

# PARKWATCH



SEPTEMBER 2009 No238 \$7.00

*People caring for nature*

THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE VICTORIAN NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION

## Native grasslands under threat



VNPA SUMMARY ANNUAL REPORT 2008-09 INSIDE



PHOTO: ELAINE BEASLEY

## Grow West plants more!

(Above) Over 150 dedicated volunteers, including many VNPA members and friends, planted 6,300 indigenous seedlings (1,300 more than planned) on the Grow West Community Planting Day, Sunday 19 July, at 'The Island' in the Pentland Hills at Myrning near Bacchus Marsh. The previously bare hillside was transformed with thousands of white tree-guards.

Grow West Works Facilitator Trevor Prowd thanks everyone who took part, particularly the VNPA's John Stirling and Bernie Fox, and Bob Reid of the Friends of Werribee Gorge and Long Forest Mallee, who did a tremendous job in planning and coordinating the day.

Grow West is working with landholders along Myrning Creek, including Conservation Volunteers Australia (owners of The Island), to create a vegetation corridor connecting Lerderderg State Park with Werribee Gorge State Park.

(Below) Grow West planters at work, and in the left background a remarkable natural lava/ basalt 'dam' which blocked Myrning Creek and forced it to create a new course.

For more about the planting day, see [www.growwest.com.au](http://www.growwest.com.au)

PHOTO: EFFIE KENE, FORMER VNPA OFFICE MANAGER



# PARK WATCH

*People caring for nature*

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#### VNPA'S VISION

We share a vision of Victoria as a place with a diverse, secure and healthy natural environment cared for and appreciated by all.

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#### GETTING INVOLVED IN VNPA

Everyone can help in the conservation of Victoria's wild and beautiful places. Here are some ideas. For help phone (03) 9347 5188 or visit [www.vnpa.org.au](http://www.vnpa.org.au) You can:

- make a donation (see enclosed form)
- become a member (see enclosed form)
- volunteer. You'll be welcome in the office, on a campaign or in a park
- join the Regular Giving program
- leave a bequest to VNPA in your will.

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You're always welcome to contact the editor to discuss ideas for articles. Phone the VNPA or email [michaelh@vnpa.org.au](mailto:michaelh@vnpa.org.au) Articles may be submitted by email, on disk or as hard copy. Include your contact details and brief biographical information. Photos, maps and drawings are needed too. Digital photos should be 300dpi and around 8cm by 12cm.

COPY DEADLINE: December 2009 issue:  
23 October 2009

PRINTING Tara Press

DESIGNED BY Mark Carter, markmaking

FRONT COVER Main photo: Kangaroo grass (*Themeda triandra*), Merri Creek grasslands.

Photo: David Tatnall

Insets: Native grassland wildflowers.

Photos: Caitlin Griffith, Werribee Open Range Zoo, Phil Ingamells.



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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

### Out and about, and hands-on

**O**VER THE PAST YEAR Council and staff have been looking at how we communicate with our members and supporters. These efforts are now beginning to bear fruit.

For example, have you logged on to the VNPA website lately? It has a link to *Nature's Voice*, the revamp of our quarterly newsletter. The new format enables us to use colour for more effective presentation. The email/web version also reaches many more people, and has links to further information and other websites.

Another great link on our website takes you to our Events calendar. On it you'll find an up-to-date listing of bushwalks, excursions and special events, including cancellations and other last-minute changes to the published program.

A quick browse through the August calendar highlights our extensive activities program. On it I found events as diverse as a 3km Walk, Talk & Gawk, a family-oriented picnic to Serendip Sanctuary, day walks to the Mornington Peninsula and Wilsons Prom, a weekend at Mt Kooyoora, the annual Project Hindmarsh planting weekend, a national park bushfire recovery weekend, a tree-planting weekend near Benalla, a 35km bike ride, a coach excursion to Hanging Rock and Organ Pipes NP, a navigation training

weekend, and social evenings. Phew!

Given that it's winter in Victoria, this is a truly astounding array of activities covering the whole State, and a testament to the hard work and enthusiasm of our volunteers in the BWAG and Excursions committees.

I encourage any members who would like to assist in planning or leading events in the program not to be shy.

Jobs are tailored according to your areas of interest and experience, and your available time. Many hands make light work. Please call Amy or Caitlin at the VNPA office on 9347 5188 and they'll put you in touch with the relevant person within our activities groups.

This extensive and diverse range of our 'out and about' and hands-on activities does not always get the promotion it deserves. It sets us apart as an environment organisation. In this crowded and busy world it is up to us to trumpet our own cause, and our new formats and media make it much easier to do so.

Please promote the VNPA to your friends and encourage them to join. You can on-send *Nature's Voice* by email, or direct friends to our website—[www.vnpa.org.au](http://www.vnpa.org.au)

— Fred Gerardson, VNPA President

### For your diary

**13 October:** VNPA Annual General Meeting.

**22 November:** VNPA Caring for Nature Day picnic, Point Nepean Quarantine Station.

### Thank you!

The VNPA is extremely grateful for the many generous donations we have received for the Jenny Barnett Tribute Conservation Campaign.

The funds are being used to support our Fire Ecology Project, led by Phil Ingamells.

We have sent a preliminary submission to the Bushfire Royal Commission, and continue to meet with government officials on fire-related issues. We've also commissioned a number of papers from leading scientists to highlight the complexity of fire impacts on biodiversity, including on fungi, invertebrates and micro-organisms – the building blocks of ecosystems.

Future work will focus on:

- developing community education materials to inform and engage local communities and landholders in fire and ecology issues
- organising a Melbourne-based conference and a series of regional workshops
- developing a statewide strategy for improved community engagement in regional fire planning.

Your donations ensure that Jenny's fantastic work can continue, and that the VNPA can make a significant and positive impact on fire and ecology issues.

Thank you to all our donors for your generous support. It is very much appreciated.

— Matt Ruchel

### Old-growth logging to continue

The State Government announced on 21 August that remaining areas of the Brown Mountain old-growth forest in East Gippsland will be logged, mostly for woodchips to be exported to Japan.

The VNPA's Megan Clinton said Victorians deserved to see the ALP's 2006 election promise fulfilled and Victoria's last remaining stands of old-growth forest protected.

Protected areas announced include important stands of old-growth forest but also areas which have already been logged.

Areas to be logged will be subject to tougher rules, including wider buffers around creeks and no logging of old hollow-bearing trees.

The Minister also acknowledged that VicForests is failing to undertake pre-logging assessments. A new system should be established to ensure that the Brown Mountain decision is not repeated across East Gippsland.

# VNPA riparian campaign gathers momentum

Nick Roberts and Megan Clinton explain VNPA proposals for protecting both water quality and streamside vegetation across Victoria.

**T**HE VNPA is seeking a commitment from the State Government to reform the antiquated management of Victoria's Crown water frontages.

Crown water frontage grazing licences will soon be renewed, presenting a key opportunity to ensure that they are underpinned by strong environmental objectives.

Riparian (streamside) vegetation is crucial for maintaining river health and in-stream biota. There is much evidence to show that cattle grazing on these fragile areas is causing a loss of vegetation, severe erosion and soil compaction, as well as drastically reducing water quality.

The VNPA has recently focused its attention on the long-standing issue of poor water quality. It is clear that the government has been ignoring this issue, despite scientific evidence clearly linking cattle grazing with poor water quality.

As a result, the VNPA sought legal advice from the Environment Defenders Office (EDO) to consider statutory, common law and policy arguments that could be brought in to support discontinuing grazing in Crown water frontages.

The response was that there is a robust and sometimes complex statutory framework for the protection of riparian land, waterways and human health. Some legislation creates penalties for polluting water and/or for damaging human health as a result of polluted waterways. Other legislation provides avenues for judicial review, or the recovery of damages, in the case of a breach of duty of care by a public authority.

This advice from the EDO demonstrates that allowing waterways to be polluted by cattle, resulting in damage to human health, creates a legal liability risk for the State Government.

As a result of the damage caused by grazing in Crown water frontages, and the threat to human health, the VNPA is calling for changes to the terms of all licences and requiring improvements in riparian condition.

New licences, underpinned by strong conservation objectives, would deliver major improvements in river and streamside health.

As part of this process, we are calling for an urgent assessment of all Crown water frontages.

The VNPA is proposing a five-pronged approach which will engage landholders in varying degrees of active conservation management.

- **Additions to the National Reserve System:** using existing assessments and action plans,



identify areas that meet national conservation commitments, improve connectivity and improve management integrity that can be reclassified as Nature Conservation Reserves and State Parks.

- **Conservation Licences:** for areas not suitable to be added to the reserve system but in good to moderate condition, licensees should be offered the option of a conservation licence. This will specify minimum management actions such as fencing, stock removal/grazing regimes, weed control, etc. Leaseholders will pay a minimal amount for the lease.
- **Voluntary program for licence holders:** here the government makes a 'special offer' for boundary fencing and off-river watering. Once the three-year period expires, landholders will be responsible for the Crown land boundary.
- **Unlicensed frontage:** remove unauthorised activities and require landholder to pay for fencing unless licensed for grazing.
- **Waterway Guardian/ Stewardship program:** here an incentive should be provided to licensees with a significant conservation asset. A new agreement could be established to fence the frontage and transfer the grazing licence to a Conservation Licence with additional stewardship payments for extra conservation activities. Adjacent land could be delivered via reverse auction to set the price, as per Bush Tender.

These proposals could effectively engage landholders in rebuilding riparian health over time.

Your ongoing support for this campaign is, as always, invaluable. The VNPA sincerely thanks everyone who has already made a donation towards this important campaign.

**It's time for an end to cattle-damaged streambanks and poor water quality.**

PHOTO: NICK ROBERTS

# Urban sprawl threatens native grasslands

*VNPA Executive Director Matt Ruchel explains the VNPA's grave concerns about the State Government's plans to expand Melbourne.*

**T**HE PROPOSED EXPANSION of Melbourne's Urban Growth Boundary will include the building of some 284,000 new houses, greatly increasing the city's climate and water impacts.

Even worse, it will approve the clearing of almost 8,000 hectares of some of the most endangered habitats in Victoria.

Many nationally significant threatened species live in the grasslands and grassy woodlands of the Victorian volcanic plains. Of the 25 fauna and 32 flora species of national significance, five animal species and at least nine plant species are known to occur in the proposed Melbourne growth areas.

Less than 5% of Victoria's original native grassland remains, and only 2% is protected in reserves.

This proposed urban expansion creates huge ecological and environmental challenges for both the State and the Federal governments.

The State Government is giving the green light to property developers to clear native vegetation, including 6,918 hectares of critically endangered volcanic plains grassland, mostly in the west, and 924 hectares of grassy woodland, mostly in the north (total 7,842 ha).

These losses are to be 'offset' through the proposed establishment of two new grassland reserves, totalling 15,000 ha in area, outside the proposed Urban Growth Boundary: around Mt Cottrell (south-east of Melton), and north-east of the You Yangs. But we believe these 'offsets' would not adequately replace or protect the habitats and species that would be lost.

## Fell swoop

The State Government has asked Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett to approve the clearing in one fell swoop, instead of on the current block-by-block basis, through the use of a Strategic Assessment under the EPBC Act 1990.

Under this process, the Australian Government will be a key decision-maker in determining the future of these species and ecosystems. Decisions made in the next few months will determine the survival of some of the most endangered habitats and species in the country.

This process may save property developers millions, but it does not guarantee a good result for the environment.

Although the VNPA welcomes plans for new native grassland reserves, there are still many unanswered questions.

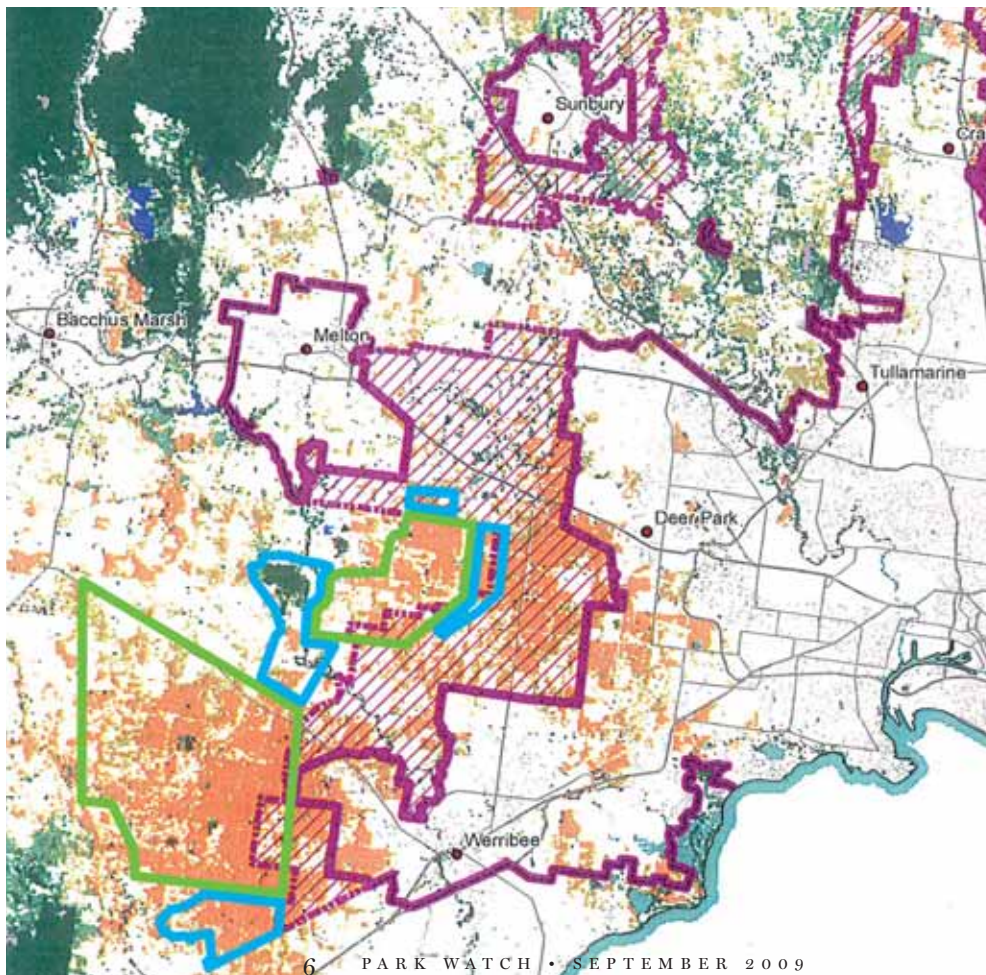
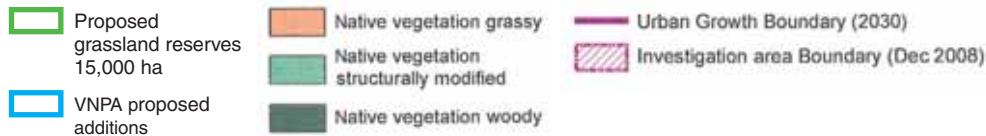
The VNPA and local conservation groups have four key areas of concern. **1. The Strategic Assessment is a rushed process**

Other strategic assessments, such as in the Kimberley in WA, have taken years, not months. The Melbourne Final Report was scheduled for completion by 14 August 2009, with only 30 days for community consultation.

(The VNPA put in a submission, of which this article is a summary. The full VNPA submission is on our website.)

There is a danger that the process will become a rubber stamp for development, without delivering good

**New native grassland reserves proposed by State Government north-east of the You Yangs and south-east of Melton.**



environmental outcomes for future generations or being in the national interest.

In addition, the assessment is based on poor data; further ecological surveys in spring and summer are urgently needed.

## 2. The plan for new reserves needs clarity

The VNPA welcomes the principle of the proposed reserves, but greater clarity is needed on how and when they will be established and funded.

The reserves, currently mostly private land, are expected to be set up over the next 10 years, and will be acquired through a Public Acquisition Overlay under the planning scheme.

The reserve plan needs greater detail, particularly in relation to governance, purchasing and management, to ensure that a permanent and satisfactory outcome can be delivered.

## 3. High conservation value sites within growth areas should be protected

The VNPA and local groups have identified 42 sites and key habitat links within the proposed urban growth areas which need protection.

Prescriptions for grasslands and key species need to be revised to allow high-value sites within the urban growth boundary to be retained as part of the 'urban conservation network'.

## 4. The proposed Outer Metropolitan Ring Road should be realigned.

The current alignment has not been subject to an on-ground ecological assessment and appears to go directly through a number of high-quality grasslands and four state significant grassy wetland areas (see example at right).

We recommend that the road corridor should be realigned to avoid the Western Wetland areas. The corridor should also be subject to an additional Environmental Effects Statement or additional detailed Federal assessment.

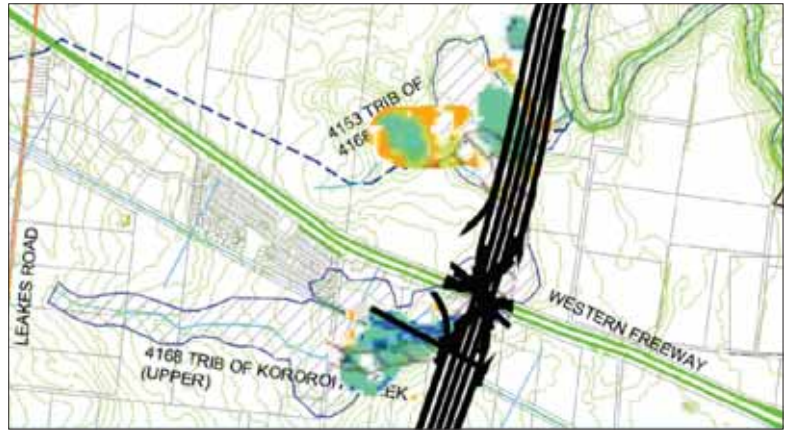
## Under threat

Many people have raised concerns over the impact Melbourne's proposed growth will have on the city's liveability. Kelvin Thomson, federal member for Wills and one of the few government members to put in a public submission, commented:

*"Everything that makes our city a great place to live, work and raise a family, is potentially under threat if population growth and urban sprawl continue at the current rate ... We have a responsibility to secure our city's future through thorough, thoughtful and detailed planning. This planning should not include an expanding Melbourne waistline".*

The VNPA is deeply concerned about the process and the potential results. The fact that the Federal Government may sign off on a growth process that could take 20 years to complete is of great concern. Many things can change in that time.

The worst-case scenario is that State and Federal governments sign off on broad-scale clearing for urban development, without protecting any of the high-value sites within the growth



**Planned route of Ring Road through a wetland site of significance.**

GRAPHIC COURTESY OF  
GIORGIO DE NOLA/  
CSONGRASS 2009

area or establishing a clear and binding process for purchasing the proposed 15,000 ha of grassland reserves.

Many landowners in the proposed reserve areas may be unwilling to sell and some may even move to clear the areas in the meantime. Governments change, and the \$200-\$300 million set aside for grassland purchase may catch the eye of a prospective Treasurer or Premier who needs a cash splash to combat diminishing opinion polls.

It is high unlikely that any of today's decision-makers (Jennings, Madden, Garrett or Brumby) will still be in office or even in public life in 20 years' time.

As our record of 56 years shows, the VNPA will still be around, but it would save everybody a lot of time and effort if a little more care were taken to get the decision right in the first place.

Our children and grandchildren will thank us for it.

## What you can do

### Write to:

- Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett, c/o Parliament House, Canberra, ACT 2600, [Peter.Garrett.MP@aph.gov.au](mailto:Peter.Garrett.MP@aph.gov.au)
- Victorian Premier John Brumby, c/o 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne, 3000, [premier@dpc.vic.gov.au](mailto:premier@dpc.vic.gov.au)

**Contact** your local State and Federal MPs and tell them your concerns about the proposed expansion of Melbourne and its impacts on natural values.

**Donate** to the VNPA's grassland protection campaign.

## V/Line to pay after clearing

In an 'enforceable undertaking' with the federal environment department, V/Line will pay \$188,000 after clearing 38 nationally endangered Spiny Rice-flower plants in railway land at Mitiamo near Bendigo.

The money will go to conservation of the species; monitoring, recovery and fencing; and staff and contractor training.

Landowners and corporations must liaise with the department before taking any action which might impact on nationally protected species.

A 2008 enforceable undertaking required a landholder to pay \$20,000 after clearing habitat of the Striped Legless Lizard near Cressy, west of Geelong.

— from a press release

*VNPA Park Protection Project Officer Phil Ingamells reports on aspects of the management of our alpine areas, and on the Royal Commission into Victoria's bushfires.*

## The alps in (and out of?) focus

### Changes for the Mount Buffalo Chalet...

**M**OUNT BUFFALO National Park, one of Victoria's two oldest national parks, has many buildings. Indeed sometimes it seems as if there are more buildings on the plateau than people.

Parks Victoria is now calling for expressions of interest for running the historic Chalet, and basically calling for pretty much the same old thing again.

We could be missing a great opportunity here.

- The Premier is currently calling for community support for programs for disaffected youth in Melbourne and elsewhere.
- Of all Victoria's national parks, Mount Buffalo is the one that is ideally suited to introducing young people to experiences in the natural world.
- The Chalet's outdated accommodation is more suited to young adventurers or backpackers than high-end tourism.
- The principle of equity of access, identified by the Alpine Resorts review (below), applies at least as strongly under the National Parks Act.

Next year Parks Victoria is running an internationally promoted *Healthy Parks Healthy People* conference, and their conference website quotes Barack Obama:

*"My Administration is working to connect America's youth with our treasured landscapes, which should be viewed as classrooms for environmental education and gateways to careers in natural resources. These efforts will include outreach to those who typically lack representation in, and exposure to, these fields."*

The Chalet could be the focus for a flagship program to launch or highlight at the conference — one where large numbers of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds take part in adventure programs and/or environmental monitoring/management programs in the park.

To have a really marked effect on the community (something Parks Victoria's own research shows) these programs should be extensive, and backed by Government, social welfare agencies, community groups and industry. Yet Victoria hasn't been nearly as pro-active as it could (and should) be in this regard.

Such programs are completely consistent with the objectives of the National Parks Act, and

could produce significant long-term benefits for the State. They might also end the perception in the community that national parks are simply the playground of privileged city greenies.

### and for the alpine resorts...

**I**F YOU GO up to the alps today (and you haven't been for a while), you might notice a very real change. In the big resorts, a lot of the 'affordable' accommodation has been replaced by upmarket lodges and hotels where the going price is very steep indeed.

Sure, the rich need somewhere to stay too, and even I sometimes opt for a bit more comfort these days, but there seems to be a very strong trend to surrender Victoria's alpine resorts (particularly Falls Creek and Mount Hotham) as playgrounds for the very well-off.

This may change again. The State Services Authority (a Government body set up to "provide State public sector services more effectively and efficiently") has reported to the Minister for the Environment on the operations of Victoria's Alpine Resorts.

Among its recommendations, it says that policy development (though not actual management) for the resorts should revert to DSE, rather than staying with the somewhat remote Alpine Resorts Coordinating Council. It also says that the resorts should achieve more equitable public access, allowing for use by individuals from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds (see Mount Buffalo above).

Another very welcome recommendation is that the Mount Stirling Alpine Resort, (currently set aside for cross-country skiing, but always in danger of development) should revert to management under DSE. This opens the way for its long-awaited incorporation into the Alpine National Park.

### Alpine Parks plan going nowhere

**V**ERY LITTLE has happened with this plan since June 2008, when Parks Victoria started its whimsically innovative wiki-based process for developing a management plan for our alpine national parks.

Now well over a year into the process, the Alpine Advisory Committee (required under the





Parks Act to give advice on the plan) has not yet been appointed. The Scientific Advisory Group has been appointed, but has met only once — to discuss its terms of reference.

Very few of the promised information papers, which were to ensure that the anticipated multitude of web-based contributions to the plan were well-informed, have actually appeared on the web. There is still no information available on the parks' natural values, the many serious threats to those values, or the very significant climate change impacts on the alps.

Very few people have contributed to the wiki site, leaving the whole fraught process seriously

lacking in credibility.

DSE and Parks Victoria are responsible for the development of a management plan for each national and state park in Victoria, and that is a serious responsibility. This highly unprofessional process, to develop a populist plan for around one-third of Victoria's parks in one hit, trivialises park management and has stumbled around ineptly for long enough.

It's time to pull the management plan for our Alpine National Park, and the other parks, seriously into line, and hand the whole basket to a more professional park planning process.

**The alps recovering after the 2003 fires. While most ecosystems can recover well from occasional fires, frequent fire can have long-term impacts on many species (see page 10).**

PHOTO: PHIL INGAMELLS

## The Bushfires Royal Commission part 2

**F**UEL REDUCTION burning, and vegetation clearing, will soon be in the Royal Commission's spotlight.

Having delivered its interim report, largely on the effectiveness of Black Saturday's emergency response process, the Royal Commission into Victoria's bushfires has already begun deliberations for the final report. This will deal with many new issues around fire, including building design, electricity supply and climate change predictions.

However, the most frequently cited concern in the first round of submissions to the inquiry was fuel reduction or prescribed burning. The Commission has made it clear in the interim report that this is a complex issue, with a broad range of views expressed on the topic.

The VNPA has never opposed effective fuel reduction programs. But we do strongly believe that, except in critical safety zones, they should be

ecologically based, and should be backed up by the best available science.

Because it is an evidence-based investigation, the Royal Commission offers a rare opportunity to get this right. Anyone who is able to put in a submission should keep a watch on the Commission's website, where any future call for submissions will be announced.

The VNPA will be preparing a submission to the Commission on fuel reduction and vegetation clearing. In the meantime we have commissioned a series of studies outlining current levels of knowledge of fire ecology, and looking at the current capacity of our land management agencies to administer an ecologically enlightened fuel reduction program.

Go to the Commission's website at [www.royalcommission.vic.gov.au](http://www.royalcommission.vic.gov.au) or the VNPA's website at [www.vnpa.org.au](http://www.vnpa.org.au), or call the VNPA for more information.

# Fire frequency in Victoria's ecosystems

*Geoff Lacey is an environmental engineer, naturalist, and long-standing member of the VNPA and Friends of French Island. This article is an edited version of his complete referenced essay, which will be on the VNPA website.*



**(Above) Heathland from the Pinnacles, French Island. Heathlands need fire to maintain species diversity, but not too often.**

**(Above right) Blue Mountain, Wombat Forest. Frequent fires in forests could lead to loss of species.**

PHOTOS: GEOFF LACEY

## The importance of fire history

The ecosystems of south-eastern Australia, and their fire dynamics, have been greatly altered since European settlement.

Some would say that their pre-European condition is no longer relevant to present and future fire management policy. But how can we manage the landscape and its ecosystems if we do not understand their history?

Many writers claim that Aboriginal people engaged in intensive regular burning, even 'fire-stick farming', in the grasslands, woodlands and some forests. However, we know very little about pre-European fire regimes in south-eastern Australia. It is hard to find first-hand evidence, and to distinguish natural fires caused by lightning from those of human origin.

There are a few contemporary accounts. Hume and Hovell, in their journey to Port Phillip (1824-25), described the grassy understorey of the country being burned in several locations and imply that this was through human agency.

For example, to the west of Mt Buffalo they recorded in November that *All the country in the line of route today had been burned and, a little to the westward of this line, the grass was still blazing to a considerable height.*

The scarcity of direct evidence is not surprising, as the coming of settlers and stock disrupted the Aboriginal economy and lifestyle.

The purpose of this article is to examine what has been recorded about fire in some of Victoria's ecosystems, and to consider the implications for fire policy today.

## Mountain Ash forests

No-one suggests that Victoria's Mountain Ash forests were once burnt frequently, but some modelling studies throw light on their fire history.

McCarthy and Lindenmayer developed a model of the development of multi-aged Mountain Ash forest in response to fire, and compared the model predictions with observations in the Ada Forest Block. Their results suggested a mean fire interval of 75-200 years, with the best fit about 100 years.

There is considerable variation in mortality of Mountain Ash trees after an extensive fire, though studies suggest that about 50% of the trees survive in an area of Mountain Ash forest that is burnt.

## East Gippsland

Two east Gippsland studies demonstrate the difficulty of determining pre-European fire regimes.

Magistrate and naturalist Alfred Howitt, in a study of the eucalypts of Gippsland (1890), claimed that the Aborigines kept the forests open through annual fires. Early settlers reduced the fire frequency, so tree seedlings could survive.

After some years of European occupation, whole areas became covered with saplings of White Box, Snow Gum, Manna Gum, Peppermint, etc. In the Omeo district, young forests were growing where formerly the hills were open and park-like.

But the naturalist Norman Wakefield (1970) gave another account of the upper Snowy River valley and the area to the west.

The first European settlers who came to the district in 1843 had spoken of the open, park-like appearance of the forests.

It became accepted practice for them to burn the bush about every four years to produce grassy feed for cattle. This was done in very hot dry weather to make a clean burn, except in the White Box (rain shadow) country, which was hard to burn and had a permanent grassy understorey.

Wakefield studied the effect of burning in the different forest types. In dry forests there was vigorous regrowth of trees and several shrubs, and in the dry grassy woodland on the plateau there was regrowth of eucalypts from root stock. He argued that this contradicted the hypothesis that frequent Aboriginal fires kept the understorey grassy.

On the contrary, the grassy forests were associated with a comparatively low fire frequency. The subsequent development of scrub was a consequence of a high frequency of burning.

The possibility remains that the Aborigines did carry out regular burning in relatively cool conditions, in contrast to the settlers' practice, and that this may have favoured an open grassy understorey. We need more evidence to know the answer.

## Forests on French Island

French Island experienced clearing, logging and some burning after European settlement. Then, with the establishment of a wildlife reserve in 1971 (expanded to a national park in 1997), a slow recovery of the forests began on parts of the island.

Around 1980 the forest sites, except those on the south coast, generally had a heathy understorey, dominated by tea-tree species and Silver Banksia. However, *in the absence of fire*, by around 1995 the dense heathy understorey had begun to die away, leaving a more open understorey dominated by grasses or bracken.

This process has continued to the present. A few patches have been burnt in recent years, with a temporary dense proliferation of some wattle and pea species. But in general the 'opening up' has continued.

This suggests that prolonged disturbance favoured the formation of a dense heathy under-

storey, while absence of burning or other disturbance led to an open understorey. This goes against the common supposition that fire is needed to keep an understorey open.

## Non-forest ecosystems

Data on pre-European fire history is especially scarce for ecosystems such as woodlands and grasslands.

We know that their species composition is greatly influenced by fire and other forms of disturbance, in particular grazing by native or introduced animals. However, it is difficult to separate out the effects of fire.

There have been a number of studies of the fire dynamics of heathlands. One in South Australia found that shortly after a fire a diversity of species sprang up. The heath became floristically poorer with age; the number of species decreased and a small number of large shrubs eventually became dominant.

If fires are too frequent, some species that have not had time to set seed may become locally extinct. On the other hand, long-term absence of fire in the heathland sometimes appears to lead to permanent change in the floristic composition, with fewer species.

Studies of the woodlands and grasslands in the alpine areas of Victoria and NSW have shown that European settlement led to increased fire frequency. There is little if any evidence that Aborigines deliberately burned these areas.

## Implications for fire policy

It is essential to understand the history of our landscape and its ecosystems in order to manage them adequately.

Assertions about Aboriginal 'firestick farming' are misleading as we have very little data about their fire regimes in south-eastern Australia. The open grassy understoreys encountered by settlers in many forests may have been the result of frequent cool burning, or of very infrequent burning.

Evidence from French Island shows that an open understorey is not necessarily the result of frequent burning. And there is plenty of evidence that frequent hot burning by settlers in some locations produced dense growth of trees and shrubs.

Different ecosystems have had very different fire frequencies. And the examples considered suggest diversity in fire dynamics even in apparently similar ecosystems.

This indicates the need for caution. Increasing fire frequency in a particular ecosystem is likely to eliminate a range of species, and perhaps change the ecosystem. It could even increase flammability by favouring fire-tolerant shrubs.

The effects of global warming, especially lower rainfall and higher evaporation, are likely to intensify these shifts in ecosystem type. They will also lead to increased frequency and severity of fires.

# We want some more from Victorian environmental law

Chris Smyth, *the Australian Conservation Foundation's Healthy Oceans campaigner*, says that the State Government's approval for developments at Bastion Point (Mallacoota) is one of a number of bad planning decisions due largely to the weakness of Victoria's *Environment Effects Act*.

**W**'ANT SOME MORE' might be the most-quoted text from Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, but 'The law is an ass' could come a close second.

If alive today, Dickens could apply his references to Victoria's *Environment Effects Act*.

We want much more from this ass of a law if it is to protect the environment from development excesses.

Point. Its beach and shallow reef are popular for surfing, swimming, rock pool rambling, scientific study, snorkelling, angling and many other recreational and social activities.

But by defying planning logic, Minister Madden's decision could see this natural icon of the Wilderness Coast buried under rubble, concrete and asphalt.

He rejected the findings of his Panel's long and comprehensive investigation, the first time a Victorian planning minister has done so. The Panel said the development could not be justified on environmental, social and economic grounds.

Nevertheless, he approved it, with the safety and separation of boat users and bathers his stated prime reason. This too was at odds with the Panel's conclusion that the proposed development would in fact be unsafe.

Opposition to the harbour development is broadly based.

The Gippsland Coastal Board did not support the proposal because it is inconsistent with the Victorian Coastal Strategy.

Neither did 87% of the people who submitted to the Panel, as well as many coastal experts, local surf lifesavers and SES volunteers.

The only support comes from the East Gippsland Council (less than unanimous), local independent MP Craig Ingram and a handful of Mallacoota business people.

It appears the Brumby Government has abandoned any commitment to proper and detailed environmental impact assessment, treating the process as either optional or a rubber stamp.

It determined that major developments such as channel deepening and the north-south pipeline would proceed well before an Environment Effects Statement (EES) was considered.

It is also ignoring the directions it set itself in documents like the Victorian Coastal Strategy. Approval of a canal estate at Lonsdale Lakes in a time of dangerous climate change, and the Bastion Point decision, are the latest examples.

In the case of channel deepening, the Government failed to provide a robust environmental management plan, comprehensive monitoring program or sufficient environmental safeguards.



**Not much doubt about what these Mallacoota residents think of the proposed Bastion Point developments.**

PHOTO: MICHAEL RAYNER

Planning Minister Justin Madden's approval of the East Gippsland Shire Council's Bastion Point ocean access ramp, breakwater and beach road for Mallacoota, despite his own expert Panel recommending strongly against it, again shows a planning system in trouble.

The August application by the Friends of Mallacoota for a Supreme Court judicial review of the Minister's decision (served on Madden and also environment minister Gavin Jennings) indicates the community has had enough.

The Friends action is based on two grounds. The first is that the Planning Minister failed to assess the development's environmental impacts, his clear task under the Act. The second is that the groups opposing the development were denied natural justice in his cursory approval process.

Mallacoota residents and visitors do not want a destructive development dumped on Bastion



**(Above) Bastion Point with artist's sketch of proposed developments, including road along beach and loss of coastal vegetation.**

PHOTO COURTESY DAVID HUXTABLE

**(Below) Bastion Point as it is now. This part of the beach would be obliterated by a road and large boat ramp, and a breakwater would cover the rocks.** PHOTO: CHRIS SMYTH



It pleaded that an EES was not required for the desalination plant at Wonthaggi. Presumably it reluctantly agreed to one after federal government insistence, but mocked the process in its haste to approve the plant.

These bad decisions are in large part due to the weakness of Victoria's *Environment Effects Act*. It is a mere 16 pages long, has no objects clause and provides no credible ministerial assessment framework for informing decisions under such laws as the Coastal Management Act.

Open to broad interpretation, the *Environment Effects Act* makes it easy for political self-interest to steamroll environmental concerns. Calls for its reform, including the 145-page report of a 2002 Planning Advisory Committee, have been ignored.

The Brumby Government can still get it right at Bastion Point and also turn the ass of an *Environmental Effects Act* into a thoroughbred.

It should take heed of the broader community concern reflected in the Friends of Mallacoota Supreme Court action, and reform the law.

Reform of the Act should include provisions that trigger environmental impact assessments, remove ministerial discretion on whether an assessment is required, and establish a tiered approach that identifies the level of assessment a project needs.

There should also be clear process timeframes and opportunities for community input, and open and transparent assessments with the mandatory release of assessment reports.

If the State Government doesn't reform the law, it will cast further doubt on its willingness to protect Victoria's environment.

*See also 'Port Campbell headland still at risk' (p.23)*

# Save NSW red gums!

Bob Carr is a former Premier of NSW. This is a condensed version of an article he wrote that appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 24 July 2009.



**F**ROM THE AIR they are bands of green that emerge from the Great Dividing Range and run along the banks of our major rivers as they snake west. On ground they are stately silhouettes, mighty arms akimbo, hefty trunks streaked red on white: statuesque, unmoving, some hundreds of years old but with the look of eternity ...

Log these?

Log them until in ten years the old ones are all gone and we are left only with straggly regrowth? Log them when 80% of the landscape along the Murray has already been cleared? When on some stretches 75% of the trees are already dead or dying or stressed because of drought and climate change?

The most reliable estimate is that there are only 136 jobs in red gum logging on public lands in this state [NSW]. Timber jobs are 0.2% of employment in the region. All can be accommodated in new national parks.

How can I be so certain?

First, because Victoria has just done it. As of June 30, logging stopped [there] forever in 91,000 hectares of red gum wetlands. The outcome is jobs positive because there are 30 new park ranger jobs in four new parks, ten jobs in forest management and 24 in the tourism sector.

Second, because NSW offers loads of experience in world-significant nature conservation

made possible through industry restructuring without job losses.

We have had 30 years of these arguments. Each has ended with decisive conservation victories, and the outcomes have been endorsed at state elections.

In my experience — and I was environment minister in the Wran government between 1984 and 1988 — the case made by conservationists starts by looking over-reaching. But it always ends up being vindicated.

The rainforests of northern NSW are an argument-winning example. They were going to be logged until Neville Wran in 1982 mobilised a cabinet majority to protect 90,000 hectares, creating green swathes of new national park that included Nightcap, Washpool and Border Ranges ...

In their bones country and city people alike know that as the continent's population climbs we will count precious every hectare of national park this generation has declared.

The conflict over the river red gums is the same as these earlier ones, only easier. The conservation outcome is inevitable. What's up for debate is the quality of the outcome, how big we make this gift to future generations. Also, whether it will be settled through orderly policy or a scramble to win the support of conservationists at five minutes to midnight in the shadow of the March 2011 state election.



(L-R) Neville Atkinson of the Yorta Yorta Nation, Bob Carr and Nick Roberts (VNPA) meet at the Murray.

*On the same day (24 July), the NSW State Government announced that there would be an independent review of River Red Gum forest management in the State, conducted by the NSW Natural Resources Commission.*

*This will be an independent, scientifically based assessment which is expected to recommend the creation of new national parks in negotiation with Indigenous Traditional Owners.*

*The VNPA, the National Parks Association of NSW, The Wilderness Society, Friends of the Earth and the Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation have all congratulated the NSW Government and look forward to a positive outcome.*

*Go to [www.npansw.org.au](http://www.npansw.org.au) to send an email to Premier Nathan Rees and his Cabinet, commending them on taking this important step and calling for red gum national parks for NSW.*

# GKP Storylines

Verity McLucas of *Environment Victoria* tells us about a new DVD in which people describe their connections with the Murray River's red gum forests.

**G**KP STORYLINES is a digital storytelling project, an initiative of Environment Victoria's Healthy Rivers Campaign with funding from the Murray-Darling Basin Authority through The Living Murray program.

Under the guidance of filmmaker and social historian Malcolm McKinnon, the project brought together a diverse group of people to share and record the story of their personal connection to the Murray River wetland forests of Gunbower-Koondrook-Pericoota (GKP).

Over the course of a four-day group workshop at Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE, participants scripted and produced their own short digital story on computer software and digital media equipment.

Everyone had varying levels of skills and experience but each participant was carefully guided through the process.

The result is a collection of ten short films that celebrate the social, cultural and ecological values of this precious icon site and present compelling arguments for why it must be protected and restored. The 30-minute DVD is an entertaining and educational resource for students, educators and the whole community.

An accompanying Teacher's Guide is suitable for both primary and secondary students.

Before watching the DVD one could be forgiven wondering what a farmer, forester, conservationist, sawmiller, Aboriginal elder, art teacher, apiarist, university student and pilot could possibly have in common. But it all becomes clear as their stories come to life.

GKP is a remarkable place of work and play, a

safe haven for a vast array of native animals and plants, and home to our beloved River Red Gums.

It is also a landscape under threat.

Since the early 1900s the Murray River has been increasingly regulated to supply water for irrigation and other uses. This has led to changes in natural flooding regimes and a significant decline in the health and productivity of the forest and river ecology.

Continuing low water levels in the Murray have put this delicate ecosystem under great stress. Many of its plant and animal species face an increasingly doubtful future.

GKP is one of six 'Icon Sites' identified within The Living Murray initiative, which aims to recover 500 gegalitres of 'new' water to support restoration of the Murray's ecosystems.

By sharing their personal stories about this precious and extraordinary place, the GKP storytellers are helping to ensure GKP's survival by showing why it is worth protecting and restoring.

For more information or to order your free GKP Storylines DVD or Teacher's Pack, please email [verity.mclucas@envict.org.au](mailto:verity.mclucas@envict.org.au), or phone (03) 9341 8109.

To read more about GKP or any of the other five icon sites of The Living Murray initiative, see [www.mdba.gov.au](http://www.mdba.gov.au).

*Environment Victoria acknowledges the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE, North Central CMA and DSE for supporting this project.*



## Unhurried river

by Robin Pryor

*The massive river red gums, stocky,  
solid,  
formed a ragged guard of honour  
for the wide brown stream  
soothing its way across the  
dry flat land, horizon bound.*

*They dipped their drab, curled fingers  
in silent supplication and parched plea  
towards the cool deep waters which  
with scarce a ripple of log or rock  
flowed on sedately; quiet; slow.*

*Like a forest of Rodin's thinkers  
the stained scarred trunks  
leant their gnarled and knotted elbows  
on the banks of ancient wisdom,  
pondering the pains and hopes of life.*

*Unfazed by history's shifting sands,  
wounded  
but unbowed by thoughtless human  
needs,  
they summoned from deeper depths  
their sustenance for drought and fire  
their strength for howling wind and  
flood.*

*And the wide brown waters, composed  
and calm,  
moved inexorably on, their  
patient path of cosmic destiny  
mapped by the eucalyptus haze  
of centuries of fragrant distillation.*

*A distillation, yes, of cleansing, healing  
oils,  
but more an extract of the essence of  
this southern land itself,  
of heat and cold and searching tribes,  
drawn into unhurried life by this river  
in the sun.*

# Wingan Inlet's 100 years

*Parks Victoria ranger Graham Parkes worked at Wingan Inlet and Croajingolong National Parks from 1976 to 1982, and is currently Ranger in Charge of Grampians National Park.*



**The Skerries rocks from Wingan Inlet.**

PHOTO: PARKS VICTORIA

**2**009, the centenary year of Wyperfeld National Park, also marks 100 years since the establishment of Wingan Inlet National Park (now part of Croajingolong NP) in far east Gippsland.

In October 1909 an area of 4560 acres (1890 ha), including the Skerries Rocks, was temporarily reserved as a national park following a deputation from the (then) National Parks Association to the Minister for Lands.

One of the few undeveloped estuaries in SE Australia, Wingan is a favourite camping spot for people seeking a remote and quiet destination. It combines so many different elements: a rocky offshore island group, exposed coastal heathlands, coastal forests, rainforest and the tidal inlet itself.

In the coastal middens there is a history of thousands of years of occupation by Aboriginal people.

In damp gullies are areas of 'jungle', or warm temperate rainforest, where Kanooka and Lillypilly, draped with vines, shield an understorey of ground ferns.

George Bass sheltered here from rough seas in December 1797. Sealers probably called in the early 1800s as the Skerries would have been a good source of seals.

After 1909, the park's 'protection' was in name only as there was little on-ground management. However, people visited the Inlet, some

stopping for lengthy periods.

Visits to the Inlet increased after the war. Following an inspection by the National Parks Authority in May 1959, toilets and rubbish disposal were provided for campers.

In 1964, ranger Ken Morrison was appointed to look after Lind, Alfred and Wingan Inlet national parks, in addition to Mallacoota Inlet NP, where he was based. Over the next few years he improved the campground facilities, constructed a new walking track to the beach, and supervised works on the access road.

A full-time Ranger in Charge, Ray Maguire, was appointed to Wingan Inlet in 1975, and he made significant improvements to the campground and constructed a boardwalk and jetty.

The creation of Croajingolong NP in April 1979 brought an increased level of protection to a much larger area, plus more staff and resources.

Today the gravel access road to the inlet from the Princes Highway is trafficable for two-wheel drive vehicles, but it can still be rough and slippery in wet conditions.

Camping among the large Bloodwoods in the campground is a special experience. In the daytime you can see Wonga Pigeons and lyrebirds, while at night you can listen to the screeching of Yellow-bellied Gliders and the bellowing of seals.

Fortunately, this remarkable place remains as unspoilt as when it was reserved 100 years ago. May it survive unspoilt for another 100!



# VNPA Marine and Coastal news

*Paige Shaw is the VNPA's Marine and Coastal Project Officer.*

**T**HE MARINE AND COASTAL CAMPAIGN is gearing up again in 2009 after the appointment of a new marine campaigner (me!), and there are a number of exciting projects under way.

The VNPA is currently undertaking its fourth Nature Conservation Review (the first was published in 1971). The Review will identify nature conservation priorities not just on land but across all Victoria's terrestrial, marine and freshwater environments.

We are excited that the associated Marine and Coastal Issues Paper is due for release very soon. This will assess key threats to the marine and coastal environment, including climate change; identify key priority habitats in the marine and coastal environment; and discuss approaches to building marine and coastal biodiversity resilience.

The issues investigation includes the creation of a valuable Coastal Issues Database, which will allow users to compare coastal threats and conservation priorities across different areas of the state.

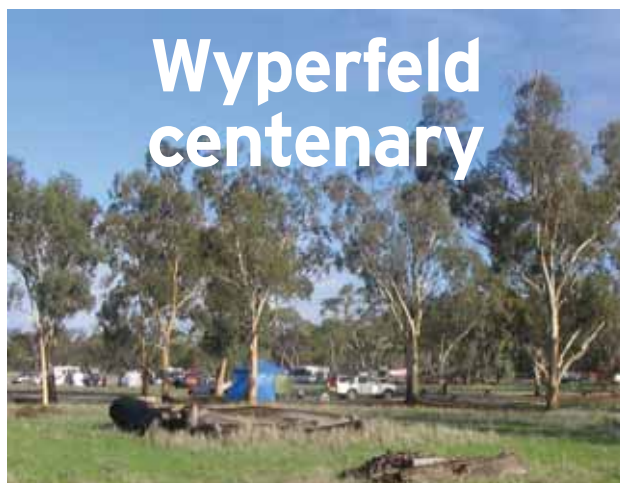
The VNPA and Reef Watch Victoria are also developing a new marine web portal that will be a central hub for information about the natural values of Victoria's marine environment, and showcase its spectacular diversity via a marine photo bank.

The website will help members, groups and individuals find out how they can be involved in activities in their local areas along the coast and within the marine environment.

We will be holding forums to launch the new portal later this year. It will be a great opportunity to celebrate the work of volunteers, share ideas and stories, and learn about the diverse marine and coastal projects going on across the state.



**Flinders Weedy Sea-dragon silhouette.** PHOTO: DAVID BRYANT



## Wyperfeld centenary

Parks Victoria will mark the official centenary of Wyperfeld National Park's initial 1909 reservation with a special event on **Sunday 11 October**. Everyone with a past or present connection to or interest in Wyperfeld is warmly invited!

The day will include activities, displays and a range of guest speakers, and a barbecue lunch will be provided. It will be held at the Wonga campground in the south end of Wyperfeld, about 40km north of Rainbow.

The event will begin at 10.30am, and the main part will end after lunch, though some activities will continue into the afternoon.

To RSVP and for more information, please call the Parks Victoria Information Centre on 13 1963.

**Friends weekend at Wyperfeld, June 2009.**

PHOTO AND TEXT: JEREMY DOWNS, PARKS VICTORIA

# The babblers are back!

*Ray Thomas is the dedicated organiser of the Regent Honeyeater and Grey-crowned Babbler revegetation projects in northern Victoria. VNPA members and friends are among many people who have planted trees and shrubs for the projects in recent years. Contact Ray on raydavidthomas@hotmail.com or phone 5761 1515. The last planting for this year is on 19-20 September.*



**W**E HAVE RECENTLY [April 2009] completed the annual Grey-crowned Babbler survey of the Lurg Hills near Benalla, and have some VERY exciting news to share about how these rare birds are faring in our district.

After locating the last couple of elusive family groups, there were instant powerful insights about the effectiveness of our planting strategies over the past 14 years.

One of the babbler groups had spent the hot summer nesting in the dense shade of some deciduous trees, right beside a farm dam in a creek line. From there they had only a short flight to feed in the road verge and adjacent paddock trees.

This fits the pattern of many other babbler families that spend their time in the cool, moist conditions of farmhouse gardens.

Another group was about 1 km from the nearest roadside, feeding and nesting in a site planted

five or six years ago around a cluster of old Grey Box paddock trees.

This babbler family had shifted 3 km from a narrow roadside verge in the dry foothills, down to the plains where the food is more secure. Not surprisingly, the family has grown from four to six over the past year!

Two years ago the vegetation on site was only three years old, and much more open of course. There were no babblers.

This 'shifting down' to more fertile habitat has been observed with several family groups, and in each case it seems that the birds had to wait until our plantings were old enough and dense enough to provide secure habitat.

Further good news is that the original dense grassy weed layer has largely disappeared through competition with our planted saplings. This has left a lot of bare ground and sticks, which improves the opportunities for ground-foraging birds like babblers.

The total babbler population for the Lurg Hills is now officially **81**, compared with the previous highest total of **72**. Given that these delightful birds have declined across Victoria to only 0.1% of their former population, these gains are really significant.

It looks as if we have turned the population decline around, in fact! And our strategy is the same as the one we've been applying for Regent Honeyeaters since the mid-1990s. Restoring and 'bulking-up' degraded remnants on more fertile country gives these shy birds a safe place to be, right in the best food reserves where there is enough food to raise their young.

It's news worth sharing, and cause for being hopeful about all the other rare species that will benefit from our strategic plantings in the same way. Think about rare species as sensitive indicators of environmental health.

Sincere thanks for everyone's part in creating the habitat that has made such a difference! Special thanks also to local volunteer Nigel Lacey, for his painstaking work to monitor the babbler families over the past eight years. I don't know anyone else who has attempted such a thorough long-term survey of an entire district.

**Grey-crowned Babblers – quirky calls and happy family behaviour endear them to people.** PHOTO: PETER ADAM, VIOLET TOWN

**Busy group planting habitat for babblers.** PHOTO: RAY THOMAS





For a more detailed Annual Report,  
see our website [www.vnpa.org.au](http://www.vnpa.org.au)



## President's Report

*Fred Gerardson*

**T**HE VNPA has had a successful year, although one overshadowed by the Black Saturday fires and their aftermath.

In 2007-08 the VNPA Council and staff worked hard to finalise the 2020 Strategic Plan. The 2008-09 year has seen us working on some key planks of that plan.

Council has reviewed the rules by which the VNPA operates. The **Governance, Policy and Legal Committee** identified a need to update the Association's Statement of Rules and reinforce them with a comprehensive set of By-Laws covering many of the former administrative policies.

The proposed revised Constitution will be presented for voting at the coming AGM. The By-Laws were enacted by Council at a special Council Meeting in August.

Council's **Marketing and Membership Committee** has assisted staff in developing a comprehensive Marketing Plan to help the VNPA pursue its advocacy and fundraising goals.

Our Strategic Plan recognises that we are a member-based organisation with funding not based on any one source. A key focus of the Marketing Plan is to recognise and build on these strengths.

Due to our financial strength, Council has committed a significant component of the Crosbie Morrison Fund to fund the initial expenditure investment required by the Marketing Plan. This expenditure should be recouped and the Crosbie Morrison funds replenished over a five-year period.

The **Finance and Operations Committee** has continued to scrutinise the VNPA's finances and strong budgetary processes. The result is a small surplus, in line with Council's budget philosophy. Over a three-year cycle, with combined turnover of close to \$4 million, an overall surplus is an outstanding result.

Our **Bushwalking and Activities Group** once again put together a comprehensive program of activities and excursions for our members. This committee continues to astound me with its enthusiasm and organisation, and its ability to respond to events such as the February bushfires.

The **Conservation and Campaigns Committee** had a mixed year, losing



**Nature Watch in action.** PHOTO: CAITLIN GRIFFITH

Convenor Ian Harris and having to cope with the fallout of the bushfires. It saw successes in the Red Gum and Point Nepean campaigns, and assisted with developing new campaigns on Grasslands and Riparian environments.

As well as a personal tragedy, the sad loss of Jenny Barnett in the fires was a great blow to the VNPA, and Council must now consider how to replace or rebuild the resulting enormous loss of knowledge. A key aspect of this is increasingly to call on, and support, the many knowledgeable and experienced VNPA members who wish to play an active role in the Association's conservation work.

Council also signed off on our first official Enterprise Collective Agreement. I thank Matt and our staff for another year of significant achievement, and look forward to expanding on our talented base in the years ahead.

In conclusion, may I sincerely thank those many volunteers who help the VNPA to run so well and be so effective in its purposes, as well as those who respond to our requests for financial support, contribute to our publications, or write to our lawmakers. Your input is our major strength!

## VNPA Council members 2008-09

**Fred Gerardson (President)** – elected 2006

**Libby Smith (Vice President)** – elected 2006

**Charles Street (Secretary)** – elected 2006

**Russell Falvey (Treasurer)** – elected 2006

**Andrew Freadman** – elected 2005

**Maelor Himbury (Friends Network representative)** – elected 2006

**John Renowden** – elected 2006

**Ann Buik** – elected 2007

**Linda Parlane** – elected 2007

**Ian Harris** – 2004-06; re-elected 2008

(resigned May 2009 due to appointment to VEAC Council)

**Karen Medica** – elected 2008

**Kyle Matheson** – elected 2008

## Retiring councillors 2008-09

**Joan Lindros** (past President,  
Vice President & Councillor)



## Executive Director's report

*Matt Ruchel*

**O**VER THE 2008-09 financial year, the VNPA has made significant progress on some long-running conservation projects. While the end point is very satisfying, it's the long hard years and the continuing support of members and supporters which really make a difference.

Like many in the community we've also faced great personal loss this year, when our much loved and respected colleague Jenny Barnett perished with her husband John at Steels Creek in the Black Saturday bushfires. We miss Jenny greatly, but must continue her 20-plus years of great work at the VNPA.

For a small organisation with limited resources we achieve a huge amount. But no matter how efficient, passionate and committed we are, we still need your support to continue our work.

### Significant successes

- **New River Red Gum parks:** After ten years of persistent work by the VNPA, the Brumby government committed to establish almost 100,000 ha of new national parks and reserves along the Murray, Goulburn and Ovens rivers. Final legislation to declare the parks is expected in late 2009.
- **Point Nepean:** After almost eight years of negotiations, the State and Federal governments confirmed on 2 June that agreement had been reached on incorporating the 90ha Quarantine Station area into Point Nepean NP.
- **Cobboboonee National Park:** Following a long campaign in association with local groups and other organisations, we welcomed the declaration of 26,000ha of a new national park at Cobboboonee, adjacent to Lower Glenelg National Park.

### Ongoing and future VNPA conservation projects

#### 1. Park management and conservation planning

The VNPA's aim is to ensure that Victoria's parks and reserves are managed effectively. This includes:

- responding to park management plans
- producing submissions and report to Federal and State governments
- meeting regularly with Parks Victoria, DSE and other government contacts.

We have also commenced our fourth Nature Conservation Review, to be

completed in 2010.

#### 2. Grasslands

New plans to expand Melbourne's urban growth boundary will potentially destroy significant patches of grassland in Melbourne's west. The VNPA is working with local groups to ensure that key grassland areas are protected.

#### 3. Protecting our seas and shores

We continue to respond to issues such as Port Phillip channel deepening and the proposed Bastion Point development in Mallacoota.

We are also undertaking a major review of marine conservation priorities in Victoria as part of the VNPA's Nature Conservation Review process.

#### 4. Victoria Naturally Alliance

The VNPA continues to lead the Alliance, a partnership of nine environment groups in Victoria established to address the dire condition of the state's biodiversity.

The Alliance has produced a number of key policy reports to feed into the Government's White Paper on Biodiversity and Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy, to be released in late 2009.

#### 5. Fire Ecology Project

We have launched a dedicated project to increase knowledge of the effects of fire, and ensure that fire management protects not only people but nature as well. With our partners, we will undertake strategic research projects that will make a significant contribution to the Bushfires Royal Commission and other policy processes.

#### 6. Red gum and Riparian projects

In October 2009 the current five-year grazing licences for over 30,000km (100,000+ ha) of riparian land along Victoria's rivers and streams will be up for renewal. We are working to gain commitments from the State Government to create a new riparian 'Conservation Licence', and supporting programs.

We are following up on government commitments to new red gum parks to ensure that legislation and funding are implemented smoothly.

#### 7. Get Active for Nature

The VNPA Bushwalking and Activities Group has continued to grow with over 200 walks, 'Walk, Talk & Gawks', excursions and other activities offered by our dedicated team of volunteer leaders.

#### 8. Small Parks Project

This project aims to build a publicly accessible register of 'small parks' – areas of

public land under 20,000ha which have good conservation values – which can be fed into the current VEAC investigation into remnant vegetation. These areas will become core building blocks for large-scale biolinks and serve as refuges for wildlife faced with climate change.

#### 9. Engaging the community

Our hands-on work in nature conservation continues, including habitat restoration projects at Hindmarsh, Grow West and the Alps, and our own Nature Watch and Reef Watch projects.

*Nature Watch* completed the first year of Golden Sun Moth and grassland monitoring. Phytophthora monitoring continued in Brisbane Ranges NP and will soon begin at Wilsons Promontory NP. We also worked with Deakin University on post-fire monitoring in the Grampians.

*Reef Watch*, in partnership with Melbourne Museum, continues to deliver the Great Victoria Fish Count as well as underwater reef monitoring projects with the aid of an enthusiastic dive community.



#### 10. Old-growth forests

The VNPA has supported work by local people and environment groups to protect the last significant stands of old growth currently available for logging in Victoria. Work has included a campaign base camp over the Australia Day weekend and the production of an Investigation into Labor's 2006 Election Old Growth Forest Commitments. We will continue to work to ensure these commitments are delivered.

#### 11. VNPA 2020 Vision and Organisation

In 2008, the VNPA completed a 12-year strategic plan entitled VNPA 2020 Vision, an ambitious plan to protect nature and encourage the community to 'get active for nature'. In 2008-09 we completed a Marketing and Fundraising Strategy to develop VNPA support, membership and influence. We are working to ensure that the VNPA continues to be a strong and financially sustainable 'voice for nature'.

## Employees 2008-2009

**Executive Director:** Matt Ruchel

**Administration Assistants:** Charlotte Kandelaars, Irina De Loche

**Administration & Membership Officer:** Amy Dyer

**Conservation & Campaigns Manager:** Megan Clinton

**Finance and Operations Manager:** Sue Hayman-Fox

**Fundraising and Development Manager:** Anne-Maree Wheeler

**Joint Media Officer** (shared with other environment groups): Sacha Myers

**Marine & Coastal Conservation Project Officer:** Paige Shaw

**Marketing Officers:** Mari Ericksen, Joanna Slykerman

**Nature Watch /Community Projects Coordinator:** Caitlin Griffith

**Park Protection Project Officer:** Phil Ingamells

**Park Watch/Update Editor and Publications Officer:** Michael Howes

**Red Gum Icons Project Officer:** Nick Roberts

**Reef Watch Coordinator:** Wendy Roberts

**Research Officer:** (the late) Jenny Barnett

**Small Parks Project Officer:** Yasmin Kelsall

**Victoria Naturally Alliance Project Leader:** Carrie Deutsch

**Victoria Naturally Alliance Project Officers:** Karen Alexander, Jacqui Kelly

**Victoria Naturally Communications Adviser:** John Sampson

**Hosted Network – Victorian Environment Friends Network Committee:** Maelor Himbury, Sue Wright, Tony Woolford, Bernie Fox, Neil Duncan.

## Volunteers & Committee Convenors

The great strength of the VNPA is its members, and in particular those who volunteer. Many people give their time and expertise to the Association's activities and committees. We acknowledge all of your efforts and extend particular thanks to the following people.

This is by no means a complete list. Through the VNPA, over 1,200 active volunteers are involved in tree planting, weeding, leading bushwalks and other activities, committees, community monitoring programs, volunteer training and much more.

## Volunteer Committee Convenors

**Bushwalking and Activities Group:** Lisa Sulinski

**Caring For Nature Day:** Reg Elder

**Conservation & Campaigns:** Ian Harris (part year only)

**Executive:** Fred Gerardson

**Excursions:** William Keatley, Larysa Kucan

**Finance:** Russell Falvey

**Governance, Policy and Legal:** Fred Gerardson

**Membership, Marketing &**

**Communications:** Libby Smith

## VNPA Volunteers

**Administration assistants:** Sandra Cutts, Colette Findlay, Margaret Hattersley, Dipti Jani (NMIT), Len Lock, Raimonne McCutchan, Allan Sisson, Graham Trigg, Felix Vereker (Holmesglen TAFE)

**Education Kit coordinators:** Jill Casey and Graham Trigg

**Historical documentation:** Eileen McKee

**Library:** Beryl Halle

**Marine and Coastal research:** Adam Edmonds and Sylvia Buchanan

**Marketing research and advice:** Libby Smith, DB AdNews, Motive Market Research

**Biosis Research for the NatureWatch Grasslands and Golden Sun Moth**

**Project:** Sally Koehler and Daniel Gilmore  
Professor David Cahill and Deakin University School of Life and Environmental Sciences (Probono work)

**NatureWatch office work:** Carolyn Edwards, Clare Baxter, Barbara St John, Adrienne Bennett

**Point Nepean:** Bernie Fox

**Publications:** John Hutchinson, Euan Moore

**Reef Watch:** Museum Victoria

**Update and Park Watch mailout team:**

Murray Bird, Rita Bonvicin, Dorothy Carlton, Pat Cooper, Betna Dryden, Brian Groom, Jo Groom, Margaret Hattersley, Peter Human, John Hutchinson, Joan Jillett, Kelvin Kellett, Keith Lloyd, Ian McDonald, Sheina Nicholls, Joan Phillips, Barbara Prouse, Lorraine Ratcliffe, Wally Thies, Graham Trigg, Tom Wallace, Pat Witt

**Victoria Naturally Alliance:** Brian Coffey, Bronwyn Gwyther, Ann McGregor, Libby Smith

**Conservation Review Steering Committee:**

Anthony Hoffmann, Geoff Wescott, James Fitzsimons, Dr Charles Meredith, Tim O'Hara, Barrie Pittock and Ian Harris (for part of the year).



## Bushwalking and Activities Group 2008-09

BWAG had a very successful year, though the tragic February bushfires and severe summer heat resulted in some trip cancellations. Over 2300 people attended 154 activities, and 15 new leaders were approved.

The BWAG Committee developed a five-year Strategic Plan to guide the group.

Program highlights included a hike from Kosciuszko to Willis, canoe and hiking trips along the Snowy River, and camps at Croajingolong NP and the Errinundra Plateau. There were walking tours of Hawaii and France, a Europe cycling tour and a sea kayak/walking trip through Hinchinbrook and Fraser islands.

Mid-week walks were extremely well-attended, as were family walks, public transport trips and Walk, Talk & Gawks.

Monthly coach excursions were also well attended.

Social night topics included Climate Change action, wildlife of Kosciuszko NP and a second-hand gear sale and gear demonstration.

We developed a program to survey Under 35 activity participants, with the aim of increasing membership.

## Training

We ran leadership training for 14 trainees in July at Kinglake, to support the locals following the fires, and held a training weekend at Shelley camp.

BWAG leaders participated in Bushwalking Search and Rescue training weekends and in searches.

## Conservation

Major projects in which BWAG members took part included a Regent Honeyeater tree planting and nest box survey near Benalla, Grow West and Project Hindmarsh tree plantings, and NatureWatch monitoring and research in Brisbane Ranges NP.

## Financial report

Financially, we had a very healthy and successful year. We donated \$13,000 to VNPA, the same as for 2007-08, and had a much smaller overall loss.

More people purchased Annual Walks Passes, which can now be obtained by direct debit. We received slightly more money through walk fees and social nights than last year.

We would like to sincerely thank Wally and Arthur Thies, who have processed walks passes for the committee for the past ten years. This has been enormously valuable to us.

## Financial Report

Abridged audited special purpose Financial Report for year ended 30 June 2009

### Statement by Members of the Council

The members of the VNPA Council have determined that the Association is not a reporting entity and in our opinion the abridged special purpose financial report set out below presents a true and fair view of the financial position of VNPA as at 30 June 2009 and its performance for the year ended on that date.

At the date of this statement there are reasonable grounds to believe that the VNPA will be able to pay its debts as and when they fall due.

This statement is made in accordance with a resolution of the Council and is signed for and on behalf of the Council by:

*Russell Falvey, Treasurer*

*Matt Ruchel, Executive Director*

Dated this 13th day of August 2009

### Income Statement

for the year ended 30 June 2009

REVENUE	2009	2008
<b>Operating Activities</b>	\$	\$
Appeals, Donations & Bequests	624,698	395,906
Grants & Sponsorships	410,703	512,953
Membership Fees	120,570	115,312
Other Income	137,805	232,382
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>1,293,777</b>	<b>1,256,552</b>
EXPENDITURE		
Employment Expenses	739,341	717,159
Campaigns, Projects, Activities & Education	248,538	218,387
Office & Administration	112,032	167,844
Printing/Publications/Web	101,300	77,450
Other Expenses	91,319	88,977
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>1,292,531</b>	<b>1,269,817</b>
OPERATING SURPLUS (DEFICIT)	1,246	(13,265)

### Balance Sheet as at 30 June 2009

ASSETS	2009	2008
<b>Current</b>	\$	\$
Cash/Receivables/Inventory	194,257	130,391
<b>Non-Current</b>		
Investments	1,502,257	1,254,844
Fixed Assets at Written Down Value	57,931	68,883
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>1,754,445</b>	<b>1,454,118</b>
LIABILITIES		
<b>Current</b>	974,407	706,275
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<b>974,407</b>	<b>706,275</b>
NET ASSETS	780,038	747,843
<b>Funded by:</b>		
ASSOCIATION FUNDS		
Association Funds	780,038	706,275
<b>TOTAL ASSOCIATION FUNDS</b>	<b>780,038</b>	<b>706,275</b>

### VNPA – Activities Accounts

for the year ended 30 June 2009

The operating accounts for the Bushwalking and Excursions Groups have not been consolidated into the general accounts above and are reported separately as follows:

	2009	2008
<b>BUSHWALKING &amp; ACTIVITIES GROUP</b>	\$	\$
Opening Bank Account Balance	3,316	4,956
Income	14,365	12,845
Expenditure	(2,054)	(1,485)
Funds Contributed to VNPA	(13,000)	(13,000)
<b>Closing Bank Account Balance</b>	<b>2,626</b>	<b>3,316</b>
<b>EXCURSIONS GROUP</b>		
Opening Bank Account Balance	22,584	21,432
Income	59,120	16,927
Expenditure	(42,189)	(10,775)
Funds Contributed to VNPA	(30,000)	(5,000)
<b>Closing Bank Account Balance</b>	<b>9,516</b>	<b>22,584</b>

NOTE

### Independent Audit Report

As in previous years, the Auditors have issued a qualified Audit Opinion on the annual financial statements on the basis that it is not feasible for organisations such as VNPA to implement accounting controls over all cash collections from donations prior to their initial processing in the accounting records.

The full Independent Auditors Report will be tabled at the forthcoming Annual General Meeting as part of the Audited Financial Statements and the full text of the Report is available at [www.vnpa.org.au](http://www.vnpa.org.au)

**The VNPA would like to extend special thanks to all its supporters and donors. Your support is invaluable – thank you!**

### VNPA supporters and donors 2008-09

The VNPA acknowledges and thanks the following key supporters and donors.

- Albert George and Nancy Caroline Youngman Trust, administered by Equity Trustees
- ANZ Staff Foundation
- Australian Geographic Society
- Australian Government Envirofund
- Corangamite Catchment Management Authority
- The Dara Foundation
- Department of Planning and Community
- Exchange, Greening Australia and Australian Government
- Grants to Voluntary Environment and Heritage Organisations (GVEHO)
- Helen Macpherson Smith Trust
- John T Reid Charitable Trusts
- The Myer Foundation
- The Norman Wettenhall Foundation
- Parks Victoria
- Pepperstorm
- Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority
- RACV
- Reichstein Foundation
- The R.E. Ross Trust
- WildCountry Small Grants Program

# Port Campbell headland still at risk

Marion Manifold, *Secretary of the Port Campbell Community Group Inc.*, wrote about a risky development proposal at Port Campbell in Park Watch, March 2009. Here she updates us on the issue.

**C**LIFF AND ROCK stack collapses occur regularly on the Port Campbell coast. Recent major collapses include Island Arch near Loch Ard Gorge, the rock stack 'The Man's Head', and a large sea cavern at the Bay of Islands.

This natural process can be hastened by human activity such as excavations and building foundations near the cliffs.

Geotechnical specialists have warned the State Government that the proposed Southern Ocean Beach House (SOBH) development at Port Campbell, consisting of a four-storey building containing 97 apartments (130 rooms), 10 shops and a 200-seat restaurant, and needing a ten metre deep excavation and foundations near four major sea caverns, is likely to accelerate collapse of the Port Campbell headland.

The caverns are largely formed by water draining from the land along joints and bedding planes. There appears to be at least one such drainage line running through the SOBH site from the largest sea cavern to a smaller cavern opening up in the bay.

If one of the larger caverns collapses, the SOBH, and the roadway and port, will be unviable.

The SOBH has now applied for a 97-apartment and retail subdivision, apparently for timeshare. Corangamite Shire Council has approved the subdivision. The Port Campbell Community Group Inc. will pursue the matter at VCAT.

The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE), and 12 objectors (including various Port Campbell groups), have highlighted that the subdivision is 'premature' as the developers have not met building permit conditions, including the all-important geotechnical condition.

It seems the Government is now aware of the potential impact of the SOBH on the fragile environment, for DSE also states that the geotechnical report "might require that the development be significantly altered from what is presently allowed under Planning Permit 2004/144".

Government policies show that it is unwise to build large structures near these fragile cliffs.

The development requires further adjoining (and unstable) Crown land as a bus exit.



(Left) Port Campbell headland about 1980, showing five sea caves. The SOBH development would replace the buildings nearest the camera. The section of the Great Ocean Road shown is now closed because of collapse concerns.



(Above left) Port Campbell coast.

(Above) Aerial view of development site (red overlay) and sea caves.

PHOTOS: MARION MANIFOLD

A Parliamentary Select Committee on Public Land Development, and environmental and heritage groups, have expressed strong concerns about the SOBH proposal. Some 130 people have also signed a petition against the subdivision, asking the Government instead to purchase the site for a smaller-scale community development.

VCAT and the Government must halt this proposed development, to protect Port Campbell's special heritage and landscape values — and to avoid a calamitous cliff collapse.

## What you can do

Write to Premier John Brumby, [john.brumby@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:john.brumby@parliament.vic.gov.au), and Ministers Gavin Jennings and Justin Madden, [gavin.jennings@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:gavin.jennings@parliament.vic.gov.au) and [justin.madden@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:justin.madden@parliament.vic.gov.au)

Any expert written support would be gratefully received by the Port Campbell Community Group Inc, c/o Post Office, Port Campbell, Vic. 3269, or [mmanifold@anson.com.au](mailto:mmanifold@anson.com.au)

# Biodiversity as climate change solution, not casualty

Karen Alexander  
reports on an  
August conference,  
organised by the  
Green Institute and  
Lawyers for  
Forests, on  
Biodiversity for  
Climate Protection.

**T**HE MESSAGE is hitting home and it's a hard one to face. To keep global warming to a maximum of 2°C we must reduce our fossil fuel emissions by (on average) 3% per annum, and massively reduce emissions from logging and degradation of forests.

There can be no trade-offs. We can't just offset our fossil fuel emissions by protecting tropical forests, though this is one of the main proposals in the discussions leading up to Copenhagen.

This was the strong message from Dr Rachel Warren from the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research in the UK at the recent Biodiversity for Climate Protection conference in Canberra.

hectare if we just leave them alone. By stopping logging and clearing we immediately reduce our carbon emissions by 20% and over time take CO<sub>2</sub> out of the atmosphere as disturbed and logged forests regrow.

Forests are not the only carbon stores. All native vegetation (and undisturbed soils) hold carbon. We should protect as much as possible. Any clearing that really can't be avoided should have a carbon loss assessment costed into the development.

We must also encourage natural regeneration. In areas of Victoria where commercial farming is no longer viable and lifestyle farmers have moved in, extensive regeneration is already happening. This is a very cheap way of sequestering carbon.

Finally, we must reconnect our isolated patches of bushland by revegetation or by managing degraded bush.

(Note that carbon captured by new plantings is actually replacing carbon lost when we cleared the land in the first place. This is not really offsetting for current fossil fuel emissions.)

Our plants and animals are already faced with increasing heatwaves, more fires, less water, reduced or changed flowering and fruiting of trees and shrubs, and other challenges, and they need major networks of very wide wildlife corridors connecting large patches of bushland to be able to respond to the changing climate.

The *Connecting Country* project (see box opposite) is an example of what's needed in Victoria, as are the VNPA Small Parks Project and Hindmarsh in western Victoria.

So how will we pay for this? 'Polluter pays' is a good beginning. Under a cap-and-trade system applied to fossil fuel emissions, the major polluters will buy permits to pollute. A percentage of this income should then be used to protect and restore our biodiversity. The ACF has suggested 10% and calculated this at \$1.8 billion per annum.

A carbon tax would do the same thing, or we could increase the GST and spend a percentage of it on restoring the natural environment, at the same time taking carbon from the atmosphere.

At a personal level most of us are still driving cars, reading newspapers, travelling by plane and enjoying some heating and cooling, and we too should reduce our emissions and also put some of that carbon back in the ground by restoring our biodiversity.

Please join us today by getting involved in, or donating to, a campaign to stop clearing and logging, or maybe taking part in one of the inspiring landscape restoration projects under way around Victoria!

Globally, there are two major sources of greenhouse gas emissions. Fossil fuel emissions make up 75%, and emissions from the clearing and degradation of the natural environment, especially forests, contribute 25%.

So far, much more emphasis has been placed on the need to reduce our emissions from fossil fuels.

Dr Warren says we must indeed do this, and also stop clearing and degrading forests as well.

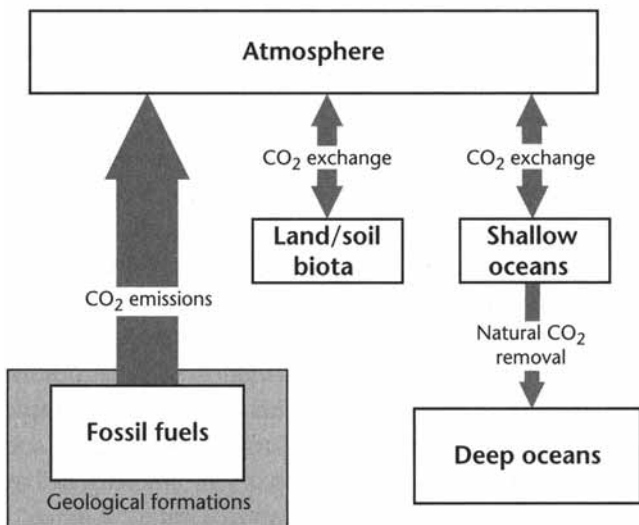
This of course can also translate into a win for much greater protection and restoration of the world's biodiversity: biodiversity as a key solution to climate change, not simply a casualty of it.

In Victoria, this means protecting and restoring our biodiversity, just what is needed to ensure our plants and animals are resilient in the face of climate change.

We must stop the loss of carbon by keeping what we have already in native vegetation, as well as capturing carbon from the atmosphere by 'regrowing' our biodiversity.

We can protect and restore biodiversity relatively easily compared to a low-income country, where access to tropical forest timber might mean the difference between sustenance and starvation.

Our old-growth forests are massive stores of carbon, storing up to 9000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> in one



**This diagram shows the present imbalance between emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere, land and soil biota and shallow oceans, and its eventual removal into the deep oceans (taking hundreds or thousands of years). Arrows show flows between carbon reservoirs (or carbon stocks); the width of the arrows represents the relative size of the flows. Note the one-way flow from fossil fuels.**

– From A. Barrie Pittock, *Climate Change: the science, impacts and solutions*, 2nd edition, CSIRO Publishing (2009).



# Strong interest in 'special places' across Victoria

Yasmin Kelsall is the VNPA Small Parks Project officer.

**T**HE SMALL PARKS PROJECT is now past its mid-point and the end is almost in sight. There's been strong interest in the project in many locations and lots more areas are being suggested for inclusion!

Although this is a pilot project, focused on Central Victoria, we have heard from people from all over Victoria, showing that people are keen to see increased recognition and management for their 'special places'.

I've been fortunate to meet many great people who are very passionate about their local areas. It will be quite difficult to shortlist the growing number of 'places' to the 10 or 15 that we will assess on-ground for inclusion in the final 'register of small special places' to promote to the State Government for increased protection and management.

One local group (of many) that has put forward a very strong case for their local 'special place' is the Bendigo and District Environment Council. This group is promoting Wellsford State Forest, just east of Bendigo.

'The Wellsford' has a mixture of vegetation types and geology, but is largely dominated by Box-Ironbark forest. It sits between two nature conservation reserves and is a strong contender to be considered for reservation under the National Parks Act itself in the future.

It has significant habitat for many threatened species, including the nationally endangered Swift Parrot, and state threatened Brush-tailed Phascogale (Tuan), Grey-crowned Babbler, Chestnut-rumped Heathwren and Lace Goanna.

At present, the Wellsford is still subject to timber harvesting and firewood collection.

One of the main premises of the current VEAC investigation into remnant native vegetation across Victoria is a response to the government's *Net Gain – first approximation* report, which found that Victoria is still experiencing 'net loss' in the extent and quality of its native vegetation.

The report also found that opportunities for gain were greatest, and would be most cost-effective on public land, if threatening processes such as pest plant and animal impacts, and also firewood collection and timber harvesting, were reduced.

The VEAC Remnant Native Vegetation Investigation has just been extended to March 2011. This seems much more in line with the scope of the task at hand.

The VNPA has put in a submission to inform the coming VEAC discussion paper for its investigation, and will supply the information developed through the Small Parks Project as part of its response to the discussion paper when that is released.



**Big old ironbark in the Wellsford Forest.**

PHOTO: PAUL LAMB



**Red Spider-orchid.**

PHOTO: MARIE JONES

## Connecting Country shows the way

The *Connecting Country* project in Central Victoria, which is supported by The Norman Wettenhall Foundation, is an excellent example of 'from the ground up' approaches to landscape restoration.

The overall aim of the project is to connect people and landscapes for the management of a healthy, productive and resilient natural environment.

*Connecting Country* (Mount Alexander Region) Inc. is now an incorporated association managed by a Management Committee, supported by a Reference Group (consisting of representatives from the Landcare and wider communities, and agencies) and advised by an expert Advisory Panel as needed. It has the support of a part-time project officer.

It has recently been successful in obtaining over \$600,000 in State and Federal funding for the protection of Yellow Box woodlands and

habitat enhancement for the Brush-tailed Phascogale and a suite of other endangered species.

This funding will cover a range of activities including project coordination, stewardship payments for protection of high-value woodlands (through weed control, grazing management and natural regeneration), community education, supporting Landcare and community group involvement, flora and fauna assessments and monitoring.

Future funding will depend on the successful delivery of this exciting project.

Further details may be found at [www.connectingcountry.org.au](http://www.connectingcountry.org.au)

— Karen Alexander



**Project Officer Geoff Park (second from left) explains the Connecting Country website.**

PHOTO: MARIE JONES

# Volunteers boost bushfire recovery in parks

*Sally Nowlan, Senior Media Relations Officer with Parks Victoria, explains how fire restoration work by young Green Corps volunteers benefits both them and the parks.*

**A**S THE RECOVERY effort continues in the parks and reserves burnt in the February fires, Parks Victoria is enlisting a small army of young volunteers to help it tackle the vast amount of work involved.

In particular, Bushfire Recovery Green Corps Teams, managed by Conservation Volunteers Australia, are stepping in to lend a hand with rehabilitation and recovery work.

Green Corps teams are currently involved in post fire projects in three bushfire-affected parks: Wilsons Promontory and Kinglake national parks, and Bunyip State Park.

Green Corps is a youth development training program that encourages young people to get involved in environmental projects. Projects are designed to be both educational and skill-building for young workers who often have little or no previous experience with environmental work.

Parks Victoria staff supply overall supervision and direction for the teams, and often work alongside them on specific projects.

## Erosion control

For example, erosion control work is a major focus of both the Kinglake and Prom teams, but instead of just being directed in how and where to place or build structures such as coil logs, silt traps and dams, the young people also develop an under-

standing of erosion and its consequences.

As a follow-up, they carry out water quality surveys to measure the effectiveness of the erosion control methods.

The Kinglake Green Corps team, which started work in mid-June, call themselves the Kinglake Kookaburras — because they are up early to start their projects and fly high to get them done!

As well as gaining insights into the issues of the post-fire landscape, practical skills relating to its recovery are a key feature of this team's program. Their tasks range from learning skills involved in fencing a conservation plot to putting nest boxes in trees for native birds and animals.

Clearing tracks, repairing fire-damaged track surfaces and reinstating edgings and handrails is a major component of all the team programs.

## Feeding, surveys and nest boxes

However, not all the work is physical. The Bunyip team has been helping out with supplementary feeding of the local Helmeted Honeyeater colony. They are also doing mammal and bird surveys to check the numbers returning to burnt habitats.

The work of the Kinglake team was significantly expanded by a large donation of nesting boxes by South Australian Rotary to Parks Victoria. The Rotarians made 1,000 boxes to be distributed across the state's burnt regions. Two hundred of these have been delivered to Kinglake National Park, the first ones being installed by Green Corps in late July.

The handmade wooden boxes, complete with Rotary logo, are suitable for a range of native birds as well as small possums and gliders.

Accompanying the boxes is a device called 'The Nest Box Peeping Tom' by its Adelaide inventor Barry Barrett. It's a camera on the end of a telescopic rod, attached to a viewing monitor. Staff and volunteers can check on the inhabitants of a box without having to disturb them or transport and climb a ladder.

## Records

Green Corps team members are also applying technology to measure and record post-fire recovery. At the Prom, volunteers will be involved in developing long-term photo records of post-fire regeneration. This involves learning how to set up photo-point monitoring, deciding on the

**Green Corps team rebuilding a walking track at the Prom.**

PHOTO: VICTORIA HEMMING, CVA



best locations in fire-affected areas, setting appropriate timeframes for specific sites, and producing electronic and hardcopy records for future reference.

These visual records give specific information about which plants respond after being burnt, and how and when they respond, and become valuable references for future conservation and management decisions.

The teams are also using GPS devices to map specific plant species, mark locations of surviving nesting sites, and record sites of particularly low or high regrowth.

The Green Corps program runs for six months, after which team members will graduate with a Certificate 1 in Conservation Land Management.

For some, the experience will help them move forward in life; for others it will assist in deciding on future career directions. For Parks Victoria, this additional workforce is a major boost to post-fire recovery programs that are helping with the huge job of restoring fire-damaged environments.

## Books for rangers

*Park Watch* readers may not be aware that eight Parks Victoria and DSE field staff lost their homes and possessions in the Black Saturday fires.

They are rangers Tony Fitzgerald, Natalie Brida, Kim Hunter and David Langmead (Kinglake), project firefighter Tom Chambers (Kinglake), rangers Peter Cobb and Rhyl Shaw (Marysville/Alexandra) and ranger Miles Stewart-Howie (Narbethong/Healesville).

The Victorian Rangers Association is collecting books to help them rebuild their libraries, and asked the VNPA to help. We have donated sets of our own publications, and also obtained donations from CSIRO Publications, Macdown Productions and Brumby Books, which we gratefully acknowledge. An additional set of books is going to the Kinglake National Park office (also destroyed by the fires).

The Victorian Environment Friends Network has offered to support the VNPA's book donation, and we sincerely thank them for this.

If you would like to donate other relevant books to the rangers, please contact your nearest park office or Parks Victoria on 13 1963.

We extend our best wishes to the above park staff members, and everyone who suffered loss in the fires, as they rebuild their homes and lives.

— Michael Howes

# Kinglake community concerns about post-fire clearing

*Cam Walker from Friends of the Earth found that, despite media reports, many people in fire-affected areas don't want hasty or large-scale clearing of trees and bushland.*

**"T**HE TREE CLEARING has been worse than the fires," said a friend as I walked into the [August] meeting at Kinglake Central.

Around 140 people pressed into the community hall to hear from a range of arborists, council representatives and contractors, and community representatives, about the 'clean-up' efforts after the fires.

It was plain there was a deep-seated belief that the clearing had gone too far and too fast after February's devastating fires. Themes kept emerging — that forested areas were being trashed, habitat lost, there had been insufficient consultation with the local community before trees were removed.

Despite Council claims that there was an exhaustive system of assessing trees before marking them for destruction, residents said that often far more trees were removed than had been identified as being unsafe. Some people, keen to see even more clearing, are said to be marking trees in the hope they will be taken out as the contractor teams move through the area. A range of contractors and jurisdictions are in operation, making it confusing about who is doing what.

Many people talked about their experiences of having areas they love destroyed by over-clearing, like 50-metre sections being hacked into a reserve near Castella without approval from the management committee.

People kept saying that time hadn't been given to see if trees would survive, that pre-emptive clearing had occurred.

There was particular outrage about the destruction at Number One Creek in Kinglake, a popular and beautiful area. Crews gutted this area, where trees hundreds of years old were cut down.

Others expressed concern about the township of Flowerdale being next to suffer the same damage. One comment from the floor seemed to sum up the sentiment of the meeting, that "there will be hundreds blockading the trees" if crews try to cut them.

People all seemed to agree that clearing and clean-up had to happen because of public safety concerns. But there was also a strong sentiment that the clearing had gone too far, too fast, was largely out of control, and that ecological values were being lost as 'safety' concerns over-rode everything else.

The local landscape is being profoundly changed through the clean-up efforts. The community will have to live for decades to come with the actions being taken today.

There was a resounding message of 'slow things down', take time to better assess what trees will survive, and maintain the ecology as we make the place safe. Let's hope the Council can hear this message. The Kinglake community certainly deserves our support on this issue.

# The Quarantine Station returns

Geoff Durham *writes about a momentous recent addition to Victoria's park estate, the venue for this year's VNPA Caring for Nature Day picnic on Sunday 22 November.*



Two of the gracious old Quarantine Station hospitals, built about 1856. They face Port Phillip Bay.

## Celebration!

At last! The Point Nepean Quarantine Station near Portsea has been returned to Victoria and will soon be part of Point Nepean National Park, after a tortuous political *melée*.

Its addition is an achievement to celebrate — an enhancement to the parks system of unprecedented historical significance. The objects of national parks under the Act include: 'To make provision ... for the protection and preservation of features of historic interest'. This place has many layers of historical interest.

In 1973 the National Trust classified the Commonwealth-owned Quarantine Station as having major national importance, and in 1974 it classified the landscape of the whole of Point Nepean. In 1979 this was included on the Register of the National Estate, in 2004 in the Victorian Heritage Register, and in 2006 was added to the National Heritage List.

Finally in June this year, following transfer of ownership from the Commonwealth, the Victorian Government introduced a Bill into State Parliament to add 105 ha of the Quarantine Station and the adjoining intertidal zone to Point Nepean National Park, increasing the park's area to 575 ha. The VNPA's role in the long campaign to achieve this was recognised in the Government's Second Reading Speech.

Management of the Station has passed from the Point Nepean Community Trust to Parks Victoria, which is already responsible for many historic buildings: Werribee Mansion, homesteads at Point Cook and Woodlands, the Mount Buffalo Chalet, Glenample near the Twelve Apostles, Anderson's Mill at Smeaton, and huts in the high country, to name a few.

## Challenge

But with this addition Parks Victoria takes on responsibility at one stroke for some 100 buildings, many of great historical importance. It faces a massive management challenge, including maintenance of the precinct and buildings, upgrading the electricity, gas, water and sewerage infrastructure, and resisting commercial pressures that would compromise the unique ambience and historical integrity of the site.

An updated 2009 Point Nepean Management Plan incorporating the Quarantine Station has been prepared. Described as the definitive management framework, it is predicated on a 'vision' that refers to the Quarantine Station as the 'vibrant heart of the park', 'heritage buildings creatively adapted for sustainable re-use' and 'a range of accommodation and tourism services'.

There will be great debate as to appropriate use of buildings, and Parks Victoria will be under



pressure to maximise a financial return. The legislation gives the Minister the power to lease Quarantine Station land or buildings for up to 50 years for a purpose the Minister considers not detrimental to the protection of the park. The purpose may be for the occupation or construction of buildings but not for residential or industrial use.

A lease may only exceed 21 years if the Minister is satisfied that the proposed use, developments, improvements or works are of a substantial nature and of a value to justify a longer term lease, and such a lease is in the public interest. Many things are up in the air — stand by for developments.

The station will be progressively opened to the public. Already, the transporter taking visitors through the park to Fort Nepean detours through the Quarantine precinct without stopping, but there is as yet no other general public access.

Not all the Commonwealth land is in the park. Two small parcels totalling about 1.3 ha may be used for a respite centre, though if this is not established by 30 June 2013 the intention is to add them to the park. A curious outcome of the political manoeuvrings is the transfer in 2004 of the responsibility for 17 ha at Police Point on the eastern boundary to the Mornington Peninsula Shire. The leased Portsea Golf Club is not included in the park.

## Heritage

This is Boonwurrung/ Bunurong country and has a significant Indigenous heritage. The earliest European building is a Shepherd's Hut (1845) that later served as the base of the Regimental Sergeant Major of the Officer Cadet School.

The arrival of the plague-ridden ship *Ticonderoga* in 1852 hastened the transfer of Melbourne's original quarantine station from Point Ormond (Elwood) to Point Nepean, where it operated continuously from 1852 until 1978. The reception and fumigation complex is largely intact.

The Army occupied the site from the early 1950s with the Officer Cadet School to 1978, and then the School of Army Health until the early

1980s. In 1999 some 400 refugees from Kosovo were accommodated here.

The focus of this article is the Quarantine Station, but there is much more to Point Nepean National Park. Part of it adjoins Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park. It has geological and geomorphological features of State significance, spectacular coastal scenery and panoramic views; vegetation, habitat and flora and fauna values of high conservation significance; and also problems of pest plant invasion, pest animals and erosion.

There is much to interest visitors, including a complex of fortifications dating from the 1880s (and from which the first shots of World Wars I and II were fired), an historic cemetery, the Pearce Barracks site — only recently opened to the public — and Cheviot Beach, where Prime Minister Harold Holt disappeared in 1967. The private concessionaire has more-than-nominal entry charges including transporter use, and bicycles may be hired.

I write this after a July visit to the Station with Reg Elder, the organiser of the VNPA Caring for Nature Day picnic which this year by special arrangement is being held at the Station, on **Sunday 22 November**.

It was a nostalgic visit for Reg, returning after 41 years. He had been a cadet at the Cadet School in 1957, and in 1967 returned as an instructor with the rank of Captain. He found that little had changed. We experienced a tranquil retreat with stunning vistas, green lawns and freshly-painted elegant buildings

The picnic will be on the impressive grassed Parade Ground fronting Port Phillip Bay and backed by huge Cypress trees and buildings that will provide shelter if required. Reg is organising guided tours of some of the historic buildings and into previously inaccessible areas from which UXO (unexploded ordnance) has been cleared.

The picnic is a privileged opportunity to celebrate the incorporation of the Quarantine Station into Point Nepean National Park and to see an area that has been largely out of bounds to the public for more than 150 years. I look forward to seeing you there on 22 November.

**(Above left)**  
Disinfection facility, still largely intact. VNPA hopes to offer tours of this facility on CFN picnic day, 22 November.

**(Above)** Reg Elder revisits scenes from his youth at the (then) Officer Cadet School.

PHOTOS: GEOFF DURHAM

# Victoria's wildflowers on show

## Angair Wildflower and Art Show, 19-20 September

Barbara Beaumont *has been a member of Angair for over 10 years.*

In spring the Anglesea Heathlands burst into flower. The colourful blooms of these indigenous plants, including local orchid varieties, are showcased each year at the Anglesea Wildflower Show.

The show is on **Saturday 19** and **Sunday 20 September**, 10am-4pm at the Memorial Hall, McMillan St, Anglesea. Admission is \$4.00 for adults, \$2.00 for pensioners and students, and free for children 12 and under.

As well as seeing the plant displays in the hall, you can take a bus or walking tour to see them in their natural surroundings. Tours are included in your admission.

As spring approaches, our thoughts turn naturally to the coming summer, the ever-present threat of bushfires and ways to minimise the risk to homes and lives. This will be a major theme of displays by the local CFA, DSE and the Surf Coast Shire.

Did you know that many of the plants we see in the townships are not indigenous to our area, and are adding to the fuel load? The Shire's 'Weeds to Mulch' program explains which plants are the culprits and what is being done to eliminate them.

## Grampians Wildflower Show, 1-4 October

Every October for the past 72 years a Grampians Wildflower Show, showcasing the wildflowers of the area, has been held at Halls Gap.

About a third of Victoria's indigenous flora can be found in the Grampians, and some 20 species are found nowhere else.

Displays in the Halls Gap Centenary Hall feature plants from across the Grampians, grouped according to their habitats. Extensive reference material helps visitors with plant identification, botanical names and advice on where to see

plants in the park, and there are daily bus tours.

Each year different themes are highlighted. In recent years the Banksia family (2008), the six seasons of Gariwerd (2007) and recovery after fire (2006) have been featured. This year it's 25 years of the national park, and also the fascinating story of Grampians orchids and orchid pollination.

See [www.grampianswildflowershow.org.au](http://www.grampianswildflowershow.org.au) for more information and excellent photos, or ring 5356 4679.

## Brisbane Ranges Wildflower Show, 11 October

Helena Lindorff *is the Co-ordinator of the Wildflower Show.*

On **Sunday 11 October** (9.30am to 5.00pm) the Friends of Brisbane Ranges are hosting the Wildflower Show at the Anakie-Staughton Vale Hall, Anakie. The day will include displays, workshops and guided bus tours. Admission is by gold coin donation. A \$5 (cash) fee for the bus tours is payable on the day and workshops are free.

The Brisbane Ranges are rich in native flora. Some 619 native plant species (about a fifth of Victoria's total) can be found in the ranges, and over 100 terrestrial orchid species have been identified.

In the hall you can find out how to collect native seeds and attract native wildlife to your property, or find information on pest plants and animals, or sign up as a Friends Group member. You can also buy some Brisbane Ranges plants for your garden.

As well, there are free workshops on macro photography and basic plant identification (native bush peas being the focus).

For more information, or to register for a bus tour, please contact the Parks Victoria Bacchus Marsh office on 5366 0000.



# NatureWatch monitoring

*Caitlin Griffith reports on the VNPA's community biodiversity monitoring program NatureWatch, which involves enthusiastic volunteers in gathering data on the health of the natural environment.*

## Fire and fauna monitoring project

Over May and June, NatureWatch volunteers attended three trips to Grampians National Park to take part in a study, led by Deakin University, of the impact of wildfire on small native mammals.

Designed to look at the influences of fire severity, and the size of burnt patches and their connectivity to unburnt areas, the study has been set up to run as a long-term monitoring project. This is the second year of data collection. Given the limited knowledge of the impact of fire on mammals in Australia, this is very valuable research.

Volunteers were involved in setting mammal traps, checking traps and setting up remote sensing cameras. In addition two NatureWatch volunteers carried out bird monitoring.

Over these trips we were treated to close encounters with cute but feisty Yellow-footed Antechinuses, Heath Mice, Agile Antechinuses and Common Dunnarts.

Despite being washed out on our final trip, we had a great time surrounded by the spectacular scenery of the Grampians, and interacting with the local fauna.

## Grassland and Golden Sun Moth monitoring project

Our grassland monitoring season is rapidly approaching!

To begin the season we are hosting a **Grassland Community Day on Saturday 17 October**. To be held at Mulla Mulla grasslands on



Mt Cotterell Road, this will be a great opportunity to learn about grasslands in Victoria.

Given that Victoria's native grasslands have been largely cleared, many species that inhabit grasslands are threatened. This includes the Golden Sun Moth (Critically Endangered) and the Striped Legless Lizard (Vulnerable).

Over November and December we will be out in the grasslands of western Melbourne again searching for Golden Sun Moths at Derrimut Grassland and other grassland sites to be announced. This will help the VNPA and land managers in managing grasslands better and protecting these threatened species more effectively.

To get involved in our Grassland and Golden Sun Moth monitoring project, including the Grassland Community Day, please get in touch on [caitling@vnpa.org.au](mailto:caitling@vnpa.org.au) or 9347 5188.

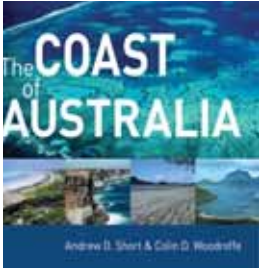
**Mother and daughter NatureWatchers check a small mammal trap.**

PHOTO: CAITLIN GRIFFITH



## The Coast of Australia

by Andrew D. Short & Colin D. Woodroffe. Cambridge: Australia/ NZ, 2009. RRP \$150.00. Contact VNPA office for member discount.



SHORT AND WOODROFFE present the Australian coast as diverse and dynamic, with the world's best beaches: 10,865 of them!

The three introductory chapters describe how the coast evolved geologically, how processes such as climate, tides and currents shape the coastline, and the different vegetation types. Coasts are grouped into 'types': estuarine, dune, rocky, reef and so on. These chapters are accompanied by numerous diagrams.

In a book of this scope the treatment given to any one place is necessarily brief. You probably won't find an explanation of your favourite bit of coast. But you should be able to put a known place in its general category of shoreline and read about the features and processes described for it.

The continent-wide perspective made me realise what small a proportion of the whole is part of my personal (Victorian) geography. Less than a tenth of the total number of beaches is in Victoria, and more than a third in WA. And local beaches are not typical:

*'The typical Australian beach is not only 1.4 km long and bordered by headlands, but it is also inaccessible by vehicle and unnamed.'*

Some Victorian beach facts: the world's southernmost occurrence of mangroves is at Corner Inlet; our Ninety Mile Beach (222 km) is one of four very long sandy beach systems in Australia; rapid change is intrinsic to the spectacular rocky coast of the Great Ocean Road. NSW and Victoria have the highest percentages of their coastline in parks and reserves (45% and 41%)

The final chapter covers human impact. From a south-eastern Australian point of view, the interactions between human actions and coastal processes are so evident and frequently so worrying that it seems odd that this aspect of our coasts has been separated from the rest.

This chapter's tone is carefully neutral and its conclusion rather upbeat: the coast is basically in good hands, as *'Australians are widely regarded as world leaders on coastal science and coastal management'*. Many readers concerned about the land-use pressures common in Victoria might wonder whether such knowledge is always applied appropriately.

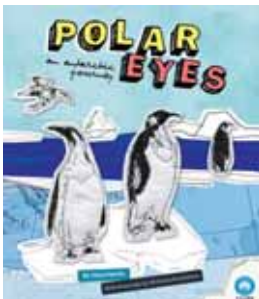
The overview on climate change is especially interesting, as again the Australia-wide perspective is different from a Victorian one. It points out that as most of the Australian coast is undeveloped, we will at least be able to allow coastal processes to take their course with changing sea levels.

This is an expensive reference book, probably more suited to libraries, and the text is rather technical, more for a specialist than a general reader. The book's strength is the evidence of extensive fieldwork around Australia, and the numerous photographs which, with their detailed captions, illustrate well the processes described in the text, and convey the vast scale of many of our important coastal places.

*Reviewer Deirdre Slattery is a member and former Councillor of the VNPA, and a member of the National Parks Advisory Council.*

## Polar Eyes – a journey to Antarctica

by Tanya Patrick. CSIRO Education, 2009. RRP \$24.95.



ANTARCTICA is a fascinating, mysterious continent that houses unique animal species, has drawn famous explorers, and plays a crucial part in world climate and climate change research.

For these reasons, Antarctica is considered an important topic in schools, but few primary school teachers or students are likely to have first-hand experience of it. This informative book brings the icy landscape into the classroom.

Tanya Patrick is editor of the CSIRO children's magazine *Scientriffic*, and *Polar Eyes* is her account of a six-week visit to Antarctica for CSIRO research. Part scrapbook, part personal diary, part scientific journal and part hands-on activity resource, the book will be invaluable for upper primary school students.

As well as the day-to-day narrative and answers to common questions, it has photos of stunning sunsets, icebergs, yawning Weddell seals and penguin huddles, not to mention charmingly drawn penguins in the endpapers (*shades of Happy Feet!*).

To make lessons even more entertaining, there are instructions for how to make an igloo, insulate your hand with 'blubber', pass a penguin egg (think ball) safely to a partner, and make an edible Antarctica.

The book's facts about Antarctica's ecosystem and its natural value, the visual narrative and the suggested activities combine to make a classroom resource that is, quite literally, refreshing.

*Reviewer Elizabeth Howes is studying primary education at the University of Melbourne.*



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## Boom and Bust: Bird Stories for a Dry Country

Edited by Libby Robin, Robert Heinsohn and Leo Joseph. CSIRO Publishing, 2009. RRP \$39.95.

**A**FTER A BRIEF Introduction, the first chapter sets out the parameters of this very readable book: different perspectives on what is known about the adaptations of certain birds to the irregular weather cycles of arid and semi-arid Australia.

This is set in a world-wide context: “The fundamental boom and bust idea that underpins international ecological understandings of desert environments came out of Australian rangelands science.” (p.27)

Then follow ten chapters, on different bird species and by different writers from a range of backgrounds. Each chapter takes an interestingly different approach: for example, looking at the history of observations of a species of bird by explorers and others (“Night parrots: fugitives of the inland”), Aboriginal concepts of the relationship between bird and environment (“Rainbirds:

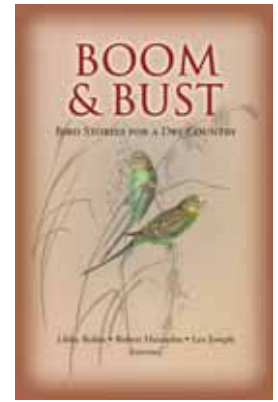
organising the country”), or a probable prehistoric boom and bust leading to the extinction of one bird species but not another (“Genyornis: last of the dromornithids”).

Taken together, and with references across to each other, these chapters build up a picture of the interactions of the birds with their surroundings, while acknowledging that some elements of these remain mysterious.

There are some thought-provoking ideas about human life in Australia as well.

This is a beautifully produced little hardback, with charming small black-and-white chapter-heading illustrations taken from Gould (except of course for the Genyornis sketch), and it is a pleasure to handle and to read.

*Reviewer Marian Maddern is a long-time amateur observer and lover of nature.*



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## The Complete Field Guide to Stick and Leaf Insects

by Paul D. Brock and Jack W. Hasenpusch. CSIRO Publishing, 2008. RRP \$44.95

**I**S IT A TWIG? Is it a leaf? No, it's a stick insect!!

God was surely having fun when s/he designed these weird and wonderful creatures.

Australia's insect fauna is as distinctive as our mammals, and most of the 100 or so species of stick and leaf insects — 'phasmids' — are endemic. Even less is known about them than about our mammals. You too can find new species.

This Field Guide not only has excellent photos

of each species in its habitat, but also photos of museum specimens to show more detail. And with the distribution maps and descriptions as well, you should be able to identify that strange beastie clinging to the rose bush or gum tree.

As well as a section on habitat and ecology, there's a guide to collecting, preserving, photographing ... and rearing! Five phasmid species have now become 'pets'.

— Karen Alexander



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## Poles Apart – who's right about climate change?

by Gareth Morgan and John McCrystal. Scribe, RRP \$35.00

**I**CONFESS, I didn't read this book... but there is a reason.

The authors (who aren't climate scientists) set out to investigate the arguments for and against human-induced climate change. They then take the reader through the whole discussion before they tell you what conclusion they came to.

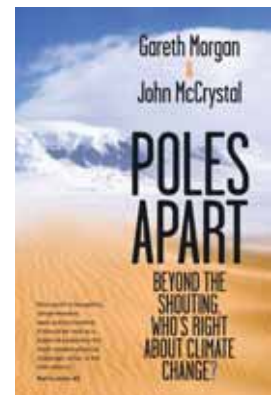
Well, this reader went straight to the last chapter. I'm reluctant to spoil the suspense, but we aren't in a position to muck around with this debate any more. I feel bound to let you know

that the authors decide “the alarmists were right”, and that many of the climate sceptics are just habitual deniers.

For those who would like to check out the arguments, Barry Jones says this book “should be read as a model of explaining the most complex physical challenge, so far, in the 21st century”.

Those unfamiliar with scientific terminology might also find the glossary useful.

— Phil Ingamells

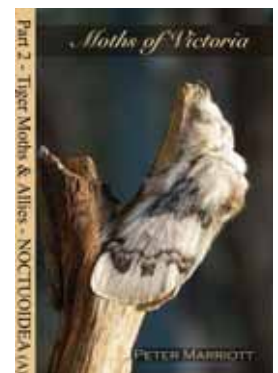


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## Moths of Victoria part 2. RRP \$12.00; VNPA members \$10.00

**W**E HAVE just received copies of the second book in Peter Marriott's series on Victoria's remarkable moths. This one

covers Tiger Moths and their allies, and describes 175 species. You'll discover 'moths without wings, tiny jewels, and bizarre behaviours'.



# Obituary: John and Jenny Barnett

*This tribute is by Lynne Selwood of the Department of Zoology at the University of Melbourne, a close friend of Jenny and John.*



PHOTO: JOHN SAMPSON

**S**ATURDAY 7 FEBRUARY marked a day of great loss to the study of mammalogy, because on that day two great Australian mammalogists died in the bushfire at Steels Creek.

John and Jenny loved the bush and had made their 'other' home at Steels Creek in the mid-1970s. They were to be found there most weekends, exploring the bush around them and entertaining their friends.

John and Jenny were very different people, but they both combined excellent scientific skills with a good deal of modesty. They will be sadly missed.

John was born on 27 March 1949 in London, UK, to Sylvia and Sydney Barnett (deceased). His stepfather, Joe Phillips, was also a considerable influence in John's life. John went to the University of Sheffield (BSc. Hons, 1969) before coming to Australia to do a PhD with Tony Lee at the Department of Zoology at Monash University (1973).

During his PhD, John met Jenny, and they married in 1972.

At Monash, John furthered his interests in Australian mammals and stress physiology by doing a study of that most interesting of dasyurid marsupials, the agile antechinus. John's PhD and subsequent papers showed that in the period preceding the post-mating male 'die-off', males underwent dramatic weight loss and showed an increase in the concentration of corticosteroids, hypoglycaemia, and liver, blood and adrenal gland changes.

In 1973–1974, he received a Leverhulme Commonwealth Visiting Fellowship, which he took at the Department of Zoology, University of Hull (UK) to develop his work on stress physiology.

I first met John and Jenny in 1976, when John was one of three Post-Doctoral Fellows in Zoology (1974–1977) at La Trobe University. John, Rick How and Bill Humphreys were known as the 'Three Musketeers', and what a wonderful swashbuckling group they were. They went on to work together on various aspects of the ecology of small mammals, possums and gliders in eastern Australia, and made a significant contribution to this field.

Around this time (1978–79), John became the Assistant Secretary of the Australian Mammal Society Council.

The 1970s and early 1980s provided few job opportunities for zoologists, and John turned his knowledge of measurement of stress parameters to improving farming conditions for domestic and companion animals, particularly pigs and poultry.

This proved to be a fortunate decision for animal welfare. He worked as Research Officer, and later Head of the Animal Welfare Department, with Agriculture Victoria from 1977 to 2003. He was then made Leading Scientist, Department of Primary Industries (2004–2008), before moving in 2008 to become an honorary Associate Professor and Principal Research Fellow in Animal Welfare at the University of Melbourne, Melbourne School of Land and Environment.

His contributions in the animal welfare field at conferences and in more than 300 publications earned him an international reputation and greatly improved animal husbandry techniques for farmed animals, especially his work on pigs and poultry. He showed quite clearly that the right housing conditions are paramount to the maintenance of animals in a good stress-free state. He received a meritorious service award from the RSPCA (1999) and a science excellence award from the Department of Primary Industries (2005).

John and Jenny continued to make a contribution to wildlife biology by regular participation in the Mammal Survey Group of Victoria and in mammal surveys in other states. They taught many people the joys of trapping, spotlighting and learning to recognise our native fauna. They also contributed a publication to the mammal survey field and made numerous contributions to the distribution maps for native fauna.

We will all miss John, with his careful and analytical approach to his work and his thoughtful assessment of data, which he somehow managed to combine with a very laid-back approach to life. He was a great scientist and a very good friend.

He leaves his mother Sylvia, stepfather Joe Phillips, brother Mark, sister Julia, and several nieces and nephews. They have our deepest sympathy.

Jenny (Jennifer) was also born in England, at Feltham on 25 August 1947, to Laura and Fred Forse. She arrived in Australia in 1950 and did a BSc. at Monash University (1969), going on to do

*'I saw her as  
the irresistible  
force moving  
an immovable  
object.'*

an MSc. with George Ettershank at Monash on the biology of ants — about which she was always able to reveal many interesting facts. During this work she made lifelong friends with people she met at her study site, some of whom regularly gathered at the Barnetts' famous pre-Christmas lunch at Steels Creek.

After her marriage to John, Jenny worked at various research positions at the University of Hull, La Trobe University and the University of Melbourne. Over the years, she became interested in the cultivation and biology of native orchids, especially the symbiotic relationship between native orchids and certain native trees, and she used this knowledge to achieve successful cultivation of several species.

Eventually she also took to painting them, so that they bloomed successfully on the door of the fridge or adorned her T-shirts. Her artistic efforts and very green thumb certainly enhanced their houses at Steels Creek and in Yarraville.

Jenny was always interested in all aspects of conservation of wildlife and the environment, and she used this interest to good effect when she started part-time and volunteer work during the 1980s at the VNPA. She served on the VNPA Council and was Vice-President from 1988 to 1993. If there was an issue to be investigated, Jenny applied herself to it and brought her considerable analytical skills to the task.

When we met, as we did several times a year to catch up and have a meal, she would always have a brief outline of the problems in the latest environmental issue and what could be done about them. She was awarded a richly deserved Honorary Life Membership of the VNPA in 2006.

Jenny's working briefs, several of which I saw, were masterly assessments of the issues and how they might be dealt with. She combined her ability to analyse quite complex situations, as many environmental issues are, with a detached analytical approach to how the problem might be solved. I always thought she was very formidable in this role and I would hate to try to argue against her because she had such mastery of the evidence. I always saw her as the irresistible force moving an immovable object.

She often had a faint smile during discussions and you could see in her shrewd but benign eyes that she was assessing what you said — sorting out the wheat from the chaff — as you chatted on. The Age photograph accompanying the short article on 11 February 2009 captured this look perfectly and it was a comfort to see it.

Jenny was not a person of extreme moods. She was passionate about the environment and the protection of wildlife but never seemed to get angry. I only saw her laugh outright once, when we were going to look for fossils in the roadside verges at Kinglake. I have been trying ever since her death to remember what was said at the time. Her ability to maintain a calm and reflective manner was what made her such an effective



**Jenny Barnett with one of the T-shirts she hand-painted.**

PHOTO: VNPA

campaigner for environmental issues.

Typical of Jenny was the production of her excellent small book *Standing Up for your Local Environment: an action guide* — simple, unpretentious, effective and incredibly useful.

Our sympathy goes out to Jenny's brothers, Richard and Jim Forse, and her sister-in-law Elizabeth Forse and her family.

Australia has really gained from the lives of John and Jenny Barnett. They have contributed much to Australian biological sciences, especially in the fields of physiological ecology, animal welfare, wildlife biology and conservation biology, and to addressing conservation and environmental issues. They have enriched Australian science and the lives of their friends.

Rest in peace, dear friends.

• • • • •

*This tribute was first published in Australian Mammalogy 31: 71-72 (April 2009) and is reproduced here in abridged and edited form by permission of the author, the Australian Mammal Society (copyright owners of the journal) and CSIRO PUBLISHING (publishers of the journal). The original is available on [www.publish.csiro.au/journals/am](http://www.publish.csiro.au/journals/am), specifically at [www.publish.csiro.au/nid/257/issue/5268.htm](http://www.publish.csiro.au/nid/257/issue/5268.htm)*



**Jenny's photo of bats during a mammal survey activity.**

**Jenny's and John's ashes were scattered in Kinglake National Park, near their Steels Creek home, on Friday 31 July, in the presence of family members. These simple words were said for Jenny:**

**"Jennifer — we return you to the earth that you loved  
In the place that you loved  
To be with the husband that you loved.  
May you rest here in eternal peace."**

**Matt Ruchel and Phil Ingamells attended on behalf of the VNPA.**

# The Milford Track and how VNPA helped us prepare for it

Victoria Osborne is a VNPA member and keen bushwalker, writer and photographer ... as you'll discover in her story.

**O**F COURSE, you know the Milford Track is one of the world's finest walks. You've been meaning to get round to it ... one of these days. Should be a bit of a doddle. It's a fairly easy touristy stroll, isn't it?

Well, actually, no. 'Easy' isn't an entirely accurate description. There's real mountains in them there hills! Although the highest point is not even 1,200 metres above sea level, you've still got to get there. All the way up... and all the slippery rocky treacherous way down. You've got to be sensible. You've got to prepare!

After reading the solemn safety advice in the NZ Department of Conservation's excellent website ([www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz)), we really didn't want to be 'those idiot Australian tourists who had to get airlifted off the track because they'd twisted an ankle'.

How best to prevent such a fate? Of course. Join the VNPA and suck as much information as possible out of the wonderful bushwalking groups. Not only are members knowledgeable about the parks and reserves of Victoria but many are experienced

international trekkers.

We walked roughly once a month for a year, increasing our pack weight and fitness and meeting some fantastic people. We'd like to thank Russell, Anne, Colin, Elizabeth, Cheryl and Hans et al for leading us through Jawbone Sanctuary, Lysterfield Park, Masons Falls, the Brisbane Ranges, Mt Feathertop, Mt Tanglefoot and into Werribee Gorge.

Not only is fitness is required for the Milford but also some sort of bush sense. Knowing what to wear can be a matter of life and death. The type of gear available in those big camping shops is confusing and the best advice you can get is right next to you when you go tramping with the VNPA. There's knowledge about blisters and recipes for scroggin and quick drying fabric and trimming your toenails that will never be revealed if you're just talking to salespeople.

Regular bushwalkers love their particular trousers or leg warmers or gaiters or hats for their own personal reasons. There's also the notion of

the Alpine walking pole. If used correctly two of these light, telescoping sticks can support up to 40% of your body weight. One stick will assist you in balance, checking the depth of streams and prodding relatives for another piece of chocolate when you can no longer speak.

The oldest walkers in the VNPA, some we suspect on the wiser end of their 70s, are terrific advertisements for walking — beating whipper-snappers half their age — whilst carrying tents and food on overnight walks. One gentleman we met explained that it was not only the exercise and the careful placing of feet that kept you vibrant, it was regularly breathing clean air deep into your gasping lungs.

There is no doubt that building fitness does allow you to enjoy the walk. Though it's difficult to gasp at break-taking scenery when your breath has already been taken and your legs are jelly.

The Milford Track is 53.5 km long. It's carefully regulated and your three nights are monitored and inevitable. You may not camp there. Over 14,000 people march over those rocky paths every year so if you decide to stop you could cause a nasty traffic jam. Because it is one way, however, most of the time you do not need to see another human on the track.

If you let yourself relax and breathe and stop taking photos every now and then, you will be stilled with incredulity as a bell-bird serenades or a fantail air-dances or a kea banshee screeches past. You may as well take your time to experience the wilderness because what are you going to do when you get to the hut? Eat and sleep. And wash. In the water. Lots and lots of water.

In comparison with the VNPA tracks we experienced over the last year, there's plenty of water on the Milford; you're walking beside an ever changing river most of the way and there are swimming holes at every hut — though, personally, it's getting a bit cold in April.

You will need an excellent bum-covering raincoat. It will rain during your time in Milford. There is nothing more certain. We heard anecdotally Milford can have anything up to 15 metres of rainfall a year. Nine metres is entirely normal. Melbourne, of course, currently enjoys about nine millimetres per annum.

One should note, however, that where there is running water, there is also a flight of anticoncord. It is of course *namu*, the sandfly. This tiny cloud of stinging menace is trouble. If you know



Son Felix at the start of the Track.

PHOTO: VICTORIA OSBORNE

you are a tender flower, easily irritated by insects, it is worth experimenting with a course of vitamin B at least a month before travel. Long sleeves and trousers are essential. We also carried three different types of insect repellent because, as you know, everyone is different. A pair of polarising sunglasses comes in handy too.

There are two ways to do the Milford Track. One is the independent way we chose. This is Freedom Walking. The other way is The Way of Showers and Chardonnay. Here you pay staff to look after you, thereby opening the track to rich people who like to walk lightly, smell nice and eat well.

The waters are teeming with trout and eel. Some of our fellow Freedom Walkers bought a licence and a rod each and ate fresh fish with lemon and dill for the first two nights.

DOC provides cooking facilities in the peak season so you don't have to carry stoves or fuel. You do have to carry pots and all your food and you have to carry out all your rubbish. Mind you, if you're cooking a nice big trout the bones and guts get spilled right back into the river. What comes from the track stays on the track.



**B e f o r e** actually setting foot on the track itself, we step out onto Glade Wharf to wash our boots in detergent to prevent the spread of *didymo* — a foul algae (nicknamed rock snot) that wraps itself around rocks and propellers

and is spreading through the New Zealand waterways. So far, the rivers and valleys of the track are clean.

We're already used to washing our boots, of course. Our membership in the VNPA has introduced us to the frightening *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, or root rot fungus. (Plus the energetic customs officers in Christchurch carefully steam cleaned our boots, a semi-religious experience we didn't care to repeat on our return to Australia so we scrubbed them thoroughly in our Christchurch cousins' laundry before heading out to the airport!)

A cruise on the Sound is the perfect finish to the walk. You can rest your weary selves, eat, drink, and absorb the majestic scenery. You simply won't be able to fit it all into your camera.

Good luck with your sensible preparations and keep walking with the VNPA. Machu Picchu sounds good. What about the Tour du Mont Blanc? Or we could all join Terese Rein up Kilimanjaro ...



(Above left) Felix's photo of lots of water.

(Above) Dwarfed by the Milford scenery. PHOTO: VICTORIA OSBORNE

# BWAG news and updates

## Coming events

**23 Sept. (Wed) U35 EVENING**

ORGANISER: Fiona Buntine, [fbuntine@hotmail.com](mailto:fbuntine@hotmail.com)  
0419 549 786

**28 Sept. (Mon) LEADERS' PLANNING NIGHT**

**Robert.M.Argent@gmail.com** / 0417 502 191

**13 Oct. (Tues) BWAG and VNPA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETINGS**

CONTACT: 9347 5188 / [vnpa@vnpa.org.au](mailto:vnpa@vnpa.org.au)

**16 Oct. (Fri) WESTIES DINNER — SOCIAL NIGHT**

Cheryl Mioch 9395 3819 / 0412 743 866

**21 Oct. (Wed) SOCIAL NIGHT: NEW MEMBERS**

CONTACT: 9347 5188 / [vnpa@vnpa.org.au](mailto:vnpa@vnpa.org.au)

**28 Oct. (Wed) U35 EVENING**

ORGANISER: Anne Conneely, [a.conneely@gmail.com](mailto:a.conneely@gmail.com) /  
0413 788 225

**11 Nov. (Wed) SOCIAL NIGHT**

CONTACT: 9347 5188 / [vnpa@vnpa.org.au](mailto:vnpa@vnpa.org.au)

Helga Svendsen will talk about her hike along PNG's Kokoda trail. Doors open from 7pm at 60 Leicester Street Carlton.

**22 Nov. (Sun) CARING FOR NATURE DAY, POINT NEPEAN**

Reg Elder, 9439 9527. Contact VNPA office for details and see enclosed information sheet.

**26 Nov. (Thurs) U35 END OF YEAR BBQ**

Russell Bowey, [rbowey@hotmail.com](mailto:rbowey@hotmail.com) / 0417 328 651

## Amendment to current program

**12 Sept. (Sat) DAY WALK: BUNINYONG — BALLARAT**

GRADE: medium 18km. LEADER: Glenn King 0448 816 504 / 5336 6775 (W)

Addition to walk: optional visit to Sovereign Hill for dinner and show. Accommodation there or nearby. Contact Glenn for details.

## Addition to current program

**16 Dec. (Wed) WALK, TALK & GAWK DAYLIGHT SAVING STROLL: DAREBIN CK.**

GRADE: easy, 6 km. LEADER: Geoff Durham, 9523 5559.

Our traditional celebration of another year of WT&Gs with guest naturalist Grif Ward. BBQ from 5.00 pm, followed by walk at 6.30 pm. Train to Alphington Station. Limit 30.

## Cancellation

**2-5 Apr. 2010 ADVANCE NOTICE: EASTER IN SYDNEY**

LEADER: Alison Thomas

Trip postponed to a future program.

## Annual Walks Passes

Application form now available on VNPA website, at bottom of Events page in the Bushwalking and Activities section.

## Excursions

**Saturday 26 September:** Coach trip to Lerderderg Gorge, Long Forest Mallee and Bacchus Marsh with interesting walks.

LEADER: Geoff Durham. Cost \$35.00. Limit 57.

**Saturday 17 October:** Coach trip to **Portsea** and environs with clifftop walks. Tea and cakes at Nepean Historical Society museum.

LEADER: Doreen Parker. Cost \$40.00. Limit 57.

**Saturday 28 November:** Coach trip to **Firth Mill** and **Blackwood** with old goldmine and mineral springs, plus honey and apples at Bacchus Marsh.

LEADER: Glenn King. Cost \$35.00. Limit 57.

Enquiries for trip circulars to Nancye Blades 9596 2189, or Larysa Kucan 9347 3733.

## Do your brain a favour: spend time in nature!

If you spend most of your time in the city, it may be a good idea to trade in your city shoes for hiking boots.

A study in *Psychological Science* (Dec. 2008) revealed that spending time in nature may be more beneficial for mental processes than being in urban environments.

Three psychologists from the University of Michigan designed two experiments to test how interactions with natural and urban environments would affect attention and memory processes.

First, a group of volunteers completed a task designed to challenge memory and attention. The volunteers then took a walk either in a park or in downtown Ann Arbor, returned to the lab and were retested on the task.

In the second experiment, the volunteers simply viewed either nature photographs or photographs of urban environments, and then repeated the task, instead of going out for a walk.

The results were quite interesting. In the

first experiment, performance on the memory and attention task greatly improved following the walk in the park, but it did not improve for volunteers who walked downtown.

And it is not just being outside that is beneficial for mental functions. The group that viewed the nature photographs performed much better on the retest than those who looked at city scenes.

The authors suggest that urban environments produce a relatively complex and often confusing pattern of stimulation, which requires effort to sort out and interpret.

Natural environments, by contrast, offer more coherent (and often more aesthetic) patterns of stimulation that, far from requiring effort, are often experienced as restful.

Thus, being in the context of nature is effortless, allowing us to replenish our capacity to pay attention and so having a restorative effect on our mental abilities.

— from *Maelor Himbury*

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**WILLIS'S WALKABOUTS**



**Kakadu's paradise**

**Kakadu is bushwalking at its best.**  
It is Australia's largest national park. It contains thousands of rock art sites, dozens of beautiful gorges and spectacular waterfalls, uncountable swimming holes you need share with no one but your walking companions.  
  
The dry season weather is as near to perfect as you can find anywhere in the world – **it's paradise!**  
  
I've been running bushwalking tours in Kakadu since 1984.

Unlike many tour operators, I spend as much time as possible out bush, leading trips myself. Why? Someone else put it better than I can.

*"What we get from this adventure is just sheer joy. And joy is, after all, the end of life. We do not live to eat and make money. We eat and make money to be able to enjoy life. That is what life means and what life is for."* George Mallory, 1922

Join us and share that joy.

*Russell Willis*



[www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au](http://www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au)

12 Carrington St Millner NT 0810 Email: [walkabout@ais.net.au](mailto:walkabout@ais.net.au)

Phone 08 8985 2134 Fax 08 8985 2355



**Alpine Discovery Tour  
January 4-9, 2010**

Breathe in the clear mountain air, summer is wildflower time in the Alps! Lots of short guided walks with wildflowers at your feet and a sea of mountains extending to the horizon. Fully accommodation and a very relaxed pace.

**Mt Feathertop Adventure  
January 11-15, 2010**

Classic lodge-based Alpine walking. Good day walks build up to a long full day walk along the Razorback Ridge to Mt Feathertop. One of Victoria's greatest Alpine walks with superb mountain views and summer wildflowers at your feet.

For full day by day itineraries or details of the current program contact Jenny:

**Gippsland High Country Tours  
Phone (03) 5157 5556**

Email: [jennyghct@netspace.net.au](mailto:jennyghct@netspace.net.au)

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Join the VNPA's Bushwalking and Activities Group and you might end up discovering the plants of the northern Wimmera (above) or enjoying lunch on a walking tour of Point Nepean and Sorrento (below). Or even in New Zealand (see page 36). There's more to BWAG than just walking! PHOTOS: BERNIE FOX; RUSSELL BOWEY

