

PARK WATCH



FINDING GREATER GLIDERS
ABORIGINAL NAVIGATORS
VNPA ANNUAL REPORT
CALLS OF THE WILD
PORT CAMPBELL NATIONAL PARK
TREE FELLING IN PARKS
HORSES FOR COURSES

SEPTEMBER 2016 NO 266



VICTORIAN
NATIONAL PARKS
ASSOCIATION
Be part of nature



Be part of nature

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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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COPY DEADLINE for December 2016 *Park Watch* is 24 October 2016.

DESIGN Mary Ferlin **PRINTING** Adams Print

FRONT COVER

Citizen scientists working with the Goongerah Environment Centre have been finding Greater Gliders in forests earmarked for logging in East Gippsland, which has helped gain better protection for the species. Photo by Pavel German/www.australiannature.com.

BACK COVER

Insect-eating Sundew at Brisbane Ranges National Park. Photo by Philip Ingamells.

Park Watch ISSN 1324-4361

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From the President

Winter and spring are the seasons for tree planting, which VNPA members have been doing for the past 18 years in the annual Project Hindmarsh.

Started as an ambitious project to re-establish native vegetation corridors along roadsides between the Big and Little deserts, Project Hindmarsh has expanded to include habitat restoration on private land. Each year tens of thousands of native trees and shrubs are planted.

In the early years of Project Hindmarsh we saw very high plant survival rates. More recently these have dropped as climate change and drought have resulted in an earlier start to hot dry summers. This year the planting weekend was brought forward from late August to the last weekend of June so that the plants would be better established before summer and hopefully survive it.

VNPA is also a partner of, and our members play a key role in, the Grow West project, which aims to reconnect the Brisbane Ranges National Park, Werribee Gorge and Lerderderg state parks. The Grow West planting day was held in early July. There was also a good turn-out of VNPA members to help plant 11,000 seedlings at Mali Dunes, a Trust for Nature covenanted property owned by Sue Hayman-Fox and the late Bernie Fox.

Habitat restoration is an important aspect of conservation work but it must be seen for what it is, fixing past mistakes. Restoration activities do not restore the environment to a natural state. At best they result in a jigsaw with missing pieces. We do not have the knowledge, or indeed the option as some species may be extinct, to repopulate with the original suite of plants, animals, fungi and microbes that made up the original habitat. The presence of invasive species also contributes to what will be a novel ecosystem.

These revegetation projects have received welcome support from programs such as the Australian Government's 20 Million Trees. At first glance this appears to be a large program but it must be seen in context of the size of the problem. Twenty million trees equate to between 10,000 and 15,000 ha of land revegetated; it will take decades before it produces adequate habitat for many species. Meanwhile, across Australia tens of thousands of hectares are cleared each year, approved under lax and inadequate clearing regulations.

How can we repair the country in the face of climate change? I attended a very informative seminar at La Trobe University jointly hosted by the VNPA, Melbourne University's Bio 21 Institute, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and Parks Victoria, to explore answers to this difficult question. Should we be using local provenances of species or those from further afield where the climate resembles what we expect it to be in a hundred years?

What these examples illustrate is that we continue to degrade the environment while using band-aids to create the appearance of protecting our native flora and fauna. It is far better and, in the long run cheaper, to avoid the need to undertake habitat restoration and heroic recovery programs for critically endangered species.

Politicians of all persuasions seek to convince us that they are the best economic managers yet fail to see the whole picture – the costs as well as the benefits to the community.

At the federal level a parliamentary committee has recommended that environment NGOs spend a proportion of their donations on tree planting and erosion control works. In practice this costs more and is less effective at protecting native species, soils and water than preventing ongoing land clearing, the logging of old-growth forests, reducing the pollution that is causing climate change and protecting the conservation reserves that we already have. • PW

Euan Moore, VNPA President

Statewide assessment of public land

The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) has been investigating how we have been, and should be, categorising public land in Victoria. Its terms of reference include:

- assessment of the many public land categories (some date back to the 19th century)
- assessment of how land use has changed
- an inventory of the types of values on public land.

VEAC has made a number of draft recommendations, including a simplified system of land categories, and amending Victoria's National Parks Act to accommodate that. They have also released a comprehensive discussion paper. Both are available at www.veac.vic.gov.au

Submissions from the public are due by **Monday 7 November**.

ENDING THE REIGN OF HARD HOOVES



GETTING COWS, DEER, HORSES, GOATS AND PIGS OUT OF NATIONAL PARKS IS PROVING A VERY DIFFICULT EXERCISE, EVEN THOUGH THE DAMAGE THEY DO IS ABUNDANTLY CLEAR, SAYS PHIL INGAMELLS.

When the VNPA was fighting licensed cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park, the cattlemen always asked why we weren't arguing for control of horses and deer.

Deer hunters want a strong population of deer protected in the bush, primarily so they can shoot them. Horse supporters, on the other hand, hold strong to the brumby legends and, understandably, find any plan to take a gun to a horse difficult to comprehend. Each supporter group, it seems, wants population control to be focussed on another group's animal.

Goats and pigs are less fortunate. They have few supporters, so Parks Victoria's management of them has been allowed to continue pretty much without opposition. They are still a problem but their numbers, relatively speaking, are small.

Horses and deer, however, are now in plague proportions in some of our finest national parks. If goats or pigs appeared

in those concentrations there'd be widespread public outrage.

Accurate population estimates are difficult. A 2014 survey of horses in the Australian Alps National Parks showed a population of around 9,500 all told, with about 3,800 in the much troubled eastern section of Victoria's Alpine National Park. Brumby supporters claim those numbers are an over-estimate.

Measuring deer numbers is a far more difficult exercise, especially for Sambar Deer, which are secretive by nature and tend not to gather in herds. However, a survey of the annual 'deer harvest' comes up with about 60,000 deer being taken by amateur hunters each year in Victoria. On that reckoning the feral population must be in the many hundreds of thousands at least, and it's still growing.

But population numbers, accurate or not, aren't the best measure of the need for action. The damage they are

Above: Healthy water-holding sphagnum moss in the background, with trampled moss in the foreground.

Right: Many horses stay snowbound in winter.



PHOTO: FEDERATION TRAINING STUDENTS

causing to natural areas is far more simple to assess, and should be the trigger for population control.

So where do we stand with these two major threats?

Feral horses in the Alpine National Park

Parks Victoria set up a wild horse consultation process in late 2012, with a dedicated scientific advisory panel and a stakeholders' Roundtable Group. The VNPA was represented on the roundtable together with the RSPCA, mountain cattlemen, brumby runners, brumby rehomingers and tourism interests. That process resulted in a series of papers from Parks Victoria, outlining the clear damage that horses cause, their cultural relevance, and assessments of various control methods.

It's probably worth stating here that shooting horses has never been the first management

PHOTO: BILL KOSKY



Sambar deer caught in the act. Male sambar Deer rub their antlers on dead or living trees, often ringbarking them. In this picture, deer have also trampled much of the surrounding ground cover. Sambar impacts are widespread.

option – re-locating horses to farms where they can be cared for would be a great outcome. Brumby running (chasing horses and roping them, Man from Snowy River style) and hopefully rehoming them was the control method of choice in the 1992 park management plan. But that plan also called for ‘other control means’ if brumby running wasn’t containing numbers. Those numbers are well out of control today.

As far as we (or Parks Victoria) are aware, no-one has a viable option for getting significant numbers out of the park and rehoming them.

What are the alternatives?

The RSPCA has advised Parks Victoria that Brumby running causes horses great stress. There are other methods of rounding up horses, such as tempting them into holding yards with salt, but in remote areas that still means a long journey out on rough tracks, with most then sent on a very long road trip to a slaughter yard.

And importantly, horses in the park are often in poor condition, and suffer considerably and die in large numbers in times of drought, fire and heavy snowfalls.

For these and other reasons, the RSPCA has said, ‘We accept aerial shooting when performed under strict protocols by highly competent operators, because aerial culling is the best for the horses’ welfare and would be most effective in the current situation in the eastern alps where the country is rugged and large scale control is required.’

The VNPA accepts this advice from the leading animal welfare organisation, but it’s not proving very socially acceptable. Importantly, shooting horses is only an option when humane rehoming isn’t practicable or possible.

Victoria’s Minister for the Environment under the previous government ruled out shooting horses altogether, effectively stopping any meaningful, humane control program.

However in NSW, where a *Wild Horse Management Plan* is being developed for Kosciuszko National Park, the minister has defended the scientific evidence of damage to the park, and accepted control by ground shooting (though he doesn’t want aerial shooting). The NSW draft plan aims to reduce the NSW population to two groups of around 300 each.

Because the southern NSW population is linked to the main Victorian population, it is very important that the two state ministers, and the two park agencies, agree on targets and strategies for horse control.

The National Parks Associations of NSW and Victoria have both called for removal of all feral horses from the alpine parks, while retaining a manageable population in adjoining state forest for heritage purposes.

Parks Victoria will finalise its feral horse strategy after the release of the Greater Alpine National Parks Management Plan – due soon.

Dealing with deer

There are around five species of deer in Victoria’s parks and forests. Sambar Deer are rife in eastern Victoria, trashing rainforests, wallowing in wetlands at all altitudes, invading farms and causing car accidents – sadly, they have even appeared at the Prom where Hog Deer are already well-established. Red Deer are trampling through the Grampians.

Even though Sambar are listed as a serious threat to natural ecosystems in Victoria’s *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act*, they are simultaneously protected as a game species under the old *Wildlife Act*. The latter Act can be overridden by park managers, but it sets a psychological barrier to serious control. The deer ‘belong’ to the powerful hunting community: they even have people in our parliament as the cattlemen once did. The hunters are claiming to have successfully negotiated access to a further 118,000 ha in national parks, potentially limiting safe access for park visitors.

Despite the large number of deer ‘harvested’ each year, the population keeps growing in size and extent. So far, Parks Victoria has pretty much limited its control efforts to using accredited amateur hunters in a few strategic programs in places like the Prom and Yellingbo. But, any expansion of that volunteer program is limited.

Park managers need the resources to employ professionals in a strategic, ongoing program aimed at removing deer from our most vulnerable areas. And we need research into biological and genetic controls, and targeted baits, if we are ever going to halt the damage deer do. • PW

Goats caught on the mobile

When Kinglake Ranger, Sean Hunter, decided to apply his IT skills to a growing goat problem in Kinglake National Park, he didn’t know how successful it would be.

Over about two years, his use of sensor cameras linked to the internet has helped remove around 400 goats from the park’s Everard block. There hasn’t been a goat sighted there since, and a healthy regrowth of native trees and plants has appeared.

The cameras are installed on portable trap yards baited with tasty goat food. When a goat enters the yard, the camera is set off, an alert is sent to Sean’s mobile, and the image to a

website called Spypoint. Sean then logs onto the site to check what’s been caught on film, after which he arranges collection of the captured goats by a local goat farmer.

Apart from getting rid of the goats, which cause major environmental damage, the best thing for Sean is the time it saves him.

‘I used to spend at least two to three hours a day visiting traps. Now, by pressing a few keys, I can see what’s there.’

But Sean’s not resting on his laurels. After a short break he now has his sights set on the Arthurs Creek area, which has an emerging goat problem.

HORSES FOR COURSES NOT BEACHES

Horses gallop along the soft sand at the top of the beach and base of the sand dune, eroding the dune but also disturbing the prime habitat for the beach-nesting Hooded Plover.



CHRIS SMYTH VISITS BELFAST COASTAL RESERVE AND REPORTS ON ITS HORSE PROBLEM.

The odds are definitely against the Hooded Plover if commercial horse training is allowed to continue on the beach and sand dunes of the Belfast Coastal Reserve.

Stretching between Port Fairy and Warrnambool in the state's south-west, the reserve was established in the 1980s to protect the local flora and fauna, including migratory birds, help stabilise sand dunes and support low-intensity recreational uses such as walking, swimming, boating and picnicking. Commercial use just wasn't in the mix, nor should it be.

The area is considered 'hoodie central' by birdos, providing habitat for up to 52 Hooded Plovers (>9% of the species' Victorian population) and having one of the highest densities of breeding birds in eastern Australia (at least 21 pairs).

Hoodies nest in shallow scrapes on the high side of the beach between August and March, and are vulnerable to attacks by dogs and feral animals, and disturbance from people – and now horses. They are listed as threatened under national and Victorian laws.

For many years the use of the reserve by horses was minimal but recently there has been an invasion by commercial horse trainers. This is how Moyne Shire Council Environment Officer, Robert Gibson described horse activity to his council in March 2016:

'Reports and officer observations confirm up to 20 horses are working on the beach at any one time with training occurring on the beach on a daily basis, including weekends, from sunrise until about 10.30am. However, a resident reported racehorses on the beach at about 4pm on 10 February 2016. Council officers have observed horse trucks, horse floats and vehicles blocking access to the boat ramp and making access to the car parking areas difficult with up to 12 horse trucks and floats using all of the available car parking. Horses then access the beach from the boat ramp causing the sand to become loose and difficult to drive on when launching and retrieving a boat. Horses are also using pedestrian access tracks to enter and leave the beach, increasing the risk of a serious injury arising from a horse versus pedestrian incident.'

There are increasing reports of recreational users of the reserve being bullied and intimidated by trainers – I was threatened with legal action if I were to publish images I had taken of one commercial horse trainer riding along the beach, although it is entirely legal to photograph such activities in a public place. Vandalism of signage aimed at educating people about protecting hoodies is also occurring.

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and Parks Victoria have been conducting

consultation with various community groups and the commercial trainers – the South West Owners and Trainers Association – on what to do about the horse problem.

There is great concern in the local community that the agencies will try to legitimise what is an unauthorised and inappropriate use.

At the time of writing there were reports that the agencies were to recommend the licensing of commercial horse trainers in Belfast Coastal Reserve. There were also indications of some new regulations, seasonal closures at Levys Point and Rutledge's Cutting, and the transfer of horse training from Killarney Beach to East Beach at Port Fairy. All of this is just shifting the problem, not solving it. This would likely result in the loss of hoodies from sections of the Belfast Coastal Reserve and continue to cause other environmental and social impacts. Commercial horse training should be removed from the reserve and the racing industry should establish a purpose-built facility elsewhere.

But the problems for the Belfast Coastal Reserve don't end with horses. Like many other parts of the coast, it is beset by fragmented management (Parks Victoria, Moyne Shire Council and City of Warrnambool each manage separate sections of the reserve), unleashed dogs,

illegal camping and off-road vehicle use, sand dune erosion, feral animals and weeds.

It is not just the hoodies that are under threat. There is other wildlife, Indigenous community cultural sites, and the use of the reserve by walkers, swimmers, surfers and anglers.

In the VNPA report, *The coast is unclear*, it was recommended that the reserve become a coastal park under the management of Parks Victoria, with a set of regulations that provided rangers with the authority to implement the objectives of a new management plan (there are no specific regulations for the reserve, which leaves rangers with little power to manage anything).

At the time the report was prepared, the use of the reserve by commercial horse trainers was limited. But with one of them winning the 2015 Melbourne Cup, putting much of the win down to training on the Killarney Beach sands, many more are now using it.

Of course, changing the status of the reserve and preparing a management plan will take time, of which the hoodies have very little. Necessary and urgent short-term actions include refunding the Summer Ranger position (it's been defunded), which has been very successful in educating the community about the plight of hoodies, and gazetting regulations specific to the reserve to reduce the immediate threats.

The VNPA is working closely with Birdlife Australia, the Belfast Coastal Reserve Action Group and others in the local community. As part of that work, we have recently requested the Moyne Shire Council to rezone the land within the Belfast Coastal Reserve. For reasons known only to the council, the reserve is zoned for farming, even though other public land along the foreshore within the shire, and in the adjoining City of Warrnambool and the remainder of the state, is zoned either Public Conservation and Resource Zone or Public Park and Recreation Zone. Our request seeks a rezoning to Public Conservation and Resource Zone. Otherwise, the future for the reserve could be its conversion to crops and livestock grazing.

Resolving these issues is a nature conservation test for the new environment minister, Lily D'Ambrosio. Let's hope she does the right thing by the



This section of the Belfast Coastal Reserve, looking east from the Killarney Beach car park, is managed by the Moyne Shire Council.



Signage vandalised in the Belfast Coastal Reserve.

hoodies and the local community and not weaken coastal protection by giving into the racing industry. At a time when the government is reforming marine and coastal laws, failing to do this would indicate that the reform could simply be window dressing and make little if any difference on the ground. • PW

To express your concerns about the impacts that commercial horse training is having in the Belfast Coastal Reserve, please contact:

The Minister for Environment
The Hon Lily D'Ambrosio
Level 36, 121 Exhibition Street
Melbourne VIC 3000
E: lily.dambrosio@parliament.vic.gov.au
P: (03) 8392 2100



PHOTO: CHRIS TZAROS

GIVING WILDLIFE A GENUINE GUARANTEE

Clearing of land, damaging fire management and roadside habitat destruction are virtually unchallengeable in Victoria.

The key law protecting nature in Victoria – the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* (FFG Act) – gets ‘trumped’ by land-use laws and gives no real protection for threatened species or critical habitat.

In 2009 the Victorian Auditor-General released a ‘performance audit’ of the FFG Act and found it ‘no longer provides an effective framework for the conservation and protection of Victoria’s native flora and fauna’. The audit also revealed deficiencies in the management processes and the use of conservation and control measures and various powers under the Act.

Three years later Environmental Justice Australia (then EDO Victoria) further examined the Act’s implementation and found that ‘the FFG Act remains very poorly implemented, with many of the legal measures to protect flora and fauna never used’.

The Act is well overdue for overhaul and the Victorian government must better protect threatened species and do more to reverse trajectories of decline. The current government review of the FFG Act provides the perfect opportunity for it to become an effective and efficient nature protection law for Victoria. And this is how that can be achieved:

1. Obligate public authorities to operate consistently with the FFG Act. Currently, the Act only requires public authorities to ‘have regard’ to its objectives. The FFG Act should affect whole of government decision making to prevent habitat destruction like that of the Leadbeater’s Possum under forestry laws.
2. Remove the exemptions that currently override the threatened species provisions of the FFG Act. These exemptions (by Ministerial Order) have made ineffective the FFG Act protections over the habitat of listed threatened species,

SARAH BRUGLER FROM ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AUSTRALIA MAKES THE CASE FOR MAJOR REFORM OF THE STATE’S FLORA AND FAUNA GUARANTEE ACT.

communities and populations. For example, removing protected habitat in state forest and Crown land when it is ‘incidental’ to logging is seen as OK. This is unacceptable.

3. Mandate in the FFG Act positive actions by the government to protect threatened species. For example, while there are a number of tools that the government could use to protect species, communities and populations, such as the designation of critical habitat or the issuing of ‘interim conservation orders’, it has chosen not to use them. These tools should now be updated and their use by government mandatory.
4. Incorporate a landscape-scale approach to environmental management and ecological restoration in the FFG Act. Threatened species should continue to be a major focus for the Act, but to have any chance of restoring our environment, and reversing trajectories of decline, a landscape scale approach is essential.

The Swift Parrot is listed under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act and considered endangered in Victoria and nationally, but stronger laws are needed for its protection.

5. Include more obligations on government for preparation of the biodiversity strategy, such as updating it every five years and working towards 20-year biodiversity targets. The draft of a new one currently being finalised by the government says very little.
6. Establish an incentives framework for landscape-scale restoration activities in the FFG Act, centring on the preparation of 'Landscape Action Plans' for regionally nominated landscapes. This would enable and incentivise communities, local government and businesses to engage in the development of binding plans to deliver regional biodiversity targets.
7. Include environmental justice provisions in the FFG Act. As part of this, and to ensure that private individuals and companies comply with the Act, two key reforms are required:
 - a new entity to monitor compliance and to enforce the provisions of the FFG Act
 - a scale of penalties for non-compliance including sufficiently dissuasive fines and community service orders, as well as options for criminal prosecutions for serious offences. To ensure that the government is accountable, communities need to be allowed to challenge decisions through the courts and for this not to be financially prohibitive. More publicly available information about what is being done under the FFG Act is also needed.

If each of the above recommendations was adopted by the Victorian Government, the FFG Act would be a world leading nature protection law setting a high standard for other states to follow. • PW

For more information on the biodiversity law reform work of Environmental Justice Australia, go to www.envirojustice.org.au

Protecting wildlife with sledgehammers and nut crackers

The FFG Act was considered landmark Australian conservation legislation when introduced in 1988, but it has never reached its potential and should now be reviewed.

The Andrews Government's 2014 election policy on the environment committed to such a review:

'The diversity of our natural flora and fauna boosts tourism and our economy. Labor will review the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act* and institute a state wide biodiversity strategy to protect our habitats for future generations'.

The 2014 ALP Platform, the policy adopted at the party's state conference prior to the election, makes the same commitment but goes further by adopting world's-best-practice threatened species protection.

'Labor acknowledges that protecting and restoring biodiversity underpins the well-being of the environment, society and the economy. Labor will:

- Review the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act and put in place a state wide biodiversity strategy which includes recognition of the role of native apex predators in maintaining biodiversity
- Modernise threatened species protection to adopt world's best practice'.

Over the past 18 months there has been preliminary consultation on FFG Act issues, piggy backed with consultation on the draft Biodiversity Strategy, the final of which is expected late in 2016 or early 2017.

As the new EJA report outlines (see story opposite page), there are many areas of the FFG that need improvement. For example, there are inconsistencies in the one national and two state threatened species lists. Of the 293 vertebrates on the Victorian threatened species advisory list, only 177 are listed under the FFG Act and just 81 nationally.

There are no direct legal requirements or consequences that flow from inclusion of a species on the lists, although they are given some protection under Victoria's Native Vegetation Management Framework.

The FFG Act mechanisms and regulatory tools, if implemented, are powerful and include the designation of critical habitat protection and interim conservation orders.

The loss of critical habitat is one of the main causes of species decline. But the determination of critical habitat under the FFG Act is entirely at the Minister's discretion. As a result, there is currently no critical habitat protected for listed species.

Interim conservation orders are intended to provide legally binding conservation measures to protect listed threatened species. They can be applied to areas declared critical habitat and can operate for up to two years. The failure by successive state governments to use them is often dismissed by government officials because as it would be like '...using a sledgehammer to crack a chestnut'. But in some cases a sledge hammer is needed to protect habitats or species, not using it at all could be put down to a lack of political will.

A range of legislative tools for threatened species protection is needed to apply to different circumstances, with some requiring a sledge hammer while others a nut cracker. With pressure on the environment and threatened species continuing to rise, we hope the Andrews Government moves quickly with the proposed FFG Act review.

Matt Ruchel

OUR PARKS DESERVE FAR MORE THAN THIS



Victoria's national parks and conservation reserves are the keystone of conservation efforts. Without them, natural systems will fail and we'll lose species at a great rate.

But just reserving an area for conservation is not enough; we have to give ecosystems enough well-trained staff to look after them. Anything less is manifestly unfair to the currently overstressed staff, and is already failing ecosystems in many ways.

Climate change, almost unimaginable a few decades ago, is now having effects we couldn't guess at a few years ago.

Tree felling

Take a recent episode in Moondarra State Park, a delightful mixed eucalypt woodland straddling the road between Moe and Erica in Gippsland. Around 300 roadside trees were felled along two tracks over a total length of two kilometres, leaving large sections of both tracks with no trees of mature or even medium age. One of these, Senenis track, is the road visitors take to the park's only campground.

Why is that a climate impact? Well, we have been experiencing more frequent and severe fires, especially in Victoria's alpine region. And sadly, two Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) firefighters died in 2013 when a fire-killed Alpine Ash stag fell on their fire truck.

That accident generated a reassessment of trees that might prove dangerous to fire crews across Victoria. Thousands have since been felled in state forests, national parks and reserves across Victoria to protect crews faced with increased fire, or when managing increased fuel reduction burns.

Unfortunately, while DELWP has 'guidelines' for identifying dangerous trees, there is little recognition of the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act* (FFG) trials protection given to hollow-bearing

trees, and there seem to be no guidelines as to who is qualified to assess hazardous trees. In the Moondarra State Park case, as far as we can ascertain, DELWP bypassed any consultation with Parks Victoria and handballed the assessment to a local contractor who did the felling. When I visited after the event, firewood collectors were having a field day.

The safety of fire crews is clearly important, but so too is care, respect and responsibility when managing our prime conservation reserves. Perhaps if DELWP employed the same vigilance it applies to people wanting to fell trees on private land, where the purchase of offsets is mandated, they might be a little more judicious in their supervision.

Planning tracks and trails?

A few decades ago, when many of our parks were proclaimed, walkers were the main users; cyclists had machines only capable of handling roads – preferably sealed. Motorbikes were generally too big and clumsy for the park experience.

Now the unpowered fraternity gets about in adventure-hungry mountain bikes or, increasingly, 'fat bikes' that can pretty much handle any off-track challenge. And the powered crew has trail bikes that can gouge out new tracks wherever the existing road network fails to provide enough excitement.

In Warby-Ovens National Park, the volunteer Friends group spent years constructing a walking track taking visitors through many of the park's most interesting features. Interpretive panels point out, for example, the only occurrence of Spur-wing Wattle in Victoria.

Now a budding naturalist, or a walker simply wanting a good heart-healthy stroll, has to dodge mountain bikes roaring around any bend. And bikers have to handle walkers in their path.

SECURING ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR OUR NATIONAL PARKS IS A CONSERVATION BATTLE WE CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE. PHIL INGAMELLS LOOKS AT A NUMBER OF AREAS WHERE FUNDING AND EXPERTISE ARE SORELY NEEDED.

In some parks it's not just a matter of bikes gaining access to existing walking tracks, but new tracks illegally carved by bikes are actually being formalised. More worryingly, people on noisily powered trail bikes are roaring through some parks with impunity, creating tracks wherever they choose, knowing those parks are staffed so poorly they will rarely if ever meet a ranger.

There is an urgent need for park planners to set new planning guidelines for tracks throughout the park system, separating walkers from bike riders. And this planning process should allow the development of high-adventure tracks for trail bikes, mountain bikes and fat bikes in suitable areas outside conservation reserves whenever possible.

The key problem

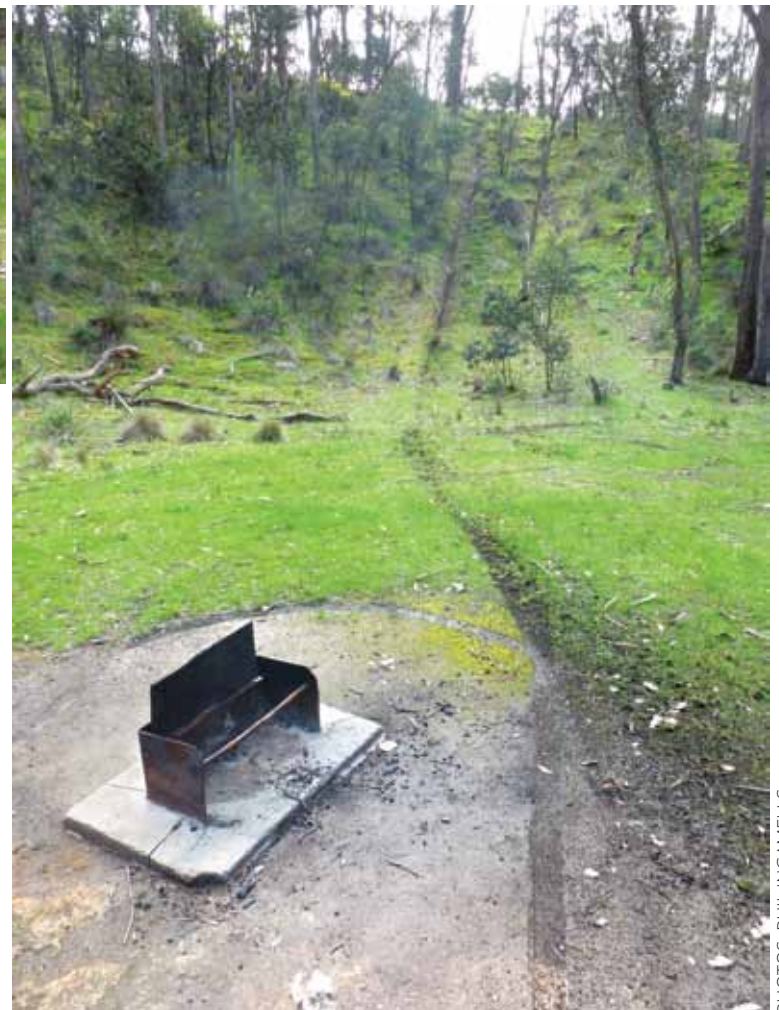
The most fundamental issue park managers and park visitors face is a serious lack of resources.

Vandalised signs take ages to be replaced, which encourages more vandalism. Pest plant and animal programs are often intermittently funded, wasting resources and threatening ecosystems. And the many park visitor centres that once served our finest parks have either gone or been significantly downgraded, leaving park visitors often ignorant of the natural wonders they have been set up to protect, and the thousands of years of cultural history behind them. Climate change, of course, adds another dimension on all of those things (see page 13).

The key solution

Fundamentally, we must radically fix funding levels. Percentage-wise, there has to be a big increase, but it's not a huge amount in the overall scheme of things: we won't have to sell submarines or close hospitals.

Good funding will allow, for example, fencing off the Prom at the park entrance so staff can control invasive species without dealing with reinvasions; so they



can reintroduce threatened native species; and so they can reclaim the once wide and open grassy woodlands across the Yanakie isthmus.

But the real solution, the one that will drive funding, the one that will bring careful control of hazardous trees, the one that will bring new expertise to our parks, the one that will bring new visitors to wonder at them, is simply respect.

Our parks protect around 100,000 native species, the product of 500 million years of evolution on land (and far more in our marine national parks). That heritage is worthy of respect, and worthy of very careful management. • PW

Top: The small Toothed Helmet Orchid, one of many orchid species in Brisbane Ranges National Park.

Above: Good park funding could ensure damaged signs are replaced quickly.

Right: Trailbike riders have created this hill-climb track from a picnic area in Brisbane Ranges National Park, potentially spreading Cinnamon Fungus to new areas.

PHOTOS: PHIL INGAMIELLS

Forest Industry Taskforce

After a strong campaign for a Great Forest National Park by conservation groups in the lead up to the 2014 State election, the Andrews Government committed to establish a Taskforce for a 'consensus approach' to any new national parks:

'The taskforce will have members from the forestry and forest products industry, unions, environmental groups and scientists, threatened species experts, land owners, timber communities and other relevant stakeholders. A Labor Government will consider any reasonable recommendations and proposals reached by consensus of the major

stakeholders through the Industry Task Force, but will not impose solutions.'

In May 2015, a group of eight conservation, industry and union representative was convened as the Forest Industry Taskforce (FIT), and included the VNPA Executive Director Matt Ruchel. Its first task was to develop its terms of reference and structure, and these were submitted to government in September 2014 and formally accepted in November 2014.

The FIT was formally convened in February 2016 with the following membership: Jane Calvert (Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union), Tim Johnston (Victorian Association

of Forest Industries), Amelia Young (The Wilderness Society Victoria), Alex Millar/Anthony Pavey/Travis Wacey (CFMEU), Vince Hurley (Australian Sustainable Hardwoods), Julian Mathers/Peter Williams (Australian Paper), John McConachy (harvest and haulage contractors), Sarah Rees (MyEnvironment), Matt Ruchel (VNPA), and Jess Abrahams (Australian Conservation Foundation).

In addition, the FIT is supported by the State Government through the appointment of an independent Chair, Professor Don Henry (University of Melbourne), a secretariat to fulfil administrative, research and other support and logistical tasks, as well as an independent facilitation team.

The process has involved intensive discussions, with more than 20 meeting days over the past six months, and a mid-year or interim report presented to the Premier in late July. In line with its terms of reference, the FIT further refined the agreed opportunities for change which included: the establishment of new parks and reserves; threatened species; wood supply security; industry investment and growth; carbon; jobs and regional employment; regulatory revision and reform; the future shape of the industry; and the future shape of conservation and the parks system.

A series of enabling processes, including new investigations by the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council, are proposed, as well as the development of both a Future Parks and Reserve Plan and a Future Industry Plan. There is also a series of discussions about the new Timber Release Plan, ongoing logging of high conservation value areas and new industry contracts. • PW

At the time of writing, work is ongoing and a public announcement about progress is expected in September. Updates are posted on the FIT website: www.forestindustrytaskforce.com.au



*Leaving
a gift
in your
Will*

We understand that making your Will can be a very personal matter. But if you've already included the Victorian National Parks Association in your Will, or are considering doing so, it would be great to hear from you. We would like to thank you personally, and also discuss your wishes with you.

To discuss making a gift to the VNPA in your Will, please contact Emily Clough on (03) 9341 6501 or via emilyc@vnpa.org.au

PHOTO: TONY LADSON

Getting real about a changing climate

THERE IS ONE CLIMATE DEBATE PEOPLE SEEM RELUCTANT TO ENGAGE IN: WHAT SHOULD WE BE DOING RIGHT NOW TO HELP OUR NATURAL ECOSYSTEMS HANDLE CLIMATE CHANGES? IT'S A DEBATE RICH WITH OPPORTUNITY, SAYS PHIL INGAMELLS.

In a recent article in *The Conversation*, renowned geneticist Ary Hoffmann called for the deliberate moving of species (and their genes) around the landscape 'in a careful and contained manner'. The problem his solution addresses is a very real one.

As our climate warms and dries (it's predicted that Melbourne will be experiencing Wagga Wagga's weather by the year 2050) many plants and animals, and their ecosystems, will only survive if they can move south; in our alpine region, it's a matter of moving uphill. However few plants can manage to cover enough distance within that timeframe – some have wind-born or bird-carried seed, but most can only move as far away as their seeds can drop.

For many natural areas, towns and farms stand in the way of migration, or adjacent soil types aren't compatible, and for Victoria's coastal ecosystems Bass Strait is a formidable barrier. Increased fire frequency is another factor, especially for species that rarely set seed.

Of course we should be doing whatever we can to reduce carbon emissions but, whatever future emission levels might be, the climate will be warmer and many of our natural areas will struggle.

Ary Hoffman's proposal is for a series of areas within our reserve system, especially areas that have already been damaged or disturbed, where we can introduce genetic variants of local natives, or even different species, from warmer areas. He says:



Mountain Ash in Victoria's water catchment, killed by the Black Saturday bushfire. Frequent fire can prevent reseeded of Mountain and Alpine Ash forests.

'As long as these plots are set up at a sufficiently large scale, they can act as nursery stock for the future. As fire frequency increases and exceeds some plants' survival capabilities, the surviving genes and species in these plots would then serve as sources for future generations.'

He adds:

'Overseas plots covering several hectares have already been established that aim to achieve this at a large scale. For instance, in western North America there is a plot network that covers 48 sites and focuses on 15 tree species planted across a three-year period that covers temperature variation of 3-4°C.'

This is new territory in biodiversity management, but possibly critically important for Victoria where many of our natural areas are highly fragmented, and where ecosystems

like our great Mountain and Alpine Ash forests are already compromised by frequent fire.

The VNPA, together with the Royal Society of Victoria, Melbourne University's Bio21 Institute, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), La Trobe University, DELWP's Arthur Rylah Institute, and Greening Australia have recently held a second symposium on managing biodiversity in a changing climate.

The presentations and discussions from the first symposium have been summarised as 'Ten things we can all do to help nature adapt to a new climate' at www.vicnature2050.org. The findings of the second symposium are yet to be finalised, but will almost certainly include recommendations aligned with Ary Hoffmann's above.

The Victorian Government is currently engaged in the development of two strategies that will set the stage for the future management of Victoria's ecological systems. The period for public submissions to a new biodiversity strategy have finished; *Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2036* should be released later this year. Another, *Victoria's Climate Change Adaptation Plan Directions Paper* is open for public comment until Friday 23 September.

Both of these must accommodate realistic management actions that will actually solve real problems. Careful implementation of a set of trial plots to facilitate adaptation of species and ecosystems to a rapidly changing climate could prove critical to the long term viability of our natural heritage. • PW

PORT CAMPBELL NATIONAL PARK



PHOTO: GEOFF DURHAM

GEOFF DURHAM REVISITS AN ICONIC PARK ON VICTORIA'S COAST WHERE A NEW TOURIST MASTER PLAN IS BEING IMPLEMENTED.

Close to two million people visit the Port Campbell National Park each and the Victorian government would like them to stay longer in the region.

There have been big changes along the eroding Port Campbell coastline since my first visit in 1949. These include major cliff collapses, a span of London Bridge has fallen down, and only seven 'Twelve Apostles' remain – there never were twelve.

In 1949 Port Campbell was a tiny fishing village. Since then I have visited on various occasions. Fifteen years ago (*Park Watch* December 2001) I reported that Port Campbell was in transition and having difficulty coming to grips with tourism.

The CEO of Parks Victoria, Bradley Fauteux, has said tourism is important for the future of the state's parks and that visitors ensured the long-term relevancy and protection of the parks: 'We need to transform Victoria's parks from an attraction economy to an experience economy where people stay

and explore. There is more involved than just getting off the bus, having a selfie and then going.' This is precisely what many thousands of international tourists do at the Twelve Apostles (close to two million people visit this iconic site annually).

In December last year, and after a lengthy consultation process, the Victorian Government released its Shipwreck Coast Master Plan. The then Environment Minister, Lisa Neville, said: 'By diversifying the range of experience on offer, and investing in world-class visitor facilities, the master plan proposes to encourage longer, overnight stays that will increase spending and yields. This will leverage private sector investment in critical tourism projects such as high quality accommodation, food and beverage services in the townships and on private land adjacent to the parks.'

The subject of the master plan is the 28 kilometres of coast between Princetown and Boat Bay, about 5 kilometres west of Peterborough. It includes the Port Campbell National Park and the eastern section of the Bay of Islands Coastal Park, which extends a further 25 kilometres west to near Lake Gilleard.

The Master Plan has bold (some say fanciful) concepts with plenty of hype and marketing spin. It prompted my visit in July this year to check out the situation.

We stayed three nights at Port Campbell. Its focus is the sheltered harbour with stately Norfolk Island pines. Its wide main street is softened by Coast Banksia and, at the lower end, the overhead wires have gone. There are no tall buildings. It now has many accommodation and eating options and it was an excellent base from which to visit the various attractions.



The main viewing platform at the twelve Apostles will be replaced by an all-weather amphitheatre.



There are now just seven 'apostles' but there never were twelve.

PHOTOS: GEOFF DURHAM



A providore style café and larder, children's farm and kitchen garden are proposed for the currently closed Glenample Homestead.

The Great Otway walking track ends at the Twelve Apostles after passing through a pedestrian tunnel under the road near Gibsons Steps. The original interpretation area in the Visitor Centre is now a kiosk. A busy helicopter business operates during the day on private land adjacent to the large car park with a 15-minute flight for \$145.00. Parks Victoria has a contractor who keeps the precinct free of litter. I visited the Twelve Apostles on three occasions – on an overcast wild day, an evening sunset and a sunny calm morning – each a different experience.

The nearby heritage-listed 1860s Glenample Homestead on leased land is closed through lack of visitation. It is not visible from the Great Ocean Road and all signage has been removed. When first opened to the public after its initial restoration, informative displays told the story of pastoral occupation, the *Loch Ard* shipwreck and the rescue and rehabilitation of its only survivors,

Eve Carmichael and Tom Pearce. Some essential maintenance has been carried out to the building.

The Loch Ard Gorge is the national park's second most popular visitor precinct. Steps take you into the gorge where Eve and Tom sheltered in its caves. Eve's family and Captain Gibb of the *Loch Ard* are buried in the cemetery on the rim of the gorge. The precinct does not have the level of litter collection of the Twelve Apostles and there is a need for discrete toilets.

We had time to explore the Bay of Islands Coastal Park by car. Its cliffs, bays and coves are more colourful than those of the national park and without the hordes of visitors. Between Peterborough and Boat Bay there is ready access to various lookouts and beaches. At Boat Bay the Great Ocean Road swings away from the coast and access is by back roads. Childers Cove and Murnanes Bay are particularly attractive.

The features of the Shipwreck Coast landscape are the stunning coastal limestone cliffs and islands, and the clear demarcation between the narrow strip of bush (every skerrick of which is precious habitat) and the cleared land. There are shearwaters, Hooded Plovers and penguins, Rufous Bristlebird in the scrub and whales offshore. The human history is displacement of the Kirree-Whurrong by Europeans, and shipwrecks.

The Master Plan

It is impossible in this article to cover all the proposals in the Master Plan. One of the key strategies is a shuttle bus along the Great Ocean Road, similar to the system now operating at Point Nepean, with removal of car parking and bush restoration at various visitor precincts. Three 'Park & Ride' hubs, where private vehicles and tour buses will be parked and from which visitors proceed by foot, bicycle or shuttle bus, are proposed at Port Campbell, Peterborough and Glenample.

Glenample would become an 'Experience Centre' with car parking, a 'providore style café and larder' (no doubt with souvenirs) in the homestead with associated children's farm and kitchen garden. At the Twelve Apostles, the car park and visitor centre would be removed and the main viewing platform would become an 'all-weather amphitheatre'. Similarly, car parking would go from Loch Ard Gorge. A new bridge near the mouth of the Sherbrook River would be part of a 'Twelve Apostles Trail' (walking and cycling) from Princetown to Port Campbell, with another bridge across Port Campbell Creek. • PW



PHOTO: GECO

DOING THE DEPARTMENT'S JOB

ED HILL REPORTS THAT SOME THREATENED SPECIES IN EAST GIPPSLAND ARE NOW BETTER PROTECTED THANKS TO CITIZEN SCIENCE.

Measuring an old-growth tree in a forest earmarked for logging.

909.

That's the number of Australian species listed on the Red List of the International Union for Conservation and Nature, placing us in the top 10 of nations for threatened species. This is all the more troubling when many of the processes driving extinction, such as logging of high-value habitat, are easily avoidable.

In Victoria, threatened species are legally protected under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act*. VicForests, the government's own logging company, must conduct surveys to determine the presence of protected species in forest

earmarked for logging and whether legal logging restrictions should be applied.

After years of documenting the failure of this regulatory system, in which VicForests, a logging company, determines the need for reduced logging, environment groups have taken matters into their own hands.

Since March 2015, Goongerah Environment Centre (GECO), a small grassroots community group based in East Gippsland, has been training community members in wildlife survey techniques at quarterly ecology camps in East Gippsland's threatened forests.

These citizen surveys have been very effective in locating threatened species and forcing the government to implement legal protection, in some cases stopping logging in its tracks.

GECO recently discovered 11 Greater Gliders in old-growth forest on the Errinundra Plateau in May 2016. The result was a 100-hectare protected area being declared by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) in 'an area' that would have otherwise been logged. This followed GECO's discovery of 15 Greater Gliders in January 2016, which also resulted in improved protection. In August 2016,



Checking the data on a citizen science camp in East Gippsland.



PHOTOS: GECO

Collecting data on forest biomass for a carbon accounting survey.

GECO found 12 Greater Gliders in the Cottonwood Range and logging was halted.

Greater Gliders are Australia's largest gliding marsupials and are capable of travelling up to 100m through the air. Their tree-hollow nesting habits and taste for gum leaves means their survival depends on old growth forest; logging can completely wipe out local glider populations.

The law requires the reduction of logging in Greater Glider habitat when more than 10 individuals are found on a spotlighting survey one kilometre in length. Also required are prelogging surveys of areas likely to contain threatened species. GECO has shown that VicForests either does not carry out these surveys or conducts them very poorly.

If GECO's citizen surveys had not been conducted, illegal logging would have destroyed hundreds of hectares of Greater Glider habitat (and likely the gliders themselves).

Greater Gliders are not the only species missing out on the legal protection they are due, but the GECO citizen scientists are on their side, having:

- Documented illegal logging within the Cobb Hill National Rainforest Site of Significance, which resulted in a Supreme Court injunction to halt logging and an agreement with VicForests not to log eight coupes within the site
- Completed dozens of surveys detecting the endangered Long Footed Potoroo: new Special Protection Zones have now reduced the area available for logging
- Discovered the Masked Owl in Kuark Forest: a 500-hectare Masked Owl Management Zone and the prevention of logging in three scheduled coupes were the result
- Detected the Powerful Owl at Hensleigh Creek on the Errinundra Plateau: a Powerful Owl Management Zone and the prevention of logging in two scheduled coupes were the outcomes

- Discovered the endangered Large Brown Tree Frog, a frog thought to be locally extinct for the past 20 years, inside a logging coupe: a 28-hectare buffer around the site was later created
- Found the critically endangered East Gippsland Galaxias Fish, only known to occur in Kuark Forest, and gained protection for it.

All of these species are protected by law, but it was only the work of the citizen scientists and GECO's pressure on DELWP that stopped the bulldozers and enforced protection.

These discoveries show the immense value of citizen science. But they also reveal a dysfunctional regulatory system where the logging companies responsible for surveying protected species, and DELWP, do not enforce the legal requirement to conduct a survey before logging begins.

With less than eight per cent of old-growth forest left, the least we can do is ensure that the laws that exist to reduce logging are stringently enforced. • PW

A glider that's great

At up to 46 cms from nose to tail, the Greater Glider, *Petauraudes volans*, is the largest of the gliding possums in Australia. Living on the east coast of Australia, including East Gippsland, it prefers forests where it nests in the hollows of old-growth trees and feeds on eucalypt leaves and flowers. The Greater Glider is considered very sensitive to forest clearance and is listed as Vulnerable in Victoria and nationally.

According to the conservation advice provided by the federal Threatened Species Scientific Committee in May 2016, 'logging of areas where greater gliders occur in densities of greater than two per hectare, or greater than 15 per hour of spotlighting, require a 100 ha special protection zone. However, this threshold is quite high given that density estimates in Victoria range from 0.6 to 2.8 individuals per hectare, and mature tree densities are declining meaning a lower probability that gliders will occur at higher densities. This management requirement may therefore not adequately protect existing habitat and greater glider populations'.

Come along to GECO's next citizen science camp from **28 October to 1 November 2016**. That's the Melbourne Cup weekend. Camping will be at the Goongerah campground, by the clear waters of the Brodrib River. Composting toilets, drinking water, communal kitchen and basic camp facilities are available. For more info, visit www.geco.org.au

Take action

Ask Environment Minister Lily D'Ambrosio to ensure that DELWP conduct pre-logging surveys for threatened species: <https://geco.good.do/preloggingsurveysforthreatenedspecies/> email environmentminister@lisaneville-2/

Risks in mapping Moolap's futures

CHRIS SMYTH DISCUSSES
PLANNING OPTIONS FOR
THE MOOLAP COASTAL AREA
IN GEELONG.



PHOTO: CHRIS SMYTH

There's something for everyone in the Moolap Coastal Strategic Framework Plan discussion paper released by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP).

If you are a developer wishing to turn wetlands into a canal estate – and there is one circling – you're covered. If you are a fish farmer wanting to take over the nearshore waters and wetlands, you're in with a chance. And if you want to reimagine the industrial landscape at Point Henry as another industrial landscape, there's something in it for you too.

But there are also conservation options in the discussion paper on the future of the Moolap Planning Area, 1250 hectares of coastal wetland, industry and farming just east of Geelong's CBD.

The closure of Alcoa's Point Henry operation, the uncertainty over the long-term future of the former Cheetham Saltworks, and the ongoing debate about the needs of a growing Geelong, are the impetus for the current planning of this significant marine and coastal area.

The DELWP discussion paper presents seven future land use scenarios for the area. These largely reflect the proposals submitted to the department during its most recent consultation process. There is the do-nothing scenario, the residential one, the port development one and a fourth suggesting marine-based industries. The remaining three cover tourism, aquaculture and conservation.

The seven scenarios will be used to guide the next stage of the planning process, which will produce a draft Moolap Coastal Strategic Framework Plan

towards the end of 2016. Each has been developed without consideration of the existing planning strategies for the area or any feasibility analysis. They are essentially wish-list maps.

For the VNPA and other community environment groups, the Conserving Moolap scenario is by far the best, although it fails to mention the marine component of the area. The other six scenarios would cause extensive damage to the area's natural and cultural values.

In the Conserving Moolap scenario, the entire wetlands of the former Cheetham Saltworks i.e. the freehold land (176 ha or Area 6 on the map) and leased Crown land (289 ha or areas 1-5) is almost all zoned Conservation. The now-closed Alcoa aluminium smelter (Area 12) would become part of a Regional Park, while the wetlands on the eastern side of Point Henry (areas 14-16) are proposed as a Wetland/Retarding Basin. Industry along the Point Henry and Portarlington roads would remain, as would the Rural Zone which provides a buffer between urban Geelong and the rural Bellarine Peninsula (areas 19 and 20).

The wetlands within the former Cheetham Saltworks occupy a third of the planning area and are visited by thousands of birds each summer, many having migrated from as far away as Siberia and the Arctic. They also contain a significant remnant of Port Phillip Bay's severely diminished area of coastal saltmarsh, almost half of which has been removed since European settlement. And below the

tideline is one of the largest areas of seagrass in Port Phillip Bay.

The Tourism in Moolap scenario is dominated by residential development across Point Henry and in the current Rural Zone (see Conserving Moolap map). The Coastal Residential zone, a euphemism for a canal estate, would occupy the freehold Cheetham Saltworks wetlands and those on the eastern side of Point Henry (areas 15 and 16). A Public Park would replace the Cheetham Saltworks wetlands on Crown land. The Alcoa smelter site would be converted into Major Tourist Facilities, the Alcoa Pier would become a cruise ship terminal, and the nearshore waters (areas 13 and 18) would be filled with public jetties, berths and boat launching facilities. This scenario does retain public access to much of the foreshore but:

- destroys the areas' wetlands
- removes the urban-rural buffer
- removes nearshore habitats
- entrenches linear coastal development
- requires extensive and ongoing dredging.

The canal estate has been proposed by Ridley Corporation for the leased Crown land and the freehold land of the former Cheetham Saltworks site. In the Tourism in Moolap scenario, it would be built on areas 6, 15 and 16.

Canal estates have many environmental, social and economic impacts associated with their construction and use; interstate, and for a time in Victoria, they were banned in coastal planning. Victoria must again ban them.

CONSERVING MOOLAP

Proposed uses in the other scenarios (excluding Business as Usual) include:

Production in Moolap – aquaculture in all nearshore waters and wetlands; renewable energy production on land

Port in Moolap – covers the northern part of the area with associated port infrastructure; major new road and rail connections; extensive and ongoing dredging of Corio Bay; Cheetham wetlands inundated as a response to rising sea levels

Marine Industry in Moolap – marine industry occupying the former Alcoa smelter site; a Public Park on Cheetham wetlands; new road connections; Residential Zone on most of the rural-urban buffer; cruise ship terminal; marina and jetties in nearshore waters; dredging required

Living in Moolap – Residential Zone on former Alcoa smelter site and all of the current Rural Zone; Conservation Zone on Cheetham wetlands except for ribbon residential development on the wetlands abutting Portarlington Road; public jetties and moorings in nearshore waters; Public Park on eastern side and northern tip of Point Henry.

Various planning strategies for Geelong have valued highly the natural and cultural heritage values of the Moolap Planning Area and have aimed to protect those values. Development that removed them, and also the urban-rural buffer, would turn these strategies on their head.

As a minimum, the former Cheetham Saltworks and the Point Henry Foreshore Reserve should be protected in a coastal park, an internationally important conservation and ecotourism area on Geelong's doorstep. It would protect migratory birds, improve the health of Corio Bay, reconnect people with nature and support ecologically sustainable coastal land use.

This is what the VNPA, the Geelong Environment Council, Geelong Field Naturalists Club and other community groups are advocating.

Every great city has a great park; the Moolap Coastal Park could be Geelong's. • PW

You can find the VNPA's submission on the scenarios at www.vnpa.org.au and the discussion paper at www.delwp.vic.gov.au

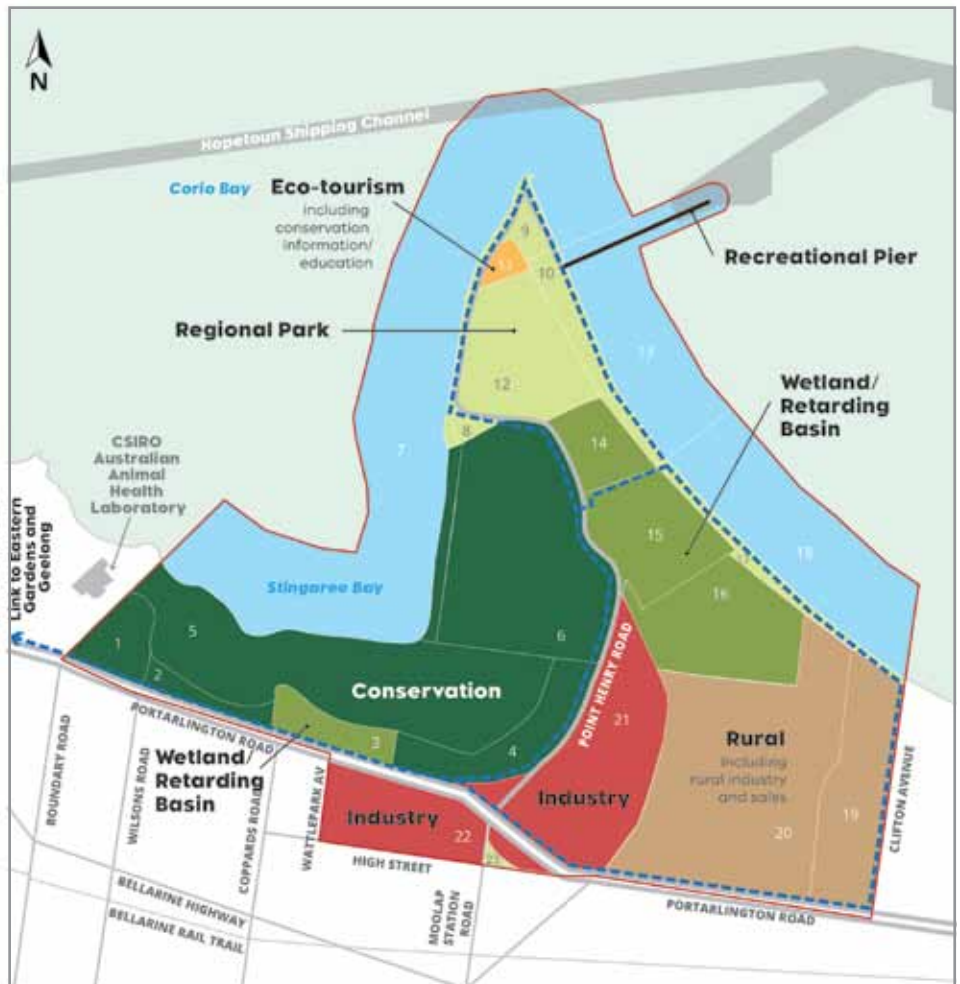


IMAGE: COURTESY OF DELWP

TOURISM IN MOOLAP

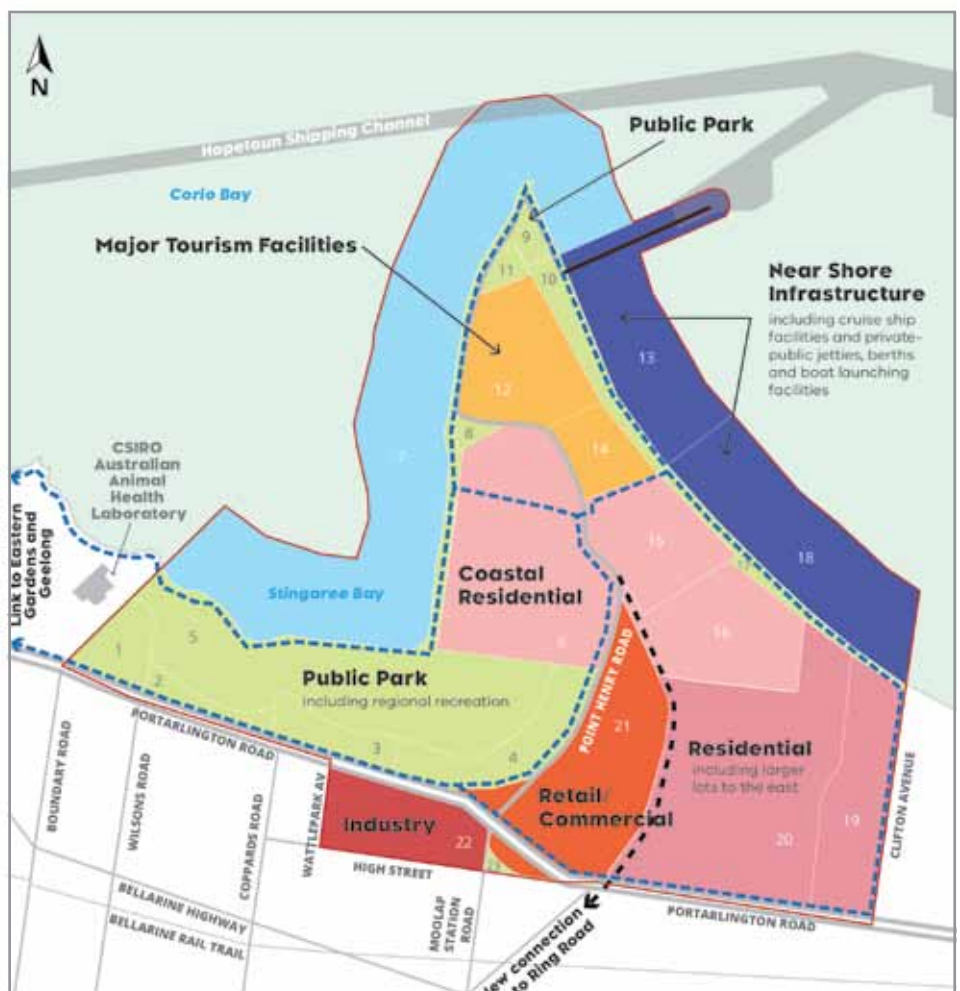


IMAGE: COURTESY OF DELWP

One of Katherine's
favourite places to walk is
the Alpine National Park.

Supporter profile: Katherine Isbrandt

'I adore waking up to a foggy mist moving across the plains or slowly disappearing between the mountains as first rays of the sun burn their way to warm up the land and dry up the grass.'

When she arrived in Australia in the late-1980s, Katherine Isbrandt's first experience of Victoria's natural landscape was at Mt Bogong in the Alpine National Park. And it's held a special place in her heart ever since.

Katherine is a Certified Financial Planner, with 20 years of financial planning experience, and the director of ASIRE Financial Planning.

She is also a keen hiker and landscape photographer – and her photos are beautiful!

Katherine grew up in Warsaw, Poland, and like her father, Kazimierz, she loves to get out of the city and into nature. As a child, her family spent many summers camping at the beach or staying in huts in the mountains.

The Victorian Alps are now Katherine's favourite place to hike. But her love for the Alps is not blind. Severe underfunding means the Alpine National Park is suffering from invasive pest plants and animals and there are not enough resources or staff to maintain facilities. So Katherine decided to do something about it.

When Katherine and three friends from the Melbourne Women's Walking Club decided to hike the 223-kilometre Larapinta Trail in the Northern Territory, she contacted the VNPA to see how she might maximise her efforts and turn her hike into a fundraiser.

Emily Clough, our Fundraising Manager, was both delighted and



Katherine used her walk along the Larapinta Trail to raise funds for the VNPA.

surprised. Delighted by Katherine's generosity and foresight, and surprised because Katherine wasn't an existing supporter of the VNPA. But Katherine had heard about the VNPA and the work we do, and was keen to support an organisation doing something about our national parks and their lack of proper resources.

So, with Emily's assistance, Katherine set-up a fundraising page on the www.givematcher.com.au peer-to-peer fundraising website, and then contacted her friends and family, asking them to support her valiant efforts and VNPA's Rescue our Parks campaign.

Givematcher.com.au is itself a not-for-profit organisation, and is committed to making online fundraising free for charities. You can see Katherine's page – and some of the wonderful photos she took while walking the Larapinta – at www.givematcher.com.au/fundraisers/rescue-victorian-parks

The Larapinta Trail leads bushwalkers, like Katherine, through the stunning Tjoritja/West MacDonnell National Park. Aside from its remarkable beauty, one of the striking things that Katherine noticed while walking the Larapinta Trail was the impact that the proper funding of parks can make.

The camping facilities were of a very high standard, Katherine noted, and there were lots of international tourists walking the trail, which has positive impacts on the local economy in the Northern Territory.

So what's next for Katherine? Aside from checking out some of the alpine walks in the VNPA's quarterly Activities Program, Katherine has her sights set on southern Tasmania. And of course, another visit to Mt Bogong is never far off!

We are very grateful to Katherine for her terrific fundraising efforts and sharing our work with her family, friends and clients. Thank you, Katherine! • PW

If you're planning a long hike, run, kayak or some other challenging activity, we invite you to consider making the most of your efforts by turning it into a fundraiser for the VNPA. For more information or to seek assistance with creating your peer-to-peer fundraising page, please contact:

Amelia Easdale
Supporter Development
(03) 9341 6505
ameliae@vnpa.org.au

PHOTOS: KATHERINE ISBRANDT

Some of the 15,000 trees planted by volunteers during the Project Hindmarsh weekend at Rainbow.

Rainbow bushland enhanced

ROB YOUL REPORTS THAT AFTER 19 YEARS THE VNPA-HINDMARSH LANDCARE NETWORK PARTNERSHIP STILL GETS THINGS DONE.

This year some 130 people, probably half from the VNPA, gathered at Rainbow to plant 15,000 trees on a cropping and grazing property owned by Murray and Leslie Robinson. The biggest local contingent came from Nhill, a team of Karen people, refugees from Myanmar, all hard workers and well versed in rural skills.

Murray and Leslie want to connect their mallee remnant and earlier farm plantings with public land: the sand-dune country carrying cypress pine and mallee eucalypts on the east side of Outlet Creek, a Wimmera River extension that in flood links lakes Hindmarsh and Albacutya.

Some planters had a chance to look at the Robinsons' ancient mallees, sprawling multi-stemmed *Eucalyptus behriana*, and it is thought *Eucalyptus wimmerensis*, of almost undefinable age – say 1500 years plus. Are these the oldest mallee specimens in Victoria? They surely saw fifty generations of Aboriginal people!



Young and older planters in action at Project Hindmarsh.

People breakfasted at Rainbow showgrounds, and had Saturday dinner – including the traditional roast (Luv-a) duck, at the local P-12 school. Many enjoyed a drive around on Sunday morning, and everyone praised the after-dinner speakers, Graeme and Maree Goodes, who explained the ecology of the Little Desert.

VNPA members can be proud of their association's role throughout this exemplary and nationally recognised project, which has broadened our outlook on conservation and appreciation of the scale at which we must work.



PHOTOS: HELENA LINDORFF

Project Hindmarsh has also established several million new trees and other indigenous plants, while at the same time creating a series of biolinks (a term coined by Hindmarsh Landcare Network and now widespread) reconnecting the Big and Little deserts and running along the Wimmera River.

As it should be, private property is frequently involved, and city and country come together happily and fruitfully.

Darryl Argall, who founded the project, is now seeking ideas on how its twentieth anniversary might be marked in 2017. • PW

Left: Old Wife.
Right: Moonlighter.



PHOTOS: JOHN GASKELL

Cleaning up our marine and coastal acts

AS PARK WATCH WAS GOING TO PRESS, THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT RELEASED ITS CONSULTATION PAPER ON MARINE AND COASTAL LAW REFORM. CHRIS SMYTH BRIEFLY OUTLINES WHAT'S IN IT.

For many years the VNPA has advocated reform of Victoria's marine and coastal planning, management and protection. That is why we were delighted that in November 2014 the incoming Andrews Government made this policy commitment:

'An Andrews Labor Government will undertake a five-yearly State of the Bay report to monitor the health of coasts, bays and waterways. We will establish a new Marine and Coastal Act, bringing together all management and protections under the one system.'

Almost two years on, the state of the bay report is due in two months and a consultation paper on marine and coastal law reform was released on 30 August. The paper comes after advice to the government on issues and options from an Expert Panel, commentary from a Stakeholder Reference Group, and its preparation by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP). Unfortunately, the scope of the reform has been constrained from the outset by the government's ongoing refusal to allow consideration of commercial fishing, ports and marine national parks.

The 92-page consultation paper has three main parts:

- Part 1 explores the strengths and weaknesses of the current system and key drivers for change
- Part 2 outlines a range of potential reforms aligned to these drivers
- Part 3 provides an overview of the suggested changes to the system.

Our advocacy for marine and coastal law reform has been articulated in VNPA's

Nature conservation review and *The coast is unclear*, both released in 2014 (you can download each from www.vnpa.org.au). In summary our proposals include:

- marine and coastal act
- marine and coastal authority
- marine and coastal strategy
- regional marine and coastal plans
- marine spatial planning
- state of marine and coastal reporting
- restructuring of coastal committees of management
- marine and coastal research and information service.

The consultation paper touches on all but the last, supporting each of them in varying forms except for the authority. Although 92 pages in length, the paper only uses one paragraph to dismiss a marine and coastal authority by creating a straw man of an 'all-encompassing entity' that would do just about everything in marine and coastal planning, protection and management. It's a major flaw in the paper and the government's vision, especially as the Stakeholder Reference Group supported an authority (interestingly, the question raised in this part of the paper asks: 'Do you think the required skills for the Marine and Coastal Authority members should be legislated?' Perhaps there's hope yet).

In an authority's place, the paper proposes a name change for the Victorian Coastal Council to the Victorian Marine and Coastal Council, and turns over the responsibilities of regional coastal boards (they will go) to catchment management authorities, which would have to expand

their marine and coastal expertise. The paper also indicates that membership of the council could be representative of 'community, user groups and industry', which would be a major and disturbing step away from the expertise base of the existing coastal council.

The only other institutional reform proposed is the formation of what the paper calls Regional and Strategic Partnerships (RASPs). Agencies could 'come together to solve shared problems ... led by one of the partner agencies with the skills and resources required to address the issue and the capacity to bring the community along'.

RASPs could be a useful way of dealing with specific regional planning issues but could also be undermined by agency power plays and dominated by influential regional interests. Further, the plans of the RASPs would seem to duplicate existing coastal management plans, which would be retained.

The paper also considers the options for covering the cost of marine and coastal management, how to better engage the community, the need to improve knowledge (although it says little on this subject), and adaptation to climate change.

Except for the paper's failure to support a marine and coastal authority, and it's a big failure, many of the proposals within it are consistent with what the VNPA has been advocating. We encourage you to provide feedback to the government at www.haveyoursay.delwp.vic.gov.au by 23 October 2016. Keep an eye out on www.vnpa.org.au for a more detailed analysis of the discussion paper's proposals. • PW



PHOTO: BRENT WOMERSLEY

KADE MILLS, OUR NEW REEFWATCH COORDINATOR, IS SET TO MAKE A SPLASH.

The VNPA's new ReefWatch Coordinator, Kade Mills, has plunged into his new role.

If it can't be surfed, it can always be snorkelled. That's my philosophy when I explore any coastline in my travels.

But I have a confession to make – as much as I love diving, surfing is my first priority. As I was never going to be a pro-surfer (too uncoordinated), I thought I would try my hand at being a marine scientist.

Like most people, I have walked a convoluted path to where I am today. I have worked for universities, private consulting companies, the Victorian Government and myself. Now I am honoured to be coordinating the VNPA's award-winning and far-reaching ReefWatch program.

ReefWatch has been on the scene for more than 10 years. In that time, thousands of divers have contributed sightings of hundreds of thousands of fish along the Victorian coastline. Part of the program's success has been due to the continuous support of Museum Victoria, Parks Victoria and CoastCare. The rest is due to the passionate people who have gathered valuable marine data that helps scientists and managers better understand and protect Victoria's unique marine environment. With new funding the VNPA can now reboot ReefWatch.

Operation sponge

In what is believed to be a world first, the Victorian dive community is currently transplanting sponges and ascidians (sea quirts) on a section of the Blairgowrie Pier that is being restored. Timber riddled with shipworm is being removed, so divers are taking sponges from the old section and transplanting them onto the replacement timber.

Operation Sponge has no 'bad guys'. Everyone is working together to ensure its success. The driving force behind it is a local dive company, Dive2U, which saw that a section of wall and attached sponge gardens had already been removed and did not want to see any more go to landfill. Dive2U quickly gained support from the Blairgowrie Yacht Squadron and the commercial divers (Ægir Divers) replacing the timber, and then recruited other divers to help with the transplanting.

ReefWatch is encouraging recreational divers to get on board the project, including those with underwater cameras to help monitor and photograph the recovery of the transplanted sponges. For more information on how you can be involved, please contact kadem@vnpa.org.au

Still counting after all these years

For more than a decade, 300-400 divers and snorkelers have jumped into Victoria's coastal waters to record abundances of 25 key fish species during the annual Great Victorian Fish Count. All 25 are endemic (found nowhere else) to southern Australia – OK, some are found in New Zealand but we will claim them as ours, just like we did the pavlova.

On 19 October you can help us celebrate what is Victoria's longest running marine citizen science event, the data it's collected and the people who have collected it. That's when ReefWatch, in partnership with the Melbourne Museum, will present a 10-year overview of fish count data. The museum's Di Bray will speak about RedMap and the new species making Victoria home, the Operation Sponge team will report and Wendy Roberts (the previous ReefWatch coordinator) will join us for a chat. There will also be celebratory food and drinks. To book a spot go to <http://gvfc-howmanyfishinthesea.eventbrite.com.au> • PW

To keep up to date with the Great Victorian Fish Count 2016, Operation Sponge and other ReefWatch projects, join the ReefWatch email list by emailing ReefWatch@vnpa.org.au. In 2016 the Great Victorian Fish Count will be running from 19 November to 4 December.

Seeing the land from an Aboriginal canoe

HISTORIAN FRED CAHIR AND DOCUMENTARY MAKER LUCINDA HORROCKS REVEAL HOW EUROPEAN SETTLERS RELIED ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLE FOR TRANSPORT.

On the rivers of remote colonial Victoria, 19th-century European settlers depended on Aboriginal navigators and canoe builders to transport goods, mail and people.

The first squatters relied on Aboriginal labour and Aboriginal canoes. F R Godfrey, of Boort on the Loddon River, was struck by the usefulness of Aboriginal canoes, noting in his journal the debt owed to the Aboriginal water carriers who rescued 'two tons of trussed hay in a fine canoe made by the blacks' on one occasion in September 1852. He added: 'The Aboriginals were often sent across by canoe for urgently needed goods – flour, tea, sugar, tobacco and the like, which were loaded onto waiting drays.'

Above and right: The Ladies want to cross a stream; In mid-stream, 1883, illustration taken from *The Graphic*, wood engraving on paper.

Below: Incident of the Late Flood, New South Wales, Samuel Calvert, engraver, wood engraving, published in *The Illustrated Australian News*, 13 August, 1870.

In Victoria, Aboriginal people built canoes out of different types of bark – stringy bark or mountain ash or red gum bark, depending on the region. After the bark was cut from the tree it was fired to shape it, sealed and made watertight, then moulded into a low-freeboard flat-bottomed craft.

It wasn't just the making that was important. The ability to steer and navigate canoes, understanding the rivers and the currents, and confidence in and on the water, were all valuable skills in the 1800s.

Gold-seekers Samuel Mossman and Thomas Banister attested that it was only with the assistance of an Aboriginal guide that their party survived the Murray River crossing in 1853.

'We had some difficulty in fording the back-water course of the river, which we were compelled to do in consequence of the accident to the bridge; and unless we had had the assistance of a native, who directed us which way we should incline when we were in the river, we might have failed in safely getting over.'

A bark canoe was, in competent hands, an obvious choice to get across a river when the waterway could not be forded or crossed by bridge. But it took some convincing to get Europeans into canoes. They saw them as unsteady craft, nothing



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA

IMAGES COURTESY OF THE ART GALLERY OF BALLARAT

like the sturdy wooden boats they were used to. And many Europeans could not swim, whereas by all accounts Aboriginal Victorians were accomplished swimmers.

There are heroic accounts of Aboriginal people saving Europeans in times of flood at great personal risk. In some accounts, the Aboriginal rescuer would put the European on the canoe and jump into the floodwater to steer the canoe by swimming with it. In the Orbost district, an Aboriginal named Joe Banks rescued a sick nonAboriginal man during the floods by 'making a canoe out of a sheet of

bark from the roof and placing the sick man in it, swam through the turbulent waters, towing the canoe and its helpless occupant to safety.'

At Moe, one European over-landing party 'afraid to cross the creek on account of the flood and having eaten all their provisions' received relief from a female Aboriginal guide whose exceptional bush and canoe skills the travellers depended upon for their very lives. She heard the desperate travellers 'cooeing' and crossed treacherous floodwaters twice over 'with a very welcome parcel of damper, tea, sugar and meat'. The travellers fearing they

would 'die by starvation', and encircled by rising flood waters, elected to use the Aboriginal canoe and crossed the floodwaters safely.

The hidden history of the bark canoe highlights one of the most under-valued contributions Aboriginal people made to the 19th-century colonial economy.

The knowledge of colonial Victoria's reliance on Aboriginal people's skills and technology fell out of historical accounts in the 20th century, untaught and forgotten. But the diaries, letters, manuscripts and newspapers still tell the story if we take the time to read them. • PW

The project features interviews with (clockwise from top left) Jamie Lowe, Uncle Bryon Powell and Uncle Rick Nelson by historian Fred Cahir (bottom left).



PHOTOS: WIND & SKY PRODUCTIONS

This article is an edited extract from the digital story 'Seeing the Land from an Aboriginal Canoe.' The project, which includes a documentary film, a gallery of images and extended audio interviews with Victorian Traditional Owners, is freely available online to watch and share at: www.cv.vic.gov.au/stories/aboriginal-culture/seeing-the-land-from-an-aboriginal-canoe

The project was produced in 2015 by Wind & Sky Productions for the online portal Culture Victoria. In May 2016 it was Highly Commended at the Museums and Galleries National Awards for Indigenous Project or Keeping Place, Level 2 Category.

CULTURE VICTORIA
STORIES—COLLECTIONS—PLACES

CREATIVE VICTORIA

WIND & SKY
PRODUCTIONS
Big ideas for the small screen



PHOTO: MICHAEL WILLIAMS, IT'S A WILDLIFE

Christine Connelly shows local landholders and Friends group members, Paul Strickland and Merrin Butler, how to ready the audio recorders for deployment.

Calls of the wild

STRZELECKI LOCAL AND PHD STUDENT CARA SAMBELL, WITH VNPA'S CHRISTINE CONNELLY, REPORT ON THE FIRST 'COMMUNITIES LISTENING FOR NATURE' PROJECT AT MT WORTH.

Mount Worth State Park and the surrounding district are located at the heart of the western Strzelecki Ranges in Gippsland. It is a couple of hours drive from Melbourne and well worth a visit for families, nature lovers and bushwalkers.

The park provides visitors with an example of the tall wet and damp forests that once dominated the Strzelecki Ranges. Originally home to the Bunurong (Boon Wurrung) and Gunai/Kurnai people, the first European to 'discover' this impenetrable forested landscape was Polish explorer, Count Paul Strzelecki, in the 1840s.

Count Strzelecki and his party spent 22 days cutting a path through the forest, mostly on foot (on the ridge now known as Grand Ridge Road), and were led by Aboriginal guide Charlie Tarra. Following the cutting of McDonald's Track by surveyor George McDonald in the 1860s, the first

European settlement in the region was made at nearby Poowong.

As the settlers arrived and worked hard to clear the forest, aided significantly by large bushfires in the late 1890s, the landscape evolved into a productive and fertile agricultural region, now well known for its dairy production.

The early settler accounts of the bird community of this region were of a forest full of song and life. In the 1870s, Arthur Thomas Henry recorded that the forest was 'alive with birds, parrots, galahs, satin birds, black cockatoos, jays together with small birds of all descriptions and last but not least the lyrebird.'

The Superb Lyrebird was widespread in the late 1800s and became well known and loved for its mimicry. Its repertoire often included the sound of axes chopping down the trees that were once its habitat, which sadly led to the decline of the lyrebird in this region.

The forests of the Strzelecki Ranges are today highly fragmented, but Mount Worth State Park and its surrounding district contain one of the most significant intact remnants of the western Strzeleckis. The remnant protected by the state park includes majestic Mountain Ash, Manna Gum, Mountain Grey Gum, Silver Wattle and Blackwood on the slopes, with pockets of Rough Tree Ferns and Mother Shield Ferns in the gullies.

In the 1970s, Jack Brooks and the local field naturalists' club lobbied to establish the park. It was later expanded through the acquisition of abandoned farmland and a major revegetation program begun. So far, 150,000 seedlings have been planted by groups such as Friends of Mt Worth, Greenfleet, Parks Victoria and others.

In the surrounding district, landholders in the Mt Worth and District Landcare Group have been working

*Christine, Paul and Merrin
install the first audio
recorder in Mount Worth
State Park.*

hard to expand habitat by replanting their own properties. This has been a major undertaking on often steep and slippery slopes prone to tunnel erosion and landslips.

Due to its close proximity to relatively large patches of natural and regenerating forest, Mount Worth State Park and the surrounding private properties are currently home to a variety of forest and woodland bird species no longer abundant elsewhere in the Strzeleckis.

These species include Rufous Fantail, Pilotbird, Rose Robin, the Superb Lyrebird, Brush Bronzewing, Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo, Brown Gerygone and the threatened Powerful Owl. The overall bird community of more than 100 species is highly diverse, with many able to tolerate a great variety of altered habitats.

Given the importance of the region for birds, it is an ideal location for the first Communities Listening for Nature project. In partnership with Museum Victoria, the VNPA are using bioacoustic technology to monitor birds and contribute to a Victoria-specific library of bird calls. We are also working with the Friends of Mt Worth State Park and Mt Worth and District Landcare Group to set up and carry out a locally relevant project.

In April, we held a workshop with Museum Victoria, the community groups and Parks Victoria to determine the aims of the project in the Mount Worth region. Local community members, Paul Strickland and Merrin Butler, expressed the community's interest in documenting the return of birds to the revegetation they have established on their properties. Parks Victoria Ranger, Craig Campbell, said the park shared the same interest.

Museum Victoria's bioacoustics expert, Dr Karen Rowe, designed a locally-specific scientific study to look at what bird species are living in plantings of three different age classes. We will compare them with benchmarks of remnant vegetation and cleared land.

The project involves installing automated sound recording devices (song meters) that record for 30 days. The recordings are then processed using software that creates 'spectrograms' to visualise the sound.

We can't wait to hear, and see, the first recordings. • PW



PHOTOS: MICHAEL WILLIAMS, IT'S A WILDLIFE



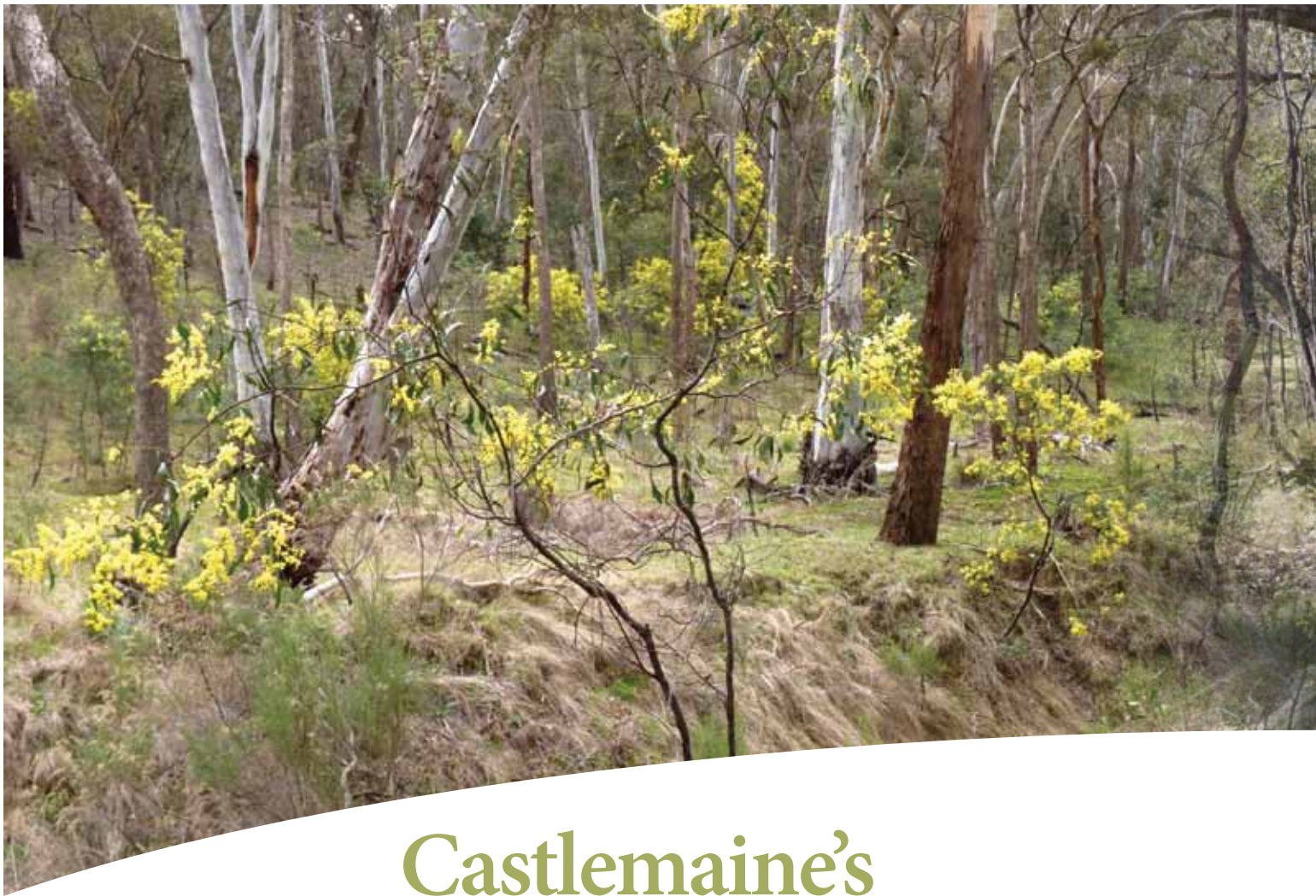
Above: A fern gully in the Mount Worth State Park.

Left: The rasping call of the Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo could turn up on the audio recordings.

You can help

An exciting part of the project is the development of automated call recognition, where specialised software automatically detects what species are in a recording. To 'train' the software, we need help to annotate species calls in the recordings. If you have a good ear for bird calls and would like to volunteer some time, we'd like to hear from you. Contact:

NatureWatch Coordinator
Christine Connelly
christinec@vnpa.org.au
9341 6510



Castlemaine's recovering forests

GEOFF LACEY REMINDS US THAT SPRING IS A GREAT TIME TO VISIT THE FORESTS AROUND CASTLEMAINE.

South of Castlemaine an irregular pattern of ridges and valleys straddles the Loddon and Campaspe catchments and is covered with open forest.

This is easy walking country, varied and subtly beautiful. My many walks with friends have been in a patch containing Sebastopol Creek and Browns Gully in the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park.

Spring in the forest

The higher ground, above the creeks, is covered with Heathy Dry Forest. The most common tree is Red Stringybark; there are also Red Box and Long-leaved Box, a diverse shrub layer and a ground layer dominated by grasses and herbs.

In September the forest looks splendid. The land has an informal, untidy character—in some places rocky or with bare soil—and an irregular assortment of trees; mostly young, some straight but most crooked. The

ground is littered with fallen branches, bark and leaves.

Elsewhere there are clumps or broad patches of lush grasses, with patterns of light and shadow, intricate textures and all shades of colour: grey, brown, green and yellow.

Many plants are in flower. Rough Wattle and Gold-dust Wattle are abundant and there are beautiful patches of Sticky Boronia, Tangled Guinea-flower and Pink Bells.

Here and there we come across Silky Hakea, Rough Mint-bush, Urn Heath, Common Beard-heath, Mountain Grevillea, Gorse Bitter-pea, Grey Parrot-pea and White Marianth. Orchids include Nodding Greenhood and Pink Fingers.

On November walks we have found even more flowers. Along Weewak Track we once explored great carpets of Matted Bush-pea. Also in flower

were Common Wedge-pea and Showy Parrot-pea.

Well to the north of Weewak Track is a hillslope covered with Silvertop Wallaby-grass, conspicuous with its tall stems. We were also delighted with a great array of Musky Caladenias and a cluster of Small Spider-orchids.

On any given day birds are abundant at some locations but sparse in others. They move around. Those commonly encountered include the Crimson and Eastern rosellas, White-throated Treecreeper, Rufous and Golden whistlers, Crested Shrike-tit, Superb Fairy-wren and several species of cuckoos, robins, thornbills and honeyeaters.

The gullies

Along Sebastopol Creek and Browns Gully the vegetation community is Grassy Valley Forest. In Browns Gully there are some beautiful stands of mature Candlebark. Other trees and shrubs include Yellow



PHOTO: S GEOFF LACEY

Left: Golden wattle at Browns Gully.
 Above: Dry Forest grows on the higher slopes.
 Top right: The ruins of Sanger's Hut provide traces of European settlement history.
 Bottom right: Dry Forest ground storey in spring.

and Grey Box, Red Stringybark, Silver and Golden Wattle, Drooping Cassinia, Bushy Hakea, and a few River Red Gums.

Along parts of its course, the gully incises a beautiful narrow floodplain with an open grassy understorey. It is heavily grazed, presumably by kangaroos. The forest here is very open, with mature and young Candlebarks, wattles, broken trees and fallen logs.

This is a peaceful and rich environment. It is a good place to sit and have lunch and enjoy the songs of the Grey Shrike-thrush, Olive-backed Oriole, Rufous Whistler, Striated Pardalote, Grey Fantail, Shining Bronze-cuckoo and White-throated Treecreeper.

The traces of history are conspicuous, especially the ruins of gold-digging structures. Along Browns Gully are the ruins of Sanger's Hut and Brown's Hut, both built from local rock fragments. A chimney, a fireplace and, in the case of Sanger's Hut, part of wall, are all that remains.

Above Middleton Creek

One September, to the south of Browns Gully, we found Rough, Ausfeld's and Spreading Wattle in flower in a dense

regrowth area, and also Rosy Heath-myrtle and Common Hovea. Here and there we disturbed a Grey Kangaroo or a Black Wallaby.

We looked down towards Middleton Creek, with splendid mature Candlebarks on the slopes and Silver Wattle at its flowering peak. This creek flows north, collecting the scarce waters of the two smaller creeks, and soon reaches the Loddon River. The east bank opposite is cleared farmland for a few kilometres—an enclave in the forest.

The changing landscape

The Dja Dja Wurrung are the traditional owners of this land. There is sparse information about their activities here or about the old fire history.

Ron Hateley, in *The Victorian bush*, discusses the Box-Ironbark Forests, to the north of this site, which have floristic similarities to the Heathy Dry Forests. His sources describe dense timber, an understorey of heathy vegetation, and little grass. Such an understorey suggests infrequent fire.

The native vegetation of this landscape has had a history of disturbance. The

forest was first cleared between the 1850s and 1880s, when there was alluvial gold mining in the creeks. The present ruins remind us of this. It has since been logged several times over.

The process of reserving the forest began in 1914. The present forest is mainly regrowth and, as we observed, most of the trees are still young.

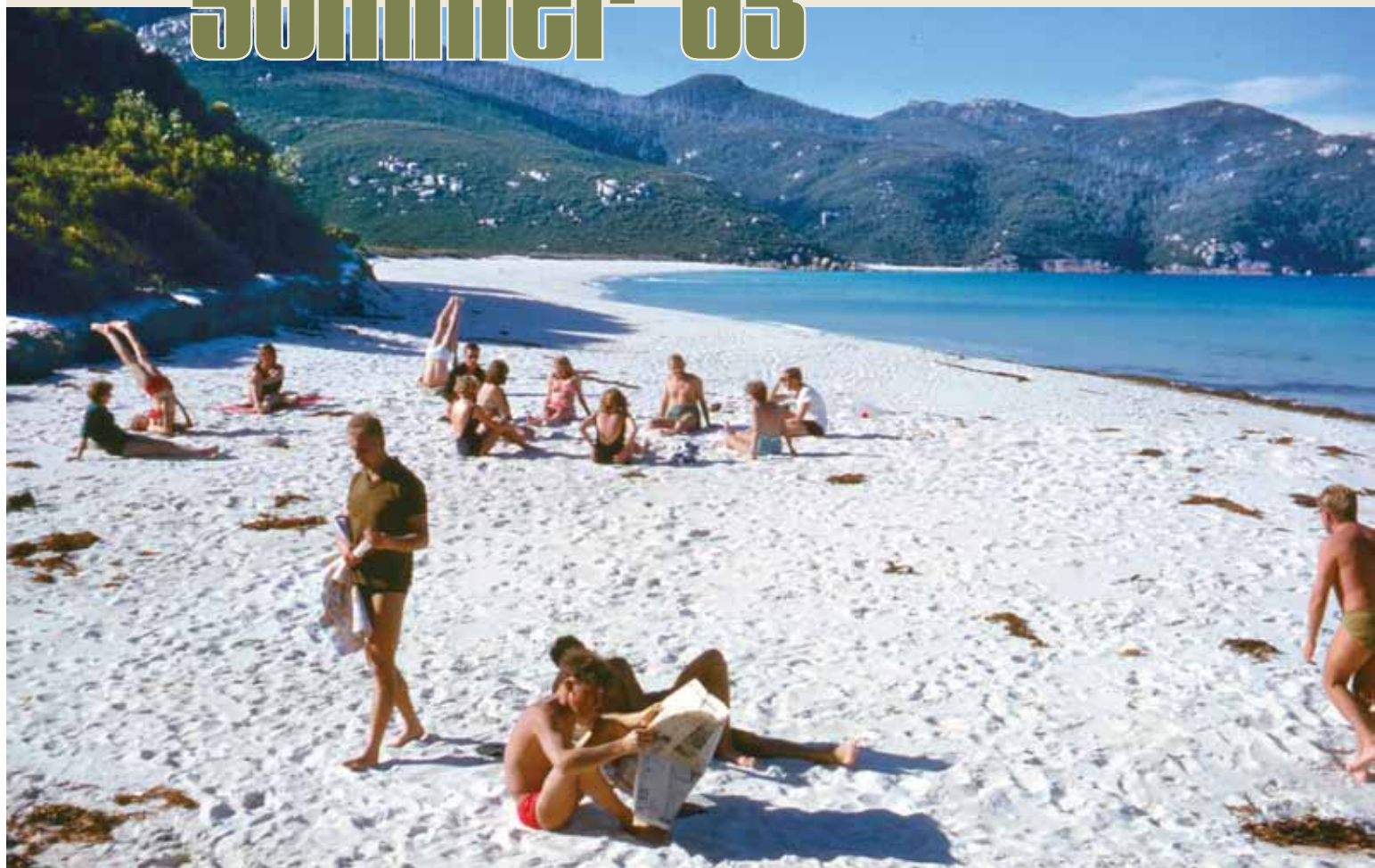
It is probable that the present Heathy Dry Forest and Grassy Valley Forest represent the pre-European communities. This is a landscape recovering from past disturbance and the forests are gradually moving towards maturity.

In my explorations around the two gullies I have observed the intricate patterns in the land and the great biodiversity. Such knowledge is important for appropriate land management but even more for our deeper understanding of and engagement with the land in all its uniqueness, beauty and vitality. • PW

You can find more information on the area's track network in Glen Tempest's book, *Victoria's Goldfield Walks*.

The Prom in Summer '63

LONGSTANDING VNPA MEMBER AND SUPPORTER, ANN CRAWFORD, RECENTLY SENT US A LETTER SHE WROTE TO HER MOTHER IN ENGLAND IN FEBRUARY 1963 WHEN BEING "AN ENGLISH GIRL IN AUSTRALIA ON A WORKING HOLIDAY". HERE ARE SOME EXTRACTS.



Last weekend I had an exhausting time bushwalking with the YHA (Youth Hostels Association). 38 of us went to a national park area called Wilsons Promontory. It juts out towards Tasmania from the south coast of Victoria... We camped when we arrived at midnight without tents, just under the stars. We each had huge rucksacks with all our gear and food for three days.

On Saturday we hiked about seven miles across the Prom from Tidal River to Waterloo Bay and I have never been through country like it. We went through a lot of spikey button grass [and] saw a few snakes ... The track got less and less until it was completely overgrown and we had to bash our way through the scrub which was sometimes at armpit level and other times way above our heads. It was very hard work with the pack on.

We came out into the open near to Waterloo Bay...It was a beautiful beach, about a mile of white sand, blue sea and mountains and rocks around... We spent the afternoon lazing about and swimming and in the evening had a singsong round the campfire on the beach. We didn't bother with the tents again but slept out on the beach with the sea lulling us to sleep.

[On Sunday] the last ¾ mile was really tough as it meant climbing up a huge sand dune...It looked just like the desert. The wind blew the sand around and we had to keep our eyes nearly shut. [Later] we put up the tents as it was rather windy, then cooked some food. In the evening we had another singsong—one of the boys had taken his guitar.

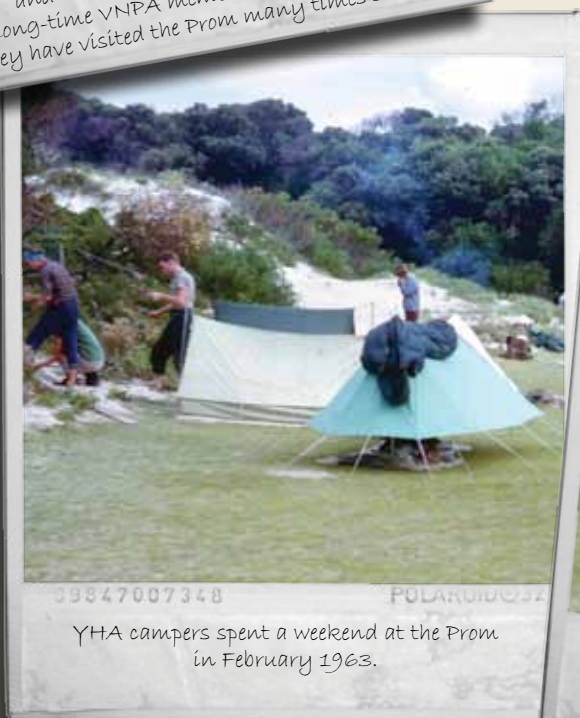
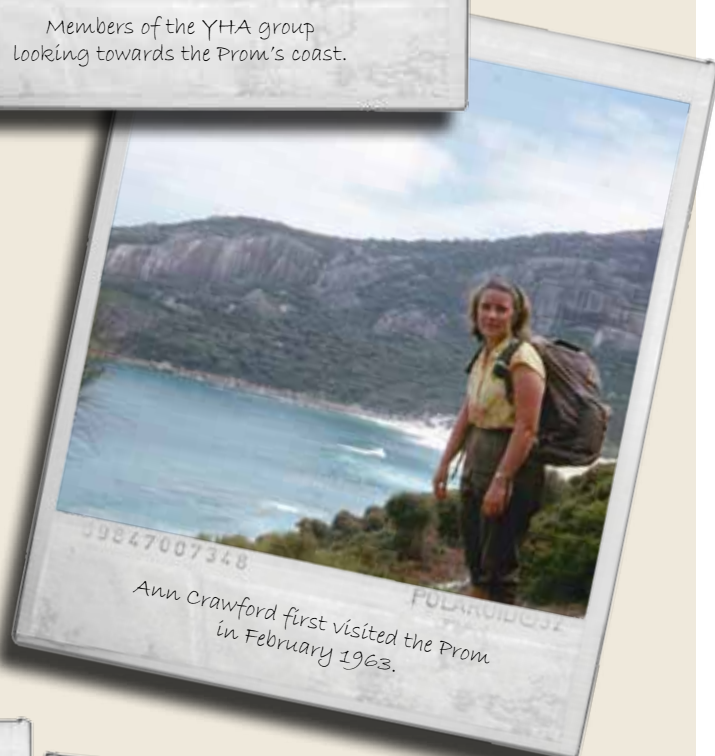
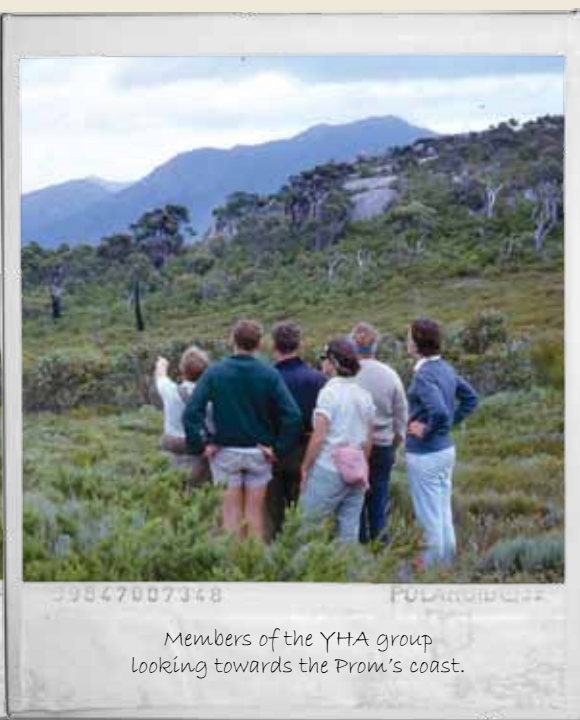
The next morning, Monday, was sunny and warm. We packed up and set off. Unfortunately the track went across

three more beaches which seemed endless, but we eventually arrived at Tidal River at 1.00 pm in time for a swim and shower before the van left at 2.45 pm.

I was very sunburnt and not a little tired, but glad I had done the trip and seen such wonderful scenery. Our nationalities were English, Polish, Hungarian, German, Belgian, Dutch and a few Australian.

Victoria's national parks hold a special place in many of our hearts. They're where many of us have found ourselves, found meaning for our lives – and found love.

As it happens, Ann's future husband Lindsay was also at The Prom on that summer weekend in 1963, but they were not to properly meet until 1971. They have visited the Prom many times since, most recently in 2014, when they enjoyed the national park's stunning views, wildlife and accessible walks. • PW



Above left: Beachgoers enjoy themselves at the Prom's Waterloo Bay in 1963.

Research Roundup



The Plains-wanderer and its habitat at Terrick Terrick National Park, where it is making a recovery.

PHOTOS: PARKS VICTORIA

Backyard birds take a bath

More than 4,000 Australians have become citizen scientists in a study that had them observing the birds that drink and wash in their backyard bird baths.

The study found that native birds were more partial to the backyards of Australia's warmer northern states, while down south the cooler climates attracted a greater share of introduced birds.

Dr Grainne Cleary from Deakin University's Centre for Integrative Ecology said that the introduced birds may be more used to a cooler climate; southern states feel more like home to them. However, in the warmer regions, the aggressive native birds such as Noisy Miners and Rainbow Lorikeets, thrived in backyards.

The research shows that in a very dry continent like Australia, artificial water resources such as bird baths can be very

important for birds. The presence of native plants, non-native plants and cats and dogs may also influence what birds are visiting.

The Australia-wide project ran in winter 2014 and summer 2015 and the results were published in the science journal PLOS ONE. Next they will investigate if different birds use feeders and bird baths, what people are feeding birds and why people feed birds and/or provide water.

How poor eating can impact the environment

Australians have long been encouraged to eat green for a healthy lifestyle; however an online survey hopes to examine the environmental impact of the nation's diet.

The 10-minute survey allows people to self-assess the quality of their diet,

compare that with others of the same age, gender, generation and profession, and identify areas for improvement. Last year more than 70,000 people took part, providing a detailed picture of Australian eating habits. The nation's diet quality was rated at 61/100 against the Australian Dietary Guidelines, a poor score driven by the country's junk food addiction.

This year CSIRO's Healthy Diet Score will also look at how our food consumption contributes to our environmental footprint. Improving the national diet can achieve environmental benefits by minimising harmful greenhouse gases via reducing processing, packaging and transport requirements.

CSIRO research has found that reducing overconsumption of kilojoules and eating whole foods at National Dietary Guideline levels could cut the greenhouse gas contribution of the average diet by 25%. Junk food accounts for up to 27% of the

14.5 kilograms of diet-related greenhouse gas emissions produced by the average Australian each day.

For more information or to take part, visit www.csirodietscore.com

Not mushroom in the deep

The mystery of the 'Deep-Sea Mushroom' began in 1986 when Australian researchers dredged up some strange mushroom-shaped creatures from the bottom of the deep-sea off the Tasmanian coast.

But it took a further 25 years before Danish researchers decided they were an entirely new kind of deep-sea animal, which they called *Dendrogramma enigmatica*.

This 'mushroom' was so unique, and so different to anything ever seen before, that the researchers could not even place it on the family tree of animal life.

In November last year, Hugh MacIntosh from Museum Victoria spotted the distinctive gelatinous mushroom-shaped bodies of this mysterious creature while on a CSIRO-led survey.

'It was a "eureka" moment! Holding one up to the light, the distinctive forked veins shimmered through the transparent body, and it suddenly dawned upon me that we had rediscovered the elusive *Dendrogramma*.'

But after further analysis it turns out that *Dendrogramma* was not a whole creature, but a piece of another creature – a siphonophore (a floating jellyfish like a bluebottle). *Dendrogramma* is a bract, a piece of animal but much bigger and more beautiful than those known from other species.

Scientists have never seen *Dendrogramma* complete, so still have no idea what the rest of the creature looks like.

You can find the research published in the scientific journal *Current Biology* 7 June 2016.

Mr Bean of birds battles back

A recent Parks Victoria survey has renewed hope that one of Australia's most critically endangered birds, the Plains-wanderer, may be bouncing back after a number of difficult years. Seven birds were observed in Terrick Terrick National Park, north of Bendigo. This is the largest number of birds detected during a single survey in the park for several years.

The Plains-wanderer only occurs in south-eastern Australia. The Zoological Society of London recently listed it as the world's fourth-most important endangered bird species and Australia's number one bird species on this list.

Parks Victoria Environmental Scientist, Dr Mark Antos said:

'After not seeing any Plains-wanderers for a few years, we started detecting two or three birds in our surveys in the second half of last year. We were delighted and hopeful on discovering a nest with four eggs in the park last December. This latest finding, including a very young female bird, is the best result we've had in five years.'

'If we can conserve the Plains-wanderer's native grasslands home, there will also be big benefits for other threatened species that also live in these habitats, like the hooded scaly foot (a legless lizard) and the fat-tailed dunnart (a small native mammal). This true "Aussie battler" may just recover and keep wandering the plains.'

Get outside together for a better family

Researchers at the University of Illinois think that families who regularly get outside together may tend to function better.

'When your attention is restored, you're able to pick up on social cues more easily, you feel less irritable, and you have more self-control. All of these are variables that can help you get along better with others,' explains Dina Izenstark, lead author of the study published in *The Journal of Family Theory and Review* (<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jftr.12138/epdf>).

'Everyone only has a finite amount of attention. Especially in today's society where we are constantly looking at our

cellphones or working on our computers and our email keeps popping up; we are constantly fatiguing our directed attention, but we're not always aware that we're doing it. It's so important that we incorporate moments into our everyday lives that we can look into nature and experience soft fascination to restore our attention. When you're at an amusement park or watching a sporting event, you're using your hard fascination. Your brain does not have the opportunity to relax or restore itself. Even though you enjoy the activity, it's still fatiguing you.'

In addition to nature's ability to restore attention, which in turn helps family members get along better, the researchers believe that doing things together in nature can foster a sense of identity and belonging.

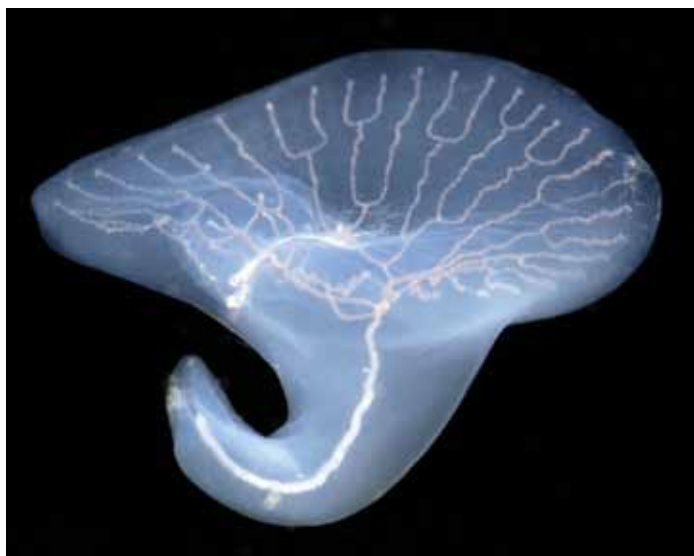
Curlew heaven

A bird that is critically endangered around Australia is defying the odds with it being found in increasing numbers in and around Darwin Harbour.

PhD candidate from Charles Darwin University, Amanda Lilleyman, said that the migratory shorebird breeds in Siberia and northern China and migrates through the Yellow Sea region every year to arrive in Australia for the nonbreeding season.

The loss of habitat due to reclamation of tidal mudflats in the Yellow Sea region was considered the major driver of population declines in many species of migratory shorebirds, including the Eastern Curlew.

This is also occurring in Australia but the Northern Territory appeared to be bucking this trend. The curlew's numbers had increased where safe roosting (artificial in the case of the Darwin Harbour) and feeding sites (due to dog regulation and beach zoning) existed. • PW



The mysterious part of the sea creature perplexing marine scientists.

PHOTO: CSIRO

Tony Woolford

1935-2016

Tony Woolford's amazing work in the environment included protecting and restoring precious native vegetation and wildlife habitat in the Geelong region, and wider areas when the opportunity presented.

He worked on the big issues of this region: the Otways, Belmont Common, Point Lillias, Anglesea heathlands, wetlands on the Bellarine and, most recently, the former Cheetham Saltworks. Tony's significant photographic skills supported each of these campaigns.

In 1972 Tony was a part of the group which established the Geelong Environment Council (GEC). He was involved continuously since then either on the committee, as President or Vice-president, and also as the convenor of the Friends of Buckley Falls. He also represented GEC on industry committees at Ford, Alcoa, Shell and Geelong Port, and on environment groups such as Barrabool Hills Landcare Group, Wurdale Landcare, VNPA Conservation Committee and the Victorian Environmental Friends Network (he was awarded the Victorian Best Friend Award in 2010).

Issues on the Barwon River were the catalyst for the creation of the GEC. In 1984 Geoff Carr, a friend and renowned ecologist, told a GEC meeting that if someone did not do something about the vegetation along the Barwon River, the weeds would take over and the remnants of the original ecosystems would be lost for all time.



Tony Woolford has left a lasting environmental legacy in the Geelong region.

Tony became that someone, leading the river restoration over the past 30 years. The revegetated Barwon River and Buckleys Falls parklands now comprise 80 ha, with a further 20 ha to be revegetated in the near future. This last addition came as result of a planning panel hearing where Tony excelled in persuasion.

Tony led the Friends of Buckley Falls through several more planning panels to achieve additions to the park. He instigated and carried out a negotiation with then Environment Minister, Marie Tehan, to exchange what is now Red Gum Island, at the time privately owned and badly degraded, with a piece of cleared Crown land useful to the owner. Red Gum Island is now an extremely beautiful and iconic area with magnificent vegetation and one of the gems in the Barwon River parklands.

Tony worked tirelessly negotiating with councils and government departments, planning what works to do each year and organising working bees, one every two weeks and with some in between. He planned and organised the works, sometimes digging the holes, gathering tools and plants—and the Friends.

Other parks that Tony was pivotal in establishing or restoring include the Wathaurong garden and adjacent creek banks in North Geelong, Cowies Creek reserve nearby, Pepperdine Park in Highton, originally just a drainage basin, the Moorabool River banks at Fyansford, previously madly overgrown with woody weeds totally obscuring the river, Tait's Point on Lake Connewarre, and extensive planting and clearing of weeds on the cliff faces and in Citizen's Park at Queenscliff.

These parklands in and around Geelong will last for all time, contribute immensely to the protection and enhancement of the region's flora and fauna, and have important educational, scenic and recreation values.

Very few people have been able or willing to work so hard and consistently over so many years to leave such a legacy. We are all very grateful to Tony Woolford for his environmental vision, commitment and hard work to protect the natural world in this region for future generations. • PW

Joan Lindros

Ned's Corner on the Murray: a history

By Catherine King,
Trust for Nature, 2015
RRP \$30 (paperback, 173 pages)

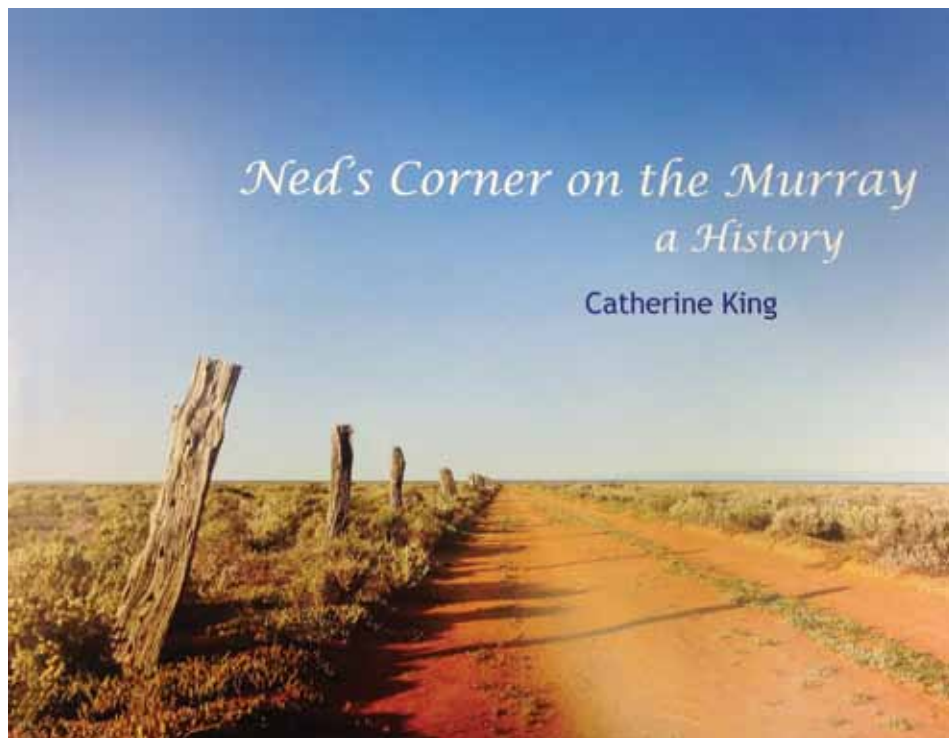
If you were looking at a map of the Murray River near the Victorian-South Australian border, and the bends or meanders of the river caught your attention, you might be interested to know that shepherds used these bends as sheep folds in the 1860s. Wire was unavailable then for fencing and the river bends were a natural corral and protection against dingos.

The vast property south of one of these bends, Ned's Corner (named after one of these shepherds), is the subject of Catherine King's book, *Ned's Corner on the Murray: a history*.

Located 80 kilometres west of Mildura and 29,000 hectares in area, Ned's Corner is the largest freehold property in Victoria and is now owned by the Trust for Nature. In the past it was even larger, an amalgam of leases four times the size.

Catherine King conducted extensive research through archives and historical societies, and with people connected with Ned's Corner and their descendants. Based on this research, her book is a rich social, economic and environmental history of the property. Its chapters are organised around the changing types of human occupation and ownership of Ned's Corner over the past 150 years.

Initially the home of Aboriginal clans for more than 15,000 years, the area was later occupied by pastoral magnates such as Edward Bagot, Robert Barr Smith and the Kidmans. After World War I, in a push for fairer land allocation and to reward returned soldiers, much of the land was leased by a returned soldiers' consortium. The final chapter covers the acquisition of the property by



the Trust for Nature and the subsequent conservation and restoration work.

King acknowledges that the Aboriginal history in the book is mainly from secondary sources. However this information gap will hopefully be filled by the archaeological work occurring on the property.

While it is easy to be fascinated by the enterprise and achievements of some of the larger-than-life figures in this history, such as Edward Bagot, a strength of the book is that it also documents the lives of the people who worked on Ned's Corner and the challenges of isolation. We learn of three-week dray rides to have children christened, twelve-mile, one-way walks, a crossing of the Murray just to go to a dance, and even the use of kerosene and sugar as a cold remedy.

While King details the economic and technological progress, such as river steam boats in the area, she also documents the associated environmental degradation. Introduced

animal pests, such as rabbits, severely reduced the grazing pastures by 70% in the 1880s and removed much of the native vegetation. The impact of overstocking, failure to adjust farming to the variability of the seasons, massive removals of riparian habitat to fuel the steam boats, and river control are clearly discussed. It is hard to believe that six tons of Murray fish were taken in a 1953 fishing competition!

An outstanding feature of the book is Mark Schapper's superb photography, which captures the spirit of the Mallee and the river environment at different times and seasons. Historical photos of camel trains transporting wool bales, and barges straining up the river with huge loads, develop our awareness of the scale of the area's wool production.

Catherine King's book is a valuable legacy for the community in the area, researchers and visitors to Ned's Corner. • PW

Review by Evelyn Feller



VNPA AGM

You are warmly invited to this year's VNPA Annual General Meeting on **Tuesday 11 October**. The guest speaker will be the new Chief Executive of Parks Victoria, **Bradley Fauteux**, who will be speaking on his vision for Victoria's parks system.

Wildlife conservation in farm landscapes

By David Lindenmayer, Damian Michael, Mason Grant Okada, Daniel Florance, Philip Barton and Karen Ikin. CSIRO, 2016.
RRP \$49.95 (paperback, 232 pages)

This is an immensely attractive and informative book. Its aim is to convey to farmers and land managers, the fruits of 17 years of scientifically and statistically rigorous research into biodiversity retention and enhancement on more than 300 farms.

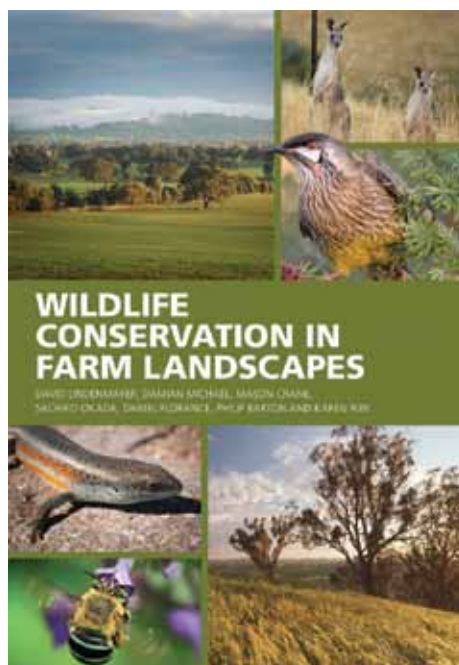
Encouragingly, despite removal of billions of trees in the Murray Darling Basin, woodland in surveyed areas in NSW and Victoria has increased 3.5% over the past decade. With increased funding, more plantings can be fenced off, weeds reduced and, as the authors sensitively put it, farmers can 'reduce grazing pressure'.

The authors' intention is to demonstrate how both productivity and biodiversity can be simultaneously enhanced through cost effective and biologically effective intervention.

They employ every possible device to make their findings interesting and informative: a map of research areas; countless brilliant photos with large captions; tables summarising farm conservation strategies; subheadings containing questions relevant to research and farmers; three scenarios of farms with varying ecological assets and suggestions for intervention; and above all, discussion in very accessible language. Appendices include a list of common and scientific names of all flora and fauna mentioned and one listing research papers noted in the text.

Several very clear messages are emphasised.

Old-growth forests are associated with more biodiversity than either regrowth or plantings, and contain hollows favoured as nests by a variety of mammals and birds.



Large plantings are more ecologically rich than small; connected strips more than disconnected ones. Besides increasing species of birds and, ultimately, mammals and reptiles, replanting has many benefits, including erosion control, salinity reduction and livestock shelter. Isolated paddock trees, often under assault from livestock trampling and manure, fertilisers and pests, provide invaluable habitat.

Ecology is about relationships between life forms. Old logs provide shelter for many invertebrates and the reptiles feeding on them, which in turn become food for birds. Ants and dung beetles aid seed dispersal, breakdown waste and contribute to soil health. Other invertebrates promote pollination and pest control. Similarly, in recommending plantings, the authors urge mindfulness of what vegetation lies nearby.

Appropriately, climate change is discussed briefly at the end. Might rising temperatures suggest planting trees native to areas further north?

This is an outstanding book for farmers, land managers and bush lovers of all stripes. • PW

Review by Bill Hempel

Mountain Ash in music

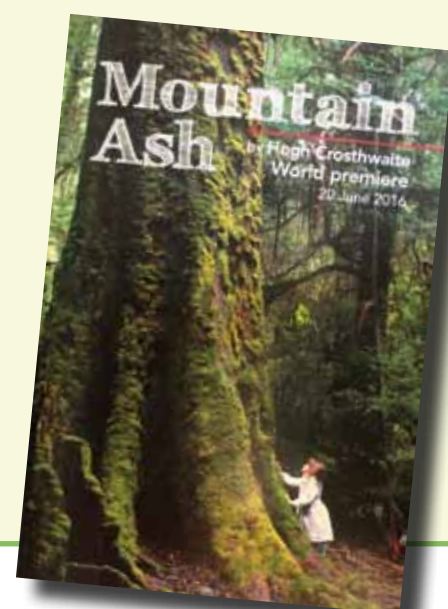
One of the most moving events I have been to in years took place in Melbourne's historic Scots Church in June.

The beautiful venue was packed full for the first-ever performance of Melbourne composer Hugh Crosthwaite's piano concerto 'Mountain Ash'. It was a great gathering of people, and a remarkable tribute to nature – just wonderful to listen to a composer, and performers, unafraid to speak compellingly from the heart. It was a reminder of the great depth and richness of feeling that drives us to care for the natural world.

While our arguments for protecting natural areas are now almost entirely based on science, there is often something intangible but very compelling that drives us, and it's the natural province of artists, poets and musicians. A program quote from Albert Einstein makes that link for us: 'Look deeply into nature, and then you will understand everything better'.

Last June's one-off performance was the product of enthusiastic support from too many people to mention here, though credit must go to lawyer Brian Walters who commissioned Hugh's composition. It should be heard more widely. • PW

Review by Phil Ingamells



Big, bold and blue

Lessons from Australia's marine protected areas

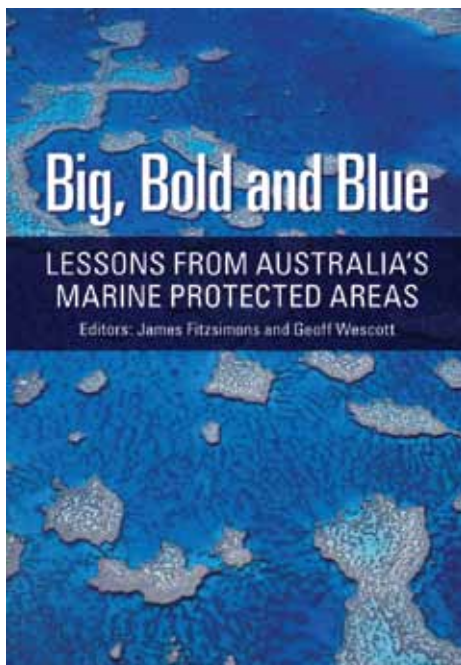
Edited by James Fitzsimons and Geoff Wescott. CSIRO, 2016
RRP \$89.95 (paperback, 432 pages)

As one of the world's leading proponents for the establishment and management of marine protected areas (MPAs), Australia's rich history and experience provides important learnings for other nations and advocates in their own journeys.

In *Big, Bold and Blue*, the editors have compiled viewpoints that capture the history and progress towards establishing MPAs in both Commonwealth and state waters, as well as identifying some of the remaining opportunities and challenges for Australia to continue as a true world leader.

The scope of this volume is ambitious and seeks to identify lessons learned as described by a wide range of MPA professionals, academics, and other authors, many of whom will be familiar to VNPA audiences through their work in campaigns here in Victoria and nationally. While not surprisingly, there is an overwhelming consensus from all contributors on the value of MPAs; the differing reflections on the effectiveness or success of alternate approaches in establishing MPAs provides some informative perspectives.

Tim Winton's short essay, as the introduction, is both inspiring and a clear call to action to care for our oceans by establishing MPAs. The first couple of chapters provide a solid framework for understanding MPA concepts as they have developed here and elsewhere. The individual stories follow, providing well-documented summaries of the events and people that have shaped Australia's current system through the eyes of the authors. Perspectives provided on



particular issues, including a focus on sea country, understanding the views of fishers, or broader community views on MPAs, are informative and highlight the ongoing challenges for marine conservation through establishing MPAs.

The final chapter brings together the key lessons and frames them with a clear view to the future. While this provides a useful summary of what these have been, it is the individual stories of success and failure throughout the book that really point to how things might be done differently if and when there is a next time.

This will be a great resource for students of marine conservation, campaigners, and for those charged with managing MPAs, in

order to understand what has happened during the past couple of decades. Our nation's various journeys towards marine conservation must be well documented and this book nails it with a solid focus on what happened, when it happened and the outcomes.

From my own perspective as a marine park manager, if there were to be any critique of this work, it would be that *Big, Bold and Blue* does not evaluate the effectiveness of actual MPA management in achieving goals. What are the critical success factors or failures in managing areas of the sea? While these can and do differ widely across the country, there are now many lessons from managing MPAs, from engaging with communities to managing key threats that should also be shared. Perhaps these could be the focus for a compendium volume to ensure we share all lessons learned from managing Australia's extraordinary blue backyard. • PW

Review by Mark Rodrigue



Give a meaningful gift

We're deeply honoured that supporters choose to remember their friends and loved ones by donating to support our work.

If you'd like to make a gift in memory of a loved one – perhaps in lieu of flowers at their funeral – please contact Amelia Easdale on (03) 9341 6505 or via ameliae@vnpa.org.au

PHOTO: PAUL SINCLAIR

Families go **wild** with VNPA!

OVER THE NEXT SIX MONTHS, THE VNPA IS TRIALLING A NEW PROGRAM 'WILD FAMILIES'.

Here is a chance for families to get muddy, go discovering, look after nature or simply bushwalk with support from VNPA.

Through our trial program, you can do any of the below with your grandchildren, children, nieces, nephews or children in your care. Here's how:

- Download a Wild Families flyer at <http://vnpa.org.au/page/bushwalking-and-activities/wild-families> and then:
 - Explore some of the featured places such as the Macedon Ranges or the Dandenong Ranges
 - Do some of the featured nature activities such as an 'Alphabet Walk' and 'Living on Logs'
 - Do some colouring ins of local wildlife or a crossword
- Register and come along to the trial of our first guided Wild Families Walk at Organ Pipes National Park on 16 October (see the VNPA Activities Program for more details and remember to register)
- Send us pictures and stories of your favourite nature adventures to share with others in the (email: vnpa@vnpa.org.au)
- Tell us about how you'd like to see us supporting families in the future at www.surveymonkey.com.



Top: 'Here is the letter 'G'.'
Above left: A letter 'C' sits on the forest floor.
Above right: 'I found a letter 'J'.'



PHOTOS: CAITLIN GRIFFITH

Activity – An alphabet walk

Activity concept from BWAG bushwalking and Walk, Talk & Gawk leader, Julia Pickwick, and prepared by Caitlin Griffith.

Discover the letters of the alphabet while you walk (letters of the alphabet could be changed to shapes for younger children).

This activity is a great way to encourage close observation, exploration, creativity and even literacy, and bring an exciting sense of discovery to an adventure. If nature is unfamiliar, this is a fun way to find familiarity in new surrounds.

Get started

1. Make a chart with all the letters of the alphabet ready to tick off
2. While walking with the family, keep an eye out for letters of the alphabet in the bush or beach around you. For example, a tree might be growing in the shape of a 'Y', a leaf curled into the shape of an 'e' or an imprint in the rock could be the shape of a 'k'. You could look for just capital letters or little letters or a mix of both. You could even look for punctuation marks!
3. Tick the letters off on the checklist as you see them. Can you find all 26 letters? You may even like to take a photo of all of your letters to make a 'bush alphabet poster'.
4. Please send in photos of your letters to vnpa@vnpa.org.au so we can share your discoveries with other families. • PW

Citizen Science Camp

Goongerah Environment Centre Office (GECO)

Come along to GECO's next citizen science camp from **28 October to 1 November 2016**.

That's the Melbourne Cup weekend. Camping will be at the Goongerah campground, by the clear waters of the Brodrib River. Composting toilets, drinking water, communal kitchen and basic camp facilities are available.

For more info, visit
www.geco.org.au



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