

PARK WATCH



FEDERAL ELECTION
PROSPECTING IN PARKS
PROTECTING NATIVE VEGETATION
CLIMATE CHANGE AND BUSHWALKING
ALPS LAND SWAP
LARGE OLD TREES
VICTORIA'S LIGHTSTATIONS
CHILDREN AND NATURE

MARCH 2013 NO 252



VICTORIAN
NATIONAL PARKS
ASSOCIATION
Be part of nature

Features...



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LEFT: Centre pivot irrigation often results in the loss of paddock trees and other vegetation. Read how the State Government is planning to make it easier for landowners and others to clear native vegetation.

BELOW: Discover the delightful new children's book *Lyrebird – a true story*, by Jackie Kerin, illustrated by Peter Gouldthorpe. You can buy copies from VNPA at a special member discount. Ideal gift!

PHOTO: YASMIN KELSALL



'Heavens to Betsy!'

A curious young bird blocked her way.

Edith stood as still as a statue. 'You're no ordinary chook,' she murmured.

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The bird examined her from head to toe with his black button eyes. Edith examined the bird. A lyrebird. And bold as brass. 'Aren't you supposed to be a shy bird?'

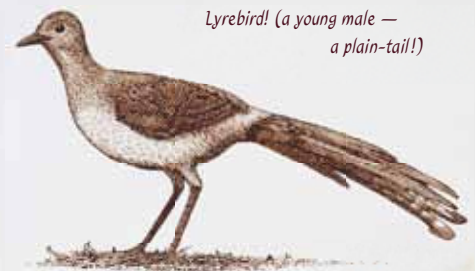
He began to scratch for grubs beside the path.

Edith was puzzled. 'Whatever happened to your tail?'

She took out her notebook and pencil.

FEBRUARY

Lyrebird! (a young male — a plain-tail!)



By the time she'd finished her sketch, he'd vanished.



Be part of nature

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VNPA'S VISION

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

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GETTING INVOLVED IN VNPA

Everyone can help in the conservation of Victoria's wild and beautiful places. You can:

- 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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GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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

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FRONT AND BACK COVERS

Children enjoy time in natural surroundings at Edwards Point near St Leonards (front cover) and Sheoak Falls near Lorne (back) with Geelong-based group Muddy Boots and Sandy Hands. See page 36. Photos courtesy Danielle Bain.

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PHOTO COURTESY RUSSELL COSTELLO

From the President

We ended 2012 with the enjoyable annual picnic at Lysterfield Park and started 2013 with the defeat of the State Government's court appeal to overturn the ban on cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park. All good.

But it hasn't been an easy year for the VNPA. We are finding – like many not-for-profit organisations – that grants for specific projects have practically dried up.

Your Council has regrettably had to take action to wind back some programs and seek new sources of revenue.

We are placing particular emphasis on our regular giving program, and welcome your participation, because it helps us to plan with a more reliable revenue base.

We have also reviewed VNPA membership fees. There have been no changes in fees for at least seven years, so we are implementing modest rises of around 11-20%, depending on the category. VNPA membership is still good value for money; members receive:

- our quarterly full-colour magazine *Park Watch*
- our *Nature's Voice* E- Newsletter and campaign alerts
- access to one of Australia's largest bushwalking and nature-based activity programs
- invitations to tree planting and habitat restoration days, plus special events
- insurance coverage while participating in authorised VNPA events
- access to our citizen science programs NatureWatch and Reef Watch
- discounts at leading gear and bushwalking stores
- capacity to vote at AGMs and/or join the Council or one of its Committees

- opportunities to help support our conservation work and Victoria's natural environment.

There will also be an option to combine membership with regular giving, of which all but a \$40 membership service fee will be tax-deductible. The new annual fee structure, effective from May 2013, is as follows:

- Concession: \$40
- Individual: \$65
- Household/family: \$90
- Giving Naturally – Conservation Partner and Member: \$20 per month minimum, plus \$40 membership fee.

We will contact relevant organisations about new fees for Associate Members and Subscribers.

On a brighter note, I joined some 26 VNPA members in the Alpine NP on the last weekend of February removing willows from the Falls Creek bogs.

It was hard work but lots of fun, and the good news is that many areas that were thick with willows a few years ago now have only scattered regrowth or seedlings.

My thanks to Parks Victoria staff for their capable organisation, and to Phil Ingamells and all our dedicated volunteers for their hard work.

The Victorian Government is still presenting us with conservation challenges. We recently learnt that there

is to be a secretive land swap in the Alpine NP. The full story is on page 18.

Similarly, in February all planning schemes were amended to exempt DSE from the requirement to obtain a planning permit to clear native vegetation on the Crown land it manages.

I urge you to write to Environment Minister Ryan Smith or your local MPs about this, and about the Victorian Government's apparent intention to dilute native vegetation clearing controls – see article on page 12.

STOP PRESS

As this *Park Watch* was going to print, Premier Ted Baillieu announced his resignation and was replaced by Denis Naphthine as Premier.

Under the Baillieu leadership we have seen significant backward steps on the environment and conservation. The key question is whether a new leadership will bring a new approach.

Premier Naphthine has pledged to continue the Baillieu agenda. As an MP and Minister he has not been a great supporter of conservation issues, but perhaps leadership will bring new insights.

The VNPA calls on the new Premier to clarify his approach to the environment and conservation. • PW

Russell Costello, VNPA President



PHOTO: MARY FERLIN

From the Editor

Welcome to the first *Park Watch* for 2013. I hope you find plenty to interest and inspire you.

Thanks to all our contributors, and in particular to three volunteers who have made a big contribution to this edition.

Michael and Evelyn Feller have each written articles on important subjects and have brought wide experience to the task. Evelyn is also helping in the VNPA office.

Writer and editor Warwick Sprawson has contributed two articles and helped with editing and layout. His questions and ideas have kept me on my toes, and his interest and enthusiasm are much appreciated. • PW

Michael Howes



Parks, the best investment

PHOTO: PAUL SINCLAIR

PHOTO: LAURENT VILLERET/
DOLCE VITA



THIS IS AN EDITED VERSION OF A SPEECH BY **JULIA MARTON-LEFÈVRE**, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF NATURE, GIVEN AT A CONFERENCE IN BUDAPEST IN NOVEMBER 2012.

Imagine a new drug that could keep you more active and fit. A new drug that reduces the risk of cancer, heart disease and diabetes ... A drug that also improves learning and mental well-being ... And – delivers clean water and fresh air.

This new discovery would surely win a Nobel Prize, but it's not a drug at all – it's simply nature! – a park, a forest, a beach ...

Protected areas are the nature-based solutions for our health, food and water security, disaster risk reduction, poverty alleviation and climate change challenges.

Protected areas have been a cornerstone of IUCN's work since its foundation in 1948, and that of our World Commission on Protected Areas – the world's premier body of protected area experts and professionals.

From a handful of national parks at the turn of the 20th century, today we have over 160,000 protected areas, covering 12.7% of the world's land surface.

It is a truly remarkable global estate that remains a fundamental strategy to conserve biodiversity and ecosystem services, with multiple benefits to people.

Today, the world's protected areas:

- provide drinking water to one-third of the world's 100 largest cities
- store the same amount of carbon as tropical forests
- help prevent disasters like floods and avalanches, saving billions of dollars
- enhance food security by boosting fisheries and preserving crop plants' wild relatives
- improve people's health by providing sources of medicines and clean air
- welcome millions of visitors every year, thus contributing to the fastest-growing global ecotourism market
- contribute to building peace and promoting cooperation among nations.

But as I'm sure you have already guessed, we cannot rest on our laurels.

In 2010, governments at the 10th meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity in Japan adopted 20 landmark Aichi Targets, including Target 11 which calls for at least 17% of the world's terrestrial areas and 10% of marine areas to be conserved by 2020.

These ambitious targets will require dramatic efforts by all countries. This will mean adding an area of at least 6 million square kilometres on land, roughly twice the size of India, and 8 million square kilometres on sea – an area greater than the size of Australia!

To this end, IUCN will convene its sixth World Parks Congress in November 2014 in Sydney, Australia. The ten-yearly World Parks Congresses is where the world gets together to chart the future for protected areas – but also way beyond their boundaries!

What we hope to achieve in 2014 is to place solutions on the table that will compel action in the decade that follows. Issues and challenges include:

- only half of key nature sites (Important Bird Areas and Alliance for Zero Extinction sites) are today formally protected
- every 10th natural World Heritage Site (18 out of a total number of 188) is listed as being 'In Danger'
- only a quarter of the world's protected areas are adequately managed
- only 1.6% of the global oceans enjoy any form of protection
- solutions that are inspired responses to the challenges that the world faces
- inspiring people to take action, change behaviour and influence others.

I believe that this would be one of the best investments we can make as a global community, to honour our ancestors and inspire future generations, and to provide hope for our one and only, beautiful and fragile, protected planet. • PW

Read the full speech at www.iucn.org

The National Parks Australia Council, which includes the VNPA, is a member of IUCN.

Engaging with the Earth- Story



PHOTO COURTESY PETER GRIFFOEN

PROFESSOR MIKE CLARKE OF THE SCHOOL OF LIFE SCIENCES AT LA TROBE UNIVERSITY SPOKE AT THE NOVEMBER LAUNCH OF 'NATURE IN THE DARK', A PRESENTATION AT FEDERATION SQUARE OF ARTISTS' RESPONSES TO IMAGES OF NOCTURNAL ANIMALS TAKEN BY THE VNPA'S NATUREWATCH WILDLIFE MONITORING PROGRAM. THIS IS AN EDITED VERSION OF HIS TALK.

I am a Professor of Zoology - a scientist who has had the privilege of studying wildlife for over 30 years in various parts of Australia and the world.

One of my particular research interests is studying the way in which animal communities recover after bushfires.

I became particularly interested in this topic when one of my long-term study sites at Wilsons Promontory was burnt in the 2005 fire, and I lost all of my individual-marked population of Crescent Honeyeaters that I had been studying for seven years. And so began another study, monitoring the recovery of the bird community following the fire.

Like all good scientists I could show the results in a graph that might cause many people to fall asleep. So instead I will try to convey the wonder of the recovery in a series of slides of a creek bed taken at intervals following the fire (see photos on next page).

And unlike your response to my beautiful Graph 1 (see next page), many of you might now gasp at the wonderful transformation that appears before your eyes.

Herein lies a challenge for scientists wanting to communicate important findings to the general public – pictures and stories are so much more accessible

and interesting than numbers and graphs.

That is why I am delighted to be part of this launch of Nature in the Dark.

I am used to identifying animals captured by the camera when they come to inspect baits. So I was intrigued to see how various artists would use the images produced by camera traps: images that for me are tools of the trade, and that as scientists we use to understand how wildlife responds to bushfire.

I am intrigued to see how those same images can be used by artists to convey additional truths and perspectives.

While I am a scientist, I firmly believe that there are complementary ways of seeing and knowing.

A scientist, a poet, an artist, a musician or a philosopher could each be looking at the same incredible creature, like the male King Parrot above, from different but complementary perspectives.

The very best art, science, writing, poetry, and philosophy is based on meticulous observation of the way the world is.

Given the state of our world and the challenges we face, we need the inspiration of artists, writers, poets and scientists to stimulate people to act for change.

None of these professions can do it alone, particularly not scientists.

That has become bleedingly obvious, if we look at the struggle scientists have in getting people engaged in issues like climate change or the fate of the Murray-Darling Basin.

Presenting cold hard scientific evidence, no matter how objectively gathered, has only limited power to change hearts and minds.

Graph 2 presents some of my own data showing the extent of bushfires and prescribed burning in the Murray Mallee over the last 35 years. In red is the proposed level of burning in the next four years if the Bushfire Royal Commission's recommendations are adhered to – that is, burning, on average, 5% of Victoria's public land each year.

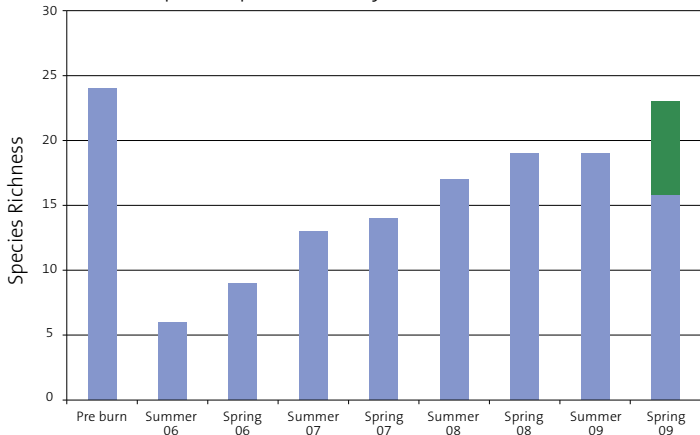
This has the potential to be catastrophic for some threatened Mallee fauna.

However, dispassionate delivery of cold hard scientific evidence of a looming environmental catastrophe is clearly inadequate on its own.

Why? Well, modern societies, particularly in the West, are increasingly disengaged from the 'Earth-Story', as environmental philosopher Freya Matthews puts it.

We don't recognise the actors in the story. We don't understand the language being spoken.

Graph 1 – Species recovery in lowland forest after fire



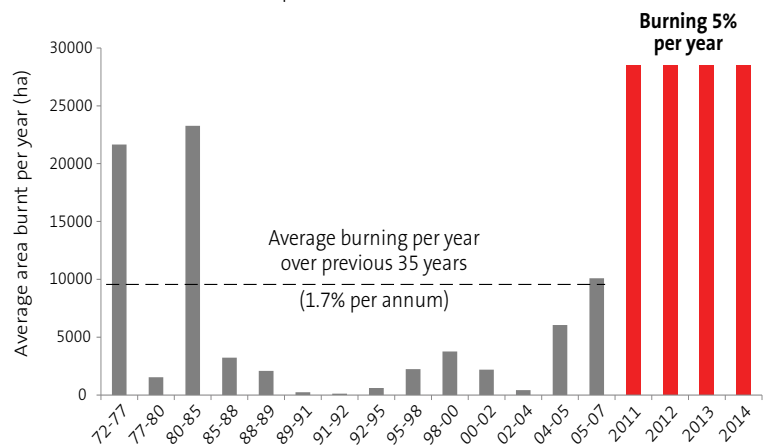
ABOVE: The graph shows that even after four years, not all species had returned to the burnt area. The first bar shows species in the area before the fire; the green section of the last bar shows newly recorded species.

ABOVE RIGHT: This graph shows that the area in the Mallee burnt under the '5% of public land' annual target greatly exceeds the average area burnt over the past 40 years.

RIGHT: Recovery after fire in eucalypt forest (top to bottom):

- May 2005, one month after fire;
- June 2005, two months;
- January 2006, nine months;
- January 2011, five years nine months.

Graph 2 – Area burnt in the Mallee



We are less engaged with the natural world than our parents' or our grandparents' generations.

We don't have first-hand appreciation of the natural setting of the story. We naively cocoon ourselves in temperature-controlled homes, oblivious to the seasons or long-term changes.

We are ignorant of most of the actors in the story – so ignorant we don't even notice how rapidly the cast is diminishing or being dominated by pest and weed species.

Scientists don't help matters here by using dreadful terms like biodiversity. How can the average person be expected to feel any emotional connections with a bunch of actors collectively labelled 'biodiversity'?

I've never met a 'biodiversity' but I have held a bilby, I have played with baby gorillas, I have marvelled at the exquisite beauty of a blue wren in my hand.

If I am to engage in the Earth-Story and care about my responsibility in the chapters that relate to my life and those of my descendants, I need to:

- connect with the story
- understand the story's natural setting, its rhythms and seasons
- care about the fate of some of the characters in the story
- care how the story ends.

So if art installations in Federation Square or elsewhere can lead viewers to:

- step into the dark
- consider or ponder what affects the world that these actors occupy
- engage with, understand and value this little scene in part of the Earth-Story...

...that will be a very good thing.

Being a child of the 1960s I will finish with the prophetic words of one its poets and songwriters, Joni Mitchell, which she penned while staring out of the window of a hotel room in Hawaii:

"Don't it always seem to go, you don't know what you've got till it's gone;

They paved paradise and put up a parking lot".

We must know what we've got before it's gone. That is my job as a scientist.

And we must use every medium and means at our disposal to reconnect people to the story – not *instead of* scientific evidence, but *alongside* it, offering different perspectives on the same story. • PW

For 'Nature in the Dark', see www.centreforcreativearts.org.au/nitd-launch



PHOTOS: MICHAEL CLARKE

The federal election: what about the environment?

VNPA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR **MATT RUCHEL** CALLS FOR COMPREHENSIVE ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES FROM ALL PARTIES, WITH FULLY COSTED PACKAGES FOR KEY ISSUES.

PHOTO: PAUL SINCLAIR

The starter's gun for the federal election has been fired, and eight months of election campaigning are under way.

Fixed dates for elections are nothing new. Victoria has had fixed election dates for some time. But this does not necessarily help make parties come up with better policy, particularly on the environment.

Most of the parties, including the Greens, have now moved to presenting policy as 'principles', without any real detail. This can be very problematic, as many dubious decisions can be justified once a party is in power.

As people who care about the environment and the survival or health of our natural areas, we need to be particularly vigilant about policy commitments relating to the environment.

The lessons from the last Victorian election are a case in point. The Liberal-National Party Coalition in Victoria did not release a formal environment policy; with the exception of a couple of clear (though flawed) commitments to return cattle grazing to the Alpine National Park under the guise of a scientific trial, and an offer of free firewood, the environment was largely a policy-free area for the Coalition.

Since the Coalition came to office in Victoria we have seen a steady chipping away at previous environment and conservation initiatives, taking us slowly but inexorably backwards. These were not election commitments; they have been instigated once the Coalition was in power.

Below are some examples:

- policy announced to allow (potentially large-scale) private development in the hearts of our national parks
- red gum parks opened for firewood collection and 'scientific logging'
- more national parks to be opened up for damaging mineral prospecting and fossicking
- key environmental staff axed from the public service
- western Victorian forests opened to logging
- open-cut gold mining supported in the important Wombat State Forest
- destructive Bastion Point breakwater development in Mallacoota approved
- critically important Green Wedges carved up for urban sprawl

- native vegetation rules watered down to make vegetation clearing easier.

Over the past 60 years the VNPA has seen many governments come and go. But more than ever it is our view that conservation and protection of our natural heritage should be core issues for all political parties.

Along Australia's east coast we have witnessed attacks on the integrity of the national parks estate, with parks being opened up for hunting in NSW and mining allowed in some protected areas in Queensland.

The Federal Coalition has started to release some of its approaches to environmental issues. Its view on the carbon tax is well known, but in addition it has committed to building more dams and establishing a 15,000 strong 'Green Army' (probably similar to the old GreenCorps established under the Howard government).

On a more concerning note, the Federal Coalition has committed to "... streamline environmental approval process for all users ..." and establish a "...one-stop shop environmental approvals process covering both Commonwealth and State legislation".

The Gillard government has also tried this, but has now backed away from the proposed 'reforms', following a concerted campaign from environment groups including the VNPA.

In this context, 'streamlining' is of course code for watering down, cutting corners, and ignoring science and good consultation processes. The environment and our natural heritage deserve much better than this from our governments.

Alpine cattle grazing is a great test case illustrating the need for policy clarity from political parties. The Baillieu Coalition announced that "a Coalition Government will restore Victoria's rich alpine history by reinstating strategic cattle grazing in the Victorian high country" almost 11 months before the November 2010 election, in the middle of the summer holidays.

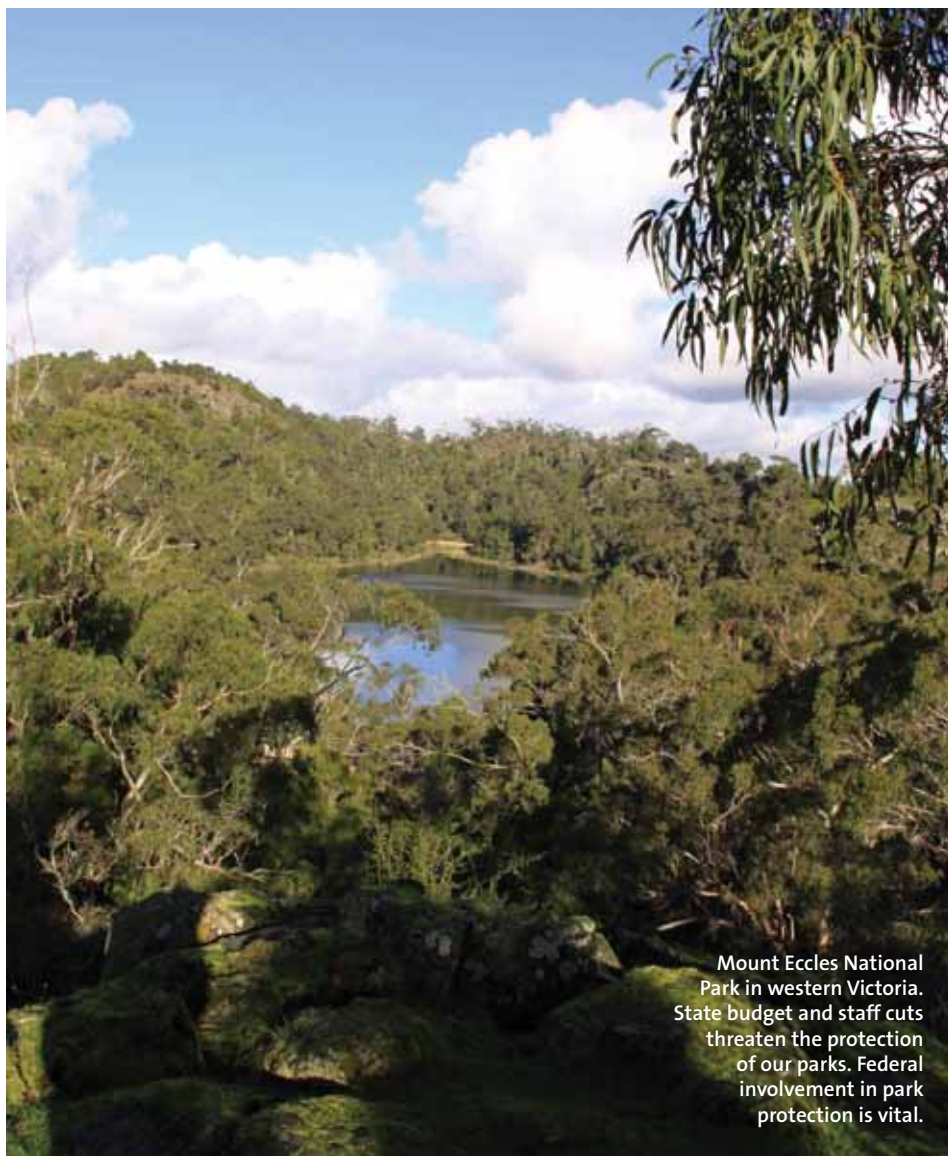
After a strong campaign from the VNPA and much community outrage, the trial was finally blocked by federal Environment Minister Tony Burke under national environmental laws.

According to the *Weekly Times*, the mountain cattlemen are counting on the Coalition to win this year's federal election and allow the Victorian Government to run the trial. This would require the Federal Coalition, if elected, to pass a new regulation to remove the ban on cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park.

Federal opposition environment spokesman Greg Hunt said in the *Weekly Times* (21 January) in relation to Alpine cattle grazing that "if elected, we would consider any proposal on its merits". While a lack of firm commitment could be interpreted as a positive, this is hardly policy, and to large extent is avoiding the issue.

Australia has a great natural heritage. As one of the world's most naturally diverse places, its natural environment deserves and demands a strong, clear policy from all levels of government.

The VNPA and our sister organisations in other states are calling for all parties at the next federal election to have comprehensive environmental policies



Mount Eccles National Park in western Victoria. State budget and staff cuts threaten the protection of our parks. Federal involvement in park protection is vital.

PHOTO: MATT RUGHEL

and fully costed packages for key areas, including:

1. Supporting the integrity of our national parks and other protected areas to protect them from logging, mining, hunting and inappropriate commercial developments.
2. A firm commitment to rule out opening up the Alpine National Park and other Australian Alps national parks to cattle grazing.
3. Reforming the national environmental laws (Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999) to improve the security of our national parks,
4. Providing \$500 million over five years for strategic national park acquisitions across Australia.
5. Focusing future national park and other protected area acquisitions on critical habitats including climate change connections and climate refuge sites.
6. Developing national conservation land management standards that ensure national parks retain the values that led to their gazettal. • PW

Take action

Contact Greg Hunt, federal member for Flinders and Shadow Minister for Environment, and ask him about the Coalition's policy on cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park. Email Greg.Hunt.MP@aph.gov.au, phone (03) 5979 3188 or write c/o PO Box 274, Hastings, Vic. 3915.



PHOTO: PHIL INGAMELLS

Prospecting: time for some *real* changes

PHIL INGAMELLS, VNPA PARK PROTECTION PROJECT, WARNS ABOUT THE THREAT OF MORE PROSPECTING DAMAGE IN PARKS.

Prospectors and fossickers have had a very good run in Victoria. For a long time now they have operated in a largely unregulated environment, digging holes, sluicing creek banks and panning for that elusive little nugget in creeks and streams over much of the state.

They even get access to some national parks – the Central Victorian parks where remnants of box-ironbark forests are still struggling to recover after the extraordinary days of the Gold Rush. The ravages of the last half of the 19th century saw most of the once great box and ironbark woodlands felled, the region's topsoil scarified and spent, and its waterways gouged and silted beyond recognition.

Some 100 years after that event, the goldfields are still on the long road to recovery. And while there have been endless publications on the cultural history of the Gold Rush and the changes it brought to our lives here,

there has been no definitive history of the impact that event had, and continues to have, on the natural environment.

Now, vowing allegiance to the old Eureka oath ('We swear by the Southern Cross to stand truly by each other and fight to defend our rights and liberties'), the Prospectors and Miners Association of Victoria (PMAV) are lobbying for access to more national parks in the state.

Indeed they've been so successful that they have convinced the Baillieu/Napthine Government to let them in to some (or all) of the Alpine, Yarra Ranges, Baw Baw, Croajingolong, Errinundra, Lake Eildon, Lind and Mitchell River national parks, as well as the Lerderderg State Park.

The Government has set up a Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) investigation into Additional Prospecting Areas in Parks, asking the once-independent VEAC team to advise where (not whether) prospecting should take place in those nominated parks.

No other Australian state allows prospecting in national parks, nor does the federal government in parks under its control.

And the activity is poorly regulated here, so that it is unclear what prospecting or fossicking actually means. In NSW, for example, there is a daily limit on the amount of soil one person can disturb, but there is no limit in Victoria. And though prospectors in Victoria can't use 'motorised equipment', they can use 'simple sluices' – devices that pump water at high pressure to erode streamsides – and there is no definition of what the word 'simple' means here. In Victoria, a keen sluicer and gold-panner can cause a fair bit of havoc in 24 hours, and a lot of damage during a week in the bush.

Perhaps partly because of the vagueness of the regulations, prospecting is not seriously supervised in Victoria, and the impacts aren't monitored. Indeed even in those Central Victorian box-ironbark parks where the management plans specifically outline the need for monitoring, nothing, as far as we are aware, is done.

The VNPA is very concerned about the current VEAC investigation, which is charged with deciding exactly where in the list of parks prospecting will be allowed. While it is very good that the job has been handed to such an august body as VEAC, their terms of reference are appalling. By disallowing VEAC from recommending no prospecting in the parks, the government has made it impossible for VEAC to adhere to its governing legislation to:

“carry out investigations that are requested by the Minister on matters relating to the protection and ecologically sustainable management of the environment and natural resources of public land.”

Time for a hard look

The VNPA is calling for the activity of prospecting to be reviewed, wherever it occurs, across Victoria. That review should look at the impacts of prospecting and fossicking, at levels of compliance, and whether enforcement of regulations is effective (or, indeed, whether enforcement is happening at all).

And this is best achieved by an alteration to the terms of reference of the current VEAC investigation

Such a review should result in recommendations for a new regulatory framework for prospecting, designed to avoid the impacts of the activity on Victoria's rivers, streams and natural drainage lines. And until such a review has been completed, and new regulations are in place, there should be no extension of the area available for prospecting.

We believe it is also high time for a new assessment of the condition of rivers and streams in Victoria, leading to the identification of rivers, streams and associated wetlands and drainage systems that would make up a representative system of rivers and streams deserving of protection. In other words, we need to make sure we are adequately protecting each type of river system in the state.

The VNPA has been calling for this for some time now and, remarkably, it is one of the few environmental promises

“
In late 2010, a Coalition media release promised that an independent VEAC investigation would “Examine the condition and management alternatives for freshwater-dependent ecosystems, such as rivers, wetlands, estuaries and groundwater.”
”

We are still waiting!

made by the current government. In late 2010, a Coalition media release promised that a VEAC investigation would:

“Examine the condition and management alternatives for freshwater-dependent ecosystems, such as rivers, wetlands, estuaries and groundwater.”

The same media release promised that a Coalition Government was committed to:

“... maintaining the independence of the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) as an effective independent adviser to the State Government on issues of land management and natural resources.”

We are still waiting!

An investigation of rivers and streams was last attempted by the Land Conservation Council in 1991, but at that time the list of 'Representative Rivers' it came up with was not given a very high level of protection.

As Victoria's rivers continue to decline for a number of reasons, and as we now know a bit more about them, it is surely time to have another look at this issue systematically across the state.

What damage does prospecting do?

Not all prospectors behave irresponsibly, but many do. And those who are 'responsible' nevertheless still erode streambanks and dig holes around the place even if they then fill them in.

By eroding the banks of creeks and streams, prospectors (or gold panners) silt up creeks, and also cause turbidity. That can affect the abundance of freshwater invertebrates (insects etc.) and also plant life, which in turn affects native fish and other freshwater animals.

And if streamside disturbance occurs on an old mine site, it can result in heavy metals and other pollutants entering waterways.

Spiny Crayfish are possibly all threatened by the disturbance associated with prospecting, as these large animals are slow-growing and require undisturbed habitat. Most river systems have unique endemic crayfish species. And the removal of snags (which are important for many aquatic species) is also a problem associated with prospecting and panning.

Digging for metals located by metal detectors can disturb the site of threatened species such as orchids and also spread pathogens, especially *Phytophthora*.

There is a multitude of Aboriginal heritage sites along Victoria's rivers and streams, and the artifacts associated with these sites are easily disturbed, or completely removed, by prospecting practices.

Prospectors have definitely had a very good run, for a very long time, in some of Victoria's finest natural areas. It's time for a change. • PW

Net gain? Net loss!

New habitat clearing rules on the cards

VNPA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR **MATT RUCHEL** AND VOLUNTEER **YASMIN KELSALL** EXPLAIN WHY THE FUTURE FOR NATIVE VEGETATION IN VICTORIA IS PRECARIOUS.

Right: Blue Devils in native grassland near Melton.
Far right: Surviving vegetation in Melbourne's Urban Growth Area. We need to protect native vegetation wherever possible.

In many parts of the state, old paddock trees, roadside vegetation and odd patches of remnant bush are all that's left to remind us of the original Victoria.

Yet now the State Government is proposing to water down the rules governing vegetation clearing to make clearing easier.

Along with the establishment of national parks and other conservation reserves, the control of native vegetation clearing is one of the few actions statistically known to help protect, and assist in the recovery of, threatened species.

And as Victoria is the most cleared state in Australia, retaining native vegetation on private land is particularly critical.

The Framework

In Victoria, such clearing is largely controlled through regulations in the Planning and Environment Act and the Native Vegetation Management Framework (DNRE 2002 - the 'Framework').

Victoria initially led the country in introducing these controls in the late 1980s, and they have been built on by both major political parties.

By the mid-1990s the annual clearing rate of woody vegetation had dropped to about 1500 hectares per year, compared to 9407 per year in 1987-1990 and 10,756 per year in 1972-1987.

However, estimates of clearing between 1998 and 2005, with better tracking of impacts on native grasslands, were

around 4000 ha per year – about 1200 ha of woody vegetation and over 3000 ha of native grassland per annum.

In fact in 2008, DSE's First Approximation Report showed that the state was going backwards by 4090 Habitat Hectares per year, mainly due to large losses on private land. Habitat Hectares (a measure of quality and extent) converted to a hectare equivalent means a loss in native vegetation extent of some 10,000 to 14,000 ha per year!

Numerous independent reports to government have reinforced the need to retain remnant native vegetation – yet successive Victorian governments can't seem to get the system to work.

Now they appear to have thrown their hands in the air and given up.

Net Gain or net loss?

The concept of 'Net Gain' was introduced by the Kennett Government in Victoria's first Biodiversity Strategy. It adopted the current goal that there should be "a reversal, across the entire landscape, of the long-term decline in the extent and quality of native vegetation, leading to a net gain". The first target was 'no net loss by the year 2001'.

That government also initiated Victorian native vegetation policy reform, published early in 2000 just after it lost office. These concepts were further developed and adopted in the Framework, adopted as statutory policy in July 2003.

The Baillieu/Napthine Government is currently reviewing the Framework,

releasing a consultation paper outlining its proposed reforms last September.

Focusing on native vegetation regulation (permitted clearing regulations) on private land only, it lists two key focus areas for review:

- the objective for the permitted clearing regulations
- the efficiency and effectiveness of the permitted clearing regulations in achieving this objective.

This has set the scope for the review, and the resultant policy focuses on cutting 'green tape' and narrowing the policy's scope.

For example, the objective it is now only concerned with the 'biodiversity value' of native vegetation, rather than the huge range of values that native vegetation has, such as erosion and salinity control, and aesthetic and cultural values.

The proposed new objective is: *no net loss in the contribution made by native vegetation to Victoria's biodiversity.*

But starting with a policy objective of 'no net loss', when all the trends point to us going backwards, is aiming to fail. The original goal of 'net gain' should be retained, giving a clear objective consistent with that of the existing overarching Native Vegetation Framework.

The proposed new regulations are a considerable watering down of the old. They also propose to remove the three-step approach – avoid (clearing), minimise, and offset. Now the policy for the bulk of applications appears to have one step only: offset.



Farmland near Avoca, Victoria, showing single paddock tree and other remnant vegetation. How safe is our native vegetation?

PHOTO COURTESY JOHN SAMPSON



Offsetting

Offsets involve activities required to be undertaken to compensate for damage or loss to an area of habitat or native vegetation.

In Victoria, an offset usually involves purchasing an area of native vegetation and then actively managing it to improve its quality (e.g. by controlling weeds and pest animals) for 10 years, after which it is to be maintained at this state, or better, in perpetuity.

So under the new policy we will see more offsetting occur, and therefore more clearing. This is hardly a policy for native vegetation conservation!

The proposed changes also mean that landholders will only have to pay a fee to be allowed to clear. Information and likely charges will be based on computer models, and the current requirement for an on-site assessment by a botanist will be removed for all but the largest and most significant clearing proposals.

The recently released *Catchment Condition Report* (Victorian Catchment Management Commission 2012) highlights the huge data gaps in relation

to environmental condition, including measures for native vegetation, leaving it to rely largely on 'expert opinion' for its conclusions.

The Report also raises important points about the stresses that Victoria's native vegetation has been under since 2007, including the sustained drought which took a toll particularly on the health of foothill vegetation.

The VCMC determined that largely intact landscapes (see map) were probably in good to excellent condition (and likely to remain so), but that fragmented landscapes were in poor to moderate condition, and assumed to be declining.

Declining extent

The experts also say that the extent of native vegetation is most likely to be declining on private land and in fragmented landscapes. "*Much of the vegetation loss experienced is incremental (as opposed to broad-scale clearance) and will have occurred through 'allowed actions' such as clearing associated with bushfire protection*", the report says.

When we have a new 'native vegetation quality' dataset later this year, DSE

should be able to produce its second 'approximation report' to show whether we've been achieving a 'net gain' across the State or are still going backwards.

We also know that the government aims to finalise its new native vegetation policy this year, probably without the new 'approximation report'.

So why are we seeing a fundamental policy being determined without essential baseline information?

It's clear that the review has not been based on ecological principles or science. It has been premised largely in response to business reports that aim to achieve 'streamlining' of policy implementation processes.

The Baillieu/Napthine Government is walking away from the intent and vision for native vegetation policy in Victoria that were put in place by the Kennett Government. It is ignoring science and creating a policy that will ensure a continuing 'net loss' in the extent and quality of native vegetation.

This will mean that the state's vegetation will be less resilient in the face of climate change, and that our landscapes, and the plants, animals and people that live within them, are destined to even more stress in the future.

We need stronger rules and stronger new legislation to protect the bush, not weaker.

Plant your foot and take action!

Contact your local councillors and State MPs and ask them to protect the bush and strengthen native vegetation rules. • PW

The VNPA's submission and more details are available at <http://vnpa.org.au/page/nature-conservation/take-action/watering-down-protection-for-native-vegetation>

Divers discover diversity

The Great Victorian Fish Count 2012

SINCE THE FIRST ANNUAL COUNT IN 2005 THE GREAT VICTORIAN FISH COUNT HAS ALWAYS BEEN POPULAR WITH DIVERS AND SNORKELLERS, BUT THE 2012 COUNT WAS THE BEST YET, SAYS WENDY ROBERTS.

During the count, over 350 divers and snorkellers surveyed reef fish at 26 sites along Victoria's coast from Portland to Cape Conran.

Running from 24 November to 9 December, the count was conducted at 12 sites in Port Phillip, three in Westernport, four along the Surf Coast, six in the south-west and one at Cape Conran in the east.

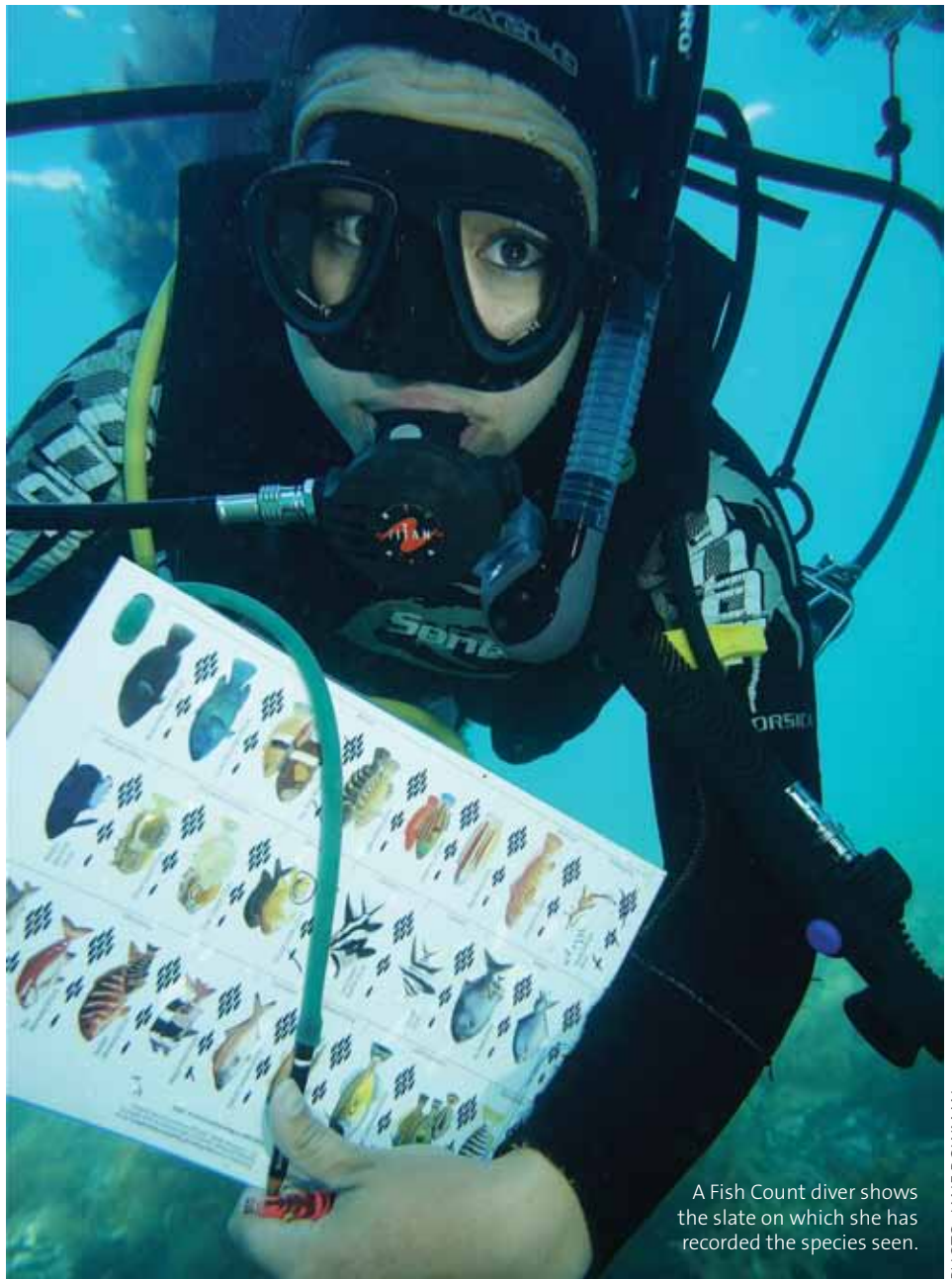
The aim of the event is to obtain a snapshot of the diversity and abundance of fish species at different reef sites.

It also builds the capacity of participants to monitor and record the types and abundances of temperate reef fish in what has become the largest marine citizen science project in Victoria.

Reef fish are a dominant component of reef ecosystems in both their biomass and their ecological functioning, and so can be useful indicators of environmental change.

Fish surveyed range from roaming predators like the Saddled Wrasse and Banded Morwong to planktivores such as the Sea Sweep and herbivores like the Scalyfin and Herring Cale.

Divers also record the environmental conditions at their selected reefs, including habitat structures, algal cover, depth, swell, visibility and temperature.



A Fish Count diver shows the slate on which she has recorded the species seen.

PHOTO: JANE BOWMAN

The reefs vary from quiet and sheltered seagrass areas within the bays to open-ocean kelp forests, and the data collected indicates the habitats in which the fish are found.

Some of the highlights of the 2012 fish count were as follows.

- Within Port Phillip's marine sanctuaries and elsewhere, we noted good-sized Dusky Morwongs, large congregations of Port Jackson Sharks and schools of Zebra Fish, plus healthy reefs and lots of other species not included in the count, such as Stingarees, Eagle Rays and Large Smooth Rays.
- Pop's Eye, the oldest section of Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park, was once again a standout with 41 Scalyfin and 75 Blue-throat Wrasse fish.

- Beware Reef Marine Sanctuary in East Gippsland also shone, with seven Eastern Blue Gropers (a protected species), 77 Maori Wrasse and 28 Bastard Trumpeter

- The south-west reported healthy numbers of Long-snouted Boarfish, Seadragons in the marine sanctuaries and the Southern Blue Devil fish at two of the sites surveyed.

Reef Watch would like to thank its amazing partners and supporters, including Museum Victoria, Parks Victoria, numerous dive clubs and businesses, Friends and marine care groups, school groups and University dive clubs. Without your help and participation, the Fish Count wouldn't get in the water!



PHOTO: JANE BOWMAN

The Ocean Divers group who surveyed the waters around Flinders Pier.



PHOTO: KIM WRIGHT, MARINE CARE RICKETTS POINT MARINE SANCTUARY

Zebra Fish and Flathead at Ricketts Point.

We'd also like to acknowledge the new groups that joined the Fish Count this year: Friends of Port Phillip Heads MNP, Friends of the Merri MS, and Dive and Dive.

And we acknowledge those who've never missed a Fish Count since counts began in 2005: Marine Care

Ricketts Point, Marine Care Jawbone MS, Friends of Barwon Bluff, Ocean Divers, Harbour Dive, Diveline, and Melbourne University Underwater Club. Thank you!

Finally, we greatly appreciate the wonderful donations made to our GVFC raffle, the proceeds of which

went to subsidising the cost of running the event. Donations came from Melbourne Aquarium, Dive Victoria, Daktari Surf and Dive, Academy of Scuba, All About Scuba, IMAX Melbourne, Polperro Dolphins and John Gaskell. • PW

Wendy Roberts, who is based at the Museum of Victoria, is the VNPA's Reef Watch coordinator.

We're not going to take it!

Far from throwing in the towel, the Save Bastion Point campaign is entering a new phase, with the fight to stop this destructive development stronger than ever.

The 80s Twisted Sister song 'We're not going to take it' sums up the campaign's defiance of Victorian Environment Minister Ryan Smith's decision to approve the East Gippsland Shire's Option 3b under the Coastal Management Act. This was the final planning approval hurdle that paves the way for a giant 130 metre breakwater and a road on the beach.

Mallacoota local Julie Parker has put together an ingenious YouTube clip with this song as the theme.

We are asking all Bastion Point supporters and friends to email this e-postcard to the local Mayor and

Shire Councillors, Gippsland East state member Tim Bull and new Premier Denis Napthine stating that:

'As a beach lover I'm calling on you to reverse the decision to pave this paradise! Please listen to the community now and move forward with a lower impact and more environmentally friendly option for boating at Bastion Point.'

TAKE ACTION!

Find and send this e-postcard at www.savebastionpt.vnpa.org.au



This environmentally destructive development can still be stopped. The VNPA is standing shoulder to shoulder with the locals and all Victorians and Australians who love Bastion Point. • PW

MORE INFO at www.savebastionpoint.org

Simon Branigan, VNPA Marine and Coastal campaign

Enjoying the alpine landscape.
Expanses of 'wild' snow like this will
become less common in future.

Less snow, more fire



PHOTO: MARY FERLIN

A RECENT REPORT ON CLIMATE CHANGE IS GRIM, BUT IT'S NOT ALL DOOM AND GLOOM, SAYS WARWICK SPRAWSON.

In December 2012 Victorian Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Professor Kate Auty released a 'Climate Change Foundation Paper'.

The Commissioner is an independent statutory office reporting on Victoria's environment.

The report, which aims to give an independent view of some of the impacts of climate change in Victoria, is available for download at www.ces.vic.gov.au. It makes for sobering reading.

CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology analysis shows that:

- each decade since the 1950s has been warmer than the previous one
- Australian annual average daily maximum temperatures have increased by 0.75°C, average daily mean temperatures by 0.9°C, and average overnight minimum temperatures by more than 1.1°C since 1910.

More frightening are the projections:

- Australian average temperatures to rise by 1.0 to 5.0°C by 2070, when compared with the climate of recent decades
- an increase in the number of droughts in southern Australia, although with a likely increase in intense rainfall events.

CSIRO's work indicates a southward movement of the Temperate and Grassland climate and the movement of Desert climate into the northwest of the state.

The report states that "the projected warming for 2030 represents the upper

copying limit for most ecosystems. As temperatures rise, so will environmental vulnerabilities and exposure to hazards."

Rainfall is likely to decrease, although it's expected that the intensity of the highest 1% of rainfall events will increase. In other words, we'll have more of the extreme rain events we experienced in February and March 2011.

Bushfires and storms will also increase, further impacting on Victoria's natural ecosystems and primary production industries.

The indications are that climate change is affecting biodiversity faster than expected. Some species are already moving to higher elevations in alpine regions; others are moving southward to cooler climates. Migratory birds are arriving earlier and departing later, mating is occurring earlier and coral bleaching is accelerating.

A warming of 1° to 1.5°C will put natural ecosystems at risk and increase the likelihood of species extinction. A rise of over 2°C will accelerate this rate of extinction.

The report notes that "A *compounding factor in Victoria is that the high level of habitat fragmentation will limit the migration opportunities of the less-mobile species. Species inhabiting high-altitude or southerly habitats will have limited scope to migrate.*"

CSIRO has also examined the threat of a global mean temperature rise of

4°C. This would lead to a marked decline in winter rainfall in southern Australia and a near complete loss of snow cover in alpine regions.

Marine ecosystems will also be affected through ocean warming, acidification and sea level rises. In 2010 the sea surface temperatures in the Australian region were the highest on record; since 1925 the surface temperature off the southeast coast has risen 2°C.

An increase of just 1°C in ocean temperature may require some marine species to migrate hundreds of kilometres south. Species unable to migrate will face increased competition from new arrivals.

The report notes that there is also an economic cost to climate change: 2011 was the most expensive natural disaster year on record, with \$380 billion of economic losses worldwide.

It's not all doom and gloom. The report stresses the wonderful diversity of plant and animal species in Victoria, and the important role that monitoring programs such as the VNPA's Reef Watch and NatureWatch play in gathering data for effective and informed management.

It also says that community-based land management and restoration organisations can help build the resilience of natural ecosystems through improving land health and biodiversity conservation, and increasing the area and connectivity of natural habitat – all with an associated increase in carbon capture.

Further recommendations will be made in the Commissioner's State of the Environment Report later this year. • PW

The future of bushwalking



FUTURE EXTREME WEATHER MAY DETER SOME BUSHWALKERS, BUT BWAG ISN'T PUT OFF, AND IT HAS PLANS IN PLACE. WARWICK SPRAWSON REPORTS.

BWAG walkers on a beach. VNPA walk leaders check local conditions thoroughly before taking walks.

PHOTO: RUSSELL BOWEY

Bushwalking Victoria's submission to a Senate inquiry into extreme weather and climate change has expressed concern about the effects of global warming on walking in the bush.

The group's submission says high daytime temperatures and increased severity and frequency of storms and bushfires will deter future hikers. The extreme weather will also mean walkers are likely to be hampered by fallen trees and track erosion.

Bushwalking Victoria represents over 70 of the state's bushwalking clubs.

Russell Bowey, Convenor of the VNPA's Bushwalking and Activities Group (BWAG), agrees that the biggest issue facing bushwalkers is an increase in severe weather conditions.

"Damage from fires and floods can put people off visiting parks," he said.

"Dedicated walkers won't be easily deterred, but the general public wouldn't be as attracted to damaged landscapes as they are to healthy forests and waterways.

"Parks authorities will have their resources diverted to replacing infrastructure like tracks and bridges, rather than focusing on conservation efforts.

"Alpine areas are the most susceptible to climate change, with the snow season getting shorter and more

variable. This could be the last generation to experience true alpine conditions in Australia," Russell said.

The Bushwalking Victoria submission says climate change will have "very serious outcomes for walker numbers, with flow-on impacts on community prosperity, health and wellbeing".

In addition, the submission raises concerns that the attraction of bushwalking may decline as global warming makes ecosystems more fragile, and reduces plant and animal diversity. In some areas bushwalking may be restricted altogether "to protect rising numbers of species endangered by growing desertification of their habitat".

Bushwalking Victoria urges the Senate to mitigate greenhouse gas pollution and to regard the impacts of climate change on bushwalking as a matter of national concern.

"Bushwalking contributes very considerably to community health, both physically and mentally, and to the local economies in the areas in which it takes place. A decline in that activity will have noticeable effects in the wider population," the submission concluded.

Russell said that BWAG leader training includes planning for extreme weather events – or more specifically, planning to avoid them.

"The increased threat of and damage

from bushfires and floods in recent years has led to many trips being relocated or cancelled," he said.

"Popular areas like the Prom, the Grampians, the Alpine NP and many of the smaller parks around Melbourne have been closed for extended periods.

"Regrowth in some of these areas has been challenging our navigation and route finding skills.

"It's always important to contact rangers to get the latest on local conditions.

"Some water sources have become less reliable for longer periods, so the best option, even for weekend trips, can be to carry all your water from home.

"We make sure that our walkers have appropriate levels of fitness for the particular walk or activity they're doing, and that they have adequate rests and water.

"However, sometimes the safest option is to move or cancel a walk," Russell concluded.

"Walking trips are to be enjoyed, not endured!"

A glance at the current BWAG Program shows that the VNPA is still offering a wide variety of great walks and other activities. Certainly precautions and planning are needed, as they always have been, but we'll still be walking for a long time yet! • PW



PHOTO PHIL INGAMIELLS

Parks open to development

PHIL INGAMIELLS SAYS THAT THE RECENT SECRETIVE ALPINE NATIONAL PARK LAND SWAP IS AN OMINOUS PORTENT OF HOW THE STATE GOVERNMENT COULD OPEN OUR NATIONAL PARKS TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENTS.

A Baillieu/Naphthine Government decision to take land away from the Alpine National Park points to a heightened risk of future proposed developments in parks.

In late February, Environment Minister Ryan Smith rose from his seat in parliament and announced that the government would excise 9.6 hectares from the Alpine National Park and hand that land to the Falls Creek Alpine Resort. In exchange, nearly 12 hectares of resort land will be added to the park.

That might sound like a fairly reasonable deal, given that the land taken from the park is very weedy and dissected by a road and tracks, and the addition to the park is largely intact native shrubland and wetland.

But in the minister's media release, we are told that this arrangement will enable Falls Creek to increase summer occupancy by developing facilities for a proposed high-altitude training 'mecca'.

To find out what that might mean, we have to go to an earlier document, the 2012 Alpine Resorts Strategic Plan. It proposes a lakeside facility "offering a training area and associated storage for water sports equipment, complemented by

a restaurant/café, interpretive centre and amenities supporting green season and winter cross-country user groups".

That is a substantial building in anyone's terms, but the strategy also flags (with no location mentioned) a high-altitude training facility that "would include gym/sports hall, swimming pool, plunge pool/spa, treatment rooms and a multi-use facility, supporting uses such as a community hall, cinema, function space and conferencing."

That's huge, and if all those facilities (or even some of them) turn up on the purloined park land, they will be highly visible across Rocky Valley Dam from many otherwise natural areas in the park (see photo).

And there is another issue. The purloined land is not just any old weedy patch; it's a carefully managed and monitored quarantine site for Orange Hawkweed, one of the most pernicious weeds in Victoria.

Any earthwork or construction that takes place there would have to be rigorously planned and supervised so that construction vehicles and personnel did not carry Hawkweed seed or plant material beyond the site boundary.

Mismanagement of the site could reverse the careful work that Parks Victoria, the scientific community and a substantial band of volunteers have engaged in, over the last decade or so, to contain Orange Hawkweed.

The trade-off – the 12 ha of land that the resort has offered to the park – is not a very good deal. It's a small area adjacent to the park, already theoretically managed for its conservation values by the resort. No species will feel safer because of the slight boundary change, and its addition to the park will scarcely be noticed.

But the land gained by the resort is potentially of considerable value, and the management regime of that land will alter completely.

Falls Creek should solve its own problems

Falls Creek Alpine Resort has not always been a good neighbour to the national park it is embedded in. Faced with a lack of summer visitors to the resort, the Falls Creek managers have been quick to blame a lack of facilities in the park. But they have been slow to admit, let alone deal with, their own planning problems.

Left: A view from the Alpine National Park looking over Rocky Valley Dam. The land being taken from the park, and due to be developed by the Falls Creek Alpine Resort, is on the far side of the dam just to the right of this photograph, and clearly visible from many places in the park.

Falls Creek in summer has the ambience, pretty much, of a construction site adjacent to a supermarket carpark. Its buildings, designed for the snow season, are very introverted.

And walking around the village in summer, trying to find a habitable coffee shop or a newspaper, is an exhausting and ultimately disappointing experience.

The resort is also a poor park neighbour, with maintenance sheds, vehicles and an old cargo container chucked holus-bolus behind the main resort complex, but in full view of the national park. And many of the park's weed invasions (including Orange Hawkweed) can be traced back to plantings and/or lax control efforts at the resort.

Minister not open to advice

It is indeed odd, given this record, that the only avenue of consultation for this land transfer was the Falls Creek resort itself. There was no public consultation (we still don't know what is actually proposed for the site!), and as far as we can see, even Parks Victoria wasn't kept in the loop.

The Environment Minister's announcement cites the 'Falls Creek Biodiversity Management System' as saying that the land to be added to the park is suitable habitat for the critically endangered Alpine Water Skink. But, frankly, no one seriously concerned about threatened species would go to a ski resort for that sort of advice.

Minister Ryan Smith knows he has threatened species managers and advisers within his own department, and that these, and others in the scientific community, are the people who should be advising him.

But it seems he didn't want any opinion that would question the value of the land he was handing to Parks Victoria.

Admittedly, the process is not as bad as the last attempted excision of land from the park. In 1997, a much larger slice of land (including the current bit, but extending to the northern slopes of Mount McKay) was included in a bill presented to Parliament by Kennett government minister Marie Tehan.

Bizarrely, the bill failed even to mention that it was national park land, referring to it by its much older designation as State Electricity Commission land.

After a strong campaign by the VNPA, that proposed land transfer was eventually reversed in 2001 by the Bracks Government.

We are still a long way from the sort of transparency good national park management requires. The Minister has at his disposal an experienced and very reputable body called the National Parks Advisory Council which has, under its governing legislation, the job of advising on any excision from a national park.

It seems they weren't asked this time, indeed we can't find anyone except the Falls Creek Alpine Resort management who was invited to the table.

You don't need to make a decision in secret if it's a good one.

The way this excision was made is ominous indeed in relation to the government's promise to open our national parks to tourism developments.

We believe DSE is developing 'protocols' for those developments.

We don't actually *know* that, though. The process is happening behind very closed doors. • PW



PHOTO PHIL INGAMIELLS

Willow busters help the alps again

The photo above shows VNPA volunteers seeking out and treating willows in February in the Rocky Knobs area of the Alpine National Park. In the foreground are the remains of shrubs killed in the 2003 fires.

After those fires, thousands of invasive Grey Sallow Willow seedlings sprouted in fire-affected areas of the Bogong High Plains. VNPA willow weeders have been helping Parks Victoria deal with the invasion since 2006.

This February, 26 hard-working volunteers made a considerable impact over two days of near perfect weather.

We were very pleased that Parks Victoria could allow the effort to go ahead this year, even though a series of fires had stretched its capacity to manage other programs.

Volunteer support for programs like this means that weed management budgets can go a lot further than they might otherwise.

However, it's important that funding for such programs is continued until the willows are finally brought under control.

Well done team! • PW



LARGE OLD TREES ARE BECOMING SCARCER
WORLDWIDE, REPORTS MICHAEL FELLER.

The fall of the giants

PHOTO: MICHAEL FELLER

Mountain Ash forest near Toolangi; clearfelled area in foreground.

Large old trees have enormous ecological value. They are among the biggest organisms on our planet, store great quantities of carbon for long periods of time, influence the soil, hydrology, and plant species present, and produce abundant crops of flowers, fruits, leaves, and seeds that many animals require.

They can also contain cavities which are homes or shelters for up to 30% of all vertebrate species present.

Their important roles continue well after death, when they become standing dead trees or fallen logs on the ground.

The former continue to provide cavities and are favoured resting sites for many birds. The latter offer runways and resting spots for many animals, including passages beneath snow in cold climates, as well as important habitat for certain plant species, particularly mosses, liverworts, and lichens.

What is a 'large' tree?

It may be a tall one. Worldwide there are only 22 species that grow over 80 metres tall, and these trees are native to only three areas – the west coast of North America, Borneo, and Australia.

The tallest trees now standing are the Coast Redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*) of California, currently reaching up to 116m. The tallest Australian trees, and the world's

tallest flowering plants, are Mountain Ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*), reaching up to 100m in Tasmania's Arve Valley.

Trees used to be taller, however. A Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) felled in south-western British Columbia in 1902 was 127m tall; a Coast Redwood cut down in California in 1886 was 129m tall; and a Mountain Ash cut down at the Watts River near Healesville in 1872 reached 132m.

Height is only one measure of size. The total volume of wood, bark and branches is another. This is approximated using the formula: Total points = trunk circumference + height + $\frac{1}{4}$ (average crown spread).

The formula, developed in the US, has been applied to trees from many countries. Using it, the largest Australian trees are still Mountain Ash in Tasmania (up to 1118 points), but Messmate (*Eucalyptus obliqua*) in Tasmania (1087 points), and Red Tingle (*E. jacksonii*) in Western Australia, Blue Gum (*E. globulus*) in Tasmania, and Alpine Ash (*E. delegatensis* subsp. *tasmaniensis*) in Tasmania (925 -996 points) can also be very large.

The world's current largest trees are still in California, the largest being the giant Sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*), scoring up to 1321 points, followed by the Coast Redwood, up to 1290 points.

The large old trees of most forest types, and the old-growth forests in which they usually occur, have been declining throughout the world. This is likely to have serious consequences for many other organisms, and for biodiversity.

These trees, whether in forests, agricultural lands or urban areas (witness Knox City Council's removal of large eucalypts), are dying and disappearing, often directly at the hand of man through logging and forest clearing, or indirectly from side effects of human activities, through forest fires, drought, high temperatures, competition with invasive plants, air pollution, disease, and insect attack.

Young trees may not grow into old trees because of overgrazing or browsing by native or domestic animals, competition with invasive plants, or altered adverse fire regimes.

In south-eastern Australia, extensive areas of grazing lands are projected to support only about 1% of the historical densities of large old trees within 50–100 years, and in Victoria a large body of research has recently highlighted the increasingly critical state of big old trees in Mountain Ash forests in the Central Highlands. These are predicted to decline by around 90%, from 5.1 such trees per hectare in 1997 to 0.6 trees/ha by 2070.

Mortality of large old trees in these forests was over 14% between 1997 and 2011,

but was greater during the driest period (2006-2009), suggesting that a warmer and drier climate could increase mortality even more. Following the 2009 fires, 79% of such trees died and 57-100% of the trees were destroyed on burnt areas.

Modelling suggested that there will be a severe shortage of such trees by 2039 that will continue until at least 2067. Only about 1.1% of Mountain Ash forest is currently unburnt and unlogged.

This continuing loss of large old Mountain Ash trees is largely the result of current forest management, which involves clearfelling of unburnt forest and salvage logging of burnt forest outside protected areas. These logging activities result in the following adverse ecological effects:

A significant reduction in large trees with cavities, which reduces critical nesting and sheltering sites required by animals such as Victoria's faunal emblem, Leadbeater's Possum. Mountain Ash trees need at least 120 years before cavities start developing.

Evelyn Feller and Bernie Mace with massive Mountain Ash tree near Toolangi, named the Kalatha Giant.



PHOTO: MICHAEL FELLER

A reduction in the abundance of multi-aged ash forests from estimated historical levels of around 30% to less than 7%. Multi-aged forests are important because they usually support the highest diversity of arboreal marsupials, and are key habitat for some bird species.

A reduction in vegetatively resprouting plants, such as tree-ferns. Plants regenerating from seed after fire may also be killed by salvage logging operations. Wind-dispersed plants, or those with deep rhizomes, such as bracken fern, can increase in abundance. Colonisation by invasive species is often facilitated. The net effect is to change the plant community composition compared to that which would follow a natural fire disturbance.

A reduction in landscape heterogeneity, as young even-aged stands become more common and older and multi-age stands become less common.

A shift in the historical fire regime. This occurs because younger forests result in more frequent and more severe fires than old forests. In turn, this means

The author with giant Sequoia tree in California, USA.



PHOTO: EVELYN FELLER

that future fires will burn more young forests, preventing the development of large old trees with cavities – unlike past fires such as those of 1939.

Enhanced soil erosion and reduced streamflow also accompany Mountain Ash logging.

A reassessment of the true (extremely high) costs of continued Mountain Ash logging is urgently required if these forests are to be allowed to maintain their biodiversity and their value to our society.

Big trees are tragically going the same way as big animals, such as elephants, tigers and whales.

There is no time to lose. • PW

Article author **Michael Feller** (below) is an Australian forest ecologist, currently an Associate Professor Emeritus in the Department of Forest and Conservation Sciences at the University of British Columbia, Canada. He has studied nutrient and water flows in forests, including his beloved Mountain Ash forests in the Maroondah catchment, and forest fire ecology.

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Yarra Ranges National Park, declared in 1995, protects some beautiful forest, but much of it is in inaccessible closed catchments, and large areas of important forest were left outside the park.

That White Pages listing

The VNPA in the 1990s



PHOTO COURTESY DAVID TATNALL

IN HIS FOURTH ARTICLE ON THE HISTORY OF THE VNPA, ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORIAN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR DON GARDEN REVIEWS A PERIOD WHEN PRIVATISATION, COMMERCIALISATION AND OUTSOURCING WENT MAD.

In mid-1995 the VNPA started receiving phone calls from people wanting to book accommodation at Wilsons Promontory National Park.

On checking, staff found that the VNPA had been listed in the White Pages telephone directory as the service number for the park – and was also listed in the government section as a government department.

They must have wondered if this were not some convoluted ironic comment on the Kennett government's obsession with privatisation, commercialisation and outsourcing. Was it the ultimate in commercial outsourcing?

The explanation is not clear but appears to be much more prosaic – probably a simple mistake by someone at Telstra, which eventually agreed to pay \$1500 compensation to the VNPA.

Nevertheless, it was a symbolic time for such a strange thing to happen. 1995 saw a plummet in VNPA relations with the Kennett government, largely over its policies towards national parks and other protected areas.

The government appeared determined to undermine or destroy many of the achievements of recent years and to send Victoria's environmental protection back to the 1950s and 1960s.

Clash of ideologies

At the centre of the Kennett fiascos was ideology.

The VNPA believed (as it still does) that the prime purpose of protected areas was the preservation of ecosystems and natural heritage, although they should of course be open for popular appreciation. The Association was opposed to activities that would damage the ecosystems and degrade the parks, particularly forms of commercial exploitation.

An independent Land Conservation Council (LCC) and a generally effective National Parks Service (NPS) had been key elements in achieving and protecting these goals since the 1960s.

The Kennett government (1992-99) was in some respects ideologically a polar opposite. Like its Coalition predecessors (except for the Hamer period) it was not always enthusiastic about national parks and protecting nature.

It saw parks as primarily 'for the people' rather than for nature protection, and to this end was more likely to downplay protection in favour of commercial and recreational exploitation.

On top of this, as a strong advocate of small government it significantly reduced government functions, some by closure, some by outsourcing and some by privatisation.

In the first two years of the Kennett government, national parks and environmental concerns did not fare too badly. The government came to power with a policy that emphasised national parks and a promise to strengthen the NPS.

Under Mark Birrell as Minister for Conservation and Environment, matters continued fairly smoothly, although there were no significant declarations of new protected areas.

Throughout the 1990s there was ongoing niggling about logging and woodchipping in Victoria's unprotected forests, mining in state parks and cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park. There was a frustrating lack of progress in having national parks established in four important ecological areas: marine and coastal, box-ironbark, the Barmah red gum forests, and indigenous grasslands.

Yarra Ranges National Park

The first and only major new national park was Yarra Ranges, announced in mid-1995, which caused much disappointment in the VNPA and other

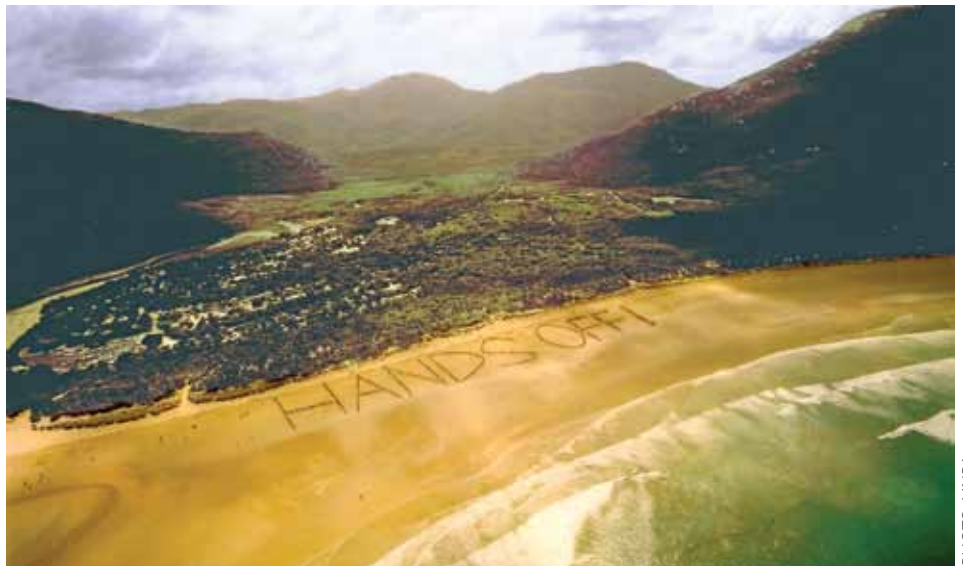


PHOTO: VNPA

groups that described it as 'appalling'. Much smaller than had been hoped for, 85% of it was existing protected closed catchments around Melbourne's reservoirs. It did not protect most of the Mountain Ash forests to Melbourne's east but left them accessible for the timber industry.

The park also created administrative challenges, as responsibility for much of its management would be shared by the NPS and Melbourne Water.

Suddenly in the middle of the decade, especially after the government was returned at the 1996 elections, sweeping changes gathered pace and the environmental movement was caught up in the Kennett whirlwind. In 1997 VNPA Director Doug Humann was moved to ask 'What is happening in the State of Victoria?'

The government seemed to want to brush aside all existing institutions and values, and start again. Doug did not know who or what was behind this rush for change, and was concerned that no community consultation had taken place.

The VNPA found itself increasingly being redirected from seeking new goals to defending old ones.

Environmentally the rush for change was concentrated in two areas – bureaucratic administration, and commercialisation/privatisation to promote tourism.

Parks Victoria set up

At the end of 1996 Marie Tehan, the new Minister for Conservation and Land Management, caused shockwaves when she suddenly announced the abolition of the NPS and the establishment of Parks Victoria, a statutory body created out of an amalgamation of a number of authorities. The VNPA watched the transition carefully and offered advice where possible.

In the long run, while not what the VNPA would have advocated and excessively 'corporate' in its early years, Parks Victoria turned out to be a reasonably successful if badly underfunded body. The main benefit

is that it has been relatively stable and quarantined from the perpetual re-shuffling that happens with government departments.

One weakness, however, is the absence of a direct line of accountability to the minister.

Equally dramatic was the announcement that the LCC would cease to exist in June 1997, replaced by the Environment Conservation Council, which would continue the LCC's work but in a rather diminished way.

A case could be made that the LCC had completed much of its initial evaluation of Victorian public land and that a new body was appropriate. However, its sudden abolition without consultation made environmentalists recoil with suspicion, especially as LCC recommendations were pending on box-ironbark forests and marine parks, and might now be lost.

Commercial development

Most heartache came from the government's desire to promote tourist developments in national parks and other protected areas. The threat of degradation and the loss of principle that would allow commercial interests to profit from public assets caused a crisis in relations with the government.

Skiing, or the further development of ski facilities, was central to many of the debates. A proposal to develop a new field at Mt Stirling was postponed after much protest. However, a dreadful precedent was set when an area of 285 ha was excised from the Alpine NP to expand the Falls Creek resort.

Other alarming proposals were for developments along the Great Ocean

Road; a large seal-watching centre at the Nobbies on Phillip Island; major facilities in the Grampians; a new road in Wyperfeld; and the Albert Park Grand Prix.

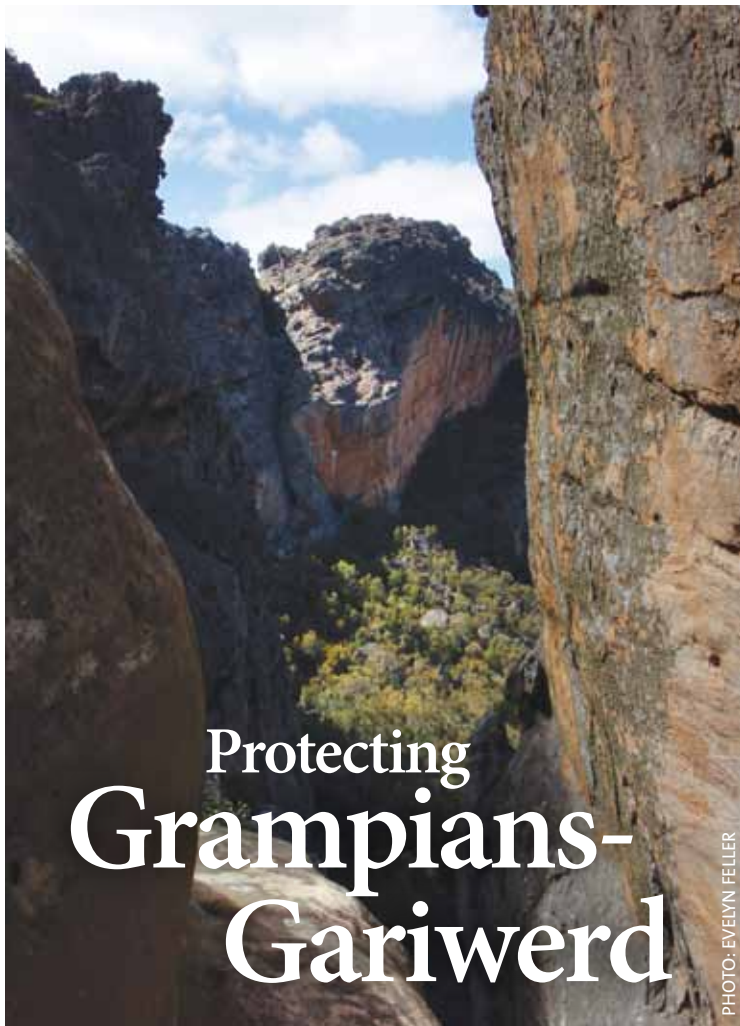
But what attracted most concern and protest was the revival of a desire to develop major resort facilities at Wilsons Promontory. When the government announced plans for a 150-bed lodge at Tidal River, the VNPA was central in organising an alliance of over 100 groups named 'Hands Off our Parks' (HOOP). Much of its focus was on 'Hands off the Prom' and a petition of 45,000 signatures was collected.

Most dramatic was a gathering at Tidal River in December 1996, when 2000 people stood on the beach to spell out 'Hands Off!' The government eventually allowed the lodge scheme to lapse, though partly because it was not viable and partly for fear of electoral backlash rather than for conservation reasons.

Other tourism development schemes remained on the drawing board, including new tracks to the southern part of the Prom, and the construction of large tourist facilities. The fear of degradation and the threat of commercialisation were constant distractions for the VNPA, HOOP and other environmental groups.

Such issues stirred the community and brought a significant increase in VNPA membership. They formed part of the community discontent that saw the Kennett government rejected at the 1999 election.

That is the lesson for all governments that fail to protect our environment and our parks. • PW



Protecting Grampians-Gariwerd

PHOTO: EVELYN FELLER



PHOTO COURTESY THELMA MCCANN



PHOTO: EVELYN FELLER

AS PART OF THE VNPA'S 60TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS, VNPA VOLUNTEER EVELYN FELLER LOOKS BACK AT THE LONG CAMPAIGN FOR A GRAMPAINS NATIONAL PARK.

Grampians-Gariwerd has been a special place for Indigenous people for thousands of years, and 19th century European explorers, settlers and naturalists soon came to appreciate its remarkable scenery and rich flora and fauna. Yet it only gained national park status in 1984. Why was this?

An early appeal for a Grampians National Park came in a 1912 *Argus* editorial in response to a deliberately lit fire in the Victoria Valley north of Dunkeld. The editor urged protection for the area before the opportunity was lost. *“These things are often neglected or overlooked during the infancy of a country: and then there comes a time, after the land has been alienated, when a lost opportunity is lamented.”*

In 1937, Ararat Shire president Councillor Alex McDonald endorsed a national park to further encourage tourism and protect the area's unique flora and fauna. But he faced counter arguments, including that the existing

state forest reserve was a de facto national park anyway, and that the Forests Commission was better staffed and funded than a park would be.

In 1952, Victorians frustrated at the lack of a government agency to manage national parks formed the VNPA to lobby for new parks with adequate funding.

While groups such as the Stawell and Ararat Field Naturalists – supported by the Melbourne Field Naturalists – had been lobbying for a Grampians park for many years, their efforts met strong opposition from groups who raised concerns about the potential loss of sawmill jobs in Stawell and feared foxes, rabbits and other vermin would overrun the area. One of the VNPA's first activities was to counter this opposition through local media.

Apart from championing a Grampians national park, the VNPA was involved in other campaigns to protect the Little Desert and the Alps. The Little

Desert campaign resulted in 1971 in the formation of the Land Conservation Council (LCC), meaning that future land-use decisions could only be finalised after a comprehensive review of an area's resources.

The LCC review of the Grampians area began in 1978, generating an energetic campaign by park supporters and opponents. Locally, Ian McCann of the Stawell Field Naturalists (and author of the VNPA 'In Flower' books) was tireless in his efforts to see the national park come into existence.

For its part, the VNPA formed a subcommittee to produce submissions and critique LCC reports. Members included Geoff Durham, Malcolm and Jane Calder, Janet Coveney and Dick Johnson.

The VNPA's 1979 submission to the LCC made clear that the key impediment to a national park was determining which agency would control the area. The

Top right: At the official dedication of Grampians National Park, 1 July 1984. L-R: Don Saunders, Director of National Parks; Hon. Rod Mackenzie, state Minister for Conservation, Forests and Lands; park proponent Ian McCann of the Stawell Field Naturalists; John Miller, first Ranger in Charge; unknown. Left and bottom right: Exploring Grampians-Gariwerd's rocky landscapes.

submission described the overlapping jurisdictions between the Forests Commission and other agencies as resulting in 'confusion and apathy'. Campgrounds such as Zumsteins and Halls Gap had deteriorated, with limited visitor facilities and few opportunities for park interpretation.

The submission also described the adverse effects of grazing and lack of supervision of stock. It concluded that conservation could best be achieved by an adequately staffed and funded National Parks Service (NPS).

The Grampians Fringe Advisory Association, a group of farmers whose properties bordered the proposed park, opposed the park, claiming that only very fit walkers would be able to reach many areas because road access would be restricted. Concerned as well that 1080 would not be used in the park to kill vermin, they organised public meetings to rally opposition to the proposal.

Local sawmillers, the forest industry and the Forests Commission also opposed a park, concerned about the potential loss of 67 sawmilling jobs in Stawell. But a Conservation Council of Victoria report pointed out that in 1978 tourism produced double the revenue of sawmilling.

In addition to writing submissions, the VNPA subcommittee met local naturalist groups and media to highlight the economic benefits of a park, and attended a forum organised by the local ALP.

Members of the VNPA wrote letters to educate the public and explain the LCC process, and the VNPA undertook market research on local concerns. To counter opposition, the Association took a low-key and non-controversial approach.

Other campaign initiatives included commissioning Jane Calder to write a book, *The Grampians – a noble range*, documenting the magnificent cultural and natural heritage of the area.

The LCC's final recommendations were a great improvement on its initial ones, with a much larger area dedicated to a national park, and management by the

NPS. However, the VNPA was dismayed by the recommendation to continue logging in over 40% of the Grampians. (Logging finally ended in 1994.)

Cain Labor government policy in the early 1980s supported the creation of a park, and Grampians National Park, covering 160,000 hectares and measuring 95km north-south and 55km east-west, was declared on 1 July 1984.

Supporters celebrated the declaration with a champagne and Vegemite breakfast in Halls Gap. The VNPA also organised a 'Grampians Gathering' with activities and official speeches. Local concerns about the new park were gradually alleviated through involving the public in the development of management plans and ensuring staff were available to discuss any concerns.

Improvements such as upgraded walking tracks and camping areas, a Visitor Centre and visitor guides also followed, and the Brambuk Centre near Halls Gap is now owned and run by Aboriginal communities of south-western Victoria.

Today Grampians-Gariwerd is one of the most popular national parks in Victoria, receiving over 1.5 million visitor days per year. A 1994 economic analysis showed that the economic benefit of tourism to the area was over \$100 million per year, generating 1270 jobs.

In this 60th anniversary year of the VNPA, members and supporters are strongly encouraged to visit the Grampians and reacquaint themselves with the wonders of the park. Join the Friends of Grampians-Gariwerd (see below) in one of their many activities to help ensure the Grampians remains a really great national park! • PW

Love of mountaineering, walking and kayaking led Evelyn to a long involvement with river conservation, park and wilderness protection and community environmental issues in both Australia and Canada. Now retired from a teaching career, she lives with husband Michael near Healesville and is a volunteer with VNPA and Healesville Environment Watch Inc.

20,000 years of human history

Indigenous people have been living in the Grampians area, known to them as Gariwerd, for more than 20,000 years. The Grampians contain about 80% of all known Aboriginal rock art sites in Victoria. Motifs painted in numerous caves include depictions of humans, human hands, animal tracks and birds.

Brambuk, the National Park and Cultural Centre near Halls Gap, continues to keep alive the culture of the Djab Wurrung and Jardwadjali, the traditional peoples of Gariwerd and the region.



PHOTO COURTESY MARGO SIETSMA

FOGG members monitoring rare plants.

Friends indeed – the Friends of Grampians Gariwerd

In 1984 the VNPA helped form the Friends of Grampians Gariwerd (FOGG), the first president being Halls Gap resident Val Hastings, an active worker for the establishment of the national park.

With a membership of about 80, the group's activities include flora and fauna monitoring, weeding, and working to help locals and visitors to enjoy, understand and appreciate the park. Members have served on the park Advisory Committee, and established the accessible Red Gum Walk in the Victoria Valley.

Go to friendsofgrampiansgariwerd.org.au for more information.



What's stopping you?

PHOTO: PROJECT HINDMARSH

We all love nature and sustainability, but how do we communicate our concerns to others?

VNPA MEMBER AND VOLUNTEER **STEPHEN LAKE** IS A MELBOURNE INVESTOR WHO HAS BEEN BUSHWALKING, ROCK CLIMBING AND SKI TOURING FOR OVER 40 YEARS. HE HAS A LONG-STANDING INTEREST IN CONSERVATION AND PRESENTS A CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC VIEW OF THE FUTURE.

For decades, conservation groups have given governments and other entities desired actions. Protect an area by making it a national park. Change the rules regarding logging. Provide more funding for research and staff. Include a species on an endangered list.

There may be scientific studies, public meetings, Royal Commissions, newspaper articles, petitions, letters, and assurances extracted.

Even with numerous setbacks, broken promises, and government actions unsupported by evidence, this has largely worked.

The new

Now the landscape has changed. Despite strong competition from economic concerns and other immediate matters, conservation has gradually seeped into the collective consciousness.

Mum and Dad Australia and International are increasingly aware that

global warming is going to affect their children. More people know of the importance of water, soil, air and seas, and wonder about food availability in a world of nine billion people in a few decades.

Dubious practices such as 'fracking' are being questioned in mainstream publications. Conservation articles regularly appear on the front and finance pages of newspapers. More value is being placed on green areas and wild places for spiritual refreshment.

There's more awareness that non-renewable resources are limited. More people realise that a non-sustainable standard of living can't be reconciled with the constraints of a finite planet and ecological limits.

Sub-prime, short-term and consumerism

Sub-prime and the GFC have drawn horizons to the immediate and short-

term: will I have a job next week, be able to pay the mortgage, and be able to afford a car? In such an economic climate where your income is in jeopardy today, it's hard to think about something 20-40 years hence.

This is compounded by consumerism in developed and, increasingly, developing countries. Smartphones, mobile web access, tablets, huge TV screens and a lot of other technology is on many people's must-have list, often discarded as the next model comes out.

These supposed must-have items place budgets already in difficulty under further stress. Work-time increases to pay for these goods and services, leaving people too tired to engage with issues that may have otherwise concerned them.

Technology allows work to intrude into what was formerly non-work time, especially for those handling information. Activities that are quite

often ephemeral like texts, emails, blogs, social web sites and others interrupt, diverting our attention, time, energy and money from really important issues. Lack of confidence in the political process is not assisting.

What can I do?

Helplessness may prevail. What can I do? Nothing. It's too big an issue. Someone else can do it. It doesn't affect me. Other things are more important. I care, I really do, but later. Not today.

But there is something that can be done, and if done properly will over time have a powerful effect. It's this.

Without unduly pushing an issue, at every opportunity very gently promote conservation values. People who know you as a reasonable person as a neighbour, at work, at the tennis club, or on the school council will most probably not dismiss your conservation views if they're moderate and factual.

Another place is online forums unrelated to conservation. I'm involved in several. Someone started a discussion about Queensland, which morphed into the Great Barrier Reef. I posted advice about acidity, turbidity, sea temperature and the major economic impact if the reef goes. Another thread discussed flooding, so I raised the impact of alpine cattle grazing on the quality, quantity and timing of water.

By no means am I expert at these or indeed any conservation topics, but I know enough to comment accurately in lay terms.

To repeat, information must be accurate and moderate. Often it's best to write and put it aside for 24 hours, a practice I followed when writing this article.

Low-key actions

You can lead by example. Major issues are often characterised by drama: boats harassing whalers in the Southern Ocean, a squatter 30 metres up a tree in a logging coupe, fences pushed down by an angry mob. But less dramatic actions happen daily.

It's cold: put on a sweater and use draft stoppers. Turn off lights if the room is not in use. Save petrol by driving steadily or not at all. Limit packaging. Use solar and wind power to dry clothes. (It's called a clothes line.)

These types of actions save money, and if done all the time will change the attitudes of those around you, disposing more people to conservation views. Surveys will then pick up the new attitudes, and our legislators will eventually follow. The media will see the trend, and give more and more sympathetic coverage.

This is a long-term strategy. It was done with seat belts, skin cancer, AIDS (now sadly increasing as complacency sets in), alcohol and other issues. It can be done with conservation. It can be done.

Actions can be at a number of levels: individual, family, street, suburb, council or shire, state or territory, national and international. One person can start something, and it can spread. Ian Kiernan started Clean Up Australia in 1989 with just him; now it's international, 35 million people in 80 countries.

Volunteering

Volunteering is another way of being involved, local or further afield. Clean Up Australia happens in many suburbs, as do tree plantings.

You can head to more distant places to plant trees, like Project Hindmarsh where over two million trees and shrubs have been planted. Grow West is up to a million. Tree planting days and weekends are fun, with a very real sense of camaraderie and achievement. Ages range from toddlers to over 80. Wow!

Children

As well as purely ecological reasons, our actions are for younger people. Today's children will bear the brunt of problems that legislators and others foist on them in the misguided pursuit of questionable short-term goals that place burdens on the future, often based on a grossly flawed ideology that benefits few at the expense of many.



PHOTO COURTESY CLEAN UP AUSTRALIA

Inspiring: Ian Kiernan started Clean Up Australia in 1989 – now 35 million people are involved.

It would be interesting to see how history judges those growing richer while many become poorer. Harshly, I think.

Conservation and economics

The link must be made between conservation and economics. Too many of our decisions are based solely on short-term economics, without consideration of long-term impacts or conservation aspects.

Land for houses seems to be needed, so the government extends the metropolitan boundary, putting farms and rare grasslands under bitumen and bricks. Lack of political certainty is denying us viable wind turbine and solar power industries. Coal continues to be used. Rapacious commercial practises destroy environments, limiting the future.

My email tag line is 'Conservation is good economics', and I've had that for over ten years. Without sustainable living, biodiversity, a few centimetres of nutrients in soil, potable water, clean air, and seas with sustainable fishing, our future is greatly compromised.

So what's stopping you? • PW



A new lease of light

GEOFF DURHAM REINTRODUCES US TO CROAJINGOLONG NATIONAL PARK AND OFFERS A VALUABLE GUIDE TO VISITING AND STAYING AT VICTORIA'S LIGHTHOUSES, MANY OF WHICH ARE IN PARKS.

Getting away from it all

In November last year I renewed my acquaintance with Croajingolong National Park when staying two nights at the Point Hicks Lightstation.

From Cann River it is a 40 km drive on a bitumen and then gravel road through State Forest and the National Park to the spectacularly located Thurra campground on the coast, and a further 4 km to the lighthouse. Along the way we drove through forest and, on a ridge, a heathland of colourful wildflowers.

Thurra campground has a day visitor area and 48 secluded sites, some of them next to the Thurra River and some with fireplaces. It is a little confusing; a sign says 'gas fires only', but wood can be purchased at the lighthouse. There are pit toilets and the only water is out of the river. The nightly fee for a site is \$18.00.

From near the Thurra campground there is now a good, though narrow, gravel road a few kilometres to the Mueller Inlet campground, but when we called, campsites were flooded because of the height of the inlet entrance bar. There are eight campsites, toilets and a small day

visitor area. Canoes can be hired at the Lighthouse. There is no drinking water.

In my opinion, Croajingolong's Thurra River, Mueller Inlet and Wingan Inlet have the best accessible 'get-away-from-it-all' campgrounds of all Victoria's parks.

Walks long and short

The 100 km Wilderness Coast Walk between Sydenham Inlet and Wonboyn passes through Point Hicks. There are also some excellent shorter walks with beautiful beaches and colourful granite headlands.

From the Thurra campground the 4 km return Dunes Walk passes through banksia and heathland to massive bare dunes above the Thurra River, and from the lighthouse there is a short walk to a lookout above 1937 metal wreckage from the Siros.

A good one hour circuit walk is along Beach Track to West Beach, with shell middens from the Krautungulung of the Kurnai tribe, then along the coast trail to the remains of the lightstation jetty and back along Sledge Track.

And from a car park 6 km north of Thurra campground at the end of Mt Everard Track it is 1.5 km return to

the granite-slab top of Mt Everard for spectacular 360° views.

It is 2.2 km from the Lighthouse Reserve gate to the lightstation. The road is open to cyclists and walkers. At the lightstation we stayed in one of two units in the timber (not stone) Assistant Lighthouse Keepers' house. There is also a bungalow for two (with exterior facilities). You supply your own bedding and food. The hire fee includes access to the lighthouse.

The Lighthouse Keeper's house is occupied by the manager, who also manages the Thurra and Mueller campgrounds.

History and heritage

Captain James Cook named Point Hicks after Lieutenant Zachary Hicks of the Endeavour, who first sighted the Australian mainland on 20 April 1770. In 1843 it was named Cape Everard by Captain Fitzroy of the Beagle, but renamed Point Hicks on the creation of the 2,750 ha Captain James Cook National Park in 1970 on the bicentenary of the first sighting. This park became part of Croajingolong National Park on its declaration in 1979 to commemorate the centenary of the declaration of Australia's first national park, Royal National Park near Sydney.



Point Hicks Beach.



Whale watching from verandah of the Assistant Lighthouse Keeper's house, Point Hicks.

PHOTOS: GEOFF DURHAM

The lighthouse was opened 1890. It is 39.7 m high of concrete construction. In the 19th and 20th centuries before satellite navigation, countless lives were saved by Victoria's lighthouses. They are of great historical significance and most are located on pristine coastlines. Solidly built, they nevertheless require maintenance,

and their use for tourism helps ensure their preservation.

Off the point is Point Hicks Marine National Park. Whales and dolphins are frequently sighted.

We were accompanied on our November stay by much-travelled friends making their first visit to

Point Hicks. I asked one of them for her impressions: *'A sweep of pristine beach with not a footprint to be seen is what I will remember – a seal close to the rocks at the base of the lighthouse and a lyrebird near the bridge at the edge of the campground.'*

A visit to Croajingolong is always rewarding. • PW

Lightstation accommodation in Victoria

From west to east the main Victorian lighthouses offering tours and accommodation are:

CAPE NELSON – Lighthouse Reserve. Privately managed, not part of Cape Nelson State Park. Accommodation in two fully self-contained Keepers' Cottages. Bookings essential: phone 5523 5119, email lightouseluxury@active8.nit.au Website: www.capenelsonlighthouse.com.au

Lighthouse tours daily at 11.00 am and 2.00 pm or by appointment; adult \$15.00, child \$10.00.

The Cafe Isabelle in the former stables serves lunch and morning and afternoon teas daily.

CAPE OTWAY – in Great Otway NP. Privately managed.

B&B accommodation in two double studios, also Head Keeper's house and Manager's House that will accommodate up to 16 people. Bookings essential. Phone 5237 9240, email: moreinfo@lightstation.com Website: www.lightstation.com

Self-guided tour of precinct including lighthouse: adult \$18.50, child \$7.50, family \$46.50. Café.

AIREYS INLET – Split Point Lighthouse Reserve. Privately managed.

Accommodation in privately owned Lighthouse Keepers' Cottage. Three bedrooms; sleeps six. Adjoining two-bedroom sleeps four. Bookings 0405 554 036.

Lighthouse tours daily on the hour: adult \$12.00, child \$7.00. Bookings: phone 1800 174 045 or email tours@splitpointlighthouse.com.au

Lighthouse Stables and Tea Rooms – Cafe 5289 6830

CAPE SCHANCK – Lighthouse Reserve. Privately managed, not part of Mornington Peninsula NP. Accommodation in two assistant keepers' cottages which can each sleep up to nine people. Also an inspector's cottage suitable for a couple. Bookings essential: phone 5988 6184 or 1300 885 259, email lamp@austpacinns.com.au Website: www.austpacinns.com.au

Lighthouse tours: adult \$16.50, child \$10.50.

WILSONS PROMONTORY – in Wilsons Promontory NP and managed by Parks Victoria.

Accommodation in three cottages; lighthouse tour included. Hike permit

required. Bookings essential: phone 13 1963. Website: www.parkweb.vic.gov.au

POINT HICKS – Point Hicks Lighthouse Reserve. Privately managed, not part of Croajingolong NP. Accommodation in two Assistant Keeper's cottages for 2–7 nights. Each cottage can sleep up to 10 people. Also a bungalow suitable for a couple.

Bookings essential: phone 5156 0432, email bookings@gippslandlakesescapes.com.au Website: www.gippslandlakesescapes.com.au

Lighthouse tours: \$20.00 per family on Fri/Sat/Sun/Mon at 1.00pm; Easter daily.

GABO ISLAND – Gabo Island Lighthouse Reserve. Managed by Parks Victoria but not part of Croajingolong NP. Accommodation available in one of the Assistant Keepers' cottages. Bookings essential: phone 5161 9500.

Access (subject to weather): Mallacoota Boat Charters - \$600.00 return (max. six), phone 0437 221 694, or Merimbula Air Services, phone (02) 6495 1074.

Lighthouse tours: adult \$13.00, child \$7.90, family \$28.20. Bookings essential, phone 5156 0432.



What on earth...?

MOST PEOPLE NEVER GET TO SEE A MALLEEFOWL IN THEIR WHOLE LIVES. YET IN RECENT MONTHS THERE HAVE BEEN SIGHTINGS OF QUITE LARGE NUMBERS OF THE BIRDS ALONG SOME MALLEE ROADSIDES.

Is this photo for real, or some sort of hoax? Have Photoshoppers been at work?

No, it's a real photo, taken recently by Colleen Barnes, who works at the Trust for Nature's property at Ned's Corner in far north-west Victoria, and published in the *Weekly Times* of 13 February.

It shows about 20 Malleefowl along a roadside near Patchewollock, apparently feeding on canola seeds that fell from a passing truck during the harvest.

But you thought Malleefowl were endangered? Well, they are, though the photo is certainly encouraging evidence of a successful breeding season. But it also shows how important it is to find out the whole story before jumping to conclusions.

Ross Macfarlane, Secretary of the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group Inc, sent the following notes about the work and findings of the Group, with particular reference to the photo:

"Each year our volunteers visit over 1200 known Malleefowl mounds in parks and reserves across the Victorian Mallee and Wimmera, and record whether or not the mounds are being used as active breeding sites.

We also collect data on the trends of potential competitors and predators, especially foxes, and collect hundreds of fox scats (droppings) each year, giving Parks Victoria a measure of the presence and diet of foxes in the reserves.

What this data shows is that:

- after long-term declines during the 10-year drought, Malleefowl breeding activity has rebounded over the past three seasons
- despite a generally dry winter, the 2012-13 breeding season has been one of the most successful yet seen, and certainly the highest since the mid 1990s
- localities where the greatest amount of fox scat is collected tend to be



in the smaller reserves such as Wandown, Wathe and Bronzewing flora and fauna reserves, which are also where the highest Malleefowl breeding densities occur. This is a long-term trend and seems to be simply because these areas are prime Malleefowl country.

Despite these encouraging signs [and the remarkable concentration of Malleefowl in Colleen's photo], we do not believe there is room for complacency about the long-term future for Malleefowl.

They are threatened by land clearing,

Bottom left and right: Malleefowl expert Dr Joe Benshemesh is happy that local communities are active in protecting and promoting Malleefowl, with warning signs and the Big Malleefowl at Patchewollock.

habitat loss and fragmentation, exacerbated by inappropriate fire regimes and the impact of climate change.”

We'd still like to know how the birds 'discovered' the canola seed, whether (and how) they communicated the discovery to other birds, and how far they travelled to reach this roadside.

Malleefowl expert Dr Joe Benshemesh may answer these and other questions in an article on Malleefowl in a future *Park Watch*.

For more information about the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group see www.malleefowlvictoria.org.au • PW



PHOTO: JOE BENSHEMESH

Vale Ann Stokie

We are saddened to pass on a report from Ross Macfarlane that Ann, the much loved and esteemed past Secretary and Life Member of the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group, passed away on 17 February this year.

Ann had been unwell for some time and had been receiving medical treatment since December, but she was not able to recover her strength, and died peacefully with her family present.

But while Ann's physical strength waned, her mind, and her spirit, never did. Her passing is a huge loss to the Group, as it is to her husband Peter and his family.



A celebration of Ann's life was held on 23 February at Cobbin Farm, Grovedale. The VNPA extends sincere sympathy to Peter and family, and other members of the Group. • PW

Vale Beverley Broadbent 1929-2013

We also extend our sympathies to the family and friends of Beverley Broadbent, who died on 12 February.

A VNPA member since 1985, Beverley was an active fundraiser for the Association in the 1990s.

• PW

Vale Arthur Thies 1918-2013

We are also saddened to record the passing of long-time VNPA member and bushwalk leader Arthur Wolfgang Thies, aged 94, on 20 February.

German-born and an engineer by profession, Arthur developed a keen interest in and wide knowledge of Victorian mosses. He reorganised the Herbarium's moss collection and had a moss species named after him.

But it is as an outstanding bushwalking leader that he will long be remembered in VNPA circles.

A Celebration of his life was held in the Old Observatory Building at the Royal Botanic Gardens on 25 February. The words in the accompanying program are memorable: *“That man is a success who has lived well ... who has never lacked*

appreciation of earth's beauty or failed to express it ...”

We extend our sincere sympathy to Arthur's wife Wally and their family, and hope to publish a detailed obituary in a later *Park Watch*. • PW



PHOTO BY LEON COSTERMANS

Checking out the Chathams



WATERCOLOUR BY ROB YOUL

LANDCARE LEGEND AND VNPA MEMBER **ROB YOUL**, A REGULAR VISITOR AT VNPA GROW WEST AND HINDMARSH PLANTINGS, VISITED NZ'S CHATHAM ISLANDS LAST YEAR. HE REPORTS IN WORDS AND PICTURES.

Waitangi West Station
Road, Chatham Island.

A 60-year-old prop-driven Convair 580 flies between the Chatham Islands and 'New Zealand'—as the 600-700 islanders refer to the mainland. Of the ten islands, only Chatham and Pitt are now inhabited, respectively covering 900 and 62 square km.

Chatham Island is rolling, with peat bogs, grassy bracken-covered moors and small prominent volcanic hills, and along the coasts numerous lagoons (Te Whanga covers 180 sq. km), beaches and dunes, with cliffs mostly in the south.

More rugged Pitt Island, one-third reserved and with just 40 residents, includes dissected tableland and cliffy shoreline.

The highest point, a plateau on Chatham, reaches 299 metres. Other islands – offshore islets, skerries, reefs and rock stacks, all restricted to scientists – cover four sq km.

The islands emerged four million years

ago, the only above-sea-level part of the Chatham Rise, a large, slightly submerged tectonic plate system east of South Island.

The basement geology resembles older South Island strata, with volcanic activity, limestone and sand deposition, erosion and soil and peat formation since the Pliocene producing today's landscapes.

A windy maritime climate guarantees an 800-900 mm annual rainfall. The economy depends on livestock production and fishing for crayfish, blue cod and black abalone, which abound. Its meatworks closed, all stock go live to Timaru or Napier, a three-day voyage, which obviously reduces condition. Tourism grows slowly.

A moving history

The human story is moving. Maori canoes apparently sailed from the north and south islands to the Chathams after

the initial Polynesian colonisation—perhaps around 1500 AD. These people called themselves Moriori, and their islands Rekohu.

Unable to grow kumera and other staples, the settlers relied on hunting, gathering and fishing, and their culture and language subsequently diverged from those of mainland tribes. The population reached maybe 2000.

After chief Nunuku banned warfare, Moriori settled disputes by negotiation, or man-to-man, yielding when blood flowed.

Captain William Broughton's 1791 Vancouver expedition, which included HMS *Chatham*, first sighted and claimed Rekohu and commemorated First Lord of the Admiralty John Pitt, second Earl of Chatham. Sealers and whalers arrived, operating there until around 1860 and introducing diseases that killed a fifth of the Moriori.



South-east Island near Glory Bay, Pitt Island.



Statue of last full-blood Moriori Tommy Solomon, Chatham Island.

PHOTOS: ROB YOU'IL

A greater tragedy happened in late 1835. Two Maori tribes displaced from Taranaki learned in Wellington about the Chathams community from a whaler, gathered 900 armed men, commandeered two ships, sailed south-east, landed and massacred 300 Moriori, cannibalising the dead and enslaving survivors. The Moriori adhered to Nunuku's law.

Afterwards, the Maori overlords forbade Moriori to marry Moriori, or to have children with each other. Remaining as slaves, many died despairingly until NZ law brought some emancipation in the 1860s.

Some women had children by their Maori masters; a number eventually married Maori or European men; others were taken away, never to return.

The last person whose mother tongue was Moriori died in the 1900s, and the last full-blood Moriori, prominent farmer Tommy Solomon, in 1933—his grandson, Maui Solomon, is CEO of Hokotehi Moriori Trust, with its beautiful, atmospheric marae (cultural and community centre). In the 2006 NZ census, 945 indicated Moriori ancestry.

Flora and fauna

Since the Pliocene uplift and exposure, the indigenous vegetation and terrestrial fauna have evolved from what drifted, flew, blew or swam there from neighbouring land masses. No podocarps, beeches, kowhai, moas, kiwis or cabbage-trees made it, but NZ flax and nikau palm arrived and adapted, as did lancewood, ribbonwood and matipo.

The most common endemic tree, reaching 20 metres in pockets, is the daisy *Olearia traversiorum*, Akeake, whose predecessor's seed, like daisies generally, was readily wind-transported. Iconic wildflowers are Chathams forget-me-not and sow thistle.

Zoologically, no frogs occur (two Australian species arrived recently) and just one skink. Several endemic land bird species clearly evolved from mainland counterparts: the Chathams pigeon (Parea) is similar to but bigger than the Kereru. I saw Chathams tomtits, fantails, warblers, tuis and oystercatchers and Forbes parakeets on Pitt. Endemic snipe inhabit offshore islands.

Thanks to the Kiwi talent for rescuing species from the brink:

- Ranguru or Chathams petrel, formerly perilously confined to Rangatira Island, are now re-established on Pitt and Chatham
- fifteen Taiko pairs (another petrel deemed extinct but rediscovered in 1978) breed on Chatham
- in 1980, only five black robins (a *Petroica*—Australasian robin) remained, with just one reproductive pair; today 200 inhabit pest-free Rangatira and Mangere Islands.

Extinctions and exotics

The broad picture remains sad. Chatham extinctions since 1800 include a rail, bellbird, fernbird and penguin. Fossil records indicate greater diversity loss during the Polynesian era. The introduced Weka, now rare in NZ, is common on Chatham and a game-bird.

Besides human predation, rats, mice, possums, hedgehogs, cats and dogs have consumed innumerable indigenous animals and their food supplies. Feral cattle, sheep (including Pitt's wild Saxon merinos), goats, pigs, horses and possums have also helped fragment the complex indigenous vegetation cover. They're now controlled in most conservation reserves.

Visiting Pitt—the essential Chathams experience—I went by fast fishing boat, a 50-minute voyage. Light aircraft also make the 20 km trip.

Pitt Island native Bernie Mallinson and husband Brent, of Flowerpot Bay Lodge, drove our group around their beautiful homeland, kept us informed and served tender local lamb, field mushrooms, paua-burgers, coleslaw, blue-cod mornay and potatoes.

My highlights were the Preece Reserve and the marvellous coast. Returning home we caught blue cod, sometimes two at once, as Buller's Mollymawks swam and wheeled around us. • PW

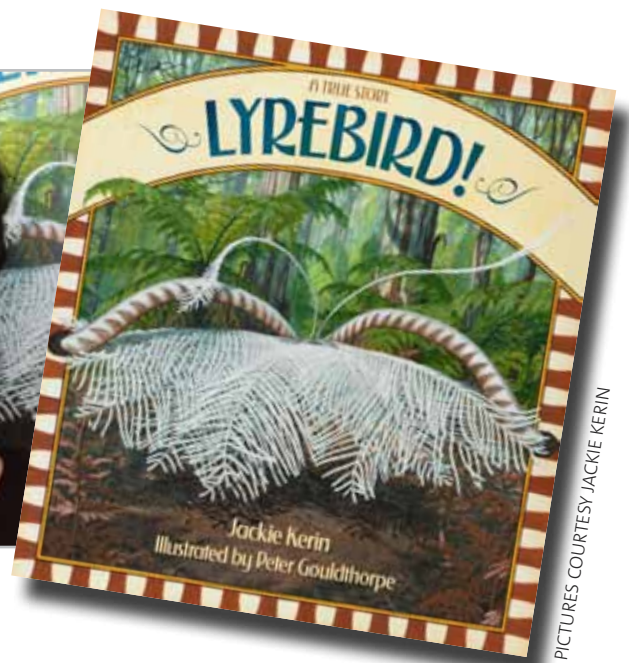
See: Miskelly, Colin (ed) *Chatham Islands: Heritage and conservation*. (DOC/Canterbury University Press: Christchurch), 2008.

Chatham Islands

- Part of NZ—own time-zone, 45 minutes ahead
- Some 800 km (150 minutes) east of Christchurch
- Department of Conservation reserves 7130 ha; private reserves 3000 ha

The story of Lyrebird!

JACKIE KERIN (PICTURED) IS THE AUTHOR OF THE NEW CHILDREN'S BOOK REVIEWED ON THE OPPOSITE PAGE. SHE KINDLY AGREED TO TELL THE STORY BEHIND THE BOOK FOR PARK WATCH. FIND OUT MORE ABOUT HER WORK AT WWW.JACKIEKERIN.COM.AU



PICTURES COURTESY JACKIE KERIN

I work as a storyteller. Now that's a word that is used to mean a lot of things, but I use it to refer to the tradition of oral storytelling.

I spend much of the year visiting schools, kindergartens, festivals and museums telling stories, and I'm always on the hunt for new tales.

In 2008, I stumbled on a small book titled *The Lore of the Lyrebird* by Ambrose Pratt, published in 1933. In this slender volume, the author described a touching relationship between an elderly woman (a flower farmer) and a young lyrebird who went on to become one of the first of his kind to be filmed and recorded in display.

My storyteller's antennae quivered with recognition of a story that needed dusting off and bringing back into the light. Set on the slope of Mt Dandenong, Mr Pratt revealed that he first broke the news of Mrs Edith Wilkinson and her avian companion (she called him 'James') in *The Age* of 13 February 1932.

I soon made a trip to the State Library of Victoria and trawled through the newspaper archives. There was no turning back. With *The Lore of the Lyrebird* and now the newspaper article, *A Miracle of the Dandenongs*, I began shaping the story.

From the moment I began the work, I was entranced by the beauty and subtle possibility of the tale. I absorbed Ambrose and Edith's wonder and passion for the birds and their environment.

I have a vast repertoire of traditional folk stories that I tell, but nothing

stills a room like a true story. With this thought and my desire to awaken curiosity in young minds, I began work on *Lyrebird!*

And of course, all the time, I was immersing myself in images and footage of the most spectacularly beautiful and wondrous animal!

As I peeled away the layers I realised the story provided a large frame for evoking the past. The language and manners of a bygone era were important, as were a charming industry (cut flower and foliage farms were once common on the mountain) and the environmental impact of roads and introduced species.

Above all, there was a way of using the story to celebrate something about lyrebirds and some of the other bird species of Mt Dandenong.

The tale of Lyrebird James, Edith Wilkinson and Mr Pratt came together neat as a jigsaw puzzle. I resisted all suggestions to fiddle with the facts and turn Edith into a child (the theory being that children like to read about children) and there is not a hint of anthropomorphism.

When a child asks: "Is this a true story?" the answer is "Yes".

Having completed the text, the search for an illustrator began. All paths led to Peter Gouldthorpe. Peter is multitalented by any measure – an illustrator, landscape artist, mural painter – but what I find most remarkable about his work is his ability to paint truthfully but with such warmth.

His paintings of Lyrebird James are

totally accurate but succeed in conjuring a bird with personality. Peter has also hidden sixteen other species of birds in the illustrations, as well as creating a reference chart for the back of the book. Exploring *Lyrebird! A true story* may well be the first 'twitching' experience for some children.

When eighty years ago Ambrose Pratt wrote *The Lore of Lyrebird*, he made an 'Appeal' on the last page. He believed that the lyrebird was threatened with extinction and urged children to take responsibility and band together to protect the its environment and to regard killing, trapping or egg stealing 'as a horrid crime'.

He said that "... the human generation that is passing ... deserves much blame" and that it "... would, if possible, atone."

Thankfully, the lyrebird is no longer a threatened species, although it is vulnerable to cats and foxes (and cars). That said, I find myself responding to the idea behind Mr Pratt's Appeal – the idea that young people do have a voice and can exert pressure for change.

Unpolluted by the idea of economic growth at any cost, or the need to flatter power, children often possess a clarity of vision that is worth heeding. But if we want our young to have opinions about the environment, and the language and confidence to speak up, we must clear away the obstacles to knowledge and feed their curiosity.

So now my book is out there, and I hope it will enrich young imaginations and inspire people to engage more fully with our unique and spectacularly beautiful environment and wildlife. • PW

BOOK REVIEWS

Lyrebird! A true story

By Jackie Kerin

Illustrated by Peter Gouldthorpe. *Museum Victoria*, 2012. 32 pages. RRP \$16.95.
VNPA special member offer: \$12.50 plus \$3.00 postage.

This delightful children's book is a winner on many levels.

It has strong natural history and conservation messages, and highlights admirable aspects of Australia's heritage. And it is beautifully illustrated with evocative pictures that draw the reader in and reward careful study with hidden details.

The story of James the lyrebird and

his human friend Edith is based on an article in *The Age* in February 1932 called 'A Miracle of the Dandenongs'.

James was the first lyrebird whose song was broadcast on the radio, and one of the first to be filmed and photographed while displaying.

The story of James helps explain why the lyrebird has become such an iconic species in Victoria, and nicely

introduces the history and landscape of the Dandenongs, and Victorian rural life in the 1930s.

Lyrebird! would be an excellent present for any child, and I hope it will be widely used in primary schools to introduce and promote Australia's natural heritage and our responsibility to protect it. • PW

Michael Howes

After the Future – Australia's new extinction crisis

By Tim Flannery

Quarterly Essay, issue 48, Dec. 2012.

Australian governments are failing in one of their most fundamental obligations to future generations: the conservation of our natural heritage, says Tim Flannery.

He writes of Australia's abject failure to protect our endangered species, with more and more facing extinction and "next to nothing effective... being done to halt their slide into oblivion".

It should be of enormous concern that 15 frogs, 16 reptiles, 44 birds, 35 mammals and 531 plants are on Australia's national endangered species lists.

Flannery documents the backward slide of governments' commitment. For instance, in 2006 the federal government "excused itself from the obligation to draft plans for species listed as vulnerable to extinction". State governments get a roasting for a denigration of science and for being influenced by small pressure groups.

So what's to be done, and can we afford it? In the Kimberley, avoiding the extinction of 45 mammal, bird and reptile species is estimated to be just \$40 million per year. Pocket change for the mining industry.

Flannery writes of northern Australia and the need to bring back indigenous fire regimes and deal with invasives. He is on the board of the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, and writes of their management of three million hectares

for just \$12 million per year and the restoration of many threatened species.

He thinks there should be legislation for zero tolerance to extinctions, and a Biodiversity Authority, independent of government, well-funded, with a clear mandate to invest in programs to prevent extinctions.

While the essay seems to jump around and is depressing, it is very thought-provoking. We can still save these species and in today's terms it is NOT much money.

What does it mean for VNPA, and for me as a lover of our Australian species? Should we be changing our focus to species and building our campaigns around them? • PW

Karen Alexander

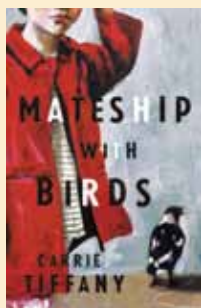
Mateship with Birds

By Carrie Tiffany

Pan Macmillan 2012.
Paperback,
RRP \$19.99.

It's vivid, full of detail and you can feel the atmosphere of country Australia in the 1950s – the dust, the slowness of daily life, and the connections to the soil, plants and animals.

Especially the animals, including Harry's cows, a ewe about to be killed, heifers



being inseminated. And his family of kookaburras: Mum, Dad, Club-toe and Tiny.

The kookaburras are Harry's daily soap opera written up in an old milk ledger where he records the details.

'Art starts with noticing things,' says Carrie Tiffany, and she is certainly an acute observer, not only of characters but of nature and life on a farm and in small towns.

Harry's a dairy farmer, lonely, and so is his neighbour, hard-working single mum Betty with two kids. She's pleased when her son Michael develops a friendship with Harry.

Harry decides to teach teenager Michael what he wishes he'd known before he married his now departed wife. But Betty's not pleased when she discovers what's been going on.

This is Tiffany's second novel after the engaging *Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living*.

The title is taken from the 1922 book by Alec Chisholm (1890-1977), which also has vivid stories of curious bird happenings and their intriguing relationships with humans, and which has just been republished by Scribe (RRP \$24.95). • PW

Karen Alexander



PHOTOS COURTESY DANIELLE BAIN

Muddy Boots and Sandy Hands

We know that many kids today have little or no contact with nature.

We also know that the more time children spend in nature, the happier, healthier and smarter they will be.

Set up by Danielle Bain and other passionate parents in the Geelong area, 'Muddy Boots and Sandy Hands' is an initiative that aims to combat 'Nature Deficit Disorder' by reconnecting

children and families with nature and the outdoors.

They plan and run free activities in natural areas that are purposefully informal but quite social.

Children are encouraged to engage in unstructured nature play, with activities ranging from identifying marine life in rockpools to walking at the You Yangs – which is their next activity, on **Saturday 13 April**.

For more information, visit www.mbsb.org.au

Of course, some of the VNPA's own bushwalks and other activities, such as those led by David Elias, are suitable for children and families. Check your BWAG Program or monthly emails for coming events. • PW

Fungi
of the Wombat Forest
and Macedon Ranges

Wombat Forestcare
Community caring for Nature

Fungi of the Wombat Forest and Macedon Ranges

The Central Highlands of Victoria are recognised as a 'hot spot' for fungi.

In celebration of this fungal diversity, Wombat Forestcare has produced a fold-out 'quick guide' to 108 of the more commonly encountered fungi of the Wombat Forest and Macedon Ranges.

The guide will be launched on Thursday 18 April 2013 with an interactive seminar on the diversity and conservation of fungi by ecologist Alison Pouliot. Entry is by gold coin donation (bookings essential – email info@wombatforestcare.org.au) and refreshments will be provided.

Alison is also contributing an article on fungi, with some of her outstanding photographs, to June *Park Watch*.



Photographic Competition

Wombat Forestcare is also hosting a photographic exhibition to showcase the forest's amazing biodiversity. The exhibition will be launched from 6-8pm on Friday 26 April.

Further details at www.wombatforestcare.org.au

Family pet kills endangered bird

THIS STORY COMES FROM BIRDLIFE AUSTRALIA. THE VNPA HAS MADE A SUBMISSION TO PARKS VICTORIA CALLING FOR NO DOGS TO BE ALLOWED ON THE SURF BEACHES WITHIN MORNINGTON PENINSULA NATIONAL PARK. CURRENT COMPROMISE ARRANGEMENTS FOR DOGS WITHIN THE PARK ARE CLEARLY NOT WORKING.

Late last year an off-leash Labrador maimed and killed a four-week-old Hooded Plover chick on a Mornington Peninsula beach in full view of a boy whose family had been closely monitoring the birds over the past two months.

Local Portsea residents were devastated by the loss of this chick, which was only days away from being old enough to fly.

“If it had just survived another week it would have been the first chick in the state to successfully ‘fledge’ this season and would add to the incredibly low population of Hooded Plovers in Australia,” explained Dr Grainne Maguire, manager of the Beach-nesting Birds program at BirdLife Australia.

“One chick may not sound like much, but to this endangered species it can mean the difference between survival and extinction.”

This incident should not have happened, because there was ample signage to indicate the presence of a flightless endangered chick on the beach.

And most locals, including local environmental activist and VNPA member Kate Baillieu, had been keenly watching it grow and keeping their distance.

The plover family had spent 30 days incubating their nest and four weeks protecting their chick on the busy bayside beach, thanks to the help of local volunteers like Kate.

“It’s terribly sad that this precious little bird was wantonly killed by someone’s pet dog,” she said.

“I don’t blame the Labrador, they’re bred to chase and retrieve birds. But I’m really upset about the owner, who ignored our signs asking people to keep their dogs on the leash and by the water’s edge for just a few more days ... until the chick was fully fledged.”

“Dogs kill chicks on our beaches all too frequently, unfortunately,” said Dr. Maguire.

“We don’t always see it as graphically as this, but there’s no doubt it happens. It’s not the dogs’ fault – they’re just following their natural instincts. But owners need to be responsible.

“It doesn’t matter how well trained a dog is, chasing things is in their blood and it’s up to owners to do the responsible thing.”

At a beach where locals and Friends of the Hooded Plover had joined together to help these birds, it was a sad but timely example of the impacts of off-leash dogs on the breeding success of this endangered species.

All the efforts put into helping improve chick survival have proved futile in the face of persistent non-compliance with the law and the signs requiring dogs to

be leashed in the adjacent Mornington Peninsula National Park.

Dog access to the national park is being reviewed. It has the second-highest density of Hooded Plovers in Australia and is invaluable to the species’ survival. But it also has the poorest chick survival record of any area in Victoria.

Dogs are officially not permitted off-leash in the park at any time, but Parks Victoria and BirdLife Australia have records indicating that over 78% of dogs are seen off-leash in the park.

Dr Maguire says that this cannot continue. “We cannot improve things if dog owners continue to deny these birds a place to safely raise their chicks. Every effort has been made to improve leashing compliance, but to no avail,” she said.

The question remains: how many more chicks need to die before the impact of off-leash dogs is taken seriously? • PW

For more information about Hooded Plovers, contact the Friends of the Hooded Plover at hploversmornpen@gmail.com, or see www.myhoodie.com.au

This article first appeared in the *Southern Peninsula News*, 13 December 2012. Acknowledgements to Keith Platt.



Hooded Plover sign on beach; (inset) remains of plover chick killed by dog.

PHOTOS: GLENN EHMKE

In memory of Jenny Barnett

VNPA staff member Jenny Barnett and her husband John died at Steeles Creek in the Black Saturday fires, just over four years ago.

In September last year we received the following email from Carrie Deutsch, former team leader of the Victoria Naturally Alliance.

In 2008, and again just before she died, that extraordinary conservationist Jenny gave me a handful of greenhood orchid bulbs.

I wrote on the memorial VNPA website that I would tend to her orchids with care in her memory. And you quoted this in a Park Watch article about Jenny.

It is quite a bit of effort, as they require some care (she provided two pages of instructions of course).



Thriving greenhoods in Carrie Deutsch's garden.

In any case, they have done well (see attached photo).

I put a note with a photo on Facebook, and got a lot of responses, one being I should send it to the bushfires recovery people for their newsletter.

It is lovely to have her memory blooming so stunningly in our garden.

*Best regards,
Carrie*

'Biodiversity across the Borders' conference, Friday 7 June 2013

You are warmly invited to this one-day conference, the fifth to be held.

With the theme 'Enhancing ecosystem management and restoration', the conference aims to communicate new ecological research to people interested in environmental management.

The conference will be held at the Mt. Helen campus of the University of Ballarat. There is no registration fee for attending.

For more information contact Dr S.K. Florentine, s.florentine@ballarat.edu.au. A full program will be available soon.

PHOTO: CARRIE DEUTSCH

Committed people wanted!

Are you a keen walker passionate about introducing people to our natural and human heritage? Do you love helping people discover new places?

If so, would you like to take up a rewarding role as a volunteer VNPA Walk, Talk and Gawk (WT&G) Leader or Facilitator?

Find out what's involved at a special two-hour Information Session at 6.30pm on Thursday 4 April.

Meet in the car park behind the Junction Oval, St Kilda – Melway map 2P B2.

For more information, contact Julie Hunt on 9568 7515 or email hunt.jm@bigpond.com

BWAG Trivia Night a winner

Congratulations to the Bushwalking and Activities Group, especially Sue Catterall, for organising the Trivia Night on 21 February.

It went very well – about 30 people attended, and everyone went home with something as lots of prizes had been donated!

The event raised an impressive \$895, for which the VNPA is most grateful.

BONESEEDING AT ARTHURS SEAT Saturday 6 April

The annual boneseed pull at Cook St spur, Arthurs Seat State Park, is on again.

We're making good progress in controlling boneseed and other weeds in the bushland here. Please come and help!

Bring gardening gloves, lunch, water and nibbles and join the happy weeders!

For details phone Marg Hattersley on 9578 2554 or email marghat@bigpond.com

BWAG Excursions

Sat. 20 April: Coach excursion to Maryborough with walks in and around the historic town.

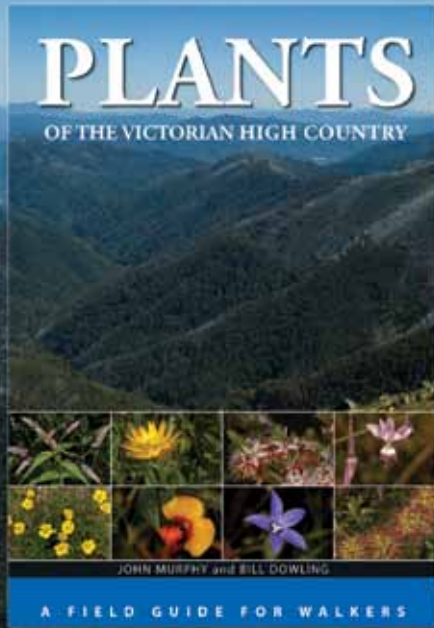
Leader: Glenn King.
Cost: \$40.00.

Sat. 18 May: Coach trip to Macedon with walk at Gisborne, visit to an organic farm, then walks and mushrooming in Macedon's pine forests. Leader: Irina De Loche. Cost: \$40.00.

Sat. 15 June: Excursion to Taradale with walks in and around the historic township, including the magnificent bluestone railway viaduct built in 1862. Leaders: Sue Parkhill and Ruth Stirling. Cost: \$40.00.

Bookings and enquiries:
Larysa Kucan 9347 3733,
Jan Lacey 9329 8187.

This 'field guide for walkers' is available from CSIRO, RRP \$29.95.



CSIRO PUBLISHING
www.publish.csiro.au

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For info: call Jill on (03) 5154 0145, forestsforever@eastgippsland.net.au, or visit www.eastgippsland.net.au



Guided walks on the BIBBULMUN TRACK (WA)



A new Calendar of Events is available from the Bibbulmun Track Foundation. See www.bibbulmuntrack.org.au or phone (08) 9481 0551.

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

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For full details of the 2013 program visit the website or contact Jenny

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