



PNHA NEWS

Pittwater Natural Heritage Association - thinking locally, acting locally

Powerful Owls in Avalon/Newport in 2009

Powerful Owls nested in a hollow in a Spotted Gum in Cannes Drive Avalon in August-September and raised two chicks.

In October after violent wind one was found confused but uninjured on Barrenjoey Road Avalon and taken into care by WIRES. It was in good condition and soon released by its carer Mandy Beaumont in Riviera Road, near Cannes Drive, where it found its family. She said she has cared for several Powerful Owls from the Avalon area in previous years.

Young remain with parents for weeks or months, roosting near or with one of them, sometimes still with parents in late autumn and this may inhibit them from breeding in the following season.

Powerful Owls also nested and raised two chicks near 205 Prince Alfred Parade Newport. As the owl flies, this is quite close to Cannes Drive. Recently an adult and two juveniles were sighted in Algona Reserve, presumably the family from Prince Alfred Parade close by.

Powerful Owls mainly hunt Ringtail Possums, but will take small Brushtails, Fruit Bats and large birds caught at their roosts. Each Owl family needs a home territory of between 400 and 1450 hectares. That two families are living fairly close means that possums are plentiful and that suitable tree hollows provide nest sites.

Their call is a loud slow Hoo Hoo, similar but louder, deeper and slower than the Boobook Owl, their smaller cousin (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*).

For more information visit:

<http://www.owlpages.com/owls.php?genus=Ninox&species=strenua>

http://www.pittwater.nsw.gov.au/environment/plants_and_animals/threatened_species/animals/powerful_owl?SO_DESIGN_NAME=



Powerful Owl juvenile found on Barrenjoey Road Avalon in October 2009
Photo: Manly Daily

Feathertail Glider

The Feathertail glider is the smallest glider. Three have recently been seen in Pittwater. A cat brought one home at Elanora but it survived. A juvenile from Bolwarra Road was taken into care after disturbance from a development. Another was seen on the balcony of a house near Bothams Beach on McCarrs Creek. Have you seen one? If so, contact Pittwater Council to register this rare little animal on the Council's fauna database.



Powerful Owl juveniles with mum looking on at 205 Prince Alfred Parade Newport. November 2009
Photo: James de Soyres



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Feathertail Glider

Acrobates pygmaeus

This mouse-sized, gliding possum is appropriately named for its feather-like tail. Feathertail gliders are not closely related to any other gliders or Possums. They belong to their very own family; the Acrobatidae.

The gliding membrane in this species stretches from elbow to ankle; glides of 20m or more are not unusual. The feather-like tail is thought to act as a stabiliser, rudder and brake during gliding, and assists with balance while climbing. Climbing is also facilitated by the broad pads



Feathertail Glider - note two rows of stiff hairs on the tail.
Photo : Pavel German (Australian Museum website)

beneath the toes which enables this species to cling onto smooth-barked Eucalypt trunks and even vertical glass windows.

Feathertail gliders are rarely seen in the wild, even in areas where they are known to occur. This is probably explained by their diminutive size and very dull eye-shine when spotlighted at night. Despite this, there are occasional reports of aggregations of 40 or more of these animals in a single flowering tree. Presumably this has something to do with breeding or out-of-season flowering of some favourite food. More often, Feathertail gliders are encountered only after they have been brought in by the family cat or during tree clearing operations.

Feathertail gliders feed on a range of plant and insect foods however pollen and nectar from Eucalypt and Banksia flowers forms a significant part of their diet. The Feathertail glider's tongue is tipped with a brush of finehairs, specifically designed for pollen and nectar gathering. Feathertails also imbibe the sap which leaks from incisions made in tree trunks and branches by larger glider species. They also eat lerps and other small insects of the trunk and canopy. They nest in tree hollows with very small openings.

Threats are cats and clearing of bushland.

Useful websites:

<http://australianmuseum.net.au/Feathertail-Glider>

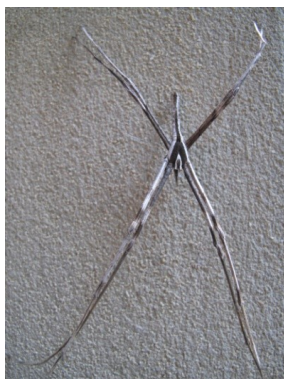
The Retiaris Spider *Dinopis subrufa*

(formerly *D. Bicornis*) This spider sometimes appears briefly on the wall of our back verandah. Generally during daylight hours the spider hangs head downward among twigs or dead grass with its legs stretched out in pairs. This makes it almost impossible to detect, even at close range. Colours vary.

This nocturnal spider is common in the Sydney suburbs. It builds a rectangular net after dark and destroys it before daylight, a new net being built each night. It is made of crinkly silk about 3cm x 2cm, which is held by the claws of legs one and two and is for throwing over a variety of insects including moths.

This male, with a body 15mm long, is much slimmer and smaller than the female and has longer legs. Its toxicity is unknown; this species is not aggressive towards humans and its venom is not considered to be significantly hazardous to larger animals

For information about lots of other spiders have a look at this website: www.findaspider.org.au/index.htm It focuses on spiders of southern Queensland but many have a big range and also occur in Sydney.



Marita Macrae

Reference: *Australian Spiders in Colour*. Ramon Mascord. Reed Books 1970

PNHA Activities 2010

Our first activity is our **Insect and Other Invertebrates** Night on February 27, in Plateau Park, Bilgola Plateau. Martyn Robinson, Australian Museum naturalist, will again tell us about these fascinating and important little creatures. To book please contact Gary Harris after February 14 on 9918 0430 or email 4gharris@tpg.com.au

See **PNHA Activities 2010 brochure** or go to www.pnha.org.au for more activities

Upcoming projects:

The PNHA committee will soon consider Pittwater

Council plans and put in submissions on:

- *Proposals for an enlarged skateboard complex in Kitchener Park, Mona Vale. Possible tree loss is our concern here.*
- *Redevelopment of Lakeside Holiday Park, Narrabeen*
- *Draft Conservation Management Plan for Governor Phillip Park Plan.*

The Bronze Flat Butterfly

In late November while at the top of Attunga reserve in Newport, I noticed what I initially thought was a large moth sunning itself on low leaves of Sweet Pittosporum *Pittosporum undulatum*. As I watched, it took off and flew in short almost territorial sweeps within the area, sometimes mixing in flight with two different butterfly types, the Varied Dusky-blue *Candalides hyacinthinus hyacinthinus* and Varied Sword-grass Brown *Tisiphone abeona* but always returning to the same resting spot. It had a wingspan of 50-52mm, was mostly light brown with small pale green wing patches. Having a closer look I noticed its antennae had swollen (almost clubbed) tips like a butterfly and its behaviour was certainly butterfly-like, but why didn't it hold its wings together vertically at rest like most species of butterfly?

Reference to M. F. Braby's *Butterflies of Australia* revealed it to be the Bronze or Eastern Flat *Netrocoryne repanda repanda*, belonging to the Skipper Family of Butterflies (Hesperiidae) and falling within a group called Flats (owing to their disposition of their wings when at rest). Slightly confusing though, is that this butterfly may hold its wings in the upright position as the air temperature rises and warming its body becomes less important. The two images below show both wing positions.

The larvae of this butterfly feed on a wide range of plants but Black Wattle *Callicoma serratifolia* and Blueberry Ash *Eleocarpus reticulatus* are likely foodplants around Attunga Reserve. The adult males are listed as a hilltopping species in the above book.

P.S About two weeks later, within the bushland at the corner of Surf and Bynya Rds Whale Beach I spotted another of this species of Butterfly but this one held its wings upright.

A visit to our bushland is always rewarding.

Gary Harris

Reference: M.F.Braby Butterflies of Australia , C.S.I.R.O.Publishing



What is Hilltopping?

Hilltopping behaviour refers to those butterfly species that have adult males that congregate on prominent or raised areas, establishing territories which they defend from other males of the same species and often other insect species.

The reasons why these males select hilltops to defend are not precisely known but from observation it appears that butterflies and other insects use hilltops as a way of finding mates. Unmated females arriving are quickly courted and won. Females do not remain on hilltops and are more normally observed in habitats where they can find suitable larval host plants or in the case of those butterflies that live with ants, suitable attendant ants. More information from www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/threatenedspecies/HilltoppingReportJune08.pdf.

The loss or degradation of sites used for hilltopping by butterflies was listed as a key threatening process on schedule 3 of the NSW Threatened Species Act 1995 in April 2001. Although 14 species of butterfly are mentioned in the description of this process the listing does not directly protect any one species or community of butterflies.

Have you noticed any of this butterfly behaviour in Pittwater? Let PNHA know and we'll pass on the information to entomologist Dave Britton at the Australian Museum.

Membership Application

I would like to join Pittwater Natural Heritage Association

Date:.....

Name:.....

Address:.....

Email:.....

Ph:.....

I would like paper copy/emailed newsletter (circle your choice)

Membership fee: \$20.00, or \$10.00 pensioner or student.

Post cheque payable to:
Pittwater Natural Heritage Association (not PNHA) or money order, to:

PNHA, PO Box 187, Avalon Beach NSW 2107

Contact us: Tel/Fax 02 9918 3368

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PITTWATER NATURAL HERITAGE ASSOCIATION INC.