

Excursion to Dunkeld Rifle Range & Dunkeld-Penshurst Rd, 19 Oct. 2014

Dave Munro

Attendees were Ken & Janeen, Rod & Dianne, Lyn & Dave, Amanda & Craig, Peter Hosking, Sally Jackson, Tim & Valletta Jackson with 3 children, along with their friends Anne & David with 2 children.

The day was fine, overcast, temperature in mid 20s and somewhat humid. The forecast squally SW change did not materially affect the day.

This excursion was moved from the previously planned site on the Serra Fire Track after a reconnoitre showed that the Rifle Range offered a more diverse and interesting array of plants in flower. In previous years the Rifle Range was often slashed before the spring flowering season. We were pleased to see that this had not happened this year and that many of the shrubby plants such as the Prickly-leaved Grevillea were quite large.

As there was no pre-formed plan the group tended to explore individually and in smaller groups. A system quickly established itself where individuals called the others to the presence of interesting plants or as a query arose. A slow but systematic exploration of the both the cleared area of the actual range and the nearby heathy woodland ensued.

A pleasing aspect was the interest and involvement of the younger members of the group. They were busy with questions, photography and alerting others of their finds.

The weather and the timing was perfect for the flowering of the two blue sun orchids, Slender and Dotted, which were present in large numbers. A patch of about 20 Purplish Beard-orchids created much interest. The children appreciated a demonstration of the “trigger” mechanism of the Stylidium. Only a single specimen of the large White Spider Orchid was found but it was a very fine example of its kind.

Large “Hawthorn” striped Thynnid wasps on flowering spikes of Austral Grasstree were observed and much photographed. Identification is yet to be established.

Our lunch spot was chosen by Peter mainly because it provided a circle of fallen logs and was in the shade. We gradually realised that it was also a 'hotspot' for the Mantis Orchid with about a dozen of them in various stages of development in and around the circle. A couple of Salmon Sun-orchids added to the show.

Janeen had planned to make the lunch a special occasion to celebrate Ken's 70th Birthday. Sadly the cake she had baked remained at Yulecart – forgotten on a bench. A rousing version of 'Happy Birthday' was sung to fill the gap.

Only one Black/Swamp Wallaby was seen, while Rod reported a Rufous Whistler.

After lunch most of the group journeyed to the Back Creek Grasslands Reserve on the Dunkeld-Penshurst road to view a wonderful example of remnant grassland. We were treated to a splendid display of Bulbine Lilies, Slender Sun-orchids and several Featherheads (*Ptilotus macrocephalus*). Of the three pea species present the Dillwynia and Eutaxia were in full flower but only one flower remained on a *Bossiaea prostrata* plant. A Rufous Songlark sang from the nearby trees.

The group helped to spot and dig about 3 dozen tiny, emerging *Sparaxis bulbifera*, a bad weed, thus improving the quality of the grassland.

Rod and Dianne left to inspect locations on Forest Lane, Krauses Swamp and Lake Linlithgow on their return to Hamilton (see Dianne's diary pages attached). The remaining 7 enjoyed a cuppa and banter at Cafe Bagdad in Penshurst – a pleasant end to an enjoyable day.

Diane provided the photographs and additional commentary for this report.

Plants in flower at Dunkeld Rifle Ra. 19 Oct 2014

<i>Brachyloma daphnoides</i>	Daphne Heath
<i>Burchardia umbellata</i>	Milkmaids
<i>Calytrix alpestris</i>	Snow Myrtle
<i>Chamaescilla corymbosa</i>	Blue Squill
<i>Comesperma scoparium</i>	Broom Milkwort
<i>Comesperma volubile</i>	Love Creeper
<i>Conospermum mitchellii</i>	Victorian Smokebush
<i>Dillwynia glaberrima</i>	Smooth Parot-pea
<i>Dillwynia hispida</i>	Red Parrot-pea
<i>Dillwynia sericea</i>	Showy Parrot-pea
<i>Drosera peltata</i>	Pale Sundew
<i>Goodenia geniculata</i>	Bent Goodenia
<i>Goodenia humilis</i>	Swamp Goodenia
<i>Grevillea aquifolium</i>	Prickly-leaved Grevillea
<i>Hibbertia prostrata</i>	Bundled Guinea-flower
<i>Hibbertia virgata</i>	Twiggy Guinea-flower
<i>Isopogon ceratophyllum</i>	Horny Cone-bush
<i>Leptospermum myrsinoides</i>	Heath Tea-tree
<i>Leucopogon virgata</i>	Twiggy Beard-heath
<i>Microseris</i> sp.	Yam Daisy
<i>Pimelea glauca</i>	Smooth Rice-flower
<i>Stackhousia monogyna</i>	Creamy Candles
<i>Stylidium graminifolium</i>	Grass Trigger-plant
<i>Stylidium inundatum</i>	Hundreds and Thousands
<i>Thysanotus patersonii</i>	Twining Fringe-lily
<i>Wahlenbergia</i> sp.	Bluebell
<i>Xanthorrhoea australis</i>	Austral Grasstree

Orchids at Dunkeld Rifle Ra. 19 Oct 2014

<i>Caladenia carnea</i>	Pink Fingers
<i>C. gracilis</i>	Musky caladenia
<i>C. tentaculata</i>	Mantis Orchid
<i>C. venusta</i>	Large White Spider
<i>Calochilus robertsonii</i>	Purplish beard-orchid
<i>Diuris orientis</i>	Wallflower Orchid
<i>D. pardina</i>	Leopard Orchid
<i>Thelymitra antennifera</i>	Rabbit's Ears
<i>T. benthamiana</i>	Blotched Sun-orchid
<i>T. ixioides</i>	Dotted Sun-orchid
<i>T. pauciflora</i>	Slender Sun-orchid
<i>T. rubra</i>	Salmon Sun-orchid



Flower wasps on the Grass Tree spikes

Notes from Diane's diary, with photos from the day

Sunday 19th

Up at 7.30 and out of the door by 9 am having enjoyed breakfast and prepared for our field nats excursion to the southern Grampians. We met some of the party at the Hamilton Visitor Centre and caught up with the day's leaders David and Lyn Munro and also Sally Jackson.

A notable absence was not having the company of John and Glenys because John had injured his leg and was not yet recovered or comfortable in moving.

David and Lyn decided that we should concentrate on the Dunkeld rifle range – always a good show for spring orchids, and so it proved to be. There were up to twenty of us: the usual ten or so with Ken and Janeen, Amanda and Craig, David and Lyn, Peter, Sally and Rod and me, as well as Sally's son's family and friends from Melbourne.

We spent the whole morning here enjoying mantis spider orchids, musky caladenias, rabbit ears, purple beard orchids, white spider orchids and blue sun orchids as well as the various other spring flowers of tea-tree, grevillea, peas and grass trees (covered in wasps, bees and ants).

We found some impressive purplish beard orchids and lined up two of our bearded members (Peter and Dave), the better to display them.



Beetles make good use of the Goodenia flower



Beards all round



Purple beard orchid, Calochilus robertsonii



Dotted sun orchid, Thelymitra ixioides



Mantis spider orchids from above



The rifle range: Sally and Lyn head back for lunch



Blotched sun-orchid, Thelymitra benthamiana



Mantis spider orchid, Caladenia tentaculata



Large white spider orchid, Caladenia venusta



Thelymitra ixioides (or hybrid)



Salmon sun orchid, Thelymitra rubra



Leopard orchid, Diuris pardina



Musky caladenia, Caladenia gracilis

Our lunch spot turned out to be a delightful circle within a field of orchids chosen by Peter. The only disappointing thing (we were to learn) was that Janeen had forgotten to bring along a cake she had baked to share with us to celebrate Ken's 70th birthday. No matter, we sang happy birthday to Ken and wished him well for the day. Ken then enjoyed a short kip during the lunch break.



After lunch we drove out along the Dunkeld-Penshurst Rd to look at the native flora on the road reserve that adjoins a small grassland reserve on the western side.



Blue sun orchid, Thelymitra holmesii



David and Lyn's native grassland project area where they remove invasive weeds – chocolate lilies, bulbine lilies and blue sun orchids were in flower.

Rod and I then returned to Hamilton via Forest Lane, Krause's Swamp and Lake Linlithgow.

Forest Lane was flush with flowers, including chocolate lilies, bulbine lilies, milk maids, blue devils and golden moth orchids. This is one of the best native grassland areas in the region – it should be a major tourist attraction for the Shire but parts have been compromised by herbicide spraying in recent years.



Not all residents appreciate the rich native floral verge as can be seen by the sprayed “firebreak”. This width exceeds by at least 1 m the legitimate 3 m width and, as shown here, has expanded the strip sprayed in years past. There is more grass to burn in the paddock than on the road reserve.

*[Further along Forest Lane the sprayed width was wider again. Clearly, the messages from the CFA’s leaflets (“**Fire and our Roadsides**” and “**Native grasslands and our Roadsides**”) and the Shire of Southern Grampians leaflet “**Roadside Vegetation Conservation – Protecting our roadside environment**” has been ignored] – note from Rod.*

Krause’s Swamp had no glossy ibis (we had hoped to see these) but did have coot, swan, sacred ibis, straw-necked ibis, swamp hen, hoary-headed grebe, musk duck, cattle egret, black-winged stilts and a yellow-billed spoonbill.

At Lake Linlithgow we were surprised and delighted to see over 20 avocets close to the southern shore. There were also many ducks of different species (teal, shelduck, pink ears) as well as swans. We saw no small waders.

Near Tarrington, a lapwing in the paddock at first sighting brought to mind the banded lapwing. However, as we headed back for a second look it turned out to be a juvenile masked lapwing, with three adult masked lapwings nearby. Interesting to see that the face was bare of the mask and that its feathers still had the mottled colouring.

It had been a very good day, and not at all physically taxing.

