

GIPPSLAND HIGH COUNTRY TOURS

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P.O. Box 69, Bruthen Vic. 3885

Australia

www.gippslandhighcountrytours.com.au

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Telephone (03) 5157 5556

Fax (03) 5157 5539

Email: info@gippslandhighcountrytours.com.au



Concert on Mt Everard

by Anne Pickles

It was the third morning of the Walking Croajingolong tour in October 2014 and we were climbing Mt Everard. It's not a very big mountain (500 m) but uphill all the way, so we were taking it gently and botanising as we went. The weather was not the best, it was overcast and showery and the strong winds off Bass Strait had been giving us an exciting view of pounding waves from our accommodation at Point Hicks Lighthouse. However, most of the walk was sheltered under the canopy of tall trees, giving an atmosphere of peace and the lovely smell of damp forest.

The understory of the forest was full of flowers, glowing in the diffuse light. Shining red *Correa* flowers hanging like Christmas bells in the bush, blue *Dampiera*, purple *Patersonia* not quite out because the sun wasn't shining, and pea flowers in every shade from the lemon yellow to deep rusty orange. As we got towards the summit, different flowers appeared including bright blue nodding lilies and streaked rock orchids.



Correa flowers hanging like Christmas Bells

We were standing on top of a large rock, contemplating the last dash to the trig point, when an extraordinary concert started in the surrounding bush. No less than three lyrebirds started pouring out their songs, each trying to outsing the others. The effect was stunning, and all plans to move on were abandoned. We just sat down on our rock, got out our lunches, and enjoyed the concert for the next 20 minutes.

Continued on Page 3

The Mallee, the Murray & more

By Lana Tinsley

The harsh beauty of Mallee country has always had a special meaning for me, having been lucky enough to see it in many States of Australia. This combined with our cosy cottage at Nangiloc, right on the Murray River, meant we were surely in for some treats.

The birds did not disappoint, and many of the iconic Mallee birds were sighted, including Mallee fowl, Mallee Emu-wren, Regent, Blue-bonnet and Red-rumped Parrots, Pink Cockatoo, Chestnut-backed Quail Thrush, Southern Whiteface, Crimson Chat, Crested Bellbird, Chestnut-rumped Thornbill and Splendid, White-winged and Variegated Fairy-wrens were favourites.

Having time to sit and observe the bush and all creatures who live there, is one of the highlights of touring with Jenny. Time to look, discuss and refer to guidebooks, all add up to a wonderful learning experience. Sharing this with a small group who have the same interest meant we could bounce ideas off each other, and pool our combined knowledge.

In spring there is so much happening:

Finding a mate; Yellow Rosellas displaying with much tail wagging, chattering musically all the while, The female repeatedly inspecting a hollow to make sure it would be the right home. Three male Splendid Fairy-wrens, in full breeding plumage, on the one branch, competing for the attention of females. They certainly held our attention.

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Editorial

Hello everyone, this annual newsletter includes a number of stories from participants on various tours in the past year and I hope you enjoy reading about their experiences. Thank you so much to all the contributors! With many early spring trips being full, the program inside leads you from late spring to summer and 2016.

During the year I asked a small group of people how have travelled with me previously what they thought characterised my tours. There were many consistencies in their responses. Nature experiences were paramount of course and this ranged with their interests from orchids to waterfalls, wildlife, birds and more.

Appreciation of the small group sizes was a strong theme. Many tours on the program have a maximum of only 4 participants and never more than 10. These small group sizes make the experience so much more personal, but places do book out fast, so please be quick to avoid disappointment.

Another important factor was the friendly caring and knowledgeable local guides. If I am not leading tours myself, other guides will offer a very similar experience and each of us shares with you our own love of nature, ecology and the landscapes and history that are very special to us. Most responses featured the importance of learning during the tour - returning home with a feeling of enrichment about the natural world.

Lastly, being catered for and not having to plan accommodation or activities, so the fact that all tours on the program are complete holiday packages even linking with train timetables from Melbourne.

What Does the Tick Mean?

Australia's Ecotourism Certification Program is an innovative "world first" program. It is a national scheme with hundreds of products across every state and territory of Australia.
www.ecotourism.org.au



Choosing a product that displays an **Eco Certification** logo means you will enjoy an experience with a quality operator, leaving minimal impact on the environment.

Advanced Ecotourism Certification recognises Australia's leading and most innovative ecotourism products, providing an opportunity to learn about the environment with an operator who is committed to achieving best practice when using resources wisely, contributing to the conservation of the environment and helping local communities.

Gippsland High Country Tours is proud that all ecotour and walk products in the regular program have received Advanced Eco Certification.

So if you have not tried a tour yet, what's stopping you?

Jenny Lawrence

Would you prefer to receive your Newsletter via email?

This Newsletter is also available electronically in full colour.

If you have a preference for receiving future newsletters electronically, just email me and let me know. Please include in the email your name and postal address so I can cross reference on my database and ensure you don't get a hard copy as well as an email version.

Established in 1987, Gippsland High Country Tours is an Accredited Tourism Business and a member of Victorian Tourism Industry Council. All product has Advanced Ecotourism Certification under Ecotourism Australia's Eco-Certification Program.

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Illustrations by Catherine Turnbull (All illustrations and photographs are subject to Copyright and must not be reproduced without permission) Photographs by J. Lawrence, J Bray and W McCallum..

Spring Discount

Select your ecotour or walking experience and book **before November 15, 2015**

Attach this coupon and receive

5% Discount

in addition to the regular discounts off the advertised fare for any departure of 3-8 days duration

REGULAR DISCOUNTS

Available on all 3-7 day departures

NOTE: Only one discount or special offer can be used on any one booking. Not applicable to local day trips and weekends.

Before Nov 15, 2015 5% may be added to these discounts

- Past Passengers 10% Discount.
- Pensioners 10% Discount.
- Early Booking (90+ days in advance) 10% Discount.
- Group Booking (5 or more persons on any trip) generous discounts apply, contact me for details.

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

Concert on Mt Everard by Anne Pickles

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The lyrebirds' mimicry was amazing, all sorts of bird calls mixed up together: whipbirds, kookaburras, currawongs, magpies, cockatoos and many others, some totally accurate and others broken and mixed with other calls. Whipbird calls seemed to be a particular challenge – the pitch was occasionally slightly off – but the calls of yellow-tailed black cockatoos had me looking up in the trees just to check that they hadn't flown in. We only got a glimpse of one lyrebird darting under a trunk, but we wouldn't have interrupted the concert for anything.

This is why I keep going on Jenny's tours - when we come across something special there is always time to stop and look and listen. This is the second time I have walked Croajingolong, each time there have been different special moments.



“We just sat down on our rock, got out our lunches, and enjoyed the concert for the next 20 minutes”

Soon on our You Tube “channel” (see page 7) will be a short video of this concert of Mt Everard

Wonderful Waterholes by Dorothy Francis

‘Thank you Jenny for a wonderful time walking from Waterholes Guest House. A marvellous few days enjoying God’s creation; the wildflowers, birds, company, the history of the area, Kaye’s gourmet meals and hospitality plus your sharing of your fantastic knowledge of the area, so readily given = 100+%.’

I enjoyed every minute of the trip and have some great photos as a reminder especially of the wild flowers.’



Calendar of Ecotours and Walks 2015 - 2016

November 2 <i>Only 2 places left</i>	Gabo Island Discovery Ecotour Graded: EASY/MODERATE Fully accommodated. Easy-Moderate walks 5 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2630 5 Days ex. Melbourne \$2750 Only 2 places left - be quick!
November 11	Walking from Waterholes Graded: EASY/MODERATE Fully accommodated. Lots of easy/moderate grade walks. 4 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$1980 4 Days ex. Melbourne \$2100
December 4	High Country Huts North of Licola Graded: EASY/MODERATE Fully accommodated. Easy/moderate walks with a focus on history 3 Days ex. Traralgon <i>SORRY BOOKED OUT</i>
December 11	High Country Huts North of Licola Graded: EASY/MODERATE Fully accommodated. Easy/moderate walks with a focus on history 3 Days ex. Traralgon \$1475
January 11 2016	Alpine Discovery Tour Graded: VERY EASY Fully accommodated, lots of short easy nature walks . 5 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2370 5 Days ex. Melbourne \$2490
March 1	Mt Feathertop Adventure Graded: MODERATE - CHALLENGING Fully accommodated. Lots of good moderate walks plus a challenging long day walk. 5 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2540 5 Days ex. Melbourne \$2660
March 1	Alpine Walking in Autumn Graded: MODERATE Fully accommodated. Lots of good moderate walks. 5 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2540 5 Days ex. Melbourne \$2660
March 12 <i>Labour Day Weekend</i>	Point Hicks Weekend Graded: EASY Fully accommodated. Lots of short easy walks. 3 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$1300
March 18	Cape Conran Explorer Graded: EASY/MODERATE 3 nights accommodation Lots of easy-moderate walks 4 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$1830 4 Days ex. Melbourne \$1950
April 4	Walking Errinundra Plateau Graded: MODERATE Fully accommodated. Lots of good moderate grade walks 5 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2330 5 Days ex. Melbourne \$2450
April 15	Mitchell River Explorer Graded: EASY/MODERATE Fully accommodated. Easy-Moderate walks. 3 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$1350 3 Days ex. Melbourne \$1470
April	Gabo Island Discovery Ecotour Graded: EASY/MODERATE Fully accommodated. Easy-Moderate walks Prices as for November 2 above
September	Birds of Hattah Kulkynne & Murray Sunset Graded: EASY/MODERATE Fully accommodated. Easy-moderate walks with a focus on birdwatching. 8 Days ex. Melbourne \$4770
October 3	Walking Croajingolong Graded: MODERATE Fully accommodated. Lots of Moderate Walks. 7 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$3360 7 Days ex. Melbourne \$3480
October 3	Croajingolong Coastal Ecotour Graded: EASY Fully accommodated. Lots of Easy Nature Walks. 7 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$3360 7 Days ex. Melbourne \$3480

More than just a holiday, these are a rewarding experience featuring expert guidance and lots of interaction with nature. These small group tours promote an appreciation and understanding of varied environments, rich history and diverse flora and fauna. **Fares are all inclusive as per itinerary. Full itinerary for each trip available on request.**

More details also available on website– www.gippslandhighcountrytours.com.au

Mt Feathertop Adventure is back

Mt Feathertop sits prominently on the skyline of many views across the Victorian Alps. Unlike some of our Australian Mountains that have worn, gently rounded summits, Mt Feathertop has a distinctly jagged outline. When you walk to the summit, you can see why with the sedimentary rock layers tilted and turned on their side pointing skyward.

It is hard to imagine the forces required to bend and buckle rock to form mountain ranges or the time that has passed to weather the formations we see today.

The bony ridgeline that extends from Mt Hotham out to Mt Feathertop is known as the Razorback ridge. Winding along this ridge and sometimes around the sides of knolls along the way is the walking track. This is the track we use for a challenging long day walk to Mt Feathertop, the culmination of a 5 day walking tour in early March.



Lunch break prior to the final climb to the summit

You need to be fit and sure-footed as the track is rocky and narrow. If the weather is clear, the views are nothing short of spectacular. Mountain upon mountain stretching out to the horizon in various shades of blue. Far below, lie the valleys, the rugged Diamantina beside us and further away to the north, the beautiful Ovens Valley.

We expect a few late summer wildflowers left to enjoy and the sting of the summer heat should have been left behind. You will have enjoyed stretched your legs on a variety of other mountain walks earlier in the week in a lead up to this day.

By the time you return home, you will have a grand store of memories of magnificent alpine vistas, plus some wonderful nature experiences and a new understanding of the alpine environment from your guides. You may well have some new friends too, as our small groups of like-minded people usually find they have so much in common.

Walking Errinundra is back too!

Another popular walking tour is back on our program for Autumn 2016. This time we will be walking in the remote mountains along the top of East Gippsland. Errinundra Plateau is famous for misty forests of enormous eucalypts, ferny gullies and cool temperate rainforest. This a place of quiet serenity, where the size and age of the forest around you makes you feel very small and insignificant.

Autumn is a lovely time to explore tracks through these forests and the weather is more predictable than spring. This walking tour will fit into the second week of Victoria's autumn school holiday break, but don't fear a holiday rush - you are unlikely to find many people in these remote forests.

There are lots of lovely secret places to discover with your local guide. Quiet leafy tracks provide a variety of moderate graded walks, sometimes to surprising views, sometimes just providing an opportunity to explore the little things in nature - ornamental fungi, soft mossy logs or a colourful robin perched on a low branch.

We won't be camping, you will have a cosy country cottage to return to every night for a relaxing evening meal and good company.

Mt Feathertop Adventure 2016

Will be run concurrently with the moderately graded walking tour, Alpine Walking in Autumn. Using two guides to offer a different walking level to each group, there will be opportunities to swap to a slightly easier or harder walk on most days if you choose.

Alpine Walking in Autumn is designed to suit those who like good moderate alpine walks, but nothing too challenging. It will also include a chance to walk part of the Razorback Ridge Track, but not the full walk to Mt Feathertop.

Total group size is only 10 participants, so you will enjoy all the advantages of a small group and every night we return to a cosy ski lodge at the Dinner Plain Alpine Resort.

Book early to secure your place on this popular walking week in Autumn.

The Mallee, the Murray and more by Lana Tinsley

Continued from page 1

Building a home; Whistling Kites, one stick at a time. White-browed Babblers, with a communal working bee in full swing. Would this nest ever be just right? Chestnut-rumped Thornbills bringing the tiniest twigs and feathers to complete their nest in the top of an old hollow log.

Feeding young; Weebills using the side entry in their beautifully woven pendulous nest, so well camouflaged in outer foliage. A male Kestrel bringing his mate prey, possibly to feed herself and chicks, as only the female incubates.

Protecting young; Wood duck, with 16 ducklings, being led by the male and shepherded by the female, as they swam across the wide Murray River. How did they not get swept downstream?

While we sat and had a cuppa and Jenny's famous fruit cake, the water birds showed their different methods of feeding. Grey Teal, typical of dabbling ducks, upending and dredging. Yellow-billed Spoonbills side-sweeping, stirring debris and organisms from the bottom. Black-winged Stilts, who rarely swim, but wade on their long legs, picking up food from the surface and in mud. Red-necked Avocets who swim readily, feeding by wading and sweeping through shallow water and soft mud. Darters sink to hunt their prey underwater. Cormorants dive to capture their food by underwater pursuit. Australasian Grebe deep dive and also surface chase to capture their prey. The last 3 had us trying to guess where they would pop up, as only tiny ripples show on the surface.



Crested Bellbird who provided us with a wonderful viewing

Finding the sliver of new moon was also a challenge, well worth the effort. The night sky was brilliant and Venus shining like a beacon in the early morning was magical.

So much more I could add, Shingleback, Mallee and Bearded Dragon lizards, Western Grey and Red kangaroos. Wildflowers I particularly remember were a soft lemon Stackhousia, Mulla Mullas and a stunning red-flowering Eremophila which attracted a little Friarbird. There was time to enjoy everything that took our fancy.

The Birds of Hattah Kulkyne & Murray Sunset Trip left all of us wondering at the adaptability of birds who inhabit the many environments we travelled through, and left many questions unanswered. Thank you Jenny for a fabulous trip.



Book Reviews

One of the joys of becoming a grandparent is that it gives you such a great excuse to enjoy children's books again (if you need an excuse that is...)

I'd like to share with you two wonderful children's books by Sonia Strong from Tasmania.

Written in verse, both these stories feature native wildlife (all artwork is by Sonia too) and introduce young people to the unique characteristics of some of our native creatures.

In **Tazzie the Turbo Chook finds her**

feet, we share Tazzie's discovery that she has a special talent - her ability to run. Anyone who has enjoyed watching Tasmanian Native Hens will be able to relate to Tazzie and her family.

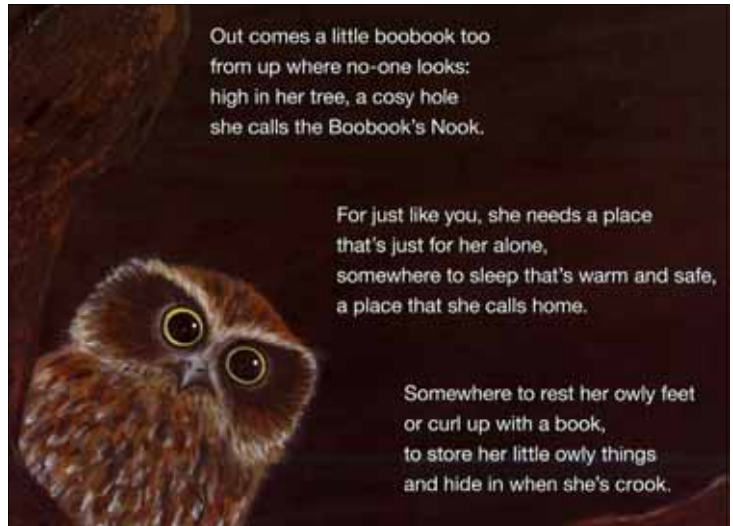
Trip to Gabo By Margaret Hallett

In December, I was lucky enough to visit Gabo Island with Jenny's tour and Wayne as guide.

There is something very special about seeing the sunrise and sunset from the veranda of the old lighthouse assistants cottage and to watch, binoculars to the eyes, gannets, gulls and terns, sea eagles and on a special occasion, an albatross from a first rate front seat. It is truly a wonderful thing to do.

While we were there we also experienced Mother Nature's best sound and light show as the storms passed across the sea. We were snug and safe so we could only wonder at it's great might and beauty.

Thanks you Jenny and our guide Wayne for a great experience.



The Boobook's nook is Sonia's second children's book and a must if you like owls! It helps children understand that night is not so scary and how important sounds in the night are to nocturnal wildlife.

Along the way there are many other bush friends- wombats, frogs, eastern barred bandicoots devils and quolls. The illustrations are delightfully detailed, keep an eye out for spiders webs, birds nests and colourful fungi. The Water Rat waving his webbed feet and holding a snail is pretty cute too!

Both books are available direct from Sonia at \$20 each and \$5 postage per book. In addition there are a series of greeting cards from the book and some original artworks available too.

Contact Sonia-

By email sonialstrong@gmail.com or PO Box 53, Kettering TAS 7155 or Phone 0439 487 208

Website: www.soniastrong.wix.com/artist

Take a look at our You Tube videos

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Are you a good listener in the bush?

For most of us, one of the joys of being out in nature is the opportunity to use all our senses to appreciate what nature provides. Sight is probably the sense we use most, looking at beautiful scenes or seeing tiny detail. Our sense of smell helps us enjoy the scent of damp earth or the fresh smell of ocean. Touching soft moss or crispy everlasting daisies and feeling the wind in our face uses our sense of touch. Taste is one we probably don't use so much, but there are sweat berries to enjoy if you know where to look and salt spray at the beach.

Then there's our ears. We hear things in nature that for many people are less familiar than sounds at home, but very welcome and soothing. Sometimes there is real silence, which is a very rare commodity in modern life. Although we hear sounds in the bush, how well to you think you listen?

Do you often stop and think about what you are hearing? Can you identify all the different sounds you hear? If you are listening to birdsong, that could be quite hard as there might be many birds calling at once. Even if you don't know their names, it can be fun to sit and listen to the tones and patterns of calls. How many different ones do you think you can hear? What else is there? Are there frogs? Wind in the trees? Trickling water or the buzz of insects.

Exploring what you hear in more detail is really interesting and recording the sounds gives you the chance to play it back and appreciate it again and again. Every time you listen, you might find you hear something you missed the first time. With practise we can all become better listeners.

But the very best thing of all is to take the time to find a quiet spot and just sit. A dawn chorus is pretty special but any time of day is enjoyable. Relax and allow yourself to be surrounded by the natural sounds and immerse yourself in what you are hearing.

In conjunction with a fellow nature tour company, I will soon be able to offer you an opportunity to join a very special tour. Led by an expert sound recordist you will learn so much more about what you hear in the bush as he takes you on a Journey in Sound. **Contact me for more details**

*When you have finished with this Newsletter,
please pass it on to a friend or
recycle thoughtfully*

**Sometimes the best things in life are
hard to find, but when you do, you
share these things with others.**

**At Gippsland High Country Tours we
are proud of our return client base and
our recommendation rate. On any tour
you are likely to find at least half the
other participants are repeat clients.
Some have travelled with us more than
a dozen times.**



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To: **Gippsland High Country Tours,
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Name: _____ Address: _____

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