



## INDIGENOTES

ISSUE NUMBER 7, OCTOBER 1987

Welcome to the third edition of Indigenotes for this year. Our intentions to produce one edition per month have failed dramatically so far. Due to circumstances beyond our control, the promised articles by David Suzuki and Andrew Paget have gone west, but instead we have the third installment of "An Insect Diary from the Suburbs" by John Reid.

Since the last general meeting (on September 29th), the collective (Geoff Carr, Mark Trendgrove, Graham Kenneday, Tym Barlow, Trish Edwards and John Reid) has met twice. They have drafted a submission to the Ministry for Planning and Environment and the Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands, asking for joint funding from the Grants to Conservation and Environment Groups programme for a publication by IFFA on indigenous plants. You are welcome to inspect the proposals (which are due in by 30th September) at the next meeting.

The Collective has also decided to incorporate IFFA, which allows formal recognition of the organization by, for example, funding bodies. The action person for this matter is Tym Barlow.

IFFA's NEXT GENERAL MEETING will be held at 8 p.m. on Tuesday 27th October at the upstairs seminar room at the Student Amenities Building at the Victorian College of Agriculture and Horticulture at Burnley (enter from Yarra Boulevard, Melways map 45 A12). Issues to be discussed include the publication submission, a proposal that general meetings (with an informative/educational aim) and business meetings alternate, and new directions for IFFA. Members are welcome of course to participate in these discussions. There will also be sections of the meeting for news and show and tell, so keep looking in your environment for something to bring to the meeting to show everyone.

### HELP

At this stage a box containing IFFA minutes books, material for Indigenotes, archive copies of Indigenotes, the mailing list, etc is still missing. If anyone knows the whereabouts of this box, please let Tony Faithfull know on 386 0264 (after hours). Please also contact Tony if you know of anybody who was on the mailing list who did not receive a copy of this edition of Indigenotes.

AN INSECT DIARY FROM THE SUBURBS - PART 3

JOHN REID

**MARCH 4** That black wasp with the rapidly twitching orange antennae mentioned in Insect Diary Part 2 (Dec. 20), was seen carrying a presumably parasitised spider.

**MARCH 6** Warm night. Grabbed hold of a large brown and gold longicorn beetle and it let out a repeated high-pitched squeak until I released it.

**MARCH 7** Passionvine Hoppers (*Scolypopa australis*) have passed from their 'fluffy bum' nymph stages to the adult insect, a quick mover with see-through wings marked with brown. Some kids I know call these hang gliders.

**MARCH 10** Out at Bimbadeen Heights Primary School in Mooroolbark, lots of Gum-leaf Skeletoniser (*Uraba lugens*) caterpillars and a couple already pupating on gum leaves.

**MARCH 25** At the lights after a beautiful sunny day, 55 small moths inc. the first Gum-leaf Skeletoniser moth of the new generation and a Red-lined Geometrid (*Crypsiphona occultaria*). On the upper surface of its wings, the Red-lined Geometrid has the grey bark-like patterning frequently seen in the family Geometridae, but is unique in having a whitish underside with a broad black band and thin red stripe under the hindwings.

**MARCH 26** At Tindalls Reserve, Warrandyte, Imperial White (*Delias harpalyce*) and Wood White (*D. aganippe*) butterflies feeding on the flowers of a Box Mistletoe (*Amyema miquelii*) growing on Red Box (*Eucalyptus polyanthemus*).

**MARCH 28** At Birrarung Park, Templestowe, following a wet day and night and hot on the heels of warm sunny weather. On the ground under Silver Wattle (*Acacia dealbata*) and River Red Gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*), the empty dry brown pupal cases of Swift Moths near exit holes in the ground. The caterpillars of these moths live underground where they feed on plant roots. When they reach full size they move towards the surface of the soil, stopping to pupate just below the surface. After many months underground the first soaking rains of autumn provide the stimulus for the moths to emerge.

**MARCH 31** In Jumping Creek reserve, Warrandyte, on a still day with light drizzling rain, watched a Grey Fantail swoop from a perch to take an unidentified moth in the air just over grass level.

**APRIL 1** At dusk and during early evening the long-horned green grasshoppers or katydids (*Caedicia* sp.) provided the background music for a big turnout of moths at the outside light.

**APRIL 10** Fresh looking Common Grass-blue butterflies (*Zizina labradus*). At the night light, the first Satin Moth (*Thalaina clara*) of the season. This beautiful autumn-emerging geometrid with satiny white wings bearing a distinctive dark brown pattern, would have been developing as a pupa for about seven months in the leaf litter below the wattle tree where it had fed as a larva.

**APRIL 28** Overcast with soaking rain. Four swift moths at the light.

**APRIL 30** Collected katydid eggs, laid in a row on grass stems, first on the introduced Cocksfoot (*Dactylis glomerata*), then on Red-anther Wallaby-grass (*Danthonia pallida*).

**MAY 5** Pulled up a large flowering Brassica sp., possibly Cabbage, on the nature strip (where nature has indeed been stripped) outside Ringwood market. Near the base of the plant were seven green caterpillars of the Cabbage White butterfly (*Pieris rapae*). This introduced butterfly arrived in Australia in 1937, probably from New Zealand where it was introduced from Europe in 1930. The first record was from Victoria. By 1943 it had spread to all Australian states and its larvae have been chewing on cabbages, cauliflowers, broccoli, turnips, radishes etc. out here ever since.

**MAY 7** On young eucalypts at Jells Park, Glen Waverley, several tight clusters of recently hatched sawfly larvae (spitfires), now about 1 cm long. The initial grouping of sawfly larvae results from the group of eggs laid by the adult female sawfly in

March or early April. Using her ovipositor (egg-layer) like a saw she lays her eggs within the leaf tissue. From the time of hatching the larvae are dependent on each other. In fact only a few of the group are capable of chewing their way out of their leafy prison. But the weaker individuals also escape using the holes made by the stronger ones. From this time on their success depends on 'safety in numbers'. They rest together during the day, rearing up as one many-headed monster to deter a potential predator, and at night when they disperse across their food plant to feed they still keep in contact by tapping the tips of their abdomens on the branches. Also at Jells Park, lots of fresh looking Gum-leaf Skeletoniser eggs, laid in straight lines on gum leaves and looking like tiny strings of green pearls.

**MAY 9** At Nortons Park in Wantirna, Imperial White, Cabbage White and Common Grass-blue butterflies still flying, but it must be getting near the end of the butterfly flight season down here in Southern Victoria.

**MAY 16** Along the railway line at Heathmont night spotting for Skipper butterfly larvae on Spiny-headed Matrush (*Lomandra longifolia*). No luck despite a lot of chewed leaves, but we did find a couple of adult weevils.

**MAY 24** Very cold night and the rain and hail came pelting down. 16 Swift Moths (*Oxycanus* sp.) at the outside light.

**MAY 26** One of the neighbourhood cats came in to try and catch a Swift Moth that was fluttering helplessly in a jar by the door.

**JUNE 1** Up at Montrose, two large brackets of White Punk fungus (*Piptoporus portentosus*) growing on Narrow-leaf Peppermint (*Eucalyptus radiata*), becoming riddled with small holes, presumably the work of fungus-eating beetles.

**JUNE 7** In the Plenty River gorge at Janefield for World Environment Day, we found two perfect fruiting specimens of one of the vegetable caterpillars (*Cordyceps gunnii*). This is a fungus whose spores are eaten by or attach to Swift Moth larvae (*Oxycanus* spp.). The fungus body develops as a mass of threads (hyphae) in the body of the larva, eventually killing it and turning it into a fully vegetabilized caterpillar. In late autumn and in winter, slender spore-bearing reproductive structures are projected above ground from the head of the parasitised larva.

**JUNE 8** Along Blind Creek, Boronia, checked out a few plants of Thatch Saw-sedge (*Gahnia radula*) and found three sheltering Skipper caterpillars.

**JUNE 22** In cold overcast conditions at the outside light, only five small moths and about ten small flies.

**JULY 20** In a patch of the indigenous Scrub Nettle (*Urtica incisa*) growing next to the Yarra River at Wonga Park, found some Australian Admiral caterpillars (*Vanessa itea*) sheltering in rolled-up leaves but got stung by the nettles in the process (and that's not a part of my body).

**JULY 27** Flying insects might be in short supply, but there are plenty of caterpillars to be found if you're a bird or a nature watcher. On a dry slope in Ferntree Gully National Park we found many shrubs of Hop Goodenia (*Goodenia ovata*) with holes in their leaves. On closer examination, small larvae of Glatigny's Tiger Moth (*Spilosoma glatignyi*) were found on the leaves, but dropped quickly to the ground when disturbed.

**AUG 15** At the SGAP Maroondah group wildflower show in Ringwood, collected a caterpillar of the Fucata Gum Moth (*Plesanemma fucata*) spotted climbing a wall after escaping from one of the displays, a spray of eucalypt leaves it had been feeding on. This leaf green caterpillar has a slender spike-like projection pointing forward from the second segment of its thorax. This lines up end to end with a pale line stretching lengthwise along the caterpillar's back. While (normally) resting during the day, it constructs a tough silk platform in the middle of a gum-leaf and aligns itself on the platform with its dorsal stripe lined up with the prominent pale mid-vein of the leaf.

**SEPT 19** Our first indigenous butterfly of the new season, an Australian Admiral.

**SEPT 20** Painted Lady butterflies common out here in the eastern suburbs. In good condition and very active, in many localities. Feeding on the pea flowers of Purple Coral-pea (*Hardenbergia violacea*) and Golden Bush-pea (*Pultenaea gunnii*) at Mount Evelyn.

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