

PARK WATCH



FORESTS AREN'T MAGIC PUDDINGS
NATIONAL PARKS FOR SALE – AGAIN!
JETTY THREAT TO DOLPHINS
ANGLESEA HEATHLANDS WIN PROTECTION
STATE OF THE BAYS
MITCHELL RIVER NATIONAL PARK
GOOD BUSH NEIGHBOURS

MARCH 2017 NO 268



VICTORIAN
NATIONAL PARKS
ASSOCIATION
Be part of nature



Be part of nature

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VNPA'S VISION

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

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

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FRONT COVER

These tawny frogmouths came along to our launch of the *Living next to nature* booklet. Read all about it on page 31. Photo: It's a wildlife.

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From the President

Some recent very good news is that the majority of the Anglesea Heathlands previously leased by Alcoa will be included in the Great Otway National Park. This will be an important addition to the park as the heathlands are home to a number of endangered and restricted-range species, including some birds and orchids. The main areas of the old mine site will remain outside the park to enable mine rehabilitation. VNPA and local groups have campaigned for many years for the protection of these heathlands and look forward to the necessary legislation passing during the autumn session of state parliament.

It was with a sense of irony that I read the news that the Heyfield sawmill in Gippsland was facing a major restructure or closure due to the lack of timber supply. VicForests has failed in the management of these forests and has allowed timber harvesting to continue at a clearly unsustainable rate, especially in the face of major bushfires. The agency has admitted the resource is just not there and that a reduction in the amount of timber being clear-felled is required.

I trained as a forester but even without that training it would be obvious to anyone looking at the distribution of age classes in the ash forests of the central highlands that there was a long-term problem. Mountain ash has been the backbone of a timber industry that targets the regrowth after the devastating 1939 fires. Well-managed silvicultural systems aim for an even distribution of age classes from seedlings through to mature timber, with allowances for losses due to bush fire, diseases and other climatic events. The impending crunch in timber supply has been on the horizon for decades.

There is ample time for the industry to establish and adapt to plantation timbers. The technology to process smaller plantation logs has been in use in Europe and North America since the middle of last century or earlier. Failure to plan for the drop in timber supply and to move to plantation forests on land that does not support native forests is a failure of management across the industry. Victoria's forest industry could have been sustainable. Instead, it has been run as a mining operation and, as every miner will tell you, when the ore runs out the mine closes. VicForests has achieved this while still managing to run at a loss.

Unfortunately, the industry is now pleading to government for more subsidies and to reduce protection to threatened species such as the Leadbeater's possum; next they will want to log in national parks.

VNPA spent an enormous amount of energy – more than half of our Director's time for the last 2 years - participating in the Andrews Government's Forest Industry Taskforce. This process has failed to find any solutions, with the forest industry walking away and running a campaign for more wood that simply does not exist.

Alarming, the Andrews Government is allowing VicForests to re-open forestry in the west of the state. These forests are highly fragmented and have high conservation value but are right next door to some of the largest areas of plantation in the country.

It is time to say enough is enough, to stop giving more resources to an industry that cannot manage them, and come up with a new policy that protects nature. • **PW**

Euan Moore, VNPA President

“

It is time
to say
enough is
enough ...

”

Minister receives 5,107 messages to increase parks funding

VNPA's Executive Director, Matt Ruchel, recently handed Environment Minister Lily D'Ambrosio a bundle of petitions signed by 5,000 people in support of increased funding to parks. The petition read:

'We love our national parks. They give us rest and recreation, protect thousands of native species and are the foundation of our efforts to protect nature for the future. And yet Victoria's national parks have suffered deep funding cuts and are now struggling to cope with feral animals, weeds, fire threats and degraded infrastructure.'

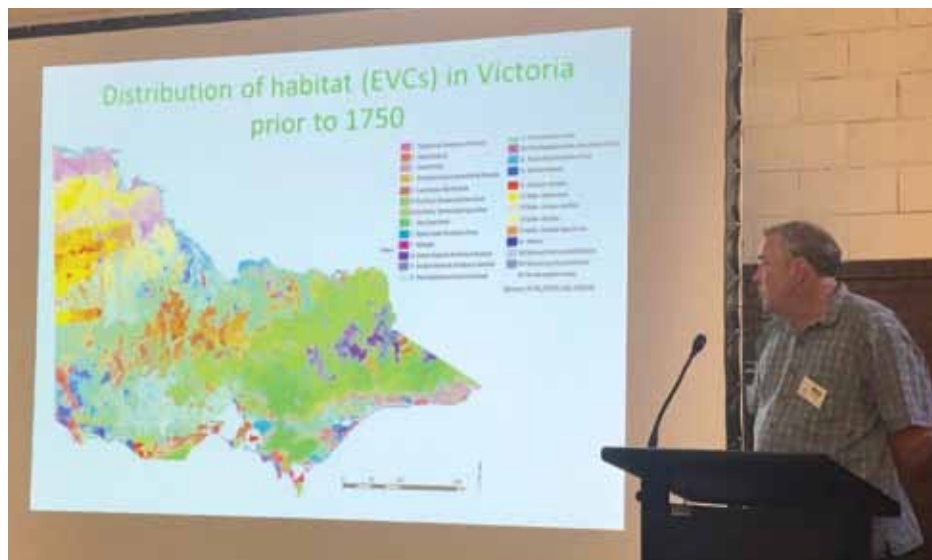
It then called for an immediate increase in management resources and the:

- development of a future funding plan to continue building resources and expertise to restore the health of our parks and address the many threats they face, including invasive pests and animals and the impacts of climate change
- the recognition of our parks as very special places for the community, with appropriate tracks, signs and facilities so they are welcoming to Victorians.

Here at VNPA we will continue to fight for increased funding to parks and are delighted with the level of community support.

Acting on extinction

More than 200 people packed into the Melbourne Drill Hall for VNPA's Act on Extinction Information Night in late February.



VNPA's Executive Director, Matt Ruchel, outlines the state of Victorian nature at the Act on Extinction information night.

They heard from the night's presenters that it's time Victoria had threatened species laws that actually protected threatened species.

The *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act* is the key piece of legislation that protects nature in Victoria. But it hasn't provided any guarantees for hundreds of threatened plant and animal species. In fact, the law has been a dismal failure.

The Andrews government is now reviewing the Act and needs to hear from you that real protection for threatened species is not optional.

You can read more about the review and where to send a submission on page 22. The submission deadline is 28 March.

5, 4, 3, 2, 1 ... Wild Families blast-off!

Bring the family and a picnic lunch down to celebrate nature and families

with VNPA and friends at the launch of our Wild Families program during Nature Play Week.

Grown-ups and children are encouraged to join us to be wild animals, wild explorers, wild artists and wild scientists from 11am–2pm on Saturday, 23 April 2017 at Yarra Bend Park, Fairfield. Dress 'wild' for the day (your wild outfit should also be practical for an outdoor adventure).

VNPA's Wild Families program is a great way for families to enjoy, learn about and look after nature. Register your attendance at the launch to receive a free wild explorer's mini snack-pack at www.wildfamilies.eventbrite.com.au • PW

For more information, contact caitling@vnpa.org.au or (03) 9341 6500 or <http://vnpa.org.au/page/bushwalking-and-activities/wild-families>

Send in your supporter survey

Many of you will have received our Supporter Survey in the post earlier this month. We encourage you to take a few minutes to fill it in and return to us.

Supporters like you have enabled the Victorian National Parks Association to grow over the last 65 years into a powerful voice for Victoria's wildlife, national parks and natural places. And we couldn't have done it without your help – thank you!

By taking part in this important supporter survey, we can get to know you and your priorities better. Your responses will help us understand what's important to VNPA supporters, and how we can continue to earn your support.

The survey also gives you an opportunity to share your personal stories about Victoria's natural environment, what it means to you, why you love it, and why you want to see it protected.

We look forward to hearing from you.



NATIONAL PARKS FOR SALE – AGAIN!

National parks for sale – again!

WE THOUGHT WE'D WON THE BATTLE AGAINST PRIVATISATION OF OUR PRIME CONSERVATION AREAS, BUT AS **PHIL INGAMELLS** REPORTS, MAYBE NO-ONE HEARD ABOUT THE VICTORY.



PHOTO: CHRIS TZAROS

Our parks protect many gems. Southern emu wren.

Three current proposals for commercial developments in national parks are seriously worrying, and there could be more to come!

Has Parks Victoria's tourism arm lost the plot? Are they simply answering to pressure from their political masters? Is the tourism industry still running on the previous government's policy? Maybe it's all three!

Whatever the case, the government and our park managers seem to have lost sight of the fact that Victoria's parks already contribute over \$1 billion to tourism, yet cost less than 1% of the State budget to run: a good deal by any standards.

And they seem to have also lost sight of the guiding principle of keeping private tourism developments outside parks, where they pose no threat to parks but do benefit regional communities.

The Andrews Government came into power promising to reverse the previous

government's enthusiasm for private developments in our parks, and quickly legislated to end the insidious 99-year park leases. It also sensibly promised to upgrade facilities in parks to 'encourage more Victorians to get outdoors and enjoy our natural environment', and increase funding for management.

There has been a moderate increase in park funding already, much of it for infrastructure. Hopefully a lot more is on the way.

But that seems to have done little to quell Parks Victoria's over-enthusiastic support for three proposals it has on hand:

1. The most outrageous is a so-called 'community-led' proposal to excise at least six hectares from Mount Buffalo National Park, around the historic Chalet, and hand it to private developers for a 'Mount Buffalo Chalet Village' (see pages 8-9).

2. Then there's the disastrous scheme to put over 30 buildings along the track from Falls Creek to Hotham in the Alpine National Park (see pages 6-7).
3. Lastly, for now, there's the proposed commercial boat tours at the Prom (see *Park Watch* June 2016, and box on page 7).

What's the theory driving all of this?

Apparently people visiting parks don't spend enough money while they are actually at their destination i.e. inside the park. So, putting private developments into parks will drain more from their wallets during their visit. But if you take a good look at most tourism plans, the best way to fleece a tourist is to get them to extend their trip at wineries, B&Bs, spas and restaurants in the region. These options don't have to be inside the park at all.

We need our parks to protect our much-threatened native plants and animals, and to give us rest and refuge from the ever faster moving world we live in. • PW

*Feathertop's wild eastern side from
Diamantina Spur, not far from
the proposed luxury huts.*

Falls to Hotham alpine crossing

PHIL INGAMELLS REPORTS
THAT PLANS TO CONSTRUCT
31 BUILDINGS ALONG ONE
OF VICTORIA'S MOST POPULAR
LONG BUSHWALKS ARE
RINGING ALARM BELLS.

It's the latest of four 'icon walks' emerging from a decade-old ecotourism strategy. That document found that Victoria was short of experiences to attract the 'comfort in nature' market, the sought-after big spenders from foreign lands.

The trouble is that Victoria, by far the most cleared state in Australia, isn't short of buildings and the comfort they provide. What it is short of is wild experiences.

The first walk off the rank was the Great Ocean Walk along the Otway coast, and the second the Grampians Peaks Trail, running north to south through Grampians National Park (Gariwerd).

Despite initial hopes, neither of these walks attracted interest from private operators for lodge accommodation along the track. The easily accessible

existing B&B accommodation adjacent to the parks won the day.

Now, as if seeking revenge on those lost ambitions, the tourism industry and Parks Victoria have conspired in a scheme to actually displace the low-spending 'adventure seeker market' (the people who already walk between Falls Creek and Mount Hotham), with walkers prepared to pay big bucks for guided walks with serviced huts and gourmet food at every stop.

The prime camp spots along the route are to be occupied by bookable tent platforms, large communal shelters and a stack of double-bed luxury huts. Self-sufficient campers will have to find somewhere else to pitch a tent. The draft plan admits there will be a drop in the number of adventure walkers but optimistically predicts a surge in comfort seekers to replace them.

There are a few very basic things wrong with this scheme.

For a start, it completely ignores the many hundreds of empty beds the two alpine resorts of Falls Creek and Hotham have over summer. A really simple way to attract big spenders to the Alpine National Park might be to promote a great range of day walks over the Bogong High Plains and the Hotham area, all accessible during a week's stay in a fine ski lodge.

This can be done without discarding, or disrespecting, those who want a self-sufficient experience in the wild.

Then there's the problem that, through many years of underfunding, walking tracks and visitor facilities are in a poor state in many of Victoria's parks. And there's a host of other serious management issues that need addressing, such as feral horse, deer and weed



populations. These are fundamental things that a park management agency should attend to before it embarks in glam tourism promotion.

And there's a serious safety issue. Sending inexperienced people on a High Plains walk without their own food and shelter is plain dangerous.

There was the day on the northern Bogong High Plains when my beard had long icicles hanging from it, and a howling gale swept up snow-drifts covering the pole line we were struggling to follow in a whited-out landscape. And the day we started walking from the Howqua Valley in blissful sunshine, to be greeted by freezing sleet once we'd climbed onto the Howitt High Plain: my hands were so cold I had trouble undoing my pack's buckles to get at the much-needed protection inside.

It has been a long-standing practice to advise alpine walkers to be self-sufficient with shelter, clothing and food. People have died trying to find huts in fierce weather.

So it's alarming that the Alpine National Park's managers are encouraging inexperienced people to set off on a five-day unencumbered walk, with a luxury hut, warm doona and fine food waiting for them each evening – if they get there!

Then there's the Mount Feathertop issue.

Australia is a time-worn landscape without the great peaks of New Zealand, Canada, South America or the Himalayas. And Victoria is particularly lacking on that scale, with only one large free-standing mountain in the state: the majestic and much-loved Feathertop. It has a couple of small huts on its western side, but the eastern side, where a series of parallel, angled spurs may have given the mountain its name, has remained unencumbered.

The proposed trail has a series of luxury huts perched near the top of Diamantina Spur, and they would have to be serviced daily by helicopter. Why any community would choose to do this to its finest mountain is beyond understanding.

But perhaps the most short-sighted part of the whole deal is that it may not be the best way to make a contribution to the state's economy anyway – not by a long shot!

According to Parks Victoria's own figures, their parks already contribute around \$1.2 billion annually to the economy through tourism, a figure that completely dwarfs its meagre management budget.

And the parks also contribute a relatively small but important \$180 million to what is called 'avoided health costs'. It's now well-established that people who spend time in nature are physically healthier than those who don't. They are also less likely to suffer from depression, and more likely to make positive contributions to society generally. It's a figure that can, and should be, greatly increased.

Parks Victoria, most usefully, could be putting its famous but somewhat empty slogan of 'Healthy Parks, Healthy People' into action. It could be promoting access to natural areas

for disadvantaged kids, for marginalised social groups, and for anyone else who needs an escape into nature.

The well-off 'comfort in nature' seekers are already very well accommodated.

The Falls to Hotham alpine crossing project should go back to the drawing board, along with its key premise of civilising the wild. And the next proposed 'icon walk', along the remote and beautiful Croajingolong coast in East Gippsland, should be dropped completely.

Our park managers should be vigilant in protecting the wildness of the remaining natural areas in their care, if only to protect the wellbeing of the community. It may only be once in someone's life that they need to escape into nature, but that one time can be critical. • PW

This article first appeared in *Wild Magazine's* March 2017 issue.



An artist's impression of Norman Bay where the amphibious boats will land and be parked.

Prom boats' proposal

Parks Victoria is assessing a licence application by Pennicott Wilderness Tours (PWT) to operate three powerful amphibious boats, each holding 34 people, from the main visitor area of Norman Bay beach at Tidal River, Wilsons Promontory National Park. Currently, the Prom is suffering from 2-3 times its carrying capacity for cars in peak periods, a situation that compromises visitor enjoyment and safety. These proposed tours, which can only exacerbate that situation, should not be granted a permit until the Prom's traffic dilemma is solved.

Parks Victoria has set up an appalling process. Back in September 2015 they glowingly praised the PWT proposal in a letter supporting a tourism grant, compromising their capacity to assess the licence application.

Ravaging Buffalo

AN OUTRAGEOUS NATIONAL PARK DEVELOPMENT GRAB DISGUISES ITSELF AS A 'COMMUNITY LED' PROPOSAL. PHIL INGAMELLS TAKES A GOOD LOOK AT IT.

Mount Buffalo National Park is one of Victoria's oldest and most loved natural areas. First gazetted in 1898, it's roughly equal with the Prom as Victoria's oldest national park.

It has long been a favourite destination for nature-based tourism, well before the term was invented. Indeed, Alice Manfield, the legendary Guide Alice who brought many travellers to the plateau around the year 1900, was following in the footsteps of her parents and grandparents.

I once met Guide Alice's daughter, Genevieve Baumgarten, who told me how much her mother was captured by the spirit of the plateau, spending months at a time there before a viable road made access easy. Buffalo's many plants and animals, especially the lyrebirds, fascinated her, and wandering among the plateau's tumbled granite boulders gave her strength.

I couldn't help remembering Genevieve's account of Guide Alice as I read through the *'Vision for Mount Buffalo'*, launched recently by the 'Mount Buffalo Destination Advisory Group'.

The comparison left me sad.

The 'Vision' is flagged as a 'gift from the community', but has been delivered to Parks Victoria before the Victorian community has even seen it. And it calls for at least six hectares of the national park to be excised and handed over to private development, in perpetuity.



Winter near the Mount Buffalo Gorge.

PHOTO: DAVID TATNALL

So, let's have a good look at this 'gift'.

After a few failed attempts by various Victorian governments to rehabilitate the historic Buffalo Chalet, a group of local people, including tourism interests, offered to solve the Chalet 'problem'.

Perched near the edge of the precipitous 'wall', and a short stroll from where Crystal Brook cascades through great boulders into the Buffalo Gorge, the Chalet is well-placed for tourists. But since its construction in 1909, a rambling hotch-potch of added accommodation, sheds, stables and tennis courts behind it has expanded its footprint over some six hectares.

The government's last attempt to fix the Chalet proposed the removal of most of that ad-hoc expansion and a couple of old wings of the Chalet, reducing the footprint to a more sensible one hectare.

But the 'Vision' recommends the excision of the whole six hectares from the park, allowing massive commercial occupation of the area in a new, privately owned 'Mount Buffalo Village' development.

The old Chalet would be refitted with luxury suites up front, and a hostel at the rear. It would also house a new park office.

But accommodation options would be doubled, with the construction of a new Mount Buffalo Spa Retreat Hotel and day spa.

The many old outbuildings would be revamped, or rebuilt (see map opposite).

The new 'village' would create a parking problem, so the plan is to turn the current park office and works area into a 'centralised car park hub and logistical point' and shuttle people around the plateau in electric cars.

There is more.

The Lake Catani camp ground would be expanded with 'glamping' facilities and wilderness huts, Dingo Dell would get a new 'Outdoor Education Centre of Excellence', and an 'Alpine Activity Centre' would be constructed at Cresta Valley.

The plan is honest about the need to generate a considerable amount of power to supply all of these developments, provide water and deal with waste, but less clear about where that considerable infrastructure might be located. (Power supply has been a long-standing problem with the Chalet, as the plateau is often cloaked in cloud, and winds tend to be updrafts.)



Perhaps the most bizarre aspect of the proposal is the mooted key visitor attraction, the 'Mount Buffalo Gorge Skywalk' – a great glass-bottomed loop walkway extending out over the Buffalo Gorge. It would be modelled on the USA's Grand Canyon Skywalk (try Googling it!).

But the Grand Canyon is around 450 kilometres long and occupies some half a million hectares; its skywalk has limited visual impact.

The Buffalo Gorge is tiny by comparison and only tens of metres wide where you might put the skywalk. The visual impact would be considerable, but that doesn't seem to bother the development's planners.

In order to distinguish the skywalk from similar experiences elsewhere,

they recommend adding 'an in-air dining option that capitalises on the uninterrupted views' to 'enhance the profile of the offering'.

The proposed skywalk would have a disastrous visual impact on Mount Buffalo's famous gorge, and is a completely inappropriate addition to an already fine natural attraction.

The driving logic behind the whole scheme is that while visitor numbers to the park are increasing, those visitors do not actually spend a lot of money 'inside the park'.

But it's a national park, and its prime objective is the protection of its native animals and the ecosystems that support them. A secondary objective is to allow visitors the opportunity to experience the place in its natural

condition and, by implication, its natural ambience.

Even without a re-opened chalet, visitor numbers are now increasing at 5% a year, approaching the pre-alpine fire figures of over 200,000 a year. There is plenty of opportunity for off-park attractions, such as wineries and B&Bs, to capitalise on those numbers.

Handing over Mount Buffalo to the fantasies of private developers would, I can't help thinking, have appalled Guide Alice.

And it should seriously concern all Victorians who value our remarkable natural heritage, and the national parks that seek to protect it. • PW

Flowers empowered

CHRIS SMYTH REFLECTS ON AN HISTORIC
NATURE CONSERVATION WIN.

It's official – the internationally significant Anglesea Heathlands will be included in the Great Otway National Park in the autumn session of state parliament.

This remarkable outcome is the result of the long and concerted campaign by the Geelong Environment Council, Friends of the Eastern Otways, Angair and Surf Coast Air Action, supported by VNPA. The groups had campaigned for the Alcoa coal mine behind Anglesea to be closed, the company's adjacent power station to cease operation – Surf Coast Air Action raised concerns about local air pollution – and the heathlands included in the national park.

The threat to the heathlands emerged more than 50 years ago, when the US aluminium company, Alcoa, secured a long-term lease over 7,145 hectares of the Anglesea Heathlands in 1961.

The 1960s might have been the flower-power decade of peace and love, but the Bolte Government was hell-bent on industrial development, and even wanted to turn Western Port into the Ruhr of Australia. Little-known heathland flowers behind Anglesea had no power to stop it.

By 1968, Alcoa was open-cut mining for coal to be used in its nearby power station transmitting electricity to the company's Point Henry aluminium smelter.

Six years ago it was likely the mining operation would continue for at least another 50, when Alcoa's lease was renewed in late 2011. At that time, the company signed a revised agreement with the Victorian Government that, among other things, reduced the potential mine area to 665 hectares – it would have still allowed Alcoa to double the mine's surface area existing at that time – and saw the company lodge a bond for mine rehabilitation.

Alcoa also agreed, after community consultation – the company had established an ongoing community consultation process in 2001 – to mine deeper rather than its initial plan to dig further into the heathlands.

But market forces intervened, and as the aluminium industry struggled,

PHOTO: MARGARET MACDONALD

Pink heath.



PHOTO: TONY WOOLFORD



Clockwise from top left: The Anglesea Heathlands and the Alcoa open-cut coal mine and power station; Flying duck orchid; the Anglesea grevillea is endemic to the heathlands; Chocolate lily.



ALL PLANT PHOTOS: MARGARET MACDONALD

Alcoa decided to close the ageing Point Henry smelter and, after an unsuccessful attempt to sell them, the mine and power station too.

The closures in August 2015 sparked negotiations between the company and the Andrews Government about the ongoing lease of the Anglesea Heathlands and rehabilitation of the mine.

In February 2017 it was announced that Alcoa would surrender more than 6,510 hectares of the lease, almost all of which would be included in the Great Otway National Park during the 2017 autumn parliamentary session. The company

also agreed to rehabilitate the mine site over the next decade. It continues to hold a lease on the mine site and some heathland around the edge.

So what makes the Anglesea Heathlands worthy of inclusion in the Great Otway National Park?

For starters, they are one of the most diverse vegetation communities on the planet, with more than 700 plant species - one-quarter of Victoria's flora and one-third of its orchid species.

Twenty-one plant species are rare or threatened in Victoria, and four are found nowhere else: Anglesea

grevillea, Anglesea leek orchid, large bearded greenhood and the Anglesea grey gum.

The heathlands also act as a refuge for many native animals: 100 species of native birds, including the powerful owl and rufous bristlebird, and 29 mammal species, including the critically endangered new holland mouse and rare species such as the swamp antechinus, southern brown bandicoot and white-footed dunnart.

So next time you're down in Anglesea, follow the river upstream and take a look for yourself at these remarkable and soon-to-be protected Anglesea Heathlands. The flowers are now empowered. • PW

Victoria's forests are not magic puddings

MATT RUCHEL, MEMBER OF THE FOREST INDUSTRY TASK FORCE, EXPLAINS THAT SAWMILLS AND THE PULP AND PAPER INDUSTRY DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW FORESTS WORK.

Forests are living ecosystems, not magic puddings, and cannot supply something that doesn't exist.

The recent declaration by VicForests, the state government's logging agency, that there is insufficient wood to supply Gippsland sawmills, is hardly surprising; the writing has been on the wall for decades, made worse by the Black Saturday fires.

The blame for the shortfall should not be laid at the feet of the two-year-old Andrews Government nor the workers; regional jobs are important and workers should be supported and not misled or given false hope.

The blame should squarely be laid at the feet of sawmills and the pulp and paper industry. Their failure to change and innovate their use of the feedstock has driven the collapse of the forests, the decline of native wildlife and a shortage of wood.

The controversy is over the feedstock, the ash forests of the Central Highlands and the tall forests of eastern Victoria.

Successive governments of all political colours have failed to grapple with the fundamental constraints of this living ecosystem. Their failure has

been encouraged by an industry dependent on special treatment – either through government handouts, subsidised wood supply or exclusive legal arrangements – and shielded from real world economics.

The Andrews government needs to stand firm and break the cycle of jobs being dependent on unsustainable environmental practices, poor planning and special treatment.

In 2014, Victorian Labor's election commitment in this policy area was to establish a Forest Industry Taskforce. This forced the main protagonists, industry, union and conservationists – who have been in a 30-year battle over the future of forests – to try to reach consensus.

Over the past months Australian Sustainable Hardwoods, Australia's biggest sawmill, has run a sustained campaign to get special treatment for more wood and for a \$40-million handout to re-tool after VicForests offered it less wood in future contracts. A rich ask when the 2012 purchase price of the mill was reportedly just \$28 million.

Almost all of the feedstock for the Heyfield sawmill comes from publicly owned ash forests, and close

to half-a-million tonnes of trees are needed each year to feed Australian Paper's contract for the Maryvale pulp mill. A significant percentage of wood is also trucked to Geelong Port for export to Asia. A large volume is used to make pallets and, unbelievably, some is sent in shipping containers to China as whole logs with no value added in Australia.

Incredibly, VicForests not only provides the wood, it also covers the costs of logging and hauling. It's a profitably cosy arrangement for the industry, especially when it convinces governments to pay compensation when the forests cannot supply the wood.

Last year in the taskforce process, the industry agreed that there is wood 'uncertainty' and that native forest resource has 'reduced over time, remains under pressure and constrained'. Nevertheless, the industry resists change.

A report by the Land Conservation Council in 1994 warned that the amount of ash forest available 'may decrease if wildfire or disease affects substantial forest areas'. In 2009, the devastating Black Saturday bushfires burnt at least 72,000 hectares of the Ash forest.





PHOTO: SARAH DAY

In early February, logging began just a few hundred metres from the Ada Tall Trees Reserve, a beloved destination for locals and tourist in the mountain ash forests just north of Warburton. The road created to start the logging coupe is just a few metres from the Ada Reserve tourist sign! Leadbeater's possum detections had been recorded throughout the area known to be prime Leadbeater's habitat. Yet logging commenced and continued for a week after community protest and legal intervention by locals and conservationists. On 1 March, conservationists confirmed that logging had finally been halted in the coupe following detection of a Leadbeater's possum inside the active logging coupe.

In 2013, VicForests provided a briefing on future resource outlook to all its customers: by 2017 there would be at least a 25-per-cent reduction in ash sawlog.

For all these reasons, the wood reductions now being proposed should hardly be a surprise to anybody in the industry.

The real picture of where the wood comes from is bleak.

After decades of logging, plus the impact of fire, the health of the forest and the animals which rely on it – such as possums, gliders and owls – are in free fall.

The entire Mountain Ash forest was listed as critically endangered on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Ecosystems in 2015. That same year one of the key species occurring nowhere else on Earth, the Leadbeater's (fairy) possum, was classified as critically endangered under Australian federal environmental law. This is the last classification before extinction in the wild.

A couple of things need to happen. As a matter of urgency the discussion needs to move from behind closed doors. Hopefully, the two initial

Victorian Environment Assessment Council (VEAC) investigations already underway – the first into the conservation values of Victoria's eastern forests was released in early March (www.veac.vic.gov.au), the second into the capacity of these forests to continue to supply wood and fibre to industry is expected in May – will bring sense and clarity to the debate.

What's needed now is a full independent assessment by VEAC to determine the best use of the forest in eastern Victoria which would allow all forest users and local communities to

have a say, and ensure we get the best use of unique natural areas for people, the economy and for nature.

Continued logging at the same rates will likely drive the Leadbeater's possum to extinction. But even if you don't like possums, gliders or owls, there's no getting away from the fact that the wood supply for industry is largely gone, and the magic pudding never existed.

There have been enough warnings. The time for industry reform and supported change is now. • PW

Forest National Park great for the economy too

Victoria's proposed Great Forest National Park could draw almost 380,000 extra visitors a year to the Central Highlands, add \$71 million annually to the local economy and generate 750 jobs with a little private investment adjacent to the park, according to a new report by the Nous Group.

Even without private investment, simply declaring the national park, improving park infrastructure and visitor management, and establishing the Healesville-to-Eildon hiking trail could generate 520 jobs, attract an extra 242,000 visitors a year and add \$48 million annually to the economy in 10 years' time (and keep growing). And by just creating the park, that could boost visitation by 16 per cent or 24,000 extra visitors annually, create 80 jobs and add another \$7.5 million to the economy annually in the same timeframe.

That's the conclusion of a major economic analysis of the benefits of the proposed park just an hour's drive from Melbourne in the Central Highlands. Once established, it could grow to rival Sydney's neighbouring Blue Mountains National Park.

Investment in nature tourism is the next big thing for growing centres such as Healesville and Warburton, and will invigorate smaller towns such as Toolangi, Noojee and Rawson.

The Great Forest National Park would also help save Victoria's rapidly disappearing mountain ash forests, the tallest flowering trees in the world, and the state's animal emblem that calls them home, the Leadbeater's possum, which is teetering on the brink of extinction. It would also help keep secure Melbourne's vital drinking water supplies.

The economic analysis was commissioned by The Wilderness Society, Friends of Leadbeater's Possum and VNPA, with input from MyEnvironment. It can be downloaded at: http://www.greatforestnationalpark.com.au/uploads/1/5/5/7/15574924/nous_gfnp_economic_contribution_study_3_february_2017.pdf



PHOTO: STUART FRASER

Gold dust wattle and daisy bush understorey in the Wellsford Forest.

Proposed logging in western state forests slammed

MATT RUCHEL RAISES THE ALARM ON PLANS TO LOG VICTORIA'S WESTERN FORESTS.

Concern and anger has been sparked among conservationists by a decision that appears to escalate logging in state forest and some forest parks in western Victoria (west of the Hume Highway).

Just days before the caretaker period started for the 2014 state election, the then Agriculture Minister, Peter Walsh, handed over control of logging in west of the Hume highway to VicForests, the state forest-logging agency. Previously the Coalition had undertaken a review aiming to increase resource security and opportunities for industry growth in a region. VicForests had previously only ever, operated major forestry areas in eastern Victoria (east of the Hume Highway).

There had been little movement between 2014 and 2016 amid assurances that the areas flagged for logging by the coalition would not proceed. But in October 2016, VicForests commenced an expression of interest process seeking new operators or bidders for native forest in western Victoria, including around the Otways, Portland, Pyrenees Ranges, and Mt Lonarch state forests and other areas south of Ballarat.

In the west of the state there are habitat rich but comparatively small areas of state forest in largely cleared landscapes. It is a region where commercial native forestry had largely been phased out, including some operators being paid

out or transitioned when the Otway National Park was proclaimed in the early 1990s. The Coalition review was deeply flawed and failed to consider any ecological implications or impacts on threatened species or wider biodiversity protection efforts.

VNPA understands that the VicForest expression of interest process has generated three or four new business interests in the Portland area alone, and the process has now moved to the next phase of producing a new Timber Utilisation Plan (TUP) for 2017-2019/20. The plan identifies 43,000 ha for various types of logging. These range from thinning through to speciality timber selection to commercial firewood, and more than 7,000 ha of hazardous tree removal.

VicForests has said that they are not planning clear-felling but it is not ruled out in the draft plan. Likewise, the TUP continues to include eight coupes in the Wellsford Forest, near Bendigo, including high conservation and controversial 'Big Tree' coupes identified by local conservationists.

Public comments on the draft plan close on 27 March 2017.

The Andrews Government appears to be endorsing the approach of VicForests and the previous coalition government. The Minister for Agriculture, Jaala Pulford, has confirmed to VNPA that '...there is no change in forest policy for western Victoria ...'.

The VNPA has joined with local conservation groups, such as the Portland Field Naturalist Club and the Bendigo and District Environment Council, to slam the proposed return to native forest logging in Western Victoria.

It has been well documented for decades that the history of land use in Victoria has left a legacy of fragmented native vegetation with a high proportion of animal and plant species now threatened or extinct, especially west of the Hume Highway.

Native vegetation in Victoria's fragmented landscapes supports the majority of the state's biodiversity. Around 40 per cent of Victoria's native land vertebrate species (mammals, bird, amphibians, reptiles) are virtually restricted to fragmented landscapes. A further 45 per cent rely on fragmented landscapes across a major part of their distribution in Victoria.

Preventing habitat loss and improving the condition of native vegetation is, by many orders of magnitude, more cost-effective than revegetation, and has significantly better conservation outcomes.

It seems a profoundly flawed approach to provide millions of dollars and thousands of volunteer hours for revegetation of our most cleared landscapes in western Victoria, while opening up logging in the last remaining native forest remnants on public land.

To add insult to injury, the targeting of native forest is in a region containing



A recent example of so-called, low-intensity single-tree selective logging from the controversial Parlour's Coupe in the Strathbogrie Ranges, one of the silvicultural methods proposed for logging in western Victoria.

a massive hardwood and softwood plantation forestry estate accompanied by the biggest export woodchip facility in the world.

The area is also covered by the Western Regional Forest Agreement. This agreement essentially turns off national environmental laws in the region and, like the other Victorian Regional Forests agreements in the east of the state, is now being reviewed as a package and will be completed in early 2018. The independent review of the last review for western Victoria recommended that:

'There are a number of key issues that I have recommended the Parties consider for the continued implementation of the REAs. The most critical of these is consideration of

cancelling the West Victoria RFA or substantially amending the RFA given the significant additions to reserves and reduction in timber availability made since the agreement was signed.'

VicForests is obligated to maximise its profits and should not be involved in forestry in western Victoria, which will never be ecologically or economically sustainable. Conservationists are calling for the:

- cancellation of the Western Regional Forest Agreement
- reversal or dropping of the VicForests responsibility for western Victoria
- cancellation of the current Timber Utilisation Plan process
- completion of a full and detailed ecological assessment of forested public land in the region. • PWW

Invitation to book launch

'Repaying my debt: A conservationist's tale' is the memoir by well-known conservationist, Geoff Mosley, and is to be launched by Geoff Goode on 30 March.

In this extensive memoir, Geoff Mosley tells of his early formative years spent in the famed Peak District of the UK. The book gives a good account of what life was like during those turbulent years (1931–50) before moving on to his student days. Trained as a geographer, Geoff tells of his early adventures abroad, his time spent completing National Service and then his embarking on further travel to Canada and New Zealand before eventually settling in Australia in 1960.

It was here in Australia that Geoff was to make his mark as a conservationist of both national and international significance. The Australian Conservation Foundation and Geoff's involvement with it from its earliest days is part of this detailed story. There is also a personal story of a busy life with a growing family and the sacrifices made along the way. A tireless worker still, these pages also outline his message on how to save the Planet from the excesses of today.

The book will be launched on Thursday 30 March 2017 at 7pm in The International Bookshop, Trades Hall, 54 Victoria Street, Carlton. Please RSVP to nibscordinator@gmail.com or phone 03 9662 3744.

'Repaying my debt' will be reviewed in June *Park Watch*.

Planning our parks

'WHERE ARE WE GOING WITH NATIONAL PARK MANAGEMENT PLANS?' ASKS PHIL INGAMELLS.

It's a long time now since our land managers dutifully respected the National Parks Act's call for a management plan for each national park.

Instead, we have regional park plans, which include parks of a similar nature and location in one document.

The good side of that change is that the plans can actually be prepared under Parks Victoria's (PV's) depleted resources. The unfortunate side is that plans are often lacking in specifics; the details appear in a series of in-house documents that don't see the light of day.

Another promised benefit of the regional approach is that they allow planning across the landscape – important for things like pest management, fire and, indeed, visitor management. However, the plans don't take into account any surrounding or linking public land, let alone private land, so their capacity to address landscape-scale issues is quite limited.

There is another downside to that situation. Park management plans are the only planning process for public land to which the community has access. That means people pushing for trail-bike tracks, mountain-bike tracks, huts, hotels or anything else only get a hearing within the national park planning process. There is no process at all for looking at where facilities and infrastructure are best located across other public land.

So where does that leave us?

Alpine parks

The most recent plan off the presses is the long-awaited Greater Alpine National Parks Management Plan. It swept up 923,000 ha, nearly a

third of Victoria's park estate, in one swoop. It covers the Alpine, Baw Baw, Errinundra, Mount Buffalo and Snowy River national parks; the Avon Wilderness; Tara Range Park; and Grant, Howqua Hills, Mount Murphy, Mount Wills and Walhalla historic areas.

There have been some big improvements on the old alpine and other park plans. There are now very clear statements about the scale of feral horse and deer damage to the Alpine National Park and, at least in the case of horses, achievable options for meaningful control. Thankfully the current Minister for the Environment is taking a serious look at those options, and promising action.

There is also clear acknowledgement of the impact of fire in the high country, with fire having affected '90% of the parks in the recent past'.

That's serious, and while PV has limited responsibility for fire management (the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning has prime responsibility), the plan makes it clear that increased rapid-attack capability will help keep fire from some of the area's very fire-sensitive ecosystems, including peat beds, alpine ash forests and snow gum woodlands.

On the other hand, the plan gives several nods to possible tourism developments. Identifying new 'recreation development zones' at the Chalet, Lake Catani, Dingo Dell and Cresta on Mount Buffalo could be interpreted as allowing the bizarre

private development options recently proposed for the park (See pages 8-9).

And the plan's support for development of the Falls to Hotham trail is again vague and open-ended, allowing the possibility of the construction of the 31 huts now proposed (see pages 6-7).

One last note. At the 2015 World Parks Congress in Sydney, a researcher reported on management plans of 87 parks in Victoria and Tasmania. She said only 27 had mentioned climate change, and while 13 identified the problem of climate resilience of ecosystems, only eight had specific prescriptions. The alps plan clearly identifies the climate problem, but offers few solutions (see pages 18-19).

Joint management for Gippsland parks

In 2010, Victoria's State Traditional Owner Recognition and Settlement Agreement transferred 10 parks and reserves to be jointly managed by Gippsland's Gunaikurnai community and the State of Victoria. Those parks are Tarra Bulga, Mitchell River and Lakes national parks; Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park; Lake Tyers State Park; Gippsland Lakes Reserve at Raymond Island; Buchan Caves Reserve; Corrinle Foreshore Reserve and The Knob Reserve.

The Gunai Kurnai community are currently developing a draft plan consistent with the *National Parks Act*. Full community consultation will occur once a formal draft has been prepared. • PW



PHOTO: PHIL INGAMELLS

A second container port for Victoria?

THE DEBATE ON VICTORIA'S FUTURE PORT NEEDS IS ENTERING A NEW PHASE, SAYS CHRIS SMYTH.

If you've ever considered the when and where of a second container port in Victoria, or even the need for one, then you will be interested in looking at reports just released by Infrastructure Victoria.

The agency has released a discussion paper, consultation paper and 40 technical reports as part of its investigation into options for a second container port in Victoria. The purpose of the documents is to: '... provide an overview of the evidence Infrastructure Victoria will consider in developing its advice to the Special Minister of State on when and where the Government should invest in new container port capacity for the State ... Our future advice to the Minister will help ensure that the Victorian Government is well placed to make an informed decision about when to invest in new capacity, and whether that capacity should be at the Port of Melbourne, or at a new port at either Bay West or Hastings.'

The investigation by Infrastructure Victoria stems from the debate, prior to the 2014 election, about the Napthine Government's big plans for the Port of Hastings, a massive container port that would have risked Western Port's natural values. Those plans were put on hold with the election of the Andrews Government but could resurface if the Port of Hastings is chosen as the site of Victoria's second container port.

Under the Napthine Government's plans, Western Port would have seen shipping traffic increase from fewer than 100 ships per year to more than 3,000. Research commissioned by VNPA and the Westernport and Peninsula Protection Council showed that most high-value conservation areas could be hit by a spill within less than six hours. Those areas include Phillip Island Nature Park, home to colonies of little penguins, and French Island Marine National Park, critical roosting, feeding and wading areas for waterbirds.

Two other expert reports heightened fears that internationally significant birdlife would be put at risk from oil spills, dredging, land clearing and vessel wash. Seabirds such as little penguins, cormorants, grebes and hooded plovers, along with seagrass, mangrove and saltmarsh habitats, could be seriously impacted.

Bay West was the then Labor Opposition's alternative to the Port of Hastings expansion and was proposed for the western shoreline of Port Phillip Bay, which contains one of Australia's richest saltmarshes and extensive seagrass

meadows. Its flora is of national significance and its fauna of international significance, and the area should be a priority for better management and protection. At the time Bay West was proposed, there was scant information, but in the Infrastructure Victoria report there is plenty.

The supporters of an expanded Port of Hastings or a new port at Bay West have placed great faith in the coming of mega ships to Australian ports. But this has been debunked as a myth by the Supply Chain Advisory Network, an expert think tank of up to 40 freight and logistics experts which says that markets dictate the size of ships not government policy, and Australia's market is simply not 'mega' enough.

Both port development options are environmental disasters in waiting, requiring substantial dredging and the likely clearing of important marine and coastal habitat such as seagrass meadows and coastal saltmarsh and wetlands.

The release of the Infrastructure Victoria's reports is a most critical moment in the debate about Victoria's future port infrastructure. The needs of our marine and coastal environments and wildlife should be paramount in any future port planning.

Now is your chance to comment on the when and where of a second container port or on whether you think there is a need for one at all – perhaps the existing ports could be reconfigured to meet future needs.

Public submissions on the Infrastructure Victoria discussion paper can be made up until 3 April at <http://yoursay.infrastructurevictoria.com.au/ports> • PW



WILL VICTORIA SET UP
GROUND-BREAKING
RESEARCH INTO CLIMATE
RESILIENCE FOR OUR
NATURAL AREAS? PHIL
INGAMELLS REPORTS.

We absolutely need to reduce our carbon emissions, but no matter what anyone, or everyone, does there will still be big changes ahead for nature in Victoria.

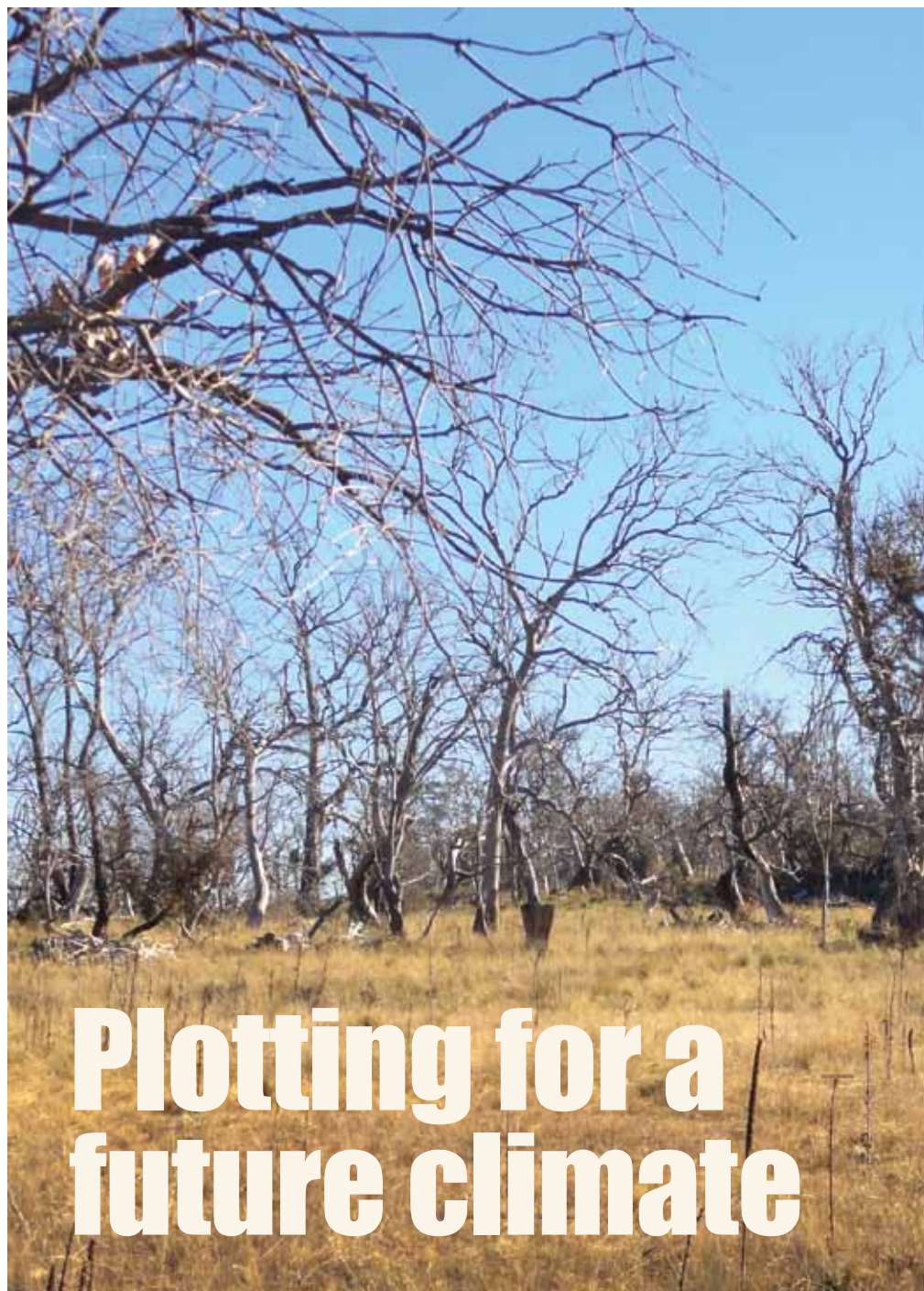
The climate is already altering, and the bush as we know it will be impacted in many ways: more severe droughts, more extreme floods, more frequent severe fire, generally higher temperatures, new pest invasions and coastal erosion.

Our future land managers (and we're talking about the near future!) are likely to be dealing with dilemmas rarely faced before: ecosystems transforming before their eyes, or actually crashing.

One fine day in mid-February, about 30 interesting people gathered at the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning's (DELWP's) Arthur Rylah Research Institute. Their task was to work towards a design for a series of studies that could help our future land managers, community conservation volunteers and private landholders make decisions on whether, when and how to intervene in climate-stressed ecosystems.

Leading ecologists and geneticists from Victorian universities were joined by CSIRO climate experts from Canberra and Perth, and an ecologist from Tasmania.

The scientists were met by people working on ecosystem restoration in Victoria (catchment management authorities, Greening Australia, Bush Heritage and Parks Victoria) and senior policy people from DELWP.



Plotting for a future climate

Under earlier historic climate changes, ecosystems were interconnected across the landscape, and temperature changes were generally slow. This allowed adaptive processes, such as cross pollination with genetic variants of each particular plant species, and survival of the best climate-adapted types.

Now however, many of our ecosystems are fragmented, often leaving little genetic variation in an isolated bit of bush. And even in larger, fairly well-connected places (such as north-eastern Victoria), the rapid pace of our current changing climate may not allow species with poor seed dispersal enough time to build genetic resilience.

So the idea is to set up, across Victoria, a series of 'Climate Future Plots'. These plots would be located adjacent to or even within vulnerable ecosystems. Genetic variants of the plant species within these ecosystems, brought from further afield, would be deliberately introduced to the trial plots and their success monitored.

Then, if a particular plant species in an ecosystem fails in the future, and an introduced variant is thriving in the trial plot, an informed decision could be made about introducing that better climate-suited variant into the ecosystem.

Climate impacts are already happening in our region. The extensive dieback of manna gums in the Cooma-Monaro region of New South Wales is almost certainly the result of long periods of drought.

(See: Ross C and Brack C. *Eucalyptus viminalis* dieback in the Monaro region, NSW. Australian Forestry 2015.)



PHOTO CATHERINE ROSS

It's not a simple thing though, and any intervention in our national parks and other high-value conservation areas must be done carefully. Indeed, some would say we should be leaving nature to fight out its battles alone, as it has done over the last few millennia.

But intervening in Victoria's natural areas is not new.

Over the past 50 years or so, production-forest managers have often been fairly cavalier about introducing variations of tree species; Central Highlands' genetic stock has turned up in East Gippsland's forests and vice versa.

Importantly, natural selection, Darwin's now long-recognised process that allowed the strengthening of old species and the evolution of new species, depends on the evolution of, and ready exchange of, genetic material.

If we can help our much fragmented and otherwise imperilled native ecosystems by exposing them to their own genetic variants, we are allowing them access to that evolutionary process and to help themselves survive climate change.

One neat example of how that sort of intervention might work comes from the animal world.

The few small surviving colonies of the endangered *Burramys*, or mountain pygmy possum, were failing to breed up well in the wild. A costly captive breeding program was instigated, but it didn't greatly help populations.

Then came the notion to simply mix up the isolated wild populations, so the pool of genetic varieties of *Burramys* increased at each location. That relatively uncstly process has resulted in more robust, and growing, *Burramys* populations at each site.

We are hoping the Victorian Government's soon-to-be-released biodiversity strategy will recognise the potential of a carefully designed set of climate future plots across the state, where genetic variants of plant species can be introduced, and monitored.

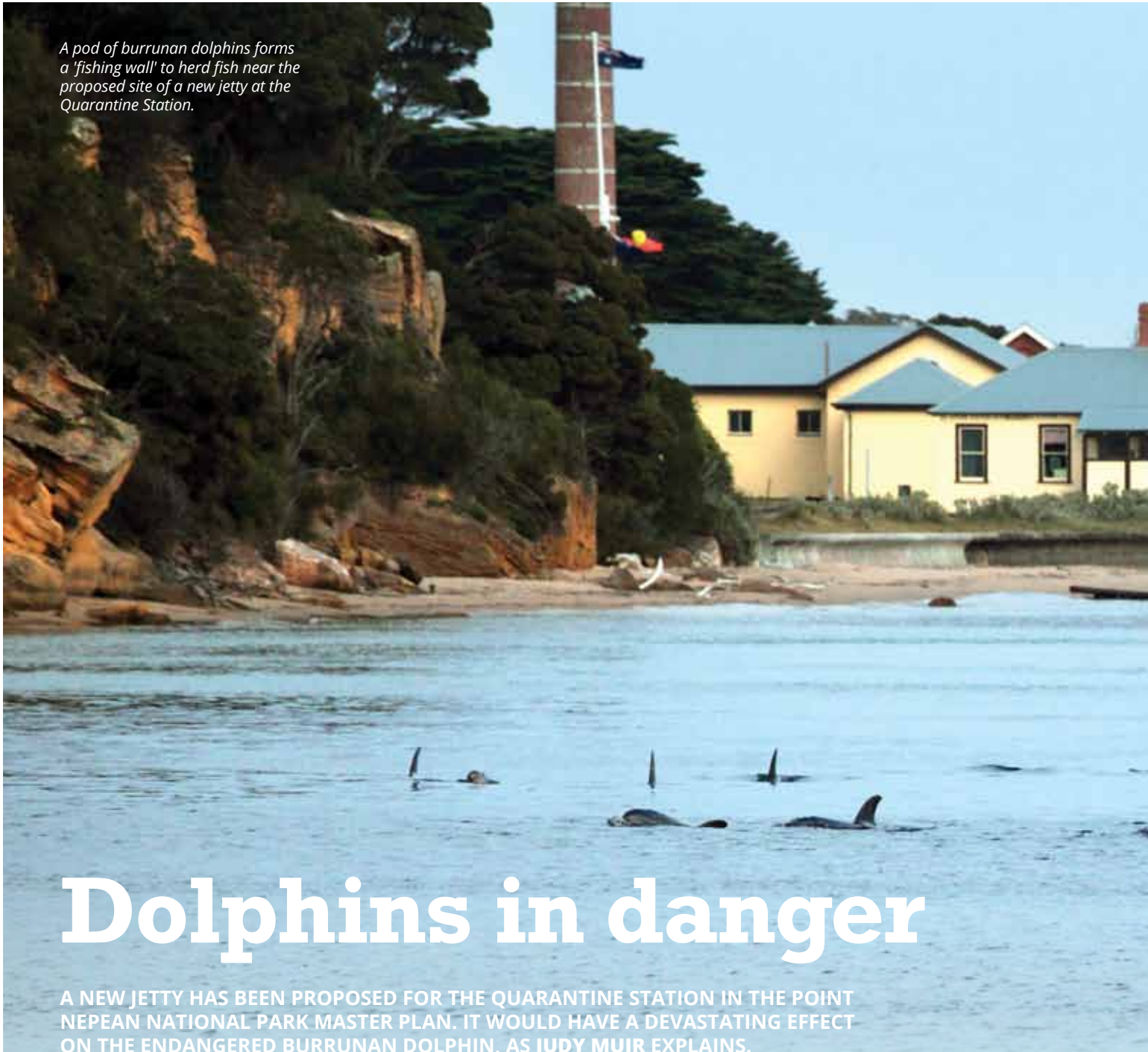
In a few parts of the world, including Tasmania, plots have already been trialled in certain ways. But systematically applying and monitoring such plots across a large range of ecosystems would be a world first.

Potentially, with the right design protocols in place, these trials could guide future managers of our park system, as well as private conservation landholders and community groups involved in rehabilitation and connectivity programs.

If we don't do this, we might not have the necessary knowledge and tools to help our remarkable natural heritage deal with whatever the future brings.

February's gathering was the third symposium held by the VicNature2050 partners: the University of Melbourne's Bio 21 Institute, La Trobe University, Greening Australia, the Royal Society of Victoria, DELWP's Arthur Rylah Institute, and VNPA. The event was funded by DELWP, and co-ordinated by VNPA.

A paper outlining options and possibilities for a series of climate future plots across Victoria is currently being prepared, based on the talks and discussions of the day. It should appear soon on the www.vicnature2050.org website. • PW



A pod of burrunan dolphins forms a 'fishing wall' to herd fish near the proposed site of a new jetty at the Quarantine Station.

Dolphins in danger

A NEW JETTY HAS BEEN PROPOSED FOR THE QUARANTINE STATION IN THE POINT NEPEAN NATIONAL PARK MASTER PLAN. IT WOULD HAVE A DEVASTATING EFFECT ON THE ENDANGERED BURRUNAN DOLPHIN, AS JUDY MUIR EXPLAINS.

Port Phillip Bay is one of two areas where the endangered burrunan dolphin *Tursiops australis* lives; the other is at Lakes Entrance. The bay has an effective population of 89; there are fewer at Lakes Entrance.

The Ticonderoga Bay Sanctuary Zone off Point Nepean's Quarantine Station is significant for the burrunan dolphins' food, socialising, breeding and maternal pods. It offers a deep drop off used as a 'fishing wall' shown in the above photo - that's how dolphins herd fish. The zone also offers shelter in south-westerly gales for maternal pods, and it is an area where whale watching laws apply – in the case of tour operators, they preclude any interaction for 200 metres shoreline to seaward.

The importance of the Sanctuary Zone is supported by science, as is the notion of setting aside marine protected areas. The other important area in the bay is from Blairgowrie to Tyrone-Rye, but where a fourth ramp is proposed for use by boats and jet-skis. This too will impact

heavily on the dolphins as they use the area for socialising, including breeding.

The justification for recreating the jetty that once stood at the Quarantine Station is for historical reasons. But it is not intended that park visitors re-live the horrors of landing passengers from disease-ridden vessels on to a wild and frighteningly foreign land or taking corpses and the near-dead ashore. History? The arguments for this intrusion are not justified.

The early European use and development of Point Nepean was a very tragic part of local history. A camp of the Boon Wurrung/Bunurong people was brutally invaded by sealers in the early nineteenth century, women were kidnapped and the community dispossessed of their land and sources of food. Families from overseas arrived at the Quarantine Station in the 1850s with very few possessions and often with fewer family members than when embarking on their voyage. If history is the premise



for rebuilding a jetty, then be true to the story. Sound and light shows ashore can recreate the events of 150+ years ago.

Back then the early explorers state that the bay was alive with thousands of whales and dolphins. It was densely populated with marine life – the sighing of whales was a cacophony. We now have isolated populations in which female philopatry (they stay in or habitually return to the area) is evident. This matriarchal pod is destined to live here. The pod will not move out, they will die out. The need to have the Ticonderoga Bay Sanctuary Zone is never more important. (There are no longer resident pods in Botany Bay or Sydney Harbour).

Port Phillip Bay is just a sheet of water over which money passes, much as a bank teller's counter in days of yore. It's a speedway with no laws and no policing. There is little consideration of the column of water, the exquisite yet fragile ecosystems or of the amazing richness and

diversity in these southern waters. Wildlife is now the wild lifestyle of humans freed from responsibilities for their actions.

At a pre-season Department of Land, Water and Planning meeting with wildlife operators, Parks Victoria officers noted that when on patrol they would approach recreational boaters about breaking the law (be it speeding close to shore, harassing wildlife, being close to dolphins etc.) and the vessel would then move on. But the same vessel would be picked up again and again, some days for the same behaviors that day in a different area.

We need to stir the planners to change what seems to be a concerted effort to put tourism expansion ahead of any other needs despite the degradation of the very environment that was, in itself, the attraction. And that means a jetty should not be built at the Quarantine Station. • PW

Judy Muir AOM and her family run the award-winning Polperro Cruises in southern Port Phillip Bay.

PUTTING THREATENED SPECIES FIRST

MATT RUCHEL SAYS IT'S TIME TO ACT ON EXTINCTION

The trend is not nature's friend

Victoria is the most cleared state in Australia. Since European settlement, 18 species of mammal, two birds, one snake, three types of fish and 51 plants have become extinct in Victoria.

Between a quarter and one third of all Victorian land-based plants, birds, reptiles, amphibians and mammals are considered threatened with extinction. While we have made significant efforts over the past 50 years, our biodiversity and natural areas continue to decline and this will worsen under climate change.

Our national parks and conservation areas are the foundations of our efforts to protect whole ecosystems. But they are only part of the puzzle in ensuring that our natural heritage is handed on in better condition, not worse.

We need to do more to reverse these trends, but laws that are supposed to also protect nature are clearly not doing their job in Victoria. Our threatened species laws are like a rotten verandah post, swinging in the breeze, held on with a rusty nail. It is so thoroughly eaten by white ants that the post maintains a veneer of form but has been hollowed out over time, riddled with loopholes and tunnels. In this case the white ants wore suits, and usually had interests in forestry, farming and infrastructure.

Reviewing species-protection laws

Victoria's main piece of threatened species legislation, the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act* (FFG Act), was introduced in 1988. And despite more than a decade of critique and review, it is yet to be amended.

Following urgings from VNPA and others, the then Victorian Labor Opposition made its 2014 election promise to 'review the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act*' and the ALP 2014 Platform committed to 'modernise threatened species protection to adopt world's best practice'.

The review of the FFG Act was run concurrently with the development of a state-wide biodiversity strategy, and a consultation paper was released after two years of workshops with stakeholders. Public submissions on the paper close at 5:00pm on 28 March 2017 and can be made at <https://engage.vic.gov.au/review-flora-and-fauna-guarantee-act-1988>

The consultation paper outlines a series of directions for change and has more than 50 areas of potential improvements. Some of these are sensible, but in many places it does not go far enough to put threatened species first or to slow their overall decline. The consultation paper even suggests removing the 'Guarantee' in the Act's title.

Weaknesses of the FFG Act and its implementation

Probably the biggest driver for a review is that the current legislation is simply not effective.

We can't even stop our only endemic mammal, the Leadbeater's possum, being put on the critically endangered list nationally – the last step before extinction in the wild.

The current FFG Act lists threatened species, ecological communities and potentially threatening processes. It allows for the creation of action statements and flora and fauna

management plans, for areas to be proclaimed critical habitats through interim conservation orders, and to enter into agreements via public authority management agreements.

The performance statistics are stark. Less than 50% of listed species have action statements, and many of those that do are fairly wishy washy. There have been no flora and fauna management plans prepared, no interim conservation orders issued and only one public authority agreement entered into in the past 10 years. And the legislation does not directly cover private land (unlike federal legislation), and most decisions need to be made jointly by environment and agriculture ministers.

Reforming the FFG Act

The FFG Act was ground breaking when passed in 1988. It included the 'guarantee' that all of '...Victoria's





The Leadbeater's possum is one of many native species failed by the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act.

PHOTO: DAN HARLEY

flora and fauna ... can survive, flourish and retain their potential for evolutionary development in the wild'.

Many conservation-minded people have cherished this idea as showing a societal aspiration for conservation. These days there are mixed views, some people arguing that this is impossible in the face of climate change and forces governments to focus only on species very close to the edge of survival in the wild. The current consultation even proposed to remove the 'Guarantee' in the Act's title.

But the government's review is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for Victoria to make much-needed improvements to its main nature protection law. The FFG Act urgently needs modernisation to better incorporate new approaches to threatened species, recognise the role of Traditional Owners and prepare

for the impacts of climate change on nature, as well as provide new tools to reverse the decline in our natural areas.

Key reforms

There are five key reforms conservation groups are calling for in new legislation:

1. A fair go for threatened species: threatened species provisions must be retained in the FFG Act and overhauled so that, among other things:
 - all public authorities are required to comply with the provisions of the FFG Act to ensure that its provisions have greater effect across various spheres of government decision-making
 - current exemptions to threatened species protections removed to ensure they apply to all sectors – including forestry – and apply on private, as well as public land.

2. Stronger stop and protect powers: there must be greater clarity around when and how the government is required to act to protect threatened species (as opposed to the existing discretionary tools such as improved and strengthened critical habitat provisions)
3. A nature cop on the beat: the compliance and enforcement provisions of the FFG Act need a major overhaul, including a new entity to monitor and enforce the provisions of the Act, and a range of penalties for non-compliance, possibly both civil and criminal.
4. Clear targets and timelines: the biodiversity plan currently being finalised by the government must have a stronger legislative framework, including the requirement to have simple, measureable and ambitious 20-year biodiversity targets.
5. Giving the community the power to act: to take legal action to protect threatened species. A framework should be established that enables regional communities to develop landscape-scale restoration action plans, and new obligations for publicly releasing information included.

The time for reform is now

With less than two years before the next state election, there is not much time to complete the necessary consultation and pass legislation, particularly for such a complex area of law. While it is important that governments deliver on promises, it is critical in this case that the legislation is fit for purpose. It should put threatened species first and make Victoria once again a leader in nature conservation. • PW

Thanking 'the Doc'

EVELYN FELLER AND
MICHAEL HOWES EXPLAIN
HOW VICTORIANS AND OUR
PARK SYSTEM OWE A LOT TO
DR LEONARD HART SMITH.

When Len Smith became Victoria's second Director of National Parks in 1958, the then National Parks Authority was a new and poorly resourced body.

He worked in a political context where developers had close personal connections with cabinet ministers. He also inherited a system where existing parks had committees of management that resisted the Authority being established in 1956.

In the 1980s, Dr Smith (known to his staff as 'the Doc') wrote a comprehensive account of his time as Director from 1958 to 1975. His daughter Helen Kosky and son Dr John Hart-Smith asked the VNPA to publish this history on line, with their support.

The history is a valuable source of information about the development of Victoria's National Parks Service, now part of Parks Victoria. Dr Smith was also a keen photographer, as well as an authority on lyrebirds, and the history is largely illustrated with his own photos.

The following is an extract from chapter 4, 'Learning the Trade', which describes Dr Smith's first day as Director and shows just how limited the Authority's resources were at the time:

'The sun was shining brightly out of a blue sky when I arrived at the Observatory Building near Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance, where the National Parks Authority had become established, on 1st September 1958.



Dr Smith and parks authority rangers show the Duke of Edinburgh around Wilsons Promontory National Park in 1973.

'I was met by the Secretary, Mr R. B. (Ron) Newson, and our typing assistant, a delightful young lady of sixteen years named Joy Barker. Ron showed me where I would sit – it did indeed feel strange to be sitting in the chair previously occupied by my old friend Crosbie Morrison [the first Director, who had died in March 1958].

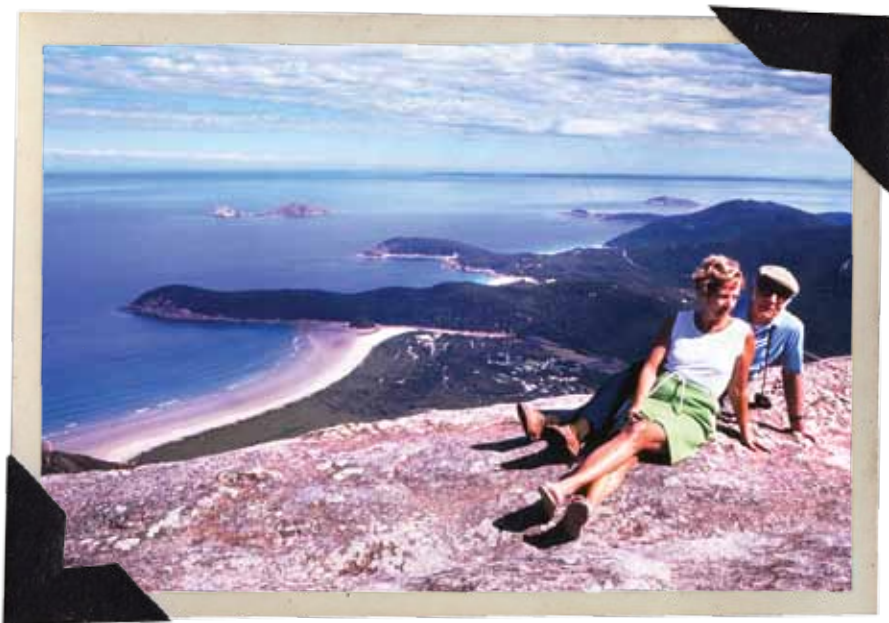
'After a few minutes, I began to take stock: the office, about 12 feet wide x 15 feet long, contained two ample desks with comfortable chairs, and there were two four-drawer filing cabinets, two teledexes and two telephones ... Our typist shared an [adjoining] office with two other ladies employed by the Weights and Measures Department.'

In the 28 chapters of his history, Dr Smith covers a wide range of topics, from the workings of the Authority

and relationships with committees of management and the VNPA, to the provision of visitor facilities and activities such as fire management, vermin control and commercial developments in parks.

Some of the many achievements under his directorship were:

- major park infrastructure improvements such as road access, water supplies, camp grounds and accommodation, track building and garbage management. Examples are the roads into Wyperfeld National Park and from Tidal River to Oberon Saddle; new tracks at the Prom; concrete water tanks at Wyperfeld; incinerators at the Prom and Fraser (Lake Eildon); and the Riverview Flats at Tidal River. Many of the first toilet blocks and picnic shelters in our parks were built during his directorship



PHOTOS COURTESY HELEN KOSKY
AND JOHN HART-SMITH

Commercial developments proposed for Mount Buffalo and Wilsons Promontory national parks were threats that Dr Smith resisted.

- developing ranger training. In 1958 there were only four park rangers in the state, and no professional training. Dr Smith employed more rangers and organised a number of training programs in different parks.
- defining and restricting the roles of the committees of management and strengthening the role of the Authority. The committees complained to politicians; Dr Smith was described in parliament as 'being like Khrushchev' (the then Russian president). He also employed excellent technical staff such as John Landy, Trevor Arthur and Don Saunders
- establishing ranger housing. Facilities for rangers in parks were non-existent and Dr Smith lobbied successfully for the funding of ranger housing in parks.
- a proposed 140-hectare development at Pillar Point (Wilsons Promontory National Park) in the early 1960s, with a chalet for 200 people, motel beds for 500, a swimming pool, squash courts, gym and even a mini railway. Dr Smith and his staff argued strongly against this on environmental grounds. Financial issues and community opposition finally killed the proposal.

He also battled against many threats to the parks. Outstanding examples are:

- a similarly large development proposed for Mt Buffalo National Park with hotel, restaurants, tennis courts and fishponds. Again, this was rejected. The Authority could not reject developments outright, but restricting them to 10 ha reduced the enthusiasm of developers.
- minimising the destructive impact of road building in parks. At Wyperfeld, Dr Smith had a road realigned to protect a native cypress-pine grove and stopped the roads authority from dumping construction waste in the park
- preventing excessive fire-access tracks in parks, particularly across the northern part of the Prom. He quickly realised that many of these tracks satisfied bulldozer operators rather than fire management needs
- reducing the height of a proposed 100-metre communications tower on Mt Oberon (Wilsons Promontory) to 45 metres. Dr Smith could not stop the tower from being built, but was able to reduce its visual impact from Tidal River
- preventing the Authority from losing responsibilities and even being abolished. The Forests Commission always wanted to take over fire suppression work in parks, and also proposed that it should entirely manage national parks. Dr Smith vigorously resisted these attacks, gaining support from sympathetic politicians.

Dr Smith's attitude to private development was that 'Private enterprise has no place in parks. The environment is the inevitable victim in the pursuit of money'. Ironically, he was involved in consultations and negotiations in 1960 that allowed legislation for 33-year leases in parks, and even 75-year ones. He said that he was surprised by the introduction of the proposed legislation, and was possibly involved in reducing its potential harm.

Dr Smith's account of his time as Director of National Parks is now available on the VNPA website. We encourage you to read Dr Smith's history and reflect on the past and future of Victoria's parks. The story of Organ Pipes National Park is particularly fascinating, but you'll have to read the history to find out about that! • PW



PHOTO: GEOFF DURHAM

A tranquil scene along the banks of the Mitchell River.

Mitchell River National Park

GEOFF DURHAM LAST VISITED MITCHELL RIVER NATIONAL PARK MORE THAN A DECADE AGO.

On several occasions over the years I have visited the Den of Nargun, 25 km northwest of Bairnsdale.

During Easter 1996, I completed the two-day walk in Mitchell River National Park from Angusvale in the north to the Den of Nargun, camping overnight beside the river. I renewed my acquaintance with the park in December last year after a gap of ten or more years.

On my December visit, I was impressed by the improvements in the car parks and picnic areas, and the state of roads, but disappointed at the minimal interpretation. I was surprised at the

amount of fuel-reduced areas. Parks Victoria says the burns are ecologically based, but Environment East Gippsland and VNPA have serious concerns.

Park values

Parks Victoria's 'Park Notes' accurately state: 'the park protects impressive river scenery and is an exciting destination for outdoor enthusiasts who can enjoy both 4-wheel and 2-wheel driving, sight-seeing, picnicking, camping and caravanning, bushwalking, canoeing and rafting with disbursed camping, horse riding, bike riding, some rock climbing, and fishing. Dogs are not permitted.'

The park's vegetation is of exceptional interest: grassy woodland in the north, a variety of eucalypt forest on the ridges and slopes, dry rainforest on rocky slopes and warm temperate rainforest within the moist gullies. It also has special flora and fauna conservation values with rare or threatened species.

Major weeds are blackberry and ragwort, while deer, foxes and cats are the main animal pests.

The Mitchell River is the largest free flowing river in Victoria. It is designated a 'Heritage River' and is particularly important for the threatened native fish, the Australian grayling.



PHOTOS: GEOFF DURHAM

Above: Rivermouth Road on the Mitchell River silt jetties.

Left: The Mitchell River.

Flowing out of the Alps through a spectacular gorge in the national park, the river then crosses the fertile Lindenow river flats, past Bairnsdale and between the narrow and geologically significant silt jetties that form an eight-kilometre channel into Lake King.

Disappointingly, a lookout at Eagle Point does not give a good overall view of the silt jetties. The northern jetty has been breached but you can drive along Rivermouth Road to the end of the southern one.

Evolving protection

The river was named in 1840 by Angus McMillan, after Surveyor General Sir Thomas Mitchell. Alfred Howitt explored the river by bark canoe in 1875, sketching the Den of Nargun and describing it as 'this wonderfully picturesque and beautiful spot'. In the 1920s the Melbourne Amateur Walking Club and the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria called for the reservation of the Mitchell River Gorge. Land was donated by APM Forests Pty Ltd and in 1962 the 163-hectare Glenaladale National Park, encompassing the Den of Nargun, was proclaimed.

There have been various proposals to dam the Mitchell River. In 1881, the Glenaladale Weir was constructed of sandstone, but it was soon breached and never repaired. Ninety years later a dam was proposed at Billy Goat Bend, then another upstream at Angusvale. A site was acquired and an access road built, but following the election of the

Cain Labour Government in May 1982, the project was deferred indefinitely.

The area was then under investigation by the Land Conservation Council (LCC), the VNPA submission to which was for a Mitchell River Gorge National Park. The LCC recommended a 12,200-hectare Mitchell River State Park incorporating Glenaladale National Park. But in 1996 the Mitchell River National Park of 11,900 ha was declared. The Angusvale weir site and other land were added in 2002, expanding the park to 14,395 ha.

Joint management

In 2010, the Gunaikurnai gained native title to the park under the federal *Native Title Act 1993*, and the Victorian Government entered into an agreement with them under the Victorian *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010*. The park is one of ten transferred to the Gunaikurnai to be jointly managed with the state. They have rights to access and use of the land for traditional purposes within existing laws.

The federal and Victorian governments provide funding to the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation, which employs a team that works in the park. The Gunaikurnai and Parks Victoria have a joint management partnership; the Gunaikurnai Traditional Owner Management Board is developing a draft management plan to replace the current 1998 Parks Victoria management plan.

Getting around

The river bisects the park. The eastern section is bounded by Weir Lane, Wattle Creek Road and Sandy Creek Road, off which there are 4-wheel-drive tracks leading to the river. The old Glenaladale Weir can be accessed via Old Weir Track off Weir Lane. Recreational hunting of Sambar Deer takes place in this eastern section.

The western section of the park extends to the Dargo Road, off which Waller Road takes you to the Den of Nargun car park, Billy Goat Bend Road to the Amphitheatre, and the wide gravel Mitchell Dam Road to Angusvale Camping Area.

The expansive grassed open free camping area at Angusvale is suitable for caravans. Shade is limited and the only facilities are basic toilets. Outside the park is the privately operated Echo Bend Camping Park which, by prior arrangement, will drive you in your vehicle to the start of the spectacular two-day Mitchell River Walk (phone 5157 6317).

In a day visit you can take in Angusvale, the lookout over Billy Goat Bend at the Amphitheatre, and the Den of Nargun. Do the full 5-km Loop Walk down the steep rocky track to the Den of Nargun, then along Woolpack Creek to the river, Deadcock Den and Bluff Lookout. The dens are of great cultural significance to the Gunaikurnai people, especially Aboriginal women.

I highly recommend a visit. • PW



Wake-up call on bay health

THE STATE OF THE BAYS 2016 REPORT IS FINALLY OUT. WE HOPE IT BECOMES THE FIRST OF MANY.

The long-awaited report's release, an election commitment of the Andrews Government, is the critical first step in securing the good health of our marine environments across the state.

The focus of the first report is the bays of Port Phillip and Western Port. Both are under increasing pressure as the populations of Melbourne, Geelong and the bays' catchments continue to grow.

As a result, urban and industrial development, climate change, introduced marine pests, fishing and shipping will continue to threaten their health.

By synthesising the available scientific data and identifying key environmental issues, health indicators and knowledge gaps, the report will hopefully motivate decision makers to do the right thing by our bays.

The 2016 *State of the bays* report, and those that follow every five years, will be vital for the future planning, protection and management of Victoria's marine environments.

Successive governments have failed to establish a comprehensive and integrated research and monitoring regime for Victoria's marine environments. This report is a wake-up call – the time to do it is now.

To download full and summary versions of the State of the bays 2016 report, and a bays' report card, go to www.ces.vic.gov.au/sotb

This excellent website rightly claims that 'Victoria's bays contain an amazing variety of plant and animal life and some of our state's most important ecosystems'.

By clicking onto the website you will see some great videos and images, and find out about:

- how the bays were made
- how the bays work
- water quality
- bay wonders
- mammals, seagrasses, wetlands, mangroves, reefs, fish and birds
- Traditional Owners.



The Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability is to be congratulated on producing the first *State of the bays* report, one we expect to evolve into a regular, five-yearly health assessment of all marine environments in Victoria. • PW



PHOTO: DAVID PAUL AND MUSEUMS VICTORIA



PHOTO: DAVID PAUL AND MUSEUMS VICTORIA



PHOTO: JULIAN FINN AND MUSEUMS VICTORIA



PHOTO: JULIAN FINN AND MUSEUMS VICTORIA

Above: Mangroves and intertidal flats are critical habitats in Western Port.

Right centre: Pretty as a picture, but the European fan worm is a serious introduced marine pest in Port Phillip Bay.

Right bottom: The march of the giant spider crabs is an annual event in Port Phillip Bay.

Woodland oasis in Bendigo

GILL ROSIER REVEALS A WILDLIFE HAVEN IN THE STATE'S FOURTH-LARGEST CITY.

Following the gold rushes of the 1850s, and mass European settlement, Bendigo experienced water shortages due to the contamination of its only water source, the Bendigo Creek.

Joseph Brady, an Irish engineer, was originally commissioned to construct eight reservoirs. However, after the first failed, only No. 7 Reservoir and its water filtration system at the headland of the Bendigo Creek were built. At the time of its construction in 1862, it was the first of its kind in Australia. Eleven years later, Brady built a reservoir at nearby Robinson Crusoe Gully, thereafter called Crusoe Reservoir.

Previously sustained and cared for by the Dja Dja Wurrung peoples, old photos of the decades following the gold rushes reveal a landscape utterly denuded of vegetation. Protection of the box-ironbark forests as water catchment areas, despite logging in the first half of the twentieth century, has helped these slow-growing forests gradually recover.

Fed by an open-channel system from Malmsbury Reservoir, approximately 60 kilometres south, Crusoe Reservoir stored water for Bendigo until 2000. The City of Greater Bendigo later took over reservoir management and 210 hectares of box-ironbark forest within the Greater Bendigo National Park. These were opened to the public in 2007.

A designated council park ranger, assisted by the Friends of Crusoe Reservoir and No. 7 Park (FoCRN7), works to protect nature while enhancing and supporting the public's enjoyment of the parks. Today the reservoirs and surrounding box-ironbark forests provide a successful and well-used urban water and nature park.

Local schools, kindergartens, disability groups, environment groups, the Bendigo Family Nature Club, U3A walking groups, university and TAFE environment and art students, among many others, regularly visit them for nature experiences or research. Enthusiasts of engineering history can still explore the remains of the water-settling system, basin and old channels and read the interpretative signs.

Crusoe Reservoir and No. 7 Park are a haven for many declining, threatened and endangered species such as the freshwater catfish, the brush-tailed phascogale or tuan, and the chestnut-rumped heathwren and crested shrike-tit.

Nesting boxes have been installed around the reservoirs and wider parks to supplement a good number of tree hollows, while frog ponds and a native grass picnic area have been added to No. 7 Park.



PHOTO: MICHAEL ROSIER

Above: View from the bird hide on a typical day at Crusoe Reservoir.

Below: The owl nightjar has occupied boxes and hollows throughout the woodlands.



PHOTO: JOHN MCINERNEY

Crusoe Reservoir is now a well-known state mecca for birdwatchers, with the park ranger and the Friends having recorded more than 160 bird species. Recent highlights include the breeding of great crested grebes, white winged trillers and the sighting of three owl nightjars in separate hollows of the same tree.

A 3.3km loop track at Crusoe Reservoir, 1.4 km loop track at No.7 Park, with a 1.7 km track linking the two, make for rewarding walking, photography and nature experiences year-round. • PW

For further information, see the City of Greater Bendigo website and Friends Facebook page.

Being a good bush neighbour

BENDIGO IS A CITY
SURROUNDED BY FOREST.

For Anthony Sheean, Senior Environment Officer at the City of Greater Bendigo, the 'ironbark trees and spectacular wildflower displays are an important part of our cultural identity'.

'The forests are home to a rich diversity of birds, mammals and reptiles, including the red-capped robin, echidna, kangaroo, tuart, blue-tongued lizard and galah.'

With all that forest so close to the city, Bendigo residents and visitors are now being encouraged by a new book and website to get to know, enjoy and look after their bush neighbours.

On a sunny and calm day in November, Bendigo community groups, City of Greater Bendigo and residents came together at No. 7 Park and Reservoir to launch 'Living next to nature: being a good neighbour to Bendigo's bushland'.

Being a good bushland neighbour is about the choices we make on a day-to-day basis. As the book outlines, it can



PHOTO: IT'S A WILDLIFE

be as simple as keeping cats in at night, choosing indigenous plants to create a habitat garden and attract butterflies, and being water wise in the home.

The book is also a great resource for finding places to visit and learning how to join other people wanting to be good bush neighbours. By spending time in nature, we can learn more about what a great neighbour it is and how to look after it.

The book launch spread the word, distributed the book and celebrated the hard work to create it. There were bird-watching walks, nature walks and a bush-sketching workshop with author/illustrator Trace Balla. Other highlights of the day included:

- great artwork created by amateur artists under the guidance of Trace Balla. 'I'm a plant enthusiast and have identified that plant so many times. But I've just realised that I've never really looked at it so closely before,' said one budding artist
- a family of tawny frogmouths sharing the reserve with us
- a wealth of local knowledge and lovely welcome to the site by Friends of No.7 and Crusoe Reserve
- learning the fascinating history of the reserve and its provision of water for Bendigo
- the stories of local community groups on their most valued ways of being a good neighbour to Bendigo's bushland
- Devonshire tea!

The many groups involved in the creation and launch of the book and website are now distributing the book to their networks.

Contact the VNPA office for a free copy or check out the new website www.bendigonature.org • PW

Ecotours and walking in the High Country, East Gippsland and beyond

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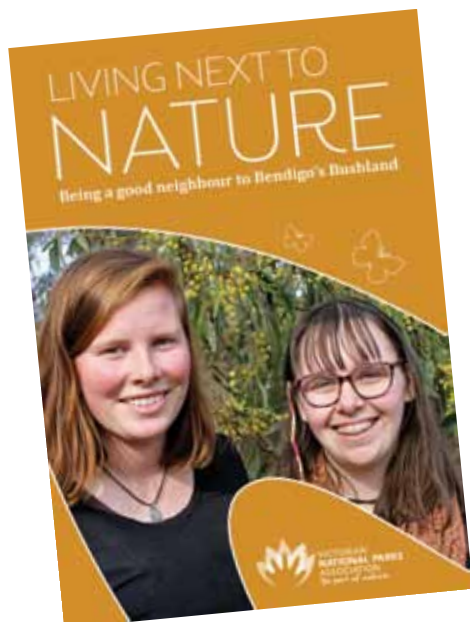
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Early baleen whales not hard of hearing

Baleen whales are the largest animals to have ever lived on the planet, and they also eat tonnes of krill each day and hear the lowest frequency sounds of any mammal. How these adaptations evolved has long been a mystery for scientists – until now.

Melbourne-based scientists have found that baleen whales have been hearing low-frequency sound during their entire evolutionary history (starting more than 30 million years ago).

The team discovered that the cochleae of today's modern baleen whales, their fossil ancestors (basilosaurids) and the early toothed mysticetes were similar, even though the earliest baleen whales had teeth instead of baleen and were roughly the size of a dolphin.

Being able to make and hear ultra-low frequencies allows whales to communicate across hundreds of

kilometres. As Travis Park, Museums Victoria and Monash University said, 'it's tempting to think that mysticetes have been singing their complex, beautiful whale songs for millions of years.'

Read more at <https://museumvictoria.com.au/about/media-centre/media-releases/new-research-finds-baleen-whales-had-extreme-hearing-prior-to-giant-body-size-and-filter-feeding/>

Birthplace for birds' nests

The most common birds' nests found today had their birthplace in Australia, according to new research from Macquarie University.

Researchers have found that 'open' cup nests evolved in Australia more than 40 million years ago and are now the most common in the world. The open nests were perhaps a key to the birds' successes – measured both in terms of

how many species they evolved into, and how far they have spread around the world.

The change to open cup nests may have been driven by the emergence of new predators or parasites or with changing climates and habitats.

Professor Simon Griffiths from Macquarie University said that: "Until now we had assumed that more complex fully roofed nests had evolved from those without roofs. This study demonstrates that in fact it was the opposite. This research really underlines the importance of Australia as the source of much of the world's avian diversity'.

Read more at <http://www.mq.edu.au/newsroom/2017/02/01/australia-the-birthplace-of-birds-nests-move-over-vegemite-and-the-hills-hoist/#ixzz4XZiAksV5>

Fish out of their waters sign of climate change

First sightings of fish outside their usual range have been identified as an early warning sign that a marine species may be shifting in response to climate change. This has major implications for local ecology and fishing industries.

'Climate change is leading to global changes in species distribution patterns and the reshuffling of biodiversity is already well underway', said researcher Hannah Fogarty.

'In Australia, for example, a lemonpeel angelfish was found off Lord Howe Island, more than 1,000 kilometres south of its usual coral reef habitat. Tropical and sub-tropical fish such as this are increasingly being found in temperate waters, with species such as wrasse, parrotfish, flounder and eels well-represented in global reports of unusual sightings.

"New marine species arriving in an area may become pests, modify the local ecosystem, or represent challenges or opportunities for fisheries and recreation.

Read more at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gcb.13635/abstract>

Small native mammals disappearing from south-east Australia

Four decades of research and monitoring of small native mammals in Victoria's eastern Otway Ranges reveals ongoing declines in numbers, including of some threatened species.

The numbers of most species have declined significantly, while two threatened species, the marsupial swamp antechinus, *Antechinus minimus*, and the new holland mouse, *Pseudomys novaehollandiae*, have plummeted.

'Management actions that we need now include prevention of further fragmentation and degradation to habitats, appropriate controlled burning to protect key habitats, and control of predators, said Dr Barbara Wilson, an Associate Professor in Ecology at Deakin University, Victoria, who has led the research.

'We found native mammal populations declining in woodland, forests and estuaries. However, at coastal dune sites there were higher numbers, showing that these habitats can provide important refugia for mammals.'

Dr Wilson presented her results at the Ecological Society of Australia's 2016 annual conference (<http://www.esa2016.org.au/program/>).

Feral cat management key to saving threatened species

Dr Tim Doherty, Research Fellow in Deakin's Centre for Integrative Ecology, is calling for the management of feral cats to be prioritised and improved.

He said that feral cats were the primary driver of Australia's mammal declines and extinctions, dining out on at least 400 vertebrate species. But controlling feral cats was challenging and eradication from mainland Australia was currently impossible.

'Options for managing feral cats range from eradication on islands and complete exclusion from small fenced areas, to population reduction over areas of varying size.

One solution Dr Doherty touches on is using 'guardian dogs', similar to the marambas protecting Warrnambool's little penguin colony from foxes. Another is to maintain habitat and promote ecological refuges that protect native fauna from cat predation.

Read more at <http://invenio.deakin.edu.au/feral-cats-cause-havoc-on-australian-wildlife/>

Leadbeater's possum faces extinction if logging continues

Victoria's faunal emblem, the Leadbeater's possum, and other species will become extinct within about 30 years unless clear-fell logging stops in Victoria's mountain ash forests.

This is the finding of new research by The Australian National University (ANU) and The University of Melbourne.

ANU's Professor David Lindenmayer said the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires

had wiped out 42 per cent of habitat and reduced the possum's population from about 5,000 to 2,000 animals.

'Unless conservation areas are expanded to cover almost all remaining mountain ash forests, the critically endangered Leadbeater's possum will become extinct and other species like the greater glider will continue to decline.'

Professor Lindenmayer said the value of water and tourism from the forests outweighed the value of logging, while logged forests have more frequent and intense fires due to the debris and the nature of young forests.

Read more at <http://www.anu.edu.au/news/all-news/leadbeaters-possum-faces-extinction-if-logging-continues>

Penguins in climate change fishing trap

Endangered penguins are foraging for food in the wrong places due to fishing and climate change, research by the universities of Exeter and Cape Town has revealed.

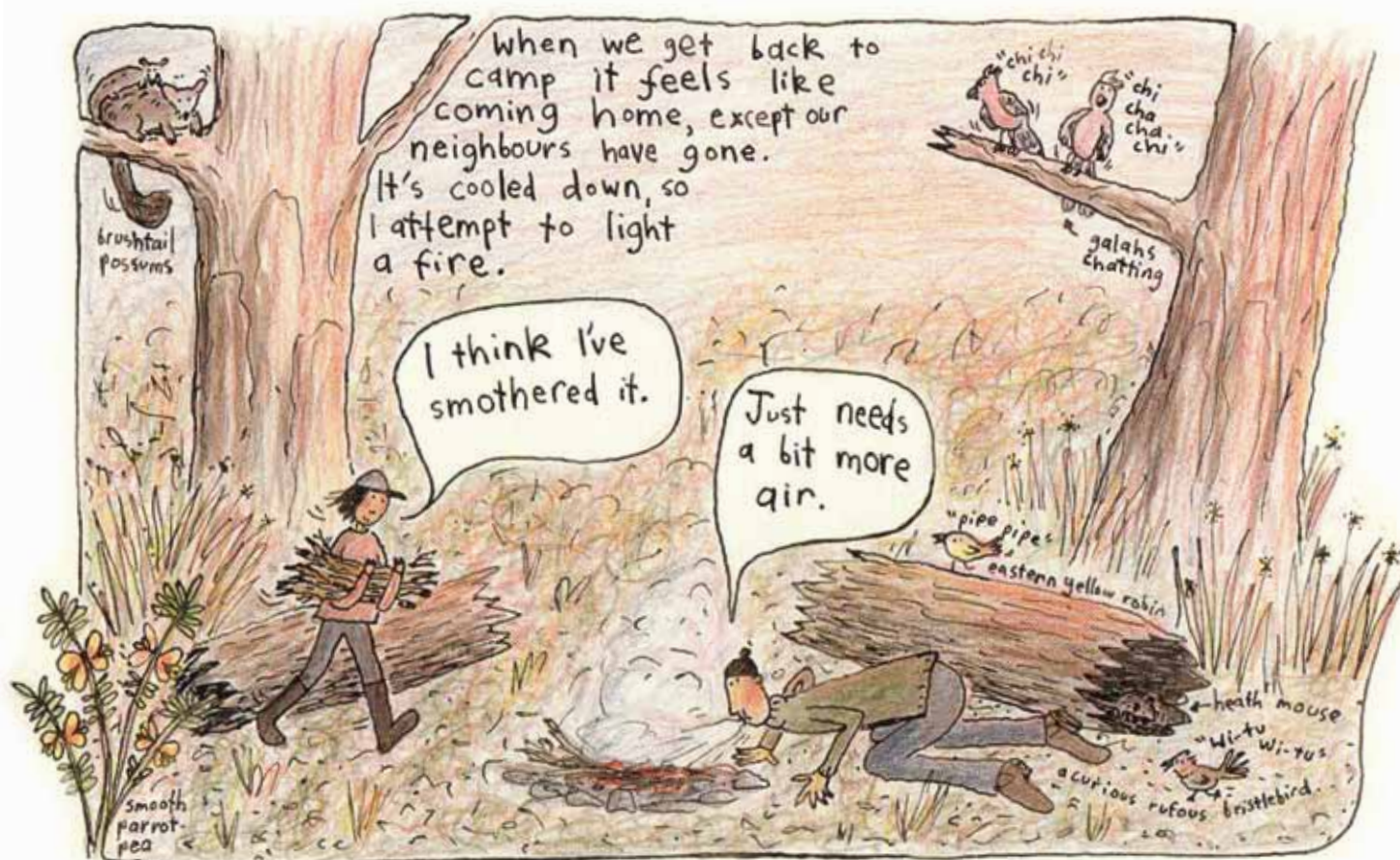
Juvenile African penguins search large areas of ocean for certain signs of prey. But rapid shifts caused by climate change and fishing mean these signs can now lead them to places where food is scarce, a so-called 'ecological trap'.

Dr Richard Sherley from the Environment and Sustainability Institute, University of Exeter said that juvenile African penguins look for areas of low sea temperatures and high chlorophyll-a, which indicates the presence of plankton and their prey fish.

'These were once reliable cues for prey-rich waters, but climate change and industrial fishing have depleted forage fish stocks in this system. Our results support suspending fishing when prey biomass drops below certain levels, and suggest that mitigating marine ecological traps will require major conservation action.'

Read more at http://www.exeter.ac.uk/news/research/title_569138_en.html

• PW



‘Rivertime’ and ‘Rockhopping’

BY TRACE BALLA. ALLEN AND UNWIN, 2014 AND 2016 HARD COVERS RRP \$24.99, 80 PAGES.

Harlow and Audrey come to stay with us, their grandparents, every Sunday night. We all love a story at bedtime and usually enjoy a variety of books. But for the last six months, the variety has disappeared and the bedtime conversation goes like this:

Grandma: What shall we read tonight?

Harlow and Audrey, in unison: ‘Rivertime’ and ‘Rockhopping.’

Grandma: Sorry, can’t read all 158 pages tonight.

Harlow: How about we have 20 pages of each book?

Grandma: That sounds like fun.

Audrey: Then we can read the rest in the morning.

Grandma: Hmmn. We can try.

The three of us snuggle down in the double bed and storytime proceeds, with much laughter, role playing, questioning and constant sound effects. It’s a very interactive experience.

In ‘Rivertime’, we follow the adventures of city boy Clancy (a reluctant starter) and his Uncle Egg, a devoted birdwatcher, as they canoe for 10 days along the Glenelg River in South Australia. Alongside Clancy and guided by Uncle Egg, readers learn about our Indigenous heritage, the beauty and fragility of nature, the value of silence and the importance of persevering to meet a challenge.

The graphic novel is a great genre for simultaneously showing and telling, and

Trace Balla is an expert in the comic-book style. Her illustrations are detailed and beautiful, the dialogue is witty and engaging, and Clancy’s narration keeps readers of all ages on track.

The storyline continues in ‘Rockhopping’, but this time the idea and enthusiasm for the adventure come from a slightly older and more experienced Clancy. He and Uncle Egg hike through Gariwerd (the Grampians) looking for the source of Bugara (the Glenelg River).

As accidents happen and plans are reconsidered, Clancy and the readers learn once more about courage, perseverance, the natural environment and the wisdom of Australia’s Indigenous culture.

Here are the things that Harlow and Audrey say they love about Rivertime:

- Uncle Egg says “Oy” to baby Clancy. (We re-enact this every week.)
- Uncle Egg can never find the rufous bristlebird – but we can
- Clancy feels bad when he can’t climb onto the jetty. Finally he works it out
- Poo joke
- Clancy accidentally smothers the fire
- They see the big emu in the sky
- Clancy does a victory dance
- The writing is big enough for Grandma to read at night time
- Uncle Egg is just like Grandpa Martin.

And their favourite bits of ‘Rockhopping’:

- Trace does beautiful wildlife drawings and tells us the sounds that all the birds make
- Clancy and Uncle Egg sit in a tree to discuss their trip
- Poo joke
- Clancy can’t stand up because his backpack is so heavy
- Clancy falls down the cliff
- He builds a little bridge over the ravine
- He goes rockhopping
- He learns about Marngrook: Aussie Rules football with a possum skin ball
- They learn from Uncle Ray about which plants can be eaten
- There’s a map at the end so you can work out where they went

In each frame of both graphic novels, there’s enough interest to keep our storytime trio reading, chatting, laughing and discovering until way after lights should have been off. I used to think I knew a lot about southeastern Australia’s ecology, but I’ve learnt so much more in the last six months. Thank you Trace, for taking the three of us on a journey that reveals new surprises every week. • PW

Review by Audrey (3), Harlow (5) and Margaret (Grandma).

The dingo debate

Origins, behaviour and conservation

BRADLEY SMITH (ED.)
CSIRO PUBLISHING, PAPERBACK,
2015, RRP \$39.95, 336 PAGES

Overall, this publication makes a useful contribution to the ‘dingo debate’ in Australia. It should be of interest as a reference source for those already familiar with dingo conservation issues and those wishing to introduce themselves to this complex area. A broad range of relevant issues are covered: the physical characteristics of the dingo, its biology, behaviour, origin, ancestry and significance to indigenous Australians, along with intelligence, ecology and dingo-human conflict.

Smith aims to give an unromanticised account of origin, behaviour and history of the dingo in Australia, and to highlight the taxon’s uniqueness. He wanted to avoid a strong focus on the ecological role of the dingo. This limitation seems rather odd because of the centrality of this issue to the current dingo debate and because, arguably, the strongest chapter in the book, by Professor Chris Johnson, deals precisely with issues relating to the role of the dingo as apex land predator, the research challenges in exploring this role and the ecological folly of continued dingo persecution.

Smith’s chapter discussing the role of the dingo in Indigenous culture and spirituality makes a valuable contribution. It provides a deep-history perspective on the cultural importance of the dingo for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Smith’s own research into the behavioural and cognitive characteristics of the dingo vis-à-vis domestic dogs makes a significant contribution to identifying what it is that we need to conserve in the wild.



Overall, the book deals with the vexed, but unavoidable issue of dingo hybridisation in a reasonably balanced manner. Researchers who frame the conservation challenge in terms of the positive ecosystem function of dingo hybrids rather than genetic purity, are acknowledged, as is the reality of the constantly evolving nature of the dingo and dingo hybrids in an ever-changing environment. It is disappointing, therefore, that the book tends to overstate the reliability of existing genetic purity testing techniques, which as a broader tendency have distorted the current debate and policy.

A good deal of useful detail is found in the book. It nevertheless suffers from uneven quality in places. This is most apparent where the discussion moves away from a discussion of empirical observation and research findings to areas that are more subjective and political. In chapter 11, for instance, discussion of the role of dingo advocacy organisations in bringing about recent positive legislative and policy change, such as the Victorian dingo threatened species listing, is not altogether complete or accurate.

Inevitably, some information in the book is now superseded. For instance, recent genetic research points to an earlier time of arrival of the dingo than is commonly accepted, and to at least two introduction events, resulting in two distinct lineages with different geographic ranges across the continent - creating new challenges for dingo conservation. • PW

Review by Ernest Healy, National Dingo Preservation and Recovery Program.



Giving nature a future voice

WE SPOKE TO LOYAL MEMBER, CATHERINE YOUNG, ABOUT WHAT INSPIRED HER TO LEAVE A GIFT TO US IN HER WILL.

Helping protect Victoria's native wildlife is one of the many reasons Catherine was inspired to support VNPA.

As a young woman, Catherine was focussed on her optometry studies and enjoying Melbourne's nightlife with her mates. But she always had a great love for wildlife and, as she matured, she became increasingly aware of the many environmental problems Victoria, Australia and the world face.

Now when Catherine's not busy treating patients in her Albert Park optometry practice, she loves spending time outdoors cycling, horse riding and enjoying the Victorian bush – Bunyip State Park is among her favourites.

And each year, Catherine's mother, Margaret, organises a family holiday at Point Lonsdale; a special opportunity for the Young family to enjoy Victoria's spectacular coastline together.

Catherine first heard of VNPA in 2000, and with her optometry practice running well, she decided she could –

and should – do something about her frustration and growing concern about the threats to Victoria's wildlife and natural places.

She knew that for nature to have a voice, she needed to support a knowledgeable and independent organisation that could put pressure on decision makers to do the right thing for Victoria's wildlife, national parks and natural places. For her, that organisation was VNPA. Encouraged to follow her philanthropic mother's good example, Catherine became a member and began making donations to support our work.

As Catherine's trust in our work continued to grow, she decided to leave a gift to the VNPA in her will.

'By making a bequest, I am reassured that the VNPA will continue to work and fight for the natural world to ensure its future survival.'

While Catherine believes the Andrews Government has made

some good progress on the environment, there are many areas for improvement. In particular, she hopes the government will learn to prioritise and appreciate Victoria's national parks.

'It would be wonderful if Victoria's national parks get the proper funding they deserve to ensure there are enough park rangers, and that pest plants and feral animals are managed appropriately to stop the damage they are doing.'

Everyone here at VNPA sincerely thanks Catherine for her generosity and foresight in deciding to leave a gift to nature in her will. • PW

If you are considering leaving a gift to VNPA in your will, or have already done so, please get in touch so we can assist you in leaving your lasting legacy. Please contact:

Emily Clough
Fundraising Manager
03 9341 6501
emilyc@vnpa.org.au

Tribute to Julianne Bell

30 MAY 1940 - 27 JANUARY 2017

Environmental activist will be sorely missed

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS WERE SHOCKED AT THE DEATH OF PUBLIC LANDS DEFENDER JULIANNE BELL ON 27 JANUARY 2017. JULIANNE WILL BE IRREPLACEABLE.



PHOTO COURTESY ROYAL PARK PROTECTION GROUP

Julianne Bell saw an urgent need to retain public lands for present and future generations. In 2003, she established Protectors of Public Lands, Victoria (PPL), based on a similar organisation in New South Wales. As secretary, Julianne was relentless in operating a coalition of urban and regional groups to oversee and fight incursions into precious public open space, both in Melbourne and in regional areas. PPL's slogan is 'Keep public lands in public hands'.

Julianne's environmental activism can be traced back to the battle for the Franklin River in the 1980s, when she made frequent trips to Tasmania to become directly involved.

Closer to home, Julianne, with the Save Albert Park Group, campaigned against the Grand Prix taking over parkland in terms of space and noise for extended periods each year.

In 1996, she was one of the founding members of the Royal

Park Protection Group (RPPG), dedicated to ensuring that activities in this area, bequeathed to the people of Melbourne by Governor La Trobe in 1854, were consistent with the 1987 Royal Park Master Plan.

Under her leadership, the RPPG fought a losing battle against parkland alienation for the State Netball and Hockey Centre, but successfully negotiated some land being returned to parkland. Importantly, her idea of a water harvesting plant at the center for use on site was implemented.

The RPPG and PPL fought hard against the Commonwealth Games Village, where 20 hectares of Royal Park and 2,000 trees were sacrificed for a real-estate development.

Meanwhile, the East-West Link threatened to cut through Royal Park. Julianne advised the PPL and RPPG barrister every day of a six-week public hearing. The planning

panel recommended against the project but the Liberal Government, in its last days, signed off on it. The Andrews Government cancelled it, a great victory for Julianne.

Julianne was fearless, one hundred percent committed and self-propelled right to the end, gaining great respect from her meticulously prepared submissions. She was a politically astute and brilliant strategist, invariably knowing the right person to approach – no matter how high – regarding any issue.

She was like the pilgrim in the hymn at her funeral service: 'No lion can him fright, He'll with a giant fight...'

Motivated by a lifelong love of heritage, parks, nature and wildlife, her democratic perspective was that public spaces belonged to everyone and should not be taken over by private interests. • PW

Jill Quirk



Going bush

Bushwalking can be a wonderful family adventure. There will be new discoveries, new challenges, exercise and the chance to achieve something together.

Aside from having the basics covered, such as making sure the walk is right for your family and being prepared for the weather, there are many ways to make a family bushwalk better and easier.

What are they? We asked the experts – families who enjoy bushwalking – to share their tips.

Being prepared

‘Take plenty of snacks and produce them at the first sign of complaining. Kids need a lot of energy when exploring new environments, but will often be so engaged they’ll forget to notice their hunger.’

‘If your walk is near water of any kind – the beach, a creek, a waterfall – be prepared to get wet. Children love water play, even on cold days. Take swimmers or a change of socks and undies for yourself and the kids. It’s much easier, and more fun, than trying to convince them to stay out of the water or walking in wet clothes.’

‘We find that walking with family friends motivates our kids. They are very enthusiastic when they are walking with other kids and will cover much larger distances and with much greater excitement.’

Imaginative play and discoveries

‘Let’s pretend we are explorers who help sick animals: “Look, I think there might be a dragon with a broken wing behind that rock up ahead. Let’s see if we can help her out”.’

‘We play “statues”. This is where the adults say: “I wonder what sort of statue I am going to see up ahead” and the kids always run off ahead and make themselves into statues. We admire the statues as we walk past and repeat: “I hope I see some more interesting statues ahead”. They come up with endlessly creative statues that interact with their surroundings and it keeps us moving.’

Managing everyone’s adult expectations

‘Don’t be attached to getting to the end of the walk. My oldest child isn’t very interested in scenic views, and will often find something more exciting along the way – a rocky overhang to play in, an ant’s nest to observe or a tree to climb. Allow space for these to be stops, or even the destination.’

‘Give older children a map to follow or involve them in planning the walk so they can learn, lead and have a sense of what to expect.’

Letting kids lead

‘We nominate our eldest as the “leader” and the younger as the “assistant leader” and give them a special prop, such as a high-vis vest, walking stick or hat. The leaders need to show us the way, identify hazards, answer questions and be allowed to make decisions e.g. “Leaders, is it time for a snack/rest/drink of water? Leaders which way now – up the steps or up the ramp?”’

‘We like to create as many opportunities for kids to be up the front of the walk, with no adults ahead of them. This gives them a great sense of adventure and ownership.’

‘Rather than being in a hurry to point things out, we try to allow kids the opportunity to notice things for themselves. They take much more delight when they have made their own discoveries.’

Being safe

‘Remember to consider safety on all outdoor adventures.’

Thank you to the parents and grandparents who bushwalk with children ranging in age from 0 to 11 who shared their tips. They were Emily, Henry, Elvira, Katherine, Adam, Caitlin and Anna. • PW

Feel free to send your family bushwalking tips to caitling@vnpa.org.au so we can share them around.

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





PHOTO: KATHERINE ISBRANDT

A gift Membership is an inspiring present for your nature-loving friends and family

If you love your VNPA Membership, why not share the experience by gifting a Membership? You'll be helping protect Victoria's national parks, natural places and wildlife – and giving your family and friends the opportunity to actively enjoy Victoria's inspiring natural landscapes.

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