

Montreal Field Journal

A monthly newsletter showcasing the biodiversity of Montreal Goldfield

Issue No. 1 ~ March 2023

Hello everyone, and welcome to the first edition of the Montreal Field Journal. Each month I will be sharing with you a small overview of the biodiversity observed on the Montreal Goldfield over the preceding month, with photos and field notes included for the more interesting or rare observations. As the editor it is my hope that you will not only find this informative but that it will also tempt you to visit the goldfield or get out into your own gardens or local bushland to discover some of the mentioned species for yourselves – you might be surprised at what else you find! Enjoy.

Much like the vagaries of autumn weather my observations at Montreal Goldfield during March 2023 were a mix of the expected and the unanticipated.

FLORA – Common Heath (*Epacris impressa*), Correa (*Correa reflex* var. *speciosa*) and Coastal Banksia (*Banksia integrifolia*) are all coming into flower this month, and the small low-growing herb White Root (*Lobelia purpurascens*) is continuing to bloom. Although not their peak season, occasional blooms of Fairy Fan-Flower (*Scaevola aemula*) and Showy Guinea Flower (*Hibbertia linearis*) can also be found around the site. Of particular interest was the discovery of a single **Austral Ladies'-Tresses** (*Spiranthes australis*) plant in flower. This delightful little orchid (pictured at right) has up to 60 tiny pink-and-white flowers arranged in a spiral around the 250mm – 450mm tall flower spike. Although not an uncommon species in the Bega Valley Shire this orchid is usually found growing in boggy or swampy ground so to find it growing on the Montreal Goldfield site was quite exciting and very unexpected.



BIRDS – Although the seasonal visiting bird species have “flown the coop” all the usual suspects can readily be seen, or at least heard, across the goldfield. Brush Wattlebirds, New Holland Honeyeaters, Red-browed Finches and both Superb and Variegated Fairywrens can all be observed in the shrubs and trees surrounding the Heritage Centre, especially in early to mid-morning. The male Fairywrens are in their eclipse phase at this time of year and particularly charming as they transition from breeding to non-breeding plumage. Grey Fantails and Eastern Yellow Robins are common and, in the afternoons, shy Wonga Pigeons can be seen along the track leading to Wallaga Lake as they enjoy a final feed for the day.

REPTILES – Although less active and less frequently seen now that the cooler weather is approaching, Jacky Dragons, Yellow-bellied Waterskinks and several species of Sunskink were all observed in March. I was also thrilled to observe a **Mustard-bellied Snake** on the Goldfield for the first time. This mildly venomous elapid species is endemic to the coast and ranges of south-east NSW



with a range extending from Newnes in the north to Merimbula in the south. Growing up to 40 cm in length, this attractive little snake is brown to grey in colour with a bright mustard coloured belly and a distinct dark head and yellow to orange band over the nape of its neck. Often found in leaf litter or under logs, the species is considered nocturnal but it will venture out on overcast days or in the late afternoon (I observed the Montreal individual on a cool, overcast morning in leaf litter). Its diet consists mostly of lizards. Interestingly, and rather unusually for elapid snakes, female Mustard-bellied Snakes are

viviparous (i.e. they give birth to live young) with an average litter size of 5. With its relatively small range and largely nocturnal and elusive nature we are lucky to have this snake species documented as present on the Montreal Goldfield.

INSECTS – Five new insect species were noted on the Montreal Goldfield for the first time this month – a Horned Treehopper (*Caraon tasmaniae*), a Vase-cell Mud-dauber Wasp (*Sceliphron*



formosum) and three beetle species. One of the beetles – a Fiddler Beetle (*Eupoecila australasiae*) - is fairly common in the area but the other two are far less common and rather fabulous! First was a large male **Rhinoceros Beetle** (*Dasygnathus trituberculatus* – no common name) which is shown at left and a day later, unfortunately found dead and missing its head, a large 35 mm long Jewel Beetle (*Temognatha suturalis* – again, no common name). With its brightly coloured blue-edged yellow elytra (wing covers) and

iridescent blue/purple thorax this beetle was both stunning and impressive despite its unfortunate state. I'm hopeful that at some point I'll be able to find a live one (wish me luck folks ... I'll probably need it as this beauty is not often seen in the Bega Valley Shire) Its sighting affords me a nice little segue to share a little information about one of my favourite beetle families.



Jewel Beetles are so named because of the brightly iridescent or metallic colours and strong patterning of many species. They belong to Buprestidae, a large family of beetles with more than 1,200 species recorded in Australia. The adult beetles are elongate and usually flattened in shape with large eyes, short antennae and a body length which ranges from 3 to 65 mm. Adults feed on either nectar (with many species showing a strong preference for white or pink flowers including eucalypt blossoms) or leaves. The larvae are usually woodborers in stems, branches or roots although some are leaf-miners or gall-formers. In the past 6 months four jewel beetle species have been found on the Montreal Goldfield site and it is hoped that as

monitoring continues more species will be found and identified. An interesting fact – the iridescence that makes many of the jewel beetle species so stunningly beautiful is not due to pigmentation but instead is the result of an effect called structural colouration whereby the microscopic texture of their hard exoskeleton selectively reflects specific frequencies of light in a particular direction. This is the same effect that makes a compact disc reflect multiple colours.

ABOVE – a small yellow and black Jewel Beetle – *Castiarina oblita* – feeding on a Flannel Flower at Montreal Goldfield – photo taken Nov. 15 2022

Although their numbers are beginning to dwindle in line with the cooling weather many of the previously observed insect species are still present. This list includes Blue-spotted Hawker dragonflies (*Adversaeschna brevistyla*), Red-and-Blue Damselflies (*Xanthagrion erythroneurum*) and several species of butterfly including the Splendid Ochre, Varied Sword-grass Brown, Common Brown, Brown Ringlet and Black Jezebel. Surprisingly for so late in the season a caterpillar of the moth *Neola semiaurata* was also found (see photo at right). These distinctive and colourful caterpillars are common from late spring and throughout summer and are quite easy to find on Acacias. I can't recall finding any others in autumn but perhaps the cooler and later than usual start to summer has delayed their emergence.



A final word before I sign off for the month. All of the species mentioned in this newsletter, and many others, are logged on the **Montreal Goldfield Biodiversity Project** (with accompanying photos) on **iNaturalist** and I would encourage all of you to hop online and have a look – the black and white images here don't do justice to the beauty of our flora and fauna. If you google iNaturalist and then type Montreal Goldfield Biodiversity into the site's search box you should be able to access it easily. The project is still in its infancy but with 466 species, many of which are rarely seen in the Bega Valley Shire, listed it is exciting to consider what else is yet to be documented or discovered. Who knew that one small site could contain and support such a richly diverse ecosystem?

If you would like to receive a copy of this newsletter each month via your email inbox, or if you have any questions, you can contact me at deb_taylor142@hotmail.com . Subscription is free and will also allow me to keep you updated on any upcoming events at the Montreal Goldfield. If you would like assistance with the identification of something you have found please also feel free to contact me – to this end photos would be helpful if you have them.

Thanks for reading and, until next month, be kind to each other and to our environment,

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