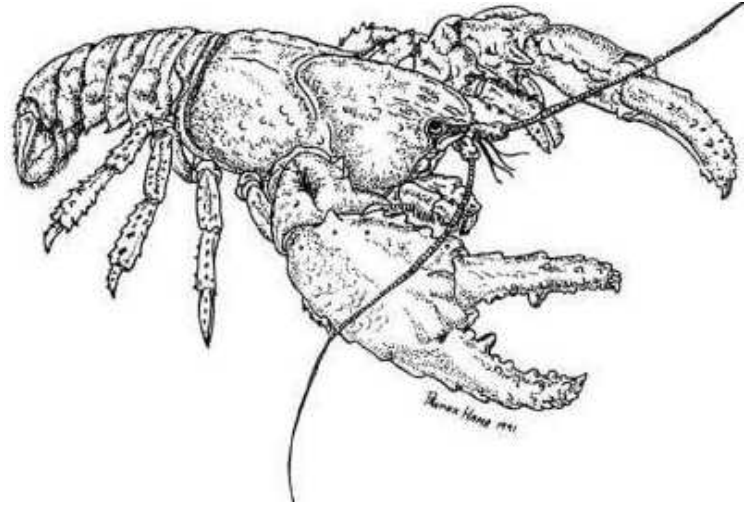


# Disjunct Naturalists

WEBSITE OF THE CENTRAL NORTH FIELD NATURALISTS



## *Return to King's Run*

by **Jim Nelson**



1. Cathedral Rock

In the spring of 1998 four members of the CNFN (then the Deloraine Field Naturalists Group) visited Geoff King's property on the West coast north of the Arthur River. The objective was to document natural values as part of Geoff's plans to manage the property as a conservation area. We put together lists of flora and fauna (including 115 species of plant, 43 bird species, 2 butterflies, one seal, three frogs, three freshwater crayfish and one unidentified female dung beetle), and in the process we were simply stunned not only by the property's sheer natural beauty, but also by its importance to Aboriginal history. Thus, when a return visit was offered to see how Geoff's dreams for the area have progressed, it was an opportunity not to be missed. Sarah, Ron and I (who were part of the original visit) jumped at the opportunity, and seven others decided to make the long trek to the West Coast with assurances

that it would be worth it. Fingers were crossed for good weather, which is never guaranteed in the area.

The property (known as King's Run) has been in the King family's hands since 1880. The 800 acres consists of heath, grasslands and shrubby woodlands, along with the coastal vegetation verge. The property has a conservation covenant put in place by Geoff for protecting its wonderful natural values along with its very significant archaeological sites.

We met Geoff near Arthur River and were led onto the property via a new entry road. The land looked wilder than I remembered, the result of the removal of cattle, with the native herbivores now solely allowed to keep the grassy areas under control. The extensive shrubby areas were expanding and could eventually cover the grasslands without some intervention. The Aboriginal people used fire to keep areas open, and Geoff sees this as a tool to be used with care along with observations of the results. Certainly, the mix of shrubby cover along with the grassy, sedgy areas allows the current rich mixture of animal and bird life to flourish, and it seems most desirable to maintain this diversity. Cool burns are perhaps the only viable alternative not only for maintaining diversity, but also for avoiding a conflagration. Fire is never pretty, selective nor without consequences, and is always something of a double-edged sword when used for conservation management.

I was particularly keen to see how the freshwater crayfish I had identified on our first visit were getting along. *Engaeus lengana* is a west coast endemic burrowing crayfish with a distribution that extends south of Macquarie Harbour; it is also found on Hunter Island. I was quite excited the first time I found this crayfish at Birchs Inlet, because I hadn't realised any *Engaeus* extended so far south. But of course when I looked at Dr Pierre Howitz's distribution map, he had the species recorded at Birchs Inlet and even further south. Nevertheless, *E. lengana*'s stronghold is the north-west, with Rocky Cape being the furthest extension to the east that has been recorded. I suspect they may extend to Sisters Creek but I have yet to set eyes on the elusive *Engaeus* there. It is not a priority to extend their distribution a few kilometres eastward where they are in a safe place, so until I find some carapace parts, or find one under a log, their identity remains an intriguing mystery.

It was good to see that the *E. lengana* at King's Run were showing recent activity in the area where I had previously found them. The other freshwater crayfish in the area is one I identified as *Geocharax insignis*. This crayfish is found in the Bass Strait Basin, and its taxonomy has recently been revised (Hanson 2006). It occupies ephemeral bodies of fresh water only on the northwest coast in Tasmania. It is quite active in the springtime, with burrows having pellets of soil loosely found around them. It is quite usual to find either dead crayfish, or parts of them, around the edges of the water. Since these ephemeral ponds dry up by summer, the crayfish presumably burrow down to the water table, and appear to remain there until the next spring.

Other wildlife we saw included two species of wallaby, a huge, quite dark-furred wombat, as well as a large echidna. The bird life was rich, with both bush birds and coastal birds. As well, a pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles came for a look at us.

A particularly intriguing frog with strange, orange colouring was discovered by Sarah while pitching their tent. From the photos I believe it to be a brown tree frog. It has the characteristic dark stripe extending through its eyes, and tiny pads can just be discerned on its toes. The brown tree frog was the only frog I heard calling at night.

The history of the original inhabitants is written large in the landscape beyond the areas kept open through the use of fire for hunting and movement. There

are many middens near the shore of huge size and significance, with stone tools still lying where they were last used. here are also hut depressions still visible in the ground a little further back from the shore. George Augustus Robinson described in his journals the huts built over these depressions using sticks and hides, along with the people living in them. He also described the depressions in the rocks close to the sea in which they used to hide while hunting seals. Amazingly, these depressions too are still visible. Surely this area must be one of the richest sites in Tasmania, and Geoff is serious in his efforts to maintain its significance.

For many years, off road vehicles have travelled this coastline with impunity, heedlessly trashing middens and coastal vegetation. Efforts are now in place to bring this 'traditional abuse' to a halt, and the authorities are finally beginning to participate in protecting this important area. Geoff vigorously discourages the vandalism which consists of driving over the middens, and gradually the message is getting across that Kings Run is off limits.

We were privileged to have a demonstration by Geoff of his Tasmanian Devil viewing program, which is a part of [Kings Run Wildlife Tours](#). The Devil viewing takes place in a dedicated building near the shore. It has a large window for viewing the sensitively lit area containing a road kill carcass that has been dragged through the grassland to leave a scent trail for the Devils to follow to the site. We didn't manage to see a Devil, but Geoff kept us well entertained with food and wine and stories of how the business was established through the advice and assistance of Nick Mooney. He keeps detailed records and is careful not to habituate the Devils.

Geoff's vision and efforts at King's Run are admirable, and his commitment to conserving this important area needs recognition and support. When visitors to Tasmania want to see something special in the way of our natural history, Kings Run has much to offer them.



2. Brown Tree Frog 3. Marrawah Skipper 4. Richard's Pipit

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