Bottlebrush & Bogong Moths & a connection to Orange

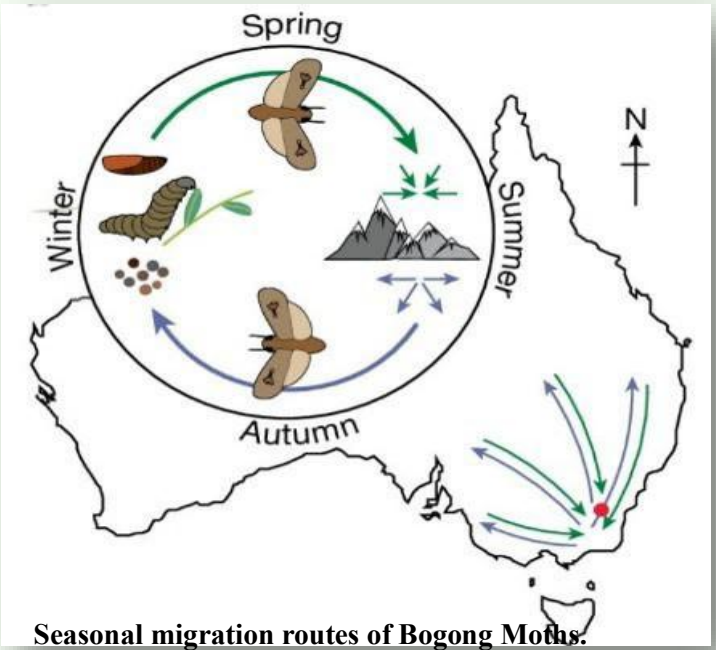


Sydney has been inundated with Bogong Moths in recent weeks, more than we have seen for many years. Their arrival has coincided with spectacular seasonal flowering of Bottlebrush (*Callistemon*), Tea Tree (*Leptospermum*) and *Grevillea*.



Bogong Moth, *Agrostis infusa*, on Crimson Bottlebrush. *Callistemon*

Bogong Moths (*Agrotis infusa*) are quite remarkable, famous for their long-distance seasonal migrations to and from the Australian Alps. In autumn and winter, they breed in southern Queensland, western New South Wales and Victoria. Their spring migration from their breeding sites on the western slopes of the Great Dividing Range to specific peaks above 1,500 metres of high mountain ranges of south-eastern Australia beggars belief. Their destinations include the Bogong High Plains, Mount Bogong and Mount Hotham in Victoria, Snowy Mountains in Kosciuszko National Park, NSW, and the Brindabella Ranges in the ACT.



Seasonal migration routes of Bogong Moths. Dreyer, Adden, Chen et al. *Nature* 2025.
https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-025-09135-3

Rather than moving to warmer regions to *escape the cold*, Bogong Moths seek out the protection of the cooler temperatures of caves and crevices in the mountains to *escape from the extreme heat and arid conditions* of the western slopes and plains. This is known as *aestivation*. The moths may travel more than 1,000 kilometres to reach their destinations in the mountains.



Philotheca myoporoides

In Autumn, the moths migrate back to their breeding grounds, although not all Bogong Moths are migratory, and where conditions are favourable, for example with cooler, milder conditions throughout summer, migration is not necessary.

Along their migratory routes, Bogong Moths use flowering shrubs such as bottlebrush (*Callistemon*) not only as a source of pollen and nectar, but also for protection from predators and shelter from extreme weather events during rest periods. Bogong Moths also play a significant role in pollination, and in addition to pollen from Bottlebrush, pollen from other Myrtaceae genera such as *Angophora* and *Eucalyptus, Leptospermum, Melaleuca* and *Kunzea,* has been found on the moths.

Pollen from other plant families visited by Bogong Moths include *Philotheca myoporoides* (Rutaceae) which is common in east coast bushland and frequently planted as a garden plant, also *Dodonaea* (Sapindaceae), *Pomaderris aspera* (Rhamnaceae), and grass *Poa* (Poaceae).

Bogong Moths are an important food source for Mountain Pygmy Possums, lizards and *Antechinus*.



Angophora floribunda – **Rough barked Apple**



Kunzea capitata, Tick Bush



The connection to Orange and Rosemary Stapleton

In late September and early October, the Orange district was also visited by large numbers of Bogong Moths. They could be seen at night flying around outside lights, they set of security lights and somehow each night a few found their way into our homes. Cilla Kinross reported that the Bogong Moths have been invading the peregrine nest box at CSU. Diamond, the female peregrine, has eaten a few if they happen to crawl past while she is incubating, but otherwise she can't be bothered to chase them around.

Knowing that archaeologist Mark Rawson, Andrew's brother, had found some Bogong Moths aestivating over summer on Gaanha bula Mt Canobolas in the late 1990's I decided to see if any were around the summit. On 1st October, much to my surprise there were thousands and thousands hiding in rock crevices and the thick leaf litter all around the summit. It was an even more amazing experience at dusk when the moths became active and many more were flying around or passing through on migration south. That night the moths appeared in very large numbers on the higher parts of the mountain above about 1,200m and few were seen in our headlights as we drove lower. On the 9th October the number of moths among the crevices and boulders were still high however by 19th October their numbers had reduced significantly. It will be interesting to see if the moths return to Gaanha bula Mt Canobolas on their return journey to their breeding grounds in the autumn of 2027.



Thousands of Bogong Moths clustered over a very large boulder near the summit and a closeup of some resting together during the day like roof tiles. Photos R Stapleton.

As Bogong Moths had been a significant source of protein for Aboriginal people what better place to find them than at such a significant cultural place as the summit of Gaanha bula. Uncle Neil Ingram has said the best way to cook them was to pull the wings off and toast them in the coals.

The moths have been making news in other ways. The ABC TV 7.00pm News meteorologist Tom Saunders related that the moth migration had confused forecasters as the radar had interpreted them as clouds, rain or snow so they had forecast showers. You can watch the radar at https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-10-20/bom-weather-radars-detect-bogong-moth-migration/107288800.
The same thing happened at the 2000 Olympics where showers were forecast for the Opening Ceremony, but it was the Bogong Moths.

If you have an abundance of Bogong Moths in your garden, it is unlikely they will feed on your garden plants other than forage for pollen and nectar. Most of their nutritional intake occurs when they are in larval stages.

Follow the migration of Bogong Moths using *Zoos Victoria Bogong Moth Tracker*: https://www.zoo.org.au/moth-tracker/ or upload your sightings to *Bogong Watch · iNaturalist*



Alison Downing, Brian Atwell, Karen Marais, Kevin Downing, School of Natural Sciences and Rosemary Stapleton, Orange Field Naturalist and Conservation Society

Australian Conservation Foundation: https://www.acf.org.au/our-work/nature/missing-wildlife/bogong-moth

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Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bogong_moth

MACQUARIE University
SYDNEY·AUSTRALIA