

## South West Wanderings, October 2014

Neil Anderton

ANOS Victoria has been assisting the Department of Environment and Primary Industry (DEPI – formerly the Department of Sustainability and Environment) in the southwest of Victoria by donating volunteer time and effort during October for the past nine years. Between 20 and 30 volunteers have taken part in searches and surveys over a seven day period each year, equating to 20 to 30 person weeks of searching during the brief flowering period of endemic orchids. When you consider that one, or at most two DEPI officers are involved, this is a huge multiplier of the effectiveness of these officers. The first two days was spent working with Dave Pitts from DEPI, the last four with Dr Noushka Reiter, an ecologist with the Australian Network for Plant Conservation (ANPC, and formerly with the

Wimmera CMA, before that DSE) working in the ANPC Orchid Conservation Program.

This year's search incorporated something different. On the Wednesday we had a 'free' day, just to look at orchids, rather than searching or surveying for specific orchids, which was much appreciated.

As in previous years, most attention was given to recently burnt areas. Orchids often flower well after a burn, and are a lot easier to see in the sparser undergrowth. It also means that by the end of the day the volunteers look like chimney sweeps from the blackened trees and shrubs.

This year we started the week at Mt Clay, near Portland, searching areas burnt last summer. The search was for orchids in general and Spider

Definitely a Tiny Fingers, *Caladenia pusilla*





At Mt Clay we found green (top) and black (bottom) forms of *Prasophyllum elatum*

Orchids in particular, but few species and few flowers were seen. Reasonable numbers of Tall Leek Orchids (*Prasophyllum elatum*) and Wallflower Orchid (*Diuris orientis*) were seen, along with Common Bird Orchids (*Chiloglottis valida*) and Tiny Fingers (*Caladenia pusilla*). We were fortunate to be able to do any searching, as 100kph winds were forecast, but didn't eventuate.

From there we moved to Lake Mundi, on the South Australian border west of Casterton. This time we were looking for *Thelymitra epipactoides* (Metallic Sun Orchid), which was known from the site, but we were looking at areas outside of the known populations. The day was very successful, with several hundred more *T. epipactoides* found, along a surprising find, the Southern Bearded Greenhood (*Pterostylis tasmanica*). We were surprised to see it so far west and a good distance inland, but on checking the Australian Virtual Herbarium, I found that samples had been collected about 30 km north of Lake Mundi, and also in the Little Desert. There were a good



number of orchids present, with the caladenias well represented, including a pure white *Caladenia carnea* (a white Pink Fingers?), *C. parva* and *C. tentaculata*, *C. venusta*, and as is typical when Greencomb Spider Orchids and *C. venusta* grow together, the hybrids – *C. venusta* x *tentaculata* and possibly *C. venusta* x *parva*.



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*Caladenia venusta* x *C. tentaculata* hybrid

Other orchids seen were *Diuris orientis*, *Thelymitra flexuosa* and *T. ixioides*

The following day was our 'free' day. Being gluttons for punishment, we once again found ourselves in burnt areas, fortunately with plenty of orchids. The first stop was the Powers Creek State Forest. This was an unknown quantity, but was burnt last summer and looked like good orchid habitat.

It didn't disappoint. Finger *Caladenias* were in

abundance, with some very deep pink *C. ornata* and *C. carnea*, with others ranging from almost white through to the more common pinks. We saw our first Fertile Fingers (*C. prolata*), *Glossodia major* and Purple Beard Orchid (*Calochilus robertsonii*), plus a lone *Caladenia venusta*. There were some excellent specimens of both the Leopard (*Diuris pardina*) and Wallflower orchid (*D. orientis*). Often after fires the *D. orientis* flowers are quite stunning, with intense orange-red colours.





After lunch we moved on to the Mereek State Forest. We were searching a different area to that searched in 2012, when we were privileged to see an orchid wonderland. This year paled in comparison, but was still a pretty good site.

Large numbers of *Caladenia venusta* were found on the roadside and scattered through the bush, along with *C. tentaculata*, *C. prolata*, *Calochilus robertsonii* and *Thelymitra ixioides*.

That night we stayed at the Edenhope Caravan Park, and had the perfect location to observe the total eclipse of the moon. We did surprise one local who couldn't work out why we had our chairs lined up and were staring up into the sky. He got quite a shock when he looked up and saw the moon almost fully eclipsed – he didn't even know the eclipse was happening.

The following day it was back to work, surveying the Yallingar State Forest, which had been burnt about 18 months prior. This was a survey of potential habitat of threatened orchids, but orchids in general were fairly sparse and no

*Caladenia venusta* (above), pure white *Caladenia carnea* at Lake Mundi (lower left) and an unexpected find – *Pterostylis tasmanica*.







This page - *Caladenia ornata* at Power Creek SF (above), the Hare Orchid *Leptoceras menziesii* (right), and a *C. venusta* photo opportunity on the way to Mereek SF.

Opposite page - *Diuris orientis* (left), *Diuris pardina* (right) and *C. tentaculata* (lower).







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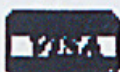
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threatened orchids were seen. The area abounded in wildflowers and was a pleasure to walk through. The Blue Tinsel Lily (*Calectasia intermedia*), a spectacular flowering plant, was reasonably common with some large patches covering 5-10 square metres. Orchids seen were Sun Orchids (*Thelymitra rubra*, *T. holmsii*), *C. carnea*, *Pyrorchis nigricans* and *C. tentaculata*. The day also provided some impromptu pollinator baiting. At the end of the day, just prior to us leaving, we noticed that some *Caladenia tentaculata* plants near the cars were attracting the attention of some wasps. A net was quickly retrieved from the car and in short order three wasps were caught for identification. An unexpected success at the end of the day!

Friday was a warm day, with temperatures high enough for pollinator baiting. Noushka Reiter was keen to do some pollinator baiting in a potential reintroduction area for Melblom's Spider Orchid (*Caladenia hastata*). Many hours had been spent chasing pollinator wasps over previous years, with minimal success.

So, equipped with nets and cut *C. hastata* flowers to attract the wasps, we backtracked to the Casterton area. I had no luck in catching wasps, and even had to watch a male wasp pick up a female wasp within a metre of our bait (wrong species though).

We might have had a bad day, but Noushka was overjoyed. Nine wasps had been caught at three different sites within the area. Those not involved in the baiting had conducted searches of the area, but had not found any *C. hastata*.

Due to the backtracking to Casterton, we had a 150 Km drive to our next stop, Horsham. The next morning, Saturday, we headed off to a burn area beside Harrop Track, on the west side of the Grampians. We were searching for *Prasophyllum subbisectum*, which had been seen at the sight after a prior burn.

This was an orchid-rich site. Orchids were seen immediately and with great frequency during the day. We did find several potential *P. subbisectum* plants, but they were still in bud. Their locations

Red Beaks *Pyrorchis nigricans* just hanging on (top) and Blue Star Sun Orchid *T. holmsii*.





*Calochilus robertsonii* (left) and *Caladenia grampiana* (right)

were recorded so they could be checked a couple of weeks later.

Orchids seen during the day included *Caladenia carnea*, *C. ornata*, *C. gracilis*, *C. grampiana*, *C. tentaculata*; *Calochilus campestris*, *C. paludosis* and *C. robertsonii*; *Diuris pardina* and *D. orientis*, *Thelymitra antennifera*, *T. flexuosa*, *T. carnea*, *T. rubra* and *T. ixioides* (including a double flower); *Prasophyllum elatum*, *P. sp. aff. odoratum* and possibly *P. subbisectum* and *Caleana major* (Duck Orchid). A slightly more exciting find was a small *Pseudechis porphyriacus*, more commonly known as a Red-bellied Black Snake.

One of the delights of a day like this is not only the orchids found, but the pleasure in walking among the masses of wildflowers — truly a delight to the senses.

The last day of the week was on the north-eastern side of the Grampians, searching areas that had been burnt last summer. The main aim was to check on some plants in bud that had been identified as *Thelymitra epipactoides*, which should be flowering.

Even though we had GPS readings for the location of the plants, and a description of the area, none could be found — not even the remnants of a leaf. There were no signs of any Sun Orchids vaguely similar to *T. epipactoides* nearby.

Most orchids had finished flowering, except for quite a few *Prasophyllum* buds. Some were in flower, and were identified as *Prasophyllum maccannii* (Inland Leek Orchid). Some *Thelymitra ixioides* were seen, as were large numbers of finished *Pyrorchis nigricans*, but a few were still in flower.

The final stop for the day, and the week, was a few kilometres further south. This was another burnt area, with some nice orchids but no threatened species.

Orchids seen were *Caladenia carnea*, *C. gracilis* (including one about the size of *C. pusilla*) *C. clavigera* and *C. tentaculata* and some nice patches of *Thelymitra ixioides* and *T. rubra*.



Once again we had a successful and enjoyable week, with some new finds and some wonderful sights.

This page, clockwise from top - Twisted Sun Orchid *Thelymitra flexuosa* (right), Inland Leek Orchid *Prasophyllum maccannii* and *Caladenia cucullata*







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