

# PARK WATCH

BIODIVERSITY AND  
CLIMATE CHANGE

*They're in  
our hands*

PLANNING FOR CLIMATE CHANGE  
POINT NEPEAN LEASE  
NATIVE VEGETATION CLEARING  
THE FIRE NEXT TIME  
EAST GIPPSLAND OWLS  
CITIZEN SCIENCE  
VNPA ANNUAL REPORT 2014-15

SEPTEMBER 2015 NO 262



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



Be part of nature

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

#### EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Matt Ruchel, Philip Ingamells, Chris Smyth.

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

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#### FRONT COVER

Mountain Pygmy-possum (*Burramys parvus*) at Mt Buller – see article p. 6. Photo: Andrew Weeks.

#### BACK COVER

The Powerful Owl (*Ninox strenua*) is listed as Threatened in Victoria, so the protection of more of its habitat is good news. See story p. 14. Photo: David Hollands.

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#### VNPA AGM

You are warmly invited to this year's VNPA Annual General Meeting on **Tuesday 6 October**. The guest speaker will be ecologist and blogger **Dr Ian Lunt** on how to connect conservationists through their mobile phones.

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## From the President

**This is my last 'From the President' – my three-year term is up. I would like to thank Matt Ruchel and the staff for their incredible work and the assistance that they have given me over that time.**

Our VNPA Council works as a smooth team. It has been a pleasure to work with its members and I hope they all continue on next year.

We were all sorry to lose Charles Street from Council due to health issues, after many years as our Hon. Secretary. He has put in tireless hours at meetings, taking detailed minutes and spearheading the campaign to see the Mount Stirling area protected. He will be sorely missed, though I am glad to see that his campaigning is unwavering.

My thanks also go to all our other volunteers, without whom your association would be a shadow of its current effectiveness. Although staff form our critical backbone, volunteers greatly extend our capacity.

We have been through five years of governmental financial drought and have had few grants. Your Association might have foundered but for the support of our many donors. In the past three years, things looked particularly grim but for the timely injection of generous sums from key donors.

Had we not had this support we would have had to downsize, and would have lacked the capacity to face the repeated and concerted attacks on our parks and natural environment.

We certainly welcome the positive attitude of the present State Government. For the first time in four years, we are being invited to consult and provide input to environmental policy.

Indeed, there has been such a reversal that we are now stretched to meet the many requests and opportunities for consultation. Our capacity to offer input to, and perhaps influence, the current government's programs still depends on your generosity. I thank you all for your continued support.

Our incredibly talented Executive Director, Matt Ruchel, has taken the opportunity to take a well-earned six months long service leave. But he hasn't entirely stepped down: he is representing us on a critical State Government stakeholder reference group on forests.

Many of you will know our new acting Executive Director, Chris Smyth, for his valuable work on our marine and coastal strategies and for *The Coast is Unclear*, a revealing review of coastal planning and conservation. We are lucky to have him with us.

We also have Caitlin Griffith operating in a new role for the VNPA as Community Education and Engagement Manager. She will oversee our nature programs, capacity building and community

events. In creating this challenging new role, we have been able to retain our NatureWatch Coordinator, Christine Connelly.

Yasmin Kelsall represents us on the Government's very welcome review of native vegetation clearing controls. I am sure those in the Department who wish to see these controls undermined by reliance on broad-scale computer-generated maps and Mickey Mouse offsets will miss my regular 'encouragement'.

I sometimes think that the ego boost of being the author of a new system blinds a person to the primary goal of an environment agency: protecting nature and natural resources. The earlier emphasis on avoiding, or at least minimising, native vegetation losses has certainly been replaced in most cases by a rush to allow clearing, with ineffective offsets.

The recent disgraceful clearing of ancient eucalypts along the Western Highway described in this *Park Watch* comes down to the lack of protection the current system gives to large old paddock trees. Perhaps the review will turn this around.

The financial, administrative, communication and fundraising activities of VNPA continue to tick over due to the wonderful work of Heath Rickard, Charlotte Kandelaars, Irina de Loche, Tilly Reynolds, Maxine Hawkins and Michael Howes.

This *Park Watch* issue has a number of positive news stories. Many wouldn't have happened without your continued support. I thank you all. • PW

Russell Costello, VNPA President



## From the Editor

**Welcome to September *Park Watch* and the VNPA Annual Report for 2014-15.**

Many thanks to Chris Smyth for producing a great *Park Watch* for June and enabling me to have a restorative break. Thanks also to Tilly Reynolds for her work on the Annual Report.

This edition again has a wide range of stories on current conservation issues. Thanks to all our contributors. I hope you, the reader, will feel inspired to submit something too – an article, a letter, perhaps a book review. I'm always very happy to discuss ideas and suggestions. • PW

Michael Howes



# Lease lapses, development collapses

CHRIS SMYTH WRITES ABOUT A BIG DAY FOR POINT NEPEAN NATIONAL PARK.

PHOTO: CHRIS SMYTH

**The first day of July is a significant day of the year in any calendar. It's the start of the financial year and also my birthday, which I share with actors Pamela Anderson and Dan Aykroyd.**

But 1 July this year had even greater significance. It was the day that a property developer's lease over 64 hectares of Point Nepean National Park lapsed.

The developer and the Napthine Government had signed the secret lease just hours before the election caretaker period began in November 2014. It gave management rights to virtually 20% of the national park's accessible area (parts of the park are inaccessible due to unexploded ordnance).

The lease would have allowed the developer to establish a luxury spa and 'wellness centre' using geothermal water extracted from beneath the park, and also to demolish some existing buildings, construct new ones, erect boardwalks and rock pools in threatened coastal moonah woodland, and largely restrict park access to those wealthy enough to afford it.

Although the contents of the lease remain secret, a key clause became known when the Andrews Government announced its lapsing. This clause said that the continuation of the lease beyond 1 July 2015 was contingent on changes to the 2009 national park management plan and the Shire of Mornington Peninsula's planning scheme.

The amendment to the 2009 management plan would have allowed

for the destruction of threatened moonah woodland to build boardwalks and rock pools, while a Special Use Zone in the Shire's planning scheme would, among other things, have allowed subdivision.

Under the clause, if these changes were not in place by 1 July 2015 the lease would lapse and compensation of up to \$1 million could be sought. The changes having not been made, the lease lapsed.

## Master plan

At the time of its 1 July announcement, the Andrews Government committed to using the 2010 Master Plan for Point Nepean to guide future planning, once a period of community consultation had helped refresh and strengthen its provisions.

The 2010 plan had remained in draft form when the Brumby Government was defeated in 2010. The incoming government refused to finalise it, preferring to establish in 2013 a policy for major tourism developments inside national parks, and a new master plan for Point Nepean consistent with that policy.

The key difference between the 2010 and 2013 master plans was that the earlier plan proposed just one new building, a boutique hotel to be built on the footprint of two 1960s barracks buildings. In contrast, the 2013 plan allowed for 'the replacement of non-significant buildings with new buildings' as well as other new buildings. This was a major departure from what the community had wanted.

The VNPA, the community groups it has worked with, and many people across Victoria have welcomed the lapsing of the lease, but it has brought a predictable response from those who have been supporting the property developer.

They have claimed that there was nothing wrong with the proposed development and that the Quarantine Station will now disintegrate from neglect, as there are so many buildings that it will cost a fortune to renovate and maintain them, with no alternative source of funds to do so.

No one is kidding themselves that the future planning, management and funding for Point Nepean will be easy. But the property developer's supporters vastly exaggerate the challenge.

## Buildings

One of their frequent exaggerations is the number of buildings that need to be maintained and used. Recently in the *Southern Peninsula News* (3 August), local Councillor Tim Rodgers was quoted as saying that '75 buildings in the precinct need to be brought up to 21st century standard and used rather than left empty'.

Six of those buildings are in the Police Point Shire Park and are being renovated for use by artists in residence and for respite. In all, 18 of his '75 buildings' have been removed by the former community trust and Parks Victoria, and it could be argued that another eight, with little heritage value and constructed during the Army's occupation, could also be removed.

That brings the number of buildings in need of use down to a little over 40. Of those, around 11 are currently in use: three for weddings, receptions and community events; two for information and administration; one as a new toilet block; another converted into an arrivals information display; and four as museum and interpretive displays. These buildings are clearly not 'empty'.

### Budget accommodation

Among the remainder are the 11 influenza huts built during the flu epidemic of 1918 and 1919, which could easily be converted to budget camping accommodation for school and community groups. Another eight, including the shower blocks and the

passenger waiting room, could be used for a major interactive museum and interpretive display showing how the Quarantine Station worked.

That doesn't leave many to find a use for. And any new uses should be those that can make the most of the buildings as they are now and recognise their 19th century origins, rather than being gutted to create the flashy artifice of Cr Rodgers' '21st century standards'. This would involve minimal changes to building interiors and a lesser need for capital investment.

Yes, funds will be required to turn the Quarantine Station into a lively place that includes activities in education, tourism, art, research and conservation, and some of that money will need to

come from government, but investment will also need to come from philanthropic, community, education and tourism organisations. In this way there will be a diversity of uses with the best interests of Point Nepean National Park at heart.

The previous government used Point Nepean as a test case in its bid to expose our conservation estate to major commercial developments. The VNPA believes that the natural and cultural heritage in national parks needs protection, and this view is shared by the majority of Victorians, as an Essential Research poll last year showed.

I'm looking forward to the first day of July 2016. I hope that by then there will have been even better news about the future of Point Nepean National Park and its Quarantine Station. • PW

## Which building, what use?

The Quarantine Station has a number of heritage buildings that will be made available for adaptive reuse. Any proposed use should ensure that the heritage of each building is protected and maintained, and that the use supports the objectives of the national park. Below are notes about some of the buildings and some possible uses for them. What other adaptive reuse do you think could be possible and what community organisation might be interested in using the building?

### Disinfecting Complex, Shower Block and Passenger Waiting Room (1866-1925). See main photo.

- Refurbish as museum, education and interpretive centre with interactive, static and Internet-based displays
- Possible café/wine bar and/or interpretation

### Influenza Huts (11) 1919

- Ecologically sustainable but basic cabin accommodation for campers and school and tour groups (could have prefabricated built form inserted that preserves heritage fabric). One each for male and female shower/toilet blocks and a third for use as a communal kitchen. The remaining 8 would be converted for use as twin share, family and dormitory cabin accommodation but no bathroom facilities
- Spaces for events and workshops

### Hospital Building 3 (1858-59)

- Use of roof for solar energy generation and storage in new batteries, and collection of water to be stored in tanks for use on site
- Ground floor theatrette showing images of Point Nepean history
- Several rooms upstairs refurbished in style consistent with 19th century use
- Spaces available for rent by community organisations, artists, artisans
- Ground floor for hire of equipment e.g. bikes, kayaks, diving and snorkel gear with introductory classes
- Ground floor gallery and artists in residence
- First floor 4 one-bedroom apartments



### Medical Superintendent's Quarters (1899)

- Reception Centre leased to commercial operator
- 5 boutique hotel suites • Restaurant



### Badcoe Hall (1963)

- Performance and meeting spaces
- Training and event centre
- Conferences



# Planning for change

CLIMATE CHANGE POSES A SIGNIFICANT THREAT TO OUR PARKS AND THEIR NATIVE FLORA AND FAUNA. WE MUST PLAN FOR THESE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES, SAY BIOLOGISTS IAN MANSERGH, DEAN HEINZE (LA TROBE UNIVERSITY) AND ANDREW WEEKS (MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY).

Climate change is already impacting Victoria's parks and reserves. Projections for a warmer and drier future, punctuated by extreme weather events and changed fire regimes, will affect the succession and distribution of vegetation.

Such changes will be complex, and occur over different time scales. For example, the extent of Mountain Ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*) forests could shrink radically as their seedlings are outcompeted by those of other montane species following regeneration events such as fire or logging.

Amid these bleak predicted changes, there are important policy issues that must be debated and resolved so that our park system and biodiversity remain as robust as possible in the face of these challenges.

Some simple propositions and contextual background may help to rethink how we can best address many of these challenges. Luckily, there are tangible Victorian examples to help.

## Parks and genetics

Since the 1970s, Victoria has developed a very good system of national parks and other reserves. Now covering over 17% of the state's land area, this system largely developed from remnants of public land left after 150+ years of alienation for agriculture and other uses.

Human population growth and habitat fragmentation are major threatening processes affecting our biodiversity, making it more vulnerable to other threats. The parks are really man-made islands surrounded by different land uses that are inhospitable to many species.

As Darwin recognised, populations of flora and fauna on islands may become modified due to isolation (smaller gene pools) and/or more vulnerable to extinction. The island-like nature of our parks may be not sufficient for the long-term resilience of natural populations.



Geneticist Andrew Weeks (left) and wildlife ecologist Dean Heinze inspect a wild-bred hybrid *Burramys* at Mt Buller. The matrilineal DNA was kept intact as only new males were translocated.

Biodiversity conservation is a prime purpose of the park system, so it is useful to look at this through the prism of a key driver, populations – the essential link between species and genetic conservation.

The *International Convention on Biodiversity Conservation* (1992), and subsequent national and state policies, correctly make the conservation of ecosystems, species and genetic diversity a key objective.

In Victoria, the protection of genetic diversity has been interpreted as ‘preservation of local genetic stock’. To date this has served us reasonably well, but it has become a rigid conservation policy that needs re-thinking as environmental conditions change.

This policy interpretation neglects the issues of small ‘island-like’ populations that have a limited genetic base from which to adapt and are ultimately vulnerable to further losses of diversity through in-breeding. Such processes are probably already present in a range of threatened fauna.

A cursory look at the historical distribution of species such as the Eastern Barred Bandicoot (*Perameles gunni*) and Southern Brown Bandicoot (*Isodon nasuta*) shows range fragmentation, with consequent smaller and smaller populations that disappear over time, sometimes quite rapidly. This is the ‘extinction vortex’.

Work with the Mountain Pygmy-possum (*Burramys parvus*) on Mt Buller has demonstrated the devastating rapidity of genetic erosion, but has also highlighted a new technique for recovery. We suspect it has much broader applicability right now.

## Gene pool mixing

In Victoria, the two regional populations of *Burramys* were genetically distinct but healthy in the late 1990s (as was the NSW population). All were high on the index of genetic variation (heterozygosity). Yet by 2002, the genetic variation of the isolated Mt Buller population had crashed, the population being less than 50 in 2010.

The dramatic decline was due to large-scale ski field expansion in the 1980s and 90s that resulted in habitat destruction and fragmentation. This compromised the functioning of the population and left it more vulnerable to fox and feral cat predation.

This was the fastest genetic erosion recorded for a mammal globally, to a point where the population had become terminally inbred. All modelling indicated extinction, so in 2006 a captive breeding program was established with the aim of producing genetically robust individuals that could be released on Mt Buller as management addressed threatening processes.

The intention was to cross-breed Mt Buller females with genetically distinct males from the other regional population at Mt Hotham. Unfortunately this program, which focused on *gene pool mixing* in captivity, failed to produce adequate numbers of genetically reinvigorated animals for release.

In the wild the situation was progressively becoming grimmer as genetic variation continued to plummet. In this desperate situation it was decided to use *wild-wild translocations* of genetically healthy Mt Hotham males directly to Mt Buller in the breeding season of October 2010.



PHOTO: ANDREW WEEKS



PHOTO: IAN MANSERGH

Fire near Mt Feathertop in February 2013, taken from *Burramys* habitat at Mt McKay which was burnt in 2003 and again in 2007. Climate change projections indicate increased bushfire risk.

This example of wild-to-wild *gene pool mixing* saw the ‘foreign’ males mating and producing a genetically more robust population on Mt Buller. As a management action it has been highly successful, the size of the population now being comparable to when it was first discovered in 1996 (i.e. around 300 adults).

A key consideration was the wild-wild translocation of males only, as this maintained the matrilineal DNA, therefore preserving the maximum ‘Bullerness’ of the population while introducing new genes and enhancing genetic variation.

Certain extinction was avoided by this innovative science. Further, the gene pool mixing was accomplished at 1-2% of the cost of the unsuccessful captive breeding program, with less disruption to the wild population and individual animals, and unambiguous measures of success and for monitoring.

These results challenge us to re-evaluate the policies of ‘quarantining’ local genetic provenances, and also the efficacy of expensive management actions such as captive breeding, when less intrusive and more efficient techniques prove to be effective.

*Continued overleaf*



Continued from previous page

Changing environmental conditions, in combination with current policies, more or less doom small, genetically isolated populations with a low genetic capacity to adapt. These policies also affect revegetation efforts, with overly zealous requirements for 'local provenance' creating a mindset in some conservationists of resistance to informed gene-pool mixing.

The policy should be tweaked from 'preserving *all* local genetic provenance' to 'making more genetically diverse and robust local populations that are more adaptable, while at the same time maintaining elements (lineages) of local provenance'.

Sound genetic science suggests that revegetation programs should use a mix of species including 60% of local provenance (genes), 30% intermediate distance and 10% long distance along a dispersal line that currently experiences the projected climate for the local site<sup>1</sup>.

Birds and bees mix the pollen, and the most suitable plants for the site survive and carry the maximum local and introduced genetic variation into future generations.

### Biolink zones

Biolinks were developed in Victoria to increase ecological connectivity across the landscape, particularly between national parks and other large areas of remnant vegetation.

Biolink zones help enable individuals and thus populations to move across the landscape as local conditions change, in turn helping alleviate the adverse issues of isolated 'islands' and habitat fragmentation.

This concept, and gene pool mixing, can also apply *within* large parks. For example, Victoria's Alpine National Park has rare and threatened species often persisting naturally in isolated populations. Identification of climate 'refuges' and biolinks to connect them would increase their resilience to future changes.

Comprehensive biolink zones could be relatively easily planned over the large areas of public land surrounding the Great Divide and East Gippsland. Indeed, there are proposals for a new national park to conserve Leadbeater's Possum.

Biolink zones linking this park to other forested and relatively natural areas would be a good example of leadership in policy shift, and help our biodiversity to adapt to a changing environment.

In other areas, private landholders and Landcare groups are becoming involved in the development of biolink zones. We now need a systematic review of nature conservation on private land as well as a comprehensive plan for the development of biolinks on private and public land.

Gene pool mixing and biolink zones are initiatives that both come from the same concept of maximising 'self-adaptation' – letting species do what they do best for long-term population health, with cost-effective minimal intrusion.

They are also tangible examples of the objectives of Victoria's far-sighted *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act* (1988): "to guarantee that all taxa of Victoria's flora and fauna ... can survive, flourish and retain their potential for evolutionary development in the wild ... and to ensure that the genetic diversity of flora and fauna is maintained." Both actions build evolutionary capacity into our conservation management!

The present State Government has put the issue of climate change back on the agenda, and the Environment Minister wants the state to become a leader in the field. Let's keep the discussion going! • PW

Dedicated to the late Joan Kirner (1938-2015), Minister for Conservation and Premier of Victoria.

1. Sgrò C, Lowe A. & Hoffmann A. (2010), Building evolutionary resilience for conserving biodiversity under climate change. *Evolutionary Applications* 4: 326–337

## Managing nature under a new climate

It's definitely time to investigate ways to manage Victoria's natural heritage under the impacts of climate change. No matter what mitigation measures are likely to be put in place by the world's governments, we will still be faced with a changed climate scenario.

In a move aimed at readying land managers, or anyone else concerned with protecting our natural areas, a symposium "Managing Victoria's Biodiversity under Climate Change" is planned for 8-9 October.

Organised by the VNPA, the Royal Society of Victoria and the University of Melbourne, it will bring together some of our best scientific minds, experienced land managers, non-government organisations and others.

Some of the anticipated climate impacts under current emission levels are considerable. By 2050 sea levels may have risen by 25cm, snowpack reduced by 50%, major bushfires would be more common, and heatwaves up to four times more frequent.

The presentations and extensive discussion periods of the symposium will look at issues like pest plant and animal invasions, fire impacts, ecosystem connectivity, the importance of assisting genetic diversity and ways to identify climate refugia.

After the symposium, the information gathered will be compiled by ecologist Dr Ian Lunt, and published on line.

For more information about the symposium, please contact the VNPA.





# Digging in for Grow West

VNPA MEMBERS AND FRIENDS HEADED TO BACCHUS MARSH ON 19 JULY TO JOIN OTHER VOLUNTEERS AND HELP RESTORE THE AREA'S BIODIVERSITY.

Some 200 volunteers of all ages gathered in the sunshine on Ironbark Road near Bacchus Marsh for the 10th annual Grow West community planting day, planting around 5,000 indigenous seedlings to help a family restore trees and shrubs on their farm, and improve biodiversity links.

Species selected for planting included Fragrant Saltbush, Tree Violet, Kangaroo Apple, Cassinia, Golden and Black Wattle, Blackwood, Red and Yellow Box, Red and Yellow Gum, and Drooping Sheoak.

The Grow West program has provided more than a million trees over the past ten years, focusing on the upper Werribee catchment and creating vegetation corridors to connect Brisbane Ranges National Park to Werribee Gorge State Park and through to Lerderderg State Park, with planting on more than 100 private properties over that period.

Emma Muir, Grow West planting day coordinator, thanked the volunteers for their help with the ongoing program.

"I'm proud to be part of such an important environmental project, helping the community with on-ground works to deliver the Grow West vision: 10,000 hectares revegetated that link the three parks, help weed control and restore degraded land," she said.

This year, the planting was on John and Tristia Lakey's 105 hectare property in Rowsley, close to Werribee Gorge State Park. They purchased the property in 2012, knowing they had a major restoration project on their hands.

"We were looking for a property that needed some TLC and was an ideal



Above: VNPA members, friends and other planters at the planting site. Members of India-based charity Dera Sacha Sauda (in brown overalls) were again a big help.

Left: The VNPA's Ruth Stirling (centre) and fellow planters ready to get those seedlings in the ground.

Right: Landowner John Lakey joined in the planting and explained his family's plans for the farm.



location to develop our farm business," John said.

"Our niece and her family have bought the farm next door and jointly we are running Saler cattle, Ryeland sheep and Boer goats, which are sold directly to Melbourne restaurants as sustainable meat.

"We're working to make our property as environmentally and productively sustainable as possible."

Their whole-farm approach is restoring the non-arable areas of the property, fencing waterways and planting strategic windbreaks.

"Through Grow West, we've been supported in tackling the weeds and pest animals and planting native trees to help repair degraded areas, turning them into habitat for wildlife and providing a more manageable landscape for farming," John said.

"Having so many volunteers come and get stuck into planting is fantastic and truly appreciated."

"We'd encourage farmers and land managers everywhere to think about the

future they want from their properties and for their children, and to look at projects like Grow West to help them."

John Cutler, Grow West chairman, said the program's popularity and longevity is a mark of its success and sustainability.

"I see it as being inter-generational, I see it as being here for the next 50 years," he said.

Port Phillip & Westernport CMA's Grow West coordinator Helena Lindorff, who has been with the program since its inception, praises the transformation of the region, which has over 100 landholders and thousands of volunteers involved with remarkable results.

Grow West conducts its community planting days in partnership with the VNPA, local landholders and the Friends of Werribee Gorge and Long Forest Mallee. • PW

For information on how to get involved in future initiatives, either as a volunteer or a landholder, see [www.growwest.com.au](http://www.growwest.com.au)



*The massive scar left by clearing for the new divided road.*

# Highway robbery

Most VNPA members will be aware of the recent appalling loss of around 880 large old eucalypts as part of the duplication of the Western Highway between Ballarat and Stawell. The trees were felled in the section between Beaufort and Ararat.

Many of the trees had hollows used by birds and other animals.

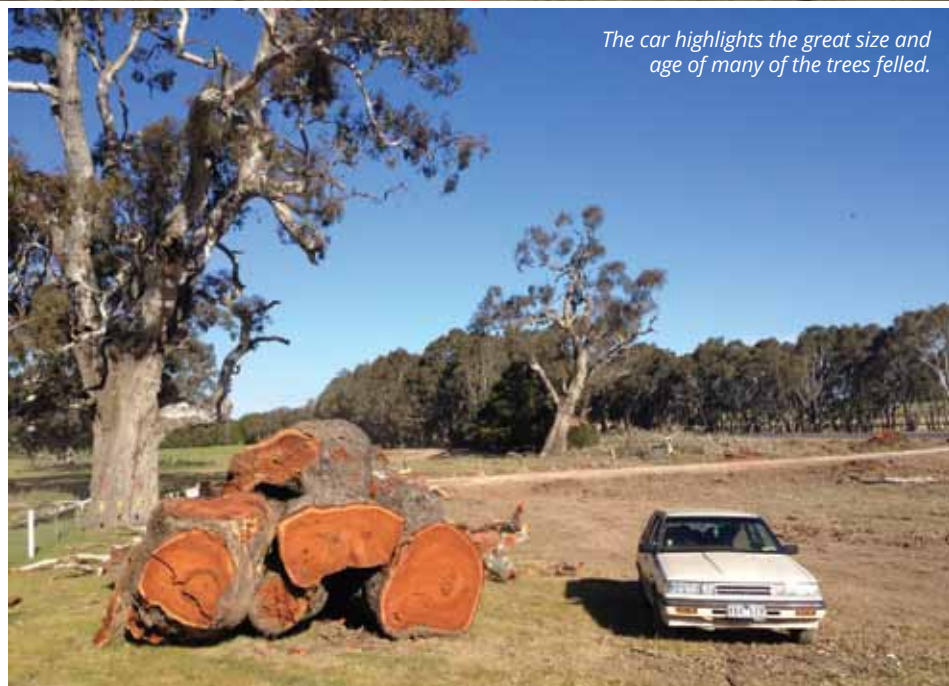
VicRoads had approval only for the removal of the 221 trees they estimated would need to be cleared. But this did not include many more 'scattered' trees in the path of the road, which were felled for debatable safety reasons.

Pressure from a local group, Western Highway Alternative Mindsets (WHAM), forced VicRoads to admit the mistake and revise plans for the next section to be widened, between Buangor and Ararat.

The VNPA applauds WHAM members' energy and persistence in the face of a powerful bureaucracy.

The revised plans include using concrete and wire rope barriers to stop vehicles running off the road and hitting a tree, rather than removing the trees themselves, and so narrowing the area to be cleared.

These design improvements are positive, but won't do much to reduce the impact of the road through hilly land. The best option is to minimise road widening as far as possible, and



*The car highlights the great size and age of many of the trees felled.*

focus on behavioural change to increase safety.

The power and speed of modern cars, and the increased traffic from a growing population, as well as a 'safety at any cost' policy, are related issues.

Another major problem is that VicRoads was exempted (in an unfortunate move by the former Brumby government) from having to gain permits for removing native vegetation.

Yet in many parts of Victoria, roadsides often have the best, or sometimes the only, native vegetation remaining.

The VNPA believes that, like anyone else, public authorities such as VicRoads should have to obtain permits for clearing native vegetation, and that VicRoads must give the protection of existing native vegetation a much higher priority.

We are in grave danger of losing the ecological and habitat value of our roadsides, as well as their variety, character and beauty – not to mention their importance for carbon capture and storage. • PW

See also book review on p. 32.

Michael Howes

PHOTO: DON BUTCHER

PHOTO COURTESY WHAM



# Vegetation clearing under review

VNPA HABITAT CAMPAIGNER  
YASMIN KELSALL REPORTS THAT,  
AS IT PROMISED, THE ANDREWS  
GOVERNMENT IS REVIEWING THE  
NATIVE VEGETATION CLEARING  
LAWS, AIMING TO SEE THEM  
'SENSIBLY PROTECT SENSITIVE  
VEGETATION'.

**Victoria is the most cleared state in  
Australia, yet we're still losing large  
amounts of native vegetation  
every year.**

The Clearing Laws, or *Victoria's  
Native Vegetation Permitted Clearing  
Regulations* as they're officially known,  
sit within the *Planning and Environment  
Act 1987* – which also has the purpose  
of facilitating development. And  
development usually takes precedence.

The role of such regulations may be  
debated, but the fact remains that they  
are the main tool we have to manage,  
and hopefully reduce, the vegetation  
clearing that is occurring with  
increased development.

After ten years of operation of  
Victoria's former regulations, the *Native  
Vegetation Management Framework*  
(DNRE 2002), the former state  
Coalition Government reviewed them  
and developed the current policy.  
Throughout that review, the VNPA  
and many others provided submissions  
and feedback on many of the ideas  
that emerged.

One of the most frequently cited issues  
was the modelled mapping products  
which became a fundamental element  
of the new policy. Other concerns  
related to the potential loss of local  
ecological values and large old trees,  
and depleted and rare vegetation types  
not being valued.

Our submissions were largely  
ignored, and the policy that emerged

in December 2013 contained all  
the elements that we had expressed  
concerns about.

This policy, which has now been in  
operation for more than a year, has  
been criticised from a number of  
quarters as well as the VNPA. Issues  
of concern have largely remained the  
same as those above.

The present policy has a number of  
features that differ from the earlier  
*Native Vegetation Management  
Framework*. These include:

- the removal of the explicit  
requirement to 'avoid clearing'  
as a first consideration
- a move away from assigning a  
proportionate value to Large  
Old Trees
- specific offsets for threatened species  
(which may be seen as a positive, and  
has certainly had an impact in the  
way offsets are measured)
- the introduction of a more explicit  
up-front assignation of 'risk' which  
then dictates the level of assessment  
and requirements for those seeking a  
permit to clear
- a move away from the 'like for like'  
offset approach
- a move away from considering  
the scarcity of separate vegetation  
types (by bioregion) or ecological  
communities
- moves towards considering habitat  
value on a statewide perspective, and  
towards a reliance on offset market  
forces for regulation
- a reliance on computer-generated  
models and calculations (generated

by the former Department of  
Environment and Primary Industry,  
now Department of Environment,  
Land, Water and Planning).

The current review seeks to address some  
of the issues identified. It is concurrently  
reviewing the *Biodiversity Strategy* and  
*Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act* as well,  
and it is planned that each review will  
take note of the others.

The aim is to conclude the review of the  
*Permitted Clearing Regulations* relatively  
quickly, with the release of a new draft  
policy by the end of 2015 or early 2016.  
A formal submission period will  
accompany this.

The government has held a series  
of twelve community stakeholder  
workshops across the state, nine of them  
in regional areas. They've also consulted  
with specific stakeholder groups and are  
running some surveys of groups that use  
the regulations, such as local government  
and ecological consultants.

Additionally, a Stakeholder Reference  
Group, with ten members including the  
VNPA, has been appointed and is now  
meeting to provide input to the process.  
We have met twice already, and two  
more workshop-style meetings are  
planned. • PW

To find out more about the review,  
including the Terms of Reference, visit  
[www.delwp.vic.gov.au/environment-  
and-wildlife/biodiversity/](http://www.delwp.vic.gov.au/environment-and-wildlife/biodiversity/)

You can also register to receive  
updates via email from  
[nativevegetation.review  
@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:nativevegetation.review@delwp.vic.gov.au)



PHOTO COURTESY WHAM

# The fire next time

WE HAVE TO TAKE ANOTHER GOOD HARD LOOK AT BUSHFIRE MANAGEMENT, AND WE SHOULD DO IT NOW, SAYS PHIL INGAMELLS.

**It should be possible to manage fire in the landscape in ways that will help to save lives and protect infrastructure, and also give great support to our natural heritage.**

Those things are the main objectives of Victoria's Code of Fire Practice, with protection of human life being the overriding priority. They are hard priorities to argue against.

And since the extraordinarily rigorous recommendations of the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, and the broad acceptance of them, you'd hope we are well on the way to achieving those objectives.

But the former Department of Environment and Primary Industry's (DEPI's) own assessment of its performance in managing fuel levels in Victoria over the 2013-14 year should be ringing alarm bells.

For key objective number one, to minimise the impact of fire on human life, communities and infrastructure, DEPI's self-assessment was that *"The outcome has not been achieved, but is a manageable risk."*

And with objective number two, to maintain or improve the resilience of natural ecosystems, DEPI repeats that *"The outcome has not been achieved, but is a manageable risk."*

That's right, the department responsible for managing Victoria's fuel reduction program is unable to protect our lives and our infrastructure, and is failing our remarkable natural heritage. The claim that the risk is manageable remains unexplained.

The Department's failure is not caused by a lack of expertise, commitment

or hard work. It's a reflection of the impossible expectation placed on our fire managers – that they'll be able to save everyone's life through fuel reduction burns.

The Department (now revamped as the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning – DELWP), together with everyone else involved in fire policy and management, should be going back to the drawing board.

They should be looking at a whole series of options very seriously, most of which have been Royal Commission recommendations all along, but were ignored or partly neglected while fuel reduction became the main game in town.

Let's look at the primary objective first: saving human lives.

## Managing fire ignition points

The best way to save people from a bushfire is to avoid one. A recent internationally published scientific study said that working hard to avoid ignition points is cost-effective management.

There are a few good options here:

1. Rather than burying most power lines, it would be sensible to encourage (if not actually mandate) **local power generation** for people in remote areas. This could be answered by solar and/or wind generation, backed up by other means if need be.
2. On severe fire weather days, there should be a very conspicuous **presence of police** on bush roads and tracks, to discourage fire-bugs.
3. We should radically improve our capacity for **rapid attack** on fires where they start, especially through



aerial attack. This would involve an investment in the hundreds of millions of dollars, but given the \$4 billion cost of the Black Saturday fires, it would be a responsible investment for Victoria – one of the most fire-prone places in the world.

(On Black Saturday, a fire that started near Ferntree Gully in the Dandenongs was extinguished almost immediately because a helicopter was nearby.)

## Well-designed private shelters

We'll never stop every fire, and we'll never get everyone to leave their home early in case a fire comes. But people can survive a fire at their home if they have a well-designed fire bunker.

The Royal Commission saw this as such an important issue that it put out an urgent interim report calling for approved designs





*The pressure for fuel reduction burning (such as here in Canadian State Forest near Ballarat) has led to many burns being done when the understorey is too dry, resulting in extensive areas of canopy scorch (lower photo). Beekeepers are concerned that this can hold back the full blossoming of eucalypts for many years. If that's true, it must affect native insects as well as birds and mammals.*

own expert committee. That group of fire scientists and ecologists almost universally recommended burning 5% of the 'foothill forests' (largely our stringybark forests), and that that program should be monitored as an experiment.

The 5% statewide target has been strongly criticised in three consecutive reports by the Commission's own implementation monitor, and the recent investigation of the target by Victoria's Inspector General of Emergency Services has recommended that it be replaced by strategic fuel reduction objectives.

This should come as no surprise, because many published scientific studies have already pointed out that, while lowering fuel loads in remote locations can impact a fire for a time, the most important places to reduce fuel are as close as possible to the buildings and people it is intended to save.

(Quite often that means reducing fuel on private land, something the 5% public land target didn't ask for at all!)

### Improved planning regulations

While there were initial moves to restrict buildings on fire-prone land, or even buy back such land, they were soon largely abandoned by government. We need much stricter planning controls on building in fire-prone areas, and clearer recommendations for appropriate planting around buildings.

### Community education

The Royal Commission made a number of recommendations about the need for community education, and

most of those things have been acted on. But communities remain largely unaware that the department cannot guarantee their safety through its fuel reduction program.

This should change, and regional communities should be invited to have input into all fire mitigation tools, not just annual fuel reduction plans.

### Where does that leave our natural heritage?

Fortunately (and we need some good fortune in the fraught fire management story), all the above methods aimed at saving lives, if implemented, would also help to save our much-troubled natural areas.

Victoria's natural areas may never have experienced such frequent fire as we've seen in recent years. Many ecological communities are mostly below their accepted 'tolerable fire intervals,' and very few areas of Victoria have long-unburnt vegetation remaining.

In addition, many thousands of old hollow-bearing trees have been felled to protect workers engaged in fuel reduction programs.

By stopping many fires at their ignition point, and concentrating fuel reduction programs at the population interface, we can allow for ecologically well-advised burns in more remote areas.

With climate change predictions for increasing frequency of severe fire weather, there will be more big fires in the future, and more inquiries will follow.

One day we might get this right, but the earlier that happens the better. • PW

for personal bushfire shelters, and a national standard was adopted before the Commission put out its final recommendations.

But virtually nothing has been heard from government agencies since.

Well-designed bushfire bunkers will definitely save lives. There should be a public education program to this effect and, most usefully, no-interest loans available for people to install one at home.

### Reducing fuel where it is most effective

The Commission's recommendation to burn 5% of Victoria's public land each year for fuel reduction was not actually recommended by its

PHOTOS: PHIL INGAMIELLS

# A WIN FOR OWLS

JILL REDWOOD OF ENVIRONMENT EAST GIPPSLAND REPORTS ON THE GROUP'S SUCCESSFUL LEGAL CASE TO PROTECT MORE AREAS OF FOREST. THE VNPA CONGRATULATES EEG ON THIS GREAT RESULT.



PHOTOS: DAVID HOLLANDS

*Masked (left) and Sooty Owls, threatened forest birds. They need large areas of forest to survive.*

## Threatened species

Owls are the 'eagles of the night', top-order predators. A pair of large forest owls needs between 1,000 and 4,500 hectares of mostly mature or old-growth forest to survive and breed.

With the impacts of logging and more frequent bushfires, such large areas are becoming increasingly rare. This is why the Sooty, Powerful and Masked Owls are now listed as threatened under Victoria's Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act.

And where owls and their habitat are protected, so are frogs, bandicoots, gliders, lace monitors and a myriad of other wildlife species.

The 2014 fires, which burnt over 170,000 ha of forest in East Gippsland, destroyed vast areas within Snowy River National Park, parts of Errinundra National Park, and adjoining state forests.

Much of this area was deliberately burnt by the then Department of Environment and Primary Industries

(DEPI). The loss of prime habitat for threatened wildlife was horrendous.

The eight-week fire burnt and destroyed thousands of large hollow-bearing trees. Add to the bushfire damage the Department's management of the fires (felling thousands of 'hazardous' trees along tracks and roads, as well as dragging fire around the landscape for weeks), and the toll on wildlife was shocking.

It was especially disastrous for those species dependent on the limited forests with old trees and large hollows.

EEG believed there were clear obligations under law to review and replace the fire-impacted owl protection zones called Owl Management Areas, 46 of which were impacted as a result of the 2014 fires.

Some zones suffered very severe fire that killed trees and 'evaporated' the understorey. Others had less severe fire through them but still lost hollow-bearing trees, along with much ground cover – both essential for the owl's prey species.

The owls themselves would either have perished or been forced to find new territory – most of which would already have been occupied.

EEG formally requested the then Coalition Government's Environment Ministers Peter Walsh and Ryan Smith to urgently review the owl zones. We asked that they replace burnt zones with new unburnt owl habitat known to support owls, but which were on the logging schedule.

The Ministers refused. This effectively subjected these threatened owls, already in trouble, to a double whammy.

## EEG speaks for the owls

On behalf of the owls, EEG decided to launch its fourth legal challenge in September 2014 against DEPI and its logging agency, VicForests – which agreed to halt logging in 90 stands of potential owl habitat that were identified while the case went ahead.

Thanks to the efforts of local 'citizen scientists' from the Goongerah





Burning heap of roadside trees at Ellery Creek Track, bulldozed (probably unnecessarily) as part of 'fire management'.



PHOTOS: JILL REDWOOD

A Manna Gum tree with hollows becomes a chimney during the 2014 fires.

Volunteer Rena went into burnt areas with feed to help keep surviving wildlife alive.

Environment Centre (GECO), the owl records we used for planned logging areas were recent and well recorded, giving us good legal ammunition to argue our case.

The other 'ammunition' (besides the dedicated team from Bleyer Lawyers) was state legislation, including the Forests Act and the Flora and Fauna Guarantee (FFG) Act.

The latter stipulates that in East Gippsland for the three threatened forest owl species, there must be between 100 and 131 zones per species set aside, containing good quality habitat and ranging from 500 to 800 ha per zone (though biologists believe this is extremely inadequate to support a pair of owls).

These zones are often 'doubled up' for more than one owl species for expediency, meaning that prey and resources are reduced for both species.

EEG believed the environment department (now DELWP, Department of Environment, Land, Water and

Planning) had an obligation under the East Gippsland Forest Management Plan to revise the owl protection zones.

The owls' Action Statements under the FFG Act also require the department to review, research and monitor the three species. We believe this has not been done.

Although we were disappointed that the new Labor government chose to continue along the legal path for another seven months, the out-of-court settlement in mid-July secured a number of areas as new protection zones.

We are pleased that the government now accepts it must do more work to ensure that the three threatened large forest owl species survive.

### The details

All up, over 2,000 ha have been set aside for owl protection as a result of the agreement reached, as well as some assessments and studies to determine whether new protection zones are necessary.

In particular, the Department and VicForests have agreed to:

- move nine stands of old-growth forest off the logging schedule and into protection zones (including Brown Mountain)
- put a four-year moratorium on another 16 stands of prime owl habitat planned for clearfelling
- increase the size of all owl protected areas in East Gippsland that are below legal minimums
- task biologists to study owls post-fire and consider if additional owl protection measures are needed
- carry out assessments of burnt owl zones
- pay a portion of EEG's considerable legal costs.

We look forward to working with the Department on these East Gippsland owl protection measures over the next year, while continuing to demand permanent protection for all remaining mature and old-growth forests and their dependent wildlife. • **PW**

# KEEPING THE DEVELOPERS AT BAY

PHIL INGAMELLS  
UPDATES US ON  
COMMERCIAL  
DEVELOPMENTS  
IN PARKS.



*Mount Buffalo Chalet in its heyday, ca 1912.  
Climate change predictions make it clear that the  
mountain will not remain the winter playground of earlier days.*

PHOTO: HISTORIC PLACES COLLECTION, DELWP

**Since the change in government in Victoria, the pressure has been taken off developments in parks. Our finest natural areas are, thankfully, free of private developers holding 99-year leases.**

But let's look at a few projects currently in action around the state.

## Mount Buffalo Chalet

The historic Chalet at Mount Buffalo National Park is currently undergoing a much-needed revamp – largely a process of restoring and reviving the front half of the building, and demolishing the hotch-potch of additions at the rear.

The partial demolition received the blessing of Heritage Victoria (and the VNPA). What we don't know is what will be there in the future.

The VNPA is opposed to any suggestion that a new private development could be encouraged on the footprint of the demolished sections. There is no need for the Chalet to re-establish its previous outsized growth.

And we are not at all convinced that the chalet should, in the future, be the preserve of high-end tourism.

Mount Buffalo has always had the potential to be a really top-rate youth hostel or school education centre. The plateau is one of the best places in Victoria for safe but adventurous

outdoor education, and getting young people into our parks brings health, sociological and economic benefits to the whole community.

The revamp also creates a rare chance to bring the park office, work centre and a visitor information centre back to the Chalet complex, allowing the other buildings scattered across the park to be removed and restoring the plateau to its former natural grandeur.

The Chalet revamp will cost the taxpayer considerably, so it's only appropriate that the broad community, and the park itself, should benefit.

## Quarantine Station, Point Nepean National Park

This has been an unnecessarily protracted battle involving a range of governments and developers, and various schemes and dreams, for many years now. For an update, see the story on p. 4.

## Arthurs Seat chairlift

With the closure and then demolition of the old chairlift to Arthurs Seat in 2006, after a series of safety concerns, there has always been enthusiasm by governments and some developers to replace it with a 'bigger and better' one along roughly the same route.

One of these proposals, the \$16m Arthurs Seat Skylift, has progressed through various planning processes and is set for completion by late 2016, after

the recent signing of a 50-year lease for access to Arthurs Seat State Park.

The local community group 'Save our Seat' has been concerned about the loss of vegetation along the skylift route, the size of the new buildings at the top, including a restaurant, and the scenic impact of the project's large and bright blue gondolas.

## Grampians Peaks Trail

This 144km multi-day walking track from north to south through Grampians National Park has had, since it was proposed, a variety of options for accommodation along the way. The original concept was for basic hikers' shelters, and little else.

Then, matching the previous Victorian government's push for private tourism infrastructure in national parks, the proposal changed to a series of seven privately built and operated serviced lodges along the way. They would have had kitchens and en suite bathrooms, and required road access for servicing.

One section of the trail has now been completed, and state and federal funding will ensure its completion. However, there is no longer any mention of the private lodges.

While this is primarily the result of the current government's lack of enthusiasm for private developments in parks, apparently no tourism operators actually expressed interest in the scheme.

It seems there are preferred locations for tourism investment: outside, but adjacent to, our parks. • PW



# Parks Victoria update

When a Regional Services Restructure was announced by Parks Victoria CEO Dr Bill Jackson about two years ago, it was stated that the restructure would reduce the number of higher-grade positions in a top-heavy organisation and create more lower-grade positions, resulting in additional rangers.

In fact the opposite seems to have happened.

As part of the restructure, Rangers in Charge have been replaced by Team Leaders in parks and by Area Chief Rangers, some of whom manage one park while others are responsible for several.

Many rangers and Field Service Officers received promotions as a result of the restructure, but not all of the resulting lower-grade vacancies have been filled, and many positions have just disappeared from the organisational chart. There are now fewer rangers and FSOs than before.

The CPSU has written to Parks Victoria asking if it intends to fill all the positions on the organisational chart presented as part of the restructure.

(The VNPA too is concerned that the restructure may result in fewer rangers 'on the ground' in parks in the longer term. We would like to hear from Parks Victoria in relation to this concern.)

Meanwhile, many staff 'matched' to new positions still have no idea what their roles are, and Corporate Services (Head Office) staff are still going through a 'realignment'.

There have also been changes to weekend roster arrangements for rangers and other field staff. Staff are now permitted to work a maximum of only 20 weekend days per year. This means that some staff have had their weekend days (and thus their rostered weekend allowance) cut by 50%.

Internal management discussion on this issue commenced over two years ago apparently without discussion with PV staff affected.

Bargaining for a new Parks Victoria Enterprise Bargaining Agreement for 2016 will begin soon. CPSU organisers will visit PV work centres over the next few months to discuss the claim for the new Parks Agreement.

CEO Dr Bill Jackson announced his resignation in March, continuing in the role until June. He has now become Chairman of the Thin Green Line Foundation that supports rangers worldwide. The VNPA commends him for carrying out a difficult role under an unsympathetic government, and wishes him well in his new role.

A new CEO, Bradley Fauteux from Canada, has just been announced. Mr Fauteux is currently Managing Director of Ontario Parks and a Board Member of the Canadian Parks Council. He will start work at Parks Victoria on 16 November. Chris Rose will continue as Acting Chief Executive until then.

Mr Fauteux was quoted recently as saying: "... in environmentalism and conservation, I don't think there is a higher calling than being part of a Friends group." Sounds encouraging!

The VNPA welcomes Mr Fauteux and looks forward to working with him. • PW

Thanks to the CPSU (Community and Public Sector Union) for information supplied.

Michael Howes



## ANDREW SCHULZ

### *A tribute*

*Dowds Morass State Game Reserve near Sale – part of Andrew's management area.*

after his 49th birthday, he died at home with his family after a long battle with Motor Neurone Disease.

So what might Andrew want you to know about him? I imagine he would just want to be known as someone who did the best for his area, his staff and the public he served.

Most people would agree that rangers across the state should be appreciated and respected for their dedication to the protection of our wonderful parks and reserves, but perhaps a special place belongs to those who, like Andrew, commit to one area for most of their working lives.

He started at Sale as a maintenance crew worker for the then Fisheries and Wildlife Department and worked his way up the ladder until he became ranger in charge.

Until recently Andrew Schulz was Parks Victoria Ranger in Charge at the Sale office. His area of management stretched from The Lakes NP and Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park to the

State Game Reserve wetlands around Lake Wellington and Holey Plains State Park to the west.

Andrew had worked in this area for over three decades. But sadly, just

PHOTO: PETER LAWRENCE

*Continued on page 39*

# Environmental governance

THE VNPA NATURE CONSERVATION REVIEW LOOKS AT THE MANAGEMENT OF OUR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT. VNPA VOLUNTEER EVELYN FELLER SUMMARISES THIS CHAPTER AND ALSO LISTS ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIONS UNDER THE ANDREWS GOVERNMENT.



PHOTO: PARKS VICTORIA

*Our pest plant and animal problems, such as the growing numbers of deer in our parks, are partly the result of shortcomings in environmental governance in terms of laws, responsibilities and resources.*

**Environmental governance is the system of laws, implementation mechanisms and institutional arrangements for environmental protection and biodiversity conservation.**

Achieving the many essential reforms recommended in the NCR involves addressing the following deficiencies.

**Lack of integration and coordination:** laws, administration, programs and plans are poorly integrated, leading to inefficiencies and conflicting objectives. The important 2009 Land and Biodiversity White Paper 'Securing our Natural Future' was the closest the government came to a comprehensive approach, but it was not implemented.

The Victorian Auditor-General has reported many instances of inadequate leadership and coordination, for example in marine biosecurity. There has also been too little strategic planning, resulting in an ad hoc and fragmented approach to biodiversity conservation.

**Weak laws and enforcement:** Victoria's environmental laws are complex, fragmented and outdated, and fail to mandate sufficient priority for biodiversity conservation. The previous state government weakened environmental laws and treated them as an impediment.

An independent regulator with requirements to report on enforcement and outcomes should be established.

**Limited planning and data:** reviews of Victoria's biodiversity approach have criticised the lack of an overall biodiversity strategy and of a clear articulation of statewide priorities, objectives and targets.

In addition, knowledge of Victorian biodiversity is deficient in many areas, including the conservation status and trends of many species and the effectiveness of different management techniques.

An urgent priority is to develop a nature conservation strategy that matches nature conservation with well-defined targets and effective measures.

**Limited disclosure:** it is not possible to gain a clear understanding of the state's environmental performance from the government's public reports. State agency performance measures in the annual budget papers are not linked to environmentally meaningful measures in state of environment or catchment reports.

**Low commitment and priority:** because of the previous government's low political commitment to the environment, funding is extremely inadequate and environmental progress made under earlier reforms slipped back.

Victoria needs a new biosecurity law to give appropriate priority to preventing new invasive species and provide institutional structures and tools to manage existing invasive species more effectively.

**Federal involvement:** the Commonwealth has no direct legal means to intervene when state governments undermine the integrity of national parks, so environmental groups recommend that parks should also be protected under federal environmental laws. As well, there should be federal funding for special park management programs.

## Climate change

Victoria should be responding to the threat of climate change by:

- reducing the state's greenhouse gases through conserving carbon sinks such as forests, and preventing carbon-emitting activities such as clearing
- ensuring that responses to climate change are ecologically sustainable
- reducing threats to nature and improving habitat quality

## Funding

The failure of past governments to invest sufficient public funds to arrest environmental decline in Victoria is



resulting in enormous economic as well as environmental and social costs.

Without investment now, future Victorians will inherit further loss of natural capital and spiralling costs for restoration and threat mitigation.

Only a small proportion of the Victorian budget has been allocated to support nature conservation, and government agencies are unable to meet their fundamental environmental obligations. Till 2015 Parks Victoria received just 0.6% of the state budget to manage 15% of the state's land area and 5% of its marine area.

As pointed out in June Park Watch, Parks Victoria has also not been allocated its proper share of public money collected in the Parks and Reserves Trust Fund.

Because knowledge of Victoria's biodiversity and how to manage it is still poor, there is a great need for funding to improve this knowledge. Funding decisions for the environment should:

- fund core programs and not rely on external funding
- allocate guaranteed long-term funding
- allocate funding to support and train volunteers
- be transparent and available for public review.

The NCR proposes the establishment of a Victorian biodiversity fund to support programs necessary to build the resilience of Victoria's ecosystems.

### Update: governance reform actions

Just as the NCR was completed in 2014, the state government changed. Here is a summary of the Andrews Labor Government's progress in improving environmental governance.

### Integration of laws

A new consolidated Victorian Environment and Conservation Act

may be considered in the review of the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act (see below).

The Andrews Government is also committed to developing a new marine and coastal act to better integrate law in this area. It has established an expert panel to identify and analyse the key challenges to marine and coastal health and management in Victoria.

### Biodiversity law

In mid-2013, 667 taxa and communities were listed as threatened under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act, but many other species need formal listing. Action plans need to be developed for many species, and compliance, monitoring and enforcement improved.

A review of the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act is now under way, and a new Biodiversity Strategy, to be completed by 2016, is being developed. The VNPA is represented on the Stakeholder Reference group for this.

### Institutional structures and processes

The NCR states that a new structure is needed for Victoria's environmental and sustainability agencies. These agencies should be based on the following principles:

- each agency must have clear objectives, functions and targets
- regulatory roles should be separated from policy setting and management to avoid conflicts of interest
- environmental regulators should be independent
- ecological sustainability and biodiversity conservation should be core principles in all government departments
- accountability with regular reporting and independent audits is needed.

There has been a restructuring of the department responsible for the environment (now Department of Environment, Water, Land and Planning, DEWLP) to remove Agriculture, which is now in a separate department. Parks Victoria has been restructured but there has been little structural change in the environment department. • PW

### Environmental actions by the Andrews Government

Although there has not been much institutional and legislative change under the Andrews Government so far, it has addressed a number of environmental issues left by the previous government.

- Cattle grazing has been removed from the Alpine National Park and red gum parks.
- The proposed large private development in Point Nepean National Park has been stopped.
- The government has started public consultations on native vegetation management rules and development of a biodiversity strategy.
- In the recent state budget the Andrews Government has increased Parks Victoria's allocation by \$21 million over four years and allocated \$11 million for infrastructure upgrades of buildings, roads and toilet blocks.
- There is to be a review of the Climate Change Act.
- A committee has been set up to deal with riparian management issues, with \$20-30 million in funding allocated.
- There have been public meetings about the promised Yarra River Act.
- A State of the Bay report is being prepared (geographical extent is yet to be determined).

# Tackling rabbits and weeds

LINDEN GILLBANK OF THE SCHOOL OF HISTORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL STUDIES, THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE, REPORTS ON A MALLEE MISSION IN JUNE.

## I try to commemorate the Queen's birthday appropriately.

As her subjects, we and our invading forefathers have caused enormous damage to Australian ecosystems and their original managers. Rabbits are a big part of the environmental damage package.

So a rabbit-focused weekend is a perfect commemoration of the royal birthday.

Thanks to Euan Moore and his discussions with rangers at Hattah-Kulkyne National Park, south of Mildura, Queen's birthday weekenders contribute to the park's ongoing rabbit control program. The weekend is becoming an annual VNPA event.

The volunteers are part of a five-year program organised by the Mallee CMA and Parks Victoria to control rabbits in the park. The volunteers back up work done by contractors.

As in previous years, some of us were repeat 'warreners' and others were newcomers.

We also searched for certain priority weeds – those targeted for control by the Mallee CMA.

And this year, a new activity was available: canoeing in search of aquatic weeds. Lucky us!

Hattah-Kulkyne is a grey-green island in an ocean of cleared land. Its sometimes ephemeral lakes and their associated creeks, billabongs and floodplains are precious, and

internationally significant, being recognised under the Ramsar Convention.

We camped at Lake Mournpall campground, with River Red Gums fringing the lake and Black Box and mallee further back. The weather was kind: breath-condensing early mornings and clear crisp days.

While the canoeists paddled off in search of the wetland weeds Elodia, Cabomba and Arrowhead, we landlubbers searched for warrens and weeds within grids decided by rangers.

Alert eyes and supple necks were essential. After lining up at 10 metre intervals, we walked forward, each searching ahead within a 10m wide corridor – 5m on each side.

Staying in line is relatively easy when roped together as, for example, when hawkweed-hunting in treeless vegetation, but here we relied on visual contact with the hi-vis vest of the warrenner on each side of us.

Maintaining our 'correct' relative positions while carefully searching around trees and in shrub thickets was challenging. It required lots of looking sideways, forwards and, for those carrying a GPS tracking device, downwards.

As well as recording our actual search-routes, GPS units helped keep us from diverging too far from our starting GPS position and were used to create waypoints to mark the positions of warrens and any African Boxthorn,



PHOTO: JENNY ROLLAND



PHOTO: CHRIS DUNN

Checking out aquatic weeds.

Olive, Noogoora Burr and Bridal Creeper. We left our way-pointed warrens for professional rabbit controllers to destroy.

Although few targeted weeds were found, we came across too many incursions of such other weeds as Tree Tobacco, Thornapple and Horehound.

As well as the generous camaraderie and diverse expertise and interests of my fellow warreners, my most cherished memory is of magnificent ancient River Red Gums, sometimes growing far from present surface water and even bigger than the grand old trees around Lake Mournpall.

These huge gentle giants rely on groundwater, and are the last of their cohort, which germinated centuries ago on the fringe of retreating floods. Outliving their fellow seedlings and saplings, they were mature trees when white invaders first brought saws and grazing stock to the area.

Will the groundwater be recharged sufficiently for their future survival? • PW



# ANNUAL REPORT 2014-2015



## President's Report Russell Costello



What an amazing year! We started on the financial ropes, opposing many government actions that were damaging the environment, and with a massive and potentially expensive court

case looming on Alpine cattle grazing. And then came recovery.

It was a year of two contrasting halves. In the first, we were defending the natural environment against one attack after another, and were totally excluded from government consultation. In the second, consultation was reinstated and there was renewed optimism for a range of positive environmental achievements.

In one of my President's introductions I pointed out the poor performance of the former Coalition administration compared with those of the past, particularly the golden era of the Hamer Government and Conservation Minister Bill Borthwick.

This time, we had environmentally disastrous policies, a developer's paradise at the expense of the environment, national park 'sales' through 99-year leases and no environmental achievements of note.

What's our take-home message? That we must work closely with all sides of politics to encourage the development of sound environmental platforms. I'm certain that failing the environmental test in the eyes of the community contributes to electoral failure, and even to one-term governments.

We survived these difficult years because of our very generous donors, our hard-working staff and volunteers, and eventually because of a change of State Government.

Whether we are entering another golden time for the environment remains to be seen, but the signs are much better. The Environment Minister has already reversed some of the negatives of her predecessor, including alpine cattle grazing and the Point Nepean lease, with more under review.

We are now working with the government on a number of fronts, though our capacity to meet the requests for input, even with volunteer support, is being severely stretched.

With government grants such a rarity and philanthropic trusts still recovering from the GFC, we need a reliable income to serve your expectations.

Regular Giving has been steadily growing by about 10% per year. Our monthly donors now contribute around 8% of our income. This is really important to us.

As Regular Giving grows, particularly Regular Giving Plus (which includes membership), our revenue becomes steadier and more predictable. That makes program planning so much easier. I encourage you to consider it if you can.

Our Executive Director Matt Ruchel mentions many of the achievements of the past 12 months. In addition, Council has elected to invest in a new on-line system for managing membership, contacts, payments and so much more. Our clunky old system was costing too much staff time.

The next step is to develop a new website, linked to the new system, to provide a smooth service to all. This will make online enquiries, payments and event registration much easier.

It may also lead the many fleeting visitors to our site to stay, find what they are looking for, return regularly, and perhaps become supporters.

We all want our Association to grow. And with your help, it will.

### COUNCIL MEMBERS

**President:** *Russell Costello* (Conservation & Campaigns; Executive; Governance, Policy & Legal; Membership & Marketing and Education & Events)

**Vice President:** *Euan Moore* (Executive; Membership & Marketing and Education & Events)

**Secretary:** *Charles Street* (Conservation & Campaigns; Executive; Governance, Policy & Legal) to June 2015;  
*Michael Forster* (Executive; Finance Governance; Policy & Legal; Education & Events) from June 2015

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

*Ann Birrell* (Executive; Governance, Policy & Legal)

*Russell Bowey* (Bushwalking & Activities Group)

*Michael Feller* (Conservation & Campaigns)

*Deborah Henry* (Bushwalking & Activities Group; Membership & Marketing and Education & Events)

*Bruce McGregor* (Conservation & Campaigns, Executive)

*Kyle Matheson* (Finance; Governance, Policy & Legal)

*Libby Smith* (Membership & Marketing and Education & Events)

*James Thyer*

**Note:** Committee memberships in brackets



PT NEPEAN PHOTO: MATTHEW MACKAY; INNER LIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY; CATTLE PHOTO: PHIL INGAMIELLS; NATUREWATCH PHOTO: TRACEY KOPER, VCMC.

# The Year in Review

Executive Director Matt Ruchel



When I look back on this past year, I'm reminded what can be achieved with the support of like-minded and passionate people in small organisations like the VNPA.

The past 12 months saw a change in government at the November state election, and a change in the atmosphere for conservation in Victoria. Our ongoing defence of natural areas has taken on a more positive outlook, with some significant outcomes.

First, we saw the delivery on an election commitment to ban cattle grazing in Victoria's Alpine and Red Gum national parks. This ban closes loopholes in the legislation and will hopefully see the end of this antiquated and damaging practice in our park system.

We also worked successfully with local communities on the Mornington Peninsula to block a proposed large-scale private development at the Quarantine Station in Point Nepean National Park.

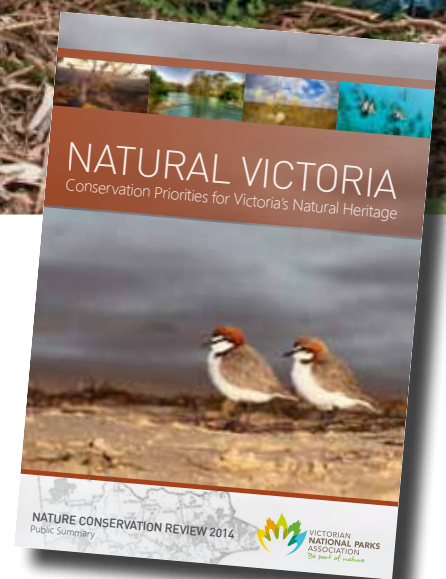
We now look forward to helping develop a more permanent and sustainable future for the site which maintains its significant natural, cultural and recreational values.

We continued our role in working on complex policy issues such as fire management, native vegetation controls, grassland protection and urban growth, and protection of biodiversity state-wide.

As part of this, we released our fourth Nature Conservation Review – *Natural Victoria, conservation priorities for Victoria's natural heritage* – which synthesises the condition of, threats to and challenges facing our unique natural areas.

Forest protection has also gained momentum, with widespread recognition of the plight of the tiny Leadbeater's Possum and the proposed creation of a Great Forest National Park front and centre in the state election.

The VNPA has been campaigning for our parks and nature for more than 60 years, so it is good to know that what we stand for has widespread public support. Polling commissioned by the VNPA last year showed almost unanimous support for national parks across the Victorian community.



On the organisational front, with your support our funding base remains stable. We worked hard through the year to improve our operations and capacity, and service and support our members and supporters, with the difficult job of introducing a new database.

Our community engagement and education work such as NatureWatch continued to flourish, though we have had to halt our Reef Watch project for the time being, due to a shortfall in funding.

Significantly we have had a number of staff changes, with Nick Roberts (Red Gum campaign), Simon Branigan (Marine and Coastal campaign) and Wendy Roberts (Reef Watch) moving on this year. We thank them for their hard work and dedicated service.

Many thanks and congratulations to the VNPA Council, staff and our many committed volunteers, members and supporters for a great team effort. We look forward to another good year in 2015-16.



## Bushwalking and Activities Group

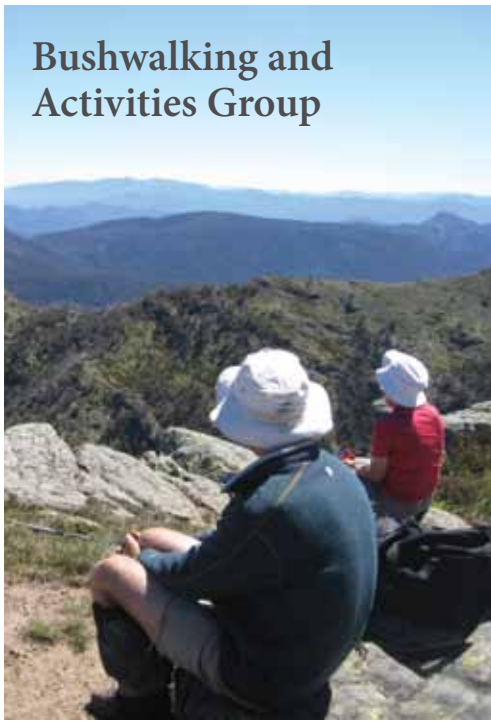


PHOTO: MARY FERLIN

*Mt Howitt, Alpine National Park.*

First, I'd like to thank all our volunteers: walk leaders, Emergency Contacts, leader mentors, event coordinators and committee members. They made it possible to offer over 250 activities and social events for the year.

35 weekend trips (overnight and base camps) were offered, and their leaders deserve special thanks for the extra commitment required.

These activities are not just enjoyable and healthy – they help people appreciate our natural places.

Highlights among the many activities included a family overnight walk at Mt Baw Baw, family bike rides, canoeing on the Goulburn, and snow shoeing. Overseas, John Bales led a hiking trip to Canada.

### Social Nights

Presentations at these monthly social events included Euan Moore on the Antarctic Peninsula; controlling weeds in the Central Highlands; a foray in the fungi world; Caught on Camera footage; and John and Ruth Stirling's Japan trip.

Other social activities were the regular Christmas and mid-year dinners, and monthly Under 35 dinners. Sue Catterall organised our very popular Odd Ball.

Prospective leaders attended a Leadership Briefing by Russell Bowey.

Some of our leaders deserve a special mention. Larysa Kucan has done a wonderful job coordinating the coach excursions, Geoff Durham led his Easy Going Ambles, and Ruth Stirling and Sue Parkhill continued their great Monday walk series.

Richard Tagg continued to promote BWAG activities through the website 'MeetUp', and

## Volunteers and Committee Convenors

### VOLUNTEERS

**Administration Assistants:** David Alberton, Jilly Casey, Christine Cockayne, Colette Findlay, Margaret Hattersley, Raimonne McCutchan, Graham Trigg, Fredrick Tropp-Asher.

**Research Assistants:**  
Evelyn Feller, Dianne Marshall.

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

**Native Vegetation & Grasslands:**  
Andrew Booth, Adrian Marshall.

**NatureWatch:** (*Office volunteers*) Emma Barnett, Margreet Drijfhout, Jill Johnson, Meg Loyn, Ann Williamson. (*Team leaders*) Colin Cook, David De Angelis, Jasper Hails, Michael Longmore, Julia Pickwick, Garry van Dijk, Wilma van Dijk, Ian Vaskess. (*Equipment management*) Eddie Schambre.

**Publications:** Geoff Durham, Evelyn Feller, Euan Moore, Jenny Norvick, Bernard Slattery.

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

### VOLUNTEER COMMITTEE CONVENORS

**Bushwalking & Activities Group:**  
Terese Dalman.

**Conservation & Campaigns:**  
Bruce McGregor.

**Executive:** Russell Costello.

**Excursions:** Larysa Kucan.

**Governance, Policy & Legal:**  
Ann Birrell.

**Finance:** Gary Allan.

**Membership & Marketing and Education & Events:** Euan Moore.

### COMMITTEE VOLUNTEERS

Other than VNPA Councillors and staff, the following volunteers have been members of VNPA committees:

Fredrick Tropp-Asher, Liz Forbes, Darren McClelland, Linda Parlane, Maelor Himbury, Larysa Kucan, Deirdre Slattery, Evelyn Feller, Fred Gerardson, John Renowden, Joan Lindros, Gerard McPhee, Bernie Mace, Lindsay Hesketh, Terese Dalman, Rob Argent, Gayle Davey, Sue Catterall, Julia Pickwick, David Moore.

David Moore got our walks included in the Seniors Week program. We've also continued our 'Bring a Friend for Free' initiative.

### Conservation

BWAGers participated in a range of conservation activities including Project Hindmarsh, Grow West, boneseeding on the Mornington Peninsula, rabbit warren surveys in Hattah-Kulkyne NP, NatureWatch activities, Clean Up Australia Day, and a Malleefowl nest survey. Walk, Talk and Gawk leaders offered 14 WT&Gs, with one especially for children.

BWAG contributed \$7,000 to VNPA with income from walks and other activities.

I especially want to thank outgoing Convenor Russell Bowey for his excellent leadership of the Group over the past three years. He's so dedicated that he has stayed on the Committee as Secretary! And thank you to Geoff Durham, who introduced the Walk, Talk and Gawk concept. Geoff has now stepped down as Coordinator.

And a final thank-you: thanks to the committee members for giving their time to make all this happen. Rob Argent, Russell Bowey, Gayle Davey, Sue Catterall, Deb Henry, David Moore and Julia Pickwick – you've done a great job!

Terese Dalman (Convenor)

## Coach excursions

The Excursions Group conducted ten day trips in 2014-15, all well attended by both members and visitors – a total number of 432 people. Places visited were Coolart Wetlands, Wilsons Promontory, the Maribyrnong River by tram boat, Mt Baw Baw, Mt Buangor SP, Morwell NP, Yea, Kinglake to Seymour, Eynesbury and Blackwood, and lastly Walhalla.

On these trips, all led by volunteers, we enjoyed walks in national parks and along rail trails, picnics, and visiting farmers markets, historic homes and galleries.

The VNPA has been using the services of McKenzie's coaches since the early 1960s and we thank them for their continued support. Their expert drivers contribute greatly to the success of the excursions.

As a result of these trips the group contributed \$5,742 to the VNPA, up from the previous year's \$5,299.

Many thanks to the trip leaders, and to all the members and visitors who participated in the excursions.

Larysa Kucan (Convenor)

## Financial Report

Abridged Audited Special Purpose Financial Report for the year ended 30 June 2015.

### Statement by Members of the Council

The members of the Council have determined that the Association is not a reporting entity and in our opinion the abridged special purpose financial report set out below presents a true and fair view of the financial position of VNPA as at 30 June 2015 and its performance for the year ended on that date.

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

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

Gary Allan (Treasurer) & Euan Moore (Vice-President) dated this 3rd day of September 2015.

INCOME STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2015		
REVENUE	2015	2014
<b>Operating Activities</b>	\$	\$
Appeals, Donations & Bequests	854,142	847,167
Grants & Partner Contributions	106,379	159,527
Membership Fees	109,067	116,668
Interest Income & Sundry Sales	59,906	62,304
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>1,129,494</b>	<b>1,185,666</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>		
Employment Expenses	594,400	712,957
Campaigns, Projects, Activities & Education	100,747	89,114
Office & Administration	157,750	164,656
Printing/Publications/Web	54,558	70,032
Accommodation & Insurance	99,627	103,246
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>1,007,082</b>	<b>1,140,005</b>
<b>OPERATING (DEFICIT) SURPLUS BEFORE TRANSFERS (TO) FROM RESERVE FUNDS</b>	<b>122,412</b>	<b>45,661</b>
<b>Transfers from (to) Reserve Funds</b>	<b>(109,426)</b>	<b>(20,089)</b>
<b>OPERATING (DEFICIT) SURPLUS AFTER TRANSFERS FROM (TO) RESERVE FUNDS</b>	<b>12,986</b>	<b>25,572</b>

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 30 JUNE 2015		
ASSETS	2015	2014
<b>Current</b>	\$	\$
Receivables and Inventory	30,079	142,414
Cash and Cash Equivalents	926,256	748,088
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>956,335</b>	<b>890,502</b>
<b>Non-Current</b>		
Fixed Assets at Written Down Value	23,151	32,421
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>979,486</b>	<b>922,924</b>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>		
Current and Non-Current	302,556	368,406
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<b>302,556</b>	<b>368,406</b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>	<b>676,930</b>	<b>554,518</b>
<b>Funded by:</b>		
Association Funds	676,930	554,518
<b>TOTAL ASSOCIATION FUNDS</b>	<b>676,930</b>	<b>554,518</b>

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

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

VNPA - ACTIVITIES ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2015		
The operating accounts for the Bushwalking and Activities Group have not been consolidated into the general accounts above and are reported separately as follows:	2015	2014
	\$	\$
<b>Opening Bank Account Balance</b>	<b>3,125</b>	<b>4,142</b>
Income	10,060	9,365
Expenditure	(75)	(382)
Funds Contributed to VNPA	(7,000)	(10,000)
<b>CLOSING BANK ACCOUNT BALANCE</b>	<b>6,110</b>	<b>3,125</b>

### VNPA supporters, donors and partners

The VNPA acknowledges and thanks our key supporters, donors and partners for their generous support.

#### Donors:

The following subfunds of the Australian Communities Foundation:  
Alf and Meg Steel Fund  
BB & A Miller Fund  
Melliodora Fund

The Arnold Foundation  
The Dara Foundation  
Equity Trustees Limited  
Field Naturalists Club of Victoria  
Gras Foundation Trust  
Foundation for National Parks & Wildlife  
The Ian Potter Foundation  
Rowe Family Foundation (Perpetual)  
Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation  
Parks Victoria  
Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority

#### Project partners:

bankmecu  
Bendigo and District Environment Council  
Ecology Australia  
Environment East Gippsland  
Environmental Justice Australia  
Friends of Bunyip State Park  
Geelong Environment Council  
Grow West  
Hindmarsh Landcare Network  
Museum Victoria  
Practical Ecology  
Preserve Westernport Action Group  
The Wilderness Society  
The University of Melbourne  
Volunteering Western Victoria  
Westernport & Peninsula Protection Council  
Wombat Forestcare

### VNPA Employees

**Executive Director:** Matt Ruchel

**Fundraising Manager:** Emily Clough  
(maternity leave from Dec 2014)

**Direct Marketing Officer:** Maxine Hawkins

**Finance & Operations Manager:** Heath Rickard

**Administration Officer:** Charlotte Kandelaars

**Administration Assistants:** Irina De Loche,  
Ann Williamson, Tilly Reynolds

**Marine & Coastal Project Officer:** Simon Branigan  
(to Oct 2014); Chris Smyth (from Feb 2015)

**Parks Protection Project Officer:** Phil Ingamells

**Habitat Protection Project Officer:** Yasmin Kelsall

**Red Gum & River Rescue Project Coordinator:**  
Nick Roberts (to Jan 2015)

**Manager, Community Education and Engagement:** Caitlin Griffith (from March 2015)

**Nature Watch Coordinator:** Christine Connelly

**Reef Watch Coordinator:**  
Wendy Roberts (to Sept 2014)

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

**Conservation Review Project Coordinator:**  
Andrew Cox

**Media & Communications Consultant:**  
John Sampson/EcoType



*Large old tree stumps at the Shepherds Flat mine site show how big the forest trees were before Europeans came. We need to protect the new forest that is growing back.*

# Plundering paradise?

**GAYLE OSBORNE OF WOMBAT FORESTCARE WARNS OF THE THREAT OF GOLD MINING IN THE FOREST.**

**The northern section of Wombat State Forest, adjoining Hepburn Regional Park, is a wonderful example of our drier forests.**

There are many waterways flowing north. These creeks can appear dry but water seeps underground along them, often collecting in pools.

Brilliant arrays of wattles, wildflowers and orchids abound in spring, with patches of the threatened *Grevillea repens*.

The area suffered greatly in the 19th century mining boom, and existing eucalypts are mainly regrowth from stumps.

But it's still Tuan or Brush-tailed Phascogale territory. These cute but fierce marsupials like this drier country, where they feed on smaller mammals, birds, lizards and insects.

Recently, despite strong community opposition, a 53.8 hectare mining licence (MIN5572) was approved for an area within the forest near Shepherd's Flat.

This is probably to be expected, as mining is a permitted land use within a state forest. 'Park status' for the Wombat would have protected the site, as mining is not allowed in national or state parks.

The next step is for the licensee to obtain an authorised work plan from the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources. This document details the operation and extent of the works.

During this process the relevant authorities look at biodiversity and



PHOTO: GAYLE OSBORNE

water issues. The Environment Department biodiversity officer can usually only put in place restrictions to protect threatened species, set the amount of offset the licensee must purchase to compensate for loss of native vegetation, and detail the rehabilitation of the site.

Should the proposed works be within 20 metres of either side of a designated waterway, the water authorities should insist that the licensee apply for a 'works on waterway' permit.

The process of the licensee applying for a work plan only allows the community to object to the issuing of the licence. The objection from Wombat Forestcare was dismissed on the grounds that it was 'specific to potential impacts on the environment'.

We were told these issues will be dealt with in the work plan process, a process to which we have no input rights.

Once the work plan is approved, the licensee has a legal right to proceed, and work can only be halted if there are breaches of the work plan. Then a mining inspector (or warden) is called in to deal with the breaches. There do not seem to be any instances where a mine has been closed due to non-compliance.

Also, once the work plan is approved, the licensee must commence a 'community consultation' process. However, this can be as little as having a website. The licensee is not bound to take notice of community concerns.

It is shocking that there are so few legal protections for our natural environment. On the face of it the processes are legal, but it is clear that our environment is not protected.

The department regulators are also the bureaucrats in charge of making sure mining proceeds. It is not in their interest to keep mining out of our waterways if that is where the gold is.

There are examples throughout the country where communities have stood up to the legal rights of miners. Many have succeeded - look at the successes of the 'Lock the Gate' campaigns.

As a community we need to do all we can. Let's work towards protecting this special place. • PW

## TAKE ACTION

Write to:

**Hon. Richard Wynne**  
Minister for Planning  
1 Spring Street, Melbourne  
VIC 3000

Cc the letter to:

**Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio**  
Minister for Energy and Resources  
121 Exhibition Street, Melbourne  
VIC 3000

Ask that Sandy Mining Pty Ltd be required to complete an Environmental Effects Statement (EES) for MIN5572 as there are potentially significant environmental effects from mining this site.

# Vigilance or vigilantes?



Are these cheerful environmentalists just planting trees, or are they really vigilantes planning to take legal action against the government?

The Abbott Government has now moved to abolish all of section 487 of the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act* 1999. Legal advice suggests that this would mean any person wanting to challenge a federal environmental approval would have to prove they had been directly and personally adversely affected. (*Guardian*, 19/8/2015).

This means repealing an important provision which recognises that nature cannot speak for itself, and therefore that environmental organisations need to be able to initiate legal challenges.

This is part of a chain of fronts opened up by the Federal Coalition. First, they started by pushing to hand back federal environmental powers to state governments, under the snappy slogan of a 'one-stop shop' for environmental approval – which in turn would mean decision-making under eight different jurisdictions in the one country.

This was followed by a House of Representatives Inquiry in May 2015 into the tax deductibility status of environmental groups. Liberal MP Alex Hawke, chairman of the inquiry, was quoted in the *Australian Financial Review*, 20 May 2015, as saying: "I think there is an argument mounting about what taxpayer concessions are being used for and if that money is being used for groups that are purely political who are claiming environmental work that is not being spent on the environment."

Federal Industry Minister Ian Macfarlane was also quoted as saying that it was quite clear some environmental groups were not playing by the rules. "You have to play by the rules. If they are an environmental group and they are promoting the environment, that's fine, but to use money for political activism, that's a problem."

Yet on the back of the Adani decision, Attorney-General George Brandis said on the ABC's AM program (20 August): "There may be people who care deeply about the environment, but they should prosecute their views through the political system, not through the courts."

VNPA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MATT RUCHEL RESPONDS TO THE RECENT ATTACKS BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT ON ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS, PARTICULARLY IN RELATION TO LEGAL ACTIONS.

The recent unprecedented political rhetoric by the Abbott Government in declaring 'war' on 'environmental vigilantes and saboteurs', 'green vigilantism' and the use of 'lawfare' (whatever that is) is part of an orchestrated attempt to demonise the environment and conservation groups.

The flurry of furious language came in response to the Federal Court decision this month to overturn the approval for Adani's proposed \$16 billion Carmichael coalmine in Queensland, delaying the project for a few weeks. (*Guardian*, 19/8/2015).

PHOTO: COURTESY GROW WEST



So according to the Abbott Government, conservation and environment groups should not be allowed to be engaged in the political process, we are not playing by the rules if we do, and we should not be allowed to use the courts either. Really?

Sue Higginson, principal solicitor at the NSW Environmental Defenders Office, said the action to change the standing provision in the EPBC Act “would probably be limited to farmers protecting their direct business interests, but not the interests of an endangered species or the Great Barrier Reef”. (*Guardian*, 19/8/2015)

Since the EPBC Act was enacted, about 5,500 projects have been referred, but fewer than 30 (about 0.5%) have been challenged in the courts. Only six of those challenges have been successful – 0.1% of total referrals!

The Human Rights Law Centre’s Senior Lawyer, Ruth Barson, said that changing laws to limit court scrutiny of government decision-making is a retrograde step in a democracy like Australia.

“The ability to take legal action in the public interest is central to ensuring governments remain accountable. Locking particular groups out of the courts is heavy-handed and will mean that bad decisions will go unchecked and unchallenged,” Ms Barson said in a media release.

“It is ironic that the Government is rushing through this amendment on the back of essentially conceding inadequate ministerial decision-making. Without the legal scrutiny of the environment groups who took this case, it is entirely possible that significant environmental impacts would have remained overlooked,” she said.

The Attorney-General has also been criticised for his inflammatory remarks about legal proceedings brought by environmental organisations. Ms Barson said: “Using a term like ‘vigilante’ when describing a court case – one of the most orthodox and proper methods for challenging

Waleed Aly said in an excellent comment piece (*The Age*, 21/8/15) that “[The term] ‘vigilante litigation’ is literally nonsensical – like ‘gluttonous starvation’ or ‘rapid-fire sluggishness’”

Government decision-making – is extraordinary. The Attorney-General should be showing more respect for the separation of powers and the rule of law.”

The move to attack environment and conservation groups is clearly a backward step, and is likely to be a political over-step. The argument that environment groups have no right to highlight issues or take legal action unless they live ‘next door’ to a site is a flashback to the antiquated ‘nuisance’ and amenity principles found in centuries-old common law.

If this principle were to take hold, who would stand up for Australia’s public land or the vast swathes of Commonwealth-controlled marine waters – oil interests and fishers? ‘Foxes in charge of chooks’ comes to mind.

Looked at optimistically, this sort of attack must mean that the environment movement is having an impact – or why would you bother potentially marginalising and alienating the millions of Australians actively involved in conservation and environment issues?

On the other hand, there appears to be an attempt at a political strategy to link the ALP with the Greens or the ‘anti-job, anti-development’ environment movement, making environmental groups somehow anti-worker and anti-economy.

This approach is simply punching at clouds. Most Australians understand and support the notion that

environment and economy are linked and that ‘our land of nature’s gifts’ (to quote the national anthem) supports millions of jobs as well as being a key part of our national identity. To demonise the environment or conservation movement will likewise get little traction across the community, but will no doubt sound good to some ideologues.

In a state-wide poll last year, undertaken by the VNPA, 78% of Victorians said they think it is important to have a community-based independent organisation to advocate for the protection of parks in Victoria. 29% said this was ‘very important’ and 49% ‘important’. More than 70% of all demographic groups believed that it was important.

It’s a great shame that conservative politicians have drifted in this divisive direction when through the 1970s and 80s, and even the 90s, they were leaders in this space. It was the Howard government which in 1999 passed the EPBC Act, now presented as a problem of ‘war’ proportions.

Many of the places we love in Victoria and Australia – Fraser Island, the Franklin River, the Grampians, the Alpine National Park and many others – would not be protected without the vigilance of the community and the conservation movement.

These are not groups of vigilantes. These are people with values, passion, and the courage and vigilance to stand up for what they love. • PW

# Technology supports data collection

GRAEME JOHANSON REPORTS ON NEW WAYS OF COLLECTING AND SHARING INFORMATION ABOUT NATURE.

**Two new portable technologies – the digital camera and the smart phone – have changed the way in which volunteers can collect data in the field.**

Both technologies are used regularly by Dr Russell Best of the Australian Plants Society Victoria (APSV). When interviewed for our research project, he said that the digital camera had made a huge difference.

He went on: “The other big technical change has been the iPhone. The amount of information you can collect is phenomenal.” The phone also gives him a GPS location.

More and more digital repositories collect data about nature for public use via the internet. A large group of people can collect and collate much more information than a single dedicated group of employed specialists.

Every year the ‘Birds in Backyards’ survey collects data for the Birdlife Australia website – see [www.birdlife.org.au](http://www.birdlife.org.au)

The main Australian database is the Atlas of Living Australia ([www.ala.org.au](http://www.ala.org.au)), funded by the federal government.

BowerBird, begun in 2013 and hosted by Museum Victoria, contains masses of Victorian flora and fauna data, and brilliant photographs sent in by nature lovers. A visit to its website ([www.bowerbird.org.au](http://www.bowerbird.org.au)) is a visual treat.

NatureShare ([www.natureshare.org.au](http://www.natureshare.org.au)) is two years older, and primarily the work of Russell Best. Members can help each other to identify specimens loaded on to the growing database.

These repositories are still developing as they become better known.

We undertook our research project because we knew what new

technologies could achieve, but also realised that many volunteer organisations were not using them extensively.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are being used more and more. Yet there was scant evidence of adoption of mobiles by volunteers for scientific purposes.

We determined that a study of the interactions between a voluntary environmental group and big repositories by means of crowdsourcing and/or online connections would be useful.

In the 1950s Australians were starting to turn to indigenous plants for conservation, inspiration and national knowledge. Although propagation occupied the minds of most early APSV members, there has been a commitment to research from the beginning.

With financial support from APSV and the Norman Wettenhall Foundation, we undertook a three-phase study to understand how APSV members used ICTs for collecting, analysing and managing their field data, and whether they benefited from this, or could benefit more.

In the first phase of our project (2011) we interviewed APSV members about their data collection and management, and use of ICTs. Despite their high level of enthusiasm and commitment, this showed that data collection, management and storage were not systematic or methodical, and that very limited use was made of ICTs.

In the second phase (early 2013) we noted slight improvements. In the third, later in 2013, we devised a project to train members to maximise their use of NatureShare and BowerBird.

This aimed to improve data-sharing and encourage use of big data in big repositories.

Three of the core ideas used in our project – crowdsourcing, big data and citizen science – need a little further description.

- Crowdsourcing involves enlisting a group of people with a shared interest. It is commonly done via the internet, increasingly on mobile computer devices.

At the moment, most APSV data collecting is done in three stages: data collection, uploading to a personal computer, then sending it to a repository via the internet.

When fully operational, mobile crowdsourcing relies on ubiquitous wi-fi connectivity. Crowdsourcers can draw from, or upload to, big data repositories remotely via their mobile devices – so you can use a mobile device to check a specimen against a verified image of it on the internet.

- Repositories containing crowdsourced data are called ‘big’ because they contain massive amounts of useful data on a huge range of topics.
- Citizen scientists are non-professional volunteers who collect, analyse and share natural data. The term ‘citizen science’ was coined in the USA in the 1990s and its use is catching on in Australia.

An aim of future research is to describe the relationship between citizen and professional scientists, and explore the ramifications of trust between them. To make full use of each individual and group contribution to big data, trusting collaborations are essential.

The citizen science community is very interested in our research. We have applied for further funding, alongside Museum Victoria and the Atlas of Living Australia. If readers are interested and would like to see our published papers about the project, please contact [graeme.johanson@monash.edu](mailto:graeme.johanson@monash.edu) • PW

Research team members Associate Professor Graeme Johanson, Kirsty Williamson and Mary Anne Kennan are in the Faculty of Information Technology at Monash University, Caulfield.



# Celebrating incredible citizen scientists

IN JULY, THE VNPA'S CITIZEN SCIENCE SPECIALISTS CAITLIN GRIFFITH AND CHRISTINE CONNELLY HEADED TO CANBERRA TO SHARE IDEAS WITH PRACTITIONERS FROM ACROSS THE NATION AT THE INAUGURAL AUSTRALIAN CITIZEN SCIENCE CONFERENCE.

**Science is about curiosity, observation, questioning and evidence. These are things people practise all the time.**

'Citizen science' refers to members of the public engaging in authentic scientific investigations. It's a big and growing interdisciplinary field that can change the way we think and learn about science.

It's not a new phenomenon. Science became professionalised in the late 19th century, but before that nearly all research about the natural world was conducted by people who were not paid as scientists.

Wine-growers in France have records of grape harvests going back more than 600 years. Amateurs gathered many specimen collections and observations for Carl Linnaeus, the father of modern botanical taxonomy. Charles Darwin relied on observers from naturalists across the world to develop his theory of evolution.

Today more than 130,000 Australians take part in over 90 known citizen science projects across the country, ranging from grass-roots and local community group-based projects to large-scale national and international projects.

To be successful, citizen science projects need a compelling research

topic focused on an issue the community can understand; an engagement strategy to communicate the issues and build partnerships with scientists and the community; and efficient, flexible technology to implement the program.

And it's not just about data. The information gathered helps in addressing important scientific questions and can be a valuable learning experience for the participants.

Australia's Chief Scientist, Professor Ian Chubb, has recently released an Occasional Paper about citizen science, recognising the value of people getting involved in citizen science projects.

"Science is awesome, and is crucially important to all our lives," he says. "There is no better way to learn about science than to practise it."

The concept of citizen science has gained great traction in recent years, though when we first started running key VNPA citizen science programs Reef Watch and NatureWatch we hadn't heard the term.

Reef Watch participants record fish species along the Victorian coastline, while NatureWatch involves designing projects with community groups, scientists and land managers on a range of projects across Victoria. Volunteers are the core of these projects.

There have been great advances in the way technology can be used for a broad community to collect critical data. We're not using them widely at this stage (apart from motion-sensing cameras), and we're still excited about the centuries-old technology of pencil and paper. You don't have to be a technology buff to take part in citizen science projects.

Finally, we'd like to share a quote from Deidre Murphy of the Corangamite CMA which captures the sentiment of the conference: "From **incredible** volunteers we collect **credible** data!" • PW

For more information on the Australian Citizen Science Association, including a downloadable book of the speakers' abstracts, visit [www.citizenscience.org.au](http://www.citizenscience.org.au). For the Chief Scientist's Occasional Paper, see [www.chiefscientist.gov.au](http://www.chiefscientist.gov.au).

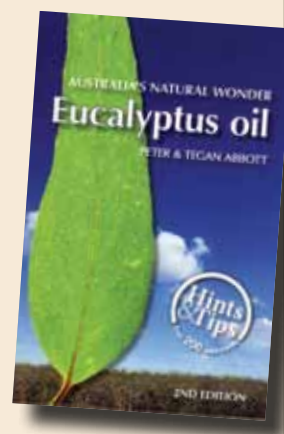


PHOTO: ANDREW FRASER

## Book offer

This year's Project Hindmarsh planting at Antwerp near Dimboola was on the site of a eucalyptus oil plant (1880-1905) established by Joseph Bosisto. The Bosisto company supported the planting and is offering planters a free copy of its 170-page book *Australia's natural wonder: eucalyptus oil*, which describes over 200 cleaning and other uses for the oil. A free bottle of eucalyptus oil is included.

If you have been a Hindmarsh planter, contact the VNPA for your copy and sample. You can also pick them up at the VNPA AGM. Note that stocks are limited!





# Les Smith, Best Friend

HELEN KAPTEIN REPORTS ON  
A WELL-DESERVED AWARD.

The Urimbirra Co-operative Society is proud that Leslie Smith has received a 2015 Best Friend Award, coordinated by the Victorian Environmental Friends Network.

Les received the award for his work in founding the Friends of the Little Desert (FOLD) in 1988, and also in recognition of his enormous contribution to the Little Desert Co-operative since 1974.

He was part of the group which in 1974 bought a 400 hectare property adjacent to Little Desert National Park. A second block of 600ha was purchased in 1997. The group saw the Little Desert as a conservation 'mecca' and believed that as much of it as possible should be preserved.

Les was a director of Urimbirra for 33 years until his resignation in 2014. He was instrumental in getting the Urimbirra properties protected by covenants through Trust for Nature, ensuring their indefinite environmental protection. A huge achievement!

He also led the important work of gaining support from initially suspicious Little Desert locals. The outcome was a strong and positive relationship between 'town and country'.

One example of building this relationship was the renovation by Urimbirra members of Bill's Gully Hall, situated close to the block. Another was introducing the expertise of locals such as Alec Hicks to the Urimbirra group at their annual visits to the block. Les was at the forefront of all these initiatives. He and his wife Helen have led annual trips to the block for many years.

Les was presented with the Best Friend award by Geoff Durham, from FOLD, on 2 May 2015 at the Wyreena Community Arts Centre in Croydon.

The following is a summary of the citation for his award:



Above and inset: The Little Desert is famous for wildflowers.

Left: The VNPA's Geoff Durham (right) reads out the citation for Les Smith (left) at the Best Friend award function.

PHOTO COURTESY HELEN KAPTEIN

*Les Smith was the founder of FOLD, which began soon after the legislation for the large national park had been enacted. His devotion to the Little Desert and his involvement with Urimbirra and the Friends continue to this day.*

*In the beginning there was a lot of weeding, then monitoring of Malleefowl mounds for many years until the Malleefowl Recovery Group took over. In 1990 the revegetation of the degraded Kiata campground was begun and took 14 years to complete. Throughout this time Les remained at the helm of the group, continuously serving on the committee and holding each position at some time.*

*Les's vast knowledge is greatly respected. His passion and persistence in environmental protection are greatly admired. Few have done so much for the care and protection of the environment as Les has; he was recently described as the 'godfather of environmental advocacy'.*

*work. Les has done all these consistently and persistently.*

*He has also kept in touch with environmental happenings across Victoria and has developed a remarkable number of contacts in all areas.*

*The wider community has rightly acknowledged Les's outstanding vision and his years of bringing environmental awareness to the many people privileged to know him. His FOLD colleagues put it more simply: 'Les is a good friend and great to work with.' • PW*

To join the Friends of Little Desert, contact Sue Hayman-Fox on [hayburn@bigpond.com](mailto:hayburn@bigpond.com)

For more about Urimbirra, including joining the forthcoming annual weekend trip on 26-27 September, contact Anna Heyward on [urimbirracooperative@gmail.com](mailto:urimbirracooperative@gmail.com)

FLORA PHOTOS: MICHEL BEUCHAT, URIMBIRRA





Karen Alexander among the Snow Gums in the Alpine NP.

## Congratulations to Karen Alexander OAM

The VNPA council, members, staff and friends heartily congratulate former VNPA staff member and Victoria Naturally coordinator Karen Alexander on her Queen's Birthday award of an Order of Australia for services to conservation and the environment, and to the community.

Karen worked with the Wilderness Society for a number of years, developing campaigns to protect places such as the Franklin River, the Wet Tropics of north Queensland, and Kakadu. Later, she took on leadership roles in the Australian Conservation Foundation, Bush Heritage and the VNPA. She also plays a key role in Landcare in her local area around Emerald. • PW



Karen's photograph of an ancient Snow Gum became widely known when it was used for a poster. Sadly, the tree was killed in the 2003 fires.

### *Karen Alexander and the Franklin River*

After some remarkable adventures in the Southwest Tasmanian wilderness in the 1970s, Karen Alexander volunteered to organise the Melbourne office of the Tasmanian Wilderness Society after its formation in 1976.

From upstairs rooms in Hardware Street, Karen gathered and united a large contingent of fellow volunteers as the campaign to save Tasmania's Franklin and Gordon rivers from a series of dams grew out of Tasmania into a nationwide environmental furore.

Melbourne became pivotal to saving Tasmania's wild rivers. Karen was the all-important co-ordinator of that campaign which culminated in rallies of up to 15,000 people in downtown Melbourne, including on the eve of the 1983 federal election.

Karen was MC at the final rally, welcoming Opposition Leader Bob Hawke to the podium where he declared that, if elected, he would stop the Gordon-below-Franklin dam then being built in the Tasmanian wilderness.

Famously, Hawke's wife Hazel put on 'No Dams' earrings while standing next to him.

A fortnight later Hawke swept to victory and made good his promise. Years of remarkable commitment by Karen and her team culminated in these crucial river-saving events in Melbourne. Without that campaign, the wild rivers of Tasmania would have been destroyed.

Karen's award of an Order of Australia is as belated as it is so richly deserved.

*From Bob Brown*

The VNPA also congratulates the following recipients of the Order of Australia in the Queen's Birthday honours:

**Janet Stuart Oliver, Mornington.**

*For service to conservation and the environment, and to the community of the Mornington Peninsula.*

**Dr Valerie Margaret Tarrant, Black Rock.**

*For service to conservation and the environment, and to community history. Valerie is a long-standing VNPA member.*

**Emeritus Professor Martin Edward Westbrooke, Buninyong.**

*For service to ecology, and to environmental management.*



# Werribee River Park

GEOFF DURHAM DISCOVERS A NEW PARK THAT LINKS  
WERRIBEE SUBURB TO WERRIBEE PARK MANSION.

*Cliffs along  
Werribee River  
near K Road.*

PHOTO: GEOFF DURHAM

It's all somewhat confusing – Werribee Park, Werribee River Park, Werribee Gorge State Park and the Werribee River, which has been described as 'the river of many names and varied spelling' – Ex, Exe, Arndell, Tweed, Peel, Weiribie, Wearaby and more.

Werribee township was once called Wyndham, and what was Werribee Council is now Wyndham Council.

'Werribee' is believed to be an Aboriginal word for 'backbone' or 'spine', perhaps because of the river's many bends. It is the boundary between Kulin tribes: the Wada Wurrung people to the west, and the Woiwurrung (Wurundjeri) and Boon Wurrung people to the east.

The river rises in Wombat State Forest near Bullarto South and flows approximately south through Ballan, then south-easterly through the Rowsley Fault escarpment at Werribee Gorge and across the Bacchus Marsh basin into Melton (Exford) Reservoir.

It then flows over the basalt plains to Werribee township, meandering

through a flood plain in the Pleistocene delta to the Werribee estuary and finally into Port Phillip Bay at Werribee South.

Rich irrigated alluvial soils, black at Bacchus Marsh and red at Werribee, produce quantities of vegetables. South of Werribee and west of the river is the flat, clear expanse of the old Werribee sewerage farm. The big question is – what is going to happen to its vast excess land?

Wyndham is in a Residential Growth Zone and is expected to double its population by 2031. As the developers' tentacles advance, provision must be made for open space and recreation, but equally important is provision for nature. The limited natural areas that remain must be protected, and degraded areas restored.

## The Mansion

What is now Werribee Park on the eastern side of the river was the centrepiece of the vast Chirnside pastoral empire. The impressive mansion, completed in 1877, became a Catholic seminary in 1923 and was

acquired by the Hamer government in 1973.

The park has well-tended spacious formal gardens with a parterre, lake and grotto, historic farm buildings, picnic area, Sculpture Walk, polo field and the Victoria State Rose Garden. The Mansion Hotel and Shadowfax Winery and café are privately operated. To the north is the Open Range Zoo; east is the National Equestrian Centre and south the Werribee Park Golf Club.

Admission to Werribee Park is now free, but there are entry fees for the Mansion building. Don't miss the detached bluestone laundry and its audio-visual presentation. There is a café in the old seminary library.

Community gardens near the farm buildings are part of the 'Working beyond Boundaries' initiative for involving local ethnic communities. A track from near here leads down the eastern escarpment to the river flats and a footbridge across the river.

Upstream is a bluestone ford and fish ladder – the river is tidal below and fresh





PHOTOS: GEOFF DURHAM



Top left: VNPA Walk, Talk and Gawk group in Werribee River Park, April 2011.

Top right: Red Gum picnic area. Note ground cover of weeds (Soursob).

Lower: Fishing the river for Black Bream.

water above. There are platypuses and Rakali, the native water rat.

## A new park

Werribee Park is well known and a major tourist destination, but few people have heard of Werribee River Park, an important addition to the Metropolitan Parks system. Both parks are managed by Parks Victoria; Melbourne Water manages the river bed and banks.

Once part of the Werribee Sewerage Farm, Werribee River Park is an 8km 260 ha Crown Lands Reserve linear park along the river between the Princes Freeway (Maltby Bypass) and the river mouth. It takes in five Ecological Vegetation Classes – Coastal Saltmarsh, Estuarine Wetland/Floodplain Reedbed, Floodplain Riparian Woodland, Escarpment Shrubland and Berm Grassy Shrubland.

Residual indigenous vegetation includes old River Red Gums along the river, some Blue Box, and clumps of Moonah, but the ground cover is as alien as you can get, with swathes of Panic Veldt Grass *Ehertia erecta* and Soursob *Oxalis pes-caprae*.

Degraded areas can be restored, as shown at the adjacent Open Range Zoo, and grants have enabled Parks Victoria to commence commendable work in controlling Spiny Rush *Juncus acutus* and Carpet Weed *Galenia pubescens*. But it will be wasted money unless ongoing funds are available for follow-up.

## Access, values and activities

Stage one, the northern section of the park, was opened to the public in 2010. Vehicle access is from Old Geelong Road on to New Farm Road, over the Princes Freeway and left on to a road that leads to a small car park (Melway 244 J5 – the park boundaries shown are not accurate).

The Wyndham River Walk Development proposes access into the park from Werribee; only a short section under the freeway remains to be completed.

From the car park a ramp takes you down the escarpment to the river and into Red Gum picnic area with tables but no toilets, and also to the footbridge to Werribee Park. A 3.5 km

return walking and cycling track south along the valley floor and back above the western escarpment has great vistas featuring red escarpment cliffs.

Stage two, south of Boundary Road, is not yet open to the public. At its southern end is a high significance conservation area with reed beds, saltmarsh and Orange-bellied Parrot habitat.

The park is notable for its birds, particularly ground-nesting birds, water birds and raptors. It is a Ramsar site for migratory birds. Twenty-four species of fish are recorded; Common Carp is one of three introduced species. There are wallabies, snakes, Blue-tongue Lizards, skinks, and the nationally endangered Growling Grass Frog, and also rabbits and foxes.

Recreation activities are walking, picnicking, cycling, boating and fishing, but no horse riding or trail bikes. Dogs are permitted on leash above the western escarpment. Rubbish dumping is a management issue.

Rocky Barca, Parks Victoria District Manager, says:

*“Werribee River Park is a fantastic new open space. It allows the people of Werribee to experience nature at their doorstep. There are great future opportunities to enhance this park by providing access to the bay and continuing the habitat restoration works begun by Parks Victoria.”*

John Forrester of the Werribee River Association, and recipient of the 2015 Dame Phyllis Frost Award, offers a community perspective:

*“Opening such a park in Wyndham has enabled a higher focus on the Werribee River as many people are unaware of its many features. The Werribee River Association has undertaken bird surveys for three years now so that as habitat works continue we can monitor changes in birds seen. We encourage people to become friends of the park, and support Parks Victoria in the tasks ahead.”* • PW

# Pope Francis on caring for our common home

ANNE BOYD, EDITOR  
OF *EARTHSONG JOURNAL*,  
WRITES ABOUT THE RECENT  
ENCYCLICAL FROM POPE  
FRANCIS THAT HAS GAINED  
WORLDWIDE ATTENTION.



PHOTO: [HTTP://COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA.ORG/WIKI/COMMONS:ALFREDO BORBA](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/commons:Alfredo Borba)

Readers of *Park Watch* are well aware of the integral nature of ecosystems, so it is a delight to find that we have recently acquired a valuable ally in the surprise that is Pope Francis.

Coming as he does from the global south, Francis is acutely aware of the mutual impact of impoverished lands and impoverished humans. He is also acutely aware that the lifestyles of wealthy westerners contribute disproportionately to global warming, catastrophic weather events and destruction of the homelands and livelihoods of the planet's poorest peoples.

In his recent Encyclical (letter) to all peoples on the planet, religious belief is intrinsically tied to economic, political and scientific discussion. In its very publication it bears witness to the message it seeks to convey – that all life on this planet is interconnected, and that no lens, social institution or academic discipline alone can offer a sufficient understanding or insight into the common good without intentional conversation with the others.

In its several hundred pages, the Encyclical references many sources, including UN documents, the Greek Patriarch Bartholomew, bishops' conferences from several countries including Australia, and a Sufi Muslim mystic. While it aligns with the Catholic tradition by citing statements from previous papal documents, these references make a significant advance into the wider world.

The title *Laudato Si'* (Praised Be) comes from the opening words of the *Canticle to Creation* by the 12th century monk Francis of Assisi. This pope of course chose the name of Francis to demonstrate his commitment to simplicity, inclusion and a joyful spirit, all evident in the life of this man. His alignment with the values of Francis of Assisi also includes speaking with a prophetic voice and drawing attention to the needs of the poor and disenfranchised.

*On Care for our Common Home* is the subtitle. After presenting the scientific consensus on climate change, along with a description of other threats to life on the planet including loss of biodiversity and other elements of degradation affecting all life, the Pope issues an urgent appeal for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the planet:

*We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all . . . We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth . . . our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.*

In acknowledging the achievements of the world-wide ecological movements, he regrets the resistance that has rendered many efforts ineffective:

*not only because of powerful opposition but also because of a more general lack*

*of interest. Obstructionist attitudes, even on the part of believers, can range from denial of the problem to indifference, nonchalant resignation or blind confidence in technical solutions. We require a new and universal solidarity.*

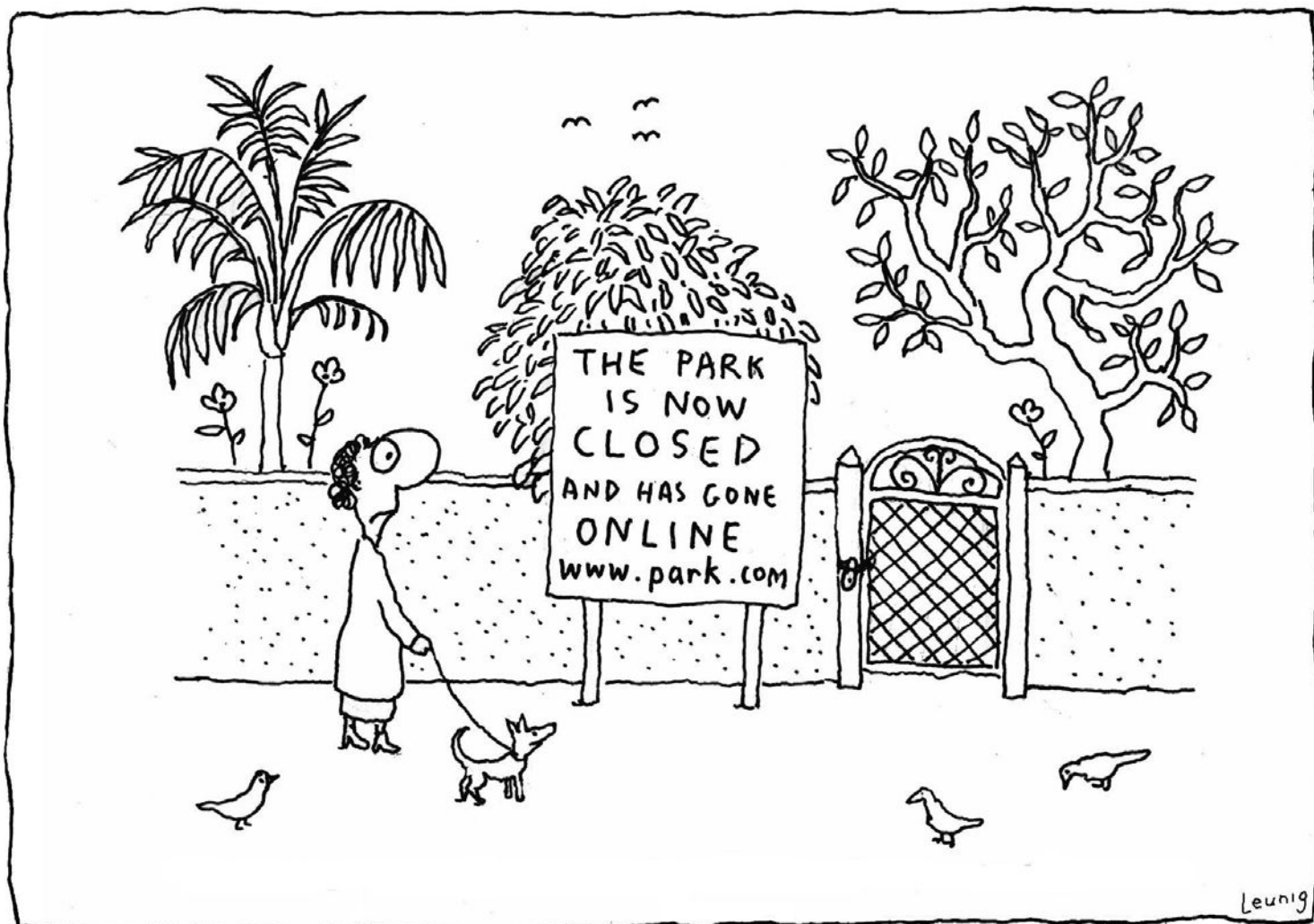
In dealing with the human roots of the ecological crisis, the notion of unlimited growth is challenged. Our 'enthrallment' with technology, along with the assumption that it alone can fix the crises, is seriously questioned. Francis calls for a more effective distribution of wealth and a serious consideration of the rights of future generations.

Chapter 4 addresses Integral Ecology, and some will find this the most refreshing section. The insistence on the interconnectedness of all fields of enquiry and all systems on the planet bears a strong resemblance to the work of geologist ('Earth scholar') and priest Thomas Berry, who asserts that 'the natural world is the larger sacred community to which we belong. To become alienated from this community is to become destitute in all that makes us human. To damage this community is to diminish our own existence'.

The influence of liberation theologian and Earth Charter Commissioner Leonardo Boff can be also glimpsed in this chapter.

Some very practical suggestions are offered to those who belong to Catholic communities. A process of conversion is advocated along with calls for a 'new' lifestyle and a new sense of identity:





CARTOON COURTESY MICHAEL LEUNIG, THE AGE, 24 JULY 2015

Both Pope Francis and cartoonist Michael Leunig are concerned about our 'enthrallment' with technology, which can separate people from nature (and from other people).

*We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal.*

This is a clarion call to extricate ourselves from the anthropocentrism that characterises our contemporary consumerist culture, and that, according to the pope, makes our hearts feel empty. It is a plea for a more joyous, simple, generous and communally conscious way of living

As one reads this document, dozens of relevant examples in our Australian situation come to mind: the Great Barrier Reef and the Liverpool Plains are just two. What is the danger threatening them? The blindness, the deliberate blindness, to the enduring

value of natural capital by comparison with the myopic grasping at short-term financial profit by corporations.

Criticisms abound. Some believe the Encyclical exceeds its purpose. Climate sceptics refute the Pope's credibility in citing the reality of climate change and its impact, particularly on the poorest peoples; some are disquieted by his passionate denunciation of unbridled consumerism, unlimited growth and the deification of technology. Others regret the avoidance of an expanded discussion of the population issue.

All things considered, however, this document is an important contribution to the global conversation for the future wellbeing of our planet. From a religious perspective it affirms all of creation as sacred revelation, with an integral relationship that calls for the minimisation of destruction whereby one sector of the network imposes harm on another.

So in the words of the author:

*'Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope.'* • PW

The EarthSong Educational Project began in 2003 from members of several religious congregations wanting to explore connections between the environment and spirituality. It runs seminars, workshops, retreats and programs for adults and senior students, and since 2004 its *EarthSong Journal* has offered Australian reflections on ecology, spirituality and education.

For more information, and to subscribe to the inspiring *EarthSong Journal*, see [www.earthsong.org.au](http://www.earthsong.org.au)

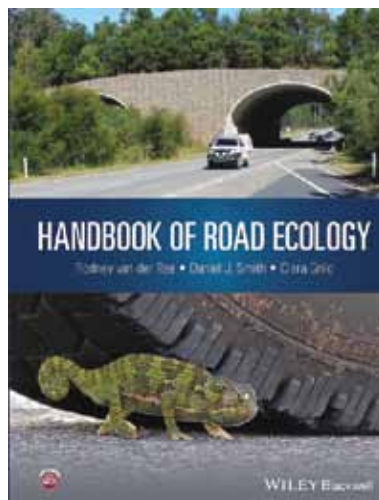
# Handbook of Road Ecology

By Rodney van der Ree, Daniel J. Smith, Clara Grilo  
ISBN: 978-1-118-56818-7  
522 pages. Wiley-Blackwell, June 2015. RRP \$212.95, eBook \$170.99.

**The incursion of industrial-age transport corridors into 'natural' areas has been problematic for a long time: think of Wordsworth's fulminations against the intrusion of the railway into the Lake District, for example.**

This book doesn't neglect this major issue. It contains a provocative essay on the Amazon, arguing that no matter how sensitive and careful the road makers are, the very existence of a road will bring a trail of cultural and environmental destruction; and also a persuasive essay arguing for road-free areas.

Unfortunately these essays are in a minority of the 62 in the book, the overall impression of which is that we can make roads more acceptable if only we 'follow the mitigation hierarchy' (i.e. avoid, minimise, mitigate and lastly



offset), and recommend realistic measures to protect the environment.

The key word here is 'realistic', and who can blame the publishers for wanting to produce an informed view of road ecology which could lead to our having our cake and eating it too? Not me: and yet, remembering disputed roads of recent generations – Wonnangatta, the Daintree, the Tarkine – I can't help thinking we should never forget that roads can be a very bad idea.

Nor should we be seduced into allowing 'offsets' to become a licence for environmental damage.

Yet there's plenty of interesting stuff here on practically every aspect of road/nature interaction, mainly from Africa and Asia: from animal/vehicle collisions to the need for good scientific knowledge; from the effect of road noise on Mornington Peninsula birds to the challenge of

balancing safety and biodiversity in managing roadside vegetation.

Given the recent wholesale massacre of ancient trees along the Western Highway, you'd like to think that our Government budgets would stretch to the point of giving a copy to every DELWP, VicRoads and Parks Victoria manager responsible for road and track management.

If there's a deficiency in the book it's the muted look at the need to modify human behaviour. For example, references to road speeds are made intermittently in the several articles dealing with vehicle wildlife collisions, but these are often bland.

We read that 'road closures and speed reductions are not desirable for motorists or transport planners'. Is there a scientific argument that they should be—or is this a philosophical question for another book?

Maybe, but the book has a case study on tiger conservation in India detailing a successful campaign to reroute a road around a reserve, and to close it at night. The campaign focused on educating drivers to slow down, and building 'public acceptance and support'.

More articles on how to do this would have been good—especially if some of them were directed at road builders themselves. • PW

Review by Bernard Slattery.

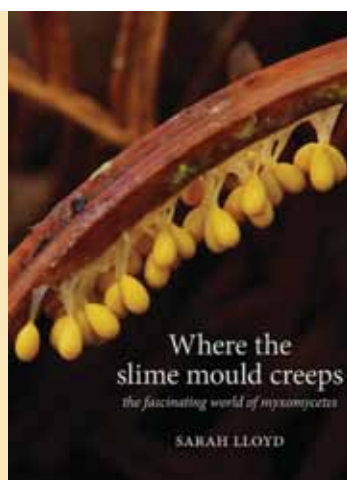
# Where the slime mould creeps

By Sarah Lloyd. 102 pages.  
RRP \$30.00. Available at  
[www.fungimap.org.au](http://www.fungimap.org.au)

**Without much doubt, slime moulds are the most Martian of earthlings: they have very strange lifeforms, and live very odd lives.**

They have also proved hard to classify, and at times have been grouped with fungi (they produce spores) and even animals (they move around and eat stuff).

Naturalist Sarah Lloyd has explored the lives of these little-studied, but truly fascinating, creatures for many years, and has found around 100 species within a kilometre of her home at Birrallee in northern Tasmania.



Sarah is one of those naturalists who not only want to share their knowledge, but are very good at doing that. Her intriguing self-published book takes the reader through her own voyage of discovery, outlining where and how to find slime moulds (it turns out they're pretty much everywhere), and even how to care for them at home. If you really want to get keen, she offers some helpful hints on equipment.

This very readable book is full of her excellent photographs, allowing the identification of many species, though she warns it can be difficult to identify some of these shape-changing tricksters.

The book is also rich with clearly explained insights into slime mould biology. Their life cycles are very complex, and sometimes unpredictable. One group (the most recognisable) can mutate from a fairly normal single celled organism with a single nucleus, to a monster cell with billions of nuclei.

Sarah champions these often maligned species (some have common names like 'dog vomit'), and shows us that they are highly sensitive, often quite beautiful, and addictively intriguing.

This book is a great addition to any nature lover's bookshelf. • PW

Review by Phil Ingamells.



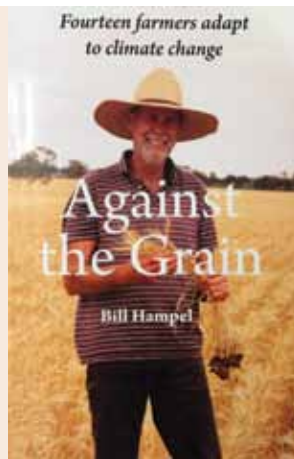
# Against the Grain

By Bill Hampel. Rosenberg Publishing, 2015. Soft cover, 280 pages. RRP \$29.95.

**In this book, Bill Hampel introduces 14 Victorian farmers and describes how they are restoring their land while responding to the threat of climate change.**

The farmers' stories are highly personal and enjoyable to read. Hampel articulates their love for their land and what they do, as well as some of their gripes with the agricultural industry.

Featured among the 14 are Bernie Fox and Sue Hayman-Fox, who occupy an eco-friendly terradome home built on their property in NW Victoria and harvest seeds from native trees and shrubs to regenerate indigenous vegetation. Bernie was formerly VNPA President, and Sue was VNPA



Treasurer, as well as our Finance and Operations Manager.

The book highlights Bernie and Sue's involvement in Project Hindmarsh as well as the connection between that and NatureWatch's 'Caught on Camera' project, which has cameras operating on their property.

Many of the profiled farmers are involved in Landcare, and Hampel stresses the importance of local partnerships for environmental

conservation, as well in supporting stressed and often isolated farmers.

Revegetation is just one practice being adopted by many of the landholders. The book also discusses how the properties are reaching carbon neutrality by measures such as supplying higher quality feed and oils to stock, improving soil carbon, employing new techniques of fertiliser application, and harnessing biofuels and renewable energy.

Hampel dedicates almost half of the book to giving a context for the climate change issue. He sets out the science underpinning climate change, and discusses Australia's response to it in terms of the media and politics.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book, in which Hampel effectively draws on science to tell a story about our lack of response on a national level, and the local farmers who are determined to make a difference on a local level. • PW

Review by Tilly Reynolds

# The Bush

**Travels in the heart of Australia**

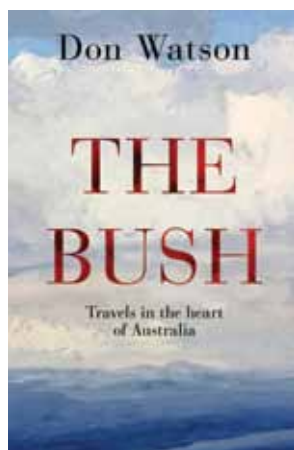
By Don Watson. Hamish Hamilton, 2014. 427 pages, hardback. RRP \$45.00.

***The Bush* is an exhilarating read but with a surprising gap in the perspective it offers.**

Watson admits the impossibility of his subject: 'The bush being so many different things, to speak of it as one place is a heroic assumption ... the bush means everything and therefore almost nothing.'

He then proceeds to give this impossible subject a red-hot go, in a narrative mix of memoir, social and environmental history, travel journalism and literary reflection. Aboriginal culture, squatters, miners, selectors, conservationist farmers, country towns, kangaroos – all get a run, in a narrative by turns affectionate, angry, humorous, bitter, sardonic and elegiac.

Ignorance is a major unifying theme through all these subjects: 'A great deal of what European Australians came to 'know' about the land had either shaky foundations or none at all.' The settler society, he says, 'willed its own ignorance' through its refusal to accept Aboriginal knowledge of the country—and to acknowledge crimes against the



Indigenous people: 'The bush is tainted with this cowardice.'

This is the sad story of a country lost in the mad and destructive scramble of settlers to survive.

Yet strangely, there is no consideration of campaigns to create and protect national parks. 'Most Australians,' he says, discussing the horrific scale of environmental destruction, '... have only known the bush when it was half dead, a shadow of itself.' Perhaps: but the closest most of us have come to bush that isn't just a shadow of its best is in these parks. You could say of them what Eric Rolls said of our forests 35 years ago: they are the 'packed containers of so much

that has gone from the rest of the country.' For millions of Australians, they are 'the bush' in its purest form. Watson gives two pages to a discussion of management issues in South Australia's Ngarkat Conservation Park, but there's no context to this discussion.

In his eloquent conclusion, Watson argues that 'we need a relationship with the land that does not demand submission from either party, that is built more on knowledge than the hunger to possess, and finds the effort to understand and preserve as gratifying as the effort to exploit and command.'

Isn't this the view of those who fought passionately to create and defend national parks? There are farmers who farm this way, he says, and he does discuss Landcare: but absent from his story are the heroes of conservation who are just as central to the bush's history – Maisie Fawcett, Baldur Byles, Jean Galbraith, Olegas Truchanas, the humble country field naturalists who fought to create some of the world's first national parks.

These people are no more obscure than most of those whose diaries and memories he cites. Does Watson consider them less representative of 'the bush' than station hands and drovers? If so, he's conceding ground to the kind of people he excoriates in his consideration of the Winton museum in Queensland, whose exhibits skip from dinosaurs to settlers, leaving a gaping hole where Indigenous culture screams for consideration. • PW

Review by Bernard Slattery

# Always a & special place

**BWAG LEADER TAARIQ HASSAN REPORTS ON TWO ENJOYABLE HIKES HE LED IN THE ALPINE NATIONAL PARK IN JANUARY AND MARCH THIS YEAR.**

## Discovering the High Country huts

The January trek was a three-day 45km pack-carry across the Bogong High Plains on part of the Australian Alps Walking Track.

At first the weather was cold and windy and we put on goretex jackets. Starting at the Cope Hut car park, we followed the pole lines across the treeless plateau and camped at Dibbins Hut by the Upper Cobungra River, bumping into VNPA stalwart James Shannon while enjoying the views on the summit of Mt Jim.

As we descended through the treeline we saw the Basalt Temple and had some great views of Mts Feathertop and Hotham.

The tour of High Country huts continued on day 2 with a visit to Blairs Hut for morning tea by the upper Kiewa River. We then climbed steeply to the recently rebuilt Westons

Hut, from where there is another fine view of Mt Feathertop. Lunch here was followed by more sightings of wild horses on the way up to the signpost and pole line junction for Tawonga Huts.

Once again we were above the treeline on the vast undulating High Plains, after spending time on the valley floor. The wind had now died down and it was sunny.

We had the beautiful scenery at Tawonga Huts all to ourselves on the second night. After setting up camp, it seemed that a walk to the rocky summit of the Jaithmathangs would have to wait until next time, but there was a wonderful sunset to compensate.

It was very chilly that night and we lit a fire in one of the huts. At dawn there was ice on our tents.

After packing up, we headed above the 1800 metre mark, with a fine view of The Fainters before we descended to

Pretty Valley Pond and morning victuals at Pretty Valley Hut.

More vast High Plains vistas were revealed en route to the Cope Saddle Hut (aka the SEC hut), where we consumed the last of our rations and sought shelter from insects and the strong sunshine. The last leg was easy going as we had only 5 km left to walk on an easy section of the AAWT.

A quick visit to Cope Hut rounded off the High Country huts walk. We had indeed seen more mountain huts in three days than we had seen previously in years.

## Busy weekend at Mt Howitt

In March the busy Labour Day long weekend saw a full contingent of walkers heading up the dusty and often rocky Howitt Road to Macalister Springs.

We met in the Wellington River valley on the Friday night, and on Saturday morning went on in two cars up to the scenic Howitt High Plains. Some of



*Left: Sunset over The Fainters summits, from Tawonga Huts.*

*Right: VNPA hikers on the Crosscut Saw.*

*Below: Heading for Pretty Valley.*



PHOTO: TAARIQ HASSAN

PHOTOS: TAARIQ HASSAN

the walkers had never been to this amazing, remote and wild part of the Alpine National Park, so it was a thrill for them to see it in such good weather.

After about two hours of driving along the very rough Howitt Road, avoiding monster 4WD trucks driven by hooners at high speed in dust-storm-creating convoys, we arrived at the Howitt Plains car park.

It was full. The campsite was crowded beyond capacity, and even the approaches to the site were showing signs of overcrowding in what is usually a quiet and serene place.

I later found out that a recent *Royalauto* magazine had run a story about Macalister Springs and how it's only 5-6 km from the car park. This seemed to bring all kinds of people out of the woodwork – people in teams clad in jeans and carrying unwieldy car camping tents were lighting giant bonfires in a fuel-stove-only zone, washing plates in the springs, dropping

litter and taking wood from the Vallejo Gantner Hut without replacing it. And of course you had to queue at the 'loo with a view' to answer nature's call.

After setting up camp we walked to the Mt Howitt summit and the summit to the west in clear autumn weather. The wonderful views from the treeless rolling summit plateau didn't disappoint anybody.

The next morning we headed off for a day walk to Mt Buggery along the Crosscut Saw. This is a wild and scenic place in good weather, but I imagine it would be hazardous and inhospitable in poor conditions. The views of Mt Speculation and The Viking from Mt Buggery were magnificent.

We had lunch along the way and got back to Macalister Springs well before dark. That evening I played some songs on my travel guitar by the fire inside the Gantner Hut, amusing my fellow hikers.

The next morning we walked back to the cars across Clover Plain through the snow gums well above 1600 metres and enjoying a very sunny morning. Up there, such good weather is a blessing.

Later we returned to the much warmer Wellington River valley and spoke with a ranger about the poor behaviour of some of the other park users. Some of us then had a dip in the river at campsite no. 11. That was just the ticket and a great way to finish a fabulous weekend in the superb Victorian High Country.

I really love the Mt Howitt area but prefer it when it's not so busy. Of course, hiking up there from the Upper Howqua campsite along the western ridge of Mt Howitt is much tougher and more demanding. If that was the only way to Mt Howitt, one would find a different sort of camper at Macalister Springs in peak periods.

None the less, the Alpine National Park is always a special place. • PW

# Bushwalking on wheels



PHOTO: JOHN HASLER

PRUE HASLER DESCRIBES THE BENEFITS OF USING FOUR-WHEEL-DRIVE VEHICLES TO VISIT OUR PARKS AND REMOTE PLACES.

**Standing on Mt Wellington in the snow at Easter, finding the Black-Allen stone cairn marking the Victoria-NSW border near Mt Tingaringy, looking for the Pale Golden Moth Orchid and Latham's Snipe in the Wonnangatta Valley – these are all possible on a weekend from Melbourne for people with a suitably equipped 4WD vehicle.**

Many people think of 4WDs in a negative way, seeing what look like large aggressive mud-splattered vehicles returning from exploring the bush. But there's much to recommend using a 4WD to safely discover our special natural places.

Growing up on a farm in the 1960s, our family vehicle was a Land Rover for both the farm and the highway. We explored the Toolangi, Eildon and Marysville areas on family outings. Later we bought a 4WD to travel deeper into the Victorian High Country on weekend and longer hiking trips, and in 1997 to cross the Simpson Desert.

When personal circumstances changed and I still wanted to travel in the bush,

but not by myself, I joined the Land Rover Owners' Club of Victoria in 2001. Before I went on my first trip I attended their accredited driver training course, an evening of theory and a day of practical experience.

Even though I'd been driving 4WDs for years, I learnt much about the vehicle and its capabilities, and many important safety and environmental lessons: how to drive in wet conditions, in sand, on steep slopes; what to do when stuck; and how to recover a vehicle. Later lessons included convoy procedure, navigation, communications, vehicle set-up, first aid and trip leading.

The fun of attending trips now began and I really started to discover Victoria's many remote places, like the Deddick Trail in far east Gippsland, the Davies High Plain, and snow camping on the Howitt High Plains. And I learnt about the bush, natural features, flora and fauna, Indigenous history, explorers and early settlers along the way.

Trip leaders included many stops for walking and discovering natural and

historical features, and chose pleasant places for our bush camps. We made new friends, learnt bush skills and found places to explore in the company of knowledgeable people – some who had been exploring the country for decades, others inspired by the Leyland Brothers.

The Code of Conduct adopted by all 4WD Clubs affiliated with the peak body Four Wheel Drive Victoria (FWDV) guides members in respecting the environment and other people in the bush. You also learn how to set up your vehicle to travel safely and comfortably, and come to understand why some modifications and recovery gear are important.

You learn about snatch straps, UHF radios, cargo barriers, tyres, diff lockers, dual battery systems and more. Travelling with experts ensures the safety of the group and an enjoyable trip. From my first trip I saw the camaraderie and willingness of everyone to assist others, even though many people had not met before.





Above: Bluff Hut,  
Alpine NP.  
Left: Mist at Millers  
Hut, Alpine NP.

PHOTOS: JOHN HASLER

The 4WD Club trip calendar includes all types of trips, from base camps with day trips to weekend trips and longer, more remote trips. Standards are easy, medium and hard.

Some trips, such as to Lake Tarli Karng and Mt Feathertop, have a strong bushwalking component. Others explore gold mining areas, feature High Country huts and waterfalls, or take in Victoria's desert regions. Specialist trips include following the tracks of explorers like Burke and Wills, crossing Central Australian deserts and other areas opened up by Len Beadell, the 'last true Australian explorer', and trips across Mongolia and Russia.

Trips after bushfires show how the bush regenerates, and others look at land management practices such as logging. A club trip across Australia with Mike and Margie Leyland as special guests was a real highlight.

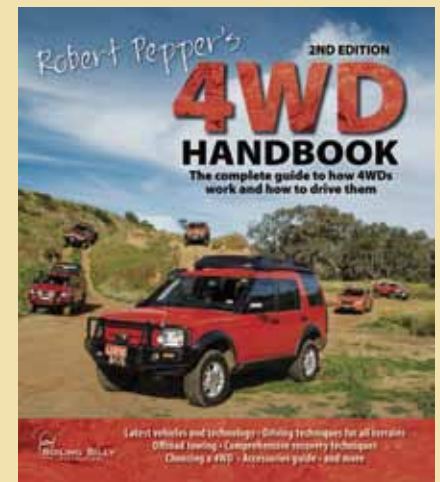
This year marks the 40th anniversary of FWDV, which has been involved in keeping many tracks open over the years for responsible public use. It was

FWDV which suggested that seasonal closures of tracks would ensure they were not damaged during winter.

Other initiatives include co-ordinating club assistance in times of fire and flood, assisting land managers by clearing tracks of fallen timber, and the 'Dob in the Hoon' program to report criminal and irresponsible activity in the bush.

Providing logistical support for the Museum Victoria and Parks Victoria Bioscan in the remote north-eastern Victorian Alps was a special time for those involved, and a new Clean Up the Bush program builds on the successful use of club 4WDs to remove rubbish dumped in the bush, from car bodies to garden and household waste and building rubble.

Yes, there are some irresponsible users of 4WDs, but there are many more responsible 4WDers who value, appreciate and enjoy their time in the bush, responsibly discovering our natural heritage with their families and friends.



## Robert Pepper's 4WD Handbook

By Robert Pepper

Published by Boiling Billy. Second edition, 2014. RRP \$44.95.

This book unlocks the secrets of buying, owning and driving a 4WD vehicle so you can safely journey into the remote bush and outback. All the information you need is here, from setting up your vehicle to driving, recovery and the importance of specialised maintenance.

With an emphasis on looking after the environment, and written in clear language with comprehensive photographs and diagrams, this detailed book is recommended for everyone from the complete beginner to the experienced 4WD driver.

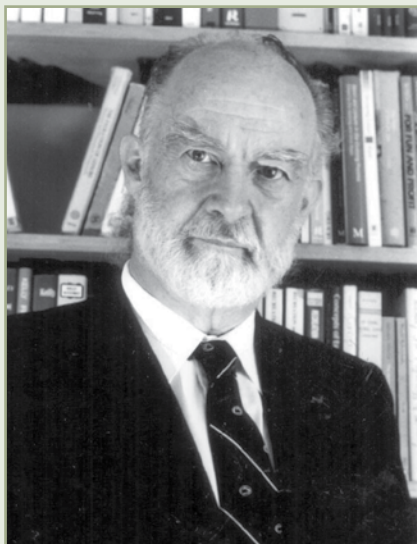
Review by Prue Hasler.

And when you have little ones, are time-poor, less physically able or no longer able to carry a pack, have medical conditions, or are elderly but still passionate about exploring the bush, a well-set-up 4WD, some training and your camping gear will give you that freedom. • PW

Prue Hasler (Thwaites), has been assisting husband and keen amateur naturalist John Hasler in running 4WD trips in Victoria and interstate since 2002. They support Parks Victoria with track clearing and field work and are members of the VNPA, the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria and Birdlife Australia. They have submitted two trips to the VNPA for the next BWAG program.

# Tributes

## ELERY HAMILTON - SMITH



Long-time VNPA member and academic Elery Hamilton-Smith, who died on 27 June aged 85, had latterly been adjunct professor of Environmental Studies at Charles Sturt University.

He had worked in teaching and community services, and later in social policy and as a planning consultant. He was appointed lecturer and continued as Professor in Social Policy and Community Services (1969-95), carrying out research and consultation in leisure policies and programs.

In the 1990s Elery moved from outdoor recreation into examining issues of sustainability and environmental studies, working as an advisor with IUCN and the UNESCO World Heritage Bureau.

He was closely involved with conservation, particularly tourism and visitor appreciation of wilderness and national and urban parks, and (as a keen caver) the management of caves and karst areas. He also assisted the VNPA in developing community education policies.

Elery's contributions to society were recognised in 2001 when he was awarded Membership of the Order of Australia. • PW

## FELICITY WISHART



The VNPA was saddened by the unexpected death in her sleep of Felicity, aged only 49, on 19 July.

A scientific officer with Parks Victoria in its early years, Felicity (Flic) was a senior leader and campaigner with the Wilderness Society from 2004 to 2013, when she became Director of the Great Barrier Reef campaign for the Australian Marine Conservation Society.

She was a great and inspiring leader for the environment, dedicating her entire adult life, over 30 years, to environmental protection and campaigning.

She was also partner to Todd and the mother of two boys. We extend our sincere sympathy to them, to her other family members and to her many friends and colleagues. • PW

## PHILLIP TOYNE



We also remember environmentalist, lawyer and co-founder of the national Landcare program Phillip Toyne, who died from cancer on 13 June, aged 67.

Phillip will be remembered for his influence in the environmental movement, his ability to be a bridge between farmers, green groups and government, and as a life-long advocate for Aboriginal land rights.

As the head of the ACF from 1986 to 1992, he led successful campaigns to protect Kakadu, the Daintree rainforests of Queensland, and the Antarctic. And along with Rick Farley of the National Farmers Federation, he elevated the emerging Landcare movement to the national stage. Landcare became a national program in July 1989.

The VNPA extends sincere sympathy to Phillip's family, colleagues and friends. • PW

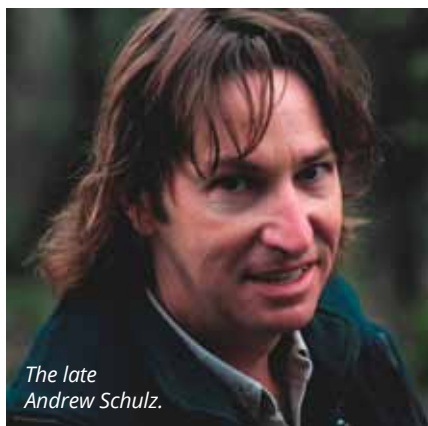


## Andrew Schulz – a tribute

His area of responsibility was full of complex park management issues. He could find himself dealing with a difficult weed problem in the coastal park, water management and protection of breeding bird colonies in the wetlands, and balancing fire protection with threatened species needs in Holey Plains, all in a day's work.

Often there were difficult challenges. Funding and staffing levels are rarely adequate, local stakeholders can be demanding, and servicing the internal bureaucracy can be gruelling. But Andrew had a way of making the best of the situation and getting on with the job.

He tackled each issue and problem with a clear focus on putting the protection of the environment first. His knowledge of Gippsland's flora and fauna, ecological awareness, and understanding of wetland and fire management all helped shape his management style, greatly admired by many of his colleagues.



Equally he was known for his empathy, good nature and wicked sense of humour, while showing genuine care for others when dealing with staff, contractors, other agency staff, the local Indigenous community and the public. His legacy lives on in the land that he cared for.

Rangers around the state have stories similar in some ways to Andrew's. They have all made, and are still making, a positive difference to our protected public lands, just as Andrew did. • PW

This tribute is by Peter Lawrence, a colleague of Andrew's and former Alpine NP ranger based at Heyfield.



Breeding Royal Spoonbills at Dowds Morass State Game Reserve near Sale – part of the area Andrew looked after.

PHOTOS: COURTESY PETER LAWRENCE



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