

ANNUAL REPORT 2015-2016

President's Report Euan Moore



The past year has been an extremely busy one for the VNPA. After years of fighting rear-guard campaigns to protect our natural environment, we

are now being consulted by government as a key stakeholder in environmental matters.

Our Executive Director, Matt Ruchel, has been heavily involved with the Forest Industry Taskforce, which is looking at ways to resolve the problem of protecting our old-growth forests in a way that will have widespread acceptance within the community. This work continued even while he was on long-service leave!

VNPA staff is increasingly engaging with government. This is stretching our capacity in the best way possible – we are working to have sound environmental management incorporated in proposals from the start rather than fighting threats already entrenched.

A major highlight for the year has been the two VicNature 2050 symposia that VNPA ran in association with The Royal Society, DELWP, Parks Victoria, Arthur Rylah Institute, Greening Australia and all Victorian Universities. The first of these brought together a range of top-level scientists who discussed the biodiversity impacts of climate change in their respective fields. The second concentrated on where and how we should intervene and whether such intervention, while hopefully protecting native species, will result in novel ecosystems different to those we have today.

Major grants during the year have enabled us to boost our NatureWatch capacity. Our Caught on Camera project has been extended to include Communities

Listening for Nature, where audio recorders are placed in the forest to record and identify the sounds of the wild. Another grant has enabled us to reactivate our ReefWatch program.

Over the past few years staff and councillors have been working on our Strategic Plan. Now completed, it lays out the strategic goals for the VNPA in three themes: Conservation of Victorian nature and protection of natural heritage; Inspiring and encouraging all Victorians to experience, value and enjoy nature; and A strong independent and influential community-based organisation.

Our new system for managing our membership and supporter database is now fully bedded down and is an integral and reliable part of our operations. A new phone system has been installed to take advantage of NBN technology. Council has also approved the redevelopment of our website and online communications tools in line with the strategic plan. We should see the new-look website around the end of 2016.

All of this work can only take place because of the support that we get from our members and supporter base. I would like to thank every one of you for this support; it is what keeps VNPA running. Our income from donations and regular giving has continued to grow while our membership base has stabilised. If you are not already a regular giver, I would urge you to consider becoming one. We all want to see our organisation grow; you can help further by introducing new supporters to the VNPA.

I would like to thank our staff and volunteers who carry out so much work on your behalf. They are enthusiastic and dedicated and put in hours over and above the normal expectations.

Special thanks go to Chris Smyth, who served as acting director while Matt Ruchel was on long service leave. Chris, like Matt, kept everything running smoothly and was always on top of the issues of the day.

Finally, I extend my thanks to the Councillors who have assisted with the governance of the VNPA. There is a very wide range of valuable skills within our council and extends across all areas of our operations. It has been a pleasure working with you.

VNPA COUNCIL MEMBERS

President: *Euan Moore* (Executive; Finance; Conservation & Campaigns; Marketing & Community Engagement; Governance, Policy & Legal)

Vice President: *Bruce McGregor* (Executive; Finance Conservation & Campaigns)

Secretary: *Mike Forster* (Executive; Conservation & Campaigns)

Treasurer: *Gary Allan* (Executive; Finance; Governance, Policy & Legal)

Lara Bickford (Marketing & Community Engagement)

Ann Birrell (Executive; Governance, Policy & Legal)

Russell Bowey (Bushwalking & Activities Group)

Russell Costello (Conservation & Campaigns)

Michael Feller (Conservation & Campaigns)

Deborah Henry (Bushwalking & Activities Group)

Dianne Marshall (Marketing & Community Engagement)

Kyle Matheson (Finance; Governance, Policy & Legal)

James Thyer (Marketing & Community Engagement)

Note: Committee memberships in brackets

The Year in Review

Executive Director Matt Ruchel



It is always amazing to review the year past, when day-to-day priorities often deal with the urgent over the important. 2015-2016 has been characterised by some significant milestone achievements in

the first half and continued hard work on a range of strategic reforms in the second.

The Andrews Government moved on some of its key election commitments: the private development lease over the Point Nepean Quarantine Station was ended in July 2015 and the option of 99-year leases in national parks was removed from legislation in September 2015. This, we hope, puts to rest the push to privatise national parks.

The VNPA have been heavily involved in a raft of consultations with the government, including on reviewing the native vegetation clearing rules, development of a new marine and coastal act, preparation of the state of the bay reporting, review of the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act* and the creation of a new state-wide biodiversity strategy. We also worked resolutely to improve funding for Parks Victoria, which has suffered drastic cuts over the past few years. Special thanks to Yasmin Kelsall who worked tirelessly to protect our unique habitats but left us during the year to pursue other interests.

During this past year, even while on long service leave, a large amount of my time has been involved in the Forest Industry Taskforce as one of four conservation representatives. The taskforce was established following an Andrews Government election commitment and comprises the major stakeholders of industry, unions and conservation groups. Its purpose is to reach common ground on a durable, long-term set of recommendations and proposals to government about the issues facing the industry: jobs protection, economic activity and protection of our unique native flora, fauna and threatened species, such as the Lead beater's Possum.

Thanks to your ongoing support, the VNPAs organisational capacity remains



PHOTO: GECCO

stable and our community engagement and citizen science work is flourishing. NatureWatch is soon to celebrate its 10-year anniversary and has been strengthened with the new Communities Listening for Nature project in partnership with Museum Victoria. Also new to the VNPA is Kade Mills, the coordinator of a reactivated ReefWatch program. Caitlin Griffith has taken on the role of Manager Community Engagement and Learning to coordinate these expanded activities.

We welcomed back Chris Smyth, who not only filled the role of Acting Executive Director while I was on long service leave in 2015, but has variously applied his considerable skill to editing Park Watch, coordinating the development of our new website and campaigning on marine and coastal issues. Emily Clough, our Fundraising Manager, returned from parental leave, and our new Supporter Development Officer, Amelia Easdale, began in June. Maxine Hawkins left us during the year after more than six years of invaluable fundraising which, among other things, helped keep the lights on.

Last but not least, I wish to acknowledge Michael Howes and his long running editorship of Park Watch and other VNPA publications. Michael has taken the big step of retirement. His attention to detail and generosity of mind over many years – *Park Watch* December 2003 was the first he edited – will be sorely missed.

The work of the VNPA brings together a broad community of committed people and organisations that strive to secure and protect Victoria's natural areas. Financial donors, members, volunteers, partners, VNPA Council, committees and staff are all fundamental to our success. I thank and congratulate everyone involved in this amazing team effort during 2015-16 and we look forward to another successful year being part of nature in 2016-2017.

Bushwalking and Activities Group

The Bushwalking and Activities Group had a full program this year, providing a wide variety of opportunities to experience our natural environment. From snowshoeing at Mt Stirling to bird watching tours of Mud Islands in Port Phillip Bay, there were many activities on offer.

We had over 230 activities and social events listed, with an estimated 2,000 participants. These included day walks, Walk Talk & Gawks, base camps, easy going ambles, excursions by bus, overnight pack carry hikes, under 35s walks, family walks, meetup walks, bike rides, 4WD tours, bring a friend for free walks, canoeing, snorkeling, social nights, dinners and conservation events.

This is all thanks to our dedicated volunteers. We are proud to honour their contribution as walk leaders, emergency contacts, leader mentors, meetup coordinators, excursion organisers, event coordinators and committee members.

Our monthly Social Night speakers were engaging and informative, starting with Caitlin Griffith presenting the VNPA NatureWatch 'Caught on Camera' footage, followed by John and Ruth Stirling showing film of their trip to Japan, John Bales speaking about the trip to Canada, Campbell Phillips reporting on Australian wilderness heritage through the Wild Magazine, Sue Catterall speaking of the UK Coast to Coast walk, Zac Lewis of the Wildlife Conservancy giving a presentation 'Back from the Brink', and Deb Henry speaking of her Feathertop to Bogong hike.

BWAG hosts a number of training opportunities each year. Russell Bowey, our training leader, led two introductory briefings for new leaders. Rob Argent and Russell ran a two-day course on using GPS to assist navigation and the BWAG Committee held a leaders workshop to introduce BWAG online and meetup.

BWAGers participated in a broad range of conservation activities. These annual events are well supported by VNPAs loyal members. They are Project Hindmarsh tree planting in the Wimmera region, Grow West community planting day just west of

Melbourne, the malleefowl survey in the Wimmera, the Forests Forever Camp in East Gippsland, boneseeding at Arthurs Seat and the rabbit warren and weed survey at Hattah.

This year there have been a number of initiatives, the most noteworthy being the new format for the Activities Program. Thanks to the efforts of the VNPA staff, and in particular designer Mary Ferlin, we now publish an A4 quarterly as an insert of Park Watch, using attractive icons to depict activity types. In addition, the program can now be downloaded from the VNPA website.

Finally, a special thank you to the BWAG Committee members who make all this happen: Rob Argent, Russell Bowey, Gayle Davey, Deb Henry and David Moore. As Convenor, I am very grateful for their dedication.

Terese Dalman (Convenor)

Excursions Group

The Excursions Group, led by volunteer leaders, conducted 10 day trips by coach and one by ferry in 2015-2016. All the trips were well attended with a total of 437 members and visitors.

This year we travelled from Kinglake to Seymour, Eynesbury to Blackwood, to Walhalla, Torquay and Point Addis, Launching Place and Wanderslore, Tower Hill, Around the Bay by coach and ferry, Winchelsea and Wilsons Promontory.

On these trips our members enjoyed walks in national and state parks and along rail trails. Other activities included visiting farmers' markets, historic homes and a ferry cruise along the Yarra to Williamstown.

VNPA has been using the services of McKenzie's Coaches since the early 1960s. Their expert bus drivers contribute greatly to the success of the excursions.

Many thanks to the leaders and all who participated in our excursions this year.

Larysa Kucan (Convenor)

Volunteers and Committee Convenors

VOLUNTEERS

Administration Assistants: Jill Casey, Reg Elder, Colette Findlay, Margaret Hattersley, Raimonne McCutchan, Graham Trigg, Fredrick Tropp-Asher.

Bushwalking & Activity Leaders: we are grateful for the hard work of all our volunteer leaders.

Excursions: Larysa Kucan, Jan Lacey.

Grow West & Project Hindmarsh: John Stirling and Terese Dalman plus VNPA planters.

Forest Forever Easter Ecology Camp: Euan Moore, Jenny Rolland, Jill Redwood, Lizzi Jodell, Ann Birrell, Terese Dalman, Mike Forster, John Renowden, Environment East Gippsland and all other volunteers.

Mapping and GIS: Tony Hampton.

Native Vegetation & Grasslands: Andrew Booth, Adrian Marshall, Rowan Ewing, Oliver Field.

NatureWatch: (Office volunteers) Emma Barnett, Fiona Kealy, David Forbes, Genie Fleming, Asitha Samarawickrama, Sam Weston, Jill Johnson. **(Team leaders)** Colin Cook, David De Angelis, Jasper Hails, Michael Longmore, Julia Pickwick, Garry van Dijk, Wilma van Dijk, Ian Vaskess, Chris Bonnici. **(Equipment management)** Eddie Schambre.

Publications & Photography: Geoff Durham, Evelyn Feller, Euan Moore, Jenny Norvick, Bernard Slattery, Marcel van Regteren Altena, Emma Barnett, Melanie Dalman, David Tatnall, Paul Sinclair, and many other photographers and authors.

Park Watch Mailout Team: Mem Alexander, Murray Bird, Jan Gay, Brian Groom, Jo Groom, Margaret Hattersley, Leonie Hudson, Ann Jacobs, Keith Lloyd, Margot Marasco, Ian McDonald, Sheina Nicholls, Mary-Lou Phillips, Joan Phillips, Barbara Prouse, Lorraine Ratcliffe, Paul Stokes, Graham Trigg, Pat Witt.

Research Assistants: Evelyn Feller, Dianne Marshall, Geoff Lacey, Isidora Veljovic, Shannon Hurley and many in the scientific and conservation community.

COMMITTEE VOLUNTEERS

The following volunteers (other than VNPA Councillors and staff) have been members of VNPA committees: Fredrick Tropp-Asher, Liz Forbes, Darren McClelland, Maelor Himbury, Larysa Kucan, Evelyn Feller, Fred Gerardson, John Renowden, Joan Lindros, Gerard McPhee, Bernie Mace, Lindsay Hesketh, Terese Dalman, Rob Argent, Gayle Davey, Sue Catterall, Julia Pickwick, David Moore, Libby Smith, Charles Street, John Kotsiaris, Greg Jones.

VOLUNTEER COMMITTEE CONVENORS

Bushwalking & Activities Group: Terese Dalman.

Conservation & Campaigns: Bruce McGregor.

Executive: Euan Moore.

Governance, Policy & Legal: Ann Birrell.

Finance: Gary Allan.

Marketing and Community Engagement: Euan Moore.

VNPA HOSTED PROJECT:

Forest Conservation Groups Caucus

Coordinator:
Sarah Day (from Oct 2015)

Australian Conservation Foundation	Lawyers for Forests
East Gippsland Rainforest Management Network	MyEnvironment
Environment East Gippsland	Bernard Mace
Fauna and Flora Research Collective	Chris Taylor
Friends of Leadbeater's Possum	Strathbogie Sustainable Forestry Group
Goongerah Environment Centre	Warburton Environment
Knitting Nannas of Toolangi	Victorian National Parks Association
	The Wilderness Society (Victoria)
	The Wilderness Society Ltd

This project is supported by the Victorian Government.

Financial Report

Abridged Audited Special Purpose Financial Report for the year ended 30 June 2016.

Statement by Members of the Council

The members of the 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 2016 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 for payment.

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

Gary Allan (Treasurer) & Euan Moore (President) dated this 1st day of September 2016.

INCOME STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2016		
REVENUE	2016	2015
Operating Activities	\$	\$
Appeals, Donations & Bequests	847,239	854,142
Grants & Sponsorship	146,132	106,379
Membership Fees	106,806	109,067
Interest	18,584	18,435
Publication Sales, Events & Outdoor Activities	59,773	41,471
Total Income	1,178,534	1,129,494
EXPENDITURE		
Employment Expenses	737,767	594,400
Campaigns, Projects, Activities & Education	112,693	100,747
Office & Administration	150,624	157,750
Printing/Publications/Web	65,010	54,558
Accommodation & Insurance	91,592	99,627
Total Expenses	1,157,686	1,007,082
OPERATING (DEFICIT) SURPLUS BEFORE TRANSFERS (TO) FROM RESERVE FUNDS	20,848	122,412
Transfers from (to) Reserve Funds	(25,000)	(109,426)
OPERATING (DEFICIT) SURPLUS AFTER TRANSFERS FROM (TO) RESERVE FUNDS	(4,152)	12,986

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 30 JUNE 2016		
ASSETS	2016	2015
Current	\$	\$
Cash and Cash Equivalents	1,122,984	926,256
Receivables and Inventory	7,188	30,079
Total Current Assets	1,130,172	956,335
Non-Current		
Fixed Assets at Written Down Value	36,479	23,151
TOTAL ASSETS	1,166,651	979,486
LIABILITIES		
Current and Non-Current	468,873	302,556
TOTAL LIABILITIES	468,873	302,556
NET ASSETS	697,778	676,930
Funded by:		
Association Funds	697,778	676,930
TOTAL ASSOCIATION FUNDS	697,778	676,930

NOTE: Independent Audit Report: As in previous years, the Auditor's 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 Auditor's Report will be tabled at the forthcoming Annual General Meeting as part of the Audited Financial Statements and the full text of the Report will be available at www.vnpa.org.au.

VNPA - ACTIVITIES ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2016		
	2016	2015
The operating accounts for the Bushwalking Group have not been consolidated into the general accounts above and are reported separately as follows:	\$	\$
Opening Bank Account Balance	6,110	3,125
Income	8,206	10,060
Expenditure	(533)	(75)
Funds Contributed to VNPA	(9,000)	(7,000)
CLOSING BANK ACCOUNT BALANCE	4,783	6,110

VNPA supporters, donors & partners

VNPA's work to protect Victoria's natural places is only possible thanks to the support of dedicated and generous donors and partners. Our key supporters are listed below.

Donors:

The following subfunds of the Australian Communities Foundation: BB & A Miller Fund, Melliodora Fund, The Arnold Foundation, Bank Australia, Coastcare Victoria, The Dara Foundation, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Equity Trustees Limited, Gras Foundation Trust, Helen Macpherson Smith Trust, Foundation for National Parks & Wildlife, The Ian Potter Foundation, Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, Rowe Family Foundation, Parks Victoria, Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority, Tree Pot

Project partners:

Belfast Coastal Reserve Action Group, Bendigo and District Environment Council, Bendigo Family Nature Group, Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, Bendigo Sustainability Group, Birdlife Australia, City of Greater Bendigo, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Ecology Australia, Environmental Justice Australia, Far West Friends of the Hooded Plover, Friends of Bunyip State Park, Friends of Brisbane Ranges National Park, Friends of Mount Worth State Park, Friends of the Prom, Geelong Environment Council, Geelong Field Naturalists Club, Grow West, Hindmarsh Landcare Network, Killarney Coastcare, Mandurang Strathfieldsay Landcare Network, Merri Creek Management Committee, Mid Loddon Conservation Management Network, Mount Worth & District Landcare Group, Museum Victoria, Northern Bendigo Landcare Group, Parks Victoria, Practical Ecology, The Royal Society of Victoria, Sheepwash Creek Landcare Group, Under the Radar Abbotsford Group, The University of Melbourne, The Wilderness Society, Wombat Forestcare

VNPA Employees

Executive Director: Matt Ruchel

Acting Executive Director (Aug 2015 – Feb 2016), Project Manager and Park Watch (Feb – Jun 2016), Marine and Coasts (from June 2015): Chris Smyth

Fundraising Manager: Emily Clough (returned from maternity leave Jan 2016)

Direct Marketing Officer: Maxine Hawkins (to Jan 2016)

Supporter Development: Amelia Easdale (from June 2016)

Finance & Operations Manager: Heath Rickard

Administration Officer: Charlotte Kandelaars

Administration Assistants: Irina De Loche, Tilly Reynolds (to Feb 2016), Helen Sartin (May to June 2016)

Parks Protection Project Officer: Phil Ingamells

Habitat Protection Project Officer: Yasmin Kelsall (to Mar 2016)

Native Vegetation: Rowan Ewing (Mar to Jun 2016)

Project Facilitator, Bendigo Bushland Ambassadors: Elaine Bayes (Aug 2015), Leah Crisps (Sept to Dec 2015)

Manager, Community Engagement and Learning: Caitlin Griffith

NatureWatch Coordinator: Christine Connelly

ReefWatch Coordinator: Kade Mills (from June 2016)

Park Watch Editor/Publications Officer: Michael Howes

Communications Consultant: John Sampson/EcoType