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Wombat Forestcare Newsletter

As this year ends we contemplate with great sadness the efforts of the Victorian State Government to dismantle protections for native flora and fauna. Our greatly loved Wombat Forest is an "Ark" for its inhabitants. It is these large areas of intact forest which provide essential habitat for all species and we will need to work hard to continue to ensure their protection. As usual we encourage you to spend time in the forest. This time of year is great for bird-watchers to catch up with the many summer visitors, particularly the Rufous Fantails breeding in the Musk Daisies in the wet gullies.

Gayle Osborne (editor) & Angela Halpin (design)

The Red-browed Treecreeper – one of the Wombat's special birds

By Tanya Loos

Most nature enthusiasts in the region are familiar with the White-throated Treecreeper (*Cormobates leucophaea*), a small to medium sized brown bird that lives up to its name by creeping up trees on the bark, its white throat catching in the forest light. These birds call loudly and persistently, with a number of different calls, but all with the same strident, far carrying quality. I see or hear these plucky little birds nearly every time I am walking in the bush.

Red-browed Treecreeper *(Climacteris erythrops)*
Photography © Paul Gullan/Viridans Images

Much more difficult to see and hear is the smaller Red-browed Treecreeper *(Climacteris erythrops)* who is also found in the Wombat Forest. Red-browed Treecreeper calls are described by Pizzey as a "distinctive quick explosive, zizzing chatter", and despite watching these birds very closely over the years when I do see them occasionally, I still can't seem to hear their call! They seem to be silent, moving quickly over the tree bark, frequently stopping to investigate hanging bark and the bark around knot holes and hollows.

How is it that these two similar species can live together in the Wombat without stepping upon one another's toes ecologically, so to speak? The most detailed studies that compare the White-throated and Red-browed Treecreeper were undertaken in NSW in the 1980's by a chap called Richard Noske who carefully recorded where the birds foraged, what trees they preferred and any other similarities or differences in their behaviour.

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Noske found that while the White-throated spent most of its time travelling up tree trunks and large branches, the Red-browed spent a lot of foraging time travelling along smaller branches, and investigating bark strips and hollows as I mentioned earlier. The White-throated is happy with any kind of bark trees, but seemed to prefer peppermints and stringybarks, whereas the Red-browed prefers trees such as Manna Gums with the hanging bark, especially in the branch – trunk creases. The White-throated may be found throughout the forest, but the Red-browed seems to prefer gullies. This may be the case because gullies are where gums such as Manna Gum prefer to grow, and often many larger trees remain in gullies whereas they have been lost from the slopes and ridges.

So these birds have some effective resource partitioning going on, that is they each have a niche that provides their food of insects, spiders and other invertebrates.

So why is the White-throated Treecreeper so common and the Red-browed Treecreeper so much less common? Detectability is of course a factor; you can tell if a forest patch contains White-throated very quickly due to their loud calls. I have only seen Red-browed Treecreepers when I have binoculars and I am looking specifically for birds. Habitat is also a factor, if these birds prefer large old gums with lots of hanging bark and they prefer creek and river gullies, well that is a lot less available habitat to start with!

White-throated Treecreeper *(Cormobates leucophaea)*
Photography © Gayle Osborne

The map on page 3 shows the distribution of the Red-browed Treecreeper in part of Victoria, zoomed in so we can see the Wombat Forest region. The Red-browed Treecreeper does not occur at Mt Cole or at the Otways in similar wet forest habitat, so here in the Wombat we are seeing the species at the western point extremity of its range which follows the Great Dividing Range all the way to the Qld/NSW border forests.

The following map shows a close-up of records in the Wombat Forest region. Note that there are no records north of Daylesford; however I have seen Red-browed Treecreepers in Porcupine Ridge, along Leitches Creek. Note also that the distribution is clustered heavily around the two river systems, the Lerderderg through Blackwood and the Werribee up through Spargo Creek. And for some reason, there are no records in the Lerderderg State Park or over east in the Macedon Ranges! Our Red-browed Treecreepers are an isolated population, separated from its core distribution in the east of Victoria.

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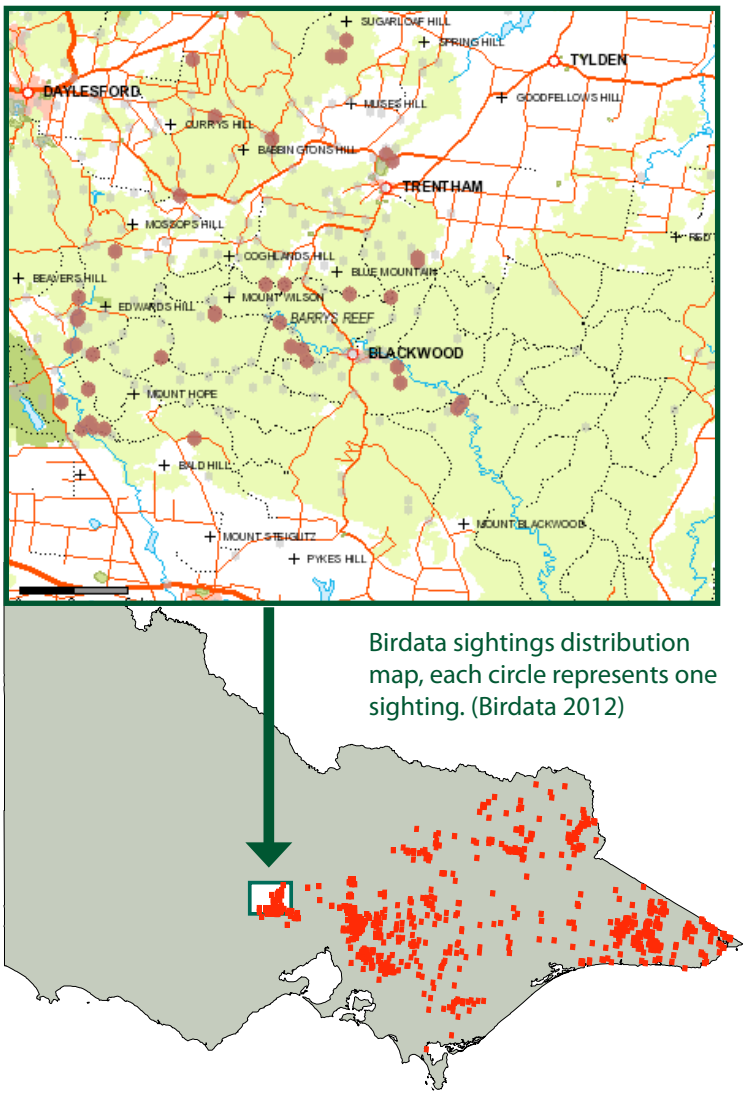
Red-browed Treecreepers are a species of interest in the Wombat, just like our Greater Gliders and our Mountain Brushtail Possums (Bobucks) who are also isolated from their larger eastern populations. According to Birdlife International, and the IUCN criteria, the Red-browed Treecreeper, while uncommon, is classified as Least Concern. However, local extinctions of populations in isolated and fragmented forests are occurring in parts of its range over south eastern Australia.

The Red-browed Treecreeper is a cooperative breeder; young from previous broods stay with the parents and help raise the next young. Red-broweds have much larger territories than the White-throated Treecreeper, and a slow breeding rate. They rely on small to medium sized hollows completely for breeding, and are vulnerable to disturbances from logging, wildfire and loss of hollow bearing trees in prescribed burning operations.

Let's hope this handsome little bird continues to persist in the Wombat Forest for many years to come in the future, despite being a bit tricky to see! ■



Birdata sightings distribution map, each circle represents one sighting. (Birdata 2012)

Data: Victorian Fauna Database, Viridans - 2009 - © Viridans Biological Databases

Reference

BirdLife International (2012) Species factsheet: Climacteris erythrops.

Downloaded from http://www.birdlife.org on 30/11/2012.

Caught on Camera

The Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA) is keen to run the 'Caught on Camera' monitoring project for a second year in the Wombat Forest.

This is a great opportunity for our community to collect data and enjoy the camera technology. We will have more details soon.

The Wombat Forestcare motion camera project is also moving along and we recently had a Kookaburra find the bait of great interest. Kookaburras are kingfishers so maybe the tuna oil in the bait was irresistible.

The naming of names – curiosities of biological nomenclature

Words and photography by Alison Pouliot

I've spent much of today on my belly intimately engaged with *Xylaria hypoxylon*. Such a fabulous, dare I say, exotic, name. If only my parents had thought of it. If you're also inclined to traverse the Wombat on your stomach, you may too have encountered this captivating creature. But somehow, its common name, Candlesnuff Fungus, just doesn't quite hold the same appeal.

The desire to name and catalogue organisms reflects our need to find order within the complexities of the biosphere. Naming an organism makes it more real and multi-dimensional, validates its existence. It perhaps even makes it worthy of empathy. Our own names are directly linked to our identities and this applies to non-human species as well. Many organisms have both a scientific name and a common or vernacular name. Most scientific names are derived from Greek or Latin or from the weird sense of humour of enterprising systematists. The clam, *Abra cadabra*, and the Lesser Earwig, *Labia minor,* both come to mind. Or even more strangely, the braconid wasp, *Verae peculya*. I'm not joking. It gets even sillier than this.

Many people prefer common names as they usually require less oral elasticity than their often multi-syllabic scientific counterparts. But I beg to differ in the claim that scientific names are too hard for children to learn. For it is children who have the flexible brain space and curiosity to explore the wonder of scientific names. Just think of all those kids who so adeptly wrap their tongues around the great suite of complicated dinosaur names before those of their classmates.

Poetry in the Wombat

Those keen to name the Wombat's marvellous curiosity cabinet of life forms may be challenged by the meaning and pronunciation of scientific names. But don't despair. It may just be a matter of re-engaging Dr Seuss. Once you start to dissect scientific names they are usually both wonderfully informative and imaginative. *Corvus splendens* arguably piques more intrigue than House Crow. And don't you think *Gonocarpus tetragynus* has a more poetic ring than Common Raspwort? Such curious-sounding names may well have been the inspiration of the likes of Seuss, Dahl and Poe. Not only do scientific names often reveal important characteristics of a species, but

Xylaria hypoxylon (Candlesnuff Fungus)
Photography © Alison Pouliot

as the sounds roll around in young mouths they also promote phoneme awareness, that is, the ability to hear and manipulate individual sounds, or phonemes, in spoken words. The play-like multiple syllable sounds and rhythms, coupled with a close-up and sensorial encounter with an organism also increase our capacity to remember it.

Scientific names take on more meaning if we understand a little Latin and Greek as this may allow us to create a mental picture of the organism. Once you become familiar with a few basic root words, you'll find them repeating in the scientific names of other species and suddenly those names also take on new meaning and familiarity. But of course common names have their place too. Most people opt for common names as ultimately it's about communicating in

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whatever way necessary to convey information. Common names contribute to linguistic richness and allow a spectrum of people from specialists to the general community to policy makers to communicate easily about a given species.

There are criticisms of western science's need to name and inventory life which I will address in another article. However, scientific names remain very much the currency of biology. And while the ability to name species does not in itself amount to knowledge, it may provide a conduit to understanding and affection.

Phylogeny and Taxonomy

As species are discovered each is assigned a unique two-part scientific name through a system known as "binomial nomenclature." By adhering to an international naming standard people of different regions or languages can communicate unambiguously about a species. Naming and describing species is also an essential precursor to conserving species.

Unlike scientific names, common names are not unique. Consequently common names can cause confusion about the species in question. You may have encountered the term *phylogeny* which refers to the evolutionary history of organisms, in particular, the relationships between organisms and their lines of descent. Common names rarely provide clues to an organism's evolutionary history as they don't usually reflect relationships between organisms. *Homo sapiens* are attempting to reflect the evolutionary connections between species, that is, their phylogeny, through taxonomy. Taxonomy refers to our efforts to identify, classify and name organisms.

Taxonomy is in a constant state of flux. The names of organisms change as systematists make new discoveries about their relationships with other organisms. This can further contribute to the challenge of remembering names, but it's simply an inevitable consequence of new knowledge and approaches such as molecular techniques that weren't available when organisms were first classified. However, efforts are underway to improve the accuracy and consistency of naming protocols. For example, *The International Code of Botanical Nomenclature* was changed to *The International Code of Nomenclature for algae, fungi, and plants* at the International Botanical Congress in Melbourne last year. The former code treated algae and fungi as plants and new changes will stabilise the processes of naming organisms that reflect changes in scientific processes and technology.

Dissecting names

Many scientific names provide information about characteristics that help us identify an organism. Other times, they are less helpful and simply tell us after whom an organism was named. Scientific names often refer to important characteristics of an organism such as colour, size, shape, texture, taste, smell, host, or habitat. For example, with the aforementioned Candlesnuff Fungus, *Xylaria hypoxylon*, described in 1745 by the father of binomial nomenclature himself, Carl Linneaus, the specific epithet is derived from *hypo* (Greek for below) and *xylon* (Greek for wood) in reference to the location and substrate it grows on. This is one fungus you may find all year round in the Wombat.

Omphalotus nidiformis (Ghost Fungus)
Photography © Alison Pouliot

Another commonly encountered fungus in the Wombat is the eerily green glowing Ghost Fungus, *Omphalotus nidiformis*. Its name comes from the Greek word for navel, *omphalo*, and the Latin words, *nidus* meaning nest and forma meaning form or shape in reference to this species' concave caps that

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form overlapping 'nests' around the bases of trees and stumps.

If you've got keen eyes you may spot the tiny, translucent, *Mycena albidocapillaris*, in the wetter parts of the Wombat. Its specific epithet is derived from the Latin for white, *albus*, in reference to its colour, and *capillus* for hair in reference to its slender hair-like stipes. The genus name, *Mycena*, is derived from the bonnets worn by the Mycenae in ancient Greece to describe the 'bonnet-like' caps of this mushroom.

On a less polite note, the puffball, *Lycoperdon pyriforme*, or Wolf's Farts is derived from the Greek word *lycos* meaning wolf and *perdon,* to break wind.

Lycoperdon pyriforme (Wolf's Farts)
Photography © Alison Pouliot

This is probably less a reference to its smell but rather its tendency of puffing out a cloud of spores when pressure is applied to its outer membrane. The species epithet, *pyriforme*, means pear-shaped, appropriately describing its form.

Mycena albidocapillaris (Bonnet)
Photography © Alison Pouliot

The scientific names of organisms reveal a fascinating world of descriptions and associations. Although taxonomy is constantly evolving and inevitably prone to controversies and frustrations, it's also never short of curiosities and surprises. Should I ever need to adopt a nom de plume, I reckon I might borrow *Lepista nuda* or *Armillaria luteobubalina*... both kind of roll beautifully off the tongue don't you think? ■

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Suggested Reading:

It may not be the most riveting bedtime reading, but A Dictionary of the Roots and Combining Forms of Scientific Words by Tim Williams may provide new meaning to the mysteries of scientific names.

The Business of destroying native forests in Western Victoria

By Gayle Osborne

"Under-utilised" is the word used by Agriculture Minister, Peter Walsh, to describe the need to re-introduce logging to Mt Cole and similar state forests which we assume includes the Wombat State Forest. Under-utilised by whom, Greater Gliders, Powerful Owls or are we just not destroying the planet fast enough?

This State government seems to be on a fundamentalist mission to promote development in any area that has been set aside for native flora and fauna or in the case of the western forests, areas needing to be conserved.

All this is described in language which disguises the REAL impacts on the environment, the flora and fauna and the quality of the water emanating from these water catchments.

This government is "assessing the capacity of Mount Cole state forest to sustainably supply timber in future years" as well as "reviewing timber resource information in state forest across western Victoria".

For many years our State governments have used the word "sustainable" to describe the level of timber extraction. This word is thrown around to prove that everything will grow back in 100 years. Well, many of us have seen mass destruction passed off as a sustainable yield.

Past estimates of sustainable yields for the Wombat Forest were proved to be radically over-estimated.

As part of the Commonwealth – State Government Regional Forest Agreements (RFA) a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) reserve system was established.

The VicForest Sustainability Report 2012 claims that "The aim of this reserve system is to ensure the survival, maintenance and enhancement of all biodiversity values within publicly owned forest. The CAR reserve system is considered to adequately protect all known and quantifiable threatened values."

Hence throughout our forests there is a network of Special Protection Zones, from which logging is excluded. However, as well as this there was an agreement to protect percentages of Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs) in each bioregion.

In the Central Victorian Uplands Bioregion only about 10% of the targets have been reserved.

Placing the Wombat, Mount Cole and the Pyrenees State Forests into protected areas such as State Parks would go a long way towards achieving the targets the State Government has committed to.

The Victorian Environment Assessment Council (VEAC) noted in its final report for the Remnant Native Vegetation Investigation that "While there may often be debate over their extent or location, protected areas are widely recognised and supported as the cornerstone of biodiversity conservation.

Protected area establishment is often one of the most cost-effective, reliable, secure and timely options for conserving biodiversity."

The VEAC recommendation for an investigation of public land use for the Central Victorian Uplands Bioregion was rejected by the Baillieu government.

Sadly "Business first, life on earth second" is the mantra of choice. The Baillieu government is on a crusade... a mission to 'utilise' nature for profit all across the State.

We wait to see whether the Wood Utilisation Plan to be released in February 2013 contains plans for sawlog extraction in the Wombat Forest, a situation we could not allow to go unchallenged. ■

Reference:

The Age, 14 December, 2012.
Baillieu to open up native logging in the west.

VEAC – Remnant Native Vegetation Investigation, Final Report.

Photography © Ivan Carter

Wombat Forest's remarkable residents - by Gayle Osborne

It is unusual to visit the Wombat Forest and not be delighted to see a plant or bird of interest. Due to the intensive exploitation there are many flora species that are common throughout the State but rare in our forest, and hence regionally significant.

On our Chettle Road walk, east of Trentham, one of our members spotted two Caladenia orchids and our initial reaction was that they were the common Pink Fingers. Closer inspection revealed a black tongue and they were identified as Black-tongue Caladenia, *Caladenia congesta*. It is rare that we can be so confident with specie identification however this time it was very easy as the book says there are no similar species to confuse it with.

This Caladenia is common in Victoria but has not been listed as occurring in the Wombat. We will all look more closely at Pink Fingers in future.

On another walk we came across a little trailing plant with white flowers (four ovate and pointed petals) which did not seem familiar. It is the Dwarf Boronia, *Boronia nana*; another specie which is relatively common but with only one other recorded sighting in the Wombat Forest.

The lovely little Blue-winged Parrot, *Neophema chrysostoma* is found in summer feeding on seed. We came across a flock in a patch of farmland surrounded by forest, south-west of Blackwood. The underparts are yellow with some orange-yellow on belly, which had us wondering for a minute whether these were endangered Orange-bellied Parrots.

Birdlife reports that many aspects of the movements of the Blue-winged Parrot are poorly understood. There is migration from Tasmania to Victoria and then to northern semi-arid zones but it seems that some birds remain in Tasmania and Victoria. The farmer where these birds were feeding said there are Blue-winged Parrots on his property all year round.

Taking a camera on your forest forays is very useful; it is surprising how unobservant we can be and even the poorest of images can be helpful to assist to identify an unfamiliar plant or bird. ■

Blue-winged Parrot, *Neophema chrysostoma*

Dwarf Boronia, *Boronia nana*

Black-tongue Caladenia, *Caladenia congesta*

Wombat Forestcare Membership

Wombat Forestcare Inc. is dedicated to preserving the biodiversity and amenity of the Wombat State Forest by utilising the skills and resources of the community. By becoming a member you will have input into our activities and projects, and give support to caring for our forests.

For memberships and further information contact Gayle Osborne, phone 03 5348 7558 or email info@wombatforestcare.org.au

Membership fees are only $15 single and $20 family. **Visit our website - www.wombatforestcare.org.au**