

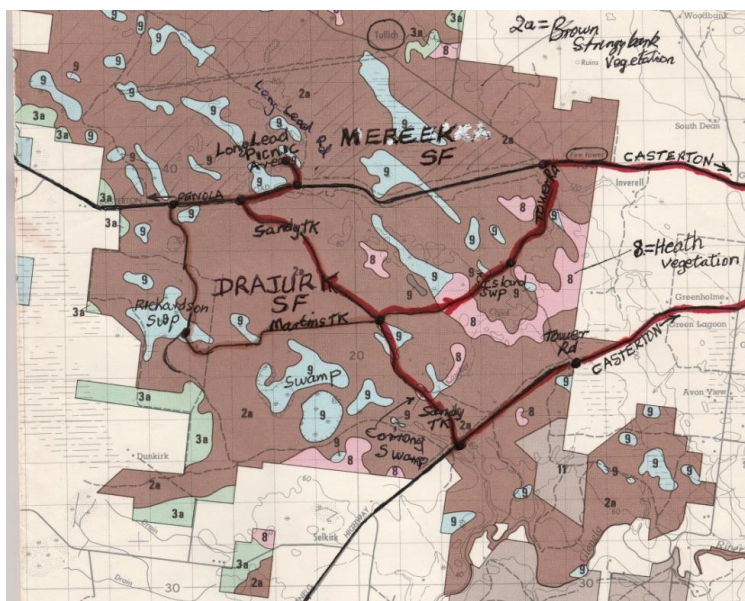
HFNC Excursion to Drajurk State Forest – 21 September 2019

Rod Bird

Participants: Diane Luhrs, Rod Bird, Yvonne Ingeme, Reto Zollinger, Sarah Patterson, Ann Galway, Glenys Cayley, Liz Fenton, Greg Kerr, Nicole Kerr & Marlies.

Rain had fallen steadily during Friday night and persisted into the Saturday morning. However, as the front was moving from the west we anticipated that it would largely pass the Drajurk area by mid-morning Saturday.

Drajurk State Forest and adjacent Mereek State Forest occupy part of the **North Kanawinka Sand Plain**. These are sheets and dunes of white, acid sand overlying clayey lagoon deposits of the former coastal plain. Sand overlies laterised tableland in the eastern part. Brown Stringybark is the major eucalypt but Swamp Gum (*E. ovata*), Marsh Peppermint (*E. falciformis*) and River Red Gum (*E. camaldulensis*) occur near some of the wetter areas and Manna Gum (*E. viminalis* ssp. *cygnetensis*) on a few sandy areas near swamps.



Most of the landscape in the forest is Brown Stringybark (*E. baxteri*) and associated understorey of Grass-trees (*Xanthorrhoea australis*, Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*) and the usual assembly of heath species. Many small and large shallow swamps are found across the area.

Sallow Wattle (*Acacia longifolia*) and a few Blackwood (*A. melanoxylon*) were seen sporadically along most of the drives. Sweet Acacia (*Acacia suaveolens*) was also seen near Tower Hill. A few Desert Banksia (*Banksia ornata*) were seen in a couple of places, survivors of past too-frequent prescribed burns.

Most of the Crown Land adjoining the Drajurk and Mereek State Forests has been converted to *Pinus radiata* plantations. It may be that the occurrence of many swamps throughout the present unalienated areas is the reason that they were not also cleared in the 1960s and 1970s and planted with pines. We believe that the Drajurk and Mereek State Forests should be gazetted as a National Park or State Park, on account of the species-rich natural vegetation and rare fauna (e.g. Red-tailed Black-cockatoo, Heath Mouse and Swamp Antechinus) that occupy the area. There are few secure areas in the region.

We approached the **Drajurk State Forest** from the Casterton-Mount Gambier Rd, entering by the **Sandy Track**. Our first stop was on the rise 100 m from the highway for our first search for wildflowers. Luckily the showers ceased a few minutes after our arrival and, for the rest of the day, we had little trouble from a couple of short showers that occurred.

We found many wildflowers in bloom, despite it being early in Spring. A list of those in flower is given below. Notable finds included Shrub Violet (*Hybanthus floribundus*), Gnat Orchid (*Cyrtostylis reniformis*), Small Spider-orchid (*Caladenia dilatata*), Tiny Caladenia (*C. pusilla*), Leafless Bitter-pea (*Davesia reniformis*), Beaked Hakea (*Hakea rostrata*) and Showy Parrot-pea (*Dillwynia sericea*). There, and at all of the other stops, were hundreds of orchid leaves of several species.

Our third stop was at **Coorong Swamp** (od. 1.7 km from Casterton-Mt Gambier Rd) – a narrow pool of water that extends quite a distance. No waterbirds were seen and the pool was far from capacity.

The trees at this site appeared to be mainly Manna Gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis* ssp. *cygnetensis*) but a few may have been Marsh Peppermint (*E. falciformis* – formerly *E. willisii*) or hybrids with that species.



Coorong Swamp on Sandy Tk

The sandy banks supported a wealth of wildflowers and shrubs, including Scrub Sheoak (*Allocasuarina paludosa*), Spike Wattle (*Acacia oxycedrus*) in flower. There were masses of Showy Parrot-pea there also.

A few African Weed Orchid (*Disa bracteata*) were also found near the track and were dug up. This species is now widespread in Victoria and probably beyond control.



Some of the group with the old Stringybark

We travelled slowly up Sandy Track, crossed Martins Rd and reached Penola Rd (od. 8.6 km), after another 2 stops in areas that appeared to be slightly different. At one stop we observed a very large multi-trunked Brown Stringybark (*E. baxteri*) that survived the loggers for that reason. It is surely the largest remaining tree in that forest.

At lunch-time we diverted east about 2 km along the Casterton-Penola highway to the **Long Lead Rd** and **Picnic/Camp Ground**. As we approached the turnoff a flock of about 25 Red-tailed Black-cockatoo flew out of a Stringybark tree near the road and landed about 70 m away in the Drajurk State Forest. This was a great unexpected spectacle for everyone.

The Long Lead Picnic Ground has picnic tables, a shelter, toilets and space to camp. This area is in the **Mereek State Forest** and is part of the Tullich Water Reserve. It is also a playground for hoons with trail bikes and 4WDs. The surface has been churned up extensively around the site. However, we did find some interesting wildflowers in the undisturbed parts, including Dwarf Greenhood (*Pterostylis nana*), Pink Fairies Caladenia (*C. latifolia*), Love Creeper (*Comesperma volubile*) and several Black Morel (*Morchella elata*) and Rainbow Fungus (*Trametes versicolor*) on dead stumps. A huge Prickly Moses (*Acacia verticillata*) and several Sallow Wattle (*A. longifolia*) were flowering profusely.

Greg undertook a 20-minute bird survey after lunch, while others took a walk around the picnic area looking for orchids and other flora.

After lunch, except for the Kerrs who had to leave early, we retraced our route back along Sandy track, stopping again along that section before we reached the first cross-road and turned east along Martins Track. The track crosses wet heathland at **Cameron's Island Swamp** and we stopped there to walk into the low heath which was quite wet underfoot. The most interesting find there was the appearance of pink or red-flowered Common Heath (*Epacris impressa*). Only the white-flowered form had been observed at other places.

A shower of rain had us quickly back in our vehicles but we stopped again a little later to inspect an area that had been burned earlier in the winter. As expected, there was no orchid-flowering response. Our experience has been that an autumn or very early winter fire is needed.

We arrived at the T junction with **Tower Track** and turned left to the **Casterton-Penola Highway**. This

last section was through higher ground with taller Stringybark trees. The track was, by this time, rather wet and slushy – not helped by the activities of some hoons who had just roared around the tracks with 4WDs. Our next stop on our way back to Hamilton was in Casterton, where we stopped for coffee. The excursion had been very satisfactory and were very happy that the inclement weather had not dissuaded us from undertaking the trip.

Species with flowers:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. <i>Acacia longifolia</i> (Sallow Wattle) | 15. <i>Comesperma volubile</i> (Love Creeper) |
| 2. <i>Acacia myrtifolia</i> (Myrtle Wattle) | 16. <i>Correa reflexa</i> (Common Correa) – few |
| 3. <i>Acacia melanoxylon</i> (Blackwood) – few | 17. <i>Craspedia glauca</i> (Billy Buttons) |
| 4. <i>Acacia verticillata</i> (Prickly Moses) – few | 18. <i>Cyrtostylis reniformis</i> (Gnat Orchid) |
| 5. <i>Acacia suaveolens</i> (Sweet-scented Wattle) – few | 19. <i>Davesia brevifolia</i> (Leafless Bitter-pea) |
| 6. <i>Allocasuarina paludosa</i> (Scrub Sheoak) – few | 20. <i>Dillwynia sericea</i> (Showy Parrot-pea) |
| 7. <i>Banksia marginata</i> (Silver Banksia) – few | 21. <i>Epacris impressa</i> (Common Heath) |
| 8. <i>Boronia pilosa ssp. parirdaemonis</i> (Hairy Boronia) | 22. <i>Glossodia major</i> (Wax-lip Orchid) |
| 9. <i>Boronia pilosa ssp. pilosa</i> | 23. <i>Hakea rostrata</i> (Beaked Hakea) |
| 10. <i>Caladenia carnea</i> (Pink Fingers) | 24. <i>Hibbertia virgata</i> (Twiggy Guinea-flower) |
| 11. <i>Caladenia pusilla</i> (Tiny Caladenia) | 25. <i>Hybanthus floribundus</i> (Shrub Violet) |
| 12. <i>Caladenia dilatata</i> (Small Spider-orchid) | 26. <i>Leucopogon virgatus</i> (Common Beard-heath) |
| 13. <i>Caladenia latifolia</i> (Pink Fairies Orchid) | 27. <i>Kennedia prostrata</i> (Running Postman) – few |
| 14. <i>Chaemoscilla corymbosa</i> (Blue Squill) | 28. <i>Stenantha conostephioides</i> (Emu Heath) |
| | 29. <i>Styphelia adscendens</i> (Golden Heath) |
| | 30. <i>Tetratheca ciliata</i> (Pink Bells) |



Davesia brevifolia



Dillwynia sericea



Hakea rostrata



Epacris impressa



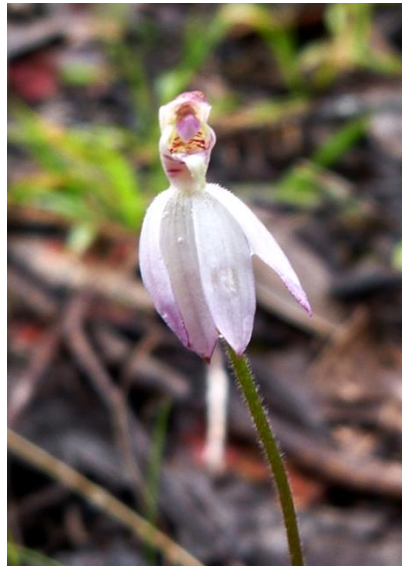
Epacris impressa



Leucopogon virgatus



Glossodia major



Caladenia pusilla



Cyrtostylis reniformis



Tetradlea ciliata



Hybanthus floribundus



Stenantha conostephioides



Allocasuarina paludosa



Boronia pilosa ssp.



Boronia pilosa ssp. *pilosa*?



Craspedia glauca



Acacia oxycedrus



Caladenia dilatata



Caladenia latifolia



Styphelia adscendens



Comesperma volubile



Trametes versicolor



Morchella elata



Caladenia carnea



Heterotexus mitinis



Amanita sp.



Cortinar or *Pholiota* sp.



Pterostylis nana



Banksia marginata



Hibbertia sp.

Birds seen:

- | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Crimson Rosella | 9. New Holland Honeyeater | 17. Masked Lapwing |
| 2. Red-tailed Black-cockatoo | 10. White-naped Honeyeater | 18. Little Raven |
| 3. Sulphur-crested Cockatoo | 11. Yellow-faced Honeyeater | 19. Australian Magpie |
| 4. Eastern Spinebill | 12. Grey Shrike-thrush | 20. Welcome Swallow |
| 5. Grey Currawong | 13. White-throated Tree-creeper | 21. Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo |
| 6. Pied Currawong | 14. Golden Whistler | 22. Superb Fairy-wren |
| 7. Grey Fantail | 15. Jacky Winter | 23. Emu |
| 8. Laughing Kookaburra | 16. Scarlet Robin | |