

GIPPSLAND HIGH COUNTRY TOURS

Newsletter no. 42

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Australia

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Walking in Victoria's Alps

Alpine Walking in Autumn

Perfect selection and variety of walks, scenery and more

Really interesting and informative

Great company

Great guides

Beautiful food

Wonderful, well organised and run

What more could we want?

THANK YOU Jenny, THANK YOU Tom.

We did enjoy our time with you in the High Country so much. Wouldn't mind doing it again actually! Andrew & Vicky, Melbourne



Mt Feathertop Adventure

"I finally reached the peak of Mt Feathertop and it was not a let down. Big thanks to Jenny for helping me achieve this and Tom who was a great walking companion/guide. (He did not hold me back at all!) Catering and accommodation tops plus enjoyable companions have made this a memorable week." Tony, Adelaide

Alpine Walking in Autumn and Mt Feathertop Adventure run concurrently to cater for both Moderate and Challenging walking levels and provide maximum flexibility for everyone. Early autumn is a truly splendid time to enjoy the Alps.
5 Days with 4 nights accommodation
March 6-10, 2017 \$2600

Nature Sounds and Birdsong

When we think about spending time out in nature, most of us think first about what we will be seeing. Will I see nice views, pretty flowers or wildlife perhaps? We would like to introduce you to the art of listening to the sounds of nature and help you both sharpen your listening skills and learn more about what nature sounds tell us about various landscapes and what lives in them.

Andrew Skeoch from Listening Earth will be bringing his enthusiasm for sound to join forces with Jenny on a very special tour in November. Discover the richness of the bird's dawn chorus and sounds of the bush during the day in a variety of habitats.

Then as night falls it seems so quiet, but is it? Hopefully we will hear nocturnal wildlife and owls and well as tiny sounds, many people rarely notice.

Along the way Jenny will lead you to explore bushland around our cottage accommodation, plus parts of the Mitchell River National Park. From dry rain-shadow woodland, to pockets of warm temperate rainforest, this park protects Victoria's largest un-dammed river catchment.

Andrew will have some formal presentations and you will be introduced to the equipment used for nature sound recordings and maybe try your hand at recording yourself.

New for 2016, this promises to be a wonderful journey of discovery and places are very limited.

Nature Sounds & Birdsong, Nov 2-5, 2016

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Editorial

Hello everyone, Winter is quiet time at Gippsland High Country Tours, which is a great opportunity to investigate some new tours to add to the program. This annual Spring Newsletter comes with news of *Nature Sounds and Birdsong* which has been in the pipeline for a while and working with Andrew Skeoch from Listening Earth this tour is now a reality for November and again in autumn. The program also has plenty of regular favourites to tempt you, covering the coastal areas of East Gippsland as well as the Alpine peaks and the hills and valleys in between. I've even added a mystery walking tour taking advantage of Melbourne Cup Weekend for those of you who don't find it easy to get away for a longer break.

The website has undergone some upgrades over winter including the addition of a new page allowing you to meet our guides as well as more comprehensive information on the questions page. However if you've never tried a tour before, please don't hesitate to contact me if you'd like some further advice.

The Nature Notes section returns to this Newsletter with a focus on some interesting moth caterpillars. Wildlife are an integral part of every tour experience, although with so many of our mammals being nocturnal our daytime encounters are more often smaller creatures - birds, lizards and a wonderful variety of insect life. But you just never know when an echidna will be snuffling along the side of a track or a wallaby will bound out in full view. Marine mammals are not so shy and whales and seals regularly provide a show for us on coastal tours. We always take time to enjoy whatever wildlife opportunities come our way.

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.

Lets spring into Spring this year and I hope to see you soon!

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 and W McCallum.

Spring Discount

Select your ecotour or walking experience and book **before October 17, 2016**

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 3-8 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 Oct 17, 2016 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

High Country Huts beyond Licola by June Torcasio

"I appreciated walking in the area where aboriginals had once made flints for hunting purposes. It was wonderful to see fragments which they had broken off so long ago - I forgot to ask Wayne which tribes were involved and when (to the nearest thousand years). [Ed: The culture of the Guanikurnai people goes back many tens of thousands of years]

The huts were all different, eccentric architectural achievements with the bed platform, fireplace and roof fundamental to keeping warm at night. Wayne had lots to tell about the native animals, the flora and the swamp drainage as a result of cattle grazing. He also related a chilling story of the Wonnangatta murders. After that we looked uneasily at old logs for any sign of an old boot or a stray skull. The only hint of blood was the scarlet breast of a robin which briefly posed for us near one of the huts, then flew off before it could be photographed. Later we were surprised to meet a proud deer hunter who had killed a stag. He showed us the antlers which he had kept as a trophy. I'm glad he shot the stag - one of the many feral deer in the area - but I would not like to have seen it happen! It was a very enjoyable trip, thanks to Wayne's informative guiding."



Walking from Waterholes - the last hurrah by Sannie Pritchard

"Just four of us who gathered at the fabulous Waterholes for what turned out to be the last trip. Welcoming hosts, delicious meals, amazing garden to wander around in. First day's walk we got thoroughly rained on and, as the rain set in, the afternoon was spent relaxing. Second day meandering to Deptford sometimes overlooking the Nicholson River and exploring the remains of the gold rush town. As a non birdwatcher two memories stand out. One sitting beside the river late afternoon and watching a kingfisher in a tree opposite. Suddenly the kingfisher drops down to catch a fish and flies off down stream. The last morning, still lying in bed, I noticed birds in the trees outside. Stepped onto the balcony and realised they were king parrots. For some reason they took a liking to me! They sat on the roof, they sat on the railing, they sat on the floor and my only thought was that they were used to being fed. But no, on enquiring, we were told birds were never fed at Waterholes. So just a very special performance for me to make the Waterholes experience even more memorable! "



Gippsland High Country Tours were privileged to be the first guests at Waterholes Guesthouse when it opened in Spring 2001 and we were also the last guests before its closure in November 2015. During this time many of you have enjoyed the delights of this unique accommodation, set in a delightful garden and surrounded by bushland plus of course Kaye and Bob's hospitality and Kaye's exquisite meals. Ooh, memories of the Lemon Delicious pudding will remain!! Kaye and Bob are now enjoying the joys of retirement, still living here, but free to travel and enjoy their hobbies. We thank them sincerely for all the wonderful experiences over the years and wish them well for the future.

Calendar of Ecotours and Walks 2016 - 2017

October 3	Croajingolong Coastal Ecotour Graded: EASY Fully accommodated. Lots of Easy Nature Walks. 7 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$3360 <i>Only a couple of places left</i>
October 29 <i>NEW</i>	Mystery Walking Weekend - East Gippsland Graded: MODERATE Fully accommodated. Lots of moderate grade walks, mystery locations 3 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$1340
November 2 <i>NEW</i>	Nature Sounds and Birdsong - Mitchell River Graded: EASY/MODERATE Fully accommodated and includes specialist guide. Easy/Moderate walking 4 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2160
November 9	Cape Conran Explorer Graded: EASY/MODERATE Fully accommodated. Lots of Easy / Moderate nature walks 4 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$1890
November 14	Birds of the Snowy River Graded: EASY Fully accommodated, easy walks with a focus on birdwatching 5 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2350
November 21	Snowy River & Errinundra Explorer Tour Graded: EASY Fully accommodated, lots of easy nature walks 5 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2400
December 2	High Country Huts beyond Licola Graded: EASY/MODERATE Fully accommodated. Easy/moderate walks with a focus on history 3 Days ex. Traralgon \$1600
January 9 2017	Alpine Discovery Tour Graded: EASY Fully accommodated, lots of short easy nature walks . 5 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2490
Autumn <i>Contact us for date options</i>	Gabo Island Discovery Ecotour Graded: EASY/MODERATE Fully accommodated. Easy-Moderate walks 5 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2800
March 6	Mt Feathertop Adventure Graded: MODERATE - CHALLENGING Fully accommodated. Lots of good moderate walks plus a challenging long day walk. 5 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2600
March 6	Alpine Walking in Autumn Graded: MODERATE Fully accommodated. Lots of good moderate walks. 5 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2600
March 22 <i>NEW</i>	Nature Sounds and Birdsong - Mitchell River Graded: EASY/MODERATE Fully accommodated and includes specialist guide. Easy/Moderate walking 4 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2160
April 3	Walking Errinundra Plateau Graded: MODERATE Fully accommodated. Lots of good moderate grade walks 5 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2450
April 28	High Country Huts North of Licola Graded: EASY/MODERATE Fully accommodated. Easy/moderate walks with a focus on history 3 Days ex. Traralgon \$1600
August 27	Birds of Hattah Kulkynne & Murray Sunset Graded: EASY/MODERATE Fully accommodated. Easy-moderate walks with a focus on birdwatching. 8 Days ex. Melbourne \$POA

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

Mystery Walking Weekend

Fancy a weekend of surprise bushwalks in East Gippsland? Do you need to escape and re-charge with some good walks but don't have much time free? What are you doing on Cup Weekend?

Jenny promises you river and mountain views as she leads you along walking tracks meandering through beautiful bushland, sprinkled with spring wildflowers. Wildlife are sure to add some surprise appearances too.



We won't walk all day, there will be some time to yourself too. Quiet nooks to sit and read a book, clean fresh air to enjoy and conversations with your small group of fellow walkers.

You can look forward to two nights accommodation in a peaceful garden and bush setting, with meals provided and lots of fun exploring. You do need to be fit, the walks are graded moderate and include hills and minor rocky tracks.

Departs Bairnsdale Sat November 29, 2016
3 Days (2 nights accommodation) \$1340

Get in early for Autumn 2017

Don't just think about spring, now is a perfect time to plan ahead and put your name down for an eco-tour or walking holiday in Autumn. Once the heat of summer has abated, our program includes a variety of great autumn opportunities.

March 6-10 Mt Feathertop Adventure / Alpine Walking in Autumn Two different walking experiences running concurrently and based at Dinner Plain Alpine Village.

March 22-25 Nature Sounds and Birdsong An introduction to nature sounds in the bush as we explore Mitchell River National Park.

April 3-7 Walking Errinundra Plateau Magnificent inspiring forests, leafy tracks & fern gullies.

April 28-30 High Country Huts beyond Licola Wayne shares his love and knowledge of High Country Huts and the stories behind them.

Feb-April Gabo Island Discovery Tour An island to explore, what fun! Seals, seabirds, interesting vegetation and of course a rich history.

Swans

The coal black feathered swan, scuffles down through golden tilting breaths of light. Highlighted flecks of brilliance form on white wing-tips, under a retreating sun.

Dipped down to meet the silvered sheen of waters still repose, feet extended skimming trails across a lakes reflected sky. Graceful wakes carve out from bodies floating ease.

Hard crossed flight replaced with tender curves of neck and wing now folded over a gently arching back. Simple progress by unseen effort, toward nested partners call

A rank strapped sedge green nest, mounded large and high above waters flow. Lifelong mate secure upon the lakes inky blackness with five downed chicks huddled beneath.

The greeting chorus demands attention, flight stressed muscles still recovering of no consequence with hungry mouths to please. The meal provided for all but

one who's lot of life will be short lived. For within each brood a few will suffer, the fate of one's belated birth, left starved when siblings keen to take your share.

Others too, will follow in deaths footsteps, when foxy breath ruffles new feathers not yet accustomed to joyous flight. A cygnets time so full of promise cut short with evil cunning.

Then comes a time when all fears forgotten new wings tested on windy days, now take flight. A cycle complete, as another coal black feathered swan departs, under a retreating sun.

Peter Lawrence



Nature Notes

Caterpillar Excavators?

No, I don't mean the yellow digging machines, I am talking about beautifully coloured caterpillars of the Pasture Day Moth (*Apina Callisto*) but they do dig holes!

We encountered quite a number of them at the Pink Lakes, on our recent birdwatching tour to the Mallee. We all watched fascinated as these industrious little caterpillars slowly and methodically reached down inside the narrow vertical hole they were digging and came back up with a bundle of soil which they deposited around the surface. The little balls of soil were systematically pushed further away, sometimes just on one side of the hole, sometimes in a wide ring all the way around.

Pasture Day Moths are native to Australia and are so named as they are a moth that flies by day rather than at night. Saltbush and other herbaceous plants including Early Nancy and succulents such as pigface are part of their natural diet, but they are also happy to eat some weeds such as Capeweed. Farmers are not fond of them as the caterpillars can be a nuisance in crops such as wheat. It has been suggested that they are more likely to attack crops when the weeds they have been eating have been killed by herbicides in cropping areas.



These are very pretty caterpillars with two distinctive yellow spots at the rear end and red blobs at the head end along with scattered bristles and blue spots on every segment. Once the hole is deep enough they pupate inside a chamber at the bottom, with the Moth emerging to be seen flying during Autumn.

The image above does not do justice to the effort this little fellow was putting in, so take a look at the Pasture Day Moth Caterpillar video added to the [Gippsland High Country Tours channel of You Tube](#)

While still on a caterpillar theme this article is reprinted from Gippsland High Country Tours Newsletter 14 - Spring 2000

Nature Notes - Processionary Caterpillars

*In May 1999, while walking along the banks of the Snowy River near the Vic/NSW Border, our group encountered a curious sight. A long line of small furry brown caterpillars slowly moving head to tail across the sand. There were 38 caterpillars in all, playing follow the leader like cars, bumper to bumper in a traffic jam. As we watched the procession reached some charcoal lying on the sand (from someone's campfire, I suppose) which seemed to confuse the leader. Perhaps the charcoal distracted it from its otherwise purposeful march. After some hesitation the lead caterpillar started moving in a curve which brought it back into the line behind. We now had a circle of caterpillars, appearing somewhat confused and the leader became lost amongst the others. There was much head waving, but those in line seemed reluctant to move from their designated position and take the lead. We left our confused furry friends for a short time and when we returned about half an hour later, it took some searching to find them. They were now all clinging to the stems and foliage of a young acacia sapling, probably a Black Wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*).*

Further inquiries and some text book hunting by Andrew Bould from Bairnsdale Field Naturalist Club, suggests that although there are a number of caterpillars who exhibit this procession like movement, these ones probably belong to the genus *Ochrogaster*. According to [Moths of Australia by IFB Common](#) the gregarious larvae of this genus live communally in silk bags spun and hung amongst the leaves and twigs of their food trees (often Acacias), although sometimes the silk bag is found at the base of the tree. When their food source runs out, they move procession-like in single file to another plant.

Continued page 7

Processionary Caterpillars *cont. from page 6*

It seems that if we had been aware of this, that day on the Snowy River we could have searched nearby Acacia trees and probably found the abandoned silk bag in a pretty much defoliated Acacia tree.

Since I wrote this 16 years ago, we have occasionally had similar encounters and I have learnt a bit more about these caterpillars. Each one goes through a series of about 8 moults before its fully grown. During the second and third stages they feed on Acacia or other leaves by day (returning to the silken bag at night), but older caterpillars feed only at night returning to the bag before morning. They leave a trail of silk to follow up and down the trunk of the tree. The brown stocking like bag grows over the summer months and soon becomes filled with cast skins and the associated hairs. It is also well documented that the hairs on these very hairy caterpillars can be responsible for some serious itching and dermatitis, so best admired, but left well alone.



It would seem these caterpillars also dig to some degree to pupate in soil under leaf litter.

The last time I came across a long line of Processionary Caterpillars I took some video footage which is now available on [You Tube by clicking this link](#). (Alternatively go to You Tube and type Gippsland High Country Tours into the search bar) Then look for this Processionary caterpillars video.

Take a look at our You Tube videos

[Click this link](#)

**or go to You Tube and search for
Gippsland High Country Tours**



Find us on
Facebook

Find our photo
albums on
Facebook now too.

Snowgums, Bogong Moths and Summer Wildflowers

In early January we head off to Victoria's alpine areas and invite you to come and share one of our long standing favourite tours.

For tens of thousands of year aboriginal people followed the seasons and trod well worn pathways that took them from coastal area up into the alps. Here they held ceremonies and feasted on seasonally abundant plants and animals. Your guide will share stories of the importance of Bogong moths to the Traditional Owners and the wildlife of the alps.



Alpine wildflowers are at their peak in January, temperatures are more pleasant than our capital cities and this is a great way to unwind after a busy festive season.

Our accommodation is at Dinner Plain Alpine Village, walks are short and leisurely so you can enjoy all nature has to offer. Take time to touch the smooth bark of the snowgums and enjoy their shapely form.

Alpine Discovery Tour, January 9-13, 2017

Snowy River Valley bird happenings

Kevin and Joanna from Deddick (where we stay on Birds of the Snowy River tour in November) tell us that the birds are already getting busy for spring -

"With all the rains we've had, the birds are having a great time. Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters are plentiful in the flowering yellow box trees. Kev saw a black fronted dotterel enjoying an overflowing dam - first time seen here.

Our White-winged Chough family are already playing around on their new nest and we are pleased that the Clamorous Reed Warbler is back to nest amongst the cumbungi on the dam near the house.

By the way, Kev also saw a Bassian Thrush in the Burgan by the river.

There are flocks of dozens of red browed firetail finches as well as plenty of diamond firetails and various cuckoos calling around the place. Lots of other birds - you will have to come up and see for yourself"

Ecotourism and making a contribution

As part of our commitment to Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism, Gippsland High Country Tours believes that our tour experiences should give something back to local communities and most importantly to the environments we visit.

One way we support local communities is buying locally and we are lucky to have a fresh food store in Bairnsdale which sources most of its meat, plus some fruits and vegetables from local producers. You will generally enjoy jams and preserves made by small cottage industries too.

Contributing to the environment is really important to us and we do this in a variety of ways. Most of this contribution is through data collection and surveys. Since 1992 Jenny has been recording wildlife encountered on tours and walks then contributing this data to the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas (and its predecessor). Mostly these are casual observations that add to knowledge of species distribution, but there have also included targeted surveys or repeated monitoring. Wildlife surveys run in conjunction with tours have compared pre and post fire wildlife records and surveyed for, or monitored threatened species. The re-discovery of a small population of threatened Smoky Mouse during a specialised wildlife research tour was very significant and resulted in an article published in The Victorian Naturalist.

Bird lists are routinely submitted to the Birdlife Bird Atlas and over 60 fixed survey sites are visited during a variety of tours. Sometimes these observations are part of a dedicated birdwatching tour, but most often just the birds encountered during a variety of walks and activities on a tour.

We have recently been able to add some nice invertebrate sightings (moths, dragonflies etc...) to the Atlas of Living Australia, which has resulted in some new "dots on the maps".

Currently we have a couple of Citizen Science projects we are contributing to-

- Looking out for feathers to collect from wetlands as part of an Australia-wide study on wetland birds called Feather-map.
- Looking out for emu feathers as part of a genetic study of Emus in south-eastern Australia.
- Reporting dead sea birds to contribute to a study of plastics in the diet of sea birds.

On any tour we do little things to help when we can, picking up rubbish (especially the sort that poses a risk to wildlife), removing a few scattered weeds or reporting a larger infestation to relevant managers. Every little bit helps.



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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.

To: **Gippsland High Country Tours,
Reply Paid 69,
Bruthen Vic. 3885 (No Stamp Required) or email info@gippslandhighcountrytours.com.au**

Please send me more information about the following trips - _____

Name: _____ **Address:** _____

_____ **Postcode:** _____ **Phone:** _____