

HFNC Excursion to Walkers, Gooseneck & Bradys swamps in July 2018

Rod Bird & Diane Luhrs

Participants: Lachlan Farrington, Glenys Cayley, Lyn & Dave Munro, Rod Bird & Diane Luhrs, Janeen Samuel, Sarah Patterson, Peter Hocking, Roger Thompson, Ross Simpson, and visitors Michael Innes, Helga Birgden & Carolyn Rundell.

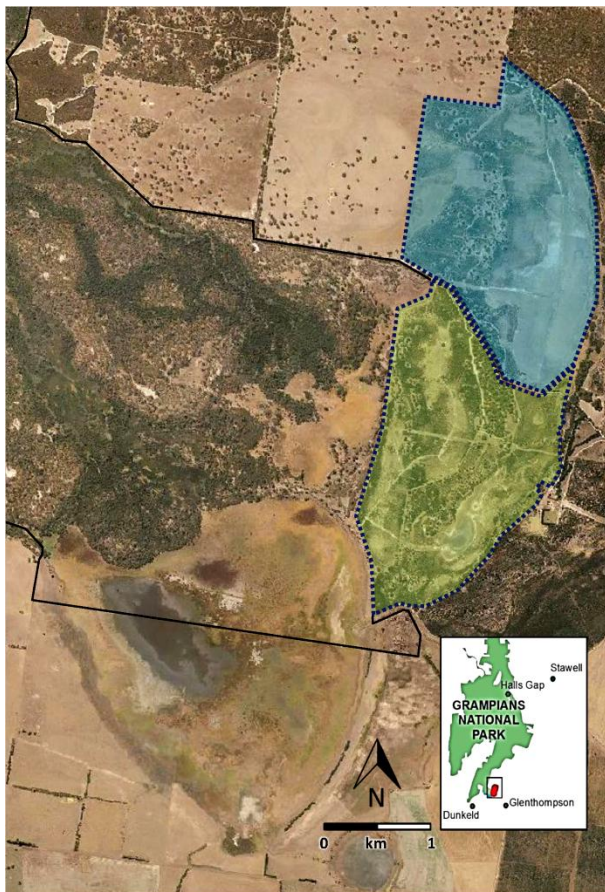
Members met at the Hamilton Visitor Centre at 9 am and travelled to Dunkeld to 'collect' other members before continuing on the Glenelg Highway to Les Burghers Rd and thence to the Old Ararat Rd, Dogleg Rd and Lynchs Crossing Rd. Our first stop was at Walkers Swamp. The roads were quite wet and muddy but the day was mostly overcast but fine.

Our guide for the morning, Lachlan Farrington from Nature Glenelg Trust (NGT), met us at 10 am and gave an outline of the works that had been done at Walkers Swamp since Aug. 2013 and Aug. 2014 when sandbagging works were done on the outlet drain. The sandbagging was set at a conservative height but still succeeded in conserving water for a long period over summer on the eastern part of the swamp.

In the early 1900s private drains were dug from farms to the north to discharge into Walkers Swamp, with a high-level outflow over Lynch's Crossing Road taking the water into Bradys Swamp. That outflow was improved in the 1950s when a drain was dug westwards from the centre of Walkers Swamp to drain into Gooseneck Swamp. This greatly reduced the depth and duration of water retention in Walkers Swamp, since the drain was cut to the bed level.

Blue Gums had been established on mounds on the western half of the swamp by Macquarie Plantations and most of the trees either died or were suppressed, since temporary flooding and tough clay created hostile conditions for the seedlings. The eastern part of the swamp is Crown Land (Walker Swamp Lake Reserve), controlled by Parks Victoria but now managed in concert with NGT.

In March 2018 NGT acquired 200 ha of the land north of Lynchs Crossing Rd (Northern Block, coloured blue in the map from NGT) after the plantation company put the property up for sale in 2017.



The sale of a further 220 ha of presently drained floodplain south from Lynchs Crossing Rd (Southern Block, coloured green in the map) was negotiated and a campaign to raise \$150,000 for its purchase was started in May 2018, with settlement due in late August 2018.

The map shows Gooseneck Swamp (in the Grampians National Park) adjacent to the Southern Block and Bradys Swamp to the south. The drain from Gooseneck Swamp was sandbagged in Aug. 2013 and Bradys Swamp in Dec. 2013.

Assistance has been provided by GHCMA & DELWP and various grants have been obtained for infrastructure works, including removal of Blue Gums and/or control of coppice growth, removal of mounds on the wetland, fencing the reserve and hydrological restoration assessments. Much work will be needed to restore the wetlands in the Southern Block and remove the Blue Gums.

The HFNC has contributed a modest sum of \$3,000 to each block of the Walker Swamp project, and has surveyed waterbirds over the last 5 years. That monitoring will continue for a few years.

We all ventured on to the top of the Lookout Tower – a facility that NGT obtained from a site in Melbourne when its purpose there was no longer required. The tower was donated and much assistance was provided by various people to shift it to Walkers Swamp and re-erect it. That is a story itself, told by Mark Bachmann in a recent blog.

The tower provides an excellent view across the wetland and will be good for surveying waterbirds in the early morning using a spotting scope. The sun later in the day will create some difficulties but our policy has been to survey the birds from the eastern bank, a matter that will be made easier by the access now available along the eastern fence through the Blackwood and Scent-bark trees.



Lookout Tower at Walkers Swamp and view to the Grampians



Lachlan addressing the group



S-N view up the centre of the wetland

The photos above show the Public Reserve to the right and the former Blue Gum plantation on the left. The mounds have been smoothed away by a laser grader bucket. That will remove most of the weeds that colonised the mounds and allow the water to spread evenly across the swamp.

Lachlan took us west to an entrance where the drain crosses the Lynchs Crossing Rd and we drove a short distance along the bank of the drain until we were stopped by a boggy patch. Lachlan then used a dip net to sample some of the aquatic fauna in the drain on the swamp side of the sandbagged barrier.

Interesting animals found were tiny Shield Shrimps and the threatened Western Swamp Crayfish (*Gramastacus insolitus*). The crayfish is also tiny and is not a burrowing species but finds a home in the side of a burrow made by other crayfish. We saw the 2 palps on the underside rear of the body that identify the male of the species. These animals are a great food for ibis, egrets, spoonbills and herons.

The sandbag barrier in the drain was breached in 2016 and had to be repaired. Further work is planned to achieve a higher level in the wetland and a re-direction of the overflow to the south, under the road.



Views along the drain to the swamp



Western Swamp Crayfish

We walked along the drain to near the centre of the swamp. The surface was wet and with many puddles. The mud was extremely sticky but many in the group walked out to a slight vegetated rise towards the northern end of the swamp. Beyond that, near the eastern shore, was open water and this was where a flock of Grey Teal and a few individuals of several other species including Black Swan and Australian Shelduck were seen.



The NW part of the swamp wetting up

A Flame Robin was seen near the eastern shore and, on way back to our vehicles, a number of Split Gill fungi (*Shizophyllum* sp.) were found on the Blue Gum stumps. Lachlan, Carolyn, Michael & Helga left us at noon and we drove back to Lynch's Crossing Rd to the entrance to Gooseneck-Bradys Swamp trail, but before we did that we had some trouble getting a vehicle out of a stick situation. Fortunately that proved fairly easy. We had a picnic lunch on the roadside and Sarah and Jane then left.



Flame Robin male near the shore



Grey Teal in the deeper water of NE corner



View from the centre to E edge of the swamp



View across NW end to Grampians



Shizophyllum sp. on Blue Gum stump



A minor problem of slippery mud

Those remaining took a walk to Gooseneck Swamp, which was dry, and on to Bradys Swamp which was also dry except for pools in the east and west. Two Brolga were heard and seen on the walk back from Gooseneck Swamp. The River Red Gums (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) were showing the effects of past defoliation by insects. Our visit concluded at about 2.30 pm.



River Red Gum at Gooseneck Swamp

Birds seen at Walkers Swamp: Australian Wood Duck (14), Australian Shelduck (100), Black Swan (16), Chestnut Teal (1), Emu, Flame Robin, Grey Teal (250), Masked Lapwing (6), Pacific Black Duck (10), Superb Fairy-wren, Wedge-tailed Eagle (1), White-faced Heron (1).

Birds seen at Gooseneck/Bradys Swamp: Australian Magpie, Brown Falcon, Brown Thornbill, Crimson Rosella, Emu, European Goldfinch, Grey Shrike-thrush, Jacky Winter, Laughing Kookaburra, Magpie-lark, Scarlet Robin, Superb Fairy-wren, Tree Martin, Whistling Kite, Yellow-rumped Thornbill.