

# HFNC Excursion to Griffith Is, Port Fairy, 23 March 2019

Rod Bird & Diane Luhrs

**Participants:** Diane Luhrs & Rod Bird, Dave & Lyn Munro, Glenys Cayley, Janeen Samuel, Peter Hocking & Roger Thompson from HFNC and members of SEANA.

At a meeting of the South Eastern Australian Naturalists Association (SEANA) in 2018 Diane had suggested to the committee that an informal autumn meeting of SEANA could be held at Port Fairy. This was a new concept, coming about as a result of no Field Naturalist Club wishing to host the autumn meeting, which included the Annual General Meeting. She made enquiries about possible venues for meetings and dinners and suggested a structure for the excursions on a 'campout' weekend. An offer was made to lead a group on Saturday morning and early afternoon to look at life in tidal rock pools on Griffith Island. A list of other possible self-guided excursions was also provided.

Port Fairy is favoured by having a range of geologically significant features nearby, including the lava flows from Kolor (Mt Rouse) at Peshurst that reached the sea at Port Fairy and Killarney, the Tower Hill volcano and lakes, the limestone-sandstone cliffs at The Crags, the river estuaries at Saltwater Swamp and Yambuk, and some great sandy beaches from Port Fairy to Warrnambool where Hooded Plovers, Red-necked Stint, Sanderling, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and other shorebirds may be seen.

Some members of HFNC who were staying in Port Fairy met the SEANA group for dinner at the Victoria Hotel on Friday evening. On Saturday, HFNC members and other members of SEANA met at 10 am at the car park near the access to Griffith Island. About 30 people set off over the causeway to the island on a lovely fine day. We walked anticlockwise around the island stopping to inspect the rock pools on the south of the island and the rocky shore around the light house.

Before we began, a flight of White-throated Needle-tails were sighted high overhead. No small waders were seen on the expanse of sand near the causeway, where the tide was out. A list of birds was made on our walk around Griffith Island, listed below in order of sighting. The first 18 species were seen in the vicinity of the causeway.

Singing Honeyeaters were present along our walk. We were puzzled at the identity of small birds darting in and around bushes some 30 m from our path after we left the sandy bay, on our way to the lighthouse. After looking at photos taken by Peter Turner the mystery was solved: the birds were immature Eastern Spinebills, feeding on the Boxthorn flowers.



Immature Eastern Spinebill on a Boxthorn bush

A Brown Falcon gave us a great view as it held a position in the sky above the sand dune.

The only small waders seen were Ruddy Turnstones, in 2 groups approaching the Lighthouse (about 9 birds) and on the rocks near it (13 birds).

## Birdlist for the Griffith Island walk:

- |                               |                           |                              |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Welcome Swallow            | 12. Pied Oystercatcher    | 23. Crested Tern             |
| 2. Silver Gull                | 13. Sooty Oystercatcher   | 24. Great Cormorant          |
| 3. White-throated Needle-tail | 14. Pacific Black Duck    | 25. Little Pied Cormorant    |
| 4. White-faced Heron          | 15. Masked Lapwing        | 26. Pied Cormorant           |
| 5. Common Starling            | 16. Little Pied Cormorant | 27. Australasian Gannet      |
| 6. Forest Raven               | 17. Straw-necked Ibis     | 28. Eastern Great Egret      |
| 7. Little Raven               | 18. Pacific Gull          | 29. Eastern Spinebill (imm.) |
| 8. Magpie-lark                | 19. Hoary-headed Grebe,   | 30. Ruddy Turnstone          |
| 9. Chestnut Teal              | 20. Singing Honeyeater    | 31. Kelp Gull                |
| 10. Black Swan                | 21. Brown Falcon          | 32. Willie Wagtail           |
| 11. Australian White Ibis     | 22. Nankeen Kestrel       | 33. Australian Magpie        |

Many of the Short-tailed Shearwater burrows appeared to be disused and we wondered whether the adults had already departed on the flight to the northern Pacific. However, the information board suggested that this would not occur until mid-April. The adults would leave a week before the chicks, who would emerge hungry from their nests and find a way into the water. After grouping there they would take off on their long flight north of New Zealand and Japan, returning via the west coast of America in September-October.

Had we not been going to the SEANA dinner in the evening we would have taken the opportunity, with a full moon glowing, to watch the parent birds fly in after dark (at about 8.30 or 9 pm).

Graham Patterson identified New Holland Cuttlefish and Giant Cuttlefish cuttles as we walked around the southern sandy bay between the outer basalt barrier (the favoured seabird roost) and the island proper.



Graham and other members with the cuttlefish



Great Cormorants and Crested Terns on the basalt rocks



SEANA members looking into tidal rock pools or birdwatching on a lovely day at Griffith Island, Pt Fairy



Other organisms of interest in and around the rock pools included both marine plants and animals. These organisms were identified through reference to Gould League of Victoria's *Coastal Wildlife* (1998).

### Plants

- Coastal Beard Heath (*Leucopogon parviflorus*)
- Bower Spinach (*Tetragonia implexicoma*)
- Cushion Bush (*Calocephalus brownii*)
- Green Sea Velvet (*Codium fragile*)
- Neptune's Necklace (*Hormosira banksia*)
- Bull Kelp (*Durvillea potatorum*)
- Wrinkled brown alga (*Petrospongium sp. ?*)
- Brown alga with air bladders (*Cystophora sp. ?*)
- Encrusting *Corallinaceae* on rocks under water
- Various orange, white and grey flat lichens covering rocks above the high tide zone.

### Animals

- Acorn Barnacle (*Chamaesipho columna*)
- Limpet (genus not known)
- Tube Worm (*Galeolaria caespitosa*)
- Checked Periwinkle (*Littorina praetermissa*)
- Banded Periwinkle (*Littorina unifasciata*)
- Black Nerite (*Nerita atramentosa*)
- Elongate Chiton (*Ischnochiton elongatus*)
- Waratah Anemone (*Actinia tenebrosa*)
- Shore Crab (genus not known)

Those looking for life in the rock pools may have been a little disappointed because little was seen. This seemed in contrast with the experience of those who had visited this shore years ago – especially for Diane who brought Year 11 Biology classes to this place for their VCE fieldwork exercises in the 1990s.

Organisms seen in the 1990s but not on this excursion include:

Rock Pool Shrimp (*Palaemon serenus*)

Common Sea Star (*Patiriella calcar*)

Elephant Snail (*Scutus antipodes*)

Sponges (various)

Southern Sea Cucumber (*Pentacta australis*)

Sea Urchins (various)

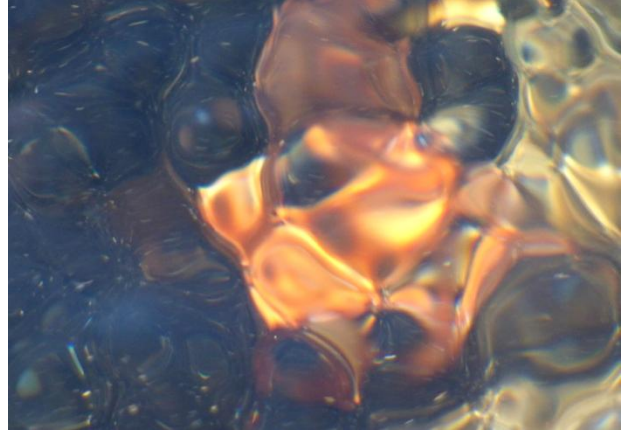
Common Brittle Star (*Ophionereis schayeri*)

Little Sea Star (*Patiriella exigua*)

A few of the plants and animal seen on the beach or in the rock pools are shown below.



Waratah Anemone



Encrusting Coralline Algae in a rock pool



Remains of an unidentified crab



Neptune's Necklace and Brown Alga with air-bladders

Lunch was had at the Lighthouse and the party then explored the rocky shore around that area.



SEANA group with a picnic lunch at the Griffith Is. Lighthouse

At 2 pm we walked back along the pier to our starting point. Members then either went down town for coffee or for a rest before attending the AGM and then dinner at 'Charlies on East' at the Eastern Beach.