

HFNC campout and traverse of the Bear State Forest – 23-24 November 2019

Rod Bird & Dave Munro

Present: HFNC members who attended the campout on Saturday evening were Rod Bird, Diane Luhrs, Peter Hocking, Reto Zollinger & Yvonne Ingeme. Dave & Lyn Munro and Hilary Turner also joined the group on Saturday to inspect fauna nest boxes at Bear SF. Liz Fenton joined the campout group on Sunday morning to enjoy the traverse across the forest from the entrance to Brunonia Hill.

The weekend activities combined an inspection of fauna nest boxes on Saturday with a campout on Saturday night and a 5 km cross-forest hike on Sunday. We left Hamilton at 9.30 am on Saturday, collecting some members at Cavendish and Hilary at the junction of East-West Rd and Hallams Rd.

We then proceeded along the track to the signpost for the Bear SF and then north to inspect the fauna nest boxes that had been installed several years ago. We found Sugar Gliders in 2 of the 10 boxes and evidence of recent occupation of 9 boxes. Details of this inspection are presented in a separate report.

Observations made on flora and birds on this day and Sunday are presented here. Interesting plants seen on Saturday that were flowering included *Comesperma polygaloides* (Small Milkwort), *Bursaria spinosa* (ssp. *lasiophylla?*), *Vittadinia* sp. (New Holland Daisy) and *Dodonaea procumbens* (Trailing Hop-bush). The *Bursaria* shrubs did not exceed 1.5 m in height and had been heavily browsed despite being protected with very sharp spines.



Comesperma polygaloides



Bursaria spinosa (ssp. *lasiophylla?*)



Vittadinia sp.

We were fortunate in having a mild day, after some slight showers as we drove to Bear. We had a leisurely inspection of the flora at our 5 fauna nest box locations, having lunch at the dam in the forest on McAdams Rd. After visiting the last site we made brief inspection of the smoky quartz fossicking site in the northern part of Bear SF. A couple of pits were being worked on by people there and there was evidence of substantial diggings, most of which had not been back-filled. Some members of our group collected a few small pieces of quartz from the rubble on the mounds.

We ended the afternoon activities with a visit to 'Brunonia Hill' (known locally as Lookout Hill) where the extensive carpet of the blue flowers of *Brunonia australis* (Blue Pincushion) was spectacular. The open woodland on the slopes and top of this rise are especially favourable areas for this species and it would be hard to find a better display in Victoria. Unfortunately, some visitors are oblivious to the beauty and insist on driving off-road over the wildflowers, perhaps in the hope of getting a distant view of the Grampians from their vehicle. Others have treated the open space as a place for 'burnouts'.

A Gumleaf Grasshopper (*Goniaea australiasiae*) was photographed on a dead leaf on the ground.

Those who were staying the night returned to the fire dam off McAdams Rd and set up camp. We observed a Sacred Kingfisher taking a few dips into the water. The bird had an unusually bright blue to the feathers on its back. That evening we did a spot-light walk along the track but failed to find any small mammals in the *Eucalyptus baxteri*-dominated landscape, apart from some small forest bats flying along the road corridor. A Southern Boobook was heard calling.

At 10 am on Sunday we drove back to the entrance of the Bear SF, stopping at a point 2.7 km from there to leave a vehicle. Our plan was to walk across the *E. baxteri* (Brown Stringybark) forest to Brunonia Hill, a distance of 2.2 km and then cross back to the parked vehicle that we had left on Hallams Track. That distance was 2.4 km. We had GPS readings for both sites and used our instruments to keep on target (see map). Because of small deviations, the distance walked was probably a little over 5 km.

A feature of this part of Bear is that the Stringybark forest has not been burned for at least 60 years, and perhaps much longer. However, we did see several places where old lightning strikes had lit small fires, blackening or burning a few trees and logs, but had not advanced beyond about 10-20 m. The floor of the forest is littered with decaying branches and small logs but there is very little fine fuel there. The macropods (Eastern Grey Kangaroo, Red-necked Wallaby and Black Wallaby) see to that.



Old lightning strike patch in *E. baxteri* forest



E. baxteri forest unburned for 60 or more years



E. baxteri forest unburned for 60 or more years



Evidence of old post cutting

There was also evidence of one or two old forestry tracks, now overgrown, and a few instances where old cut stumps were seen. Most of the Stringybark timber would have been taken for fence posts. There has been no lawful timber extraction from the forest since the RFA process in 1998, when this forest was given the status of Special Protection Zone (we did see a trailer load of firewood being taken out of the forest along McAdams track).

Xanthorrhoea minor was seen sporadically through this area but there were few shrubs. We came across a lone, large, weathered and moss-covered rock on the walk. We also noted that *Brunonia australis* was prevalent in small numbers throughout the forest but in great numbers nearer to and on Brunonia Hill where the canopy was much more open.

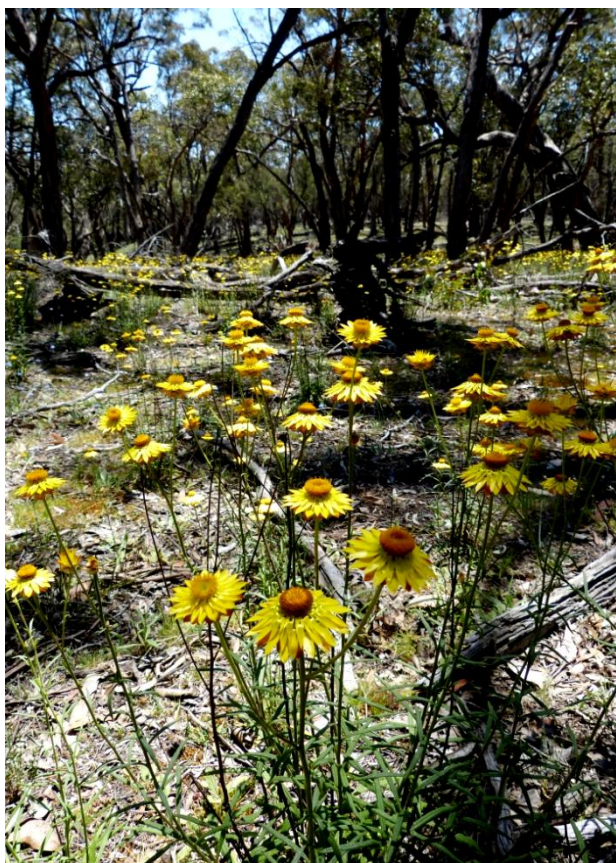


A singular moss-covered rock



A mass of *Brunonia australis*

On the northern slope of Brunonia Hill we observed an area of perhaps 0.1 ha of *Bracteantha viscosa* (Shiny Everlasting) in a patch of rather denser tree vegetation. That was a magnificent spectacle. We had not seen this species elsewhere in Bear SF.



Bracteantha viscosa near Brunonia Hill



A field of *Brunonia australis* on the north slope of Brunonia Hill

After a picnic lunch on Brunonia Hill we started our walk back to Hallams Rd. Along the way, through some different vegetation alliances, we saw some fine, old stands of *Xanthorrhoea australis* (Austral Grass Tree), with massive unburned ‘skirts’.



Xanthorrhoea australis – long unburned and flowering

As well as Brown Stringybark we now had some *Eucalyptus melliodora* (Yellow Box), *E. leucoxylon* (Yellow Gum), *E. camaldulensis* (River Red Gum) and perhaps Scent-bark (*E. aromaphloia*) in the drainage lines and slopes. A *Laetiporus* fungus was seen on a live *E. baxteri*.



E. melliodora and other eucalypts

Laetiporus fungus on a Stringybark tree

Patches of dense heath were also crossed. In one patch we found *Gompholobium ecostatum* (Dwarf Wedge-pea) and *Calochilus robertsonii* (a very reddish-looking Purplish Beard Orchid – note the 2 dark ‘eyes’). Earlier we had seen a few specimens of what may have been *Caladenia tentaculata* (Mantis Orchid) or *C. parva* (Small Spider-orchid), as well as *Microtis* sp. (Onion Orchid).



Gompholobium ecostatum

A purple-flowered Blue Pincushion



Calochilus robertsonii



Caesia parviflora ssp. *parviflora*



Podolepis decipiens

A few plants of Blue Pincushion were white or purple and we also found a single plant of white-flowered *Caesia parviflora* ssp. *parviflora* (Pale Grass-lily). We noted many of flowers observed on Saturday, including *Podolepis decipiens* (Showy Podolepis), *Microseris* sp. (Yam Daisy) and *Hibbertia* species.

Birds were not conspicuous. For example, we saw only one pair of Scarlet Robins. White-throated Treecreepers, Rufous Whistlers and Spotted and Striated Pardalotes were the most common birds.



White-throated Treecreeper



Calochilus robertsonii

In the Brown Stringybark forest the dead wood on the ground in some places made walking and keeping a direct course a little difficult, but GPS technology kept us on track.

Back at Hallams Rd, some of the group were taken back to the starting point where most of the vehicles had been parked. One vehicle returned to pick up those who had waited. We then had a cuppa and a yarn before departing at about 4 pm, after a very enjoyable hike across terrain with no internal tracks.

Birds seen/heard on the weekend:

- | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Australian Magpie | 12. Laughing Kookaburra | 23. Striated Pardalote |
| 2. Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike | 13. Little Raven | 24. Sulphur-crested Cockatoo |
| 3. Brown Falcon | 14. Pacific Black Duck | 25. Superb Fairy-wren |
| 4. Buff-rumped Thornbill | 15. Pied Currawong | 26. Wedge-tailed Eagle |
| 5. Common Bronzewing | 16. Red Wattlebird | 27. White-eared Honeyeater |
| 6. Crimson Rosella | 17. Rufous Whistler | 28. White-throated Treecreeper |
| 7. Fan-tailed Cuckoo | 18. Sacred Kingfisher | 29. Weebill |
| 8. Gang Gang Cockatoo | 19. Scarlet Robin | 30. Yellow-faced Honeyeater |
| 9. Grey Currawong | 20. Shining Bronze-cuckoo | 31. Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoo |
| 10. Grey Fantail | 21. Southern Boobook | |
| 11. Grey Shrike-thrush | 22. Spotted Pardalote | |

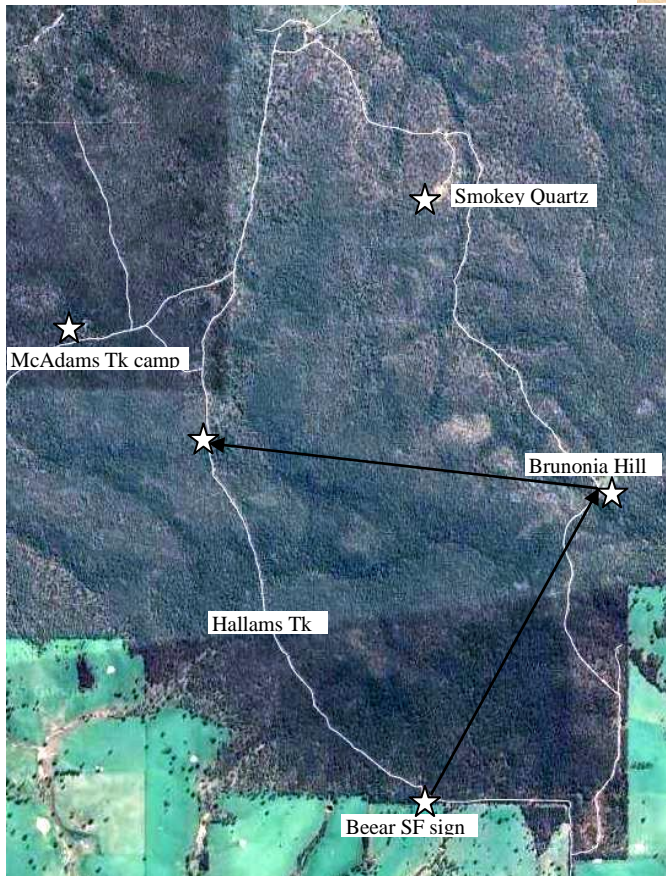
Plants in flower identified at Bear SF on Sat 23 & Sun 24 November 2019

<i>Acacia mearnsii</i>	Black Wattle	<i>Hypericum gramineum</i>	Small St. Johns Wort
<i>Arthropodium stricta</i>	Chocolate Lily	<i>Leptorhynchus squamatus</i>	Scaly Buttons
<i>Arthropodium fimbriatum</i>	Vanilla Lily (s)	<i>Leptospermum continentale</i>	Prickly Tea-tree
<i>Bracteantha viscosa</i>	Sticky Everlasting	<i>Leptospermum myrsinoides</i>	Heath Tea-tree
<i>Brachyloma daphnoides</i>	Daphne Heath	<i>Microceris</i> sp.	Yam Daisy
<i>Brunonia australis</i>	Blue Pincushion	<i>Microtis</i> sp.	Onion Orchid
<i>Burchardia umbellata</i>	Milkmaids (s)	<i>Millotia tenuifolia</i>	Soft Millotia
<i>Bursaria spinosa lasiophylla</i>	Sweet Bursaria	<i>Monotoca scoparia</i>	Prickly Broom-heath (s)
<i>Calochilus robertsonii</i>	Purplish Beard-orchid (s)	<i>Oxalis perennans</i>	Grassland Wood-sorrel (s)
<i>Caesia parviflora parviflora</i>	Pale Grass-lily	<i>Pelargonium rodneyanum</i>	Magenta Stork's-bill
<i>Calytrix tetragona</i>	Common Fringe-myrtle	<i>Pimelea glauca</i>	Smooth Rice-flower
<i>Comosperma polygaloides</i>	Small Milkwort	<i>Podolepis decipiens</i>	Showy Podolepis
<i>Convolvulus erubescens</i>	Pink Bindweed	<i>Ptilotus macrocephalus</i>	Featherheads (s)
<i>Cynoglossum suaveolens</i>	Sweet Hounds-tongue	<i>Thelymitra</i> sp. (seeds)	Sun Orchid
<i>Dianella revoluta</i>	Black-anther Flax-lily	<i>Trichoryne elatior</i>	Yellow Rush-lily
* <i>Disa bracteata</i>	Sth African Weed-orchid	<i>Vittadinia</i> sp.	New Holland Daisy
<i>Gompholobium ecostatum</i>	Dwarf Wedge-pea(s)	<i>Wahlenbergia stricta</i>	Tall Bluebell
<i>Goodenia geniculata</i>	Bent Goodenia	<i>Wahlenbergia</i> spp. x 2	Bluebell
<i>Goodenia pinnatifida</i>	Cut-leaf Goodenia (s)	<i>Xanthorrhoea australis</i>	Austral Grass-tree (s)
<i>Hibbertia riparia</i>	Erect Guinea-flower	<i>Xanthorrhoea minor</i>	Small Grass-tree
<i>Hibbertia fasciculata prostr.</i>	Bundled Guinea-flower(s)		

Note: (s) after the species name indicates seen only on Sunday.



Map of Hallams Tk circuit in Bear State Forest and the route of the walk



Gumleaf Grasshopper

The Gumleaf Grasshopper feeds at night on green eucalypt leaves and acacia phylodes. It is common across much of Australia.

The capsules (and presumably the leaves) in this photo are from *E. leucoxydon* (Yellow Gum).