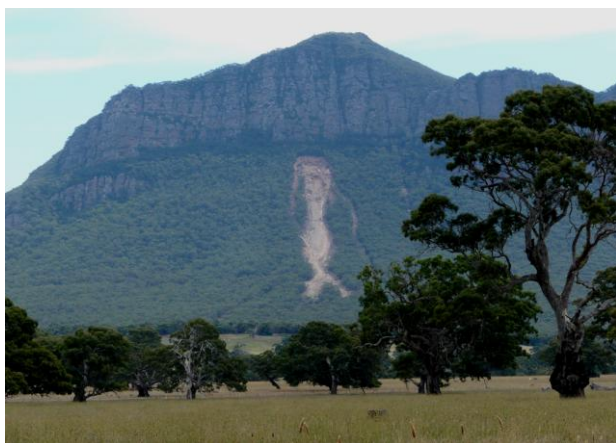


HFNC Excursion to Gooseneck Swamp and Bradys Swamp Grampians/Gariwerd National Park

Report for Sat 16 April 2011
Rod Bird

The excursion was attended by John & Glenys, Richard & Julia, Rod & Diane, Hilary and one visitor. We drove from Hamilton to Dunkeld and along the Old Ararat Rd to Mahoneys Lane (a good view of the recent landslide on Mt Abrupt was obtained there), then North Boundary Rd, in order to view the southern side of Brady Swamp. From there we continued on to Burghers Lane to meet the Old Ararat Rd again. About 800 m to the east we turned down the Dog-leg Rd, proceeding over the Bunnungul Drain and turning left after 2.2 km onto Lynch's Crossing Rd. Our destination was 1.2 km to the west of Walkers Swamp, which lies on the north side of the road. We parked off Lynch's Crossing Road, near the drain that passes beneath that road and continues south along the line of the embankment on the park boundary.



The weather was fine and warm and we all enjoyed the 2 km walk along the embankment on the eastern side of Gooseneck Swamp to Bradys Swamp. This was the first visit by the club to these magnificent wetlands.

Background

253 ha of Bradys Swamp remains in private hands (Burgher 170 ha & Craig 83 ha) and 235 ha is Public Land within the park. The Bunnungul Drain runs into Bradys Swamp on the eastern side and water is drained out on the western edge, at a point where it is possible to construct a weir to regulate the water level.

These swamps were very significant breeding areas for Brolga and Magpie Geese and that capacity has vanished with the drainage that has occurred. With a drier climate, continued loss of wetlands to cropping, plantations and further agricultural drainage, the outlook for Brolga, Magpie Geese and many other waterbirds is bleak. Local landholder Doug Craig reported that, with vegetation partially blocking the outlet drain from Bradys Swamp, the wetland retained water for long enough in 2004 and 2005 to allow nesting of Ibis – apparently the first time since 1957.

Gooseneck Swamp lies wholly within the park and receives some flow from a drain off private land to the north and a major flow from the Wannon River that discharges water over a wide delta fan within the park. This is a clean source of fresh water and perhaps the most reliable flow to any wetland in SW Victoria.

Gooseneck Swamp was illegally drained into Bradys Swamp by a landholder who, at that time, owned Gooseneck swamp and some land to the west. That work was not part of the official Bunnungul Drainage works of 1957 that cut a drain through Bradys Swamp. In 1987, following an earlier purchase of the land on which Gooseneck Swamp lies, a levee bank was constructed by Horsham DCF&L on the eastern side of the swamp. In the event of a major flood that bank was presumed to prevent water from spilling onto private land to the east (currently a Blue Gum plantation).

On 17 March 2007, there was an inspection of these drained wetlands by GHCMA (Peter Waldron), adjoining landholders (Roger Burgher, Doug Craig and Van Tromph), Gavin Cerini (ex. Fisheries & Wildlife Officer who was involved with the original plans for restoration in 1987-96), Hamilton Field Naturalists (Rod Bird, John & Glenys Cayley and David Munro) and a Parks Victoria officer from Ararat Office.

Gavin Cerini (Swampcare Wetland Management and Consultation) provided details of previous history and GHCMA provided maps. Photos of the drain from Gooseneck Swamp and one of Bradys Swamp are shown over the page.

Before consideration is given to the purchase of the remaining private holdings on the Bradys Swamp, we asked Parks Victoria to urgently consider restoring Gooseneck Swamp. All that would be required would be to back-fill part of the 80 m cutting that was made across the lunette that separates the swamps. This would

at least allow some water to remain in the area and provide nesting and feeding opportunities for many species but especially Brolga. With the planned construction of well over 500 wind-driven electricity generators in SW Victoria (Glenthompson, Hawkesdale, Peshurst and Macarthur areas) there will be a continual loss of Brolga from inevitable collisions with the windmills – breeding success must be increased to compensate for those losses.

North Boundary Rd stop – we spent about 20 minutes parked on the road while we viewed the ducks on the water some 100-200 m distant across the paddock. The water level was unseasonably high, as a result of the floods in January. Eastern Grey Kangaroos were grazing along the shoreline. We were able to see 3 vehicles parked on the northern side of the swamp (see photo). These were plainly part of a duck-shooters camp (illegally shooting in the National Park), and in 30 minutes or so we were to walk to that spot.

Gooseneck Swamp – we enjoyed the walk in, with the sun warm on our backs. We stopped at the giant fallen (dead) River Red Gum to photograph the swamp and look for the birds on the water (GPS Aust84 was 37-34-52/142-27-37). There was a glorious view across the swamp to the Grampians (Serra Range). The surface of the swamp was pink with Azolla (see photo).

There were Brolga (2) on the western edge of the swamp and they were calling from time-to-time. Royal Spoonbills (12) and Yellow-billed Spoonbills (3) were feeding along the shore, along with about 70 White-faced Herons and a hundred or more ducks, mostly Pacific Black Ducks, Grey Teal, Australian Shelduck and a few Chestnut Teal. No doubt there is a lively interchange of birds between the adjacent water bodies.

Bradys Swamp – when we arrived at the lunette that lies between Gooseneck Swamp and Bradys Swamp the shooters had gone, leaving behind a fire and a pile of duck feathers, heads and offal. We counted wings of 12 Teal, 4 pacific Black Ducks, and 2 Hardheads. Other refuse, partly buried was seen 20 m away and may have been the result of a shoot a week or two earlier. The shooters had access through the Blue Gum Plantation on farmland to the east, the route from Lynch's Crossing Rd being impassable because of the wet conditions along the drain that serves as a track (the embankment is too narrow to serve as a vehicle track).

We noted also that logs had been cut up on a large scale for firewood. Clearly, this part of the National Park is unsupervised, with hunters and firewood gatherers doing as they wish. It was noted on 25 February that there were many spent shotgun cartridges along the edge of the swamps, so clearly the shooters would have been breaching open-season laws too (the season began on 19 March). There is no signage out on Lynchs Crossing Rd or at Bradys Swamp to inform visitors that they are in a National Park. The nearest sign would be at Mt Sturgeon, near Dunkeld. No doubt those engaged in these illegal activities would plead ignorance.

We had written in February to the Ranger-in Charge, requesting that signs be erected, but there has been no action. We repeated our request after this excursion but again without response.

Despite the mess left by the duck shooters we enjoyed our ramble and view across the swamp. The waterbirds had mostly left the northern shore and were too distant to survey without a spotting scope. However, an Eastern Great Egret fussed around what appeared to be a nest near the drain (see below).

The water in Bradys Swamp had changed since February, with a considerable growth of 'water weed' and Azolla. Below is a photograph taken in 25 February showing the beautiful view then along the northern side of the swamp towards Mt Sturgeon.





Photographs 16 April 2011

1. Top left – Bradys Swp from Nth Boundary Rd
2. Top right - Bradys Swp from NE side
3. Mid left – duck shooters spoil, N bank Bradys
4. Mid right – duck shooters spoil, N bank Bradys
5. Bottom – Gooseneck Swp (& Brolga) from E side

