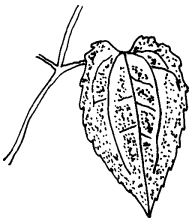


July 17th-24th.

- * Maroonhood orchids appear.
- * Gynea lily in flower.
- * False sarsparilla vines in flower.
- * Wax flowers bloom.
- * Dingo pups are born.
- * Lilly pilly in fruit.
- * Cold weather causes some snakes, bats, lizards and small mammals to seek a secure shelter and lapse into a winter torpor.
- * Silver gulls move to nesting islands with low vegetation.
- * July is the month of the least number of hours of sunshine, 6.

FOREST CLEMATIS, old man's beard, headache vine, *Clematis glycinoides*.

A wiry climber that flowers from now until the end of spring. Abundant cascades of white flowers, each 3 cm in diameter, brighten up any bush that carries the weight of this vine. Forest clematis will climb to a height of 20 metres.



A patch of this plant flowers annually beside the car park at Kingsley Beach, Boat Harbour.

Leaves are in groups of three with three parallel veins and are generally toothless. Young leaves are different, being a single large dark green leaf with pale markings around the veins.

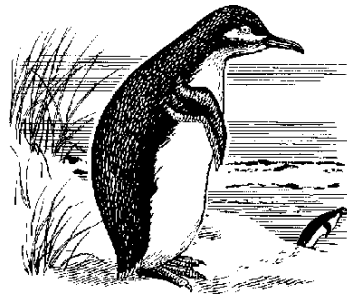


The leaves have a reputation as a cure for headache. To administer, thoroughly crush the leaves in the hand, holding for a moment to warm the vapours slightly. Inhale the fumes. The effect of doing this can be watering eyes, stinging nose and an exploding head, which lasts only a short time. Use with caution.

Male and female flowers are carried on separate plants. The male flowers have long stamens and the female flowers have ovaries. The fruit is 4cm long, narrow and silver-plumed.

FAIRY PENGUIN, *Eudyptula minor*.

You may be lucky enough one day to swim in the surf with a fairy penguin. With a pair of binoculars, from the top of Stephens Peak, you may see one of these birds fishing in the waters off Wreck Beach. The fairy penguin can be seen swimming the waters of Port Stephens and in Nelson Bay harbour. They make a happy barking sound to keep in touch with each other. This is the only penguin that breeds on



Australia, and Port Stephens is about as far north as they come.

Fairy penguins come ashore after dark and leave their burrows

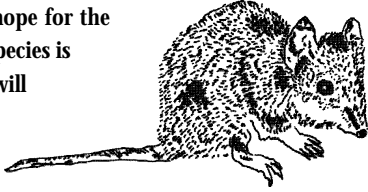
before first light. From July on there is much activity around the colonies on Broughton Island. One parent will sit on the 2 eggs for up to 10 days and then be relieved by its mate. When the chicks are two weeks old both parents will have to go to sea to get enough food for the family of four. Some penguins will raise a second family in the same season. At about 30 cm tall, this is the smallest penguin of the world's seventeen penguin species. Their burrows amongst the tussock grass may be as far as 300 metres from the water's edge. They sensibly wait an hour after dark to come ashore.

The young disperse about mid October. Three years later they will return to the area they were born in to breed. If they survive the predation of sea birds, sharks and sea lions they may live to 20 years of age.



BROWN ANTECHINUS, *Antechinus*

stuartii. Aboriginal name *Mirrin*. The most common small mammal found in the Nelson Bay area. Over the next two weeks all the males will die. The only hope for the survival of the species is that some males will be born in the next litter.



In mid July all males become sexually active and mate with as many females as possible. Mating sessions can take as long as 12 hours. During these few weeks of radical promiscuity the males do not eat. They live on their own body tissue, their stomachs become thin and ulcerated and their bodies fall victim to disease and degeneration. Aged exactly 11 months and 3 weeks all the males die a reasonably hideous death.

This die-off occurs around August 12th in Nelson Bay.

By then the females give birth to as many as 12 young. They are born in a very undeveloped state, diminutive, pink, embryonic, ant sized, they crawl about until they find a teat to hang on to.



The pouch is just a few loose folds in the skin around the abdomen and is completely open. For five weeks they hang on by their mouths with the grip of Hercules. Mum scampers about in the dark with family firmly attached and as they get older they drag along the ground, bouncing over rocks and twigs. Eventually the babies are so big and numerous that the mother's feet barely touch the ground.

It is time for the family to stay at home in the nest (usually a leaf-lined tree hollow). The mother gets the babies to let go by shaking her body and performing a somersault.

The young are weaned after 3 months. All the effort is put into this one litter and over the next year the female will also die, although a few will live on to breed a second year. Owls and feral cats are the main predators of this marsupial mouse.

The antechinus looks like a mouse with a head and body length of 120mm and a tail length of 100mm. The face is much more pointed than the house mouse and the teeth are numerous sharp needles.

It shares its habitat with another similar-looking marsupial mouse, the yellow footed antechinus. You can

July 17th-24th.

tell them apart as follows.

The yellow footed antechinus has a bright white ring around its eye which the brown only sometimes has. The yellow footed antechinus is greyish-brown above, whitish brown below, and usually has a reddish-brown band of fur between the two layers. The brown antechinus is uniformly grey-brown all over.



The antechinus is a savage little carnivore and will happily pounce on a house mouse and crush its skull or neck with a bite. It will then eat the mouse, leaving its skin turned inside out. Insects, lizards, worms and anything that moves will be eaten.

This species is well distributed over the Nelson Bay area. You may have some visit your home and even come into your house. The biggest populations are on Gan Gan Hill and around the Corlette water tank.

Antechinus help pollinate banksias by visiting the flowers at night to enjoy the nectar they produce.

APPLE BERRY, *Dumplings, Billardiera scandens*. This slender climber grows to 3 metres and can be seen everywhere in the Nelson Bay area.

The leaves are alternate with wavy margins, furry and 20mm long.

The pale-yellow, drooping, bell-shaped flowers hang from slender stalks. The real interest in this plant comes from the fruit which can often be seen the same time as the flowers.

The berry is a cylinder 3cm long, green, yellow or reddish. This furry fruit gradually changes to a brown or purple colour, eventually falling from the vine. At this stage the fruit is edible, with a flavour likened to stewed apples.

