

HFNC Urimbirra Little Desert campout, April 26-28, 2019

Diane Luhrs

The aim of this campout was to join members of the Urimbirra Cooperative at their annual ANZAC Day weekend campout to learn about the cooperative and to enjoy visiting their conservation property in the Little Desert region, purchased in 1974 and managed by them since then.

Participants: Rod Bird, Diane Luhrs and Glenys Cayley

Friday. Rod and Diane met Glenys at 10 am at the Hamilton Visitor Information Centre and together headed off in convoy through Cavendish, Balmoral, Douglas and Wombelano before travelling north along the Harrow-Nhill Rd. We enjoyed seeing seven Wedge-tailed eagles flying low over White Lake. In the district of Winiam, we turned west onto Westendorf's Rd (a farmer's dirt track) before joining the Wimmera Hwy near the Mallee Dam. We travelled a further 10 km before turning south onto Miram Sth Rd. After a further 5 km we turned east onto Bill's Gully Rd and located the Bill's Gully Hall about 900 m along this road – the site of our campsite for the weekend.

As there was no one about when we arrived, we set about pitching our tents in this shared camping and community facility. Bill's Gully Hall began as a roller skating venue with floor boards laid to assist skaters turn corners.

The Hall has certainly seen better days, but for campers the kitchen was convenient for storing and preparing food and the hall a good space to meet in inclement weather.



Bill's Gully Hall and camping area

The Urimbirra members arrived as we were still pitching our tents, so we were able to meet them and enjoy lunch in their company. We met Alex English, Eunkyong Park, Julia and Ken Coghill, Julia's sister Shona, Ross (a local farmer) and Nikki.

Alex was keen to show us over their property in the afternoon. After lunch we drove further south along Miram Sth Rd before turning east onto a sandy track and parked at the corner of the block owned by Urimbirra and an adjacent property they are also interested in. We spent a good three hours there.

Summer and autumn had been dry but there was much to enjoy as we walked through Desert Stringybark (*E. arenacea*) and Yellow Gum (*E. leucoxylo*) woodlands where banksias, eucalypts and a few Cranberry Heath (*Astroloma humifusum*) and Flame Heath (*Stenantha conostephioides*) were in flower.



Bardick on the track

At one point, a mostly-grey small snake was spotted coiled under a low bush in the middle of the track, and it was very wary with its triangular head (with white markings on the bottom lip raised) and tongue flicking in and out. This was later identified as a Bardick (*Echiopsis curta*), a small venomous snake.

This interesting species is rarely seen and regarded as ‘vulnerable’ in Victoria. Records are mainly from the NW corner of Victoria and adjacent areas in SA and NSW, Eyre’s Peninsula and SW corner of WA.



Access tracks in the Urimbirra property

We saw some White-fronted Honeyeaters, two Wedge-tailed Eagles overhead and heard a number of smaller birds including Striated Pardalotes. As we drove back to our campsite, we saw Crested Pigeons, White-browed Babblers and a Nankeen Kestrel. Musk Lorikeets were very noisy around the campsite just on dusk. We also saw a number of Eastern Grey Kangaroos.



Musk Lorikeets at camp



Flowering Desert Yellow Gum

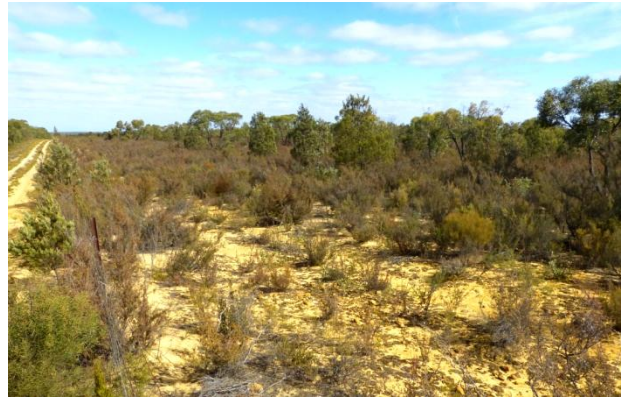


Bill’s Gully Hall and outside dining area

Jonathon Stark (Hindmarsh Landcare Facilitator) joined us for dinner and spoke of the ecological programs that he was involved in. He also identified an Owlet Nightjar and a Barn Owl by their calls.

We went to bed well before midnight – and dressed for the every cold night ahead, so different from last weekend’s camping.

Saturday. The early morning was devoted to a formal Urimbirra committee meeting where we were welcome to attend and contribute to the discussion where appropriate. Following the meeting we headed out with packed lunches to drive around the perimeter of the Urimbirra property. This entailed negotiating deep sand on some of the tracks – about 10 km suitable only for 4WD vehicles. We stopped for walks into the Banksia Springs – a restored bushland property that had been partly chain-cleared and eaten bare by sheep 18 years previously. Along the way we saw a Malleefowl nest – number 43002.



Banksia Springs – restoration 18 years after sheep removed



Malleefowl mound



Ant nest

We stopped for lunch in a Desert Yellow Gum (*E. leucoxylo*n ssp. *stephaniae*) woodland on Urimbirra.



Picnic at Urimbirra



Rod, Diane & Glenys at the picnic



Desert Yellow Gum woodland at Urimbirra



After lunch we spent some time walking through various communities of plants in the sandy rises and clay flats. Several species of mallee were seen, including Narrow-leaved Red Mallee (*E. leptophylla*) and possibly Yellow Mallee (*E. costata*) and one that occupied a winter-wet clay flat in which there was very little understory. A Red-capped Robin was also seen in that mallee community.



Narrow-leaved Red Mallee on clay flat



Red-capped Robin



Yellow Mallee ? on a sandy site

After our walk we drove on along the very sandy boundary track with the Little Desert National Park (a testing time for drivers and impossible without 4WD) and then we stopped to walk to The Bluff for views across the adjoining National Park.

Here we also saw several orchids – probably Mallee Midge Orchid (*Genoplesium nigricans*) on the top of the sand hill. Desert Banksia (*Banksia ornata*) were also flowering on the slope, as were a few Prickly Geebung (*Persoonia juniperinum*).

We made our way into the Urimbirra property from the southern end to meet up with the access track where we had walked in yesterday. This large property is rich in native vegetation and is a credit to the Urimbirra Co-operative for their conservation of the native habitat and the species it supports.



View from The Bluff across Little Desert NP



Mallee Midge Orchid on The Bluff



Desert Banksia



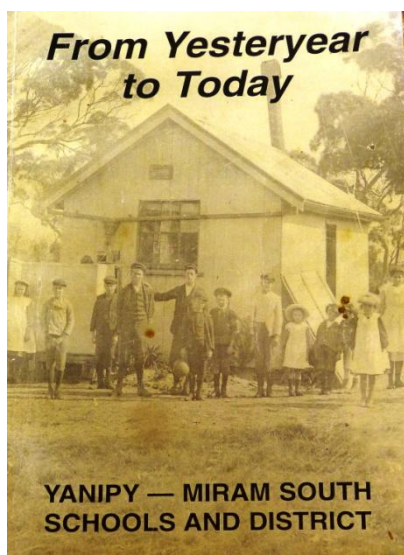
Prickly Geebung



Unknown species

Rod, Glenys and I decided to stay at the campsite for dinner while the others went into Kaniva for a pub meal. Most of the society members were staying at a motel in Kaniva. We were happy to relax and enjoy the fresh and cold night air listening to the sounds of the bush.

Sunday. Up to a relaxed breakfast and then pack up. We took our time, enjoying more conversation with Alex and Eunkyong.



Alex showed us a copy of a local history entitled ‘*Yanipy – Miram South Schools District*’. It gave a picture of the land settlement schemes that saw the opening up of the land in the area. It also described the conditions of employment of the school teachers in those days – extraordinary restrictions by modern standards. A few of the milder prohibitions are mentioned below:

For women teachers in 1915 – ‘You may not loiter down town in ice cream parlours’ and ‘You may not under any circumstances dye your hair’ and ‘You may not dress in bright colours’ and ‘You may not ride in a carriage with a man unless he is your father or brother’

For male teachers in 1879 – ‘A teacher who smokes, uses liquor in any form, frequents pools and public halls or gets shaved in a barber shop will give reason to suspect his worth, intention, integrity and honesty’ and ‘Men may take one evening a week for courting purposes or two evenings to attend church regularly’.

Glenys headed home via Nhill and Rod and I went home through Edenhope stopping for lunch at Lake Wallace – lots of birds on the lake after years of no water. We bought a coffee and drove on through Balmoral and Cavendish to Hamilton. It was a good weekend and a pleasure to meet the people we met.

Birds for the weekend:

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| 1. Crimson Rosella | 15. Rufous Whistler | 29. White-fronted Honeyeater |
| 2. Eastern Rosella | 16. Jacky Winter | 30. Yellow-plumed Honeyeater |
| 3. Musk Lorikeet | 17. Red-capped Robin | 31. Crested Pigeon |
| 4. Sulphur-crested Cockatoo | 18. Grey Shrike Thrush | 32. Common Bronzewing |
| 5. Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoo | 19. Grey Fantail | 33. Emu |
| 6. Galah | 20. Willie Wagtail | 34. Australian Raven |
| 7. Long-billed Corella | 21. Australian Magpie | 35. Barn Owl |
| 8. Blue Bonnet | 22. Laughing Kookaburra | 36. Southern Boobook |
| 9. Weebill | 23. White-winged Choughs | 37. Owllet Nightjar |
| 10. Striated Pardalote | 24. Grey Currawong | 38. Brown Falcon |
| 11. Superb Fairy-wren | 25. Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike | 39. Nankeen Kestrel |
| 12. Brown Thornbill | 26. White-browed Babbler | 40. Wedge-tailed Eagle |
| 13. Noisy Myna | 27. Red Wattlebird | |
| 14. White-throated Treecreeper | 28. New Holland Honeyeater | |