

## U3A Port Fairy

*Science...naturally!*

# Aringa Water Reserve

John Miller: 8 September 2020

This is the 25th in a series of guides for U3A members around Port Fairy and district to help us get out and about safely during COVID-19 restrictions. The aim of the guides is to provide enjoyable outdoor activities that can be undertaken either by yourself or others (in accordance with Government directives).

This guide introduces you to some of the interesting things going on at the Lake Aringa Water Reserve. If you have not been to Lake Aringa before, or maybe have been there for fishing and not paid much attention to the surroundings, then this guide will let you in on a few of its interesting little secrets.

## Where is the Lake Aringa Water Reserve?

The water reserve is located approximately 6.5 km north of Port Fairy on the Hamilton Road.

Starting from the intersection of the Hamilton Road and the Princes Highway, drive north along the Hamilton Road for approximately 6.5 km until you reach a driveway on your left (west) with the No. 691 and a black sign on the fence saying **Max Crow – The Rocky**.



It's on a tricky little bend in the road so you could miss it. However, if you reach a sign on your right that says **Watson Grasslands** (a farm) then you have gone just a bit too far – do a U-turn and it will be the first driveway on your right.



Once at the correct driveway, enter the property and after about 100m take the first fork to the left (the right fork goes to the farmers house). The reserve is public land so there is no need to call in at the farm.

Go through 2 gates, both fences are electrified so take care. Drive on about 100m after the second gate and you will come to another gate and a sign that says Lake Aringa Water Reserve. You can drive on through that gate for another 150m or so until you reach a small jetty or, better still, leave your car in the paddock and walk the short distance into the reserve. I prefer to leave my car at the reserve gate as there are usually plenty of water birds on the lake and I don't want to disturb them.



## What is the water reserve?

The Lake, which averages around 4m depth with a rocky bottom, is a disused reservoir that was formerly used as a freshwater supply for the local area. It covers an area of 14 ha and holds around 185 ML when full. It is fed through a higgledy-piggledy paddock drain that extends around 5 km to the north to around Spencer Road. The remnants of the raised reservoir bank can be clearly seen along the southern shore of the lake and the overflow is located on the south western corner

It is known principally as an angling lake, with redfin being the main catch but it is also stocked annually with both rainbow and brown trout.

Revegetation and weed removal projects have been undertaken around the Lake by the Hamilton Conservation Volunteers. The works have enhanced the terrestrial habitat value of the reserve and it now has a happy population of native birds, reptiles, frogs, mammals and other critters.



A happy angler with a couple of “reddies”.

## What to look out for

Enter the reserve through the gate and walk along the track to the west. Many of the trees each side of the track are part of the revegetation works but they still allow you to get enticing glimpses of the lake as you walk down to the jetty area. If you walk quietly you will

probably see Hoary-headed Grebes, Dusky Moorhens, Purple Swamphens and Little Pied Cormorants feeding on the lake or resting on the jetty and fallen logs around the lake.



Hoary-headed Grebe



Little Pied Cormorant



Dusky Moorhen



Purple Swamp Hen

As you arrive at the small informal picnic area and boat ramp the full expanse of the lake comes into view.

Walk over to the lake edge and near the launching ramp you will see a low-growing silvery leaved plant called Silverweed *Argentina anserina* – it looks a bit like Bidgee-widgee (Dog Burr) but the distinctive silvery leaves and bright yellow flowers make it easy to identify. It is of interest mainly because it is restricted to south western Victoria and some authorities think it is a weed while others think it is indigenous. Whatever, it is a pretty little plant.



From the jetty we will take a walk along the southern shore of the lake towards the west. It may get a bit soggy under foot, because the open areas become inundated when the lake is full, so a pair of gumboots would be a good idea.

As you walk to the west you will notice a small copse of Woolly Teatree *Leptospermum laevigatum* on your left. Woolly Teatree is a native species and a very common shrub in swampy areas throughout the whole of southern Victoria. The shrubs are growing in a row but it is because they are on a former high-water level not because they have been planted.



Further on, near the water's edge, there is a large clump of reeds up to 2 m tall – Swamp Club-rush *Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani* (try saying that out loud!). It's leaves are very small and not obvious but it's tall, spongy flower stems provide a great refuge for small birds, frogs and insects.



At this point, walk a short distance to the south away from the lake and you will see small mounds of fresh dirt and, if you look closely, some small tunnels through the grass.

There is a very healthy colony of Australia Swamp Rats *Rattus lutreolus*, a native rodent, living in the dense cover of grass and other herbs around the shores of the lake. Although it is a "rat" it is a native rat and can be distinguished from introduced rats and mice by its rounded ears and having a tail about the same length or shorter than its body length.



Swamp Rat burrows and tunnels than



Native rats have rounded ears and a tail shorter their body

Continue in a westerly direction and onto the seasonally inundated flats. The flats are covered with several dominant plant species which occur in a mosaic dependent on the level of inundation.

Looking from right to left you will see Water Ribbons *Cyanogeton procerum* with leaves and flower stems emerging from the water; then a band of reddish coloured plants with small pointy leaves – Slender Knotweed *Persicaria decipiens* – on the more elevated but still very damp areas; and then a broad band of spongy tangled grass – Water Couch *Paspalum distichum* in the slightly more elevated and drier zones.



The floating Red Azolla *Azolla rubra*, Duckweeds *Lemna* spp. and the world famous Watermeal *Wolffia australiana* as well as green sludgy-looking algae, can also be seen dispersed through the Water Ribbons zone.



Red Azolla and algae amongst the water Ribbons



Slender Knotweed with its red tinge

Further on you will also see extensive areas of a bright green ground-hugging plant with small delicate leaves – Swamp Crassula *Crassula helmsii*. Swamp Crassula can live either submerged in the water or on the damp banks above the water line.

If you look closely in amongst the Swamp Crassula, particularly where it is growing out of the water, you will also see a small herb with very shiny dissected leaves. This is Small River Buttercup *Ranunculus amphitricus* which, like the Swamp Crassula can either live submerged or on exposed damp ground. However, when the buttercup is growing submerged it has leaves with very narrow spidery leaf segments but when it is growing out of the water its leaf segments are broadly wedge shaped.



Bright green Swamp Crassula in and out of the water



Small River Buttercup on dry land

This matrix of plant species and shallow water provides perfect habitat for frogs and a range of waterbirds.

Common frogs you will hear calling during the warmer months from spring into summer are the Common Eastern Froglet (sounds like someone quickly winding a watch); Striped Marsh Frog (dull click like someone hitting two rocks together occasionally) and the Eastern Banjo Frog or Pobblebonk (sounds like someone plucking a low note on a banjo).



Common Eastern Froglet



Eastern Banjo Frog



Striped Marsh Frog

If you bring your frog guide and your mobile phone with the Frogid App you will probably be able to identify some other frog species as well.

It's a great little reserve with lots to see and think about. And, its right on our doorstep.

As always, there are many more plants and other good stuff to discover as you wander around. If you find a plant or animal you want to know more about, email me a photo and a short description and I will endeavour to work it out for you. [jmiller3350@gmail.com](mailto:jmiller3350@gmail.com)

Please feel free to share this with anyone else who might enjoy the reserve.