

R.J.Chambers Reserve, Upper Pakenham. Fauna Survey Group report. February 2012.

Late in 2011, the Toomuc Valley Landcare group approached the Fauna Survey Group to assist them in adding to their knowledge of the fauna of the R.J.Chambers Reserve, Upper Pakenham. As a result we visited the reserve for our February survey trip and were warmly welcomed by this very enthusiastic group.

Chambers Reserve is managed by Cardinia Council. It is 121 ha in size and was logged in the early 1900s and 1960s, before being preserved as bushland. The reserve has numerous walking tracks and a pleasant picnic area, where we were granted permission to camp. Horse riders are able to use the outer trails, which had been slashed just prior to our survey, but clearly they use other tracks too at times. There are several vegetation communities including: drier open forest of Messmate (*Eucalyptus obliqua*) mixed with Narrow-leafed Peppermint (*E. radiata*) and an understorey of wire grass; beautiful wet gullies full of tree ferns; riparian forest along Toomuc Creek, which has several small intermittent tributaries flowing into it; and stands of eucalypts such as Mountain Grey Gum (*Eucalyptus cypellocarpa*), Manna Gum (*E. Viminalis*) and more Narrow-leafed Peppermint (*E. radiata*) with a dense understorey. There are many native grasses, along with sedges, rushes and ferns present and a good record of indigenous orchids exists. We observed Hyacinth Orchids, some late Tongue Orchids, Banksia spinulosa and Cassinia species in flower. Except along the main Toomuc Creek and tracks, there appeared to be surprisingly few weeds throughout the reserve.

Traps were set in two locations over both Friday and Saturday nights, along with all four of our Harp traps. General observations were made at both sites, as well as at the campsite and we went spotlighting on Friday evening.

Our first exciting sighting was of a Lace Monitor or Tree Goanna (*Varinus varius*), seen before we had even begun setting up traps. The locals said they had never seen one in the reserve, although it had been recorded in the past as being present. Several of us saw a Sambar Deer (*Cervus unicolor*) crash through the bush and then cross a track as we were putting out our trap lines a little later and many of us saw a Powerful Owl (*Ninox strenua*) perched high up in the trees too. An Eastern Yellow Robin (*Eopsaltria australis*) was seen feeding one of its offspring with a McCoy's Skink (*Anepischtos maccoyi*), which was quite amusing, as the young bird initially tried to eat the skink tail first, then had a second and third try before swallowing it head first. While the cage traps caught nothing over the weekend, the Elliott traps yielded several Agile Antechinus (*Antechinus agilis*) and Bush Rats (*Rattus fuscipes*). The Harp traps caught three species of bats and many bird observations were made, particularly with the help of some keen bird observers.

It appears that little if any trapping had been carried out prior to our stay. We were pleased with the results of our efforts and, as anticipated, we added many common species to the known fauna list – nineteen in fact. No bats had been previously recorded, so the three caught, Chocolate Wattled Bat (*Chalinilobus morio*), Lesser Long-eared Bat (*Nyctophilus geoffroyi*) and Little Forest Bat, (*Vespedalus vulturus*) and the one which was heard, White-striped Freetail Bat (*Austronomus australis*) were a positive start. Surprisingly, a couple of other common bats were not found, but are most likely present. A number of adult and juvenile Water Skinks (*Eulamprus tympanum*) were seen or handled and two Garden Skinks (*Lampropholis guichenoti*) were recorded. Mammals additions were of the Common Brushtail Possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula*), the Mountain Brushtail Possum (*Trichosurus caninus*), Eastern Grey Kangaroos (*Macropus giganteus*), Black Wallaby (*Wallabia bicolour*), Common Wombat (*Vombatus ursinus*), Yellow-bellied Glider (*Petaurus australis*), Bush Rat (*Rattus fuscipes*) and the introduced European Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) and Sambar Deer (*Cervus*

unicolour). Ewing's or Brown Tree Frogs (*Littoria ewingii*) and Striped Marsh Frogs (*Limnodynastes peronii*) were heard calling and two new birds were added too, namely the Tawny Frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*) and Rainbow Lorikeet (*Trichoglossus haematodus*).

(An unexpected sighting of a Nankeen Night Heron (*Nycticorax caledonicus*) seen during spotlighting the week before our visit was another new record for this bushland area. All our results are sent to the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas as part of our permit and this record, along with other sightings, will be noted separately).

On Friday night, a large number of people met in the picnic shelter before splitting into four groups to go spotlighting along the road and tracks. Only a few species were observed or heard, perhaps because of the moonlight. These included Sugar Gliders (*Petaurus breviceps*), Yellow-bellied Glider (*Petaurus australis*), Common Froglets (*Crinia signifera*), Striped Marsh Frogs (*Limnodynastes peronii*), Southern Boobook Owl (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*), some roosting birds and a Bobuck or Mountain Brushtail Possum (*Trichosurus caninus*).

On Saturday evening we were invited to a combined thank you with Landcare and Fauna Survey Group members. The weather continued to hold off or to circle around us and we had time to socialise, enjoy the views across the valley and partake of the scrumptious food on offer. On dusk, an eager group, including some children, ducked off to release the bats. There were many cries of surprise and wonder as the microbats emerged from the holding bag and then flew off into the darkening sky. We returned for dessert, before eventually heading back to our tents after a sensational evening. Many thanks go to Don and Sue for their wonderful hospitality.

During the camp two Powerful Owl (*N. strenua*) pellets, which had been found in Chambers Reserve prior to our visit, were also examined. The bones in both pellets were identified as being the remains of a juvenile Yellow-bellied Glider (*P. australis*) which was a most interesting find. The owl had been observed from time to time in previous weeks with the remains of numerous Common Ring-tailed Possums (*Pseudochireirus peregrinus*), but none were seen during the survey. The bird had possibly reduced their numbers and had then been lucky enough to grab the juvenile glider.

Summary of trapping results.

Total cage trap nights - 20. Total Elliott trap nights - 200. Total Harp trap nights - 8.

Species	Female	Male	Total
Agile Antechinus	1	5	6
Bush Rat	7 adults, 3 juveniles	0	10
Chocolate Wattled Bat	11	5	16
Lesser Long-eared Bat	3	0	3
Little Forest Bat	14	10	24

The weekend was a great success, with about thirty Landcare members and three Cardinia Council officers joining us at some stage during Friday, Saturday or Sunday for the various activities. Thanks go to the other Fauna Survey Group permit holders and FNCV members who helped make everything run smoothly, as well as to the wonderful Landcare Group, who showed lots of interest in our work, did so much to assist us and who clearly love their piece of bushland.

(NB. All trapping carried out during our surveys is done under our permit which is issued by the Department of Sustainability and Environment).

Sally. Fauna Survey Group, Field Naturalists Club of Victoria.

