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# Wombat Forestcare Newsletter

**Early Autumn has arrived** and we look forward to a wonderful display of fungi. Silver banksias are starting to flower and will provide nectar for birds and small mammals. Don't forget to also look out for autumn flowering orchids. Read about a sighting of a juvenile Nankeen Night Heron. Enjoy this issue.
**Gayle Osborne** (editor) and **Angela Halpin** (design)

## The Slow Route to Fungal Wisdom

**Words and image by Alison Pouliot**

The world is speeding up and shrinking, or so we are told. The artificial sense of speed and urgency imposed by the media rushes us on from being in the moment. However, not all folk want to live life on fast forward, in haste, hurried on by reminders and deadlines. The Wombat Forest, of course, still ticks along at a "sensible" pace and what better way to tune to the real rhythms and tempo of life than to spend time there.

Most things in life are best understood and appreciated when granted proper time. Understanding the Wombat requires the time and freedom to ponder, pause and marvel, to study closely, to be amazed. Emotional responses to discoveries further enrich the experience and aid memory. In time, facts becomes knowledge, understanding and perhaps even wisdom.

Fungi take time to get to know but the rewards are worth the effort. Photography © Alison Pouliot

In recent years, local folk have renewed interest in foraging for wild foods including mushrooms. Like plants and animals, fungi take time to get to know. For those interested in foraging for edible mushrooms, it is vital to be able to distinguish them from similar looking toxic species. The best way to do so is to develop the skills to make a definitive identification of the species and then consult an expert or field guide to confirm edibility or toxicity. Unfortunately, there is no ten-point checklist of characteristics that differentiate edible from toxic species. Rather, each species needs to be intimately known through slow accumulative learning.

One seldom works up a sweat foraging for fungi. It is not about speed, but slow movement and close observation. Time and patience. "Slow mushrooming" over an extended period allows time for detailed examination; to fine-tune the senses and the ability to detect subtle features; to recognise the extent of morphological variability within a species; to become familiar with the associations between species; and to increase awareness of the seasonal and other more subtle changes within the forest that accompany their fruiting.

Sometimes I receive requests for 'a quick run-down' of edible species. I wish I could oblige. However, pruning facts doesn't help, especially when poor decisions based on superficial knowledge could be fatal. Accelerated approaches can only ever offer an abbreviated account, a truncated version of a kingdom of staggering profusion. Fungi, like people, cannot be known and understood straight away. They can be illusive and unpredictable. It can be years, even decades in between seeing

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some species. Although the ephemeral fruitbodies of most fungi are short-lived, the slow route to fungal wisdom provides a space for critical reflection, allowing them to resonate more slowly in both minds and hearts, evoking not only a more profound understanding, but a more rewarding experience.

Mycologist Tom May refers to the need for foragers to do an "apprenticeship", by which he means that fungi should be learned slowly and comprehensively. Interest in foraging is growing faster than the available resources such as field guides that assist foragers to identify species. Currently in Australia, most guides only indicate edibility in the very rare exception. When information about edibility is known, it is usually for introduced rather than native species. This is, in part, why foragers often seek introduced edible fungi that grow in association with European trees, as more is known about their edibility and toxicity, and this is often indicated in European field guides. For those interested in identifying edible fungi, it's best to concentrate on learning fewer species thoroughly, rather than many species scantily. Tom, along with chef George Biron and I are working toward an Australian field guide that indicates edibility for a selection of more readily recognisable species, but we're also taking a slow approach to ensure its rigour and reliability.

"Treading softly" has become a catchcry of the last couple of decades in the context of minimising our potential impacts on the earth. "Moving slowly" is the perfect counterpart. Time stands still in the middle of the Wombat, which is fortunate because it takes time to get to know. Slow wandering through the Wombat allows time to make connections and associations and be reminded of its great pleasures in our own slow time. In an accelerating world, 'fungus foraying therapy' might just be a new tonic for slowing down. ■

NB: Note that collecting fungi on public land, including the Wombat Forest, is illegal without a written permit.

## Nankeen Night Heron

**By Trevor Speirs**

This juvenile Nankeen (Rufous) Night Heron *Nycticorax caledonicus* was photographed recently at the Werribee River picnic area, south of Spargo Creek. Mainly nocturnal, and roosting during the day in tree foliage, this bird was seen standing in the shallows of the river on a rainy Sunday around noon.

The hunched neck is the typical pose, but when alarmed the neck becomes extended, giving the juvenile Night Heron a somewhat similar appearance to that of the much rarer Australasian Bittern. Adult Nankeens look quite different to their young; cinnamon-rufous and white with a black head and bill.

The Nankeen Night Heron is on the FFG Act Advisory list as near threatened, and while there have been previous sightings in nearby towns and the Hepburn Regional Park, until now there are no records on the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas of the bird being seen within the Wombat Forest. ■

Juvenile Nankeen Night Heron *Nycticorax caledonicus*. Photography © Gayle Osborne

# Pretty in Pink

**Words and images by John Walter**

Sometime in my mid/late teens my interest in music left the early 70s of my youth and delved back into the 60s where I discovered a world of lyrical sound that dared to challenge my thinking and threaten my state of mind. The rhythms of Pop were not for me and I moved with the off-beat. Long-haired and bearded I arrived at my majority having smiled at the passage of Punk (who could not smile when four young Americans called themselves The Dead Kennedys and threatened the privileged with a *Holiday in Cambodia*) but that was never going to last and I then briefly dipped into the New Wave.

Here I found sufficient substance and style to banish the Disco that had dominated (contaminated) the mainstream, discovering, among others, The Psychedelic Furs and a track titled *Pretty in Pink*.[1] This song has a dark side which was not explored by the movie of the same name that it inspired, but it is not my purpose to discuss that here. My interest in newer music soon fell away as other interests such as fungi and flora took over, although I still enjoy the heady songs of the 60s, 70s and early 80s.

These days, when I discover one of the pink Mycenas on display in the forest, I hear myself muttering about how she is "pretty in pink" and I have reproduced the first few lines of the song below with just a couple of word changes to bring it closer to our mushroom theme.

*Mycena laughs, and it's raining all day*
*Loves to be one of the troupe*
*She lives in the place in the side of our lives*
*Where nothing is ever put straight*

*She turns herself 'round*
*And she smiles and she says*
*"This is it, that's the end of the joke"*
*And loses herself in her*
*Dreaming and sleep, and her*
*Lovers walk through in their coats*

*Pretty in pink, isn't she?*
*Pretty in pink, isn't she?* [2]

The full variety of shapes of *Mycena clarkeana* are all seen in these images as is the hygrophanous nature with the paler drying top on some caps contrasting the darker translucent moister caps

There are three *Mycena* species that grow on old or decaying wood in the Wombat Forest that are considered pink in colour although colour in fungi is often difficult to define. Our first pretty is *Mycena clarkeana*, an hygrophanous species, meaning its colour changes as it dries out, generally becoming paler as it loses its translucence and becomes opaque. The bell-shaped cap is frequently curved in towards the stem on younger fruitbodies and has a slightly ragged edge giving the species a distinctive appearance. The edges of its gills are the same colour as the gill sides, making it easy to differentiate from the other large pink Mycenas.

Our second species, *Mycena kurramulla*, also varies in its colour intensity, generally fading with age. Fresh specimens are very similar in colour to the images shown here for *Mycena clarkeana*, although the shape is quite different. *Mycena kurramulla* is also found in large troupes on logs but it quickly loses any hint

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**Top:** Undersides of the plain gills of *Mycena clarkeana* on left and marginate gills of *Mycena kurramulla* centre and *Mycena kuurkacea* on right

of a bell shape as it twirls on the log sending its skirt flying out so wide that it is sometimes horizontal and sometimes enticingly upturned. Modesty prevails however, and the gills (petticoats) flash with a coloured edge that is many shades darker than the pink colouration of the cap.

Regular readers of this newsletter might recall I get a little testy when I find words listed as being Aboriginal without referencing the clan or language group that the word was drawn from. In this instance, Cheryl Grgurinovic [3] quotes kurramulla as meaning "small pink seashell" and references my old annoyance, A.W. Reed, as the source. Reed, of course, never provides any source or justification for his names.

**Middle Two:** Typical caps on *Mycena kurramulla* above and showing her fringed petticoats below

The third species is *Mycena kuurkacea*, which I find to be a troubling species as it would seem to be quite varied in colour, size and substrate. It should be easy to identify, as it is one of the "bleeding Mycenas" i.e. a broken stem bleeds a blood-like fluid, but it is so variable in other ways that I suspect further study may reveal several different species.

*Mycena kuurkacea* also has marginate gills (different coloured edges) but the stems may not bleed on older


**Above and above right**: Small group of *Mycena kuurkacea* above and part of a massive troupe right

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specimens. I have found them on litter, on mossy soil in grassy areas and en masse on old fallen tree trunks. There are two named species of bleeding *Mycena* found in Australia other than *Mycena kuurkacea*, one has orange tones and has only been recorded twice, and the other is associated to *Nothofagus* forests and therefore will not be seen in the Wombat.[4]

In naming this species, Cheryl Grgurinovic referenced James Dawson's 1881 well researched publication titled *Australian Aborigines* in which he recorded the language of the Kolor, or Mount Rouse clan of the Djab Wurrung people. Dawson recorded the Kolor word for blood was kuurk, noting that neighbouring clans used an alternative word, kaerik.[5]

The last species to mention is *Insiticia roseoflava*, which was once named *Mycena roseoflava* (it still appears under this name in the recently released 2nd edition of *A Field Guide to Tasmanian Fungi*, Gates & Ratkowsky 2016). This is the smallest of the species mentioned here, while *Mycena clarkeana* is possibly the largest of all *Mycena* species regardless of colour. As a pink former *Mycena* species growing on wood, I feel impelled to include it in this article. I have seen its colour range from near strawberry red through to white on older washed out specimens. The short stem can be whitish or pink, but generally has a yellowish base.

I have found one other *Mycena* in the Wombat that has pinkish tones but that is found on litter, not wood, and will be covered in a future article. You might argue that the colour of *Mycena kuurkacea* is more a reddish brown based on the images in this article, but I have found numerous specimens that appear more pink in colour as well. With fungus season approaching, I look forward to putting on a coat and slipping out into the forest on a rainy day to view the dance of the pink pretties one more time. ■

**Above:** *Insiticia roseoflava* showing signs of the yellowish stipe

**Above**: Two images of *Insiticia roseoflava* showing the darker cap colours

**References**

1. "Pretty in Pink" appeared on the album *Talk Talk Talk*, released in 1981 by The Psychedelic Furs
2. I have modified one word in each of the first two lines, which originally read
   *Caroline laughs, and it's raining all day*
   *Loves to be one of the girls*
3. Grgurinovic, C (2003) *The Genus Mycena in South Eastern Australia*
4. I have photographed a bleeding orange species in the Wombat that is similar to *M. kuurkacea* and might be *M. insueta*, however microscopic examination is needed to verify this. I have also photographed another bleeder, *M. toyerlaricola* in the *Nothofagus* forests in Tasmania
5. The full title of Dawson's 1881 publication is *Australian Aborigines the language and customs of several tribes of Aborigines in the Western District of Victoria, Australia* and can be downloaded as a pdf file from the internet

# Cloud Cuckoo Land

**By Trevor Speirs**

In the avian world, that of the cuckoo is, of course, not one of fanciful madness, but is one built on generations of deception.

Australia has fourteen species of cuckoos, of which five; the Fan-tailed, Pallid and Brush Cuckoos and Horsfield's Bronze and Shining Bronze-Cuckoos migrate south and can be seen in the Wombat during the spring/summer breeding season. The Pheasant Coucal, not found in Victoria, is the only non-parasitic cuckoo in Australia.

The Black-eared Cuckoo, usually in drier country, has been recorded in the nearby Lerderderg State Park and the Common Koel, a bird rarely seen in Victoria west of Mallacoota until late last century, has been expanding its range and has been seen around Daylesford in recent years.

Male cuckoos become very vocal during breeding season, often perching high on a tree branch and calling continuously throughout the day. The Common Koel calls day and night. Their calls are usually loud and distinctive, and web sites like http://www.xeno-canto.org and http://www.graemechapman.com.au are terrific for getting a handle on cuckoos' calls, along with all Australian birds.

Although the various cuckoos are reasonably common in their preferred habitat, it's their breeding habits that are most interesting. Nests of over one hundred different bird species have been recorded as having been used by Australian cuckoos, with birds parasitised in our region ranging from thornbills, fairy-wrens, scrubwrens, robins, honeyeaters and flycatchers, with each species of cuckoo having its particular favourite.

Cuckoos' eggs, although normally larger, are usually very similar in colour and markings to their host's eggs. Where there is a colour difference, the cuckoo will often choose a domed, gloomy nest. The Shining Bronze-Cuckoo/Yellow-rumped Thornbill relationship is a good example of this.

Scientists from the Australian National University have in recent years been able to demonstrate, to some degree, how cuckoos have been able to successfully lead their lives of deception. The Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo prefers fairy-wren nests in which to deposit its egg, though the nests of other small birds like robins, flycatchers and thornbills are also used.

A Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo chick hatched in a fairy-wren nest will imitate the begging call of the host's young. When hatched in a thornbill nest, the chick will imitate the whining call of a young thornbill. Researchers were interested to know what would happen if a Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo egg, laid in a fairy-wren nest was taken and put in a thornbill nest. A case of outfoxing the trickster.

Amazingly, after the young cuckoo was hatched, and a few days of calling like a fairy-wren chick, it was able to make the switch and mimic the call of a newborn thornbill. It could do this, without ever hearing the newborn thornbill's whining call, to get the attention of its adopted parents.

It's not all one way traffic for cuckoos. The female has to lay eggs in the host nest at precisely the right time so as not to be rejected, and the Superb Fairy-wren is one bird, scientists have discovered that is often able to detect a cuckoo chick as an imposter and subsequently abandon it. On the face of it, while getting another species to rear your offspring seems ideal, in the complex world of the cuckoo, success is by no means guaranteed. ■

**Reference**

Langmore, N. E., Maurer, G., Adcock, G. J. and Kilner, R. M. 2008. 'Socially acquired host-specific mimicry and the evolution of host races in Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo *Chalcites basalis*,' *Evolution* 62 (7): 1689 –1699

The Fan-tailed Cuckoo *Cacomantis flabelliformis* is a common summer visitor to the Wombat Forest
Photography © Gayle Osborne

# Egg and Bacon 2 - Who put the Dill in Dillwynia?

**Words and image John Walter**

The honour of naming the genus *Dillwynia* goes to Sir James Edward Smith, who in 1804, wrote "I am happy to name it in honour of my friend Mr. Lewis Weston Dillwyn, F.L.S., whose scientific labours respecting the genus *Conferva*, as well as his knowledge in other abstruse parts of botany, merit such a memorial."[1]

Smith was an accomplished botanist and friend of Sir Joseph Banks. He is recorded as the man who in 1783 purchased the entire botanical collection and library of Carl Linnaeus from Linnaeus' widow, after Banks had declined the offer. Smith went on to establish the Linnaean Society of London in 1788 and held the position of president of that esteemed organisation until his death in 1828. He named several other genera of the Australian pea flora including *Daviesia*, *Platylobium* and *Pultenaea*, which we will cover in future articles of this series on Egg and Bacon.

Smith was certainly no "dill", and nor was his widow who reportedly sold her deceased husband's collection, along with the original Linnaeus collection, to the Linnaean Society for over £3,000. Smith had paid £1,000 to the widow of Linnaeus some 45 years earlier.[2] It seems that Mr. Lewis Weston Dillwyn was also no "dill". His father set him up in the porcelain business in Swansea, Wales, but his passions were botany and conchology (the study of molluscs), and he published books in both disciplines.

There are records of six species of *Dillwynia* in this region although the first two noted below are not likely to be seen in the Wombat or Upper Loddon forest. The first, *Dillwynia hispida* is found north of Castlemaine and to the south of Lerderderg State Park but is generally found to our west where it extends well into South Australia. It has long-stemmed reddish flowers and is unlikely to have escaped detection in our forest for so long. The second is *Dillwynia retorta*, recorded near Daylesford by R. Wallace in 1879 and then by R.V. Smith in 1976 near Glenluce. I believe both these records for *Dillwynia retorta* are incorrectly identified and are probably *Dillwynia phylicoides*, which was once thought to be a sub species of *Dillwynia retorta*. The true *Dillwynia retorta* is most common on the coast of New South Wales.

**Above:** Twisted leaves and three different flower colours of the Small-leaf Parrot-pea *Dillwynia phylicoides*.

*Dillwynia phylicoides* however is very common in this district, favouring the drier forest around Bryces Flat and extending through Porcupine Ridge to Glenluce and beyond. This is an ideal species to illustrate that flower colour is not a reliable aid to identification although, as we saw in the last article, the flower shape can assist in quickly identifying the genus with the standard on Parrot-peas (*Dillwynia*) being much

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broader than it is tall. The easiest way to distinguish the Small-leaf Parrot-pea, *Dillwynia phylicoides* from the other species is the spiral twist in the leaves. The leaves are less than 8mm in length and have firm upright hairs giving them a rough appearance and the branches appear bristly with crowded erect hairs.

*Dillwynia cinerascens*, the Grey Parrot-pea, is certainly the most widespread of the genus and can be found throughout the Wombat Forest. Its flowers have a crinkly edge and are smaller than the other species but it makes up for this in volume. You might initially think the flowers are taller than they are wide (and some may be) but a close examination will soon reveal the typical flower shapes of the *Dillwynia*. The stems have a silky covering and the tips of the slender well-spaced leaves frequently curve out away from the branch. The leaves may be free of hairs, or have an occasional white hair scattered on their surface as in the image presented here. They can be as much as 30mm long but 10 or 11mm is more likely in this district.

**Above**: Leaves and flowers of Grey Parrot-pea *Dillwynia cinerascens,* note the leaf tip curving away from the stem

Next is the Bushy Parrot-pea, *Dillwynia ramosissima*. This species is also found throughout the Wombat Forest but it is not as common as the previous species. The 10mm long leaves on older branches are crowded together into irregular tufts while the new growth has evenly spaced leaves. Both the branches and leaves are hairless and the dark green leaves sometimes appear to have a thin waxy bloom if examined under a lens. The name ramosissima means very branched, but you may not notice this if the Swamp Wallaby *Wallabia bicolor* has been around.

Our last Parrot-pea is *Dillwynia sericea* the Showy Parrot-pea and it has a similar range to the last species. The name sericea means silky and refers to the long glossy hairs that cover the leaves and branches. That, at least, is what Cunningham saw when he named the species in 1825 but nature does not always conform and in some districts the leaves might be hairless. I have not found the hairless variety in this area but the leaves do have small wart-like lumps below the hairs. These leaves can grow from 10 to 20mm in length and have a short spine on the tip. The entire leaf tip often points back towards the branch.

Botanists will look to many other features to confirm the identity of a plant species but the features discussed here should give you a fair chance of getting the correct name for your bush discoveries.

**Above**: Leaves and flowers of Bushy Parrot-pea *Dillwynia ramosissima*, inset shows the tufts of older hairless leaves and equally hairless stems

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So, in summary, the standard on *Dillwynia* flowers is wider than it is tall, and to identify the species, look to the leaves and branch:

- short twisted leaves with short erect hairs on the branch equals *Dillwynia phylicoides*
- virtually hairless leaves with tips arching away from the fine silky covered branch equals *Dillwynia cinerascens*
- hairless leaves and branches and some leaves in tufts equals *Dillwynia ramosissima*
- hairy leaves with a sharp spine and silky hairy branches equals *Dillwynia sericea*.

With a bit of careful observation and a little knowledge about the leaves, I reckon we could all identify our local Dillwynia, in fact, there is no need for anyone to be a dill when it comes to Dillwynia. ■

**Above**: Leaves and flowers of Showy Parrot-pea *Dillwynia sericea*, the short point and tip on the leaves is often angled towards the hairy stem

**References**


1. Smith, J E (1804) Remarks on the generic Characters of the Decandrous Papilionaceous Plants of New Holland, which appeared in *Annals of Botany* edited by Konig & Sims and published 1805. *Conferva* is a genus of filamentous algae, another of Dillwyn's interests.
2. I have seen both amounts recorded as pounds and as guineas, depending of the historian, generally one amount is in pounds and the other is guineas but there is no consistency on which is which. A guinea was minted in gold and was worth more than a pound but the actual rate varied depending on the gold price.


# Greater Gliders

**Words and image Gayle Osborne**

Totally endearing, with their large eyes and fluffy fur, Greater Gliders *Petauroides volans* are endemic to eastern Australia, with the Wombat Forest being the most westerly extent of their range.

Throughout eastern Australia, populations of Greater Gliders are declining due to habitat loss from logging, fragmentation of populations and fire. This decline is likely to be exacerbated by climate change.

As we see populations of Greater Gliders under threat in other forests due to logging practices, we are greatly relieved that logging has ceased in the Wombat and our gliders will have the opportunity to thrive. ■

# Southern Boobook

**By Trevor Speirs**

Southern Boobook *Ninox novaeseelandiae.* Photography © Gayle Osborne

One of the most familiar nocturnal calls heard throughout Australia is that of the Southern Boobook *Ninox novaeseelandiae*. Boobooks are often the first nocturnal bird to call; this can carry for up to a kilometre on a still night, and their calls can still be heard just after dawn.

Boobooks have several different calls, but the most well-known is the territorial double hoot, 'boo-book'. Usually quieter in autumn and early winter, they become more vocal during the breeding season in August and September. Characteristics common to all Australian Ninox owls are that the main territorial/contact call has two notes, and breeding territories are strongly defended.

While larger owls can have home ranges of many hundreds of hectares, Boobooks can have very small territories, well under a hundred hectares; richness of habitat, hollows and food, being principal determinants.

Because Boobooks are prone to being attacked by other birds, honeyeaters and cockatoos being two of the main antagonists, they spend the daylight hours in tree hollows or thick foliage, making their observation difficult. Anecdotally, I would say that during the day, Boobooks in the Wombat probably roost in hollows more often than in foliage.

The owl in the photo was snapped a couple of hours after dusk on the road alongside the Trentham Golf Course. Although the location was potentially hazardous, the warm summer night was providing a plentiful supply of moths and other insects. ■