

# PARK WATCH



A LOVE LETTER TO PARKS  
VOICES FROM THE FOREST  
WILL WE STOP NATURE'S DECLINE?  
MAKING PARKS AND TOURISM WORK  
FREE MOUNT STIRLING  
RESURRECTING REEFS  
YARRA BEND PARK

JUNE 2017 NO 269



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



Be part of nature

**PRESIDENT** Euan Moore

**DIRECTOR** Matt Ruchel

Level 3, 60 Leicester St, Carlton, VIC 3053

ABN 34 217 717 593

Telephone: (03) 9341 6500

Facsimile: (03) 9347 5199

E-mail: [vnpa@vnpa.org.au](mailto:vnpa@vnpa.org.au)

Web: [www.vnpa.org.au](http://www.vnpa.org.au)

#### VNPA'S VISION

*The Victorian National Parks Association vision is to ensure Victoria is a place with a diverse and healthy natural environment that is protected, respected and enjoyed by all.*

#### EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Euan Moore, Matt Ruchel, Philip Ingamells, Meg Sobey (editor).

#### GETTING INVOLVED IN VNPA

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- make a donation
- become a regular giver or member
- volunteer. You'll be welcome in the office, on a campaign or in a park
- leave a bequest to VNPA in your will.

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You're always welcome to contact the editor to discuss ideas for articles. Phone the VNPA or email [meg@vnpa.org.au](mailto:meg@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.

**COPY DEADLINE** for September 2017 *Park Watch* is 24 July.

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#### FRONT COVER

Hundreds of nature-lovers gathered on the summit of Mount Donna Buang in May to create a giant human sign spelling out support for a new Great Forest National Park. Read why on page 5. Photo: Hexacam, Mark Webber.

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# From the President

**I would like to start by thanking the hundreds of passionate nature-lovers who rugged up against the cold mountain air of late May for our Great Forest Picnic. Forming a huge 'We ♥ Parks' sent a clear message to the Victorian Government that we support protecting our forests and the creation of a new Great Forest National Park. Your joy and enthusiasm during the creation of the human sign created a wonderful positive atmosphere.**

Over Easter I attended the Forests Forever camp at Goongerah in East Gippsland, an event jointly run by VNPA and Environment East Gippsland (EEG). The camp provided an opportunity for more than 100 attendees to learn about these forests from experts in forest ecology. Beneath these giant trees—which are up to five metres in diameter and more than 70 metres tall—is a diverse ecosystem of rainforest species that only establish after centuries without fire. These forests are home to around ten per cent of all mammal species recorded from Australia, and they have the greatest mammal diversity outside the wet tropics of northern Queensland. New species of plants and invertebrates are regularly described, and rare species are found when people take the time to look. Today much of the survey work in the area is carried out by citizen scientists at the Goongerah Environment Centre (GECO). This is work that should be done by professional researchers employed by the government.

In spite of the species richness of the natural forests, and the important role they have in providing ecological services such as reliable water supplies, our government continues to subsidise the logging of native forests. A number of legal actions taken by EEG have also

proven that VicForests does not carry out proper surveying for endangered species before commencing logging activities that threaten the long-term survival of these species. Indeed, Australian governments are actively opposing the protection of native fauna and flora, as demonstrated by the Deputy Prime Minister's recent call for the Leadbeater's possum to be removed from the threatened species list so that its remaining habitat could be logged.

But it is not just in the east and the Central Highlands that logging of old-growth forests is a threat to our flora and fauna. Recent announcements by the state government have put native forest logging back in the western districts. I was astounded at some of the areas proposed for logging in the region west of the Grampians. Like the east of the state, many of these forests are home to threatened species. But these forests are not the tall forests of the mountains. The trees are much smaller in height and diameter. At best these forests would provide firewood and fence posts. Hardly a good use of remnant woodlands in a heavily cleared region.

Unfortunately the forest industry is based on lazy management. It is much easier to log ('mine') native forests than to grow timber in plantations that require ongoing attention. The viability of plantation forestry is not helped by the ongoing subsidies for native forest logging. Even the employment arguments do not hold up. There are more employment options within plantation forests than in old-growth forest logging. The sooner the industry moves to plantations established on marginal and unproductive farm land, the better for industry, employment and conservation.

The state budget provided some additional operational funding for Parks Victoria, essentially an additional

\$10 million for the next two years, which is very welcome. However, our parks and reserves system continues to be underfunded, especially considering the contribution that it makes to the state's economy. Our national parks provide an important destination for many tourists who in turn spend money in local towns. Providing funding to rebuild run-down visitor information centres and track and to undertake pest control in parks, while allowing the private sector to build facilities outside the park, will boost regional tourism and employment.

VNPA has welcomed the release of the Victorian Government's Biodiversity 2037 plan. The vision is familiar, being almost identical in sentiment to our own VNPA vision, and the goals and targets are ones that we wholeheartedly support. Increasing funding to Parks Victoria for management of the parks and their infrastructure will be major contributor to the strategy's success. People must know what our parks protect for our parks to be valued. One of the biggest challenges will be in the implementation and bringing organisations such as VicForests into line with the strategy. • PW

Euan Moore, VNPA President

This year we celebrate our 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I would like to invite you, our *Park Watch* readers, to help us celebrate by considering a special gift to VNPA, so we can continue our essential work protecting nature in Victoria. You can find a donation form on the back cover, or visit: [www.vnpa.org.au/support/forests](http://www.vnpa.org.au/support/forests)

**I am pleased to introduce myself as the new editor of *Park Watch*, as part of the publications and online coordinator role I have recently started at VNPA.**

I love using creative ways to encourage connection with and care for our natural world. Like many of you, my love of nature started young—I grew up wandering the bush in western Victoria near the Grampians. After several years as a journalist in Melbourne, I followed my heart to work in communications for environmental organisations, most recently over in Adelaide for the Conservation Council of South Australia.

I've recently relocated to a bush block on Mount Macedon, and I am excited to join the team at VNPA advocating for national parks in Victoria. What a privilege to join an organisation with such an impressive (65 year!) history of nature protection.

I would like to acknowledge the generous guidance of former *Park Watch* editors Chris Smyth (who continues at VNPA as the marine and coastal coordinator) and Michael Howes.

Thank you to all the contributors to this *Park Watch*, it has been a pleasure receiving your words and images. I look forward to working with many more talented writers and photographers—please do not hesitate to get in contact with story ideas and feedback.

Meg Sobey



## Thank you for sending in your supporter surveys

**We rely on contributions from you, our wonderful supporters. Whether you donate your time, money or skills—every bit of progress we make for protecting nature in Victoria is all thanks to you!**

We really value your support, which is why we sent out a supporter survey in March to find out what's important to you.

We had an overwhelming response to the survey and we are really grateful to those who took the time to fill it in. We appreciate getting your feedback and reading your stories about why protecting nature is important to you.

If you are waiting for a response or for the information you requested; we'll be in contact soon—thank you for your patience!

If you have any queries please contact Amelia Easdale, supporter development on (03) 9341 6505 or [ameliae@vnpa.org.au](mailto:ameliae@vnpa.org.au)

## Annual General Meeting – Advanced Notice

VNPA's 65<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting will be held on Tuesday 10 October 2017 at 7pm in the Ground Floor Meeting Room, 60 Leicester Street, Carlton.

## Nominations for VNPA Council are now open

**Nominations for the VNPA Council are now open to members who would like to participate in the governance of the organisation.**

The Council play an important role in the life of VNPA—establishing policy guidelines, approving annual budgets and undertaking strategic planning for the association.

Elected councillors are unpaid volunteers and are asked to participate in six Council meetings and relevant committees (usually around two hours each) over the course of the calendar year.

The Annual General Meeting (see above) elects the volunteer Council and includes a president, vice-president, honorary secretary, honorary treasurer and up to nine councillors.

To nominate for Council, you must be a current financial member and indicate your intentions by writing to the executive director, Matt Ruchel via [mattruchel@vnpa.org.au](mailto:mattruchel@vnpa.org.au) by 5pm on Tuesday 12 September 2017.

More information on our Council, please visit [www.vnpa.org.au/about](http://www.vnpa.org.au/about)

## NatureWatch needs you!

**Would you like to become a citizen scientist with VNPA?**

Come along to our NatureWatch community day on Saturday 5 August in Bunyip State Park. You'll learn all about Caught on Camera, our long-term research project monitoring mammals using motion-triggered cameras, as well as a range of other NatureWatch projects.

Then we will do a hands-on training activity to learn how to use the cameras and help us launch our monitoring season for 2017.

For more information contact our NatureWatch coordinator Christine Connelly on (03) 9341 6510 or [christinec@vnpa.org.au](mailto:christinec@vnpa.org.au) or check out our winter Bushwalking and Activities Program. • PW

# WE ♥ PARKS

IT WAS A HEARTWARMING  
SIGHT ON A CHILLY MORNING  
AS HUNDREDS CREATED  
A LOVE LETTER FOR  
NATIONAL PARKS.

Over 400 passionate people gathered on the summit of Mount Donna Buang on Saturday 13 May for our Great Forest Picnic. Together we created an impressive 60 metres long by 50 metres wide human sign spelling out support for a new Great Forest National Park.

If you were one of the happy, smiling picnickers, thank you for being part of this special event.

The Great Forest Picnic was a major part of our push for new national parks in Victoria. A new Great Forest National Park, less than 90 minutes from Melbourne in the Central Highlands and Gippsland, would protect forest-dependent native plants and animals, including our state's faunal emblem, the critically endangered Leadbeater's possum. It would be a beautiful nature-based playground for Victorians, and boost local tourism businesses and employment.

But with a state election just 18 months away, Premier Daniel Andrews is running out of time to clearly commit to the creation of the Great Forest National Park. • PW

You can help spread the message that Victorians want a new Great Forest National Park by sharing our story and video from the day on social media: [www.vnpa.org.au/do-love-letters-get-any-bigger-than-this](http://www.vnpa.org.au/do-love-letters-get-any-bigger-than-this) and by emailing or phoning Premier Daniel Andrews directly, contact details are on his website: [www.premier.vic.gov.au/contact-us](http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/contact-us)

The Great Forest Picnic was organised by VNPA. It was and supported by the Wilderness Society Victoria, Friends of Leadbeater's Possum, Warburton Environment, Warburton Habitat Tree, Knitting Nannas of Toolangi, Save Mt St Leonard Community Campaign, Environment East Gippsland and the Goongerah Environment Centre.



*Friends of the forest: a Rubicon Forest Protection Group tour group enjoying the greenery on the 10 kilometre return walk to Rubicon Dam.*

# VOICES FROM THE FOREST

ECOLOGIST AND MEMBER OF THE RUBICON FOREST PROTECTION GROUP ANN JELINEK SHARES HER INSIGHTS ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNITY AND FORESTS.

*Devastation in the Rubicon State Forest: logging area recently burnt, older logged area with wattle regrowth, and log dump.*



Few people are aware of the massive scale of year-round logging occurring behind a thin veil of protected forest on the escarpments overlooking the major tourist roads from Toolangi to Marysville, Alexandra and Eildon, only 100 kilometres north east of Melbourne.

Only a few years ago, horse-riding, outdoor education and recreation businesses were extremely popular with local and international visitors; enjoying, exploring and learning about these magnificent forests. Now they cannot even access many of their previously used wilderness routes and camping sites on account of logging operations. Many have disappeared altogether, others are blocked off with locked gates, or have succumbed to dusty gravel roads, log trucks and rampant blackberries. These valuable businesses have had to drastically relocate and change or even cease their operations.

Concerned residents of Murrindindi Shire formed the Rubicon Forest Protection Group Inc. (RFPG) in late 2015. Our group promotes the significant biodiversity, scenic, historic and cultural heritage values of our area's forests. We also highlight the exceptional tourism, education and recreation opportunities and their associated economic benefits. There are similar community groups in the Toolangi area, East Gippsland and Strathbogie Ranges.

A key concern of RFPG is the long-term sustainable management of these montane ash forests—mountain ash, alpine ash and shining gum—which are restricted to a small part of Victoria. The future of these precious environments is being rapidly compromised by the ongoing massive scale and intensity of logging of the Central Highlands. Especially when combined with the devastation caused by the 2009 Black Saturday bushfire and subsequent salvage logging. This contrasts with the isolated, selective logging that occurred in the area in the past.

In 2016 the RFPG released an analysis of logging intensity, clearly demonstrating the unsustainability of current operations ([www.rubiconforest.org/sites/default/files/RFPG\\_Submission\\_v5\\_160525.pdf](http://www.rubiconforest.org/sites/default/files/RFPG_Submission_v5_160525.pdf)).

The results were further scrutinised and reported following access to additional freedom of information data showing a doubling of the rate of logging originally determined as sustainable in the Central Forest Management Area, but especially concentrated in Rubicon State Forest ('Panicking over timber jobs is not a sustainable strategy', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 March 2017). VicForests' own analysis also confirms the lack of ash supply once the remaining post 1939 regrowth is logged or subject to future bushfires.

These tall montane ash forests, and associated Antarctic beech rainforests along waterways, are renown for their unique, rich biodiversity. Yet detailed bioregional field assessments of these and other important values have not been carried out prior to the current intensive, large-scale logging. Loss of habitats of varying ages and their connectivity, and changes to plant and animal interrelationships within the forest, including invasive weeds like blackberries, are critical considerations for maintaining forest biodiversity and functioning ecosystems.

Equally, the health and wellbeing of local communities is dependent on the essential environmental services provided by the integrity of these forests; clean air, water quality and quantity, carbon storage and, importantly, a place to enjoy and appreciate nature.

RFPG has recently organised several popular tours of Rubicon State Forest to help our local community connect with its special natural, historic and cultural features. Essentially, we believe that tourism, recreation and a healthy environment are integral to a sustainable future for the Murrindindi community. We want to promote significant features of the area, including the Cerberean Caldera, one of the biggest volcanic eruptions on earth, and the Rubicon Valley Historic Area, now recognised on the Victorian Heritage Register.

In theory, Victoria has effective environmental legislation, strategies and operational codes. However, these are blatantly or deliberately ignored by bureaucracy, even when those responsible are provided with

clearly documented alleged breaches. Nevertheless, RFPG and other local community groups are persistently disregarded by bureaucracy in response to our requests for acceptable environmental protection procedures—detailed field assessments of biodiversity and other important values within a bioregional context, minimising habitat fragmentation, and strict adherence to



*Ready to be logged? This 1939 regrowth mountain ash in the Rubicon State Forest is proposed for logging.*

PHOTO: ANN JELINEK

The Code of Forest Practice for Timber Production 2014 (The Code), and state and national environmental legislation. Similarly, RFPG's detailed responses to VicForests' Timber Release Plans are not reflected in the final logging plans.

Instead, the survival of critical habitats depends on citizen scientists from Wildlife of The Central Highlands (WOTCH), together with local community groups, who volunteer many days and nights to carefully record on film selected threatened species like the Leadbeater's possum, sooty owl and greater glider. But even their tireless efforts are only protecting small, isolated patches within individual

logging coupes. It is clear that The Code is not being adhered to or rigorously monitored to ensure compliance.

A recent assessment by the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council identified the high conservation values of the Central Highlands and East Gippsland forest communities. However the state government's Biodiversity 2037 plan, also recently released, contrasts radically with what is actually happening in these forests. Time is rapidly running out as the extent of native forest clearing greatly exceeds that being revegetated. Moreover, these resulting 'plantations' ultimately form a monoculture. They have no resemblance to the original, weed-free diversity of the montane ash forests, with their complex, dense understory and succession of aging trees throughout the landscape that gradually develop a multitude of habitats for a diversity of plants and animals, sequester large amounts of carbon, and create the world-renown scenic landscapes and vistas.

The 20-year-old Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) for East Gippsland Forest Management Area expired in February 2017, yet was extended by the national and state governments without any community consultation. The Central Highlands Forest Management Area RFA is due for renewal in early 2018. It is essential that extensive community consultation occur and independent scientific expertise be sought well in advance of the expiry dates for the respective RFAs.

This is an urgent call to highlight the immediate, significant threats to our montane ash forests and the need for action now. A general lack of understanding of ecology and short-term vision needs to be addressed, possibly through a series of on-site information workshops involving local community and Aboriginal groups, scientists, politicians, state government representatives and industry stakeholders. Together we need to develop a long-term vision and management to ensure the future of our wonderful montane ash forests. • PW

Ann Jelinek is an ecologist and freelance journalist and photographer.

# ALARM AT LOGGING OF WESTERN FORESTS AND WOODLANDS



*Red-tailed black cockatoo.*

PHOTO: BOB MCPHERSON

A NEW REPORT FROM VNPA SHOWS WHY PROPOSED COMMERCIAL LOGGING IN THE WEST OF THE STATE SHOULD BE ABANDONED, SAYS MATT RUCHEL.

**Until recently the Victorian Government's logging agency VicForests managed commercial forestry operations only in the east of Victoria. In 2014 it was also handed control of forests in the west.**

Now, in February this year VicForests published its Timber Utilisation Plan. It proposes commercial logging in about 60 state forests and woodlands in the west—areas that are historically the most cleared in our state.

In response, VNPA undertook an analysis across the western Victorian forests, with the findings now published in our latest report: *Western Forests And Woodlands At Risk*.

The analysis found 70 per cent of the areas targeted for logging contain native vegetation types that are listed as either endangered (19 per cent), vulnerable (11 per cent), or depleted (40 per cent). In some forestry management areas like Horsham, Mid Murray and Bendigo this jumps up to between 80–100 per cent.

Threatened species have been found either within or near 33 per cent of the planned logging coupes. In certain forest management areas, including the Portland forest management area, that figure leaps to 67 per cent.

In addition, there are 34 threatened species (20 fauna and 14 flora) listed in the forestry codes that have been recorded occurring in or adjacent to coupes listed in the Timber Utilisation Plan, yet no detail has been provided on how the plan addresses these species and relevant code prescriptions.

For example, the endangered southern red-tailed black cockatoos have been recorded in 11 proposed coupes in the Horsham and Portland forest management areas. There are thought to be only 1,400 of these birds left in the wild and they are already subject to an extensive recovery effort.

On reading, the so-called 'plan' is actually a just a list of geographic reference points, and it is not until the information is properly mapped that you can actually start to understand the scale and impacts.



This has been done as part of the VNPA analysis and the maps are organised according to forest management areas in our report.

Some areas in the central west that are listed for logging, such as the Wombat, Wellsford, Mount Cole and Pyrenees Range state forests, are also subject to a recently announced investigation by the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC). They should be removed from logging schedules while this investigation is completed.

This planned logging across almost 50,000 hectares of some the most fragmented and depleted landscapes in Australia will be extremely ecologically damaging. It will also be of limited commercial or economic value. It is all incredibly misguided.

VicForests' Timber Utilisation Plan lacks important details, contains is out of whack with state-wide biodiversity policy and in all likelihood in its current form does not comply with the Code of Practice for Timber Harvesting and other state government policy. It also includes logging in some forest parks, which appears inconsistent with legislation.

Commercial native forest logging in the west of state should be cancelled. At the very least the Timber Utilisation Plan should be withdrawn, significantly reviewed, reassessed and re-advertised, with relevant details to address

concerns about threatened species, how the conservation significance of vegetation types will be managed, and relevant forest code prescriptions and tenure inconsistencies.

It is very odd indeed that the Andrews Government would continue to implement Coalition policy from the Napthine government, and endorse logging plans which damage some of the last remaining fragments of native vegetation on public land in the west of the state. • PW

You can read more on our website: [www.vnpa.org.au/why-the-wests-woodlands-are-important](http://www.vnpa.org.au/why-the-wests-woodlands-are-important)

With your help we can protect our western forests—and those right across the state. Make your gift today by:

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- Phoning (03) 9341 6500
- Donating online at [www.vnpa.org.au/support/forests](http://www.vnpa.org.au/support/forests)

Together we can ensure we have forests forever.

## Horsham FMA

Area: 13250 ha

No. Coupes: 115

- Coupes with rare, threatened of depleted vegetation types (EVC): 81%–100%
- Coupes with threatened species within or adjacent: 49%
- Places: Twenty six state forest areas and two other reserve types including Cherrypool State Forest, Connawirricoo State Forest, Glenisla State Forest, Woolhpooper State Forest, Kalingur State Forest.

## Mid Murray FMA

Area: 1885 ha

No. Coupes: 22

- Coupes with rare, threatened of depleted vegetation types (EVC): 100%
- Coupes with threatened species within or adjacent: 59%
- Places: Four state forests including Benwell State Forest, Gunbower State Forest.

## Bendigo FMA

Area: 8616 ha

No. Coupes: 120

- Coupes with rare, threatened of depleted vegetation types (EVC): 93%–100%
- Coupes with threatened species within or adjacent: 27%
- Places: Fourteen state forests including Wellsford State Forest, Bealiba - Barp State forest, Redcastle-Greytown State forest, St Arnaud & Pyrenees State forest.

## Midlands FMA

Area: 5533 ha

No. Coupes: 134

- Coupes with rare, threatened of depleted vegetation types (EVC): 86%–76%
- Coupes with threatened species within or adjacent: 22%
- Places: Nine state forests and three other reserve types including the Wombat State Forest, Mt Cole State Forest, Mt Lonarch/Berungomer State Forest, Beerimpmo State Forest.

## Portland FMA

Area: 2616 ha

No. Coupes: 27

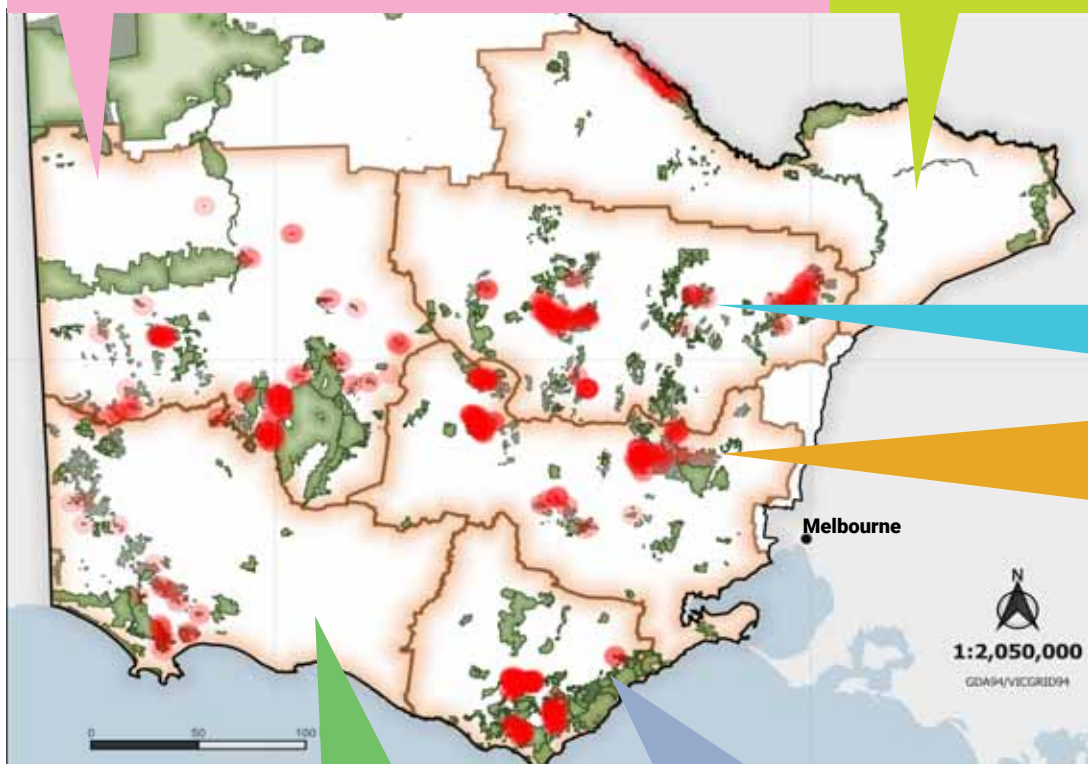
- Coupes with rare, threatened of depleted vegetation types (EVC): 52%–48%
- Coupes with threatened species within or adjacent: 67%
- Places: Eight state forests and two other reserve types including Cobboboonee Forest Park, Annya State Forest, Homerton State Forest.

## Otway FMA

Area: 9179 ha

No. Coupes: 115

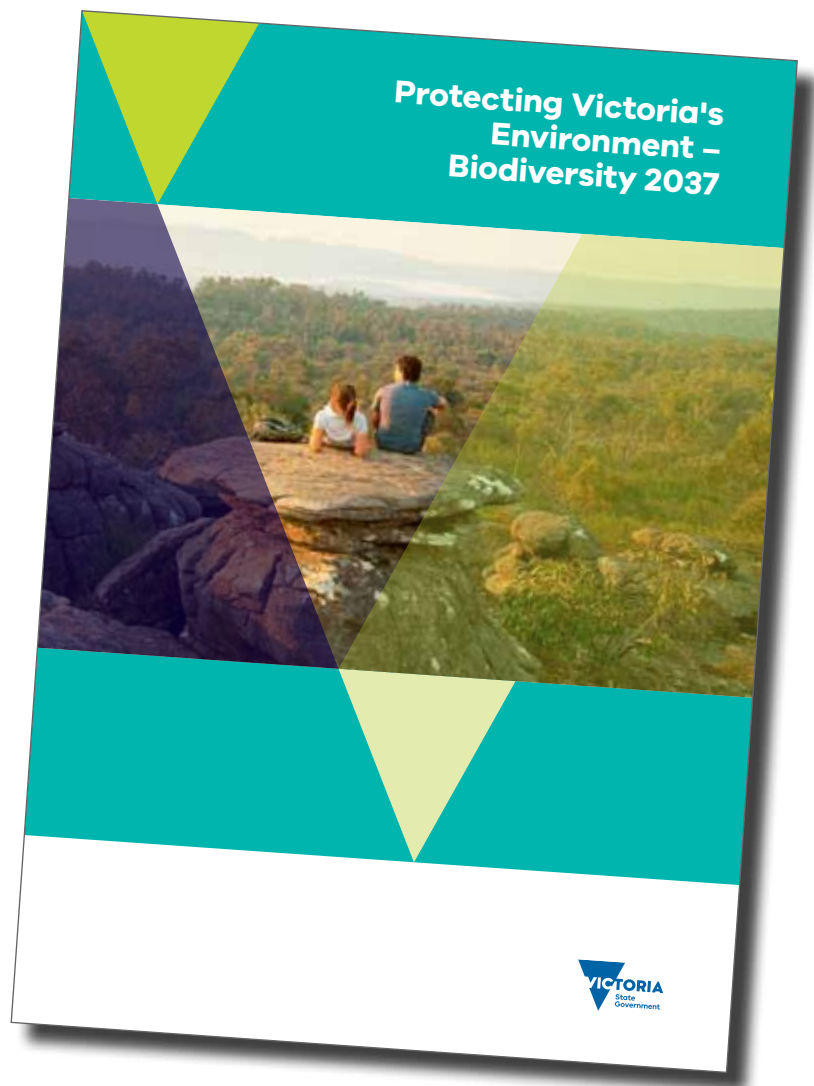
- Coupes with rare, threatened of depleted vegetation types (EVC): 84%–33%
- Coupes with threatened species within or adjacent: 23%
- Places: Otway Forest Park.



Indicative location of Timber Utilisation Plan Coupes in Western Victoria. Note not to scale.

# Will we stop nature's decline?

IT'S BEEN 20 YEARS COMING, BUT A NEW STRATEGY TO PROTECT VICTORIA'S ENVIRONMENT HIGHLIGHTS THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR NATURAL PLACES, SAYS MATT RUCHEL.



**Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037 is the first formal state-wide, long-term biodiversity plan in two decades. There was a process undertaken by the Brumby government for a land and biodiversity white paper that flagged a biodiversity strategy, but it did not pass the draft stage before a change of government.**

While some of our natural areas are doing well, others face threats from pest plant and animal invasions, land clearing and destructive development. Increasingly, the impacts of climate change are adding to these pressures and require new management strategies. Overall, our natural assets and biodiversity are still in decline.

There are some significant new goals and directions flagged in the new plan. Of particular note is the emphasis both on nature and people. These two key goals are interlinked.

**VISION: VICTORIA'S BIODIVERSITY IS HEALTHY, VALUED AND ACTIVELY CARED FOR**

**GOAL: Victorians value nature**

Victorians understand that their personal wellbeing and the economic wellbeing of the state are dependent on the health of the natural environment.

**GOAL: Victoria's natural environment is healthy**

Victoria has functioning plant and animal populations, improved habitats and resilient ecosystems, even under climate change.

The strategy includes 20 priorities with 74 associated initiatives around these two goals.

Importantly, the strategy includes a range of targets, and reinforces the role of government in leadership in delivering the plan.

The state Environment Minister Lily D'Ambrosio described the strategy as "...not just a plan for action, but a blueprint for our success in stopping the decline of Victoria's unique biodiversity".

Delivery will however be hamstrung without significant new funding.

Funding levels for nature conservation and protection across the board are at record lows. Management resources must be significantly increased over coming years.

The new strategy calls for a 'sustained period of investment' and, critically, guides the effective application of resources, linking knowledge and expertise to strategic actions.

The strategy also recognises the critical importance of our national parks, indigenous protected areas, and other reserves on public and private land. It calls for both the extent and condition of these protected areas to be enhanced. To meet Australia's international commitments the strategy estimates that the gap in Victoria's protected area estate is about 2.1 million hectares.

The plan also shifts the focus of threatened species management away from one species at a time and the most endangered species. It notes that focusing only on the 'emergency end' of biodiversity decline is unlikely to be the most effective way of preventing extinctions. At least on paper, the plan instead seeks to focus on how whole ecosystems and ecological processes can be managed for the benefit of all species. Conceptually this a sound approach, but implementation will be the key test.

The plan introduces the target 100 per cent net positive 'change in suitable habitat' in 50 years for threatened species, with co-benefits for non-threatened species. In an appendix to the strategy is an explanation of the 'change in suitable habitat' methodology, essentially a computer model (or in government parlance a 'decision support tool') that ultimately aims to spit out 'predicted areas that provide the highest and lowest return on investment for management'.

The plan also invites new, and potentially critically important, evidence-based management actions to manage climate impacts on our natural areas.

These tools can really help guide action, but as we have seen with native vegetation rules—an inflexible black box can also generate perverse and even nonsensical outcomes. If these tools are to take such a central role in the decision-making about threatened species, they need to be subject to serious rigour, independent peer review and transparency.

For our children and grandchildren to have the same opportunity to enjoy our unique natural places as we have, let's hope the plan works and we are not in the same situation lamenting decline in 2037.

The direction is set. We just need the secure funding, the education programs, and the involvement of us all—government agencies, corporations and the broader community—to make it work. • PW

## A step in the right direction for nature protection

### EXAMINING THE 2017-18 STATE BUDGET.

#### **Funding for nature protection in Victoria has been at record lows in recent years.**

The 2017-18 state budget does include some important nature protection initiatives, and could offer the beginnings of the long-term rebuilding of the state's capacity to look after its natural environment.

Funding for the recently-released Biodiversity 2037 plan, as well as increased short-term core funding for Parks Victoria, are welcome.

However our national parks estate still needs far more secure and substantial long-term core funding.

Funding gaps include no new or explicit commitments for the creation of the Great Forest National Park to protect the critically endangered Leadbeater's possum.

We were also disappointed not to see an increase in funding for Trust for Nature's revolving fund. This would have helped the Trust purchase high-conservation land, covenant it and then re-sell it, creating a ongoing pool of funds for future investment, while protecting land and the wildlife that inhabit it at the same time.

Nature-related highlights of the Victorian budget include:

- \$86.3 million over four years for much-needed nature protection and biodiversity work identified in the Biodiversity 2037 plan
- \$31.8 million increase in Parks Victoria funding, mostly over two years, with the bulk to be spent on much-needed core operations, such as rangers
- \$22.8 million for new additions to Victoria's national parks estate
- \$7.2 million for management of marine and coastal environments
- \$33 million for improved forest and wildlife regulation
- \$110 million for establishing new plantations to continue the transition of the timber industry away from native forests
- \$19.2 million towards the eradication of invasive red fire ants
- \$162.5 million to rebuild Environment Protection Authority Victoria

There is still plenty of room for more leadership in this area, and VNPA will continue advocating for increased funding for nature protection in our state now and into the future. • PW

Additional detail available from the department's website: [www2.delwp.vic.gov.au/environment-and-energy-big-winners-in-the-201718-budget](http://www2.delwp.vic.gov.au/environment-and-energy-big-winners-in-the-201718-budget)



*Leadbeater's Possum, Gymnobelideus leadbeateri, 1884 by John James Wild.*

# A TALE OF TWO MARSUPIALS

HIGH UP IN THE TREE TOPS, THE LEADBEATER'S POSSUM  
AND GREATER GLIDER ARE RELYING ON US FOR PROTECTION.

The future is still up in the air for both Victoria's largest sawmill, Australian Sustainable Hardwoods, and the ash forests of the Central Highlands. The Andrews Government cabinet remains split and seemingly paralysed about how to handle an increasingly aggressive misinformation campaign from the sawmill owners and the CFMEU forestry division.

VicForests have stayed firm on their statement that there is insufficient wood available to fulfil the current 130,000 cubic metre plus per annum contracts for supply of ash forest to the Heyfield mill. The Andrews Government even offered to buy the mill, but this was rejected by the current owners, who said they would prefer to move to Tasmania.

The Heyfield mill owners, backed by the union, are pursuing a strategy to try and open up areas set aside for the Leadbeater's possum under the previous government's Leadbeater's Possum Action Plan process. Covering only a couple of thousand hectares, at most this area would provide a few years wood supply, while dramatically undermining future recovery efforts for the possum.

In an attempt to ignite ideological battle grounds around jobs versus environment, Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce unhelpfully also stuck his nose in from up in Queensland, calling on the Victorian Government to open up possum protection areas to save jobs at Heyfield. His call was ridiculed by many and described by Victoria's Environment Minister Lily D'Ambrosio as "reckless" and lacking understanding of the forestry industry.

In the meantime, the Federal Environment Minister Josh Frydenberg is yet to approve and release the final recovery plan for the Leadbeater's possum, following its listing as critically endangered over two years ago. This is an important document and will have significant political weight, if it ever gets released. At the end of the day though, there is little that the federal government can do without the support of the state government, as most of their direct powers have been delegated to state level under the Regional Forest Agreements.

Almost 50,000 people have called on Premier Andrews to create the Great Forest National Park, with a full-page advertisement taken out in *The Age* newspaper on 8 April by groups including The Wilderness Society, The Australian Conservation Foundation, Environment Victoria, GetUp! and the Victoria National Parks Association.

Meanwhile, Friends of Leadbeater's Possum has called on Minister D'Ambrosio to prohibit any activity damaging

to critical habitat of the Leadbeater's possum—including timber-harvesting operations—immediately.

Group president Steve Meacher called on Minister D'Ambrosio to declare an Interim Conservation Order across more than 170,000 hectares of ash forest in the Central Highlands. An Interim Conservation Order is a mechanism within the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act* (FFG Act) that has never been used before—but we've never had a state faunal emblem on the edge of extinction before either.

In further developments, the Victorian Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) has made a final recommendation to list the greater glider as a protected species under the FFG ACT.

SAC concluded:

"Timber harvesting in greater glider habitat has been proven to cause declines and or local extinctions of greater glider populations. Timber harvesting practices reduces the number of hollow bearing trees available for denning by tree removal or as a result of regeneration burns after logging... In Victoria timber harvesting is widespread in the eastern and central parts of the state. This is also the main distribution and habitat of the greater glider. Considering the known impacts of timber harvesting on greater gliders, it is likely that other local extinctions of the species have already occurred and will continue to occur in the future."

The greater glider was nominated for listing last year, and the SAC final recommendation has now been forwarded to Minister D'Ambrosio who has 30 days to decide whether the species will be listed.



Greater glider, *Petauroides volans*,  
1863 by John Gould.

According to Goongerah Environment Centre Office (GECO) ([www.geco.org.au/greater\\_glider\\_set\\_to\\_be\\_listed\\_on\\_ffga](http://www.geco.org.au/greater_glider_set_to_be_listed_on_ffga)) listing the greater glider on the FFG Act must be swiftly followed by measures to strengthen protections for the species in state forests subject to logging.

The greater glider is Australia's largest gliding marsupial. It occupies very small home-ranges, needs old-growth trees with hollows for denning and eats gum leaves. There are no protections elsewhere in Victoria for greater gliders. Recent surveys by Wildlife of the Central Highlands (WOTCH) in the Central Highlands and the community in the Strathbogie Forest found greater gliders in areas earmarked for logging. The federal government listed the species as vulnerable to extinction on the federal threatened species list in May 2016.

The future survival of these two marsupials depends on our forests—and our forests depend on us taking action. • PW



PHOTO: DAVID TYTHERLEIGH

## Sanctuary or developer's dream?

GROWING AT 2.5 PER CENT EACH YEAR, GEELONG IS A CITY THAT NOW DESPERATELY NEEDS A GREAT PARK, SAYS VNPA MARINE AND COASTAL COORDINATOR **CHRIS SMYTH**.

New York has Central Park and London Hampstead Heath. But Geelong's green space is largely limited to Eastern Park and the Barwon River corridor, areas simply too small to cater for the growth—another 100,000 people by 2036.

Parks and nature are good for community health, so when the chance to create a big new park presents itself, you would think that planners would be all over it.

Not so at Moolap, where closure of the Cheetham Saltworks and Alcoa's Point Henry aluminium smelter, and a proposed canal estate, have been the impetus for a major planning process covering 1,200 hectares of coastal land and nearshore waters.

It's a special place on the front doorstep of Geelong. The coastal wetlands each year attract thousands of migratory birds in need of our protection under international treaties. Seagrass

meadows surrounding Point Henry are some of the largest in Port Phillip Bay. And remnants of once extensive native vegetation are found along the foreshore and in corridors restored by the community.

But Moolap is also a coastal area with water access and elevated views of Port Phillip Bay.

To 'take advantage' of this, the draft Moolap Coastal Strategic Framework



PHOTO: ED DUNENS, FLIKR CC

### One possible option

*Red-necked stints are among the thousands of migratory birds that fly in to the Adelaide International Bird Sanctuary from around the world.*

When South Australia was faced with a similar situation of repurposing industrial salt fields, it made the most of the unique opportunity to maximise the benefits for the environment, economy and community, all at the same time.

In 2015 the Adelaide International Bird Sanctuary was established, and last year became the state's first new national park in a decade. Only 30 minutes from Adelaide, the sanctuary protects habitat for thousands of migratory shorebirds, while offering a

great nature experience for local residents and visitors alike. It will also boost the local economy and create jobs through national and international ecotourism.

Initially the area was also earmarked for housing development, but an extensive and progressive government-lead consultation process saw a shift in focus to conservation and community interests. The new park has been enthusiastically embraced by South Australians. Why not do the same here in Victoria?

Plan prepared by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) has proposed that Point Henry be designated a new growth area for Geelong.

That would see up to 2,000 people living in medium and high-density residential development, mooring their boats in new marinas and rubbing shoulders with thousands of visitors staying in multi-storey tourist accommodation.

Another large area of residential development is also proposed for rural land that for many years has acted as an important buffer between Geelong and the Bellarine Peninsula.

The plan does suggest that part of the coastal wetlands be zoned for environmental purposes, but more for recreation than conservation. And there may have to be commercial development to generate revenue to pay for wetlands management.

The area's seagrass meadows are largely ignored, except as a location for marinas, and remnant vegetation will suffer from urban development and visitor pressures.

These proposals in the plan are inconsistent with the 2014 Victoria Coastal Strategy, which urges the conservation of natural values and the avoidance of linear development.

The final plan is due out by the end of 2017, signalling the start of planning zone amendment processes to integrate it and the City of Greater Geelong's planning scheme. Download the draft plan at [www.coastsandmarine.vic.gov.au/coastal-programs/moolap](http://www.coastsandmarine.vic.gov.au/coastal-programs/moolap)

VNPA, along with the Geelong Environment Council, Geelong Field Naturalists Club, Birdlife Australia and other groups, are deeply concerned about the scale and type of development proposed for Moolap. They will continue to advocate for the conservation of its wetlands, seagrass meadows and remnant vegetation, and for a plan that takes advantage of these natural values by recommending a park—a great one—for Geelong. • PW

Download a copy of VNPA's submission to the Moolap framework plan at [www.vn timer.org.au/publication-category/submissions](http://www.vn timer.org.au/publication-category/submissions)



BCRAG member and Killarney resident Clinton Williams monitors commercial horse training at 'The Basin' in the Belfast Coastal Reserve.

## Horses hurting hoodies

IT HAS BEEN A POOR BREEDING SEASON FOR THREATENED HOODED PLOVERS IN THE BELFAST COASTAL RESERVE, REPORTS CHRIS SMYTH.

**Local community monitoring of one beach alone revealed that of 11 hatched chicks, only one survived. Disturbance by commercial horse training and unleashed dogs is almost certain to have been a contributing factor. Horse training was so intense that dog owners moved to other beaches where plovers came under added pressure.**

Evidence like this clearly shows that the Andrews Government's approach to managing the Belfast Coastal Reserve between Warrnambool and Port Fairy is failing—dismally.

The government's decision to licence commercial horse training in the reserve is a slap in the face for volunteers working to protect hooded plovers. It's also likely unlawful.

Legal advice to VNPA from senior counsel indicates that state Environment Minister Lily D'Ambrosio did not follow the relevant provisions in the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* and the *Coastal Management Act 1995* when in November 2016 she approved the issuing of a licence to the Warrnambool Racing Club and trainers to use the reserve.

Two key clauses in section 17B of the reserves act apply to the licensing; they set out two mutually exclusive tests for the minister to choose from when approving a licence. The minister chose the wrong one.

The first clause states that where the Governor-in-Council has given notice of a reserve recommendation from the Land Conservation Council (LCC), the use to be licensed must be consistent with the purposes of the reserve—in

this case coastline protection, wildlife conservation and passive recreation. Such a recommendation exists for the Belfast Coastal Reserve.

The second clause states that where a reserve does not have an LCC recommendation applying to it, the minister has to cite special reasons which she believes make the issuing of a licence 'reasonable and appropriate'.

The minister mistakenly chose the second clause, an easier test for the horse training to pass. In her choice, the minister would appear to have ignored the existence of the LCC recommendation.

If the minister had chosen correctly and used the first test, we believe she could not genuinely argue that commercial horse training was consistent with the reserve's purposes. Nor do we accept that the issuing of a licence under the second clause is 'reasonable and appropriate'.

Our legal advice also indicates that commercial horse training in coastal reserves requires ministerial consent under section 37 of the *Coastal Management Act 1995*, and only after a public notification process. VNPA has found no evidence of such consent or public process and, in their absence, the reserve's use for commercial horse training is likely unlawful.

At the time of writing, VNPA was considering its legal options in response to the Environment Minister's decisions. We will continue to work with the Belfast Coastal Reserve Action Group (BCRAG), Birdlife Australia and other groups seeking the removal of commercial horse training from the reserve, and the area's protection as a park under the *National Parks Act 1975*. • PW

# FREE MOUNT STIRLING

MATT RUCHEL AND GERARD MCPHEE  
EXAMINE THE CASE FOR SHAKING UP  
MANAGEMENT OF VICTORIA'S ALPINE AREAS.



PHOTO: BAHNFREUND, WIKIMEDIA CC

Victoria's alpine resorts are hugely popular and draw people attracted to all sorts of outdoor fun – skiing, snowboarding, cross-country skiing, snow hiking, snow camping and day visits.

But not every resort is the same. Some, such as Mount Buller, Mount Hotham and Falls Creek have become largely urbanised areas surrounded by the Alpine National Park. They are all about snow sports and accommodation.

Then there is Mount Stirling, a unique natural landscape with dramatic views of Victoria's alpine area. Popular with cross-country skiers, bushwalkers, campers and school groups, it is also home to many threatened plant and animal species.

## Chance to protect Mount Stirling

A new Victorian Government review now offers the chance to finally manage the unique Mount Stirling landscape the way it should be managed—as a national park.

The Alpine Resorts Governance Reform Project is looking at the governance of all alpine resorts in an attempt to streamline overlapping, inefficient governance structures and the impacts of climate change.

You may have seen news coverage of the scandal around the Mount Buller and Mount Stirling management. The Victorian Ombudsman found that more than \$85,000 worth of public funds was used for such things as international family travel and the entertainment of friends and associates.

There has been a tendency of this board and management team over the past years to try open Mount Stirling up to development, including most recently efforts to build a major sealed road to link Mount Buller and Mount Stirling.

There is no stand-alone management plan for Mount Stirling, even though one has been required under the legislation.

Mount Stirling has never fitted the economic model of an alpine resort. A 2008 review of alpine resort areas by the State Services Authority, the body responsible for reviewing the functionality of state government departments, recognised this, recommending de-coupling management of Mount Stirling from Mount Buller. This recommendation should be followed.

According to that review, Mount Stirling is “more akin to a national park and should be positioned and managed as such”, and only “the Parks Victoria management option offers any practical improvement over the status quo”.

### The Case for a Stirling Alpine Link

To include Mount Stirling in the nearby Alpine National Park will require the addition of a parcel of land to the north and east of Mount Stirling to form a seamless extension of the Alpine National Park. It can then be managed as an integral part of Victoria's largest national park, improving ecological management, recreation experiences and the overall integrity of our alpine region.

Under the proposed reforms VNPA supports the major commercial ski resorts being consolidated into a northern authority, and Mount Stirling and possibly Lake Mountain being removed from the alpine resorts and instead be incorporated into the Alpine National Park. This will require the addition of an adjoining piece of state forest to form a seamless extension of the Alpine National Park. The Stirling-Alpine Link proposal has been developed by VNPA and can be read on our website: [www.vnpa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Stirling-Alpine-Link.pdf](http://www.vnpa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Stirling-Alpine-Link.pdf)

This current review is a fantastic opportunity to make Mount Stirling part of the Alpine National Park. The many reasons include:

- Mount Stirling is a largely natural area and does not fit with the highly commercialised downhill-focused Mount Buller.
- Climate change will radically change the area's environment, and Mount Stirling should be managed predominantly for its natural values.
- Making Mount Stirling part of the Alpine National Park is an elegant solution allowing consolidation of the larger commercial resorts, without the burden of unprofitable natural areas.
- Any existing commercial infrastructure at Mount Stirling could be managed by Parks Victoria, under traditional leasing and licensing arrangements.

- Mount Stirling can then be managed as an integral part of Victoria's largest national park, improving ecological management, recreation experiences and the overall integrity of our alpine region.

The departure of the previous management team and the review and reform project represent opportunities for VNPA and its members to once again press for the inclusion of Mount Stirling in the Alpine National Park. We urge you to write to the Victorian Environment Minister Lily D'Ambrosio today. • **PW**

### Climate change in our alpine areas

Studies show that under a high greenhouse-gas emissions scenario:

- Temperatures across the Australian Alps could increase by 4–5 °C.
- Natural snowfall may decline by 60 to 80 per cent
- Snow cover may contract and only occur on the highest peaks
- These impacts will result in a reduced ski season with a later start and earlier finish

It is imperative that preparing for climate change impacts be embedded in core management of our alpine region, and that the natural areas are properly protected.



PHOTO: SHOGUN, WIKIMEDIA CC

Left: The Bluff Spur Hut at Mount Stirling.

Right: Telemark skier at Mount Stirling.



PHOTO: SHOGUN, WIKIMEDIA CC

# MAKING PARKS AND TOURISM WORK

**WE DON'T NEED LARGE PRIVATE DEVELOPMENTS  
IN OUR PARKS, SAYS PHIL INGAMELLS.**

*There is no visitor accommodation at all within Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, and climbing Uluru is now actively discouraged and rarely allowed. Park impacts are very low, and visitor satisfaction is rising.*

**How do we, and the rest of the ever curious world, satisfy our appetite for nature without loving it to death?**

How do we accommodate visitors of widely different capabilities and expectations for comfort while still offering that increasingly rare experience—time in the wild?

These are questions park managers are wrestling with around the world. There are plenty of good, bad, and sometimes disastrous examples we can learn from. It's always a challenge to get the right answers.

There's Yosemite National Park, one of the world's oldest, where a series of chalets and cabins were already in place in the late 19th century. More than 4 million visitors now come to Yosemite each year, with most arriving at the spectacular 18 square kilometre Yosemite Valley. But the wilderness experience so evocatively suggested by Ansel Adams's famous photographs is now unattainable. The National Park Service has been trying to wind

back facilities there and in many other parks across the USA, but it's proving a difficult job.

I once found myself in the middle of south India's Periyar National Park, where an annual religious festival attracts a million pilgrims in one day. Lawyers, bus drivers and bankers, all barefoot and in black, walked for days to pay homage at the shrine of Ayappa, a socially-levelling, nature-loving, tiger-riding godling. But will he, or the park's managers, be able to protect the wild world his devotees are drawn to?

Then there's Australia's own Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. The first vehicle track reached Uluru (then Ayers Rock) in 1958, sparking a tourism boom that is now unstoppable, and could have been uncontrollable. But in the 1970s it was decided to move all accommodation-related infrastructure out of the park, and relocate it in a new Yulara resort area beyond the boundary, owned by the Aboriginal community. It was a brilliant management move.

The only facilities now in the national park are the modest Anangu Cultural Centre, and some well-sited tracks and viewing points. Even roadside parking is forbidden, to protect vegetation. Visitors get a broad range of accommodation options close to the park, and they get to see an unencumbered national park in really good condition.

Lord Howe Island's remarkably successful World Heritage area also follows this model. But this time not just the accommodation but also the park visitor centre is outside the proclaimed



PHOTO: PHIL INGAMELLS

PHOTO: PHIL INGAMELLS

Permanent Park Preserve. Lord Howe Island and Uluru are the examples we should be following—they both show that vigilant protection of a park is no impediment to tourism.

## We should have this sorted in Victoria

Thankfully Victoria's policy settings and guidelines for national park tourism infrastructure, signed off in 2015 by then environment minister Lisa Neville, are also very good. They actually have the capacity to help protect nature in our parks, while allowing visitors the access, and the ambience, parks should be providing.

The trouble is, no one seems to be following them at the moment.

Current proposals for extensive tourism infrastructure in Mount Buffalo National Park, accommodation for the Alpine National Park's Falls to Hotham track, and for boat cruises at the Prom all substantially fail to follow the current government's Tourism Leases in National Parks published guidelines.

The so-called 'community-led' proposal for Mount Buffalo, which asks for six hectares of the park to be excised to allow a new private alpine resort development, is so outrageous it should be dismissed out-of-hand (see *Park Watch*, March 2017, pp 8-9).

The guidelines include the over-arching statement that "...the government will generally provide any tourism and recreation infrastructure or facilities aimed at improving the visitor experience. However there may be occasions where private investment could be utilized to fund the installation of small scale visitor facilities in a manner which complements those that the government provides".

More specifically the policy states:

- Any proposal that could be sited on public or private land outside the park would not proceed in the park.
- Any development must be consistent with the objectives of park legislation (primarily nature conservation).
- Any development must encourage visitors to appreciate and conserve the park.



Left: Climbers on the Half Dome in Yosemite National Park.

Right: Unnecessary accommodation infrastructure in Yosemite, (such as the Ahwahnee Hotel pictured above) and a lack of control over visitor access, seriously compromises the visitor experience. USA park authorities are trying to wind back visitor infrastructure in many parks.



PHOTOS: HYLGERIAK, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS  
MARK JAMES MILLER, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

- A development must not impact on Aboriginal cultural and historic heritage, and must engage and benefit Traditional Owners.
- Public access to the site must be maintained, and any impacts on the use and enjoyment by other park users minimized.
- There should be extensive consultation with the public, and the outcomes of that consultation should be published.

They are wise and useful guidelines, more or less following the Uluru-Kata Tjuta model of fostering commercial developments outside, but adjacent to, national parks.

The guidelines should have ended ad hoc, pie-in-the-sky proposals for developments inside parks that take time and energy away from park managers, governments and the community. And they should have handed a much greater degree of certainty to people and corporations planning to invest in regional tourism. But they seem to be being ignored, or simply forgotten.

It is hard to tell what's currently really going on. Some argue that the government and/or its agencies have inadvertently adopted the policies of the previous government. Or that a perceived policy void has been filled by the enthusiastic momentum from the tourism industry and other departments interested in developments in parks, and that has not been curtailed due to a lack of clear policy guidance.

And, if the flawed process for assessing the ongoing Prom boat-tour proposal

is any guide, Parks Victoria is also arguably failing to follow the Department of Treasury and Finance's important 2015 protocols for 'market led' development proposals.

## So what should tourism in our parks look like?

For a start, we should strenuously stick to the Victorian Government's idea that significant park accommodation should be situated outside the national park boundary.

It's a no-brainer really.

It allows for any amount of private investment, expansion and re-planning of facilities as demand and expectations grow. It means those facilities can be built without impacting on a park's natural areas. They can also be protected by any mandatory firebreaks without these encroaching on the park.

That gives investors far more certainty, and flexibility, when planning developments. It frees park managers from the onerous business of assessing proposals within the park. And most usefully, it frees parks staff from the costly business of managing large commercial operations in parks and dealing with their inevitable impacts and tendency to expand.

Park funds can then be freed up to improve visitor access and interpretation. In the major parks, well-messaged visitor centres can greatly improve public understanding and enjoyment. In Victoria, over the last couple of decades, most park visitor centres have been closed or greatly diminished.

Most importantly, visitors get to enjoy nature at its best—the very thing our parks are there to provide. • PW

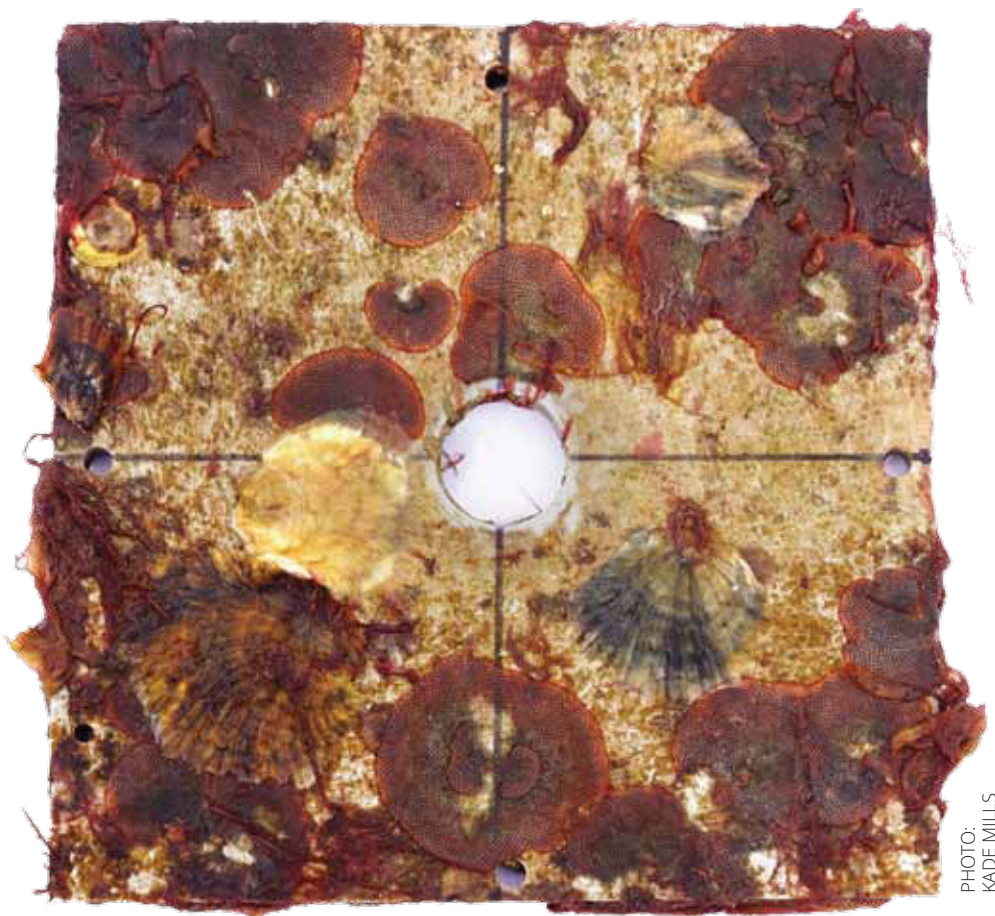


PHOTO:  
KADE MILLS

*The beginnings of a shellfish reef? Oysters growing on a settlement plate.*

# Resurrecting reefs

REEFWATCH'S KADE MILLS REPORTS BACK ON AN AMBITIOUS STRATEGY TO BRING BACK THE FORGOTTEN SHELLFISH REEFS OF PORT PHILLIP BAY.

We all know what an oyster is. Many of us even enjoy their creamy, briny taste. But did you know that there are oysters in Port Phillip Bay? And that once there were vast tracts of oysters and mussels covering the seabed of the bay creating what we refer to as shellfish reefs? Or there were once around 60 oyster saloons in the city of Melbourne? No. Me neither, and I have spent years diving, exploring and researching in the bay.

It was only after I starting working on a project to restore shellfish reefs in Port Phillip Bay and read the fantastic publication *The Forgotten Shellfish Reefs Of Coastal Victoria* documenting the loss of a marine ecosystem over 200 years since European settlement (available free from the Royal Society of Victoria), that I understood what we had lost and the amazing journey that has now begun to restore this once prevalent habitat.

## What happened to the shellfish reefs in Port Phillip Bay?

The simple answer, they ended up in our stomachs. Mussels and oysters were an important part of the indigenous diet, and middens made up of their shells can still be observed

in the Melbourne metropolitan areas of Sandringham and Brighton. But it was European settlement that would lead to the collapse of the shellfish reefs. Since European settlement it is estimated that we have lost over 95 per cent of native flat oyster and blue mussel reefs in Victoria, with overfishing, dredging, pollution, introduced species and disease all playing a part in their demise.

However, isolated individuals and small clumps remain on the sediments of Port Phillip Bay, giving us hope that they can be returned to being a dominant habitat-forming species.

## Why restore shellfish reefs?

They clean water and create habitat. Oysters and Mussels can filter two to five litres of water per hour, improving water quality by removing algae and nutrients from the water column. The reefs that get created when oysters and mussels grow on top of and next to each other provide homes for a myriad of crabs, snails, worms and fish, in turn increasing biodiversity.

## How are shellfish reefs re-established?

Slowly. Based on field surveys and historical accounts of the presence of shellfish reefs, two locations were chosen—

Hobsons Bay near St Kilda and Corio Bay near Avalon. At these locations The Nature Conservancy joined forces with Fisheries Victoria, The Thomas Foundation, the Victorian Recreational Fishing Licence Trust Fund, and the Albert Park Yachting and Angling Club to trial a shellfish reef rebuild. The pilot project placed hundreds of oysters raised at the aquaculture facility in Queenscliff on small one by one metre plots of limestone to see if they would survive. They did. So the next stage, currently underway, involves placing thousands of oysters on 600 square metres of limestone. Beyond this it is proposed to increase the restoration area to 20 hectares at each site, and then eventually to other areas of the bay. Successful restoration of shellfish reefs in the whole bay is reliant on knowing where natural populations will grow.

### How will we know where to build additional shellfish reefs in Port Phillip Bay?

With citizen science power! With the help of VNPA's program ReefWatch, a group of dedicated citizen scientists

from community and dive groups from four locations around the bay have deployed structures—settlement plate units—to help determine if the isolated clumps of oysters that remain are producing larvae that can survive. The settlement plate units are constructed from simple materials available in local hardware stores and are deployed to provide a surface for the oyster and mussel larvae to settle onto and grow.

The good news is they are working, and the even better news is that means there are plenty of oyster and mussel larvae floating around the bay looking for a place to call home, enhancing the chances for successful shellfish reef restoration. Going forward ReefWatch plans to get more groups involved in more locations to better understand the dynamics of oyster and mussel settlement and survival around Port Phillip Bay. Watch this (underwater) space. • PW

For more information about Reef Watch or how to get involved contact Kade Mills [kadem@vnpa.org.au](mailto:kadem@vnpa.org.au)



PHOTO: SIMON BRANIGAN



PHOTO: KADE MILLS



PHOTO: KADE MILLS

*Clockwise from top left:*

*Hobsons Bay shellfish reef reconstruction.*

*A single oyster takes hold on one of the units.*

*Settlement plate units on the ocean floor.*

*This building at 195 Elizabeth Street was an oyster saloon from 1912 to 1951.*



PHOTO: KADE MILLS



*'He that plants trees loves others beside himself.'*

## CELEBRATING TWO DECADES OF GROWTH

THIS YEARMARKS THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF PROJECT HINDMARSH AND THE HINDMARSH LANDCARE NETWORK. HINDMARSH LANDCARE FACILITATOR JONATHAN STARKS LOOKS BACK OVER THEIR HISTORY.

**What started out as a conversation on a living room floor in 1997, looking over recently produced roadside vegetation maps, grew into a grand vision to link the Little Desert and Big Desert.**

The first planting year may have seemed a bit 'make it up as you go along', yet a huge amount of effort went into organising it. Over 300 city and country volunteers participated in that first community weekend. Since then, Project Hindmarsh has grown into one of Australia's flagship community Landcare initiatives, having planted over half a million trees and sown nearly 3,000 kilometres of direct seeding.

Project Hindmarsh has always been about partnerships. The project has

forged valuable partnerships with federal and state government agencies, with Greening Australia, Wimmera Catchment Management Authority, Hindmarsh Shire Council, Wimmera Landcare groups, local businesses, landholders and the community.

One of our key partnerships since the beginning has been with the Victorian National Parks Association. More than 100 VNPA members turned up for that first plant-out in August 1998. The annual commitment of VNPA volunteers who travel up to the Wimmera each year, come rain, hail or shine, has been instrumental in the ongoing success of this city-and-country community planting weekend.

This year, Project Hindmarsh will again be based at Little Desert Nature Lodge

and aims to plant 12,000 trees and shrubs across four properties. Of these, 6,000 will be planted across two properties in Jeparit, where the Wimmera River drains into Lake Hindmarsh. The other 6,000 plants will be planted on two properties near Dimboola, in Buloke woodland country.

For the first time, Project Hindmarsh undertook Aboriginal cultural heritage surveys of planting sites. The two Jeparit sites are next to the river and are known to contain fireplaces, middens and scar trees. The cultural heritage surveys identified a number of significant sites, and so the planting areas have been modified to be sensitive to these areas.



PHOTO: DAVID FLETCHER



PHOTO: DAVID FLETCHER

*Growing community.*

Senator Robert Hill planting the last tree, completing 2,000 kilometres of the Little Desert to Big Desert Biolink in 2001.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HINDMARSH LANDCARE NETWORK



*Transforming the landscape.*

PHOTO: DAVID FLETCHER

The Dimboola properties, owned by the same landholder, contain significant stands of endangered Buloke woodland. The plantings here will restore the understorey of one degraded woodland patch, and revegetate a former house site in another Buloke patch. Both sites are rich in farming history.

Registrations for Project Hindmarsh 2017 are now open. The registration page can be accessed via the Hindmarsh Landcare Network facebook page or through [www.hindmarshlandcare.org.au](http://www.hindmarshlandcare.org.au) If you would like to volunteer for the 20th annual planting weekend, experience the 'wild west', explore cultural history and plant a few trees, we would love to have you along. • PW



*Above: Planters working along the Rintoules Road site in 2011.  
Below: Same roadside area after five years in 2016.*



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HINDMARSH LANDCARE NETWORK



# Forests, forever

**SARAH DAY SHARES HER VERY SPECIAL EXPERIENCE  
COMMUNING WITH THE FOREST OVER THE EASTER WEEKEND.**

PHOTO: EUAN MOORE

Rolling down the dirt track into Goongerah camp ground after a spectacular drive down the Bonang Highway, we finally meet the river we've so far only glimpsed from the road—sometimes hiding deep down steep rocky banks, sometimes flashing between layers of nodding tree ferns, sometimes disappearing into rainforest gullies. We jump out of the car, rush down to the Broadribb River and dip our hands into its clear icy cold waters.

We've arrived at Forests Forever Easter Ecology Camp, and will camp by the river for the next three nights, drifting to sleep with its gentle flow.

This is at least my fifth time at Environment East Gippsland's annual ecology camp, which sounds like a lot until you realise it's been running since 1982, with VNPA jointly organising for the last five years. This year I've come with Kristin, who is also a veteran but hasn't come along for a while, and French Will who is in Goongerah for the first time ever. Comparing their thoughts on this year's camp promises to be an interesting exercise.

As usual, the schedule is packed with old-growth walks, conservation talks and every conceivable way of communing with the feathered and furry locals—from spotlighting to bird watching and catching critters on motion sensing-cameras. I check out tomorrow's choice of walks and ponder how one decides between warm temperate rainforest, cool temperate rainforest, giant shining gums, montane splendour and mossy wetlands that hold a pollen profile stretching beyond the last ice age.

What I'm most looking forward to is getting right into the thick of Martin's Creek where the tall trees are so ensconced in jungle grape vine it appears as though they are woven into a single shag pile rug.

I ask Kristin what she's come for, and it's not about picking and choosing, she just hits the nail right on the head: "because it's beautiful and I like being here with like-minded people who have a deep appreciation of the forest like I do," she says.

As it's Will's first visit, he's still not sure what he's in for. "Some of my friends have been talking about Goongerah for a very long time and I've been wanting to come for ages," he says.

That night Environment East Gippsland's Jill Redwood gives us the highlights from several decades of campaigning for the forests' protection using: "every peaceful tactic under the sun". Then our own Euan Moore shares how VNPA has helped lift the number of Victoria's national parks from 13 to 58.

The next two days are a blur of forest bliss by day and cascades of ecological information by night (as well as some hearty dinners and delectable home-made treats).

"I loved the walk to the Darejo tree, it was very beautiful with so many tall tree ferns," says Kristin of her visit to the 600 to 800-year-old *Eucalyptus denticulata* with a massive fluted buttress, named after the conservationists who made its discovery and saved it from the chainsaws—Dave, Rena and Joe.

Will's highlight was a little unexpected. He says he most appreciated "the walk through areas where there are very old trees and the realisation that they are earmarked for logging. It woke me up to the fact that precious areas are in imminent danger of being cut down".



PHOTO COURTESY OF SARAH DAY



"...I like being here with like-minded people who have a deep appreciation of the forest."

KRISTIN AND WILL, MARTINS CREEK

PHOTO COURTESY OF SARAH DAY



PHOTOS: EUAN MOORE

Above: Sarah Day has been visiting and campaigning for these forests for over a decade. Right (and inset): Noticing the details.

It wasn't just the chance to delve into the heart of the forest that left an impression, but the opportunity to do this with people with a deep understanding of this environment and endless energy in insisting on its protection.

"I expected to meet like-minded people here who are working to protect this environment," says Will, "but I can't believe the incredible extent of their knowledge".

"David Cheal's talk on fire was amazing," says Kristin. "I had no idea how differently Indigenous people traditionally used fire compared to current government policy, especially in determining how regularly an area is burned. I thought the department weren't doing things properly but I didn't realise just how badly they were doing it".

Even though I've visited these forests for over a decade and been involved with the campaign to protect them for as long, just like my friends I never fail to be astounded by what I learn at Forests Forever. This year I discovered from local ecologist Rena Garbarov

that the law protecting greater gliders, a species in severe decline, hasn't been updated since the forest management plan was written for East Gippsland in 1995, and is based on conserving the gliders as owl food rather than in their own right.

I learned that rainforests are used to 'dampen off' planned burns—meaning that the burns lit on the edges of rainforests are left to be extinguished by the dampness of the rainforest, ensuring that each time a burn is carried out, a bit more of the rainforest is burnt dry and lost to sclerophyll species. Perversely, the rationale for burning near rainforest is often to 'protect' it from wildfire.

It would take a whole edition of *Park Watch* to cover the delightful (ecological marvels) and appalling (government ineptitude) forest facts learned on Forests Forever, so I'll just get back to Martins Creek and its blanket of jungle grape vine—the creek so clear it's invisible except for the glistening silver of the sun hitting its surface, fishbone ferns crowding its banks. The brilliant green moss

covering every shaded surface. The silver green miniature moonscapes of lichen wrapping around branches and ghostly whisps of old man's beard hanging down. The mottled light raining through canopy layers like a sun storm...

Kristin's closing comments on the camp are as concise as her opening ones: "keep doing it, it's very much needed," she says.

While Will has the following advice for people like himself who have not been to Forests Forever before: "Go on and experience the forest with people who know so much about it, experience it for yourself. A lot of people are so remote from the forest that they don't know the worth of what these people are trying to protect. I would recommend to everyone, visit this beautiful place. I didn't know that there was such a big movement in Goongerah already, it's very encouraging. I think the people here are creating a vital momentum and an opportunity for more people to join in so we can all take part in protecting this incredible place". • PW

# Looking after country

TRADITIONAL OWNER INVOLVEMENT IN OUR PARKS IS GROWING, SAYS PHIL INGAMELLS.



Red parrot-pea, Grampians National Park (Gariwerd).

PHOTO: PHIL INGAMELLS

**In recent years Victoria's Aboriginal communities have in various ways become partners in managing the state's public land.**

After a couple of centuries of searing injustice, recognition of Indigenous dispossession has been slow and often compromised, not least by the high levels of private ownership of land across the nation. Beyond the outright purchase of freehold land, public land remains the only realistic option for recognition of Aboriginal claims.

It's been a long and painful journey to get where we are today; full of unfulfilled promises and dashed hopes, and many people on that journey have not lived long enough to see progress.

There have been some significant milestones.

In 1971, the "unconditional deeds to 4000 acres comprising what is presently known as the Lake Tyers Aboriginal Reserve" were handed to the Bung Yarnda (Lake Tyers) community of East Gippsland. This was one of the earliest recognitions of land rights in Australia, though the management of that land remained under a degree of government control.

More recently, the 1993 federal government's *Native Title Act*—the great Mabo move—established a process "to provide a national system for the recognition and protection of native title and for its co-existence with the national land management system". But that process has been slow and not without obstacles. Most notably Justice Olney, when rejecting a claim by the Yorta Yorta people, infamously pronounced that the "tide of history has indeed washed away any real acknowledgment of their traditional laws and any real observance of their traditional customs".

That harsh and highly contentious judgement, surprising at the time because of the extensive evidence of a pretty-much timeless link to the land, was partly righted in 2010 when the Victorian Government reached the Yorta Yorta Traditional Owner Land Management Agreement with the Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation. It established co-management over Barmah National Park, though progress in implementing that has also been slow.

Parks Victoria has been far ahead of other government agencies in employing Aboriginal staff, and has been conducting consultations with Traditional Owners in regard to park management plans for some time. But until recently that was happening outside of any formal recognition of Indigenous people's connection to the land.

In 2010 the Victorian Labor government, frustrated by the slow progress of native title claims under federal law, introduced its own *Traditional Owner Settlement Act* (TOSA) allowing claims to be settled out-of-court.

That Act established a framework for the state government to formally recognise Traditional Owners and come to a range of agreements with them, including:

- an overarching Recognition and Settlement Agreement
- Aboriginal Title to national parks and reserves, and to other public land
- Traditional Owner Land Management Agreements facilitating joint management of parks and reserves
- Land Use Activity Agreements for future use of public land
- Natural Resource Agreements, enabling participation in natural resource management
- Orders authorising some commercial uses of flora, fauna and forest produce by Traditional Owner groups
- Funding Agreements.

Traditional Owners choosing to enter a TOSA agreement must consent not to pursue claims under the Federal Act.

The TOSA and its relationship to pre-existing laws is complex and can be hard to follow. It has also had mixed success to date, with a series of settlement agreements but fewer examples of management rights.

Importantly, Aboriginal Title to a national park, and the actual management of a jointly managed national park, is still subject to the *National Parks Act*, and public access to parks and reserves remains unchanged.

What can, and probably will, change is:

- more Traditional Owner development of park management plans, in conjunction with Parks Victoria
- more Aboriginal cultural emphasis in park management, such as increased protection for culturally significant fauna and flora, in addition to existing protection for threatened species.
- permission for Traditional Owners to hunt or gather traditional foods and other culturally significant species
- the right of Traditional Owners to spend time on country
- an increased emphasis on Indigenous stories in information presented to visitors.

Increased Aboriginal involvement in our parks is likely to bring greater cultural depth to our parks, both in terms of meanings attached to them and actual management. Grampians National Park and Budj Bim National Park (previously Mount Eccles National Park) have both benefited in that way.

Back in 2007 Victoria's major environment groups, including VNPA, produced a joint 'position statement': a five page

document recognising Traditional Owner alienation from Victoria's lands and waters, and identifying a number of ways to address that situation.

The Victorian Government's 2010 *Traditional Owner Settlement Act*, developed through a strong process of consultation with Indigenous communities, matches many of the suggestions in the combined environment groups' joint statement.

Some are clearly contentious. But the recognition of the 'right' of Traditional Owners to hunt or gather resources, in accordance with traditional practices, is compatible with the unchallenged 'right' park visitors have always had to fish in a park's rivers and streams, for example. The environment groups' joint statement makes it clear that the commercial exploitation of a protected area's resources should be prohibited, and that the need for strong measures for the protection of threatened species and ecosystems remains.

Importantly, the adoption of traditional management practices must inevitably be aligned with new pressures on native species resulting from the fragmentation of natural areas, pest plant and animal invasion and, not least by any means, the growing effects of climate change.

If our natural areas are going to survive long into the future, they will need all the help they can get. VNPA strongly welcomes the increased involvement of Traditional Owners in the management of Victoria's parks and reserves. • PW



PHOTO: PHIL INGAMIELLS

The Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act listed grey grass trees at Heathcote-Greytown National Park, unlike other grass trees, are very sensitive to fire and were possibly not deliberately burned in pre-European times. There are many indications that Aboriginal use of fire was measured, and varied greatly in season, patchiness and scale, depending on the species present and the reason for burning.

# Yarra Bend Park

GEOFF DURHAM EXPLORES THE NATIONAL PARK THAT ISN'T AND NEVER WAS.

PHOTO: GEOFF DURHAM

*Looking downstream from Fairfield Pipe Bridge.*

Many, many years ago, when my interest in national parks was emerging, I heard of Yarra Bend National Park. To check it out I visited Galatea Bend on the Yarra at Studley Park. I recall a heavy infestation of blackberry and disappointment.

It's all somewhat confusing. Are there two parks or one park along the Yarra from the Chandler Highway south to Walmer Street? Why the various references to Yarra Bend National Park?

In 1837 Governor Richard Bourke and surveyor Robert Hoddle designated the area on the west (Collingwood) side of the river as a reserve for public institutions, and the area on the east (Kew) side of the river as a village reserve.

On the west side, from north to south, there is now the Melbourne Polytechnic, formerly the Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital (in which I was incarcerated for about a week in 1968), the Victorian Institute of Forensic Mental Health, the Thomas Embling Hospital, and the Yarra Bend

Park. The latter includes the park office, the Victorian Indigenous Nurseries Co-operative, a fly casting pool, the Yarra Bend 18 hole golf course, a driving range, a mini-golf course and other recreation areas. This was the site of the Metropolitan Lunatic Asylum, opened in 1845, renamed the Hospital for the Insane in 1905 and closed in 1925.

On the east side is the Royal Talbot Rehabilitation Centre, the imposing 1860s Italianate building that was the centre-piece of what was the Willsmere Psychiatric Hospital, closed in 1988 and sold off to become Willsmere Apartments, and more recreation areas. In 1854 the Melbourne Town Council proposed the establishment of a park which was gazetted in 1876 as Studley Park, named after settler John Hodgson's house, which in turn was named after a town in Yorkshire, England.

The two parks were combined with several reserves in the 1920s to form one park that became known as Yarra Bend National Park. Whilst this is

written in large letters on the front of the Yarra Bend Golf Club house, erected in 1936, the park has never had formal national park status.

Like other inner metropolitan parks, there has been incremental loss of parkland here. In the 1930s the Boulevard was constructed along the eastern side of the river. In the 1970s the Eastern Freeway cut a swathe across the north of park, with cuttings providing impressive exposures of the underlying bed-rock. We are left with a 260 hectare park. Yarra Bend has been called 'the bushland park in the city' and also 'a park of complexity'.

Parks Victoria now manages the park. There are off lead, on lead and no dog areas. People problems include rubbish dumping, graffiti, cyclists and rowdy parties. Pest animals are foxes, cats, dogs, starlings, common mynah, feral bees and European wasps. Rabbits, which the 2000 State of the Parks report says were widespread, have been eliminated – a remarkable management achievement. Brushtail possums are overgrazing trees. Good work has been done in the past on



*Clockwise from top left:*  
*The grey-headed flying fox colony.*  
*Bushland with city views.*  
*Picnicking near Kane's Bridge.*  
*Cyclists along the many trails.*  
*The golf club house claiming*  
*Yarra Bend's 'National Park' status.*  
*Greenery abounds at a lookout off*  
*Studley Park Road.*



PHOTOS: GEOFF DURHAM

woody weeds but much more could be done to control ground-layer weeds.

The history of land use on the western, basalt, side is such that there is nothing surviving of the original vegetation communities, except for some grasses, and red gums along the river. Restoration efforts have involved various plantings of indigenous species. The fenced area signposted with 'Westfield Grassland Restoration—a project to re-establish a basalt plains grassland habitat', is overgrown with weeds. The park is Wurundjeri country and there is a small Aboriginal garden on the spit at the junction of Merri Creek and the Yarra.

On the east side it is a different scenario. There are the picnic grounds, a golf course and the Studley Park Boathouse at Kanes Swing Bridge with its café, kiosk and boat hire. But it is here, on Silurian bedrock, in places overlain with Tertiary deposits, that there is bushland of yellow gum, yellow box, lightwood, golden wattle, tree violet, hop bush, exotic and native

grasses sprinkled with bright yellow sticky everlasting and with patches of other natives. While not pristine (for example there has been past grazing and timber extraction) there are pockets of vegetation much as it was before the arrival of Europeans—with the addition of weeds.

In the riparian zone, the trees are river red and manna gums, silver wattle, a few hazel pomaderris and shrubs such as tree violet. The ground cover is largely weeds, notably kikuyu, panic veldt grass, tradescantia and blue perriwinkle. There are scenic walks along the east bank of the river on a track that is narrow and slippery when wet, and is closed between Bellbird Picnic area and the private houses on the river at Yarra Retreat because of a landslide and flood damage. The Fairfield Park Boathouse and Café on the west bank near Pipe Bridge is outside the park.

Bellbird Picnic area (the bellbirds have long departed) is the site of the remarkable grey-headed flying fox colony which has extended up-stream

on both sides of the river. The daily dusk fly-out is a noisy spectacle.

Two of the good natural bush areas are Wurundjeri Spur and Galatea Point, where the Friends of the Yarra concentrated their efforts for many years. It is no longer sullied with blackberry.

Before visiting for picnics or bushwalks of an hour or two, download the map from the Parks Victoria web site. Some of the tracks shown on this map are not well maintained or signposted, and the map does not show numerous informal tracks. You can also refer to *Still Glides the Stream—The natural history of the Yarra from Heidelberg to Yarra Bend* by Geoff Lacey (2004) which contains a wealth of information on the history of the park, its geology, flora and birds, and the contribution of community groups.

At Yarra Bend Park it is possible to have a genuine bush experience only four kilometres from the Melbourne Town Hall. In March this year I encountered a beautifully marked tiger snake. The coming spring with its flowering wattles will be a good time to visit. • PW

## Grow West volunteers to plant 7,000 trees on historic site

LOCAL GREEN THUMBS CAN ROLL UP THEIR SLEEVES AT THE 12TH GROW WEST COMMUNITY PLANTING DAY THIS JULY.

The annual planting day is one of the Grow West's biggest events and is an important opportunity to rejuvenate and restore local landscapes. Over the past 13 years, Grow West has worked with thousands of volunteers and hundreds of landholders, who have helped plant over a million trees in the Upper Werribee Catchment.

This year, Moorabool Shire Council will be hosting the event at one of their



PHOTO COURTESY OF GROW WEST

reserves. Telford Park is a 16 hectare park that is named after its last private land owner, William Telford, who died in 1928. It was a landfill site during the mid-20th century and is currently degraded and underused. Some revegetation has occurred, but more native vegetation is required

to prevent erosion affecting local waterways and to help the site become a refuge for native animals. With a bit of work from some dedicated volunteers, this park has the potential to be a significant community asset and improve the health of the local environment. • PW

This year's Community Planting Day will be at Telford Park, 182 Halletts Way, Darley, 9.30am-4pm on Sunday 16 July. For more information and to register, go to [www.growwest.com.au](http://www.growwest.com.au) Registrations close 10 July.

VNPA is pleased to support this event.

## Wildflower and Art Weekend featuring creepy crawlies

EVER WONDERED WHAT THAT CREATURE IS THAT YOU CHANCE UPON DURING A BUSH WALK?

The Wildflower and Art Weekend on the Surf Coast this September can help you with identification. Held annually by the Anglesea, Aireys Inlet Society for the Protection of Flora and Fauna, the highlight of this year's event will be a display of insects and invertebrates. On show will be



Red-Back Spider.

PHOTO: ADAM PARSONS

mealworms, king mealworms, giant burrowing cockroaches, red-back spiders, bird-eating tarantulas and scorpions, a baby crocodile and a snake or two. Less scary offerings include the magnificent indoor display of the flowers of the Surf Coast region, indigenous plant

sales, an environmentally themed art show and guided wildflower walks and bus tours. There will also be children's activities. So make your way to the Memorial Hall on McMillan Street in Anglesea between 10am-4pm on Saturday 23 and Sunday 24 September. • PW



PHOTO: SIMON YEO, FLIKR CC

# Loss of remnant vegetation, coming to a roadside near you

A NEW NETWORK HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED TO TRY CURB EXCESSIVE ROADSIDE CLEARANCES IN VICTORIA, EXPLAINS HELEN LEWERS.

The Public Land Advocacy Network for the Environment (PLAN) is comprised of community groups, peak environmental organisations, campaigners and researchers working together to protect the environment threatened by roadworks and other impacts on public land.

The total area of public road reserves in Victoria is substantial: it amounts to about the size of Wilsons Promontory National Park. In the more cleared bioregions, road reserves represent a significant percentage of all remnant native vegetation. Laws introduced in the 1870s to protect Crown reserves from timber-harvesting and firewood collection without a permit have resulted in road reserves representing some of the best remaining examples of intact vegetation, and our closest analogues to old-growth vegetation in fragmented landscapes, with relatively high densities of large old trees.

Roadsides are consequently very important for some threatened fauna

including the squirrel glider, brush-tailed phascogale, tree goanna, swift parrot and grey-crowned babbler. Roadsides are critical to the survival of many species of animals that use tree hollows, and they support higher densities of arboreal mammals and reptiles than other habitats. Vegetated roadsides also provide essential habitat links across the landscape.

Many rare or threatened plant species are now found only on roadsides. For example, 45 per cent of the remaining western grasslands occur on roadsides, as do 25 per cent of the plant species listed under the *Fauna and Flora Guarantee Act*.

The observation of what appears to be escalating destruction of this important element in the landscape is the motivation for PLAN to form and take action. If you or your organisation shares these concerns in your local area or more generally, you are invited to join the network, attend meetings and share resources to try and halt the decline of these treasured remnants. Contact [planfortheenvironment@gmail.com](mailto:planfortheenvironment@gmail.com) • PW

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## Defender of the bay dies hiking in the hills

MUCH LOVED SATIRIST JOHN CLARKE LEFT A LASTING LEGACY OF CARING FOR NATURE, WRITES KEITH PLATT.

**Tributes for satirist John Clarke flowed from far and wide as news spread of his death on 9 April while hiking in the Grampians National Park.**

The location of his passing indicated his love of nature, which for many years had included a deep concern for the future of Western Port.

Born in New Zealand, Clarke, 68, was a founding member of Western Port Seagrass Partnership, an independent trust formed in 2001 to lobby for the protection and restoration of Western Port and its catchment.

Regarded by many as the funniest satirist in Australia, Clark three years ago told journalist Mike Hast that he became interested in Western Port's environment after "sitting on the beach years ago and noticed lots of black particles in the usually clear water".

Clarke, who owned a holiday house at Phillip Island, said his "greening" followed subsequent conversations with scientists and ecologists.

He saw Western Port as "a special place ... under great pressure from human development".

Clarke said sediment resulting from draining Koo Wee Rup swamp was "one of the principal problems" facing the bay.



John Clarke

PHOTO: YANNI

"This was a bad idea. It was a huge, 50 miles by 15 miles sponge that filtered runoff before it entered Western Port. It was a work of genius by nature."

Clarke's death sees the loss of a strong and sincere advocate for the environmental health of Western Port as well as one of the most astute commentators on the often hypocritical actions of those who play a part in the wellbeing of Australia.

The twinkle of his eye, drawn out pause or completely ignoring the question posed by his long time on air collaborator Brian Dawe often said more about a politician than any number of words. Clarke seemed able to convince the viewer that they were hearing direct from the politician without any use of disguise or accent.

The seagrass partnership's secretary Doug Newton said he had been "staggered and devastated" to hear of Clarke's death.

"He will leave a big hole in our organisation – he's done so much for us," said Mr Newton. Later, in a prepared statement, Mr Newton said Clarke and Professor John Swan had helped "forge and launch" the seagrass partnership, "an organisation which champions community desire for independent advocacy and fearless protection of the wonderful ecosystem of Western Port

through education, awareness, partnership projects and scientific knowledge".

"Perhaps his most valuable legacy has been his direction and production of an outstanding resource, Western Port the DVD. This DVD is hugely popular and succinctly describes the treasures and challenges of Western Port and what people can do to help. The DVD includes fabulous interviews with local champions and scientists and several historic documentaries about Western Port and its wildlife.

"Our board meetings will never be the same without that trademark wit, clarity and out of the box thinking and inspiration.

"Most of all we will miss the company of this thoroughly decent man." • PW

First published by the Mornington Peninsula News Group.

When the Howard government was trying to sell off the Commonwealth land at Point Nepean, VNPA and the National Trust prepared a community expression of interest asking that the land be given to Victoria free of charge. Kate Baillieu recruited well-known entertainers, academics, historians, business folk, philanthropists and others as supporters of the expression of interest; John Clarke was one of the first to sign on.

# Alan Yen

WE WERE GREATLY SADDENED TO LEARN OF THE DEATH OF ALAN YEN, AN ENTOMOLOGIST WITH A RARE AND VALUABLE UNDERSTANDING OF VICTORIA'S INVERTEBRATES.

Alan worked at the National Museum of Victoria (now Museums Victoria) from 1981-2001 as a curator in the Invertebrate Survey Department. For over 20 years he participated in numerous research expeditions, coordinated several exhibitions and co-edited and published books on *Melbourne's Wildlife*, *Worms to Wasps*, and *Spiders and Scorpions Commonly Found in Victoria*.

After retiring from the Museum, Alan held a number of academic positions, notably as an Associate Professor at Latrobe University and research leader in Invertebrate Sciences for Agriculture Victoria and the Plant Biosecurity Cooperative Research Centre.

Alan had a generous capacity to pass on his knowledge. Questions were always welcomed, and inquirers well-rewarded for their curiosity.

When VNPA was making submissions to the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, we mentioned to Alan that we could find no papers dealing with the impacts of fire on invertebrates in Victoria. He soon galvanised a group to work on a paper which summarised available knowledge, and advocated the need for more research. When the Royal Commission made its final recommendations, it strongly emphasised the need for a significant increase in research into the impacts of fire on Victoria's rich biodiversity.

We are sure Alan's legacy will live on in the many people he helped and inspired. • PW

Phil Ingamells, with thanks to  
The Royal Society of Victoria and  
Agriculture Victoria



# Murray Bird

A FOND FAREWELL TO LONG-TIME VNPA MEMBER,  
EXCURSION PARTICIPANT AND VOLUNTEER  
MURRAY BIRD, AGED 92.

For a number of years Murray was part of the *Park Watch* mail-out team at the VNPA office, where his friendliness, gentle personality and wide range of interests drew him into many conversations.

Murray was born into a pioneering sheep and wheat farming family in South Australia. He excelled in school before working on the family farm, and in 1942 he joined the Army and was posted to the HMAS *Moonara*, Australian Landing Ship Detachment. In 1961 he became stores officer at the newly established Monash University, and later worked in Monash's Biomedical Library.

Friends knew Murray as a 'walking encyclopedia' as he seemed to remember every detail of every subject that interested him. He was an accomplished piano player and also a keen gardener, bushwalker, nature lover and environmentalist. He was loved and respected by all, a true gentleman who always spoke kindly of others.

On a personal note, I'll remember Murray for our conversations about the weather. Murray kept detailed rainfall records at his Mt Waverley home, and we used to compare rainfall there with my records in Ascot Vale—a much drier area! • PW

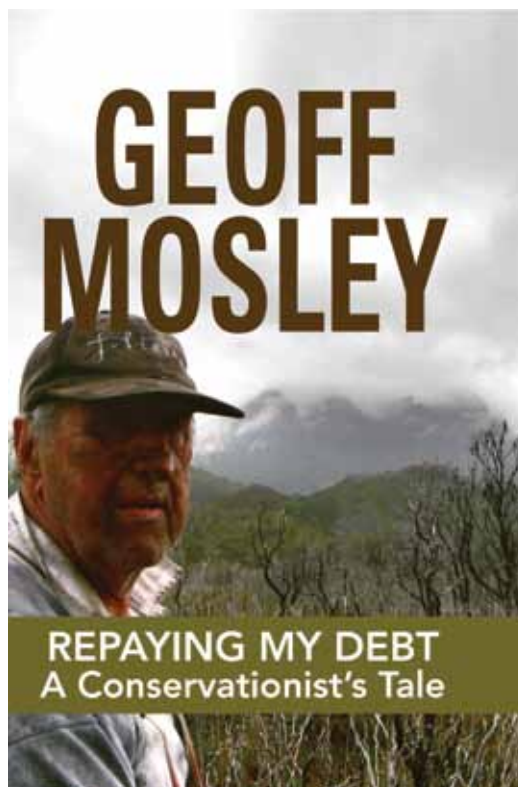
Michael Howes, former  
*Park Watch* editor.



# Repaying My Debt

## A Conservationist's Tale

GEOFF MOSLEY  
ENVIROBOOK, 2017,  
PAPERBACK, 304 PAGES.  
RRP \$30.  
FREE POSTAGE FROM  
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**With the benefit of hindsight, it's easy to see that Geoff Mosley was a lucky man, a man for his time, living in times that were right for him.**

These were the halcyon days following WWII, when jobs were easy to get, employment was permanent, houses could be bought at reasonable prices and education was free. People could look further than their immediate needs to issues of principle, and following the destruction of WWII and the decimation of cities and countryside, a desire to conserve the countryside grew and flourished throughout communities. Politicians, living in those more stable times, were able to design policies that would carry on beyond their own administration to the next, and the next after that. Community organisations began to sprout, and in Victoria the Victorian National Parks Association, the Conservation Council of Victoria and The Wilderness Society come to mind. All these worked to establish national and state parks and to resist activities such as mining and logging which frequently threatened the most diverse and beautiful regions and their multitude of inhabitants: owls, phascogales, possums and the like, many of which existed in small vulnerable populations.

These groups ached for a voice that would represent them all and at the highest levels of government. Such was the birth of the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) in 1964.

Geoff, as a trained geographer with a PhD in the discipline, was their principal research officer, becoming its assistant director in 1967 and director in 1973.

In this role he had a voice in all the great controversies of the time: the drowning of Lake Pedder and the cessation of sand mining on Fraser Island are two that spring immediately to mind. Geoff was the forceful voice of conservation in every one of these, representing himself to federal and state ministers, premiers and prime ministers always pressing his points, never yielding an inch, yet remaining on good speaking terms with all. He found Malcolm Fraser and Rupert Hamer the politicians of the day with the greatest foresight. He rather felt Bob Hawke didn't quite make the grade, despite the latter's achievements in the Tasmanian Dam controversy when the High Court backed the Commonwealth's power to stop the building of the Gordon below Franklin Dam; and his further achievement in establishing a conservation zone over the whole of Antarctica in which mining and commercial exploration was prohibited and the krill fishery severely restrained.

As times wound on through the 90s and into the new century, the good life in Australia began to slip away. Those who had been young became old and fearful of losing their assets. The young found employment harder to find and

houses even harder to buy. The focus was on cities where everyone now congregated and the services they had. In this world Geoff's powerful voice became an echo in an emptying chamber, and when he railed against economic growth was seen as a modern Don Quixote—out of touch.

Geoff was always a man of principle and action, and never a politician. His views began to grate and individuals emerged determined to push him out of the ACF. He lost his job as director in 1986, then was pushed out of the Council completely in 2015.

Geoff was a man of infinite energy. In New Zealand he worked three jobs simultaneously. As a conservationist he prepared reports and case studies prodigiously. His memory is equally astounding. Despite losing all his paper records during a domestic dispute, the information in this book is amazingly detailed. Dates, people, issues, and their sequence. It's all there. And it would be folly in this review not to record Geoff's love of wilderness and the very many walks he did over the years, quite often with his own children. They formed the source of his inspiration to keep going in the face of intense opposition.

This is a good but intense read, full of detail with many insights. He is disarmingly frank about his personal life, but what comes through over and over is the intensity of his passion both in walking and conservation, where he more than achieved his goal of 'repaying his debt'. Australia is immensely lucky to have had someone of Geoff's stature tirelessly working for the conservation of its wild lands. • PW

Review by Dick Johnson

# The Australian Bird Guide

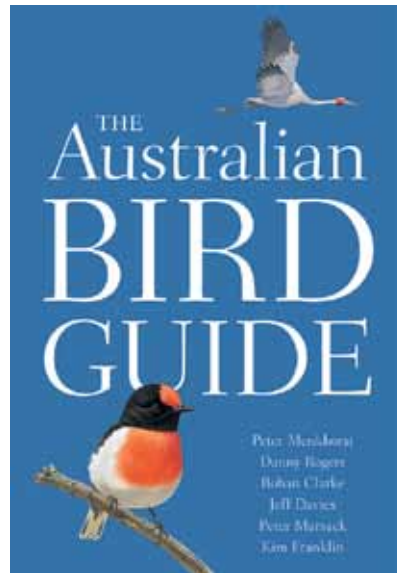
PETER MENKHORST,  
DANNY ROGERS, ROHAN CLARKE,  
JEFF DAVIES, PETER MARSACK,  
KIM FRANKLIN

CSIRO PUBLISHING, 2017,  
PAPERBACK, 576 PAGES, RRP \$49.95

**Seriously? Another field guide to birds in Australia? And it is a book? Not even an eBook?**

Just like the ever-increasing sales of LPs in the face of digital music, CSIRO have boldly published *The Australian Bird Guide*, featuring over nine year's work collating around 16 million sighting records, existing literature, volunteers and experts' information into this highly-detailed and engaging field guide.

If you've ever had the joy of spending more than 25 seconds with two or more birds, then you've experienced the high-stakes game of 'Field Guide Politics', and if you survived the ensuing bloodshed, you'll understand how important it is to get the illustrations right. *The Australian Bird*



*Guide* boasts over 4,700 self-described "lavish and scientifically accurate" illustrations. At the risk of wearing my birding politics on my sleeve, while the consistently-scaled illustrations are technically impressive, with clear lines highlighting key diagnostic features in this guide, there's no possum bleeding in the talons of a Powerful Owl. Only time will tell if they can squeeze into my heart the way Frank Knight's have.

The two main Australian birding apps are both fantastic resources, particularly with the use of GPS recording, geographic filtering and the addition of bird calls (no longer trawling through cassette tapes!) But batteries don't go flat on field guides.

The bird descriptions have the main field guide features right, clear text, bold subsections, and italicised key features. There's also a really handy ribbon page-saver built in, which might help cut-back on many dog-eared page corners.

True twitchers already know these things intrinsically, but for the rest of the birding public, the guide has a handy 'likelihood' rating, giving a guide to the relative rarity of difficulty in sighting each species in its habitat. Most bird families get a paragraph description at the start of their section, and vagrants are included as part of their respective families, which is nice.

There's no 'Other Names' section in the text, and English/common names are based on BirdLife's list, which means all the Pee-Wee or Mudlark fans will have their noses out of joint, as the only name given for *Grallina cyanoleuca* is Magpie-lark!

Back to names, both scientific and common names are combined in the index, which saves messing about in a hurry—but family groups aren't included

e.g. falcons, robins etc. So if you want to find a Robin, you have to know the name of a family member already, or go via the separate illustrated 'Family Guide' at the front of the book.

Do we need yet another field guide to birds in Australia? If you're anything like me, you've already pre-ordered a copy for your library. If not, I suspect you'll find this a fantastic new field guide for beginners and experts alike. • PW

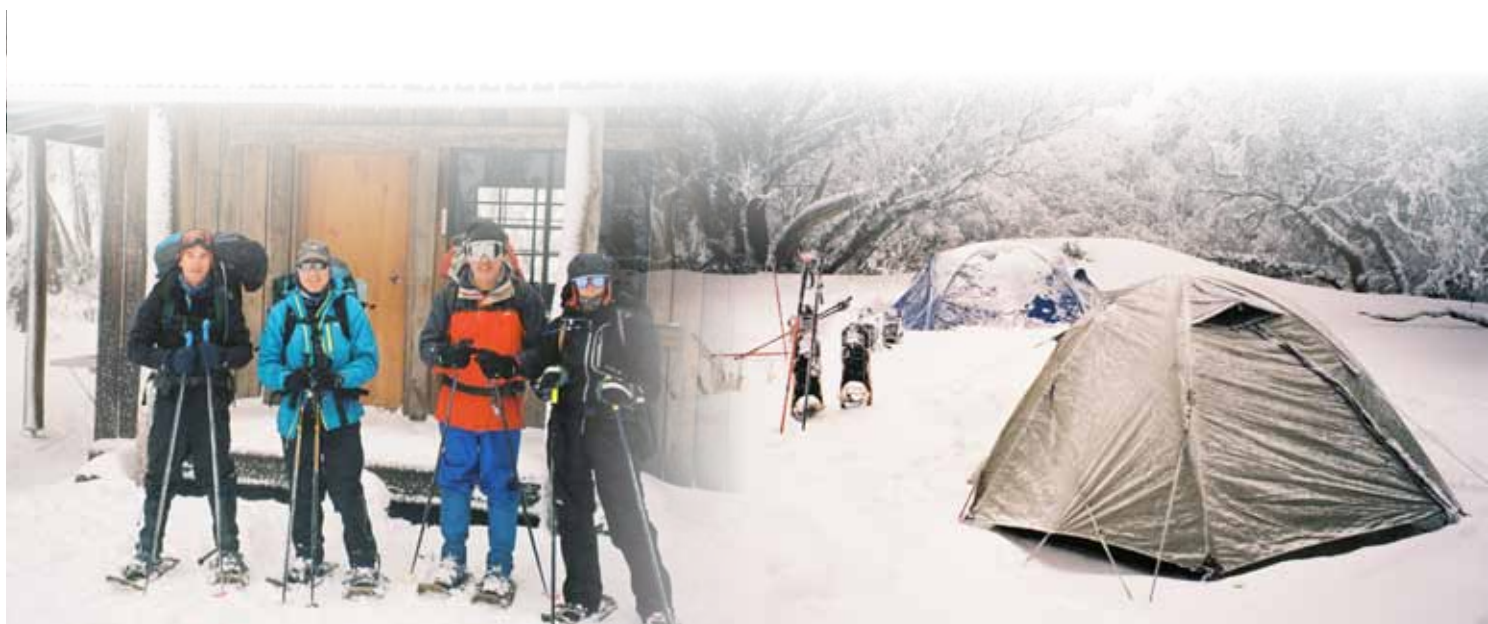
Review by  
Rowan Ewing





# Snow Shoe Fever

TAARIQ HASSAN STRAPPED ON THE SNOW SHOES ELEVEN TIME LAST WINTER, AS A VNPA BUSHWALKING AND ACTIVITIES GROUP (BWAG) LEADER, WITH FRIENDS AND SOLO. HE SHARES SOME HIGHLIGHTS FROM HIS TRIP REPORTS TO ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO ENJOY THE 2017 WHITE SEASON.



PHOTOS: TAARIQ HASSAN

*BWAG snow trekkers setting up camp on Mount Stirling.*

## Mount Stirling July

THE BWAG TRIP TO Mount Stirling late July seemed like it was going to be a disaster at the start, with torrential rain washing out our campsite on the Delatite River at Carters Road on the Friday night. However the next morning the reports at Mirimbah were that 30 centimetres of fresh snow had fallen overnight. Indeed, it was still snowing as we drove up the Mount Stirling Road.

This was a pattern for the snow season in the Australian Alps in 2016—snow melting, heavy rain and then fresh snow falls occurring at exactly the right time just before our expeditions.

We made our way in snow shoes up to the Bluff Spur Hut near the summit and set up a snow camp. The hut itself was busy with other snow lovers, and it was toasty warm inside and very nice to thaw out. A few of us went up to the summit on that Saturday. It was near whiteout conditions and the wind was gale-force and icy. It was so cold that the water in my drinking bladder froze. The next day we packed up our snow camp and headed down. The snow was fresh and powdery—just perfect! Views of the Bluff covered in snow revealed glimpses of the stunning snowy escarpment.

## Mount Torbreck July

ALSO IN JULY I MADE my first ever trip to Mount Torbreck with a friend. This is a wild and seldom visited place in white season. The last two kilometres to the rocky summit plateau area were very steep; I had to kick step and use the blade on my self-arrest ski pole for ascending and descending safely. We had to watch out for orange arrows very intently to avoid getting lost in the fog.

It was snowing and very cold at the top, but occasionally the clouds would part for a moment to afford a marvelous view of the ranges that surround the Lake Eildon area. My friend and I had a thermos of hot tea near the top which was most welcome and enjoyable!

## Mount Bogong August

IN EARLY AUGUST A couple of VNPA members and I made for the summit of Mount Bogong in good weather. This was my first winter ascent of the 'Big Fella' and it was a true highlight of my many outdoors experiences last year.

The Sunday morning that weekend was clear as can be, and despite the intense wind chill at the top, the hike up and back down from the ice-encrusted summit cairn was an extraordinary experience, with superb bird's-eye views of the Victorian Alps and the Main Range in NSW cloaked in snow.

## Falls Creek to Edmondson Hut September

EARLY SEPTEMBER THE same group of intrepid winter mountaineers enjoyed an excellent trip from Falls Creek to Edmondson Hut on the Northern Bogong High Plains. Once again it had snowed the night before, giving us unbroken snow cover.

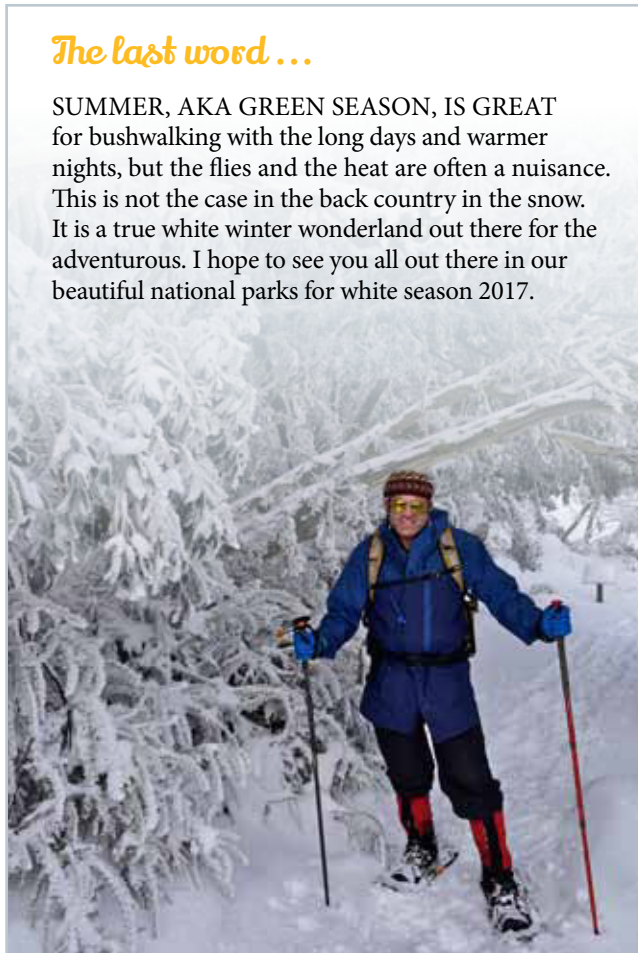
It was rather windy and cold and we couldn't stop for long at all en route. When we reached Edmondson Hut we were more than ready to rest out of the chill. The hut was buried in snow but someone had cut steps in the ice down to the front door at ground level. We set up the snow tents and found some water in the stream. Some outdoor education students from Latrobe University had built a real igloo and snow furniture for eating and cooking outside. The snow was that kind of spring snow that was perfect for building things. We had a pleasant evening cooking and drying things out in the hut and slept very well.

The next morning was clearer and we had some hours of sunny and firm snow shoe trekking from the slopes of Mount Nelse back to Watchbed Creek. These sunny days in the areas above the tree line in the Australian Alps make all the blizzards, whiteouts, driving winds and freezing rain worth enduring for such golden moments outdoors in the snowy wilderness. • PW

Would you like to join Taariq in the high country this white season? Look for his name in the Winter Bushwalking and Activities Program.

### The last word ...

SUMMER, AKA GREEN SEASON, IS GREAT for bushwalking with the long days and warmer nights, but the flies and the heat are often a nuisance. This is not the case in the back country in the snow. It is a true white winter wonderland out there for the adventurous. I hope to see you all out there in our beautiful national parks for white season 2017.



BWAG leader Taariq in his element.

# Looking after nature with the family

Looking after nature with the family is a great way to encourage a sense of love and care for nature in children from an early age. Doing so together as a family is great for:

- encouraging an ethic of care
- extending the relationship with nature from 'using nature for fun' to a reciprocal relationship where we can give back
- strengthening family relationships through doing something meaningful together

Each quarterly Wild Families activity sheet includes lots of fantastic ideas. You can find our activity sheets at [www.vnpa.org.au/wild-families](http://www.vnpa.org.au/wild-families)

## Creating your own Wildlife Garden

With support from  
City of Boroondara

Creating a wildlife garden is a great way to look after nature with the family. A wildlife-friendly garden provides a home and food for native animals, which could be big, such as possums, or small, like butterflies. Even a pot of native flowers can provide a meal for insects.

Why not get the family together to make a wildlife garden everyone can care for? The whole family could be involved in:

- researching wildlife gardens
- choosing your garden's location

- looking up your local indigenous nursery
- choosing plants from the nursery
- planting and looking after the garden
- installing fun features such as logs, rocks and little pools of water
- watching for visiting wildlife

To make a perfect garden for butterflies, plant indigenous or locally native daisies, such as the dainty blue hairy cut-leaf daisy or colourful yellow sticky everlasting daisy.

## Joining the Wild Families mailing list

To get our quarterly activity sheets straight into your inbox, as well as to hear first about upcoming events, join the Wild Families mailing list by emailing Caitlin Griffith [caitling@vnpa.org.au](mailto:caitling@vnpa.org.au) • PW



*Wild Creators: sharing love for nature.*

## Wild Families launch!

VNPA'S COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT MANAGER CAITLIN GRIFFITH IS PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE THE LAUNCH OF WILD FAMILIES.



*Wild Families' Caitlin Griffith.*

On a sunny Sunday in April we witnessed a wonderful scene of a cacophony of children acting out wild native animals and an eight-year-old taking to a microphone to proclaim "Wild Families are launched"!

Over 100 people came down to Yarra Bend Park to help formally launch the program, which VNPA has been running as a trial for the past year.

At the Wild Scientists tent families met VNPA scientists Kade and Tilly and tried using a GPS and motion-sensing camera. There were some

very creative echidnas and the lesser-known unicorns 'caught on camera'. Collecting items to view under the microscope proved to be a hit.

At the Wild Creators tent, families spent time considering all the things within forests and creating them from craft materials. The end result was a wonderful collectively made forest.

Explorers took themselves along Yarra Bend Park's bushland trail to spot an owl and try the Wild Families alphabet walk or bird watching walk.

### Where to now for Wild Families

Wild Families is a program to support families (with children up to 12 years old) to take joint journeys of discovery based on three themes of:

- enjoying nature,
- learning about nature, and
- looking after nature

Following the program being launched, the program will now involve:

"My daughter took her 'how I will care for nature' badges to kindy the next day to show off."



*Wild scientists: under the microscope.*

"My kids made a motion-sensing camera out of Lego when they got home."

- **Adventures** run roughly every three months that will focus on the themes of enjoying, learning about and looking after nature. Examples might include a workshop in making nest boxes, or birdwatching or navigation outings. These will be held at locations largely close to Melbourne as well as other spots across Victoria.
- **Activity sheets** produced every three months focus on our three themes, and include interactive activities to discover nature that can be done anywhere, interesting places to visit with the family, a sneak peak in to the family life of Victorian native animals, and fun ways to look after nature together. • PW

# Donate today to protect our forests

With more than 1.3 million cubic metres of wood logged last year, Victoria became the largest logger of Australian native forest by volume.



The Victorian National Parks Association has been committed to protecting forests and woodlands across our entire state for 65 years and our passion for forests is stronger than ever.

In celebration of our 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary, one of our generous long-term supporters has agreed to match all donations up to \$65,000. That means **any donation you make will be matched dollar-for-dollar** by this kind-hearted donor who, like you, really understands the value of what we do.

*"I hope, in some small way, my support of this campaign will encourage others to give a little more than usual or perhaps even inspire those who have only thought about donating to change that thought into action today."*

Together we can—and will—continue to ensure Victorians have forests forever.

[vnpa.org.au/support/forests](http://vnpa.org.au/support/forests)

## ☒ I'd like to make a donation to help protect Victoria's forests and woodlands

I'd like to make a tax-deductible gift of:

☐ \$25 ☐ \$65 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$650 ☐ \$\_\_\_\_\_ My choice

☐ Please make this a monthly donation by credit card or direct debit\*

## My contact details

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Address \_\_\_\_\_

Suburb/Town \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode \_\_\_\_\_ Gender ☐ F ☐ M

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_ Date of birth \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

## Payment method

☐ Cheque/money order payable to 'Victorian National Parks Association' is enclosed.

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Please post with payment to Victorian National Parks Association, Level 3, 60 Leicester St, Carlton VIC 3053, call us on 03 9341 6500 or visit [vnpa.org.au/support/forests](http://vnpa.org.au/support/forests)

\* Donations will be automatically deducted from your credit card or direct debit arrangement on the 28th day of each month. You will receive a tax receipt at the end of each financial year, and you can alter your donations at any time. Minimum gift is \$15/month. All donations over \$2 are tax-deductible. ABN 34 217 717 593

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