

# HFNC Excursion to Port MacDonnell and French Point, Cape Northumberland and Germein Reserve on 23 March 2024

Rod Bird

**Participants:** Portland field naturalists, Ruth & Ivor Graney, Virginia Keiller, Joe Logan, Rob Farnes and Graham Smith, bolstered our numbers today. Ruth was our leader and we were delighted to have Rob as our expert guide to the shorebirds. Sharon Moritz, a birdwatcher from Warrnambool, also joined the party. Others, from Hamilton, were Diane Luhrs & Rod Bird, Peter Hocking, Glenys Cayley, Jenni Mitchell & Mervyn Hannan, Reto Zollinger & Yvonne Ingeme.

We left Hamilton at 8.30 am and drove to Port MacDonnell via Digby-Dartmoor Rd to Winnap and Nelson, a drive of about 1 hour 45 minutes. The day promised rain but apart from sprinkles during our drive, and a breezy start on arriving at the foreshore in Port MacDonnell, we had a beautiful autumn day.

After a cuppa at the foreshore we drove about 2 km east along 8 Mile Creek Rd to a sharp left bend where a track leads off to the right to **French Point**, a coast line with a wide limestone and sand pavement that is a magnet for shorebirds. We drove about 1 km down a rough track along a fence line to a parking area overlooking the beach. Fortunately the Portland contingent had brought 3 spotting scopes and we were able to identify the waders that were some 50-150 m distant on the rugged shore. After an initial viewing we walked out about 40 m on the beach to obtain a closer view, but not so close as to disturb the birds.

The birding highlights: about 30 Pacific Golden Plovers (some in full breeding plumage), 1 Grey-tailed Tattler, 1 Curlew Sandpiper (in full breeding plumage) and 1 Greater Sand Plover. There were also perhaps 20 Double-banded Plover (some with a little development of their bands), about 100 Red-necked Stint (one resting group of at least 50 birds and others wandering the flats), a few Ruddy Turnstone, Red-capped Plover and Sanderling. Sharp-tailed Sandpipers were absent, probably winging their way north on migration.



Birdwatchers at French Point JM



Pacific Golden Plovers at French Point



Grey-tailed Tattler



Greater Sand Plover (centre)

The birds were too distant to get really sharp images. One bird – a lone Curlew Sandpiper – was beautifully coloured but, like the Pacific Golden Plovers, also resting a long way from us.



Curlew Sandpiper in breeding plumage



Pacific Golden Plovers

After a rewarding time at the beach we returned to the town and then visited **Cape Northumberland**. This is apparently the most southerly point on the SA mainland. A feature of one stack is the base pavement, dark in colour and presumably basalt from an early lava flow (as occurs at Cape Bridgewater).



Cape Bridgewater cliffs



Limestone cliff and base pavement



View west from Cape Northumberland



Cliff erosion pillars at the cape



Fur Seal basking



Fur Seal workout in the water

The cliffs were studded with nesting cormorants, notably the Black-faced Cormorant. We also saw 2 seals one resting on a rock face and the other frolicing in the water. They were quite dark, probably Australian Fur Seals (*Arctocephalus pusillus*). A dead juvenile Lewin's Rail was found on the edge of the road near the walk to the lookout on the cape.



Black-faced Cormorant rookery



Black-faced Cormorants with chicks DL

Hérons, Pelicans & Royal Spoonbill on foreshore DL



Lewin's Rail juv. DL



Lunch at Lions Park, Port MacDonnell JM



We had lunch at **Lions Park**, near the Port MacDonnell foreshore. The day had warmed considerably at this stage and the shade of the trees was welcome. The adjacent drain had some muddy flats between the clumps of Bulrush. Rob had seen a Spotless Crake and Little Grassbird there earlier in the morning.

After lunch we drove to the **Clarke Park** at the **Germein Reserve**. The bare ground of the picnic area has a fine stand of picturesque Yellow Gum (*Eucalyptus leucoxylon* ssp. *megalocarpa*), a sub-species found only in this coastal region (including at various places on the banks of the Lower Glenelg River). The 55-ha Germein Reserve contains the largest number of these trees in SA.

The reserve was established in 1978 and expanded in 1995 to protect this species and others in a region where only 5% of natural vegetation remains and almost all of the wetlands have been drained. The Yellow Gum is readily identified by its large (thimble size) pendula capsules on pink-red stalks – the flowers may be white or pink. The trunk and large branches show the ‘new’ yellowish bark, along with the dull green-grey areas of older bark.

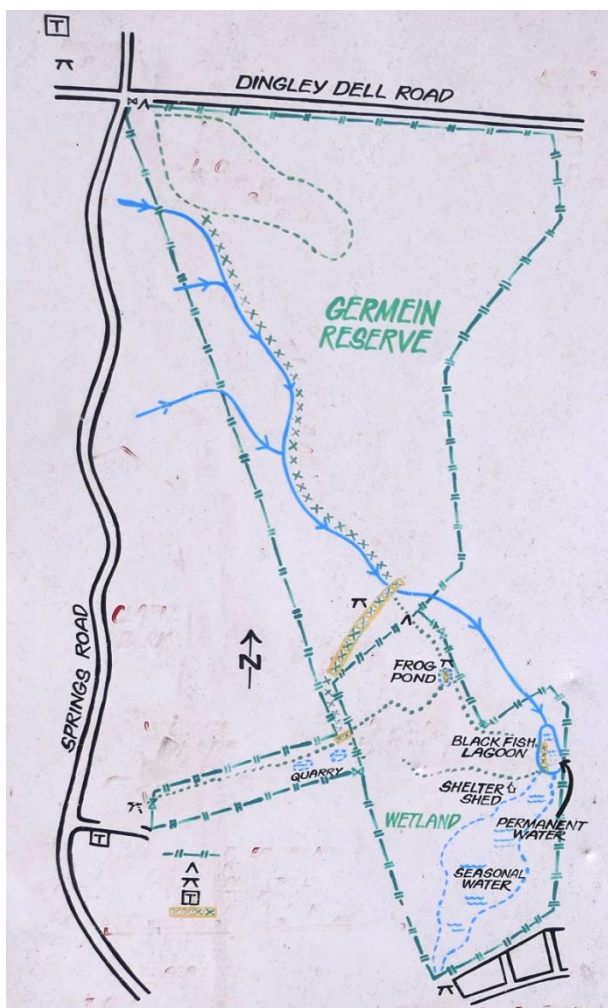


Yellow Gums at Clarke Park



*E. leucoxylon* ssp. *megalocarpa* flowers & buds

We walked on the Quarry track to the Frog Pond, around the Blackfish Lagoon and back through the quarry area to the picnic ground. Trees seen included Yellow Gum, Messmate (*E. obliqua*), Swamp Gum (*E. ovata*), Sweet Bursaria (*Bursaria spinosa*), Drooping Sheoak (*Allocasuarina verticillata*), Blackwood (*A. melanoxylon*), Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*) and Moonah (*Melaleuca lanceolata*).



The paths and boardwalks – and most of the wetland area – were quite dry and there were few flowers, apart from some on the Yellow Gums and a Lobelia species.

Birds seen on the walks included Red-browed Firetail, Blue-winged Parrot, Red Wattlebird, Singing Honeyeater and Silvereeye.

We had an afternoon cuppa at Clarke Park before driving up Springs Rd to the **Dingley Dell Rd** corner of Germein Reserve, to begin our next walk. Across the road from the entrance to the reserve is the poet Adam Lindsay Gordon’s old home; the house was not open to the public at this time.



Germein Reserve and the Loop Trail

Rob had left us earlier, while all remaining except Glenys took the 1.25 km **Loop Walk** at the northern end of Germein Reserve. On this trail we found two different soils – one with limestone rocks and pinkish soil and the other an almost black soil with a dense understorey of Austral Bracken (*Pteridium esculentum*) and other species.

The tree and shrub vegetation was similar to that in the southern area except Cherry Ballart (*Exocarpos cupressiformis*) was present and the trees and shrubs (including Sweet Bursaria) were more closely spaced and paths shaded.

Common Brown Butterflies were prominent along the walk.



Common Brown Butterfly on the Loop Trail DL

Our excursion ended at about 4 pm. Some in our group took the opportunity to visit the garden in the Adam Lindsay Gordon area. That part of the property was open to visitors.

Others departed directly, most retracing the route to Port MacDonnell and then back to Portland or Hamilton.

Bird lists for the sites visited are given on the following page.

Photos contributed by other members are denoted by initials in the caption box.

## Bird lists for the Port MacDonnell area on 23 March 2024

SPECIES	Drive to PtM	SITE			
		38-03-14/140-42-05 PtM foreshore	38-03-28/140-44-43 French Point	38-03-32/140-39-43 C Northumberland	38-03-09/140-40-46 Germein Res
Australian Gannet			1		
Australian Magpie		*			*
Australian Pelican		*			
Australian Pied Oystercatcher			*		
Australian White Ibis			*		
Black-faced Cormorant			*	*	
Black-shouldered Kite		*			
Blue-winged Parrot					*
Brown Thornbill					*
Caspian Tern			*		
Chestnut Teal		*	*		
Common Greenfinch			*		
Common Starling		*			
Crimson Rosella	*				
Curlew Sandpiper			1		
Double-banded Plover			20		
Great Cormorant			*		
Great Egret		*	1		
Greater Crested Tern		*	*		
Greater Sand Plover			1		
Grey Teal		*			
Grey-tailed Tattler			1		
Kelp Gull			*	*	
Lewin's Rail				#	
Little Black Cormorant			*	*	
Little Pied Cormorant	*		*	*	
Magpie Goose	*				
Masked Lapwing			2		
New Holland Honeyeater					*
Pacific Golden Plover			30		
Pacific Gull			*		
Purple Swamphen					*
Red Wattlebird					*
Red-browed Finch					*
Red-capped Plover			*		
Red-necked Stint			100		
Rock Dove				*	
Royal Spoonbill		*			
Ruddy Turnstone			*		
Sanderling			*		
Silver Gull		*	*	*	
Silvereye					*
Singing Honeyeater					*
Sooty Oystercatcher			8		
Straw-necked Ibis			*		
Swamp Harrier	*				
Wedge-tailed Eagle	*				
Welcome Swallow		*			
White-faced Heron		*	2		
White-winged Chough	*				

\* present, # dead juvenile