end of it all homemade ice cream at the Tankerton store, island honey, local olive oil, a flat sea to the mainland.

Our thanks to Scott for providing the transport.

*Rob Knottenbelt*



Red Bluff forest in 2007 and 2015

Geoff Lacey

These two pictures show the changes that have occurred at the photo point in the forest at Red Bluff.

The picture taken on our first visit in March 2007 shows Messmates with a varied understorey of shrubs, Wonga Vine and dried-out Bracken. The forest was subjected to an ecological burn in Autumn 2008 and this led to dense growth of Hop Wattle, Common Cassinia and other shrubs. The picture taken on this our fourth visit shows that the Cassinia has largely died off whereas the Hop Wattle is still tall and dense. We expect much of the wattle to gradually die off leaving the understorey more open.

*Geoff Lacey*



Fairy Tern chicks (journal cover picture)

Martin O'Brien

### **Fairy Tern paper published.**

A journal paper documenting the breeding history of French Island’s Fairy Terns has recently been published in the BirdLife Australia journal *Australian Field Ornithology*. The paper was written by FOFI members Geoff Lacey and Martin O'Brien and drew upon the 4-decades long volunteer monitoring of this species by members.

The vision of early FOFI members lead to threatened species monitoring at various French Island sites many years ago. This has resulted in the generation of breeding data sets for the Fairy Tern, Pelican and Sea-Eagle.

The paper shows that the Western Port Fairy Tern dataset may be the longest running set of breeding data for this threatened bird in Australia and highlights how important French Island is for the conservation of this species across its range.

A key finding of the paper was that, although nesting numbers have fluctuated over the years, there was no main trend downwards in the Western Port population. This is important as a number of Fairy Tern breeding sites in Corio Bay/Port Phillip Bay have failed, possibly due to disturbance.

FOFI has been working with Parks Victoria’s rangers for many years now in protecting the Rams Island and Tortoise Head nest sites while undertaking appropriate and sensitive management.

To receive a copy of the paper, feel free to contact Martin O'Brien (9637 9869).

*Martin O'Brien*

**Reference:** Geoff Lacey & Martin O'Brien (2015). Fairy Tern breeding on French Island, Western Port, Victoria. *Australian Field Ornithology* 32: 1-14.