

# GIPPSLAND HIGH COUNTRY TOURS

Newsletter no. 38

P.O. Box 69, Bruthen Vic. 3885

Australia

www.gippslandhighcountrytours.com.au

Spring 2012

Telephone (03) 5157 5556

Fax (03) 5157 5539

Email: info@gippslandhighcountrytours.com.au



## Look out for those spots.....

by Maria Cardoso

They have distinctive spotty coats and are agile and slender like cats! They are so much like cats in fact that they are known by some as native or tiger cats. Called Quolls, these wonderful creatures are Australia's second largest carnivorous marsupial and they play a pivotal ecological role in many Australian ecosystems. Have you ever seen one? If the answer is NO, then you're certainly not alone! Apart from a few sporadic sightings over the years, these elusive, mainly nocturnal animals are very good at not being "spotted"!

This is particularly true of the Spotted-tailed Quoll, *Dasyurus maculatus* in Victoria. The geographical distribution of Spotted-tailed Quolls has contracted significantly since European settlement, primarily due to habitat loss and fragmentation, but also introduced predators and persecution. Sadly, a large number of recent ecological surveys have failed to detect their presence in a variety of habitats within their range.

Instead, remote-sensing cameras have captured images of other large carnivores such as wild dogs, foxes and cats. These introduced species compete with quolls for limited resources, with the potential to drive quoll populations to even lower densities, making them difficult to detect. For this reason the Spotted-tailed Quoll is classified as Endangered under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* (EPBC 1999). Unlike Victorian Spotted-tailed Quolls, which are at the edge of their geographical distribution, larger, more sustainable populations still remain in parts of Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania.

In East Gippsland, population strongholds range from the Errinundra plateau to the Upper Snowy River Catchment. However, quolls have also on rare occasions been recorded closer to the coast (eg. recent record by Jenny Edwards). These records, which may be at a considerable distance from the population of origin, are likely to represent transient males in search of food or mates. *Continued page 6*

## Alpine Wildflowers

For something different after the Christmas rush is over, take a break and escape to the Victorian Alps for a taste of Alpine summer and a chance to unwind.



Relax, let us take care of the planning, then lead you on some great short walks and provide you with lots of information to stimulate your mind.

Along with glorious mountain views, picturesque snowgums and colourful butterflies to tempt photographers, there will be time to enjoy the profusion of summer wildflowers up close.

Enjoy the company of like-minded travellers and take in the rich history of the High Country.

Fully accommodated, staying in a cosy lodge amongst the snowgums at Dinner Plain ski village and also visiting Omeo and Dargo.

**Alpine Discovery Tour, January 7-1, 2013**

### ***INSIDE:***

|                                  |                               |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b><i>Calendar / Program</i></b> | <b><i>page 4</i></b>          |
| <b><i>Discounts</i></b>          | <b><i>page 2</i></b>          |
| <b><i>In the pipeline</i></b>    | <b><i>page 7</i></b>          |
| <b><i>Reply Coupon</i></b>       | <b><i>pages 8</i></b>         |
| <b><i>Trip Highlights</i></b>    | <b><i>page 3</i></b>          |
| <b><i>Walking</i></b>            | <b><i>page 5 &amp; 8</i></b>  |
| <b><i>Wildlife</i></b>           | <b><i>pages 6 &amp; 7</i></b> |

## Editorial

Spring is upon us and now is the perfect time to shrug off winter and plan to head outdoors to enjoy the natural beauty and inspiration that one finds in nature.

The program inside looks forward to summer and into 2013 and I hope you find something there to suit you.

In a change to the way I keep in touch with you, Newsletters will now only be produced once per year, so the next one will in winter 2013. However in between, I will be sending out a few email bulletins with updates on the regular program, new tours and special offers.

Even if you enjoy receiving a hard copy newsletter in the mail, please ensure I have a current email address so I can keep you up to date between newsletters.

If you don't have an email address and want to receive the bulletins by post during the year, please give me a ring to arrange this.

Do you think about your carbon footprint when you travel? Gippsland High Country Tours can help you reduce your "travel carbon footprint". My last newsletter looked at how I use environmentally friendly printing (and you can too!). This time I am encouraging you to consider leaving the car at home when you travel.

Almost all of the trips in the program have itineraries planned around the VLine train timetable between Melbourne and Bairnsdale. There will be one less car on the road while you relax on the train, read a book, have a snooze or enjoy the scenery along the way.

Full day by day itineraries are available for each trip in the current program and I'm happy to answer any questions to assist with your holiday planning. I am away from my phone a lot, so please be prepared to leave a message and I will get back to you as soon as I can.

*Jenny*

*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.*

*This Newsletter is typeset and published by Gippsland High Country Tours. Printed on 100% post consumer waste recycled paper.*

*Illustrations by Catherine Turnbull (All illustrations and photographs are subject to Copyright and must not be reproduced without permission) Photographs by J. Edwards.*

## 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](http://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.**

## Electronic version of Newsletter

This Newsletter is now available electronically as a (fairly large) pdf. file. 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 electronic copy.

## Spring Discount

Select your ecotour or walking experience experience & book **before October 12, 2012**

Attach this coupon and receive

**5% Discount**

**in addition to the regular discounts**

off the advertised fare for any departure of 3-7 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 Oct 12, 2012 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

### Shells and Seashore life of East Gippsland - March 2012

Warm weather and sunny skies greeted us at Croajingolong National Park. Low tides and a myriad of invertebrate rock pool life made for exciting times as participants began eagerly turning over rocks to make discoveries in the pools. [Rocks were always replaced to protect habitats and resting places of the inhabitants].



Alan Monger shared his wealth of knowledge on marine invertebrates, which are often different in the warmer waters of eastern Victoria to those from the cooler southern waters, making East Gippsland an ideal region for comparison of species found as we travelled east. Evening talks gave us greater knowledge of the marine flora and fauna and their interactions and discussion on the importance of conservation of the unique Southern Australian marine invertebrate habitat ensued.

Over 60 different species of chitons, snails, anemones, crabs, starfish, barnacles and other invertebrates were recorded in pools made colourful with sponges, seaweeds and encrustations. Some interesting highlights

were a bubble shell with a very large, frilly pink foot, a bright green edged sea hare, many shiny, black elephant snails and grey and red feather-duster worms. Sea stars (*Meridiastra calcar*) were found at all sites in many colour combinations and patterns.

As usual, food and accommodation were excellent and watching seals at sea playing in the kelp with sea eagles flying overhead from the veranda of the Point Hicks lighthouse keepers cottages was delightful. Jenny's organisation of time and routes was perfect with time for relaxation, a natural history trip on the Genoa River and the opportunity to admire some of the lovely vistas along the way in this beautiful part of Victoria. I particularly enjoyed seeing the Snowy River ending its journey at Marlo.

If you missed this inaugural shells and seashores trip and are interested in natural history I highly recommend you grab your shorts, sand shoes and sunhat and make a booking for the chance of a unique experience in some East Gippsland rock pools.

**Thelma Bridle (South Australia)**



**Bubble Shell ( Photo: T & P Bridle)**

### Seashore Life of East Gippsland 2013

A wonderful week of exploring our seashores and learning about the life to be found there. Enjoy an active and educational holiday with lots of rock pool rambles and beach combing. Your knowledgeable guide, Alan Monger will lead you to discover not only which creatures live in the pools, but what part they play in the overall picture. All data gathered is sent on to the Marine Research Group of Victorian Field Naturalist Club to add to the knowledge of species distribution.

Walks are generally short, but you need to be fit and agile enough to feel comfortable clambering over rocks to discover what lives in the still clear pools. No previous knowledge is required, but please bring along a healthy curiosity and a desire to get to know our seashore life up close.

**5 days with 4 nights accommodation. March 18-22, 2013.**

**\$2430 ex. Bairnsdale or \$2550 ex. Melbourne. Book early to avoid disappointment.**

## Calendar of Ecotours and Walks 2012 - 2013

|                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <b>October 8</b>                 | <b>Croajingolong Coastal Ecotour</b> Graded: EASY<br>Fully accommodated. Easy Walks.<br>7 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2830 7 Days ex. Melbourne \$2950   |
| <b>October 24</b><br><b>NEW</b>  | <b>River Life at Waterholes</b> Graded: EASY<br>Fully Accommodated. Easy Walking. Combined Ecotour and Wildlife Research Project.<br>4 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$1800 4 Days ex. Melbourne \$1920                    |
| <b>November 5</b><br><b>NEW</b>  | <b>Walking Errinundra Plateau</b> Graded: MODERATE<br>Fully accommodated with lots of moderate day walks.<br>5 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$1720 5 Days ex. Melbourne \$1840  |
| <b>November 12</b>               | <b>Birds of the Snowy River</b> Graded: VERY EASY<br>Fully accommodated. Easy walks with a focus on birdwatching.<br>5 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$1900 5 Days ex. Melbourne \$2020                                    |
| <b>November 19</b>               | <b>Walk Mt Howitt &amp; Tali Karng</b> Graded: MODERATE - CHALLENGING<br>Vehicle-based camping with Moderate-Challenging day walks.<br>5 Days ex. Heyfield/Rosedale \$1900 5 Days ex. Melbourne \$2010           |
| <b>January 7</b><br><b>2013</b>  | <b>Alpine Discovery Tour</b> Graded: VERY EASY<br>Fully accommodated, lots of short easy nature walks .<br>5 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2100 5 Days ex. Melbourne \$2220  |
| <b>March 4</b>                   | <b>Birds of the Snowy River</b> Graded: VERY EASY<br>Fully accommodated. Easy walks with a focus on birdwatching.<br>5 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$1900 5 Days ex. Melbourne \$2020                                    |
| <b>March 18</b>                  | <b>Shells &amp; Seashore Life of East Gippsland</b> Graded: EASY-MODERATE<br>Fully accommodated. Easy-moderate walks. Discovery and Research ecotour<br>5 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2430 5 Days ex. Melbourne \$2550 |
| <b>March 30</b><br><b>EASTER</b> | <b>Wonders of Wildlife Ecotour - Snowy River</b> Graded: EASY/MODERATE<br>2 nights camping & easy walks. Combined Ecotour and Wildlife Research Project.<br>3 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$1050                         |
| <b>April 15</b>                  | <b>Mt Feathertop Adventure</b> Graded: MODERATE-CHALLENGING<br>Fully accommodated with moderate - challenging full day walks.<br>5 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2000 5 Days ex. Melbourne \$2120                        |
| <b>September 1</b><br><b>NEW</b> | <b>Birds of Hattah Kulkynne &amp; Murray Sunset</b> Graded: EASY-MODERATE<br>Fully accommodated. Easy-moderate walks with a focus on birdwatching.<br>10 Days ex. Melbourne \$POA                                |
| <b>September 25</b>              | <b>Walking from Waterholes</b> Graded: MODERATE<br>Fully accommodated. Walking all day, from an accommodation base.<br>4 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$POA 4 Days ex. Melbourne \$POA                                    |
| <b>September 30</b>              | <b>Walking Croajingolong</b> Graded: MODERATE<br>Fully accommodated. Lots of Moderate Walks.<br>7 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$POA 7 Days ex. Melbourne \$POA   |

More than just a holiday, a rewarding High Country experience featuring expert guidance and lots of interaction with nature. These small group tours promote an appreciation and understanding of the High Country's varied environments, rich history and diverse flora and fauna. **Full itinerary for each trip available on request.**

## Walking and more walking

Spring walking has a special feel about it. The bush is awakening and coming to life after a sleepy winter rest. At higher elevations the snow has melted and the warm sun brings with it new growth. Birdsong tells us that our feathered friends are looking for mates and building nests while all around us the forest understorey is bursting into bloom. Tracks are lined with wattles and other flowering shrubs and at our feet tiny wildflowers are making an appearance. Spring rains keep the bush moist, treeferns are slowly unfurling their new fronds and streams and waterfalls are racing.



**Walking Errinundra Plateau** Walk beneath towering eucalypts, gaze up enjoying the straight trunks and admire the colour of the bark, peeling in strips. Stretch your legs along fern lined tracks and discover Gippsland Waratahs in bloom. Tucked away in a far corner of Victoria, the Errinundra Plateau is off the beaten tourist track and often we see no other walkers, which adds to the feeling of solitude. Each night return to cosy cottage accommodation. November 5-9, 2012 Very few places still available, so be quick. **More walks - page 8**

**Walk Mt Howitt & Tali Karnq** Mountain peaks, a hidden lake, waterfalls and days filled with fantastic walks. You need enough sense of adventure for 4 nights vehicle based camping and enough fitness to enjoy good long day walks. Awaken each morning to the sounds and smells of the mountains and enjoy relaxed evenings together at camp. **November 19-23, 2012**

### Our Lives

Time flows through our lives like a mountain stream.

Born in a snow-patch spring, a young life fragile but insistent. Just a step across at first, this trickle slowly twists and turns through an early life.

Gathering strength and depth with each mile traveled, tumbling over small obstacles with the ease of youth. Enriched by a growing band of life within.

Faster now, while mossy rocks force the growing torrent to jump and froth. Noisily dropping under aged dark logs, to return filled with vigor and splash.

By now a lot depend on the strong current flow, to give life and hope. Grand old trees, arching branches shade fish and birds, now entwined in middle life.

Mountain ridges loose their toes to the deep brown might of a river in flood. Old lives once shared washed away, to make space for the new.

More slowly now, water stressed by attacks from all around. Protection stripped back painfully, as a spirit is pummeled by forces unknown.

And then, when all ahead is sad and uncaring, a new chance at life appears. The beautiful call of a nesting swan now echoes across the marshland stillness, as again a mountain stream finds life and hope.

**Peter Lawrence**

**Continued from page 1**

Within their very large home ranges (as large as 2000ha for big males), territorial spotted-tailed quolls somehow manage to meet and breed in winter and, if successful, rear up to six young. Young quolls remain in dens (hollow logs, burrows, rock crevices, etc...) until spring when they venture out to disperse and find their own territories. Juvenile survival is relatively low at this time due to resource competition and predation of young naïve animals.

The loss of individuals from populations, be it due to natural selection and/or anthropogenic disturbance such as habitat destruction and introduced predators, tends to fragment population structure. This means that successfully finding a mate and breeding is likely to become increasingly more challenging and potentially lead to population declines in the long-term. Conservation strategies such as the control of introduced predators reduce known detrimental impacts of these species on quolls and other medium-sized native fauna. The Southern Ark project featured in a previous Newsletter\* is an excellent example of a long term predator control program targeting the introduced red fox.



**Spotted-tailed Quoll (photo: Jenny Nelson)**

These programs aim to reverse the effects of population decline by reducing pressure on threatened populations, thus allowing them to hopefully recover to more sustainable levels. However, removing competing predators alone may not be sufficient. Other conservation measures must also be considered. For instance, because breeding success is highly correlated to the availability of suitable denning sites, the conservation and restoration of suitable habitat also becomes important.

Luckily for the quoll, its predatory and opportunistic nature has allowed it to survive in certain landscapes fragmented by man. To its detriment however, encounters with humans have not always ended in the quoll's favour. Quolls are known to raid chook pens and rubbish bins and for that reason are often persecuted as a pest and menace.



**Eastern Quoll (note the absence of tail spots)**

Currently on Bruny Island, off the east coast of Tasmania, the smaller Eastern Quolls have reached such high densities that they are considered as pests by residents who wish to have them culled! Bruny Island, while fragmented by agriculture, is devoid of other competing large carnivores, making it highly suitable for eastern quolls. The same cannot be said for the rest of Tasmania, where the impact of the recently introduced red fox on remaining Eastern Quoll populations is not yet fully understood, but population declines are being reported in certain regions. Safe from foxes, the Bruny Island Eastern Quolls will therefore become an important insurance population for the survival of the species given that foxes are thought to have been the main driving force behind the extinction of Eastern Quolls on the Australian mainland in the 1960s.

You can never completely remove threatening processes, but perhaps decreasing known impacts may give the opportunistic quoll enough of an edge to allow it to reach more sustainable numbers. So, if you ever get the privilege of spotting a quoll, take a snap if you can and don't forget to report it, because as you know, every individual really counts!

*Reference:* Long, K. and Nelson, J. 2010a. National Recovery Plan for the Spotted-tailed Quoll *Dasyurus maculatus*. Department of Sustainability and Environment, Melbourne.

\* A link to Newsletter 35 with a story about the Southern Ark program is found on the Latest News page of my website.

## Spotted!!

Travelling the Princes Hwy between Bairnsdale and Stratford with Peter late on a March afternoon we were returning home after a dentist visit for me, which had been less than fun. My eye was caught by a dead animal on the side of the road which appeared to be tan with white spots. Something just did not compute... what animal is tan with white spots apart from a Quoll and what would a Quoll be doing on the side of the highway such a long way from the mountains?

Maybe my eyes were playing tricks on me—we did not stop, but decided to solve the mystery and have a look when we passed that way the next morning.

AS we approached, the road was quiet so we slowed right down - sure enough it did look like a dead Quoll on the side of the road! What excitement! We found a safe pullover and walked back. Moving the body off the road Peter was able to photograph it and we looked up close (well as close as the smell would allow) This adult male Spot-tailed Quoll had injuries consistent with an altercation with a car. Having never seen one in the wild before, I was not going to pass up the opportunity to inspect this one.

Powerful jaws and crushing teeth were evidence of its place as a top order predator. The pads of the feet were fascinating with beautiful texture and pad arrangement, all the better for climbing trees to take an unsuspecting bird or possum. And the spots! Just wonderful, randomly set amongst a deep brown on top, rich tan on the sides and softer brown coat underneath.

What was he doing here? Did it mean that the adjacent Providence Ponds Nature Conservation Reserve is home to a Quoll population in the middle of the cleared Gippsland Plains? Was there a connection with a nearby controlled burn just the week before? Or had it wandered through green corridors linking this area with the mountains to the north in search of a mate? We will never know for sure but it is an interesting record and hopefully some follow up surveys might shed more light on the answers.



## KURRAJONG

in the heart of spectacular  
Snowy River country.

Accommodation for 5 in a spacious  
self contained house by the Deddick

River, handy to the Snowy and McKillops Bridge.  
Secluded garden, hammocks, open fire and good books,  
bush walks, abundant wildlife, unspoiled nature and  
friendly hosts.

Joanna and Kevin Ph 02 6458 0216  
Or email: [jo@telgraphics.com.au](mailto:jo@telgraphics.com.au)

## The Early Bird

As the day begins the birds let you know its time to make a start - their chirpy calls beckoning you to leave you bed and enjoy the early morning.

With binoculars at the ready its soon time to wander outside into the quietness broken only by birdsong. Maybe the low rays of sun will be sneaking through the trees or perhaps a light dew on the vegetation showing off some decorative spider webs.

But the birds call and you have binoculars in your hands, so its time to set about seeing who owns those calls and trying to catch a glimpse of the fleeting movements in the vegetation.

Just identifying different species is fun, but sometimes its not important who they are, because its more fascinating watching what they are doing.

**5 Day Birds of the Snowy River  
November 12, 2012 and March 4, 2013**



**Brown Treecreeper**

### *In the pipeline for 2013-2014*

Please provide some feedback on two  
potential new trips for the program-

#### **Geology of the Eastern Alps and Snowy River country**

Rocks, rivers, mountains and valley. Learn  
about the geology underlying all of this and the  
processes that build up and cut down to form  
the landscape we see today.

#### **Climate change in the Alps**

Learn about what climate change might mean  
for the sensitive alpine ecosystems.  
Workshop with field trips.

Register your interest now to receive more  
information as plans unfold during 2013

## Walking and more walking

(continued from page 5)

Autumn walking is about breathing deeply of the crisp autumn mornings and enjoying the calm sunny days that have lost the sting of summer's heat. Lizards scuttle through the grass and the last of the summer wildflowers can be found lurking in shady corners. Snowgum trunks have brought out their autumn colours, with a splash of red mixed with grey and sometimes deep green. Overhead a Kestrel hovers and on a bright alpine flower beside you, a tiny iridescent beetle sits.



**Mt Feathertop Adventure** Walk across the roof of Victoria with mountains further than the eye can see, enjoying the expansive vistas and gaining inspiration from the mountains. Leave your everyday stresses far behind and stride out along the track. But not too fast, there is lots to see and we take time to sit on the soft snowgrass under sculptured snowgums to appreciate the smaller things in nature.  
**April 15-19, 2013**

**News from the Alps** is the newsletter of the Australian Alps National Parks. The latest issue (No 42) includes an update on hut restorations, the Snowy River, Australian Alps walking track and much more. Subscribe or view online at [www.australionalps.environment.gov.au/newsletter.html](http://www.australionalps.environment.gov.au/newsletter.html)

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

## 40% Off Sept & Oct

Couples - two nights, dinner, bed & breakfast \$550  
 Singles - three nights, dinner, bed & breakfast \$570  
 Boutique accommodation and high quality meals.  
 Walks and laid back activities in total privacy.

### Waterholes Guest House

**Ph: 03 5157 9330** (Closed June, July & August)

Email: [inquire@waterholesguesthouse.com.au](mailto:inquire@waterholesguesthouse.com.au)

Website: [www.waterholesguesthouse.com.au](http://www.waterholesguesthouse.com.au)



**Black Rainbow**  
 Environmentally Responsible Printing

- Recycled stock • Vegie Inks • 100% Solar Power • Chemical Free
- 25 Years Supplying Green Print • We deliver to your door!

Supplying all your printing requirements at pricing you can afford!

**P: 03 5155 0221**  
**E: [blackrainbow@blackrainbow.com.au](mailto:blackrainbow@blackrainbow.com.au)**

To: **Gippsland High Country Tours,**  
**Reply Paid 69,**  
**Bruthen Vic. 3885 (No Stamp Required)**

**Or Fax to (03) 5157 5539**

**Please send me more information about the following trips - \_\_\_\_\_**

**Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_**

**Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_**