

# PARK WATCH

## HOODIES SACRIFICED FOR HORSES

GOVERNMENT'S HALF-TIME SCORE  
MINING THE YOU YANGS FOOTHILLS  
MANAGING SW COUNTRY  
EAST GIPPSLAND SELF-DRIVE MAP  
INVASIONS BY NEWT AND FIRE ANT  
DEER OH DEER ...  
PARK VISITOR PRESSURES

DECEMBER 2016 NO 267



VICTORIAN  
**NATIONAL PARKS**  
ASSOCIATION  
*Be part of nature*



*Be part of nature*

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#### **FRONT COVER**

The Andrews Government's decision to license commercial horse trainers to use Belfast Coastal Reserve has sacrificed the future of the Hooded Plover *Thinornis rubricollis*. Photo of Hooded Plover chick by Glenn Ehmke. Photo of horse's hoof by Bagicat.

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# From the President

As I write this there is a parliamentary inquiry underway into invasive species on crown land. The inquiry is focussed on deer, pigs, rabbits, foxes and feral goats. These animals and many more invasive plant and animal species are causing major problems for our natural environment.

Most of the species of concern are introduced to Australia, although some are native to other parts of the continent and have become established outside their normal range.

It is hoped that the inquiry recommendations will result in more intense activity aimed at controlling invasive species.

For a start, all protection must be removed from all species of deer so that effective control measures can be professionally implemented before they do irreparable damage to many of our natural areas.

There is also an urgent need to remove feral horses from the Australian Alps where they are causing major damage in an environment that is extremely sensitive to the damage caused by hard hooves. We got cattle out of the Alpine National Park but we still need to get the invasive mammals out of the high country across all land tenures.

There is a push within this inquiry for opening more public land for recreational hunting, something which the VNPA does not support. Recreational hunting is generally not an effective way of controlling feral animals. In the long run, hunters tend to farm their target species, only taking animals when they can do so relatively easily and leaving breeding stock which allows the population to recover. In the case of deer, they target the alpha stags which are quickly replaced, thus having no impact on the population.



*Fallow Deer are spreading rapidly across Victoria. This animal is one of several that were captured on a camera trap on private land south-west of Horsham.*

PHOTOS BY EUAN MOORE

Another popular but largely ineffective method of feral animal control is the use of bounties, which can also result in the 'farming' of the target species. Why would a hunter take all animals that attract a bounty when some can be left to provide future pocket money? In the longer term, bounties are also more expensive to the public purse than other control measures.

Victoria urgently requires effective invasive species control. To be effective, control programs must be based on a good scientific understanding of the species involved, have clearly defined goals, e.g. elimination of the invasive species from a region, be professionally implemented, extend and be coordinated across all land tenures and be adequately funded until their goal is achieved. Invasive species is just one area where the funding to Parks Victoria is less than required.

Biosecurity is also important when addressing invasive species. We are all familiar with the advance of weeds along roadsides, e.g. Gazanias, those bright orange daisies that are marching out from many country towns and spread by machinery and vehicles.

It was probably a biosecurity lapse that resulted in the introduction of hawkweeds in the high country. Hawkweeds are now subject to intense search and destroy activities across the high plains.

We all have a part to play in slowing the spread of invasive species – cleaning and sterilising boots before a trip, removing dirt from vehicles and avoiding walking, driving and parking in areas with weeds to help protect our parks.

The VNPA has appeared before the Victorian Parliament's Invasive Animals on Crown Land Inquiry. The final report should be tabled by the end of March 2017.

Finally, I would like to wish everyone a safe and happy time over the holiday season. Thank you for your support in all its many forms this year. I look forward to working with you in 2017 on our efforts to achieve better recognition and protection of our natural environment. • PW

Euan Moore, VNPA President



# CONSERVATION COMMITMENTS - ELECTION HALF-TIME SCORE BOARD

**It's half time in the Andrews Labor Government's term in office, with another two quarters to go before the November 2018 election.**

To mark the occasion the VNPA, Environment Victoria, Friends of the Earth and The Wilderness Society together conducted a community briefing roadshow to their members and supporters in Fitzroy, Williamstown, Ivanhoe, Woodend, Frankston and South Melbourne.

The half-time commentary highlighted the significant progress on a number of climate and energy initiatives led by Friends of the Earth and

Environment Victoria. The VNPA and The Wilderness Society analysed progress on the significant but diverse number of nature conservation election commitments. Progress on these is outlined on the scoreboard.

The Andrews Government has scored well by removing the backward steps of the previous government. They banned cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park, and committed to a raft of important strategic policy and legislative reform initiatives that are mostly underway but yet to be completed. On the big-ticket items, like creating the Great Forest National Park, a Forest Industry Taskforce has been

formed but it is very slow moving and a result is still up in the air.

In summary, it's been a steady first half for the government. But we are now entering the premiership third quarter and some real goals need to be kicked.

While we often focus on the government of the day, the performance of the Victorian Opposition also deserves mention. The Coalition has largely vacated the field on conservation and environment policy. Disappointingly, it is a decade since the Coalition released a comprehensive environment policy, the last one prior to the 2006 election. • PW

## GOVERNMENT FREE KICK TO HORSERACING INDUSTRY

**The second half has just begun and the Andrews Government immediately gives a free kick away to the horseracing industry.**

On 15 November, the Minister for Environment, Lily D'Ambrosio, announced that the unauthorised and destructive use of the Belfast Coastal Reserve by commercial horse trainers would be sanctioned by the issuing of licences.

The Belfast Coastal Reserve, located between Warrnambool and Port Fairy, was established more than 40 years ago to protect the area's wildlife and cultural heritage, and provide for passive recreational activities.

But two years ago, the reserve was invaded by large numbers of racehorse trainers and their horses. The trainers were uninvited and unauthorised, weren't paying for the commercial use of a public reserve and proceeded to intimidate, bully and threaten beachgoers.

At the same time, the horses began to seriously disturb the life cycle of the Hooded Plover and other threatened shorebirds. Belfast Coastal Reserve is the second most important stretch of coastline for Hooded Plover in Victoria, and has the highest potential for their successful breeding. There are fewer than 600 of the species left in Victoria.

By allowing commercial horse training to continue, the Government risks the future of these birds and sets a terrible precedent for the protection and management of the Victorian coast. Today it's horse training, but tomorrow will it be sand mining and dune buggies?

The VNPA, in collaboration with the Belfast Coastal Reserve Action Group, other local activists and Birdlife Australia, will continue to campaign for the removal of commercial horse training from the Belfast Coastal Reserve. • PW

You can find out more about the government's decision and the VNPA response on page 39 (inside back cover) or at [www.vnpa.org.au](http://www.vnpa.org.au).

ANDREWS GOVERNMENT 2014 ELECTION COMMITMENT	COMMENTS	HALF TIME SCORE
<b>Cattle Grazing in Alpine National Park</b> 'Labor will, once again, ban cattle grazing in the Alpine and Red Gum National Park.'	<i>Legislation passed in 2015 closed the loophole on cattle grazing, hopefully once and for all.</i>	✓
<b>Privatising National Parks</b> "...we will not allow large scale private development in our national parks and will remove the Government's ability to grant 99 year leases'.	<i>Legislation passed in 2015 removed the capacity for 99 leases in 2/3 of the parks estate.</i>	✓
<b>Pt Nepean</b> '...immediately review the lease to determine its legal status, look to use any powers of the Parliament to disallow it where possible'. 'Labor will, again, protect Point Nepean for all Victorians and seek to ensure it remains open to all Victorians.'	<i>Lease over the Quarantine Station at Point Nepean National Park to a private developer lapsed. A new master plan commenced with draft to be released on 5 December 2016.</i>	✓
<b>State of the Bays Report</b> 'An Andrews Labor Government will undertake a five-yearly State of the Bay report to monitor the health of coasts, bays and waterways.'	<i>First report on Port Phillip and Western Port expected to be released in early December 2016.</i>	✓
<b>National Parks Funding</b> 'Labor will provide \$5 million to upgrade and provide new facilities in our parks and reserves across the state.'	<i>\$5 million delivered in 2015, with additional \$10 million + funding in 2016 and further allocation from Parks &amp; Reserves Trust. However, Parks funding was at chronically low levels, so more is needed.</i>	✓
<b>Waterways</b> "...develop a strategy to improve our riparian land and river ways'.	<i>Regional Riparian Action Plan completed and significant funds invested to commence fencing of riparian land.</i>	✓
<b>New Parks</b> '...establish a new Canadian State Park'.	<i>The new park established on the outskirts of Ballarat in 2016.</i>	✓
<b>Protecting Marine &amp; Coasts</b> 'We will establish a new Marine and Coastal Act, bringing together all management and protections under the one system'.	<i>Expert panel appointed and discussion paper released for public comment in 2016. Draft legislation expected in 2017</i>	➔
<b>Protecting Threatened Species</b> "...will review the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act'.	<i>Some initial consultation meetings held. Discussion paper expected in late 2016 or early 2017.</i>	➔
<b>Protecting Nature</b> '...institute a state wide biodiversity strategy to protect our habitats for future generations'.	<i>Series of consultations and a draft strategy released in early 2016. Final strategy expected in early 2017.</i>	➔
<b>Native Vegetation</b> '...review the new native vegetation regulations so they can sensibly protect sensitive vegetation'.	<i>A review of native vegetation clearing regulations established with an independent chair and public consultation. Approach has improved, but probably doesn't go far enough. Final revised regulation expected in later 2016 or early 2017.</i>	➔
<b>Additions to Parks</b> '...incorporate the Anglesea Heath into the Otway National Park'.	<i>Underway. Legislation expected to add the 7,000 ha of unique Anglesea Heathlands to Great Otway National Park in late 2016 or early 2017.</i>	➔
<b>Great Forest National Park</b> 'Labor strongly supports a consensus approach in the establishment of any new national parks ... 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.'	<i>A Forest Industry Taskforce (FIT) has been established and has so far produced a statement of intent. It has failed to date to significantly slow logging of high-conservation-value forests, but has commenced some supporting works such as a VEAC assessment of forest values. Slow moving.</i>	➔

Excellent; commitment delivered	✓
Done; more needed	✓
Underway; good progress	➔
Not started or much more to do	✗





PHOTO BY GOOGLE EARTH

# We're growing fast

IT'S GREAT THAT OUR NATURAL AREAS ARE POPULAR, BUT WHERE AND WHEN DO WE DRAW THE LINE ASKS PHIL INGAMELLS?

When I was a child (it was the 1950s!) we were lucky to holiday at the Summerland Guest House on Phillip Island. That slightly ramshackle building, perched on a cliff above Summerland Beach, no longer served as a guest house. About the only public function it filled was to offer hot water to passers by who needed a cup of tea. It's long gone, and the ground it was on has since been absorbed into the Phillip Island Nature Parks' penguin reserve.

But back then the territory was ours. We chased each other through the tussocks, jumping over snakes, and we

scampered down the cliffs and dunes, occasionally caving in a penguin or mutton bird burrow (I confess!).

In the evening we might grab a torch and wind our way down a track to the beach to marvel at the penguins waddling ashore. There would have been, at most, a few dozen people rugged up on that beach, and not a viewing stand or roped off area in sight.

Soon a proper carpark was installed, and the Penguin Parade became an official tourist site. Things moved fast.

It was not long before the Penguin Parade attracted visitors in the tens of thousands

each year, so to look after the main attraction, the reserve's managers sensibly engaged ecologists and wildlife management planners. At the same time, though, the island was having a housing boom and something had to give.

In 1985, under then Conservation Minister Joan Kirner, a remarkable program to buy back a total of 774 residential lots, which included 183 houses, a motel and a shop on the Summerland Peninsula, was instigated. It would take 25 years to complete, but that land is now managed by Phillip Island Nature

*The Summerland Peninsula, Phillip Island, with the Penguin Parade on Summerland Beach. Good pre-emptive cross-tenure planning can avoid problems, but our national park planning processes rarely look beyond park boundaries, even ignoring adjacent public land.*

Parks as a safe refuge for the Little Penguin and its Short-tailed Shearwater (Mutton Bird) migrant neighbour.

By the late 1980s, visitor numbers had climbed to 400,000 a year, and today the parade attracts around 700,000, of which some 60% are international tourists. The numbers continue to grow.

Children can no longer jump over snakes or peer into penguin and shearwater burrows, and that's a pity perhaps (for the kids, not the wildlife). But people do get a good view from the boardwalks, and they still feel the wind in their hair as they watch those resilient little birds emerge from the wilds of Bass Strait before waddling clumsily up the beach, eager to disgorge their catch into the hungry mouths of their young.

But the Penguin Parade is a very special case – the penguins are remarkably resilient to the presence of large numbers of people gawking at them, and as a major tourist attraction they can generate serious money for their management and protection (not to mention the State of Victoria).

Most of our other natural areas, and the 100,000 odd species they protect, can't pull that trick.

## The conundrum

How do we protect our great national parks from growing numbers of visitors, while still giving people the valuable experiences real contact with nature provides?

In the year to March 2016, Victoria's population grew by 115,000 people, making it the fastest growing state in the nation.

'Nature-based tourism' is now a critical component of Victoria's economy. Parks Victoria tells us park tourism generates \$1.02 billion annually, and a 2016 report to Outdoors Victoria and Sport and Recreation Victoria puts the contribution of all outdoor activities (park visits are a significant part of that) at \$7.4 billion.

Access to our parks is getting easier every day. Our highways and roads are more easily travelled, and people have faster and more comfortable cars. Accommodation is also more amenable, whether you're in a cosy nearby B&B, a campervan with a solar panel, fridge and wifi, or maybe 'roughing it' with gear that campers and overnight hikers of old would die for.

Our underfunded parks are already struggling to manage a vast range of pest plants and animals, and the significant



Phillip Island Penguin Parade in the 1950s. It now attracts 700,000 visitors a year – what will it be like in another 50 years?

PHOTO COURTESY PHILLIP ISLAND NATURE PARKS

impacts of climate change, such as increased fire frequency. Rapidly growing visitor numbers add to that dilemma, and can take staff time and attention away from other pressing management issues.

## The Prom and ...

These issues are now critical at one of the state's most loved national parks, Wilsons Promontory.

Parking is available there for about 500 cars, but regularly now over summer around 900 vehicles turn up in fair weather. On one day last year 1,300 cars arrived at the Prom – parking in other people's camp spots, lined up along roadsides, blocking access and generally compromising each other's experience.

Should we close the Prom when the 500th car arrives? Or is it a better option to run a shuttle bus from the park entrance on busy days? To make that work it would be sensible to have a visitor orientation centre at the park entrance, so people can learn a bit about the Prom, or plan their visit, while they wait.

That park entrance visitor centre has actually been in the Prom's Management Plan since 2002, along with a raft of other recommendations yet to be funded and implemented.

Across the state, the challenges brought about through increasing visitor numbers are multitude and varied.

Apart from the ongoing wearing out of tracks and visitor facilities, there is also an increase in non-compliant activities. Trailbike riders, as well as mountain bike and fatbike riders, are now forming their own illegal tracks in many parks, and sometimes these tracks become formalised by park planners.

Hunters, who already have access to more than half of Victoria's public land, are demanding more access to parks. Noisy helicopter rides over parks (banned in much of Canada and the USA) are now in operation at Port Campbell, starting up at the Prom and the Grampians, and soon elsewhere due to the complete absence of planning provisions – and drones are turning up everywhere.

## What can we do?

There are some very good options, and many sensible precedents.

In Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, all visitor accommodation is located outside the park. Within the park, the only substantial building is the Indigenous Cultural Centre. There is a yellow line bordering most of the roads in the park, disallowing roadside parking. Visitors clearly understand why they should not walk off-track, and they don't. Tracks do however lead to great, well-interpreted experiences, so visitors respect restrictions on access and actually act as voluntary encouragers of appropriate behaviour in others.

That sort of thing happens when park management plans are truly 'landscape scale', allowing the appropriate siting of activities either inside or outside a national park. It happens when visitors are given real information about the plants and animals the park is protecting, so they can understand the importance of appropriate behaviour. It happens when the areas they are visiting are well protected by good tracks and carefully designed visitor infrastructure, so the place looks as though it deserves and gets respect.

It also happens when funding for managing our most important natural areas actually fits the tasks at hand. • PW



# A long time coming

THE CENTRAL WEST FORESTS ARE THE FOCUS OF A NEW INVESTIGATION.

The much-neglected but much-loved forests of central west Victoria, including the Wombat, Wellsford, Mount Cole and Pyrenees Range state forests, will be at the heart of a proposed new Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) investigation.

The draft terms of reference of the long-awaited investigation were announced in early November by Victoria's environment minister, Lily D'Ambrosio and are:

1. Identify and evaluate the condition, natural and cultural values and the current uses of public land in the specified area.
2. Make recommendations for the balanced use and appropriate management arrangements to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural assets.

VNPA has long called for an investigation into the conservation

values of the area's forests. In our 2010 report, *Better Protection for Special Places*, we identified more than 100,000 hectares of high-conservation-value unprotected public land in the region.

In 2011, VEAC's statewide *Remnant Native Vegetation Investigation* also highlighted that these areas were under-represented in the state's reserve system and recommended a further investigation. This recommendation was remade by VEAC in the 2016 draft recommendations of its *Statewide Assessment of Public Land*.

The Wombat Forest alone is home to 20 rare and threatened plant species, yet much of its floral characteristics are under-represented in public conservation reserves.

The Wellsford State Forest, near Bendigo, and Mt Cole and the Pyrenees Range forests, all have high conservation values and are in need of better management and protection.

They continue to be threatened by gold mining, commercial logging, especially for firewood, and a range of other threats from poorly managed uses.

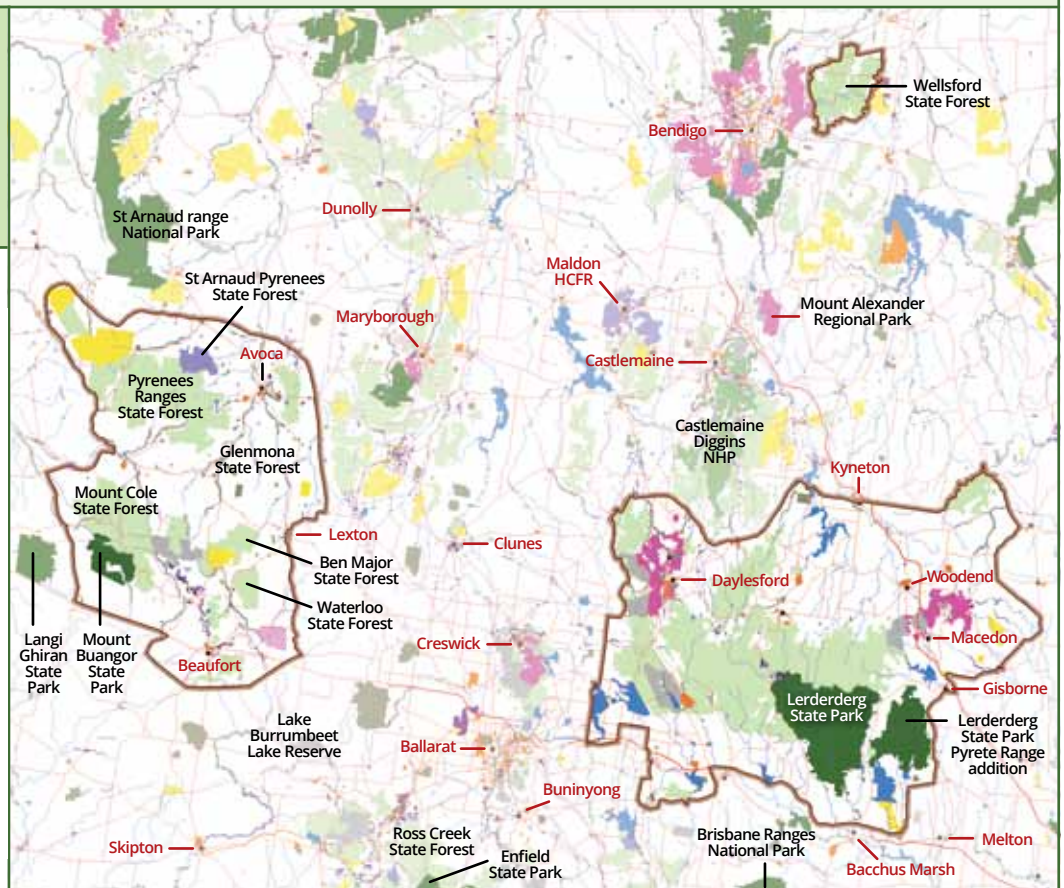
The advertising of the draft terms of reference is the first step in a VEAC investigation. After the initial consultation period, the final terms of reference are formally referred to VEAC and the investigation process starts. The full process usually involves a series of consultation periods, discussion papers and draft recommendations before final recommendations are delivered to the government and tabled in parliament. It is expected to take at least two years and unlikely to be finished before the next state election in 2018. • PW

Full details on the proposed Central West Forests Investigation can be found on the DELWP website: <http://www.delwp.vic.gov.au/parks-forests-and-crown-land/managing-land/victorian-environmental-assessment-council>

## Central West Forests Investigation area

### Current public land use

- Coastal waters
- Community use area
- Earth resources
- Historic and cultural features reserve
- National park, State park
- Nature conservation reserve
- Natural features reserve
- Plantation
- Other parks (e.g. Coastal park)
- Regional park, Metropolitan park
- Services and utilities area
- State forest
- Uncategorised public land
- Water production





# FIRE ANTS

## THE SILENT INVASION

REECE PIANTA RINGS THE ALARM BELL  
ON A DANGEROUS INVASIVE PEST.

PHOTO: MURRAY S. BLUM, UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA



*Right: Fire ants have invaded Queensland and could easily spread across Australia if eradication programs are not properly funded.*

*Left: Fire ant stings can cause serious allergic reactions in humans.*



**There is a silent invasion taking place in Australia that could fundamentally alter our way of life.**

This isn't a tagline for a movie – people living in the southern United States have been tormented by these tiny invaders for decades. Unless it's eradicated, the Red Fire Ant *Solenopsis invicta*, will change the way we live.

### The problem

Habitat mapping shows the fire ant, a native of South America, is capable of infesting not only most of Victoria but almost the entire Australian continent.

These ants attack en masse and can inflict serious injury or even death on humans, wildlife and cattle. Their stings can and have led to anaphylaxis, a serious allergic reaction that has resulted in the death of 80 people in the US alone.

Fire ants are also deadly to young, weak and sick creatures. Their nests displace or eliminate lizards, frogs, birds and mammals. Once fire ants have breached a new territory, their queens can rapidly expand the number of nests, creating dense populations and dominating surrounding areas.

In the US the impacts of fire ants have been costed at \$7 billion a year. In Queensland, ground zero for Australia's fire ant infestation, the damage bill if we do not eradicate has been put at \$43 billion over 30 years for southeast Queensland alone.

For such a small invader, fire ants have significant economic, health and environmental impacts.

### The solution

So far their main route into Australia has been through major trading ports. Alarm bells were first sounded when they were identified in the Brisbane suburb of Wacol back in 2001. Since then they have been found twice at Gladstone in Central Queensland, and once at Sydney's Port Botany just two years ago.

So far more than \$320 million has been spent trying to control and eradicate Australia's fire ant infestations. Eradication is close to complete at Gladstone and Port Botany. However, eradication of the Queensland infestation has suffered from insufficient and uncertain funding as well as arguments over how best to eliminate the threat.

A recent review of the program concluded that eradication remains technically feasible and in the national interest. Despite this, there is a lack of commitment from state and federal governments to fund eradication.

### The decision

Early next year Australia's agriculture ministers will consider fully funding the eradication of red fire ants. Queensland will be able to tackle this problem if they have the backing of state and federal governments for a fully funded fire ant eradication program.

As always, prevention through strong biosecurity protections at our country's entry points is the quickest, cheapest way to stop dangerous new invasive species from entering Australia. Once they are here, as in the case of the fire ant, they must be dealt with quickly and with the full force of state and federal authorities.

### Take action

Australia faces a national emergency if the Red Fire Ant eradication program is not fully funded. Please join us in calling on federal and state governments around Australia to properly fund it by signing the Invasive Species Council petition today: [invasives.org.au/fire-ants](http://invasives.org.au/fire-ants). • PW

PHOTO BY ALEX WILD





PHOTO BY JOSHUA TAY

*Top: Efforts to rehabilitate the land in the Hanson Holcim mine have recently begun, repairing an ugly blot to the landscape.*

*Centre: Lara Care Group members, Barry White and Sally Nicholas, look out towards the untouched beauty of the You Yangs Regional Park.*

*Bottom: Dead and dying 300-year-old river red gums are common in the area due to disruptions to natural water flows.*



PHOTO BY NICHOLAS SORAGHAN



PHOTO BY LOH WAN LI



# AFTERMATH OF A MINE

**There are seven sand quarries in the foothills of the You Yangs, just an hour's drive from Melbourne.**

An eighth quarry was scuttled in July this year when the administrators who replaced the sacked Geelong City Council voted unanimously to refuse a permit for an 80-hectare quarry on Wolloomanata Estate.

Two months later the company behind the mine, Bisinella Developments, announced it would not contest the 'hasty and ill-considered refusal' by the administrators at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT).

But the issue of sand mining in the You Yangs remains a live one.

The VCAT decision was a relief for Barry White and Sally Nicholas, two members of the Lara Care Group fighting for land protection in the You Yangs, Hovells Creek and Lascelles Dam areas.

Barry White said that people were very upset with the new mine proposal; many didn't understand what was happening.





PHOTO BY JOHN PETTIT

**NICHOLAS SORAGHAN, JOSHUA TAY  
HANWEN AND WAN LI LOH REPORT ON THE  
BITTERSWEET REALITY OF THE YOU YANGS.**

*An aerial view of sand mining by Hanson Holcim Pty Ltd, with the peaks of the You Yangs beginning in the right of frame.*

‘This is an area of great significance in terms of recreation, conservation and sport. The fact that there was no consideration given to making the proposal known to the community was of great concern.’

Once the issue was raised though, the community began to oppose the proposed sand mine.

‘It has been great that the community got behind our opposition to this. We couldn’t have done it without the community because we are such a small group.’

Sally Nicholas said that wildlife has also been affected by the increased amount of quarry-truck traffic.

‘We have a lot of roadkill. The kangaroos, koalas...they have to cross the road to get to different areas to graze. And the big quarry trucks, they don’t care. They just keep going.’

According to Geelong City Council’s General Manager of Planning and Development, Peter Bettess, as reported in the *GeelongIndy* on 27 July 2016, the administrators found the Bisinella quarry proposal unsatisfactory, particularly in terms of its economic, visual, amenity and traffic outcomes.

The battle between the mining companies and Lara environment advocates began about 30 years ago, when sludge filled water from the Hillview Quarry at Sandy Creek Road, Little River was diverted around Lascelles Dam and into Hovells Creek. The diverted water quickly eroded a gully now 4.5 metres deep, causing the level of the creek bed to drop.

In 1991, the upper section of Hovells Creek and the Lascelles Dam were listed as places of national significance in the report ‘Sites of Faunal Significance in the Western Wetlands of Melbourne’ by the Department of Conservation and Environment.

The creek and dam hold 261 species of birds, 34 animals including marsupials, reptiles, bats and frogs. The high species diversity is largely due to the large number of mature river red gums growing around the dam.

Fifteen years later, the sand mining and quarrying operations required more water and cut off the entire supply to Lascelles Dam. This lack of water to the foothills of the You Yangs has now caused 300-year-old river red gums to shed leaves and branches, and slowly die.

With seven quarries in the immediate vicinity of the You Yangs, including ones from development companies Holcim and Hanson, rehabilitation of sand mines is now extremely important in looking after the land.

However, David Withington from Bisinella Developments said on the company website ([www.bisinella.com.au](http://www.bisinella.com.au)) that the Victorian Government and Council administrators are partly to blame for failing to enforce their own code of practice when it comes to quarry rehabilitation.

‘The Holcim and Hanson quarry has been an ugly blot on the landscape for more than a decade and the City of Greater Geelong and the State Government have failed to use their enforcement powers to do anything about it.

‘As a new entrant to the quarrying industry, we were planning to introduce extraction and rehabilitation processes that are far cleaner and greener than the methods used by any of the existing quarries.’

The Lara Care Group and the wider regional community are delighted with the decision not to open the way for another mine. But advocates also understand the lasting impact existing mines have on the landscape.

‘We think that there’s tremendous opportunity to develop tourism and offer a new experience for people coming into the region,’ Barry White said, ‘particularly international visitors through Avalon airport.

‘You’re getting an opportunity to see wildlife and a pristine landscape. If you come from a city, you don’t always get the opportunity to see the landscape in this form.

‘Tourists don’t want to come and look at a hole in the ground. They want to come and look at the wildlife and bushland, and we need to preserve the pristine nature of it.’

The battle may have been won, but the war is far from over. • PW

The authors wish to thank Lucinda Strahan, Raphael Solarsh and Naomi Blackman for their assistance with this story, which was produced for RMIT University’s Professional Communication Capstone Studio Project.

# Global hotspot for leatherbacks

GRAEME HAYS OF DEAKIN UNIVERSITY REPORTS ON VICTORIA'S IMPORTANCE TO FORAGING LEATHERBACK TURTLES.

**Going to the Victorian coast this summer? If so, keep your eyes peeled for the world's largest turtle, the leatherback.**

You might think that in Victoria you're far from turtle habitats, but in fact you will have one of the best chances of seeing them.

Surprisingly, these turtles rarely breed in Australia and you won't even see them in the usual hotspots for turtle sightings e.g. Great Barrier Reef.

The leatherbacks nest on beaches in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, then travel thousands of kilometres in search of food. Satellite tracking has recently shown that the southern coast of Australia is one of their important feeding grounds.

Unfortunately, Leatherback Turtle populations are in serious decline. Many of the direct observations on our coast come from dead turtles drowned after becoming tangled in fishing gear.

We still don't know enough about leatherbacks to protect them, even though as a signatory to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, Australia has national and international obligations to do so.

Leatherback Turtles at sea are also very difficult to study, but millions of us visit the coast each year to swim, surf, fish or just watch the sunset. Turtle sightings will allow a far better assessment of their distribution in our waters.



PHOTO: GRAEME HAYS



*Above: Many leatherbacks drown after entanglement in fishing gear.*

*Left: The leatherback's mouth is designed for eating jellyfish.*

PHOTO: GRAEME HAYS

To this end, details of how to identify leatherbacks, maps of where they have been sighted previously, and details of how to report new observations are now online as part of Deakin University's Southern Australian Sea Turtle Project.

But why do leatherbacks visit Australia? If you look in their mouth, you might be able to guess the answer. They love to eat jellyfish, so their mouths are full of backward-facing spines that help stop the jellyfish slipping away while being swallowed.

The turtles wander the oceans in search of patches of jellyfish; the patches tend to be in cooler, more productive waters, like off the coast of southern Australia.

Leatherbacks are unique among the sea turtles in being able to live happily in cool waters down to at least 15°C.

At these temperatures, most other sea turtles would become lethargic, stop feeding and ultimately die.

However, because of their large size – they weigh up to 500 kilograms and can be two metres long – and a unique physiology, leatherbacks can stay warm in our cool waters each summer and gorge on jellyfish.

There's not much energy in a jellyfish, so when the turtles find a good patch, an adult can eat 100 kilograms or more in a day. This helps them put on weight and sustains them through their return migration to the tropics to breed.

So, next time you're down on the coast of southern Australia, look out for the largest turtle in the world. Let us know if you see one by following this link (<http://cie-deakin.com/about-sast/>) and clicking 'report a sighting'. • PW



*The Black Saturday fire at Wilsons Promontory National Park. Many areas of the Prom are now well below their 'tolerable fire interval'.*

# Rapid attack boost for fires

AN INCREASE IN AERIAL RAPID ATTACK CAPABILITY IS VERY WELCOME, BUT THERE IS A LOT MORE WE CAN DO TO IMPROVE BUSHFIRE MANAGEMENT, WRITES **PHIL INGAMILLS**.

PHOTO: PARKS VICTORIA

Without much doubt, controlling a fire at the point of (or before) ignition is the best way to protect a community and its assets from conflagration. There are several ways this can be done, but there has been little action on some of them:

1. **Surveillance:** Although arson is a major contributor to bushfires, research from the University of Melbourne has found that less than one per cent of arsonists are caught and convicted. Remarkably, there is no program to set up surveillance cameras in areas where fire bugs are known to operate. Yet at any one time there are many hundreds of remote sensing cameras monitoring wildlife around Victoria.
2. **Local household power generation:** it is now easy to set up, avoiding the need for dangerous power lines in many bushland areas, but there is no incentive for householders to go down that path.
3. **Rapid aerial attack:** the progress here is welcome indeed. Not only do we now have more aircraft positioned strategically around the state, we also have a system of 'predetermined dispatch': instead of waiting for fire trucks to call for air support, planes and/or helicopters are now in the air as soon as a fire is notified. This is important – 10 minutes can make a lot of difference to our capacity to stop a fire at its source. We should do even more of this one!

There are also other very good ways to lessen the impact of fires once they get away, but again, many of these have had little attention so far:

1. Well-designed household bushfire bunkers were strongly recommended by the 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission, but there has been no program of incentives to encourage installation in existing homes, or require it in new homes.
2. The Royal Commission's 19 recommendations for strong planning regulations in fire-prone areas have often been implemented half-heartedly, and some are routinely ignored.
3. Canada and the USA have powers to allow compulsory evacuation in the face of fires, but Victoria favours a perilous voluntary 'stay or go' policy. As saving lives is the prime objective of our fire policy, this apparent emphasis on saving infrastructure above public safety is highly questionable – the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) actually uses built infrastructure as a surrogate for people in its fire planning processes.

Victoria's chief strategy for bushfire safety remains fuel reduction burning, and though the Royal Commission's ambitious target of 390,000 ha each year has been dumped in favour of a

'risk-based' approach, DELWP holds to a 270,000 ha annual target – roughly what it has previously actually aimed at.

If you reduce fuel loads you can, of course, reduce the severity of a fire. But there is now plenty of evidence that, even though a fuel/fire relationship is unarguable, the link between fuel reduction burning and our capacity to save lives is much less clear.

For a start, lives are most in peril in severe fire weather, when bushfires reach the forest canopy regardless of ground fuel levels, and are then unstoppable till the weather moderates.

Then there's the problem that lightning (the most common cause of serious wildfire) usually involves multiple strikes over a large area, only rarely landing in a recently 'fuel reduced' zone.

For these and other reasons, the most effective areas to reduce fuel are close to homes, where the reduction in severity really counts, not in remote areas.

DELWP, by its own account, is failing in its efforts to protect the public. And, largely because of the frequency and extent of fire in the landscape, has also been failing to protect our natural heritage.

Perhaps if we direct resources to some or all of the strategies above, we might have a comprehensive plan that better protects lives, and gives our natural heritage a fighting chance for the future. • PWW



# Herring Island

GEOFF DURHAM TAKES A PUNT ON THE YARRA RIVER AND LANDS ON HERRING ISLAND.

PHOTO BY GEOFF DURHAM

There is nothing as liberating as an island experience – and you can have one less than four kilometres from the centre of Melbourne at Herring Island Environmental Sculpture Park in the Yarra River at South Yarra (Melway map 2M Ref. C2).

My first visit was on a scout leaders' training course in the early 1960s but I did not visit again until an open day, probably in the early 1990s. I recall seeing a fox den. Since then, I have visited on various occasions.

The three-hectare island was created in 1928-29 when a bend in the river was cut through the abandoned Richmond bluestone quarries as part of a flood mitigation scheme. The Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works named the island 'Como', built levee banks around its perimeter with silt dredged from the river, and planted native and exotic trees and shrubs. The island was leased by the Boy Scouts Association in 1951 and renamed Herring Island after the president of the Association and Chief Justice of Victoria, Sir Edmund Herring.

The scouts gave up the lease in 1971, after which the island was managed by a Committee of Management until 1994 when Melbourne Parks and Waterways (later to become Parks Victoria) took over and released a concept plan. The old scout hall was renovated and a mud-walled courtyard added for art and handcraft exhibitions, with a display of historical photographs in a side room. Good picnic and BBQ facilities were installed. Eight outdoor sculptures were progressively commissioned – two by the internationally recognised Andy Goldsworthy. Expectations were high. It was described as 'A haven for nature and art lovers alike' and 'The Island of Dreams'. The 2017 Herring Island Summer Arts Festival, running from mid-January to Easter, will feature an arts and crafts show at the hall.

Most of the island's vegetation has been introduced – either deliberately with plantings or accidentally in soil or by wind, water or animal-borne seed. A

lightwood is believed to be an original plant pre-dating the island. Most of the surface is covered in weeds, particularly invasive African grasses: Panic Veld Grass *Ehrharta erecta*, Annual Veld Grass *Ehrharta longiflora* and Kikuyu *Pennisetium clandestinum*.

The island has rats and visiting foxes. Native mammals are possums and Rakali - the native water rat - and a Swamp Wallaby was present for a few weeks in 2003. There are also snakes and some good bird habitat. The cut-off loop is silting up, creating a tidal mud bank on the south side visible at low tide that attracts waders.

The park is open all year round, except on days of total fire ban, but to get there you have to paddle your canoe or somehow cross the river. Parks Victoria operate a punt for weekend access in the summer months – initially during daylight saving, but this year from





Left: 'Steerage' by sculptor Jill Peck is a metaphor for journeys, water and knowledge on the western end of Herring Island.

Below left: For around 25 years the Friends of Herring Island have been battling weeds and planting native species.

Below right: 'Stone House' by British sculptor Andy Goldsworthy, emphasises the sense of discovery and concealment that an island holds for him.



PHOTOS BY GEOFF DURHAM

Saturday 10 December to Easter 2017 on Saturdays and Sundays from 10.00 am to 5.00 pm. The punt leaves from the Como landing off Alexandra Avenue - \$2.00 return. The voyage takes about a minute – long enough to turn off your mobile phone.

A mound around the perimeter protects a basin where there is a flat grassed area with shelters, electric BBQs and picnic tables. There is muted background noise of Citylink traffic. Take your rubbish home. No dogs, bicycles or camping. Bookings can be made for events – phone 131963.

The island has not realised its potential. It is such an attractive getaway, why aren't there more visitors? An obvious reason is access, but there may be a broader explanation. My observations suggest that the old-fashioned simple

picnic in a park, which years ago was a very popular family outing with homemade sandwiches, cakes and raspberry vinegar, followed by a billy-boil on a fireplace (more recently on electric and gas BBQs), has declined, except for some ethnic communities. Many young people now prefer virtual reality to the outdoors. We have become a latté society – the café on the bank opposite the island is very popular.

Management of the park seems to be in a downward spiral with occasional bursts of activity. Parks Victoria's inadequate financing requires it to prioritise; lower visitation means less resourcing, leading to a neglected looking, less attractive park – a chicken and egg situation.

The Friends of Herring Island have been battling the weeds and planting native species for about 25 years. Because there are no rabbits it has not been necessary to guard plants. There have been disappointments, but particular and spectacular success with saltbushes, no doubt because of the nature of the soil. The volunteer Friends group meets on the first Sunday of each month throughout the year, with punt access provided by Parks Victoria. Much more could be done with more help. The contact is Damian Curtain on (03) 9442 2521.

If you haven't been to Herring Island, check it out this summer. • PW



Stags and damage  
caught on camera at  
Monbulk Creek.

# Deer oh deer ...

PHOTO BY ALEX MAISEY

DEER HAVE BECOME THE PRIME BENEFICIARIES OF VICTORIA'S PUBLIC LAND, INCLUDING OUR MOST PRECIOUS PARKS AND RESERVES. IT'S TIME TO CHANGE THAT SITUATION SAYS **PHIL INGAMELLS**.

There could be up to one million deer running wild across Victoria, according to a statement by the Australian Deer Association during its appearance at the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Control of Invasive Animals on Crown Land. They could be right.

The damage deer cause is now widely recognised, and Sambar Deer are listed as a Potentially Threatening Process under Victoria's *Flora and Fauna Guarantee (FFG) Act*. Yet Sambar, as well as Hog, Fallow, Chital, Rusa and Red deer, remain protected as game species under much older legislation, the *Wildlife Act*.

Let's get some perspective on the problems that situation poses.

Victoria's public land hosts around 100,000 native species, including a remarkable assemblage of plants, animals, invertebrates and fungi. Many are threatened with extinction: the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) 'advisory list' identifies close to 1,000 endangered, vulnerable or rare native plants in the state.

Victoria's native species and the ecosystems on which they depend are given legal protection:

- globally under the International Convention on Biodiversity (see box)
- nationally under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act*
- statewide under the *National Parks Act*, the *Catchment and Land Protection (CALP) Act* and the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee (FFG) Act*, among others.

So we are not short of legislation to allow control of the impacts deer have on natural systems. Those impacts include: browsing on shrubs and herbs, particularly the consumption of flowers, seeds and fruits; antler rubbing leading to weakening or even completely ring-barking trees; trampling undergrowth; and wallowing in peatbed and other wetland areas from the alpine plains to lowland rainforest gullies.

The FFG Act listing for Sambar Deer identifies impacts on a dozen already threatened vegetation communities and a number of threatened plants, and the extent of such impacts by it and other deer has grown since the nomination for that listing was put forward in 2005.

The core issue here is whether control of feral deer in national parks should be strategically planned by public land managers with a good understanding of the complexity of natural ecosystems, drawing from the best scientific studies as well as experience. Or should strategic planning be skewed by a particular interest group, the recreational hunters, who are claiming that increasing their access to more of our national parks is the best way to control these animals?

The Victorian experience of an exploding deer population despite a very large amateur deer harvest (and it is large) should be enough evidence that hunting isn't the answer. While recreational hunting undoubtedly has an impact in some areas:



*Top right: The bush as it should be.  
Quite common plants can become less  
abundant through browsing or trampling by deer.*

*Bottom right (left to right): Running Postman;  
Pink Fingers; White Flag Lilly.*

- the amateur harvest is biggest where the deer are in abundance, but is much smaller where the deer are in smaller numbers, allowing populations to re-establish
- amateur shooters concentrate their attention on relatively accessible areas, allowing healthy and large breeding populations in areas more remote
- amateurs often target 'trophy' stags, but a new buck quickly takes its place, leaving females to continue breeding
- there is no strategic culling in areas where the most vulnerable ecosystems are being damaged.

In a sort of half-way approach towards professional management of the deer problem, Parks Victoria has engaged selected 'accredited' sporting shooters in a number of strategic programs across the state. This has happened at Yellingbo and Warramate Hills nature conservation reserves and Dandenong Ranges and Wilsons Promontory national parks, but in each place only relatively small numbers of deer were removed. A similar experimental program took place on the Bogong High Plains, where deer (and horses!) are now replicating cattle damage.

But if we are to get serious with this business, we need to call in the professionals. They have many advantages over even the best amateurs. They can use silencers, thermal imaging equipment and more effective guns, and are experienced in operating from helicopters. Importantly, they can operate far more humanely, and are trained and licensed to work in areas open to the public.

For these reasons, professionals have become the operators of choice in our precious water catchments. Our park managers, however, have such stretched budgets they see working with accredited amateurs as the first option available to them.

We believe deer damage can only be addressed by a series of well-informed, targeted strategic programs, developed under expert advice and, crucially, given appropriate levels of long-term funding.



PHOTOS BY PHIL INGAMIELLS

## Options for the future

There is a crying need for research programs into a range of options for pest control, including targeted, humane options for baiting animals (including delivery techniques) and innovative biological and genetic controls. It will be particularly hard to reduce populations of the many species of deer in Victoria to suitable levels by any of the control methods currently in use. That leaves us with a scenario of long-term expensive management, most likely also including fencing off large areas of Victoria's public land.

If we are ever to achieve cost-effective management of deer, and many other pest species, research must be funded and all options explored as a matter of urgency.

Responsibility for management of pest species on crown land is the responsibility of Victoria's land management agencies, acting on behalf of the people of Victoria (a responsibility clarified in the various Acts mentioned above).

We do not believe existing or extended opportunities for amateur hunting are useful strategies for reducing the impact of invasive animals on our native ecosystems. It's an inappropriate activity in a national park where visitor safety and enjoyment are overriding priorities. • PW

According to Article 8 of the International Convention on Biological Diversity which Australia ratified in 1993, signatories must, among other things:

- Establish a system of protected areas or areas where special measures need to be taken to conserve biological diversity;
- Develop, where necessary, guidelines for the selection, establishment and management of protected areas or areas where special measures need to be taken to conserve biological diversity;
- Promote the protection of ecosystems, natural habitats and the maintenance of viable populations of species in natural surroundings;
- Promote environmentally sound and sustainable development in areas adjacent to protected areas with a view to furthering protection of these areas;
- Rehabilitate and restore degraded ecosystems and promote the recovery of threatened species, inter alia, through the development and implementation of plans or other management strategies.
- Prevent the introduction of, control or eradicate those alien species which threaten ecosystems, habitats or species.



A male smooth newt captured in a Melbourne suburb this year as part of a survey conducted by Ecology Australia.

# The salamander affair

INVASIVE SPECIES COUNCIL VOLUNTEER DANIELLE WOODHAMS FINDS A TOXIC AMPHIBIAN IN MELBOURNE'S MURKY WATERS.

The suburbs of Melbourne have become home to a dangerous new ecological invader.

Five years ago, a single Smooth Newt was found in a pool of water at a Melbourne building site by a construction worker. The find was deeply alarming because it is the first time an entirely new amphibian order has been recorded outside of captivity in Australia.

The Smooth Newt *Lissotriton vulgaris*, which belongs to the amphibian family of salamanders and newts, is native to large parts of Europe and to western Asia.

Originally brought to Australia for the aquarium pet trade, it's likely the newt found in Melbourne originates from escaped or released captive animals.

Australia has no native salamanders or newts, so this discovery presents a potentially huge problem for our wildlife.

Smooth newts are prolific breeders, have a broad diet and can use a wide range of terrestrial and aquatic habitats. They are likely to compete for food and habitat with native frogs and fish, and are potentially carriers of chytrid fungus, which has decimated frog populations worldwide. Native predators including birds, snakes and fish are also at risk if they ingest the potentially deadly skin secretions produced by the Smooth Newt.

An assessment by the Australian Government identified the Smooth Newt as having a 'moderate' invasive species risk, and concluded that impacts on native plants and animals were uncertain. However, two years after the first detection, the former Victorian Department of Environment and



In search of the Smooth Newt in Melbourne.

Primary Industries decided not to take any control action. Despite the modest \$300,000 estimated price tag, the department conservatively considered the feasibility of eradication as 'low- moderate'.

This decision caused concern among local scientists who believed that a preventative course of action should be taken to avoid another cane-toad-like disaster. For the Invasive Species Council, the poor decision-making represents fundamental flaws in Australia's national biosecurity response systems and the low priority given to stopping invasive species that harm the environment.

With pro-bono assistance from ecological consultancy, Ecology Australia, the Invasive Species Council undertook surveys this year to determine if the Smooth Newt is persisting in Melbourne. So far, it has been found surviving around at least one of the previous sites.

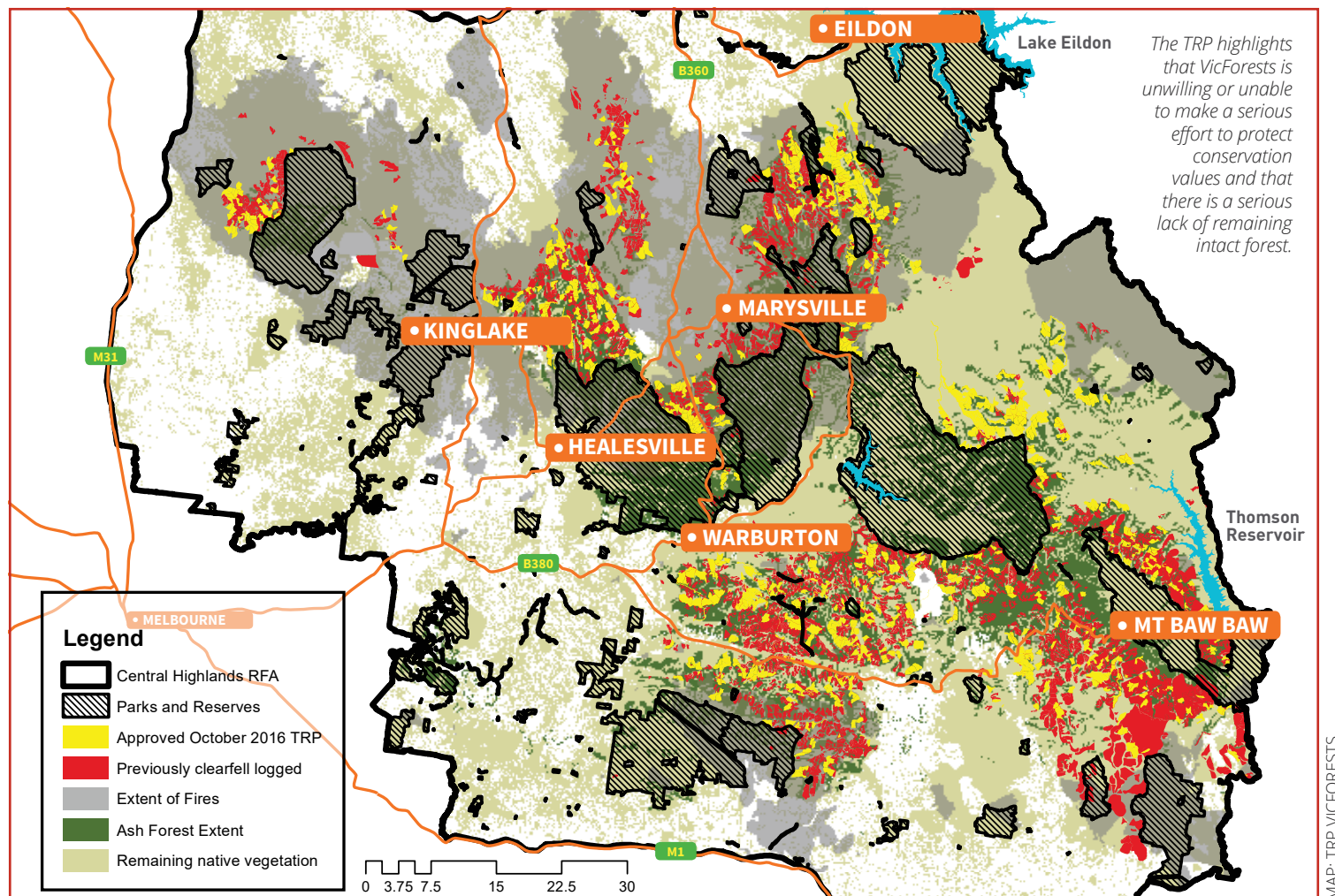
The data collected will help trigger a rethink on eradicating the Smooth Newt from Melbourne before it has time to colonise other parts of Australia.

Our time to act is rapidly running out. • PW

PHOTO BY BERNADETTE SCHMIDT

PHOTO BY ANDREW COX





## Victoria's logging plan puts squeeze on high-value native forests

Victoria is now the largest logger of native forest by volume in Australia – around a third of Australia's total native forest logging.

In 2015-2016, VicForests, the state government logging agency, logged more than 1.3 million cubic metres of wood from Victoria's native forests, almost 100,000 cubic metres above the previous year. Tasmania, by comparison, logged just under 1.1 million cubic metres of native forest in the same period.

And this trend continues.

On 17 October 2016, VicForests released the 2016 Timber Release Plan (TRP), which identified approximately 67,000 ha of publicly owned state forest to be available as logging coupes over the next 3-5 year period.

Conservationists are dismayed and alarmed by the release of the latest TRP. It clears the way for the logging of more than 10,000 hectares of high-conservation-value forest

(HCV forest) in the central highlands, and 12,000 ha in East Gippsland identified by conservation groups as high priority for interim protection from logging. These areas are needed to be the core of future national parks and conservation reserves.

The TRP highlights that VicForests is unwilling or unable to make a serious effort to protect conservation values and that there is a serious lack of remaining intact forest.

Conservationists have long argued the industry is ecologically destructive and not sustainable. But the latest TRP amendment, and the inability to step around even a relatively small comparative area of high-conservation-value places, shows just how squeezed the forests have become due to the combined impacts of decades of logging and the impact of wild fire.

If VicForests is allowed to complete the logging proposed in this latest TRP, it will significantly undermine the ability to create the Great Forest National Park and other

new national parks and protected area networks in eastern Victoria, threatening the very survival of the state's faunal emblem, the Leadbeater's Possum, and the health of many other forest species.

While a Forest Industry Taskforce involving industry, unions and conservation groups has been established, negotiations with VicForests to avoid even these high-value core areas have failed.

The Andrews Government said in its 2014 election commitment that it will only consider new national parks if major stakeholders agree: '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'.

Unfortunately, business as usual imposes a devastating outcome on forest conservation interests. Once the forest is logged, the habitat and conservation values are gone, at least for century or so if not for ever. • PW

# East Gippsland

## - SELF-DRIVE MAP -

KEY



ROUTE TO FOLLOW



NUMBERED STOP



SEALED ROAD



2WD GRAVEL RD OR TOWN RD



WALKING TRACK



RIVER



SEASONAL ROAD CLOSURES

Due to road conditions sections of this route are closed between June and November. When driving this route during the Winter months, the stops north of Goongerah are reliably accessible, however accessing the plateau can be more difficult.



SOME SIGNIFICANT LOGGING COUPES



SUGGESTED LUNCH STOP



FIREPLACE



TOILET



CAMPING SPOT

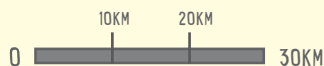


LOOKOUT AREA/  
SPECTACULAR VIEWS

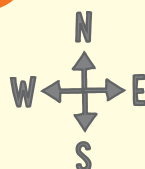


PICNIC TABLE

INDICATIVE SCALE



Please note this map is not exactly to scale.



**GETTING THERE:** From Orbost, take the Bonang Highway (route C612) towards Goongerah. Before you leave, fuel-up at service stations located in Orbost (closes 8pm) or Newmerella. Driving through the Martins Creek area (about 47km from Orbost), notice the large vines and tree ferns of this National Rainforest Site of Significance.

There is a free campground with toilets and fireplaces in Goongerah down Ellery Creek Track (look for metal owl sculpture). This is a lovely spot to camp and start the Self-drive Tour the next day.

To start the Self-drive Tour, take Sardine Creek Rd, off the Bonang Highway.

## 6. OLD GROWTH FOREST WALK

Backtrack to the intersection of Goonmirk Rocks and Gunmark Rds. Turn right and follow Gunmark Rd towards Tea Tree Flat camp area on the left. Situated on the Delegate River and in contrast to the tall, wet forests elsewhere on the Plateau, Tea Tree Flat features sphagnum moss and heath plants. **This rare, alpine wetland is inside the National Park, but is drying up due to logging in its headwaters.** Logging decreases the quality and quantity of water in the landscape.

Continue to the Orbost-Bendoc (Gap) Rd intersection. Turn left and look for the Old Growth Forest Walk carpark on left 1-2km down the road. This 2 to 3 hour walk with sections of boardwalk will take you through tall wet forest, rainforest, and one of Victoria's largest trees, discovered and protected from logging by Goongerah Environment Centre conservationists in 2003.

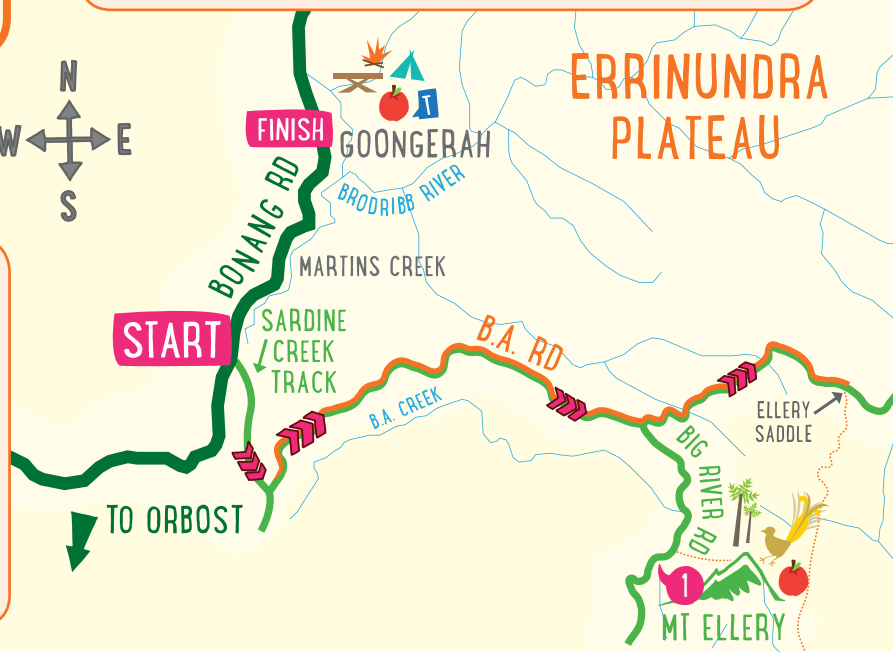
**Unique and endangered wildlife live in this old-growth forest, such as Australia's largest gliding marsupial, the Greater Glider.**

They live high in the treetops, eating gum leaves and are capable of gliding up to 100m in a single leap.



Large Tree protected after discovery by GECO | Ed Hill

**GETTING HOME:** Continue along Gap Rd until you will reach Bonang Rd. Turn left to go Goongerah and Orbost. This is the direction for Melbourne.



## 1. ELLERY CREEK CATCHMENT AND ELLERY SUMMIT WALK:

Travelling along Sardine Creek Rd, turn left onto B.A. Rd. In 10km you will see Big River Rd on the right (road sign is next to National Park sign). Turn right here if you decide to do the Ellery Summit Walk (2 to 3 hours return), which starts on the left around 3km along Big River Rd.

The ecosystem on the mountain is very special and the area is a significant place for Traditional Owners. Massive granite monoliths stand sentinel in the lush forest marking the highest point in the region at 1,219m. **Take the opportunity to walk through some spectacular forest, amongst very old Alpine Ash trees with a flourishing, grassy understorey.**

The short and demanding but very rewarding 1km climb takes you to the giant granite tors on the summit of Mt Ellery.



Granite tors on Mt. Ellery summit | Duncan Fraser





**5. LOGGING COUPES:** From Rooty Break Trail continue along Goonmirk Rocks Rd for around 4km to the junction with Clarkeville Rd. Continue to the right along Goonmirk Rocks Rd. **You will notice the forest change dramatically as you enter this area of devastating logging coupes. Be sure to take a close look at the impacts of the logging.**

The trees you see left standing are 'habitat' trees and are left due to their supposed seed spreading ability and alleged habitat value for native wildlife. You will see these trees are now very unhealthy. The ecological disturbance caused by logging and post-logging burns leads to high death rates. Dead or alive, these trees are no longer suitable habitat for the species that depended on them. Ecosystems inside the Errinundra National Park are also impacted due to the effects of logging here.

From Clarkeville Rd continue for around 3km over the hill on Goonmirk Rocks Rd to the Back Creek Rd / Hensleigh Creek Rd junction and turn right. Travel 0.5km down Hensleigh Creek Rd and you will see a large logging coupe on the right. In 2015, the Goongerah Environment Centre (GECO) reported unlawful rainforest logging here. Without the watchful eye of this citizen science we would not know the significance of logging in this area. **Ancient rainforest canopy trees such as Sassafras and Black Olive Berry were bulldozed in the gully.**

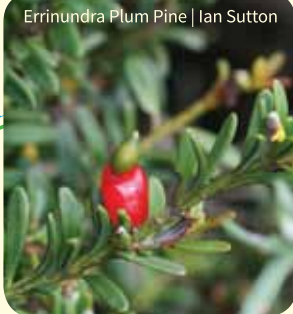
**The giant stumps near the road were once Eucalyptus trees, some over 500 years old.** The state government investigated and condemned the logging but refused to take regulatory action.



600 years to grow, one hour to destroy | Environment East Gippsland



Errinundra Plum Pine | Ian Sutton



**4. ROOTY BREAK TRAIL:** From the rainforest walk continue on Errinundra Rd until you reach the intersection of Errinundra and Gunmark Rds. Turn right and drive along Gunmark Rd until you come to the junction with Goonmirk Rocks Rd. Turn right into Goonmirk Rocks Rd towards Rooty Break Trail (2.3km from Gunmark / Goonmirk Rocks junction, sign on the right but hidden behind vegetation).

This spectacular rainforest walk goes down Rooty Break Trail to Coast Range Rd. It takes about 20 minutes to reach Coast Range Rd, **passing ginormous Shining Gums and thickets of Errinundra Plum Pine that scientists say are over 1,000 years old!**

For a longer walk, turn right onto Coast Range Rd at the end of the trail and follow it back to Goonmirk Rocks rd, turn right towards Goonmirk Rocks and follow the road back to your car.

## 2. OCEAN VIEW (GOOLENGOOK) LOOKOUT:

Drive back to B.A. Rd, turn right and continue to Ellery Saddle. B.A Rd becomes Greens Rd. Ocean View Lookout is on the side of the road on the right (0.5km before Ada Divide Track).

Ocean View Lookout is on the edge of the Errinundra Plateau looking south. **Soak up this spectacular view of the Goolengook valley and the blanket of old growth forest – some of the most spectacular left on mainland Australia.**

The Goolengook valley was to be logged and woodchipped, but in the late 1990s conservationists took direct action. After five years, the longest running forest protest in Australia's history resulted in the addition of 5,000 hectares of the magnificent Goolengook forest to the Errinundra National Park.



The iconic Goolengook valley | Nicole Newbert

## 3. ERRINUNDRA SADDLE RAINFOREST WALK:

Continue along Greens Rd (becomes Errinundra Rd) towards Mt Morris Picnic Area. For those wanting to take more time doing this tour, the Mt Morris walk is an easy short walk through Alpine Ash forests to a granite outcrop that looks over the Snowy River country.

Continue along Errinundra Rd, passing Hammond Rd on the right. Not far after this, the Errinundra Saddle Rainforest Walk at Blockade Track is on the right.

**This easy trail winds its way under the ancient, cool-temperate rainforest canopy and over small streams.** You will see many elegant ferns and colourful fungi when it is wet. This part of the forest is dominated by Southern Sassafras and Black Olive Berry. The giant Errinundra Shining Gums on this walk are over 600 years old and were only first described as a species in 1991. Breathe deeply as you take in the rainforest atmosphere, and please stick to the boardwalk that is designed to protect the delicate rainforest environment.



Picnicking in the rainforest | Environment East Gippsland



# Traditional Owners managing country in southwest Victoria

JENNY NORVICK EXPLORES HOW GUNDITJ MARA CULTURE AND ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE ARE BECOMING INTEGRAL TO PARK MANAGEMENT.

**'I'll take you to Lake Condah', offered Denis Rose, a Gunditj Mara man and Project Officer with the Gunditj Miring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (GMTOAC). 'I can show you the eels. They're fat and plentiful this year after all the rain we've had.'**

Lake Condah is a creation of the Tyrendarra lava flow, which poured out of Mount Eccles when it erupted some 30,000 years ago, a wondrous sight witnessed by Gunditj Mara people. The lava coursed south to the sea along the Darlot Creek valley, interrupting the creek's flow and creating the lake and a series of wetlands and pools as it made its way south to the sea. The pools and wetlands provided a livelihood based on eel farming, and the capacity to live a settled life that has been dated back 6,600 years.

By the time we visited, the rains had been too good and Lake Condah was in flood. We couldn't get through to see the system of pools and channels constructed by Denis's ancestors to trap and farm eels, nor to explore the remains of the domed stone and slab-roof houses where they used to live.

Instead, we visited Kurtonij Indigenous Protected Area (IPA), a Gunditj Mara-owned property downstream on the lava flow. We saw how stone blocks from the lava flow were used to construct pools, and trapping points where cylindrical woven-reed traps could be placed to trap eels.

En route, Denis showed us the Lake Condah Mission site where surviving members of the Gunditj Mara were herded in the 1860s, after they had been driven off their lands.

The Mission holds a special place in the post-European settlement history of the Gunditj Mara people, as many families continued to live on or visit the mission up until recent times. This ongoing link formed the basis for their first successful claim for land; ownership of the Lake Condah Mission was handed back in 1988.

The Gunditj Mara were granted native title in 2007. Their lands are bounded by water, three rivers – the Glenelg on the west, the Wannon (north) and the Eumerella (east) – and the sea to the south. They include 2,000 parcels of vacant crown land, national parks, reserves, rivers, creeks and the sea, and encompass volcanic lands, limestone caves, forests, marine national parks, sea country and a rugged coastline. In 2011 they were granted joint native title with the Eastern Maar over lands to the east between the Eumerella and Shaw Rivers, including Deen Maar (Lady Julia Percy Island).



During the early 2000s, the Gunditj Mara set about purchasing the private land along the lava flow, using funds from the Indigenous Land Corporation. This land was incorporated into six IPAs, three of which, Lake Condah, Kurtonij and Tyrendarra, are declared as part of the national reserve system while the other three are proposed. Along with Mount Eccles National Park (soon to be renamed Budj Bim National Park) and the Lake Condah Mission, they form the Budj Bim Heritage Landscape, which was included on the National



*A channel used to set an eel trap in the Kurtonij IPA.*



*The remains of a stone house in the Kurtonij IPA.*





Lake Surprise is the flooded crater of Mount Eccles, which spewed out the Tyrendarra lava flow.

stood looking at the flood-cut road at Lake Condah. 'We want to share our history and culture with as many people as possible.'

When native title was granted, GMTOAC was made comanager of Mount Eccles National Park with the State, which is represented by Parks Victoria, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and the Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority. The Budj Bim Council was set up to steer the comanagement process. It has ten members, six Traditional Owners and four staff from the three agencies.

'So what does comanagement involve?' I asked Parks Victoria ranger, Peter Hill, in his Portland office.

'Good question!' he says. 'Whilst the native title agreement specifies how comanagement should look, the Budj Bim Council has had to discover how it works in practice.'

'But all parties to the agreement think that is a good thing. It enables us to work together as partners to develop practical local responses to issues, using the best available scientific knowledge and the cultural and ecological knowledge of the Traditional Owners.'

Although the term comanagement isn't used, the Gunditj Mara are also equal partners in the *Ngootyoong Gunditj, Ngootyoong Mara Southwest Management Plan 2015*, which provides the framework for managing all Parks Victoria and Aboriginal-owned and managed land in the region. The Gunditj Mara cowrote the plan and partner in its implementation, and their influence shows.

The plan takes a new approach to land management. It still sets environmental, visitor and tourism, cultural and research objectives. But it also embeds the narrative of Gunditj Mara history, cultural and ecological knowledge and spiritual beliefs as an integral part of how the land is perceived and of how the land should be managed in the future.

'Parks Victoria still takes responsibility for the environmental issues and park management throughout the broader park system,' says Peter Hill, 'and the Traditional Owners provide support and alternative management directions.'

'We consult with Gunditj Mirring on a broad spectrum of management concerns; for example, on keeping machinery and fire away from a scar tree during a burn-off. If the Traditional Owners raise any issues, we seek a resolution as a group.'

'For the most part our objectives are the same, whether it is controlling the numbers of koalas in parks or working together to prevent off-road vehicles from driving over the sand dunes, eroding them and potentially destroying shell middens or Hooded Plover nests.'

'The partnership works because the people involved actively promote respectful relationships,' Peter tells me. 'The Gunditj Mara leaders are progressive thinkers, passionate about the environment, culture and heritage and providing information to the wider community. There's a lot of pride in the group and that has created pride and confidence in their community.' • PW

Heritage List in 2004. An early murder site, the Convincing Ground at Allestree, is also part of the Heritage Landscape.

The Gunditj Mara have applied for UNESCO World Heritage Listing with the support of the Victorian Government, which has also provided \$8 million in funding to develop tourism facilities.

'We'll use some of that tourism money to build an all-weather road to our eel ponds and settlements,' Denis Rose told me as we



Land and seascapes stretching west beyond Portland's Nelson Bay and are covered by the 2015 Ngootyoong Gunditj, Ngootyoong Mara Southwest Management Plan.

PHOTOS BY JENNY NORVICK

# Parks need Friends!

VNPA HONORARY LIFE MEMBER AND FORMER PRESIDENT, **GEOFF DURHAM**, EXPLAINS HOW FRIENDS OF PARKS GROUPS DEVELOPED IN VICTORIA.

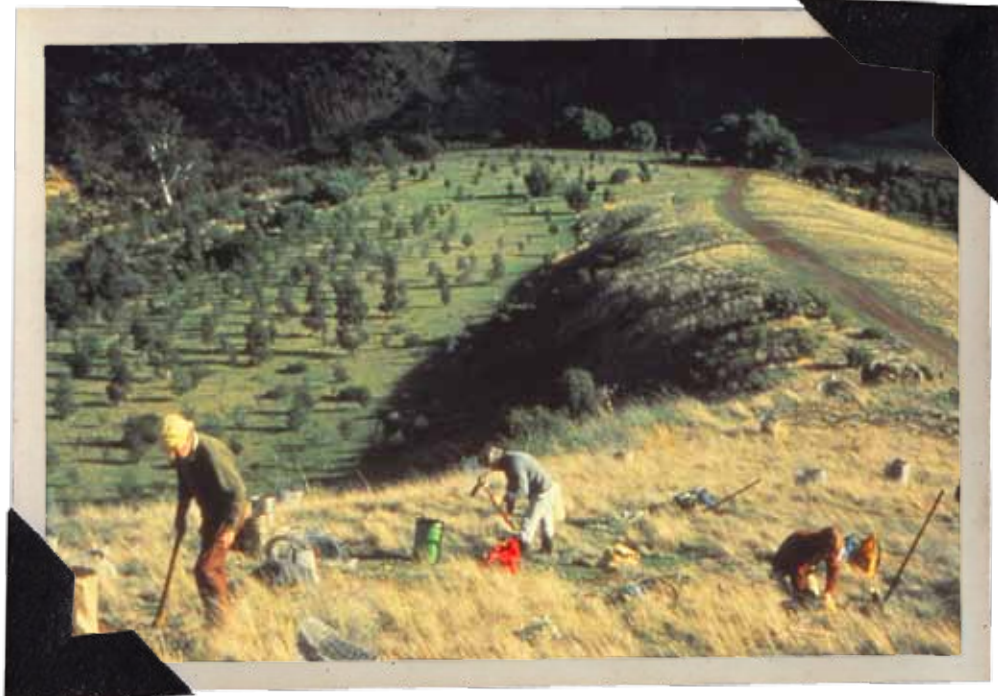


PHOTO BY LEONARD SMITH

*The first Friends group to be formed was the Friends of Organ Pipes National Park in 1975. Here group members plant trees in an early effort to rehabilitate the park.*

The VNPA Newsletter of June 1972 carried this item:

## MARIBYRNONG VALLEY GROUP FORMED

**'A new conservation group, the Maribyrnong Valley Committee of the VNPA, has been formed in the north-western suburbs with Mr Don Marsh as Convenor. One of its aims is to co-operate with the National Parks Service to clear and replant to native species the recently gazetted Organ Pipes NP'**

The Maribyrnong Valley Committee (MVC) formed in 1972, its main function being to help the National Parks Service restore the landscape of the newly created Sydenham Organ Pipes National Park to something like its natural condition. Three years later MVC changed its name to Friends of Organ Pipes National Park – Victoria's first Friends group for a national park – and it is still in existence today.

Friends of parks groups were clearly an idea whose time had come, and many more were established in the 1970s and 80s, some at the instigation of VNPA or other environment groups. A summary list follows with their formation date in brackets.

**Friends of Wyperfeld National Park (1976):** has met in the park every Queen's Birthday weekend since then, and on some other occasions. Activities include tree planting, weeding and interpretation work.

**Friends of Nepean Parks (1977):** name changed to Friends of Arthurs Seat State Park about 1994. In 2004 it was absorbed into the Seawinds Nursery Volunteers, who raise indigenous plants for the Mornington Peninsula parks.

**Friends of Coolart (1979):** supports activities such as revegetation and bird surveys, runs the Friends shop and curates historical records.

**Friends of the Prom (1979):** grows and plants out indigenous trees and shrubs, removes weeds and rubbish and helps with track maintenance.

**Friends of Churchill Island Society (1980):** active in fundraising and in protecting and promoting the island's historical significance and natural beauty. The island is now part of Phillip Island Nature Parks.

**Friends of Sherbrooke Forest (1980):** weed control and forest restoration.

Others included: Friends of Baw Baw National Park (1980), Friends of Mount Worth State Park (1981), Friends of Kinglake National Park (1981), and Friends of Warrandyte State Park (1982).

You can find out more about these groups on the internet; most have websites.

More groups were formed in succeeding years, but for several years after 1985, because of changes within the then Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands and uncertainty about its attitudes to volunteers, the

VNPA (after discussion with the Director of National Parks) did not initiate the formation of new groups. However, the idea had taken off, and groups that originated outside of the VNPA received its endorsement.

At the time, I was on the VNPA Council as Coordinator of Friends Groups, and in 1983 organised the first Friends of National Parks Conference at Woodlands (attended by 16 groups and 42 delegates) and the second at Tidal River in 1985 (27 groups and 70 delegates). The aim of the conferences was to share knowledge and experience among Friends groups and to hear from experts in park management, ecology and other park-related topics.

I became the Convenor of the Interim Friends committee formed at the second conference, tasked with organising a third at Howmans Gap in 1987 (26 groups and 59 delegates). A 'Friends of National Parks Committee' was then elected. The fourth conference was at Roses Gap (Grampians National Park) in 1989 (28 groups and 71 delegates). At the fifth Biennial Friends conference at Bacchus in March 1991 it was decided to formalise and expand the existing national parks network to include all Friends groups.

In 1997 the VNPA Council adopted a formal policy aimed at encouraging and sponsoring the formation of Friends groups for national parks and other conservation reserves, and for native species of flora and fauna.



The policy insisted that:

- a Friends group would be autonomous and independent of VNPA, but could become a Club Member
- VNPA would publicise the groups
- VNPA Council would co-opt a member of the Friends Network Committee onto Council and nominate a councillor to join the Committee
- administrative assistance to the Friends Network Committee would be provided by VNPA.

At the July 1999 Friends Network Seminar, a Friends Network Constitution was adopted. In August 2006 the name was changed from Friends Network to Victorian Environment Friends Network to avoid confusion with other non-environment groups such as Friends of the ABC. A Friends Network News was published from July 1991 until May 2003, when there was a name change to FriendsNET.

The Best Friend Award was established at the 5th Friends Conference in 1991, the first recipient being Don Marsh of Friends of Organ Pipes. The Award recognises an outstanding contribution and exceptional dedication as a Friend over a long period.

Nominations may be made only by a Friends Group; the particular significance of the Award is that it represents recognition by one's peers. Up to 2015, a total of 65 Friends had received the Award. Six Awards for 2016 were presented at the Victorian Environment Friends Network's AGM in November (see box).

A Friends group is an autonomous and independent group of volunteer supporters of an indigenous flora or fauna species, a conservation reserve or an area of scenic, historic, cultural or scientific interest. They are not paid in cash or kind, and they do things that would often not otherwise get done.

Friends work with, not for, the management authority. The key is mutual respect and good communication. Friends groups are particularly significant as expressions of community support.

Groups form out of community environmental consciousness and concern. They are a grassroots phenomenon and the proliferation of groups has been remarkable, with hundreds now established.

There is constant change, with new groups emerging and others fading away. A common complaint by groups is the lack of younger people. I think there is great potential for attracting retirees.

The contribution of volunteers, particularly Friends groups, to conservation and parks in Victoria is enormous, perhaps incalculable. • PW

## The best of friends

Each year the Victorian Environment Friends Network bestows the Best Friend Award to members of Friends groups that have gone that extra mile. This year the awards were presented by the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Lily D'Ambrosio. The awardees for 2016 are:

**Stanley Barker:** Friends of Burke Road Billabong Reserve. Ten years ago, Stanley helped form the group after he noticed derelict land on the Yarra. It had been the Kew Tip but was one of the last remaining natural billabongs on the Yarra River. He and the group have worked to rehabilitate the area with plantings and weed control.

**Merrin Butler and Paul Strickland:** Friends of Mount Worth State Park. Merrin and Paul have secured substantial grants for the group that have enabled the planting of hundreds of trees, the upgrade of walking tracks and the installation of interpretive signs. They



From left to right: Stanley Barker, Peter Somerville, Minister D'Ambrosio, Paul Strickland, Merrin Butler, Terry Lane, and Jane Hollands.

have also planted 20,000 indigenous plants on their own property.

**Jane Hollands:** Friends of Sassafras Creek. Jane joined the group 17 years ago and has championed the creation of the Community Weed Alliance of the Dandenongs, works with others to promote and encourage participation in the Melbourne Water Stream Frontage Program, and talks to local businesses and residents about weed management.

**Terry Lane:** Friends of Organ Pipes National Park. Terry is convenor of the group but also a Waterwatch volunteer

and a helper with bat monitoring, and was instrumental in setting up a sugar glider monitoring program in the park as well as involving a local school in a long-term planting and plant monitoring project there.

**Peter Somerville:** Friends of Maribyrnong Valley. Peter has been a member of the group for 30 years and has worked tirelessly to improve and restore the quality of the Maribyrnong River and its surrounding parklands. With his son, he conducts cruises along the Maribyrnong River on the well-known vessel *Blackbird*.





# LOOKING OUT FOR THE BUNYIP

VOLUNTEER EMMA BARNETT AND NATUREWATCH COORDINATOR CHRISTINE CONNELLY EXPLORE BUNYIP STATE PARK AND THE WORK OF THE LOCAL FRIENDS GROUP.

**Bunyip State Park is not usually the first destination choice for those wanting a 'nature' experience.**

But the park is an ideal place to escape from the mad rush of city life, a tranquil area of bushland where it's easy to unwind.

The park, covering 16,600 ha and just 90 minutes from Melbourne, includes three main ranges – the Blue, Black Snake and Weatherhead – and is rich in geological, botanical and cultural history.

At the height of the Last Glacial Maximum, when ice sheets had reached their highest positions, Bunyip State Park was mostly low grassland with dry snow down to 1,000 metres.

Warmer and wetter conditions prevailed in the Holocene period (last 10,000 years), and the grassland began to change into what is today wet sclerophyll forest and open woodland.

Woi wurrung-speaking clans, in particular the Buluk-willam clan of the Wurundjeri people, were the first to live in the region. There are still many

plants in the park that were used by them for food and tools.

Sweet nectar was extracted from banksia flowers and weaving tools were constructed from woody stems. The leaves of eucalypt trees were used for medicines, their bark for making bowls, and mistletoe fruits were harvested.

But there was one area that the people avoided – around the Bunyip River swamps – because it was said to be the home of the spiritual creature Buneeep (the Bunyip), who punished bad people.

## Surprise yourself

Don't let the thought of the lurking Bunyip put you off! Bunyip State Park is full of beautiful surprises.

In the park's rainforest areas, near running streams, are lush havens of tree-ferns and a tapestry of climbers, lichens and mosses colonising tree logs.

At higher elevations, the heathy woodlands and forests include an assortment of eucalypt species, including Messmate and Silvertop Ash.

*Jasper Hails leads members of the friends group and NatureWatch through the park's dry woodland on the way to set up cameras.*



*Jasper Hails setting up one of the cameras.*

The world's tallest flowering plant, the Mountain Ash, and the Mountain Grey Gum, are prevalent in parts.

It is especially rich in orchids and the 51 recorded species include the Pink and Twisted sun-orchids, and Nodding, Tall and Tiny greenhoods.

Bright and interesting fungi can also be spotted along most paths during colder months. In moister areas, Pouched Coral-fern can be found, with its distinct and intricate leaf arrangement.

The diverse vegetation supports many mammal species, like the endangered Southern Brown and Long-nosed bandicoots, Common Bent-wing and Eastern Horseshoe bats, White-footed Dunnart and Greater and Yellow-bellied gliders.

PHOTO ANDREW FRASER

PHOTO NATUREWATCH





*Above: The Land Rover Owner's Club of Victoria helped the Friends group and VNPA to access the Blue Range Road.*

*Left: Lawsons Falls and other streams are havens for tree-ferns, climbers, lichens and mosses.*

*Right: Lace Monitor.*



PHOTO ANDREW FRASER

PHOTO CHRISTINE CONNELLY

PHOTO ANDREW FRASER

Bird watchers can enjoy the park's rare owl species, including the Powerful Owl, and other interesting species such as the Golden-headed Cisticola. For those with time, patience and a bit of luck, the unique Southern Emu-wren may be glimpsed, identified by its attractive barbless tail feathers.

You might even be surprised by the sight of a prehistoric Lace Monitor climbing a tree.

## Take a hike

One of the best ways to experience the park is by walking along one of its many walking trails.

The informative and engaging Buttongrass Nature Walk highlights many of the region's rare and special plants. This self-guided circuit walk of three kilometres includes botanical illustrations to help visitors identify significant plants and animals.

Along the walk is a rare community of wet heathland plants of state significance. There are also examples of Australia's unique fire-adapted plants, attractive wattles flowering from winter to spring, descendants of ancient 300-million-year-old clubmoss, and vegetation communities including messmate forest, wet heathland and heathy woodland.

Two plant species, the Swamp Bush-pea and Button-grass, have restricted distribution in Victoria.

## Find a friend

The walk was developed and is maintained by the Friends of Bunyip State Park, which was formed in the mid-1990s as a family-friendly volunteer group.

A key purpose of the group is to foster public awareness and appreciation of the natural values of Bunyip State Park and surrounding habitat.

It undertakes activities to suit all ages and abilities, including planning, creation and maintenance of walking tracks, tree planting, signage and interpretation, and restoration of habitat for indigenous animals.

The Friends of Bunyip State Park is led by President Ian Vaskess and strongly supported by Jasper Hails, a member with great knowledge and passion for the fauna of the park. They're only small, but they achieve a great deal.

The group is working closely with the VNPA on the Caught on Camera and the Communities Listening for Nature wildlife monitoring projects.

From August to November, Ian and Jasper lead volunteers for three-weekly monitoring activities with the support of the VNPA's NatureWatch program.

Now in its fifth year, Caught on Camera uses motion-sensing cameras to gather data about mammals that is important for park management. The newer Communities Listening for Nature project is using automated sound recording to monitor birds.

The monitoring has taken place across most of the park except, until recently, the difficult to access northern part of the park. Ian and Jasper were especially keen to see what species the cameras and sound recorders would find along the Blue Range.

So, on 29 October 2016, the Friends of Bunyip State Park and VNPA teamed up with the Land Rover Owner's Club of Victoria, to access the Blue Range Road. After some tricky vehicle manoeuvring, the cameras and sound recorders were installed in little-visited vegetation high on the Blue Range ridge.

The day was a great success and a fine example of what can be achieved when small Friends groups work with bigger groups to achieve their aims. We're all looking forward to seeing what the monitoring reveals. • PW

If you want to learn more, or to get involved with any of our NatureWatch community-led nature monitoring projects, contact our coordinator, Christine at [christinec@vnpa.org.au](mailto:christinec@vnpa.org.au) or on 9341 6510.



*The Superb Lyrebird is well known for its mimicry, but not so much for its role in reducing fire risk in forests.*

# Nature's way to reduce fire risk

JILL REDWOOD REPORTS ON THE FIRE-SUPPRESSION WORK OF THE UNDERSTOREY COMPOSTING CREW.

All gardeners know that turning and aerating a compost pile decomposes it far more quickly. The resulting rich humus is a soil conditioner, encourages good fungi and invertebrates, holds water and provides nutrients to the garden.

This is a simple example of how our forests function when the many players are healthy and in balance.

The Superb Lyrebird is one of these essential components of forest fuel reduction. Using its strong legs and long toes, this two-legged compost maker can rake through tonnes of leaf litter a year. It turns over dead leaves, twigs and bark while looking for a meal.

The soil is rich, sweet and damp where there are healthy populations of lyrebirds. There is very little ground fuel, instead a deep layer of humus protects the soil, feeds plant life and provides habitat for micro invertebrates and others at the base of the food chain.

There are many other members of the understory composting crew, including the diggers and scratchers such as echidnas, bandicoots and potoroos. They help manage the soil and humus layer by mixing the 'compost'.

The fungi-seeking mammals dig and eat mycorrhizal (underground) fungi, then process and disperse the fungi spore across the forest in handy fertiliser pellets. The fungi grow in association with plant roots, exchanging essential nutrients important for their health.

Other small forest gardeners who break down dead plant material include myriad colourful fungi, mosses, termites, wood-eating beetles, grubs and even moth larvae that consume dead eucalypt leaves. In unison, this team of volunteers can clear large areas of ground litter and even devour whole logs. Who has broken open a dead log and found its soft damp innards teeming with life?

This brilliant system has for millennium maintained natural fire-reducing, healthy soils, diverse habitat and a rich food chain for birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles.

The lyrebird is a wonderful ambassador which encapsulates this system. The Malleefowl is its western counterpart. These birds mix litter and soil to speed up decomposition. They prefer unburnt areas where there is a smorgasbord of food to scratch for and vegetation cover from predators.

Research by Dr Steve Leonard of La Trobe University has shown that after a fire that can kill lyrebirds, there



is mass regeneration of vegetation. This thick regrowth makes it difficult for any surviving lyrebirds to forage through and turn the soil. Depending on the forest, this could begin a terrible feedback loop for fire.

Leonard and his colleagues excluded lyrebirds from a number of plots for nine months then measured the fuel loads. When comparing these plots to adjoining areas where lyrebirds were active, there was on average 1.6 tonnes per hectare less fuel with a maximum difference of 7.5 tonnes per hectare. So on average, there were 25% lower fuel loads in lyrebird areas.

When this data was entered into a fire behaviour model, it showed that lyrebird activity could exclude a

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fire in low to moderate fire weather conditions. But in more dangerous weather conditions, the models predicted lower rates of spread with lower flame height and a less intense fire.

Sadly, lyrebirds and their volunteer cohorts are often killed off, displaced or left without cover to be preyed on by foxes and cats after government-planned burns. Larger burns, which can cover thousands of hectares, could be effectively wiping out critical components of natural fuel reduction systems that could take decades to return. Both the vegetation and the complex ecosystem can be changed dramatically as a result of inappropriate fire regimes.

The vicious cycle of regular planned burns and the eradication of many flora and fauna groupings has not been considered with past burn plans. The new 'risk-based approach' seems to equally disregard the impacts on the environment.

Public concern has been growing over the loss of native wildlife and other values as a result of inappropriate burns. The worst examples can be more destructive than a natural fire.

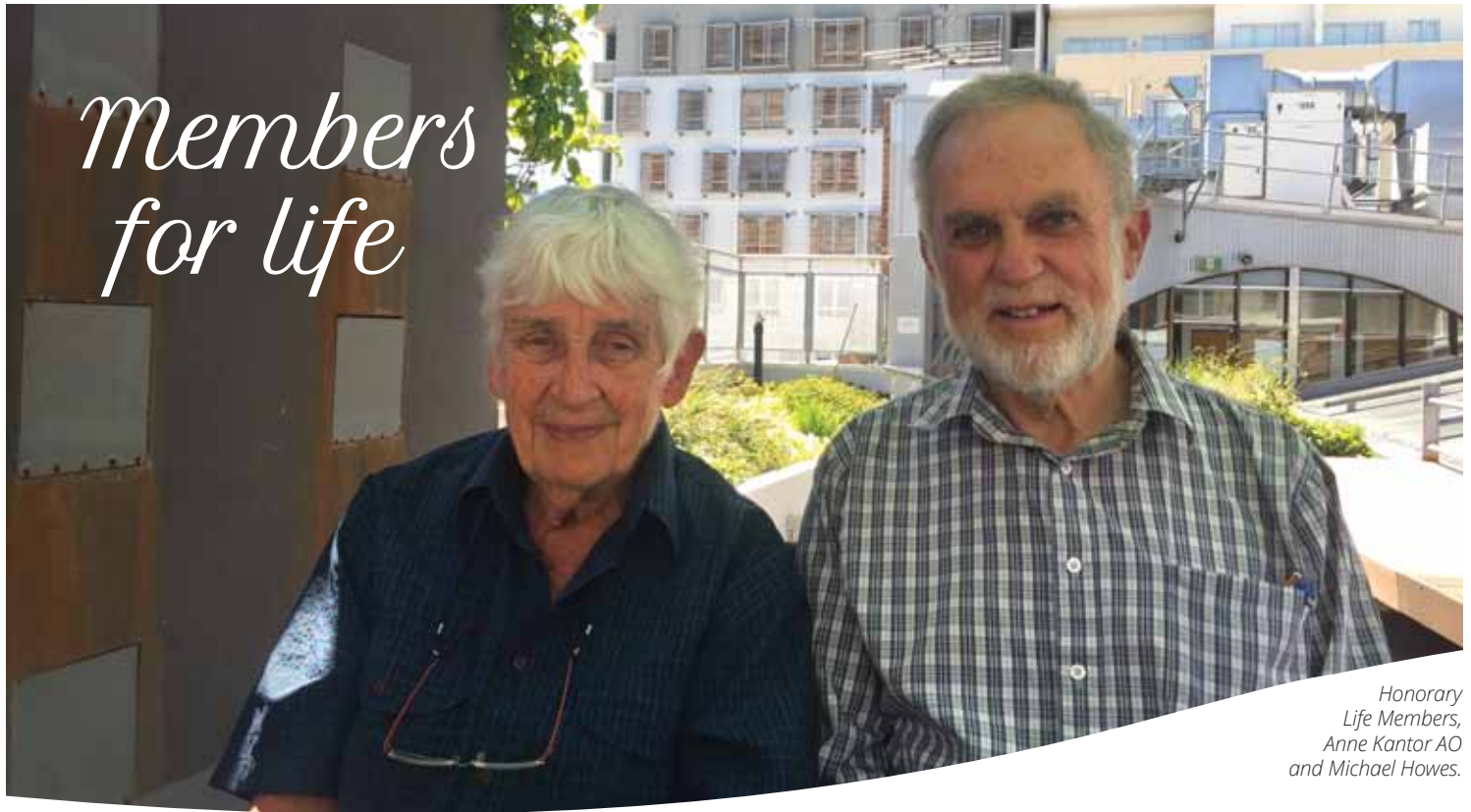
These inappropriate burns are now being seen as counterproductive and many simply provide a political placebo, giving the public a false sense of security. The effectiveness has been shown to be minimal to nil in many instances but comes at a great

cost to lyrebirds, ground and arboreal mammals, myriad invertebrates, reptiles and the flowering plants and nesting birds in spring.

The new 'risk-based' approach appears to have not reduced the hectares planned for burning nor seriously incorporated ecological or scientific information. This review of hectare-based burn targets was a lost opportunity to understand and enlist our natural bio-digesters that have been on the job for thousands of years.

Government fire agencies could make huge savings, reduce fire risk and maintain healthy public lands by protecting and teaming up with the natural populations of the Superb Lyrebird and Malleefowl to manage our forests. • PW

# Members for life



Honorary  
Life Members,  
Anne Kantor AO  
and Michael Howes.

THE VNPA COUNCIL AWARD HONORARY LIFE MEMBERSHIP TO PEOPLE WHO HAVE PERFORMED MERITORIOUS SERVICE TO THE VNPA. ANNE KANTOR AO AND MICHAEL HOWES ARE THE LATEST RECIPIENTS.

## Anne Kantor AO

Anne Kantor became a member of VNPA in 1986 and has been a very generous and loyal supporter for many years. She supports VNPA together with her husband, Milan, and also through the Dara Foundation, which she founded in 1998.

Anne is a wonderful philanthropist, supporting many charities across many sectors and her commitment and dedication to nature conservation is admirable.

In 2016, Anne became an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for 'distinguished service to the community through philanthropic support for a range of environmental, social welfare, arts and educational organisations', which includes VNPA.

Anne's long-term support has meant that VNPA has been able to commit to, and win, many lengthy campaigns – such as ensuring cattle grazing was stopped in the Alpine National Park in 2005, and again in 2014, and the establishment of almost 100,000 ha of River Red Gum national parks along the Murray River in 2009.

Anne also funded VNPA's latest *Nature Conservation Review*, released in 2014. This important piece of work is critical to identifying priority areas for nature conservation in Victoria.

VNPA Council and staff are very grateful for Anne's dedication and generosity, which is vital to our success.

## Michael Howes

Michael Howes has been a member of the VNPA since 1976.

In 1977 he left his job as a school teacher for a role in Victoria's National Parks Service. He was to spend over 25 years writing and editing publications, including possibly thousands of visitor information brochures and guides to Victoria's national parks. It was the education department's loss, and nature conservation's gain.

Michael's gentle but persuasive influence on every publication that came his way ensured they featured credible information and impeccable spelling and punctuation. His publications were always readable, always inviting, and consistent in their plea for visitors to respect parks and care for them.

His knowledge of Victoria's national parks and their plants and animals is vast (though he never makes that obvious), and he also has a considerable knowledge of the cultural history of our parks.

Michael has been a great respecter of people. It was nigh impossible to walk anywhere with him, as he'd inevitably come across someone he had to discuss something with, or maybe just simply talk to.

He always encouraged a good working relationship between the VNPA and the various iterations of Victoria's park management agency. Among other things, that facilitated the VNPA's publication of the 'Discovering' series of park guides.

It was no surprise that when Michael retired from Parks Victoria in 2002, he took up the role of editor of the VNPA's publications. Our quarterly magazine *Park Watch*, in particular, thrived in his capable hands.

Throughout his working life, Michael has been an active supporter of a number of volunteer groups, including committee member of the Victorian Environmental Friends Network, and a regular participant in tree-planting projects. It is no surprise that, as a volunteer, he is continuing to give editorial support to the VNPA. His quiet but compelling voice for nature will not be lost. • PW





# A walk in the You Yangs

Walkers of all ages—and their dogs—enjoy a walk up Flinders Peak in the You Yangs.

PHOTO: JUNE ORFORD

FRANCIS REISS AND JUNE ORFORD FOLLOW THE FOOTSTEPS OF EXPLORER MATHEW FLINDERS.

When Matthew Flinders first stood on the peak now bearing his name, little did he know that by December the following year he and his much loved cat Trim would be prisoners of the Governor of Mauritius.

The war between England and France had resumed, and when Flinders, returning to England aboard the *Cumberland*, was forced to land at the island for repairs, he was detained for 6 1/2 years on suspicion of spying. But on 1 May 1802, Flinders and his companions set forth from their tent on the shores of Port Phillip Bay and made their way

across the grassy plain to the You Yangs. Flinders, then 28, 'left the ship's name on a scroll of paper, deposited in a small pile of stones upon the top of the peak'. It was three in the afternoon when the four of them returned to their tent, 'much fatigued, having walked more than 20 miles without finding a drop of water'. Nowadays, thanks to its range of well-constructed walking tracks catering for all ages and abilities, over 50 km of mountain bike trails, rock climbing and abseiling sites, several picnic areas, and a dogs (on leash) policy, the You Yangs Regional Park has lots to offer. The 3.2 km return walk to the top of Flinders

Peak, the highest point of the You Yangs, takes about an hour.

Along the way, a huge geoglyph depicting Bunjil the Wedge-tailed Eagle can be seen. With a wing span of 100 metres, it comprises 1500 tonnes of rock and was constructed to commemorate the 2006 Commonwealth Games.

A final salute to one of Australia's greatest explorers: few visitors to the park would be aware that, having been the first person to circumnavigate and chart the entire coastline, it was Matthew Flinders who gave our country its name by writing on his map 'Australia'. • PW



The geoglyph in the valley below is a tribute to the Greater Spirit, Bunjil.

PHOTO: JUNE ORFORD



## RESEARCH ROUNDUP

AUSTRALIA'S FUTURE MARINE SCIENTISTS ARE GETTING A BOOST FROM A NEW TRAINING PROGRAM SET TO TRANSFORM CSIRO'S RESEARCH VESSEL, *RV INVESTIGATOR*, INTO A FLOATING CLASSROOM.

Reef Life Survey diver surveying reefs in West Papua.

PHOTO BY RICK STUART-SMITH

### Science ship a floating classroom

The unique program will give students and trainers dedicated time on board and expose them to a range of world-class scientific equipment and technology.

The postgraduate training initiative is called CAPSTAN – Collaborative Australian Postgraduate Sea Training Alliance Network.

Its aim is to help train future generations of Australia's marine scientists and mariners, and inspire studies in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics).

*RV Investigator* can operate anywhere from the ice edge to the equator and study the deepest parts of our region's oceans, as well as the atmosphere above.

Research voyages in 2016 have already discovered undersea volcanoes, investigated climate change, mapped tectonic plate boundaries, found rare deep-sea creatures and provided important information to monitor changes in our ocean environment.

The first participants in the CAPSTAN program are expected to join a transit voyage on *Investigator* later next year. Look out for the application process in early 2017 and further details are available on the program website.

### Global marine species database goes live

Tasmanian researchers and citizen scientists recently launched one of the world's most comprehensive and useful field guides to global marine species.

*Reef Species of the World* uses information and images collected by divers taking part in Reef Life Survey's citizen science dives during more than 8,600 underwater surveys at locations from the Arctic Circle to Antarctica, around all continents and in all ocean basins.

Located in the Reef Life Survey website ([www.reeflifesurvey.com](http://www.reeflifesurvey.com)), the database provides information and underwater images for more than 4,400 species of fish and invertebrates found across the world's shallow seas.

Reef Life Survey Executive Officer and Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS) researcher Dr Rick Stuart-Smith said the new tool would be invaluable for marine enthusiasts, aquarists, students and anyone who wants to identify what they see in their day-to-day experiences with the ocean.

### 30 minutes of park life a week makes a difference

People who visit parks for 30 minutes or more each week are much less likely to have high blood pressure or poor mental health than those who don't, according to new research by Australian and UK environmental scientists.

A study led by The University of Queensland (UQ) and the ARC Centre of Excellence for Environmental Decisions (CEED) suggests people might need a minimum 'dose of nature'.

UQ CEED researcher Dr Danielle Shanahan said parks offered health benefits including reduced risks of developing heart disease, stress, anxiety and depression.

'If everyone visited their local parks for half an hour each week there would be seven per cent fewer cases of depression and nine percent fewer cases of high blood pressure', she said.

'So how can we encourage people to spend more time in green space? We need more support and encouragement of community activities in natural spaces.'

'Our children especially benefit from spending more time outdoors. Kids who grow up experiencing natural environments may benefit developmentally and have a heightened environmental awareness as adults than those who don't.'





PHOTO BY BEN HEALLEY



PHOTO BY MUSEUMVICTORIA

Above: The Assassin Bug and its ugg-boot legs.

Left: Joanna Sumner puts wildlife tissue samples into the new Ian Potter Australian Wildlife BioBank.

## Cryotanks open for business

The new Ian Potter Australian Wildlife BioBank, a state-of-the-art liquid nitrogen cryofacility for the long-term storage of wildlife tissue samples, is now officially open.

The liquid nitrogen storage facility – the animal equivalent of a national seedbank – is the first of its kind in Australia.

Housed in the basement of Melbourne Museum, the new BioBank will play a critical role in Australian wildlife conservation, particularly that of threatened and endangered species.

For the first time, Museum Victoria researchers will be able to store viable reproductive tissues such as embryos, eggs and sperm which will facilitate research into reproductive biology, particularly in threatened species.

The new facility will allow Museum Victoria to transfer its collection of 44,000 wildlife tissue samples from its freezers into liquid nitrogen cooled cryotanks which at -185 degree will prevent sample degradation over time.

The BioBank currently has the capacity to house up to 160,000 samples plus space for additional cryotanks for a further 400,000 samples.

## Bioscanning Gannawarra Shire

In October 2016 a team of over 30 specialist field biologists, photographers and videographers converged on Gannawarra Shire to explore and document wildlife across waterways, wetlands and woodlands primarily in Cohuna and Gunbower National Park.

The survey also included a focus on the Aboriginal and European history of the region as well as a series of special events for the public, including Science in the Pub and a schools community day.

The researchers from Parks Victoria and Museum Victoria were excited by some of their wildlife observations, including close encounters with small sugar glider possums, a wide range of birds such as the beautiful Azure Kingfisher, and a bizarre shaggy-legged Assassin Bug.

Manager of Live Exhibits at Museum Victoria, Patrick Honan, described the strange feeding behavior of the Assassin Bug:

‘This bug is a specialist at eating stinging ants such as jumping jacks. It will wave its hairy ugg-booted back legs at passing ants, luring a curious ant to grab on to the leg. It will then spin 180 degrees on its special knees and drive its piercing mouthparts into the back of the ant’s neck.’

## Visualising Victoria’s biodiversity

The Visualising Victoria’s Biodiversity (VVB) web portal is live at [vvb.org.au](http://vvb.org.au).

VVB is designed to support Victorians accessing and sharing a wide range of environmental information for learning, research and conservation of natural values.

It brings together many of the existing information resources and spatial datasets produced by government, organisations, researchers, community groups and individuals.

There are interactive tools for quickly exploring the available information for an area of interest, such as the Natural Values Report.

Currently VVB provides tools to:

- generate a report with lists of environmental features
- view map layers of environmental features in any area of Victoria
- share information about your project or research.

The project is a Centre for eResearch and Digital Innovation (CeRDI) initiative, with support and funding from the Helen McPherson Smith Trust.

# Eucalypts of the Mount Alexander Region

Bernard Slattery, Ern Perkins and Bronwyn Silver.  
90 pp. RRP \$10 plus \$3 postage from [www.fobif.org.au](http://www.fobif.org.au)

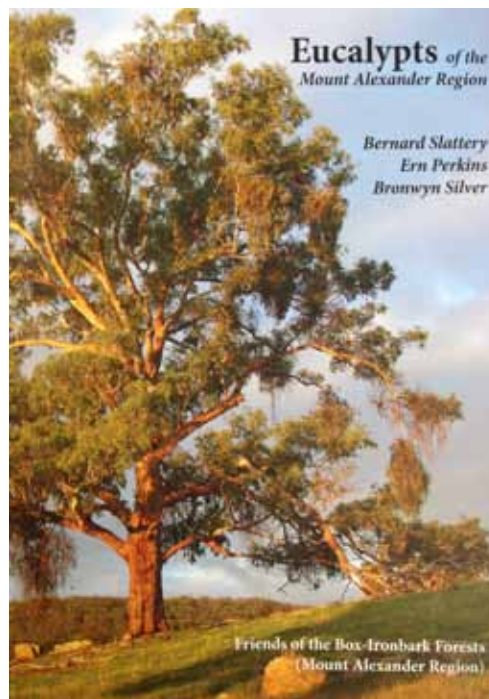
Sometimes the smallest of organisations put out the best books – just check the publications from the all-volunteer National Parks Association of the ACT.

This is the second fine publication from the Friends of the Box-Ironbark Forests (Mount Alexander Region), and it's the best guide to eucalypts I've seen.

A 10-page introduction takes the reader through the key aids to identification: tree

shape, location, bark, leaves, buds and flowers, fruit and even oil glands.

Then the twelve most common trees of the region are given four pages each. We get to see clear photographs of a fine specimen; of a younger recovering group of trees (common in the heavily impacted Victorian goldfields); of buds and mature fruits; bark; and juvenile and mature leaves. These are



accompanied by a well-informed, brief but pertinent text, and Leon Costerman's excellent drawings of buds and leaves, helpfully to scale.

If that's all a bit complicated, each description comes with 'quick check' hints: the trunk of a Grey Box, for example, often divides in a narrow-angled 'Y' shape, and its branches 'have a fluid form vaguely recalling a John Glover painting'.

Shorter descriptions of some less-common eucalypts of the region are followed by a bonus treat for Castlemaine dwellers and

visitors: a few pages identifying the many introduced eucalypts of Castlemaine's streets, with house number locations.

Mainly, though, this serves as an invaluable and very accessible guide to the native eucalypts of the box-ironbark region of central Victoria.

Some books become friends. • PW

Review by Phil Ingamells

## FORESTS FOREVER



EASTER ECOLOGY CAMP 14-17 April 2017

### Call for Volunteers to Assist Camp Activities

We are looking for volunteers to assist with the set up and running of the 35<sup>th</sup> **Easter Ecology Camp** at Goongerah, north of Orbost.

Experienced walk leaders are needed to lead forest visits, which might involve a short car shuffle and a walk, talk, gawk.

There are other simple camp tasks where additional hands will help lighten the load.

This will still leave you free to enjoy program activities and learn more about the protection of the magnificent forests of East Gippsland.

For information about the camp visit [www.eastgippsland.net.au/forestsforever](http://www.eastgippsland.net.au/forestsforever)

**Contact:** Euan Moore – [calamanthus5@bigpond.com](mailto:calamanthus5@bigpond.com)  
Mike Forster – [mike.forster10@gmail.com](mailto:mike.forster10@gmail.com)





# Bush Gems

## A guide to the Wild Orchids of Victoria, Australia

Gary Backhouse, Bill Kosky,  
Dean Rouse and James Turner.  
Available at [www.bushorchids.com](http://www.bushorchids.com)  
\$25 incl. postage in Australia.



The first things I grabbed before starting this review were my two favourite orchid books, *Orchids of East Gippsland* and *The Orchids of Victoria*, only to find that a couple of authors involved with those books were also authors of this CD. Indeed there are many contributors to this publication from among the numerous orchid enthusiasts and experts in Victoria.

The layout of this CD is easy to use and the information is very accessible. It starts with a great visual identification aid - the 'Quick Find' - that provides a representative picture of each genus, which then links to a page describing the genus and followed by pages showing all the species of that genus. This feature alone makes the CD worth having.

Each orchid species is then described with a range map, a set of informative notes, a number of pictures from differing locations and perspectives or magnifications that help with identification, as many orchid species vary significantly in form and colour from place to place.

The inclusion of pictures that show the whole plant or a colony of plants, including leaves, and then some closer images of the flowers is very helpful.

It would be great if in future editions of this CD, all species are accompanied by a contextual picture of the orchids in situ (quite a challenge) and a picture of the leaves. We amateur orchid fanciers definitely need a Barbara Triggs approach (her book *Tracks, Scats and Other Traces* identifies Australian mammals from their ephemeral signs). Orchids are incredible for their amazing jewel-like flowers, but part of their charm is their enigmatic nature.

There is no general discussion of orchid conservation in the text, which is a mistake. Especially as I searched the CD for 'endangered' and found a lot of specific information on threats to species, including loss of habitat, pressure from development, weed invasion, four-wheel driving, and occasionally trampling by orchid enthusiasts to list just a few. I also noticed that there was one photo of an illegally collected plant (p. 840) and it would have been better not to encourage this type of practice.

Will I use it? Yes. It is a terrific resource and I would recommend it to anyone interested in native orchids. • PW

Review by Jane Mullett, member of the Australasian Native Orchid Society (Victoria Group).



*Prasophyllum niphopedium Cobberas* is one of the orchids included in Bush Gems.

PHOTO BY GARY BACKHOUSE

# Supporting the parks that you love



PHOTO COURTESY LARA BICKFORD

VNPA COUNCIL MEMBER LARA BICKFORD SUPPORTS THE VNPA THROUGH OUR PARKS PROTECTOR MONTHLY GIVING PROGRAM. WE HAD A CHAT WITH LARA TO FIND OUT WHAT INSPIRED HER.

*Lara Bickford and her children exploring a forest in Malaysia.*

Lara Bickford grew up in McLaren Vale, a small town south of Adelaide renowned for its wineries. Lara and her siblings spent their childhood exploring the creek at the bottom of their backyard, looking for tadpoles and other wildlife. Keen campers, the rugged Flinders Rangers National Park was a favourite family camping spot.

It's probably safe to say that this childhood spent exploring the great outdoors sparked a love of inquiry – and a deep connection with our natural world. Lara is now a chemist with a leading French pharmaceutical company that specialises in ethical pharmaceuticals.

Together with her husband Simon, Lara has four children between the ages of seven and 13 years old; Frederick, Theodora, Hugo and Harold.

One Easter eleven years ago, a new family tradition was started. With two year-old Frederick, Lara, Simon, Lara's sister Sophie and their parents met at the Kiata camp ground in the Little Desert National Park. The family loved their time in the semi-arid landscape so much that they've made it an annual pilgrimage. Lara and Simon's children look forward to visiting their favourite trees near the campsite, going on walks and looking out for wallabies, birds and bats each Easter.

Lara first heard about the VNPA when her sister, Sophie Bickford, started working with us on the Victorian Naturally Alliance project in 2013. Soon after, Lara took out a VNPA Family membership and also chose to make a monthly gift.

Lara supports other national and international charities but also feels that it's important to support work closer to home and to do something to help the national parks her family love and visit frequently.

Lara is well aware how important her monthly gift to the VNPA is; together with other regular donors, Lara's support give us the financial stability to plan our work and implement the vision we share for Victoria's natural places. Lara is pleased her support can help tackle problems such as pest plants and animals in national parks, and help ensure parks get the funding they deserve so they can be maintained properly.

Lara and Simon have found a special way to spend quality, one-on-one time with each of their children. Every couple of months, one parent will take one child on a weekend camping adventure. Favourite spots include Badger Creek and Murrindindi Scenic Reserve. One such trip was in 2014, when Lara and Theodora joined VNPA

Members on an over-night Leadbeater's Possum monitoring activity in the Yarra Ranges National Park. Lara said they were excited to see one of these Critically Endangered possums – and a Greater Glider! It was a very special experience for Theodora and Lara.

By supporting the VNPA, Lara hopes that in the future Victoria will have national parks that have excellent funding and management, with connecting corridors that provide a safe haven for wildlife and resilience to climate change. This will ensure her children can continue family traditions of spending time together in nature – and hopefully gives them a chance of seeing the Leadbeater's Possum and Greater Glider thriving!

All of us here at the VNPA thank Lara and her family for their generous support. • PW

You can join the Parks Protector monthly giving program by filling in the coupon in this Park Watch or join online at [www.vnpa.org.au](http://www.vnpa.org.au). If you have any questions, or would like to join up over the phone, please contact:

Amelia Easdale  
Supporter Development  
03 9341 6505  
[ameilae@vnpa.org.au](mailto:ameilae@vnpa.org.au)



# LOOKING FOR FUNGI CAN BE FUN

FOR TRAVELLERS ALONG THE BASS HIGHWAY TO PHILLIP ISLAND, MARK LEARMONTH REPORTS ON A SMALL RESERVE NEAR GRANTVILLE AND THE SEARCH FOR AN ELUSIVE FUNGUS.

**I'd heard about this very rare fungus in 2015, while planning a VNPA walk to The Gurdies Nature Conservation Reserve. Tom May from Fungimap said I should be on the lookout for it.**

Tea-tree Fingers *Hypocreopsis amplexans* has only been found in Victoria in a few locations: Greens Bush (Mornington Peninsula National Park), Grantville and Nyora.

The Gurdies Nature Conservation Reserve is 260 ha of open woodlands near Grantville and has a rich understorey of mostly tea-tree (*Leptospermum spp.*), paperbark (*Melaleuca spp.*), lots of orchids and fungi, and slightly swampy streamside thickets.

After the 2015 VNPA trip, a small group of us decided to have a proper look for Tea-tree Fingers. We armed ourselves with cameras, GPS equipment and vegetation maps, and survey forms from Fungimap. Although several of us had 'collection permits', we only 'collected' photographs.

We had two enjoyable days wandering through the The Gurdies reserve in August and September 2016, both prime fungi months.



Above: Searching for Tea-tree Fingers in The Gurdies Nature Conservation Reserve.

Left: Tea-tree Fingers is about the size of a 50-cent coin.

On the second foray we were joined by Graham, a volunteer from Fungimap, to share his expertise and increase our chances of finding Tea-tree Fingers – he had actually seen it in the nearby Nyora Nature Conservation Reserve. Our team of Carol, Di, Elspeth, Jenny, Jill, John (our GPS guru) and Rosemary ventured eagle-eyed into our search areas.

So what did we find? The very rare Tea-tree Fingers is very fussy about where it lives, preferring dead tea-trees or paperbarks with branches

above the ground. It also looks for a 'substrate' fungus to associate with, and likes a slightly damp environment. The Gurdies reserve ticked these boxes so we thought the fungus should be there.

The truth is that we failed to find any Tea-tree Fingers. However, the searches were most enjoyable, even if unsuccessful. But we are not for giving up and will return in 2017 to this underrated reserve, which has lots of orchids and small birds and some great views, and is accessible by public transport. Thanks again to all who helped in our ongoing quest. • PW

## Who ya gonna call? Fungimap!

Victoria's only FFG-listed macrofungus, Tea-tree Fingers *Hypocreopsis amplexans*, has rarely been seen. Fungimap hopes that people will look out for this threatened species and contact us ([info@fungimap.org.au](mailto:info@fungimap.org.au)) should they find it. We are concerned that it may have become critically endangered as it has not been seen at two of the three known sites for more than a decade; we are keen to find any surviving populations. For more information go to the Help Save Tea-tree Fingers <https://www.fungimap.org.au/index.php/seeking-sightings>). Fungimap is Australia's national fungi not-for-profit group dedicated to community science in action by educating people about our fungi and helping them to record data on Australia's recognisable fungi.

PHOTO BY MARK LEARMONTH

PHOTO BY SJM MCMULLAN-FISHER



# Wild fun

## BIRD DETECTIVES

**Being a bird detective with the family is easy and can be done anywhere. To keep it simple, all you need do is step outside and look for birds!**

It's also a great opportunity for families to discover and learn more together – there is always something that can be learned from birds.

Children of all ages can enjoy discovering the life and habits of birds. Younger children can watch them closely, older children can explore and discuss what they are up to, describe them and identify them.

If you want your bird detective work to go a little deeper, you could try:

- being very still and quiet like a detective, so that more birds will show themselves
- using binoculars to get a close up look, feel like a scientist and add to the excitement (it's worth doing a little research to ensure children have a pair of binoculars they can actually use. Lower magnification, light weight and waterproof binoculars are generally best for children)

- identifying or describing the birds you see by looking at the size, colour and shapes of their body, beak and legs, and by listening to their calls. Use an Australian bird book or app. to help you identify what you see. There are many of them available online
- discussing (with older children) what the birds you see would need for life and where they might live
- watching what they are up to. You could make up your own story about their behaviour.

You can look for birds anywhere, such as your backyard, school yard, local parks, forests and creeks. Areas such as wetlands and open waterways can be good places to see larger birds that can be easier to get a better look at. There is no need for adults or children to have any specialist knowledge to do this activity, just a keenness to learn, wonder and discover together.

### Being in a Pelican family

If you were a Pelican, you would have the longest bill of any bird and would eat mostly fish. You may even eat in a feeding flock of over 1,000 other Pelicans.

Parents of your Pelican family would share sitting on the eggs of 1-3 young and keep them warm with their feet.

Your parents would look after you till you were around 30 days old and then you would head off to a 'crèche' with up to 100 other young Pelicans.

Your parents would still bring deliveries of food to you at crèche.

You would attempt your first flight at around three months old.

In Victoria, your parents would probably have headed to Mud Islands in Port Phillip Bay to breed.

If you were a Pelican at crèche on Mud Islands, where would you go once you were strong enough to fly? • PW



# HOODIES SACRIFICED FOR HORSES

CHRIS SMYTH REPORTS ON THE DREADFUL DECISION BY THE ANDREWS GOVERNMENT TO LICENSE COMMERCIAL HORSE TRAINING IN THE BELFAST COASTAL RESERVE.

**The Belfast Coast Reserve between Warrnambool and Port Fairy is being torn up and invaded by racehorse trainers who are using conservation areas as race tracks, undermining years of environmental management, jeopardising threatened birds such as Hooded Plovers, and impacting heavily on the safety and amenity of beachgoers.**

And yet the Andrews Government has just made an ill-advised and misguided decision to reward the trainers by sanctioning their inappropriate and destructive use of the reserve.

‘Horses belong on race tracks and in proper training grounds,’ said Matt Ruchel, VNPA’s Executive Director.

‘They have no place in sensitive conservation areas that are supposed to protect some of our most threatened birdlife. This sets a terrible precedent for coastal management and wildlife protection in this state.

Belfast Coastal Reserve is the second most important breeding site on Victoria’s coastline for the tiny Hooded Plover, listed as Vulnerable in Victoria and nationally. But also at risk are threatened migratory birds that travel there from the northern hemisphere.

Paul Sullivan, Chief Executive Officer of Birdlife Australia said that Hooded Plovers cannot co-exist with commercial horse training. The horses churn up the sand, disturb the chicks and nesting birds, crush eggs and damage protective nest fencing.

‘The arrangements announced by the government are very messy and complex and will be impossible to enforce,

especially when there is no money being offered for management and education aimed at protection of the shorebirds. All the money is being given to the racing industry.’

Matt Ruchel said that the government’s claim that it has been working on this solution for two years is simply untrue.

‘It sat on its hands for those two years while the number of horses using the beaches skyrocketed. It was only when the community raised serious concerns that it started a consultation process, largely with the racing industry, not the community.

‘We lost confidence in the consultation process when the racing minister pre-empted its outcome by making public statements that the trainers had to stay. Well, the minister has got what he wants. But it’s not what the community wants. They want the horses out now.’

In recent months, VNPA has been working with Birdlife Australia, the Belfast Coastal Reserve Action Group and others advocating the need for a long-term solution to the threats facing the Belfast Coastal Reserve – as well as horses there are off-leash dogs, illegal camping and off-road use, sand dune erosion, feral animals, weeds and fragmented management.

That long-term solution is to remove commercial horse training from the entire reserve and turn it into a coastal park under the *National Parks Act*. The coastal park would be managed by Parks Victoria, in partnership with the Traditional Owners, according to a

new management plan and regulations that ensured the protection of the park’s natural and cultural heritage from continuing threats, and supported recreational use.

The racing industry should establish its own purpose-built sand training track away from the reserve. The Andrews Government is giving them funding for such a facility but allowing them to stay in the reserve. The Ballarat Turf Club is currently developing a deep sand track that will simulate beach training, so there is no good reason – and there never has been one – to allow commercial horse training to continue in the Belfast Coastal Reserve. • PW

## TAKE ACTION

Send an email  
([daniel.andrews@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:daniel.andrews@parliament.vic.gov.au))  
or Facebook message  
([www.facebook.com/DanielAndrewsMP](https://www.facebook.com/DanielAndrewsMP))  
to Premier Daniel Andrews telling him that the Belfast Coastal Reserve is not a stomping ground for horses – it is a crucial breeding ground for the hoodies. Urge him to abandon his government’s plans to allow commercial horse training to stay in the reserve.  
**It’s time to get the horses out – Now!**

## Help our hoodies

Without protection, Hooded Plovers don’t stand a chance against racing thoroughbreds.

Please donate today and help support our work protecting these tiny birds and the Belfast Coastal Reserve, by calling 03 9341 6500 or visit [www.vnpa.org.au](http://www.vnpa.org.au)



HOODED PLOVER CHICK: GLENN EHMKE. HORSE'S HOOF: BAGICAT.



# FORESTS FOREVER

## EASTER ECOLOGY CAMP



**Why not spend your Easter in the heart of South East Australia's botanical wonderland?**

- **CAMP** among Peppermint and Manna Gums on the Brodribb River.
- **SPOTLIGHT** for wildlife.
- **EXPLORE** ancient and beautiful forests with expert biologists.
- **BE INSPIRED** to help save East Gippsland spectacular forests.

**WHEN:** FRIDAY 14 APRIL 2017 to MONDAY 17 APRIL 2017

**WHERE:** Goongerah, East Gippsland (70km north of Orbost VIC, 96km south from Bombala NSW).

**COST:** \$75 for the weekend.  
\$35 for one day.  
Concessions available.  
Children under 13 years free.

For more information  
and to book your spot, go to  
[www.eastgippsland.net.au/forestsforever](http://www.eastgippsland.net.au/forestsforever)

