

Observations from the Field Nats.

October 2005

An interesting part of every meeting of the Hamilton Field Naturalists is the reporting of observations by members and friends. This long-running tradition has resulted in the gathering of a valuable collection of natural history information. A chance sighting often sparks comment and discussion.

Here are a few examples of recent reports:

Black Wallabies were seen fighting in the front yard of a farm – two males in dispute. As these animals are usually only seen singly or in pairs it is unusual to see this particular activity. None of the club members present can remember ever witnessing it.

Brolga sightings have been made over the past few weeks. The birds were mostly in pairs and were seen feeding in paddocks, nesting in swamps, dancing and trumpeting. As one of our company remarked, “It’s just as well Brolgas can dance as they certainly can’t sing”.

Worm Lizards & Striped Legless Lizards provided two unusual discoveries, one in south west Victoria and the other in South Australia. Worm Lizards – blunt-tailed legless lizards – are easily distinguished from the Striped Legless Lizard, which has a long, tapering tail. Both types of legless lizard are found in tussocks and under logs and rocks. Many of these harmless creatures are killed when discovered because they appear at first glance to be baby snakes. Look closely and you will see that they have ear slits and you may even see tiny vestiges of legs – snakes do not have either.

Echidnas are sometimes seen and an encounter provided an amusing interlude for one of our camera-wielding members. While stalking a particularly active individual in short grass the animal turned and made its way directly towards the photographer. Echidnas have poor eyesight and this one charged for about ten metres before turning away when it was within a metre of the crouching man. The photographer said he was trying to make himself as little like an ant as possible.

Buff-banded Rails have been reported from two sightings around Hamilton in successive months. It was suggested that it could have been the same bird. This is a wading bird that shelters in vegetation surrounding wetlands before venturing to forage in the shallow water.

King Ferns were seen on a visit to a damp gully near Victoria Point. These impressive plants are growing in an area which is also rich in orchids and other wildflowers. The presence of Arum Lilies nearby was also reported. These are invasive pest plants – not such good news.

Yellow-tailed Rock Wallabies were seen by travellers to South Australia. This is an animal that lives in similar habitat to the Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby, once found in the Grampians. Some of these animals will be re introduced to the Grampians in the next few years.

Orchids – endangered species of orchids were seen by club members who are also volunteers with the Threatened Species Network. Reports of these sightings are available to departmental managers.

The variety of animals and plants reported and recorded gives some idea of the range of interests of the club members and provides a useful source of reference for future inquirers.

Photos – Black Wallaby (*Wallabia bicolor*) and Short-beaked Echidna (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*)

