

## Report on Wednesday Walk – Mount Clear to Horse Gully Hut Trail – 1 March 2017

Unlike our last two journeys along the Boboyan Road, we were entirely unimpeded by wildlife — not a Red-necked Wallaby or any birds at all claiming possession of the road this time. We drove down to the lower Mount Clear parking area and had morning tea before going off-track through a forest of Black Sallee (*Eucalyptus stellulata*) where the understorey consisted almost entirely of *Mirbelia oxyloboides*.

After a while, we came out of the forest quite suddenly onto an open hilltop covered in *Poa labillardieri* tussocks. There were no old tree stumps so it seemed to be a natural variation in the vegetation. From our vantage point, we looked down onto a wide flat frost hollow, its edges fringed by the neat bright green canopies of distant *Eucalyptus stellulata* trees.

We made our way through the dense tussocks in the hollow and crossed to the other side of the narrow creek to find another sudden differentiation in the landscape. After clambering up a hillside of shaly rocks scattered with grey quartz, we found ourselves in another *Eucalyptus stellulata* forest. There were some very old trees there with gnarled dark bark at the base of their otherwise smooth, green and brown trunks. *Mirbelia oxyloboides* was still the dominant understorey, along with several heath species, including *Leucopogon attenuatus* and *Acrothamnus hookeri*. A single *Persoonia chamaepeuce* formed a little green carpet, contrasting with the grey-green flat stems of the leafless pea, *Bossiaea riparia*. Covering the ground in places, there were bright green patches of the compact Twin-flowered Knawel (*Scleranthus biflorus*) and the more straggly Twiggy Knawel (*Scleranthus fasciculatus*).

We eventually reached the track that leads to Horse Gully Hut, where we came into Snow Gum (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*) forest. Although *Mirbelia oxyloboides* still provided the understorey cover in most places, there were also extensive stands of Clustered Everlasting (*Chrysocephalum semipapposum*), some still bearing heads of golden flowers. And, in one area, the understorey consisted entirely of the biggest population of *Bossiaea riparia* I've ever seen. There were a few taller shrubs in the Snow Gum forest too. A stand of tall *Cassinia longifolia*, still in flower, and a single *Ozothamnus thyrsoides* represented the daisies. A few scattered *Acacia siculiformis* and a lone *Persoonia rigida* were about the only taller woody shrubs.

Along the edge of the track, the bank was quite steep in places. On one of these embankments we found two *Dillwynia prostrata* plants cascading over the edge. And, where water had drained and formed a damp area, a patch of *Coronidium gunnianum* (previously *Helichrysum rutidolepis*) was still sporting a few yellow flowers. There were even a few little blue flowers of *Brachyscome rigidula* peeping out from the other vegetation. While we were admiring these treasures, something moved near my feet — a tiny dark frog, a little bigger than the one centimetre Monga one but not by much.

After lunch amongst the trees, we walked down to the creek to make our way back. Across the tussocky flat area, there were *Hakea microcarpa* growing, some of them quite large. At one stage, we walked over to look at a large *Leptospermum* and found several *Trachymene humilis* growing beneath it. We continued along the creek for a while then headed towards higher ground. On the way we found a large Mountain Cricket (*Acripeza reticulata*) again — we always seem to find one when we come out this way. Once on the steep and rocky hillside, we found a few more plants we hadn't yet seen that day — *Acacia gunnii* and *Brachyloma daphnoides* amongst them. It was evidently also an ideal place for the third species of Knawel we saw that day, the Many-flowered Knawel (*Scleranthus diander*) which was growing densely amongst the rocks.

Further on, at the top of an open hillside, a huge carpet of *Dillwynia prostrata* covered several metres of ground, surrounded by an extensive area of smaller plants of the same species — a completely different type of landscape again.

We didn't see a lot of wildlife on this walk (no Red-necked Wallabies!), just a rather relaxed Eastern Grey Kangaroo, with a joey in her pouch, who didn't bother to interrupt her siesta as we passed. But, Sandra and Wendy saw a White-necked Heron, an unusual sighting there evidently, and some Flame Robins including a colourful male bird. And, on the way back along Boboyan Road, we stopped to move a large Blotched Bluetongue lizard off the road to a safe place.

This was an interesting walk, demonstrating to us how abruptly landscapes and habitats change in this part of the country and how so many of them exist in an area we can see in a day.

Report: Jo Walker; Bird list: Sandra Henderson; Photos: Gail Ritchie Knight and Wendy Whitham

### Bird list

Grey Butcherbird	Magpie-lark
Black-faced Cuckooshrike	Spotted Pardalote
Pied Currawong	Striated Pardalote
Grey Currawong	Australian Raven
Wedge-tailed Eagle	Eastern Yellow Robin
Noisy Friarbird	Flame Robin
White-necked Heron	Scarlet Robin
Australian Hobby	Grey Shrikethrush
Brown-headed Honeyeater	Striated Thornbill
White-eared Honeyeater	White-throated Treecreeper
Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Willie Wagtail
Nankeen Kestrel	Red Wattlebird
Australian Magpie	



The walk begins



*Eucalyptus stellulata* and *Chrysocephalum semipapposum*



*Persoonia rigida*



Bill amongst the *Eucalyptus mannifera*



*Chrysocephalum semipapposum*



*Chrysocephalum semipapposum*



*Eucalyptus stellulata*



*Scleranthus fasciculatus*



*Scleranthus fasciculatus*



*Coronidium gunnianum*



*Eucalyptus pauciflora*



*Brachyscome rigida*



Lunch amongst the trees



*Acripeza reticulata*



Blotched Bluetongue lizard



White-necked Heron standing in the Naas Creek, Photo by Wendy Whitham



Naas Creek