



# WHIRRAKEE

**April 2012**

**Vol. 33 No. 3**

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**MONTHLY NEWSLETTER  
OF THE BENDIGO FIELD  
NATURALISTS CLUB**

## Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552. Web address: [www.BendigoFNC.com.au](http://www.BendigoFNC.com.au)  
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### Office Bearers for 2011 - 2012

President	Jan Orr	5443 5668
Senior Vice President	Matthew Comer	0409 162627
Junior Vice President	<i>position vacant</i>	
Secretary	Stuart Fraser	5443 1326
Minute Secretary	Anne Bridley	
Treasurer	Ben Goonan	
Membership Officer	Anne Bridley	5442 6188
Excursion organiser	<i>position vacant</i>	
Syllabus organiser	Ben Goonan	
Librarian	Diana Collier (an assistant is still required)	5443 0137
Garden Convenor/Secretary	Matthew Comer	0409 162 627
Hall Management	Maurie Lewis (assisted by Rob Moors)	0407 427179
<i>Whirrakee</i> contact	Sabine Wilkens e-mail: <a href="mailto:s.wilkens@latrobe.edu.au">s.wilkens@latrobe.edu.au</a>	5443 2797
<i>Whirrakee</i> mailing coordinator	Rod Orr	5443 5668

**Membership** of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single \$34; Family \$40; Concession: Single \$28.50; Family \$34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is \$34.

**General meetings** are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The meeting starts with a 10 minute thing-of-the night natural history segment. The invited speaker starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper. The Annual Meeting is held in September.

**Committee meetings** are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 6:00pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Anne Bridley, Glenise Moors, Joy Clusker, Kerrie Norris, John Lindner.

**Excursions** are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. Several interclub field naturalist campouts are held every year.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one sub-group (the Fauna Study Group) and is actively involved in local conservation issues. An **indigenous garden** has been established around the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building. Working bees are advertised on the *Whirrakee* diary page.

**Fauna Study Group:** Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)  
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)  
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)

Regular fauna excursions take place most Fridays. See page 11 for details.

**Bird Observing:** Club members conduct regular bird surveys. Please contact Anne Bridley 5442 6188 or Glenise Moors 5439 6254 for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5442 6188.

To propose bird observing excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

# WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club

Vol. 33, No. 3, April 2012

*Whirrakee* takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.

Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

### *Editor's Note*

*A very full issues and a delight to put together, with so many observations, stories and news, that I could not fit the summary of last month's speaker, Libby Rumpff, who talked about woodland restoration and the exceedingly difficult job of demonstrating a return for an investment. The club is so fortunate to have speakers that travel from Melbourne or from further afield, and this is a credit to Ben Goonan our syllabus organiser. This edition could have done with ten colour pages as there were so many beautiful photos from our usual photographers as well as some others. Thanks to all, and I hope that I will face the dilemma of what to put in and what to leave out every month. My apologies to those whose contributions were left out.*

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### **Front page photographer:** Joy Clusker

The participants of the March Family Nature Club, our Club Members and Phil Dyson spent a very special Sunday morning amongst some ancient animals. Some action photos are shown on pages 7 and 8, but here are some of the findings (kindly identified by Phil). *Phyllograptus typus* is the one that looks a bit like a feather (lower left image) and *Tetragraptus fruiticosis* looks more like a 3-branched tuning fork.

## Short Notices

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### 2012 Excursion Program

BFNC members are planning the excursion program for the SEANA Camp in August 17<sup>th</sup> -20<sup>th</sup>. It has been decided that it would be very useful to practise on you, our members, and run four of these excursions, to ensure that all runs smoothly in August, as well as giving members a chance to experience a bit more of Bendigo's natural history. Therefore, please mark these dates in your diaries:

Saturday April 14, May 19, June 16 & July 14  
**For details of the April excursion see below, for the rest, see page 9.** *Please note, for the excursions beyond the next month some details may change, so check with your latest Whirrakee.*

**Saturday April 14**                      **1:30 pm - 4:30 pm**

**Focus:** Bendigo's link with the ancient past, to discover Graptolite fossils

**Venue:** Local Graptolite quarry

**Leader:** Phil Dyson

**Meeting point:** Bendigo Field Naturalists' Clubrooms, Old High St. Golden Square

**Bring:** wear old clothes and boots & be 'weatherproof' - bring something to sit on, perhaps.

**Contact person:** Jan Orr, 54435668  
[r.orr@westnet.com.au](mailto:r.orr@westnet.com.au)

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### Autumn Fungi workshops

With the recent rains there's already a terrific variety of fungi springing through the earth. The first workshop at Summerfield has been completed already, but there's a whole suite running elsewhere in central Vic. There's more info and a full schedule posted at: [http://alisonpouliot.com/projects\\_fungi\\_ecology.php](http://alisonpouliot.com/projects_fungi_ecology.php) or let me know if you have any queries. Best wishes Alison

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## A Sunday spent with ancient animals

by Phil Dyson

If you are interested in old rocks and very old life forms you might have already looked at the images on the front cover and page 4. On Sunday March 18, the Bendigo Family Nature Club organised a fossil hunt in the bush at the back of Spring Gully. Lots of people turned up with their little kids and we had a great morning finding creatures from the distant past.

The fossils we found were from the geological period known as the Ordovician. This covers the time period from about 440-500 million years before the present. In Ordovician times eastern Australia was at the bottom of a very deep sea. Not much lived down there. For the most part the fossils we find are things that floated around on the sea surface and fell to the bottom after dying. The most common fossils (by far) are graptolites. These little guys were colonial organisms that had their own little flotation device. A small balloon-like structure allowed them to float, whilst the rest of the organism (the fossilised bit) dangled down in the water. Each of the little parts that look like the teeth of a saw was the home for a tiny animal known as a zoid or polyp.

Graptolites were around and very prevalent from about 500 million years ago (Cambrian Period) through to about 400 million years ago (Devonian Period). During these times, they progressed down an amazing evolutionary path and, accordingly, they are very good marker fossils, that allow for subdivision of periods such as the Ordovician. This is why and how the Ordovician rocks are shown on the Bendigo geological maps as comprising a number of different sub-stages.

Anyway, the kids (and the adults) had a fantastic time last Sunday. They turned over some rocks and broke open others, and they all found fossils.

*Editor's Note: If, after reading this, you feel that you have missed out on something very special, have a look at the April excursion program on this page for another chance!*

**A Sunday spent with ancient animals – Family Nature Club Activity, March 18**

Participants of this excursion were looking for graptolites, ancient colonial animals from the Ordovician period (see page 3 for background information)

Photographer: Joy Clusker



Young and old(er) people had a really enjoyable day. But not only fossilized animals were found:

Thick-tailed barking gecko, *Nephrurus milii* (l) and the Marbled gecko, *Christinus marmoratus* (r).  
(bottom right photo by Peter Ellis)

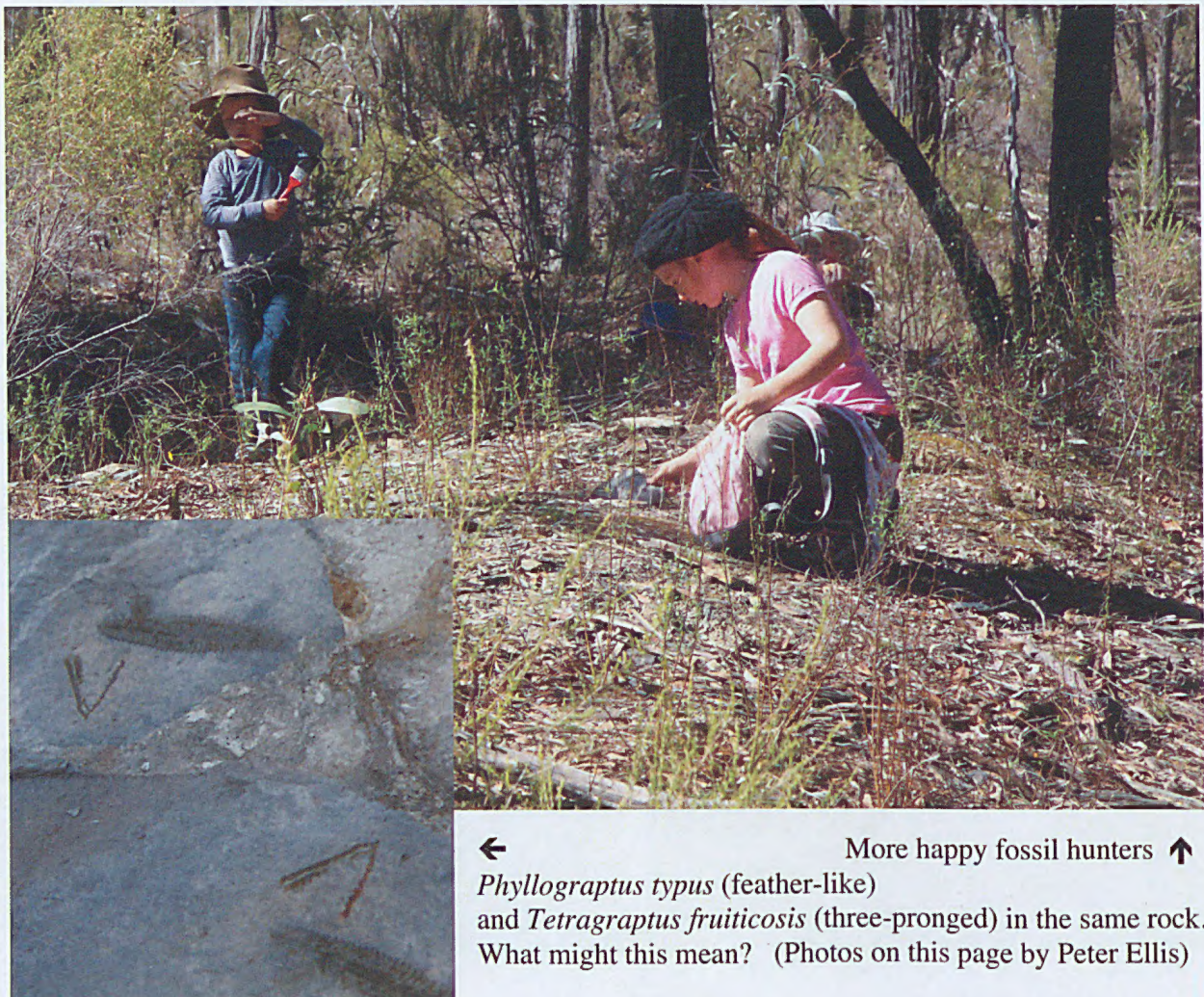


More graptolite action. In addition, check out Tamara Marwood's blog of the Family Nature Club activities and photos at: <http://bendigofamilynatureclub.blogspot.com.au/>



Happy fossil hunters

Is this species different to the ones on the front page? →



← More happy fossil hunters ↑  
*Phyllograptus typus* (feather-like)  
and *Tetragraptus fruiticosis* (three-pronged) in the same rock.  
What might this mean? (Photos on this page by Peter Ellis)

Images from the March SEANA get-together at Camperdown, organised by the Timboon FNC.  
Photos by Rod Orr



Mt Sugarloaf (above) and an artist's interpretation of the same (below right). How does this work?

The pair of Tawny Frogmouth mentioned in Rod's write-up on page 8. Are they bored?



At the end, a wonderful mixture of coloured things, photographed by Rod Orr



This is Bobbie Malone's orchid, a species of *Oncidium*. Bobbie cared for this orchid for several years until she moved to Strathhaven, when she gave it to Betty Flentje. It has taken 5 years to come into flower and this is its first flower spike. Betty brought her this flowering spray, which then continued flowering in a vase for a long time.

The flowers are only about 2 cm tall - but they are very attractively

coloured in bands and blotches. The labellum is much larger than the other petals & sepals and the column is very short with a beaked cap and wing-like appendages on each side. This species is not native to Australia, but how amazingly beautiful it is - surely worth waiting five years for!!!

Egret and friends, see page 8 for location and story →

The 28-spotted ladybird is a bit bigger than the normal ladybirds and obviously has more spots and likes a bit of cantaloupe leaf, but it is also fond of pumpkin ↘





## Selected stories from the SEANA March camp-out

by Rod Orr

### *Mt Sugarloaf and surrounds*

The photo on page 6 is of Mt Sugarloaf, as seen from the adjacent lookout on Mt Leura. The spiral track was carved into this attractively shaped mountain by a previous owner, a farmer who explained that he wanted some way to get his tractor to the top so that he could control weeds and rabbits. Much of the area was on private land used mainly for grazing but some of the higher mountains are now public land and cared for by community groups. The farmer who owned this land most recently was shamed into selling it after community outrage when he opened up a Scoria Quarry for road-making material low down on the Eastern slope but then extended his workings higher up and wanted to remove the Eastern face of the mountain. A group of concerned local people lay down in front of bulldozers to prevent him extending the quarry. We are looking at the photogenic side!

Many other Scoria Quarries 'scar' the surrounding hills (the scarring is defined from an aesthetic perspective, of course, because the material is very useful and widely used for road making - some people even find quarries fascinating and very educational places to visit). Mt Elephant is another local example of a mountain that was purchased largely by public subscriptions and a Trust for Nature appeal so that it could be protected from further damage by quarrying.

The walking track is very pleasant to use on the way down from the lookout on top of Mt Leura - we were advised to drive up, walk down, and sort out how to retrieve our cars later, which all happened very smoothly.

In the revegetated area at the bottom, we were shown the Tawny Frogmouths in the next photo - they were visited by large numbers of Field Nats during the 2 days of the SEANA Camp but were probably looking just as bored with it all at the end of our weekend.

Another photo on page 6 is of a sculptor's interpretation of Mt Sugarloaf, which is installed near the Information Shelter halfway down the track in the saddle between the 2 mountains - the shelter has an attractive and informative display, which had been completed just before we all arrived.

### *Lake Purrumbete*

Jan and I stayed at Lake Purrumbete Camping area. This lake is freshwater and is stocked regularly with, Salmon, Trout & Redfin to keep the fishermen happy.

Even though we arrived the day before the Duck Hunting Season opened, there were still large numbers of birds on this lake during the whole weekend - the surviving ducks in the entire area became very wary, very quickly, however, and tended to fly away as soon as a car approached within a few hundred metres so we didn't get close looks at many ducks. The Swans, Egrets, Cormorants & Silver Gulls stayed around - Lake Purrumbete is a bird sanctuary, so we only heard shooting in the distance on opening morning.

Near where we had parked our caravan, Jan was very pleased to find Spotted and Spotless Crakes, which were quite used to fishermen coming and going, so they allowed us several fleeting sightings. When a group of Field Nats visited the lake (and us before we left to travel home) on Monday morning, we were able to show them where the Crakes had been seen and most managed their own observations - a couple of us also saw the much smaller Baillon's Crake feeding frenetically in the mud amongst the wetland plants around the shoreline.

We soon saw why these birds in the photo on page 7 were so used to people - successful fishermen were cleaning and filleting their catch and throwing the remains back into the lake, where many of birds had learnt to forage for fresh scraps.

During a conversation with a fisherman who has visited the lake for the last 30 years, we

were warned about the large Black Snakes and he pointed out their hiding places, quite close to us.

This was immediately interesting because, the After-dinner Speaker on the previous evening, a snake expert, had told us that he and other Herpetologists who knew the Western District snake fauna very well, were prepared to bet that all of the sightings of Red-bellied Black Snakes in this entire region, were really highly coloured Copperheads and not Black Snakes at all. They had never been able to confirm a Black Snake sighting and invited anyone to send in their specimen snakes for identification if they came upon one that had been killed and looked like a Black Snake.

We told the fisherman this and he was interested, although, perhaps not so interested that he would approach close enough to take a good photo for a definitive ID by Museum staff.

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### Things you find when you are not looking ...also by Rod Orr

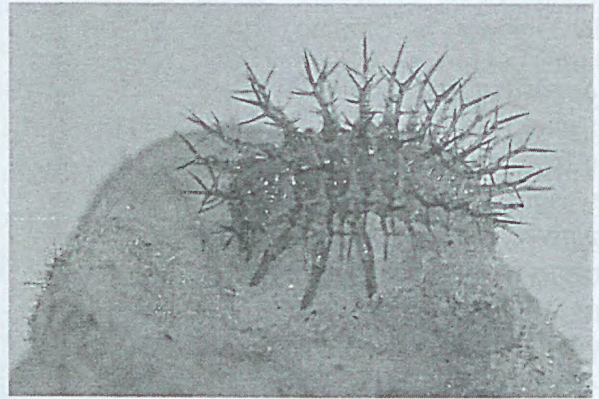
While Dianne Davies was dissecting and drawing the female flower of a Squash plant recently, we noticed this tiny, spiny creature wandering slowly around on top of the stigma. I took its photo & enlarged it a little bit so that its interesting details were easier to see.

The larva is only ~4mm long and looks sort of 'fuzzy' because of its spines.

I'd guess that it is the larva of the 28-Spotted Ladybird which eats the leaves of Pumpkins, Squashes etc. (see page 8). This little beast was grazing on the surface tissue of the stigma of this flower.

Its initial slow progress was probably caused by its refrigeration for a few days because Dianne wanted to keep the flower in good condition before she dissected, drew and painted it today. When it warmed up, it sped up, so I had to use the camera's flash to freeze its image.

Isn't it a neat little creature?



*Larva of the 28-spotted ladybird. See page 8 for a picture of the adult (photo by Rod Orr)*

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### Excursion Program until June...

*Please note, for the excursions beyond the next month some details may change, so check with your latest Whirrakee.*

**Saturday April 14 1:30 pm - 4:30 pm**  
(see page 3 for details)

**Saturday May 19 1:30 pm - 4:30 pm**

**Focus: Bats and Boxes**

**Venue:** The Fernery, Rosalind Park, then travel to Number 7 Park, Kangaroo Flat

**Leader:** Kerrie Norris

**Meeting point:** Bendigo Field Naturalists' Clubrooms, Old High St. Golden Square

**Bring:** binoculars. **Contact person:** Jan Orr, 54435668 [r.orr@westnet.com.au](mailto:r.orr@westnet.com.au)

**Saturday June 16 9:30 am - 4:30 pm**

**Focus:** Botany and birds

**Venue:** Forests South-east of Bendigo

**Leader:** Anne Bridley

**Meeting point:** Bendigo Field Naturalists' Clubrooms, Old High St. Golden Square

**Bring:** binoculars, lunch, water and clothes for all weathers. **Contact person:** Jan Orr, 54435668 [r.orr@westnet.com.au](mailto:r.orr@westnet.com.au)

**Saturday July 14 9:30 am - 4:30 pm**

**Focus:** Botany and birds

**Venue:** Kamarooka **Leader:** Matthew Comer

**Meeting point:** Bendigo Field Naturalists' Clubrooms, Old High St. Golden Square

**Bring:** binoculars, lunch, water and clothes for all weathers **Contact person:** Jan Orr, 54435668 [r.orr@westnet.com.au](mailto:r.orr@westnet.com.au)

## Victorian Powerlines—A Death Trap For Large Native Birds

by Graham Sheckelton

*Editor's note: Graham spoke to the Club at the March general meeting and passed around photos that showed the type of installation he was referring to, as well as modified types that help protect wildlife. Unfortunately, I was unable to copy the photos into this document, but can send them to members who are interested. Just let me know.*

No matter how much care in design is taken, by its nature, high voltage power transmission will always be a danger to wildlife and also humans, so it could be expected that a bird or two might be electrocuted sooner or later. However it is unreasonable to expect that as many as six little ravens would be found dead immediately under the one pole over a period of twelve months after its erection. This happened at a transformer pole directly across the road from my house in Ophir Street, Golden Square.

A concerned resident who lives next to this pole called out several representatives from Powercor, RSPCA etc after the first incident, but they could not account for what had happened, nor did they seem too concerned, for the birds had no visible injuries and therefore possibly had died by natural causes, and so the problem was allowed to progress—after all they were only crows!

During the last breeding season I started to occasionally feed a pair of magpies, which had nested in a nearby tree and continued to feed them after the one young magpie emerged. One morning after a stormy night, I noticed something black and white flapping helplessly under the pole. It was the young magpie, which was wet from the wet grass it had fallen into. I took it inside to keep it warm and after about fifteen minutes, it seemed to recover and was able to perch on my arm. It was soon intent on getting away, so I released it outside and it flew into a

nearby tree where it appeared to be fed by one of the parents about an hour later. This appeared to be a happy ending, until it was pointed out to me the following day that the young bird's mother was still hanging from one of the circuit breakers (*Graham had also supplied a picture of this grizzly sight*). I continued to sometimes feed the two remaining birds, assuming the young one would be alright, but noticed after about two weeks that about 5 mm had rotted off the tip of the top half of the young bird's beak. This would surely be a severe disadvantage when this bird had to fend for itself.

After mentioning this to friends, I found that on two occasions little ravens had been electrocuted outside one friend's house in Specimen Hill Rd., and on one of these, a blackout resulted. Another friend found and photographed two little ravens, dead, immediately under a similar pole in Creek Street.

Eventually (about two months later) the dead magpie was removed from the pole and preventative devices attached to the insulators on this pole, but it is only being done on poles where there has been continued and persistent complaint. Powercor obviously accept that these devices are poorly designed, as they have produced a modification to prevent these electrocutions, but as these installations are used all over Victoria (and possibly Australia) it must be assumed that there are hundreds of large native birds being continuously electrocuted. As these assets, I think, have been allowed to be owned by foreign interests, I can't see that anything will be done to correct this unless Government pressure is applied.

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### How long is a meat ant trail?

Recently I had a question put to me whether a 100m long meat ant trail is unusual. Does anybody know how long such trails get?

*Editor's note: This question is a repeat from last month, as nobody has suggested an answer so far.*

## Diary

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All Club meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High St Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

**Wednesday, April 11** 7.30pm  
Dr John Morgan, Plant Ecology Lab & Research Centre for Applied Alpine Ecology, Department of Botany, La Trobe University will talk about "The 'Inch Flora': morphology, seed biology and ecology of annual plant species of the semi-arid woodlands and grasslands of Victoria"

**Wednesday, May 9** 7.30pm  
Attila Kapitany, Australian Succulent Plants, "Australian and local succulent plants"

**Wednesday June 13** 7.30pm  
David Stewart, Entomological Society of Victoria: "Observations from Mt Korong"

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### Club Excursions

**Saturday April 14** 1:30 pm - 4:30 pm  
**Focus:** Bendigo's link with the ancient past, to discover Graptolite fossils  
**Venue:** Local Graptolite quarry  
**Leader:** Phil Dyson  
**Meeting point:** Bendigo Field Naturalists' Clubrooms, Old High St. Golden Square  
**Bring:** wear old clothes and boots & be 'weatherproof' - bring something to sit on, perhaps.  
**Contact person:** Jan Orr, 54435668  
[j.orr@westnet.com.au](mailto:j.orr@westnet.com.au)

**See page 9 for the excursion program until June.**

### Regular Fauna Excursions

Every Friday morning starting at around 9 to 9:30 the Fauna Group inspects nest boxes in the Spring Gully area. The excursions are led by Maurie Lewis, 16 Vains St. Golden Square. Phone 0407 427 179. Phone Maurie to confirm exact departure times and

location. If you don't phone and go directly to Maurie's house and find nobody at the house between 9 and 9:30, then the excursion is not on.

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### Family Nature Club

The next activity is titled: Wattle we do now? The focus is on locally occurring Acacias and the children will produce rubbings of the leaves/phylloides that they find and we identify for them - should be a lot of fun! It will run on April 15 from 10am till 12noon. Please register if you are turning up with family, or let Jan and Rod know if you intend to offer assistance.

Check out their 2011 and 2012 activities at <http://bendigofamilynatureclub.blogspot.com/>

### Registration:

[Bendigonatureclub@gmail.com](mailto:Bendigonatureclub@gmail.com) or 5443-1326

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### Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.

W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.

Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

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### Owls of the forest

Saturday 19th May, 1.30 - 2.30pm

This presentation will be on three nocturnal species - Tawny frogmouth, Southern boobook and Australian owllet-nightjar. Our guest speaker is Marian Weaving who is a PhD Candidate on the Tawny Frogmouth Project from the School of Life and Environmental Sciences at Deakin University.

**Where:** Trentham Neighbourhood Centre, High St, Trentham. **Cost:** Gold coin donation on the night. **Bookings:** Trentham Neighbourhood Centre (03) 5424 1354 Email [trentham@ourneighbourhood.org.au](mailto:trentham@ourneighbourhood.org.au)