



FOFI News



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

January 2013

PROJECT DAYS

We take the 10.15 am ferry from Stony Point. If you plan to come, **please contact Murray Bouchier** on 9876 1410 at least 7 days before the project day.

Feb 9 Western Port wader survey

Mar 9 Weeding at Freeman Point

April 13 King Quail search



Cormorants on Fairhaven piers

Wal Mitchell

FOFI ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

will be held at 10 Orrong Ave, Frankston
Wednesday 13 February at 7.00 pm. All welcome.

ACTIVITIES REPORTS

November 17: Westernport Wader Count

Our group—Mick Douglas, Murray Bouchier, Wal Mitchell, John Prythech, Art Terry, Chris and Martin O'Brien—surveyed Mini Inlet, Rams Island and Fairhaven beach, while Ken Harris and Geoff Lacey did Tortoise Head.

After arrival at Tankerton, ranger Mick Douglas transported the larger group to **Mini Inlet** where we recorded the following species: Red-capped Plover (4), Black Swan (172), Chestnut Teal (20), Masked Lapwing (1), Pied Oystercatcher (10), Australian White Ibis (12), White-faced Heron (1), Little Pied Cormorant (3) and three White-fronted Chat.

We then checked **Linley's Swamp**. Species included: Eurasian Coot, Purple Swamphen, Australasian Grebe, Shoveler (1 adult female + 3 chicks), Lt. Pied Cormorant, Lt. Black Cormorant, Grey Teal, Black Duck, White-faced Heron & White Ibis.

On 30 October Mick Douglas had counted 25 Whiskered Terns foraging over Rowe's Swamp, NE of Linley's Swamp.

Our next stop was **Fairhaven Jetty**. No small waders again; however: Little Pied Cormorant (16), Royal Spoonbill (1), Chestnut Teal (25), Black Swan (50), Silver Gull (5), Masked Lapwing (6), White-faced Heron (1), Pied Oystercatcher (8), Richards Pipit (1), and an adult White-bellied Sea-Eagle.

FRIENDS OF FRENCH ISLAND NP

President: Frances Garner. **Secretary:** Meredith Sherlock (3/11 Raymond Ave, Frankston 3199: ph. 9770 5229). **Editor:** Geoff Lacey

Vale Derwent Plunkett

Derwent Plunkett, our ferry captain over many years, died on 14 December. He was born in Tasmania and named after the river Derwent.

He and Pam moved to French Island (with Pam's 2 boys) in 1975. They rented 'Koala Lands', which was a derelict old house near the hall, with no windows or bathroom fittings, etc. They made it habitable and renamed it 'Mandalay Park'.

Derwent and his friends restored the garden and sheds to create a tourist destination, with an artist studio, leather workshop, and hay-bale rides on a horse-drawn cart. Peacocks wandered among busloads of tourists having afternoon tea in the gardens. Derwent was probably 'before his time' with the tourist venture; it did not prove to be viable. However, the peacocks remain today as a reminder of his dream! Later on, he ran the guesthouse on Tankerton Hill for a few years. He also ran McLeod when it was a school camp.

Derwent left the island in 1991, and became skipper of the ferry. He never lost his love for the island, and remained interested in the goings-on there until the end. He served the island community with self-sacrificing dedication, in all weathers. We owe him a great deal.

Derwent took sick and went to hospital only about a week before he died. His funeral was held on the end of the Stony Point jetty, with tributes from his son Ben, and various islanders. The funeral celebrant asked us to take a rose and drop it into the sea in memory of Derwent. Chris de Burgh's song 'Don't pay the ferryman' played in the background, as the flowers drifted out with the tide. *Chris Chandler*

We then went on to **Rams Island** where some good shorebirds were seen: Silver Gull (7), Caspian Tern (2 adults on eggs – very vocal & defensive), Little Pied Cormorant (5), Red-necked Stint (35), Curlew Sandpiper (2), Ruddy Turnstone (12), Great Cormorant (1), Whimbrel (1 very vocal and flighty), Eastern Curlew (1), Pied Oystercatcher (2, one on nest, 2 eggs) and 2 Red-capped Plover.

Our final wader site for the day was **Fairhaven beach** (main roost): Red-necked Stints (90), Pied Oystercatcher (5), Red-capped Plover (2), Australian Shelduck (8), Little Pied Cormorant (8), Pied Cormorant (1), Cape Barren Goose (2 adults with 3 young) and White-fronted Chat. *Martin O'Brien*

Tortoise Head. Meanwhile Ken and Geoff had a fruitful day at Tortoise Head. The saltmarsh was mostly dry and was covered with lush green Glasswort. An unusual number of Cisticolas were calling all over the saltmarsh and grassland. There was a Pipit on the beach and a number of White-fronted Chats nearby. We observed several raptors: a pair of Whistling Kites circling over the sea, 1 Brown Falcon, 2 Swamp Harriers, 1 Kestrel, 3 Black-shouldered Kites and a (mature) Sea-Eagle.

We counted over 1000 Swans, most of them to the east of Tortoise Head. As the tide came in, waders began to arrive on the rocky spits and all were there well before full tide. Highlights were 116 Eastern Curlew and 2 Whimbrel. *GL*

December 8: Gartsides bird count

Five of us set out on the ferry and we were met by Terry Easy who drove us to Gartsides for a bird count. We encountered a Pallid Cuckoo at the start of the grassland.

We had lunch in Gartsides forest at the old camp site. The understory to the tall Messmates is now tall bracken and dry (mainly exotic) grasses.

We then set about the bird count. As it was hot and windy, most of the birds were lying low. Species seen or heard included the Fairy Martin, Grey Shrike-thrush, Red Wattlebird, Grey Fantail, Yellow Robin, Brown Thornbill, Scrubwren and Silvereye. A Wedge-tailed Eagle flew over.

Travelling along Causeway Road, we saw 2 Brown Falcons, a Nankeen Kestrel and a Grey Currawong. Further on near Link Road we flushed 2 Stubble Quail.

Mid afternoon Terry received a phone message that the ferry was cancelled. The ferry company had not notified us in the morning that this might happen. According to *The Pinnacle* (Dec. 2012) there have been a large number of cancellations this year. In view of this, FOFI will need to check out the ferry situation the day before each proposed trip.

After discussing various options and waiting to see what other people on the island were doing, Terry, very generously, drove us back to Stony Point, taking the vehicle on the barge to Corinella. The barge service is efficient and not prone to cancellation. It

runs several trips each day. During the crossing we saw a mature Sea-Eagle gliding slowly over the bay.



Caspian Tern Wal Mitchell

Weed problems

Various weeds have gained ground on French Island. Parks Victoria staff are trying hard, with limited resources, to control them. At the beginning of December, Terry Easy removed 250 Cluster Pines—regrowth from a control burn—in the Blue Gums area.

The rangers are forming plans: (1) to remove *Pittosporum* in the south coast forest, and (2) to spray blackberries in a number of areas, in some cases involving difficult access.

Chris Chandler has reported thick growth of blackberries in the wet gully below a coastal bluff 1 km east of Freeman Point. This is the site of a unique community of Musk Daisy-bush and Muttonwood. The blackberries are growing over the top of the understorey, completely covering the small trees. He suggests cutting the blackberry stems from underneath the understorey. This will allow staff to poison the blackberries without damaging the trees.

A new and serious problem is that Cinnamon Fungus had got on to the island and has killed Messmates at a number of sites. DSE are forming a working group to see what can be done.

Protective fence on south coast completed

Two years ago we reported that F.I. Landcare had obtained a grant that included fencing along farm boundaries on the south coast. Mick Douglas now reports that this fence has been completed. It will protect the foreshore with its vegetation and birds from cattle activity. We look forward to the enhanced beauty of the site as the vegetation recovers.

Production of this newsletter is funded through Melbourne Water's Community Grants Program.



MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL DUE JANUARY 2013

Name

Address

Phone No.

E-mail

Membership per person or household: \$5

Please return to Mrs Marg Medley, Hon. Treasurer, 11 Neville St, Mooroolbark 3138