

# PARK WATCH

# HANDS OFF

# OUR PARKS!



**COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENTS IN PARKS**  
COME TO GROW WEST AND HINDMARSH!  
**SUSTAINABLE FIREWOOD GUIDE**  
MANAGING FISHING  
**FUNGI AND BIODIVERSITY**  
CHURCHILL NP  
**ROYAL PARK**

JUNE 2013 NO 253



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

# Features...



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PHOTO: MIKE FELLER



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PHOTO: PHIL HART



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PHOTO: ALISON POULIOT

**Above left:** Evelyn Feller in Banff National Park, Canada. Evelyn says that the trend in the US and Canada is to promote resort development *outside* national parks, not in them.

**Above right:** David Gabriel-Jones says it's the 'stars and silence' of national parks like Wyperfeld that most impress visitors, and that commercial developments in parks raise many vexed issues.

**Left:** Alison Pouliot explains how fungi are vital for soil and plant health. These are Sulphur Tufts (*Hypholoma fasciculare*).





Be part of nature

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

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**FRONT COVER**

Redman Bluff from Mt William (Mt Duwil), Grampians NP.  
Photo: Tom Parkes, 37° south design.

**BACK COVER**

Like many Australian fungi, the attractive red *Cortinarius kula*, generally found growing in leaf litter in wet forests, has no common name. Photo by Alison Pouliot.

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PHOTO COURTESY RUSSELL COSTELLO

# From the President

**The last few months have been challenging for the VNPA, and the support of our volunteers and members is more important than ever.**

A big thank-you to all our volunteers! Your strong support makes the staff's work far more effective.

Please call the office if you have time to help out on a regular basis.

Under our new membership arrangements, people are increasingly taking up the Regular Giving option that includes membership. For as little as \$20 a month, you can combine your membership with a regular donation. All but \$40 a year is tax deductible.

Automated monthly donations give your organisation a more reliable income on which to plan its activities. Please consider this option.

Over the last month, our national parks and native vegetation protection regulations have taken a battering from the State Government. I thank our volunteer Yasmin Kelsall for her incredible efforts in writing our native vegetation submissions and leading our public consultation, in the absence of any from the Department.

The Government's latest move on national parks is the recently introduced legislation to allow an increase in the current 21-year maximum for commercial leases in parks to 99 years in certain circumstances – effectively 'privatising' areas of your parks. Canberra's housing is built on 99-year lease blocks and they are bought and sold just like our private blocks.

The VNPA's policy is to encourage more people to visit our parks within the parks' capacity to handle visitors, and without compromising their ecological values and visual amenity.

There should be appropriate focal points where most visitors go, with unobtrusive facilities that enable them to enjoy and understand the park's values. But we affirm that, in accordance with worldwide best practice, any new developments such as hotels, other major built accommodation and entertainment facilities should be outside park boundaries.

We don't want the natural values and beauty that led to the declaration of a park to be ruined by the creeping advance of hard development for private profit, as has happened along the Gold Coast. 'Just one hotel' at the Prom would only be the start.

And don't be fooled. You're likely to be excluded from these leased areas unless you're part of the 5-star crowd.

On a brighter note, federal Environment Minister Tony Burke has expressed his willingness to confront the various state intentions of exploiting national parks. The Victorian Government wants to graze the Alpine NP, log red gum forests (so-called 'ecological thinning'), allow prospecting in many more parks and build hotels in parks. Other states too want to graze, log and mine their parks.

We've launched a last-ditch push asking Minister Burke to make the protection of national parks and reserves a matter of national environmental significance.

You can help by sending an e-message to the Minister. It's very easy – all it needs is your personal message and your name and contact details. Please give it a go. See [www.vnpa.org.au/eletter/make-national-parks-and-reserves-a-matter-of-national-environmental-significance](http://www.vnpa.org.au/eletter/make-national-parks-and-reserves-a-matter-of-national-environmental-significance)

And if you want to go one better, send a letter to your local federal member or Senator! • PW

**Russell Costello, VNPA President**

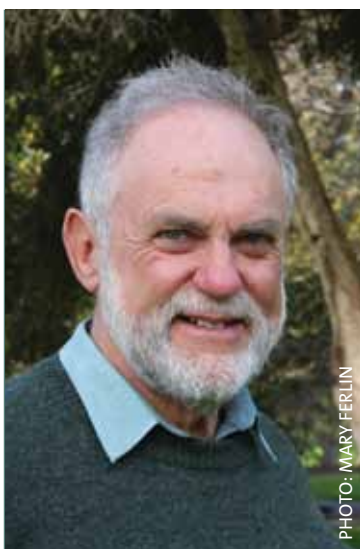


PHOTO: MARY FERLIN

# From the Editor

**In relation to nature in Victoria, 'challenging' is certainly the word for the past few months. But we're heartened by the support from many people in the form of emails, donations, phone calls, letters to the daily media and more.**

And that includes the contributors to this *Park Watch* as well, who have produced informative, interesting and inspiring articles and photos. Many thanks to you all!

As always, feedback and new article ideas are welcome. • PW

**Michael Howes**

## For your diary

**Wednesday 26 June:**

**Sunday 21 July:**

**16-18 August:**

**Tuesday 10 September:**

**Tuesday 8 October:**

BWAG U35 Social Night.

Grow West tree planting, Myrningon.

Project Hindmarsh tree planting, Nhill.

Deadline for VNPA Council nominations.

VNPA and BWAG Annual General Meeting.



PHOTO: MEGAN O'SHEA

Striped Legless Lizard, threatened species of the native grasslands west of Melbourne.

## Last chance to save Melbourne's most threatened species

ENVIRONMENT GROUPS IN MELBOURNE'S GROWTH AREAS HAVE CALLED ON FEDERAL ENVIRONMENT MINISTER TONY BURKE TO APPLY THE FULL FORCE OF NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS TO ENSURE THAT THREATENED SPECIES ARE PROTECTED FROM URBAN SPRAWL. VNPA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR **MATT RUCHEL** REPORTS.

**Urban growth plans released by the Victorian Government in May pave the way for local extinctions of nationally threatened species in the wild unless the federal government intercedes.**

The plans focus too much on clearing that will leave threatened species and habitats open to destruction by urban development.

The 'cash for clearing' offset scheme does not add up for the environment.

The State Government also released a series of reports outlining the impact of proposed urban sprawl on nationally threatened and endangered species within the growth areas, and the measures to be put in place to mitigate these impacts.

The process, known as a Strategic Assessment under the EPBC Act, is one of the first to have been conducted, and could set a dangerous national precedent if it allows environmentally damaging development to proceed.

These reports are part of an approval process under national environmental laws that has been under way since 2009.

Within each of the growth areas are tracts of some of Australia's most threatened vegetation types – grasslands, grassy woodlands and wetlands, each recognised nationally as Critically Endangered.

The plans could lead to local extinctions of such nationally threatened animals as the Growling Grass Frog and Southern Brown Bandicoot.

"Development east of Cranbourne threatens the Southern Brown Bandicoot, potentially leading to its extinction in the area. The bandicoots need adequate areas to move and breed - without these they will be doomed," said David Nicholls of the Westernport Bandicoot Regional Recovery Group.

Nicholas Croggon from the Environment Defenders Office said the office has written to the Australian Government outlining numerous contraventions of the legal process.

"The State Government should not be allowed to thumb its nose at federal laws," he said.

Regional conservation groups highlighted a suite of local instances where the proposal falls short.

"In the northern growth area, we will see almost all of the Merri Creek Catchment under concrete. Our group has planned for Melbourne's growth with corridors for wildlife, but that has all been ignored," said David Redfearn of the Friends of Merri Creek.

"And we are now likely to see the local extinction of one of the healthiest populations of Growling Grass Frog, purely due to bad planning."

Colleen Miller from the Western Melbourne Catchments Network warned that much native grassland will be lost under the plans.

"We'll see large areas of good grasslands cleared because they can't meet the impossible [size] thresholds," she said.

"The headwaters of Skeleton Creek are important for ecological and cultural values but will be carved up because the assessment process has used a philosophy of divide and conquer, where multiple values don't count."

Jacksons Creek EcoNetwork fears the Sunbury area will also suffer.

"Around Sunbury we'll see the town area double, and current plans show huge new roads and bridges cutting right across the Holden Flora and Fauna Reserve, and the important Emu Bottom river flats. This kind of planning is plain irresponsible," said the EcoNetwork's Christina Cheers.

The groups are calling on Minister Burke to use national laws to ensure that:

- important grassland and grassy woodland sites are protected within the urban growth areas, and that networks are planned to protect the ongoing health of these areas
- there is adequate protection for all threatened species, guaranteeing no local extinctions
- all areas of federally-listed wetlands are adequately protected
- all roads and major infrastructure are sited to avoid areas of high conservation value
- the proposed large grassland reserves near the You Yangs protect the most important habitats and are delivered upfront within five years.

The groups welcomed the idea of establishing a separate trust for developer levies, but urged Minister Burke to ensure that this was set in stone. • **PW**





**PHIL INGAMELLS, THE VNPA'S PARK PROTECTION PROJECT OFFICER, EXPLAINS WHY WE MUST VALUE AND PROTECT OUR PARKS.**

**In November next year thousands of people from around the world will descend on Sydney's Olympic Park for the sixth World Parks Congress. This important event, which will highlight the importance of good national park management, is held every ten years by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).**

It was originally arranged for Melbourne, but when the Coalition won power in Victoria it bizarrely surrendered the event to Sydney, possibly to avoid embarrassment as it tried to bring cattle back to our Alpine National Park.

Now, in Sydney, the new NSW government will face international embarrassment as it struggles to defend its program to introduce recreational hunting to national parks.

How did we get to such a situation?

Australia was one of the leading countries in the world in developing the national park idea – the notion that to protect native plants and animals, you have to protect large areas of intact ecosystems. And we shared the notion that it benefits us all to have contact with nature writ large.

Since the early 1970s, when the Bolte Liberal government set up the dispute-resolving Land Conservation Council, Victoria has led the world in trying to protect a viable area of each habitat type as a national park or similarly protected area.

And, though we weren't the first in the world with a marine protected area, we were the first to set up a series of marine parks representing different marine environments along our coastline, small though each one was.

We now have 58 terrestrial and marine national parks in Victoria, around 40 state parks and other areas under similar protection, and a host (about 2,800) of much smaller reserves with varying degrees of protection.

Some national parks, like the Alpine, Grampians, Snowy River and Wyperfeld, are truly grand. Others, such as St Arnaud Range or Mount Richmond, are less well-known, but the areas they protect are just as valuable. And some, like the Prom and Mount Buffalo, have been deeply loved by Victorians for over a hundred years.

Our Victorian parks protect something like 100,000 different terrestrial native

species, most of them invertebrates (insects, spiders and worms) and fungi. If we were to include much smaller (but no less important) life forms like bacteria, and then add marine species, that number would grow far beyond reckoning.

The larger vertebrate animals, the 600 or more backboned birds, bats, frogs, possums etc, live at the top of this amazing conglomeration of life forms, and ultimately depend on it.

It's an extraordinary and irreplaceable natural heritage, a system of great complexity, and it's our job to hang on to it as best we can.

Its almost limitless genetic diversity has the potential now, and in millennia to come, to give us new technologies to fight disease, improve agriculture, develop new industries and a host of other things we might only dream of.

Our natural areas also give us clean water and absorb carbon, and as tourism drawcards they contribute far more to the economy than they cost to manage.

And last, but certainly not least, they promote health and well-being in the community. Indeed having access to nature, and large natural areas, is increasingly seen to be one of the great contributors to a healthy, constructive, mutually co-operative society.

We should seriously be building the skills, knowledge and resources to care for that great heritage, simply because it is there, it's ours, and we could lose it.

*"Simply put, large healthy protected ecosystems are the best tool we have to conserve biodiversity, especially against the backdrop of climate change. We are in the middle of a global extinction crisis, with rates of biodiversity loss up to 1,000 times above pre-human levels. Well managed protected areas are the most robust proven solution to turn the tide of extinction."*

**IUCN Director General Julia Marton-Lefèvre, in November 2012**

# NATIONAL PARKS TOO GOOD TO LOSE

PHOTO: TOM PARKES, 37° SOUTH DESIGN

**Above:** Panorama from Mt William (Mt Duwil), Grampians NP.

**Below:** The tiny plant Fairy Lanterns (*Thismia rodwayi*) requires deep litter and associated fungi to survive. A management burn, planned for long-unburnt land in Kurth Kiln Regional Park near Gembrook, could lead to local extinction of this remarkable rare species.

But instead the Victorian and other state governments, on our behalf, see parks as places to graze cattle, prospect for gold, harvest firewood, entertain sporting shooters and build development projects.

Australia, as far as we can ascertain, is the only country in the world where the national government doesn't control its own national parks. Though the Federal government has responsibility, under international treaty, to protect our prime natural areas, it hasn't given itself the legal authority to actually act on that responsibility.

It would be great if, when park managers arrive from all around the world next year, Australia was able to hold its head high and say that we have given our national parks the protection, and the resourcing, they need. • PW

## You can help!

Write *now* to the Federal Environment Minister, Tony Burke, and ask him to make our national parks truly national, by giving them protection under Federal law.

### Send a message to:

Hon. Tony Burke MP  
Minister for the Environment  
[Tony.Burke.MP@aph.gov.au](mailto:Tony.Burke.MP@aph.gov.au)

### Or at:

PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

## Good fire management

An effective planned burn program would act against the bushfire risk while also ensuring the long-term protection of our plants and animals. The retention of sufficient long-unburnt areas is critical in many habitat types.



PHOTO: KEITH JESSE

## Park benefits

### Genetic diversity

Parks protect a vast array of life forms (living organisms, cells, genes and the related information), the essential raw material for the advancement of biotechnology. The potential applications for human health, environmental, industrial and agricultural purposes are endless.

### Clean water

National Parks give us clean water. The Victorian alps, largely protected by the Alpine, Baw Baw and Mount Buffalo National Parks, deliver some 3,980 gigalitres of water in an average year, worth around \$4 billion to rural and urban Victoria.

### Carbon sequestration

Parks contribute greatly to carbon storage, helping to mitigate climate change impacts.

### Tourism

National parks already contribute far more to regional tourism than they cost in management dollars.

### Health and well-being

National parks contribute greatly to the physical health of Victorians. More importantly perhaps, psychiatrists make it clear that having access to natural areas is important for the mental and spiritual well-being of individuals and the community.

### Knowledge

National parks give students, scientists and the general community irreplaceable opportunities to study nature, including individual species and evolutionary and other natural processes.

### Jobs

Well-managed parks offer a great range of employment opportunities, and contribute to the development of strong regional communities.

See also 'Our national parks must be more than playgrounds or paddocks' in *The Conversation*, 24 May 2013, [www.theconversation.com.au](http://www.theconversation.com.au).



# HANDS OFF OUR PARKS!

On Easter Sunday the Victorian Government released Guidelines for Tourism Investment in National Parks that essentially put a 'for sale' sign on two-thirds of Victoria's national parks estate.

The guidelines, which consist of a number of vague guiding principles, outline an approval process with very weak provisions for community consultation. In fact, they talk only about public *notification*.

Alarming, it's not until the *completion* of a full proposal that a detailed environmental management plan will be required, leaving no opportunity for community comment on that critical aspect.

On 29 May the Government introduced a bill to the Victorian Parliament to allow 99-year commercial leases in national parks. The current maximum for leases is 21 years.

- For details and to help stop this madness, go to [www.handsoff.vnpa.org.au](http://www.handsoff.vnpa.org.au)
- Contact the VNPA for a 'Hands Off!' Action Pack.

The following three *Park Watch* articles all deal with the issue of commercial developments in national parks, focusing on the situations in Canada and the USA, Victoria and Tasmania.

## Resorts in US and Canadian national parks

DEVELOPERS AND THEIR POLITICAL PATRONS SOMETIMES JUSTIFY THEIR ARGUMENTS FOR RESORT DEVELOPMENT IN AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL PARKS BY POINTING TO EXAMPLES IN CANADA OR THE USA.

VNPA VOLUNTEER **EVELYN FELLER**, WHO LIVED IN CANADA FOR MANY YEARS, TAKES A CLOSER LOOK.

Lake Louise and Chateau Lake Louise, Banff NP, Canada.

It's true that some of the most famous landmarks in the Rocky Mountain national parks of Canada (Banff, Jasper, Kooteney, Waterton Lakes and Yoho) are hotels: Banff Springs, Chateau Lake Louise and the Prince of Wales Hotel of Waterton Lakes.

However, a closer examination of the age of some of these hotels, and of changing views about national

parks, shows that there is now a very different attitude to resort development in national parks in North America. This supports Prof. Buckley's research showing that the worldwide trend is for resorts and other developments to be located *outside* national parks.

Many of the famous hotels and resorts in North American national parks were established as part of tourism

development in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, mostly by railway barons to cater for wealthy tourists and develop a tourist industry rivalling that of Europe.

Banff National Park, the first in Canada, was initially established to protect a hot spring and allow public access. Later it was expanded into the larger area we know today.



Commercial development was a driving force in the park. As well as the railway line which predated and bisected the park, there were hotels, highway development and a growing town. Later came ski developments such as Lake Louise and Sunshine.

Parallel developments were happening in US parks like Yellowstone with Mammoth Hot Springs, and the resort complex on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon.

This trend continued until the 1960s, when with greater accessibility for less affluent visitors (who came by car and camped), increased back-country use for hiking and climbing, and the beginning of a wilderness and park protection movement, attitudes to what was 'appropriate development' in parks changed. No longer were towns, resorts and various kinds of commercial recreation accepted as the status quo.

In Canada there has been considerable opposition to developments in the Rocky Mountain parks, including to Olympic events and highway duplication. Limits have been placed on the expansion of Banff, and resort development has been rapid outside the park in the town of Canmore.

The main target of opposition by park advocates today is the expansion of skiing infrastructure in parks, such as at Sunshine ski area, and illegal incursions into parks by commercial snowmobile trips sponsored by the resorts.

### A Canadian case study: Pacific Rim NP

Pacific Rim National Park is on the west coast of Vancouver Island. It has three segments, the most famous one being Long Beach.

The area is renowned for large sandy beaches, surf, beautiful islands for kayaking, marine life and impressive cool temperate rainforests. Tourists are also attracted to the area to watch the winter storms.

Until World War II access to the area was poor, although there were small resorts and summer residents. Then it

*Worldwide, there are fewer than 250 examples of private tourism accommodation or infrastructure in public protected areas. Almost all are on enclaves of private land established before the park, products of political patronage, associated with land tenure changes, heritage buildings or specialist viewing structures such as canopy towers or underwater observatories. Very few are recent and deliberate (for example in South Africa's Kruger National Park) and these have not raised significant funds for the parks agency...*

**From 'Rights and Wrongs in National Park Tourism' by Prof. Ralf Buckley, Director of the International Centre for Ecotourism Research, Griffith University. Quoted in *Wildlife Australia*, Autumn 2013.**

became a military base; thousands of servicemen were based there, mainly near the main town, Tofino, to protect the coast from Japanese invasion. More roads and infrastructure were built.

After the war, with more car ownership and leisure time, Long Beach became very popular as a summer destination. Campgrounds and resorts proliferated. With the hippy, draft-dodger and surf movements, many people built rustic cabins along the beach.

Long Beach also became a venue for aircraft landing, car races and horse riding. Thousands camped on the beach, which had only very limited facilities (such as two outhouses). Local residents were appalled at the

degradation, and together with park advocates successfully lobbied for a park, which was established in 1970.

Parks Canada informed the beach residents that they were being evicted and had to leave within the year. There were no exemptions for established resorts. The most luxurious resort, Wickaninnish Inn, became the park's interpretive centre.

Now, tourist development is concentrated in the towns of Tofino and Uclulet. The Wickaninnish Inn was re-established outside the park. Tofino in summer is western Canada's surfing mecca. The park's campgrounds are extremely popular and reservations have to be made months in advance.

Continued...

Ideal for kayaking: Broken Islands section of Pacific Rim National Park, Canada.



PHOTO: EVELYN FELLER

# HANDS OFF OUR PARKS!

## Resorts and US national parks

As with Canada, much US resort development in parks originated with railway companies. Resorts like Yellowstone, the Grand Canyon and Death Valley were developed by individuals such as Fred Harvey.

His company was taken over by Xanterra Parks and Resorts, now the primary concessioner for resorts in number of the national parks (Crater Lake, Death Valley, Grand Canyon, Mt Rushmore, Rocky Mountain, Yellowstone and Zion). In most cases the original buildings have been modernised or completely replaced.

In the Grand Canyon South Rim area there are both historic and more recently built resorts, but development seems to be contained and new development is occurring in the gateway community of Tusayan.

### A US case study – Zion NP

With its massive sandstone cliffs and canyons, Zion in Utah is one of the most spectacular national parks in the US. The area was designated a national monument in 1909 and then a national park in 1919.

Originally a tent camp, the only resort building (Zion Lodge) currently in the

park was established in 1920. It was destroyed by fire in 1966 but rebuilt, and the exterior was restored to its original appearance in 1990. There are three campgrounds close to the park entrance.

Adjacent to this entrance is the town of Springdale, where most new resort development is occurring. There are also several new resorts some kilometres outside the park boundaries, offering trail rides and adventure activities.

Traffic volumes became unmanageable in the park as tourists headed for its spectacular attractions. Now you can only access this area in the summer via shuttle buses – as is also the case in Yosemite and the Grand Canyon.

The growth of ‘gateway’ towns such as Tofino, Springdale and Canmore shows how tourism can strengthen the economic base of a region and revitalise local economies.

Many of these gateway communities have their own problems of over-development and pollution, but at least such problems have been removed from the parks.

**Promoting resort development outside national parks is the trend today. • PW**

The towering cliffs of Zion NP, Utah, USA. Zion Lodge is just visible at the centre of the photo.



PHOTO: EVELYN FELLER



**DAVID GABRIEL-JONES LOOKS AT THE QUESTION OF COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENTS IN PARKS IN VICTORIA AND POINTS TO SOME OF THE VEXED ISSUES.**

**That’s what astounds international visitors to Wyperfeld National Park: the night sky. The stars and the silence.**

Nothing like that in Tokyo or Seoul.

Under the Napthine Government’s new tourism policy, many more tourists could soon be amazed by our national parks. A commendable aspiration – but the devil’s in the detail.

Since at least 1985, public land managers have talked about ‘Limits of Acceptable Change.’ That’s not only the title of a seminal US work on the subject by George Stankey *et al*, but also a phrase which neatly encapsulates the dilemma.

In Victoria’s national parks, what change is acceptable?

The media statements have been released, the guidelines are up on the DSE [now Department of Environment and Primary Industry] website – and now the hard work starts. We foresee a series of major issues which still have to be worked through.

It is notoriously difficult to balance the government-determined and the



# the stars and the silence



Left: From many of our national parks you can marvel at a magnificent starry sky unaffected by human 'light pollution'.

On Crown land, the enterprising investor is faced with the threat of having his or her bright idea put out to public tender. A notable exception occurs where the proponent already owns some essential part of the whole, making the public land component unattractive to any other bidder.

So it was at the Werribee South marina – the Crown land lease could only reasonably be held by the owner of the abutting freehold.

Then there's the lease duration. There are more innovative ways of assuring investor security than by offering ever-longer lease terms, or by granting non-competitive lease renewals (which is the reason the Arthurs Seat chairlift fell down, multiple times).

As we've argued before (*TP*, May 2006) what's needed is recognition of tenants' residual interest.

Finally – looming over the whole debate is the spectre of the Seal Rocks development (Phillip Island). An incoming government had a mandate to kill the project off, but the opinion of the electorate could not overturn the poorly-constructed contract, and taxpayers had to fork out \$55 million in compensation.

Ironically, the forces of nature then ripped off the roof, taxpayers subscribed a further \$7 million, and the government resumed full control.

It would have been cheaper, certainly, to offer the tourists stars and silence. • PW

This article by **David Gabriel-Jones**, Principal of the Public Land Consultancy, appeared in the Consultancy's journal *Terra Publica* Vol. 13 no. 3 for Easter 2013. For more information see [www.publicland.com.au](http://www.publicland.com.au), phone 9534 5128 or write to PO Box 2251, St Kilda, 3182. Our thanks to David for allowing us to reprint his article.

developer-determined segments of public land proposals.

Government over-specification can undermine commercial viability. When DSE packaged up some forest sites for development, the private sector responded with a Wyperfeld-strength silence. The same happened at Argyle Square, Carlton (see *Terra Publica*, Sept. 2011).

At the core of the problem lies the apparatus for planning public land. Planning schemes are well understood and robust mechanisms for responding to developer-initiated proposals on private land, but something more is needed on public land.

In a national park, or at the St Kilda Triangle, or above Jolimont rail yards we need to go further. The public at large demands and deserves input to defining the public-benefit outcomes.

The very vocal objectors to the Triangle development would have had much weaker grounds for protest if they'd previously been given a meaningful role in defining the development parameters.

By the time the Triangle proposal went out for approval, it was already a well-defined plan, put together essentially behind closed doors by the preferred developer.

And that brings us to the reason private investors invest – profitability.

If government requires public benefit outcomes from a private sector development, those benefits may have to be paid for. This may take the form of capital grants, operating subsidies or less-than-market land rentals.

At the St Kilda triangle, the nominal ground rental alone was insufficient to offset the unprofitable public benefits; what proved necessary was a further \$20 million grant for refurbishment of the Palais.

There are a couple more issues to be addressed before national parks welcome all those plane-loads of tourists.

The first relates to intellectual property. How will DSE balance the entrepreneur's need for confidentiality against the government's requirement for public exhibition?

Wyperfeld NP has mallee wildflowers, wildlife and peaceful silence. And no brightly lit resorts.



PHOTO: PHIL HART

PHOTO: DAVID TATNALL

# CRADLE MOUNTAIN

Why infrastructure should be built outside national parks



PHOTO: RICHARD LEHNERT, FLICKR

CONSERVATIONIST, PHOTOGRAPHER AND BIRD EXPERT **EUAN MOORE**, WHO IS CONVENOR OF THE VNPA COUNCIL'S CONSERVATION AND CAMPAIGNS COMMITTEE, SHOWS THAT DEVELOPMENTS OUTSIDE PARKS ARE BETTER FOR TOURISTS, FOR DEVELOPERS AND FOR THE PARKS AND THEIR VALUES.

**Cradle Mountain is often used as the 'poster child' by those promoting commercial development in national parks. But what's the real situation?**

Cradle Mountain–Lake St Clair NP is one of the four large national parks that make up the South West Tasmania World Heritage Area. The park pre-dates World Heritage listing in 1982. The original reserve at Cradle Mountain was proclaimed in 1922 and extended to include Lake St Clair in 1936.

One of the two main entrances to the park is at Pencil Pine Creek, where the road to Cradle Mountain crosses the park boundary. At the end of this road is the start of the internationally famous Overland Track from Cradle Mountain to Lake St Clair.

World Heritage listing resulted in major changes to the way these parks were managed. It raised their profile nationally and internationally, with resulting increases in visitor numbers. It also brought Commonwealth government money for management and improved infrastructure.

One of the first projects reviewed in 1986 by the Tasmanian World Heritage

Area Consultative Committee, of which I was a member, was a proposal from the Tasmanian National Parks and Wildlife Service (TNPWS) for a visitor centre, including park headquarters, interpretation and walker registration.

### Debate – in the park or not?

The proposed site on the shores of Dove Lake – the site of that iconic view of Cradle Mountain – was to include parking for buses and up to 100 cars. A short distance down the valley a new campground would be established.

All this would require multiple buildings, some 12km of upgraded road, a similar distance of power line (preferably underground), sewage treatment suitable for a sub-alpine area, and a water supply.

This would have a massive environmental and landscape impact on the area, the buildings and car parks being visible from all the surrounding mountains.

After discussion it was suggested that we consider a site outside the park boundary at Pencil Pine Creek. This site, which was adopted, meant reduced

requirements for road upgrading, no electricity line, simplified water and sewage systems, removal of camping in Cradle Valley, and reduced environmental and landscape impacts. Ranger housing and maintenance facilities have also been moved to this location.

A few years later the new visitor centre was completed, as was a large new camping ground just outside the park. These are within easy reach of additional facilities provided privately by Cradle Mountain Lodge – also outside the park boundary.

The overall result has been a big win for the environment, the park and the public, with some great new facilities, and a big win for the budget. The cost saving at the time was in the order of 50% of the original project cost, or about \$7 million. This equates to about \$20 million in today's values.

Today there is again talk about moving the visitor centre to a new location, but the proposed location is further outside the park boundary, not inside the park.

A shuttle bus ferries people between Cradle Valley and Dove Lake, removing the need for further major roadworks.



Left: The iconic Dove Lake was to be the site of Cradle Mountain – Lake St Clair NP's visitor centre, a major campground and other facilities, but they were eventually built outside the park.

# HANDS OFF OUR PARKS!

## Commercial guided walks

Around the same time the committee also reviewed a proposal by Cradle Huts for a guided walk along the Overland Track, using private huts. Before this proposal there were already several commercial companies offering guided walks along this route, using tents for accommodation.

There were also six or seven bushwalkers' huts, in variable condition, along the track. The TNPWS had built several larger huts in recent years.

This proposal was an incremental increase on existing use and represented a major change in that it allowed private facilities within a national park, something that did not previously exist in any Tasmanian parks.

A major concern was that the park would not benefit from the enterprise, as any fees paid by the company would disappear into consolidated revenue.

Had the proposal been for huts, tracks or commercial guided walks where none existed, it would not have succeeded. As it was, strict environmental conditions were placed on the company and the construction of the huts, including that they be easily removable should the company fail. There were also restrictions on the use of helicopters for supplying the huts and removing waste.

It is unlikely that a similar venture would be approved today. Since that time there have been a number of proposals for hotel developments within Tasmanian national parks and other reserves. Most have not been approved, but even when they have been, such as at Pumphouse Point at Lake St Clair, where there have been three attempts over 20 years, development has so far not proceeded.

## Waldheim

Waldheim, a historic building in Cradle Valley, was used for accommodation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It has not been used for accommodation since 1974. The current building is a replica, built after fire destroyed the original in 1976. The nearby Waldheim Cabins, run by TNPWS, offer basic and affordable accommodation.

The history of Cradle Mountain Lodge is also of interest. This business was started under the name of Pencil Pine Lodge around 1970 on private land adjacent to the national park. Renamed Cradle Mountain Lodge in 1984, it is, and has always been, outside the national park.

Today there is a small village with a number of accommodation options, and an airport, on private land outside the national park, a few kilometres north of the park boundary.

## Development Plan

The Cradle Valley Tourism Development Plan (2003) sets out a comprehensive framework for tourism and infrastructure development that will protect the natural and cultural values of the park, and meet the demands of increased visitor numbers. It states that all accommodation facilities and major visitor facilities will be located outside the park.

Meanwhile the Tasmanian World Heritage Management Plan (1999) has the following objective in relation to accommodation:

*“To encourage the provision of accommodation in nearby townships and areas adjacent to the WHA.”*

This is based on research which indicates that:

*“much of the experience sought by visitors ... is based on the area's wilderness quality. To maintain this it is important that accommodation has minimal impact on wilderness quality and the WHA and the other natural and cultural values of the WHA.”*

Management prescriptions within the plan state:

*“Developments outside the WHA are preferred to those located within the area.”*

*“If facilities or services exist or can be developed outside the WHA that meet visitor needs, such facilities and services will not be provided as concessions within the WHA.”*

*“Concession activities will only be allowed if consistent with the protection of World Heritage and other natural and cultural values of the WHA.”*

Rather than being an example of private development in national parks, the Cradle Mountain case study is an example of how development *outside* the park is both cheaper and better.

It's better for tourism, better for the developers and, most importantly, better for the national park and the environmental values that it is protecting. • PW

Cradle Mountain Lodge offers comfortable accommodation a short distance outside the park boundary.



PHOTO: PEPPERS CRADLE MOUNTAIN LODGE

# Come and plant with Grow West!

COORDINATOR **HELENA LINDORFF** REPORTS AND INVITES YOU TO THE ANNUAL COMMUNITY PLANTING DAY ON **SUNDAY 21 JULY**.

**Grow West, an ambitious program of landscape restoration west of Melbourne, works with local communities for a sustainable future.**

Last July Grow West achieved an impressive milestone when its millionth tree was planted by Victoria's environment minister Ryan Smith.

And the celebrations are set to continue when the Grow West Implementation Committee officially turns ten later this year.

In fact celebrations will kick off on **Sunday 21 July** at the annual Grow West Community Planting Day, hosted this year by Conservation Volunteers Australia at 138 Myers Road, Myrniong. This site was purchased by CVA in July 2010 with the assistance of donors.

The 30 hectare property is an important habitat link to the W. James Whyte Reserve ('The Island') and Werribee Gorge State Park. It forms a buffer to the State Park, protecting the confluence of the Werribee River and Myrniong Creek

It complements conservation work at The Island itself, and links with broader connectivity projects in the region. These include DSE Vision for Werribee Plains, Pentland Hills Landcare Group, Myrniong & Korkuperrimul Biolinks, Rowsley Landcare Group Whitehorse Creek Biolink, and Melbourne Water's Stream Frontage and Capital Works initiatives.

Extensive conservation works have been carried out on The Island since



**Above:** Helena Lindorff of Grow West and Ken Beasley from CVA look towards this year's planting site (shown by red line) adjoining Werribee Gorge SP.

**Left and far left:** The Community Planting Day is fun for all! Make sure you wear warm clothes, though.

PHOTOS: HELENA LINDORFF

its purchase in 2006. This year's Community Planting Day target of 6,000 indigenous seedlings will bring the grand total of seedlings planted to 200,000 since works commenced on both properties.

The Grow West Project aims to rejuvenate 10,000 hectares of the upper Werribee catchment by connecting large areas of public reserves (Brisbane Ranges NP, Werribee Gorge SP and Lerderberg SP) through a mosaic of restoration works on private property.

This is being achieved with a multitude of local groups and organisations like the VNPA, Friends and Landcare groups, using various delivery models and partnership approaches tailored to suit the local community, specific project outcomes and funding requirements.

There are many paths to take to landscape restoration. Partnerships develop; knowledge of best practice and the skills acquired grows and is shared amongst the local community.

Grow West hopes that those looking over their neighbour's fence and observing restoration works being carried out will come to share the community's vision of landscape change.

To help celebrate the achievements of the Grow West Project, we are inviting all past and present members of the VNPA and their families and friends to join us on **Sunday 21 July 9.30am – 4.30pm** at our annual Grow West Community Planting Day. • **PW**

For more information about the day see the enclosed flyer, visit [www.growwest.com.au](http://www.growwest.com.au) or email [Helena.lindorff@pppwcma.vic.gov.au](mailto:Helena.lindorff@pppwcma.vic.gov.au). You need to register by 18 July.



# The VNPA and Project Hindmarsh

## *A progress report*



PHOTOS: SALLY BORRMAN

How many people does it take to plant trees? A lot, when you're planting 10,000 in a weekend!

VNPA HONORARY LIFE MEMBER **JOHN STIRLING** LOOKS BACK ON HINDMARSH'S 15 YEARS, AND ENCOURAGES EVERYONE TO COME ALONG TO THE PLANTING WEEKEND ON **17-18 AUGUST**.



**Project Hindmarsh is now in its 15th year, and the VNPA can be very proud to have been associated with this major landscape restoration initiative from the beginning.**

Biodiversity between the Big Desert and Little Desert has unquestionably been greatly enhanced since the project started in 1998, as habitat and shelter for native fauna have gradually improved.

Planting on marginal land has also assisted landowners, creating improved shelterbelts for stock and better control of wind erosion and salinity. Carbon sequestration from revegetation is making a contribution to climate change mitigation as well.

Landscapes along road reserves and views across the countryside have improved, with many more indigenous trees and shrubs visible in the flat to undulating terrain.

The VNPA's involvement began in 1997 when long-time friend Rob Youl of Landcare Australia invited me to a meeting at Nhill to discuss Project Hindmarsh. I was then VNPA Vice President, and we could both see the opportunity for members to assist in creating a 'nature corridor' between the Big Desert Wilderness Park and Little Desert National Park.

This also fitted in well with the Association's desire to embrace nature conservation outside public reserves

(such as national parks) as well as within them.

Little did we realise that the first year of Project Hindmarsh would attract no fewer than 150 VNPA members, and each year since then similar or greater numbers of members and friends have given their time to the project. Over 15 years, this represents a contribution of around 25,000 hours of volunteer tree planting or some \$500,000 worth of in-kind support.

As VNPA representative I have attended Project Hindmarsh planning and debriefing meetings each year, and regularly communicate with key local people by email or phone.

Suggestions from VNPA members have helped improve the Project and the planting weekend. I designed the concept for the tied-knot Project Hindmarsh logo, introduced BYO plates and cutlery for environmental reasons, and asked for a wash-up trough with hot water to be installed at the Little Desert Lodge for cleaning them.

The Saturday evening guest speaker program, the Hindmarsh 10th Anniversary plaques and garden at Little Desert Lodge and the use of VNPA members to act as volunteer site leaders are other initiatives.

Perhaps more important is the fact that VNPA members have connected with the local Hindmarsh community. The majority of VNPA volunteers

outside the Hindmarsh region come from Melbourne or larger centres throughout Victoria. Good friendships have now developed between locals and volunteers, increasing understanding and tolerance between city and country folk.

Farmers are not now seen as environmental 'spoilers' but as vital primary producers who care about their land. Conversely, Hindmarsh locals don't now regard VNPA volunteers as radical city slicker 'greenies' but as supportive helpers who want to see the best possible outcomes for productive farming, along with improved biodiversity.

The VNPA would like to congratulate the many visionary and hard-working people who have steered Project Hindmarsh over the past 15 years. The Project's inspiration has left its mark as one of Australia's major nature conservation projects, and it fits well into VNPA's belief that 'we share a vision of Victoria as a place with a diverse, secure and healthy natural environment cared for and appreciated by all'.

We look forward to a continuing, and growing, involvement with Project Hindmarsh. • PW

For more information about this year's Hindmarsh planting on the weekend of **17-18 August**, see the enclosed flyer or visit [www.hindmarsh.vic.gov.au/environment](http://www.hindmarsh.vic.gov.au/environment). To book accommodation, see [www.littledesertlodge.com.au](http://www.littledesertlodge.com.au) or phone **5391 5232**.



# Giving something back to the environment

## *Hindmarsh Landcare and Presentation College*

VNPA MEMBER **SALLY BORRMAN**, A TEACHER OF HUMANITIES, POLITICS AND PSYCHOLOGY AT PRESENTATION COLLEGE WINDSOR (PCW), REFLECTS ON WHAT HINDMARSH HAS GIVEN HER SCHOOL.

For eight years now the Hindmarsh Landcare weekend at Nhill in August has been part of the PCW school calendar. Over the years I've taken along a range of secondary level girls, mainly in years 9-12.

As an educator passionate about the environment I thought it would be a good idea to get the girls out of the city and experience life in the country for a weekend. And further, to surround them with adults who care about the environment and show how we can make a positive contribution to caring for our planet.

I first heard about the Landcare Hindmarsh weekend through the VNPA. As a member, a little light turned on in my head – I could share this experience with my students!

For the first few years I drove the school minibus and only took 4-5 students. When we returned, word quickly spread about the students' experiences: planting trees, seeing previous plantings, understanding farmers' concerns, meeting environmentalists, sitting

around the campfire, dancing under the stars, and meeting Ms Borrman's friends!

When the girls returned they wrote articles in the school bulletin and year book, and made presentations at our school assembly. Word quickly spread that Hindmarsh was a great weekend away.

Over the years the bus got bigger and staff numbers increased, and now the school community is very aware of our connections to Hindmarsh.

I'm grateful for the support that the Hindmarsh Landcare team has given PCW, especially Sue Hayman-Fox who has spoken at our school assembly about her involvement in the Hindmarsh project.

As a result of the school's participation, Hindmarsh has become a case study in the curriculum. I have taught a Year 9 Humanities course 'Consuming the Earth', which focuses on how we consume natural resources domestically and commercially.

One of the resources I use for this is the booklet *Project Hindmarsh – 10 years and beyond*. I ask students who have attended the weekend to share their experiences with the class. The girls understand that Project Hindmarsh aims to protect, enhance and restore native vegetation and biodiversity, and tackle salinity and soil erosion.

Environmental awareness has increased at PCW in recent years. This year our Environment Action Group set up a new rubbish disposal system with a range of ecobins in the Years 7 and 8 areas, and staff rooms. In the school's Year 12 leadership structure we have Environmental Captains; several Year 12 students attended Hindmarsh last year.

Our school is always looking for new and innovative ways to raise awareness of the environment, and Hindmarsh is an important part of this. I have recently heard students label themselves 'climate warriors'!

For me personally it is time away with the girls. The planting activity often gives way to conversations about themselves, their aspirations, life at PCW, friendships and family. Some girls have been twice and



These Presentation College students appear to be toting bazookas, but luckily they're just Pottiputki planting machines.



PHOTOS: SALLY BORRMAN



This Malleefowl was photographed in a 'caught on camera' trial at a reserve near Bernie and Sue Hayman-Fox's property Mali Dunes north of Nhill. A cat, a fox and rabbits were unfortunately also recorded.

## NatureWatch heads to Hindmarsh

VNPA NATUREWATCH COORDINATOR **CAITLIN GRIFFITH** DESCRIBES THE EXCITING NEW 'CAUGHT ON CAMERA' PROJECT BEING RUN IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE HINDMARSH LANDCARE NETWORK.

**To celebrate Project Hindmarsh's 15 great years of landscape-scale vegetation restoration, and also the VNPA's 60th anniversary, VNPA and the Hindmarsh Landcare Network (HLN) are working together to develop a new community-based monitoring project.**

This is a new spin on our Caught on Camera project. In the existing projects in Bunyip State Park and Wombat State Forest, we are studying at the impacts of fire on mammals. In the Hindmarsh project we are looking at which mammals inhabit revegetation areas, cleared sites and areas of remaining/remnant vegetation.

This is an exciting project for the local community, as many community members have been involved in planting Hindmarsh's two million plus trees, grasses and shrubs. Now they can also be involved in monitoring for mammals at a number of revegetation sites.

This year, we've started running the project as a trial with a view to continuing it over many years.

We ran a weekend activity in April with locals, landholders and a small group of NatureWatch team leaders, who all worked alongside our project scientist Richard Loyn. The team set up our cameras at two sites in the Hindmarsh area including Mali Dunes, a nearby Parks Victoria reserve and an additional private property at Jeparit.

We also ran a training session in using motion-sensing cameras at Trust for Nature's Snape Reserve near Dimboola (where Project Hindmarsh plantings have taken place) and were treated to a tour of the spectacular reserve with Lindsay and Sue Smith.

Three weeks later, VNPA team leader Christine Connelly returned to join local HLN Regional Landcare Facilitator Katy Marriott and locals to set up cameras at an additional two private properties and a nearby Parks Victoria reserve at Glenlee.

Many thanks to all the great local folk, landholders, Landcare Facilitator Katy Marriott and our project scientists Richard Loyn and Peter Menkhorst. • PW

### Caught on Camera

Caught on Camera, part of the VNPA's NatureWatch citizen science program, involves using motion-sensing cameras to monitor mammals. The cameras are triggered by movement, and when mammals are attracted to the bait stations that have been set up, the cameras photograph them, giving us an idea of the species present at the survey sites.



others have encouraged their sisters and friends to be involved.

I always ask the girls about the benefits of the weekend. This is a familiar quote:

*"The feeling of spending a weekend giving something back to the environment proved to be very rewarding!"*

I would like to sincerely thank the PCW students for coming along on this environmental adventure, and for their hard physical work. And to the team: Mrs Rowena Buncle for driving the school bus to Nhill and back, and my PCW colleagues for supporting the Hindmarsh project and working so closely with the students.

And of course thanks to my husband Peter Whelan, who loves coming on the school bus every year, sharing his experiences of the environment with the girls, and listening to them singing 'Adele' all the way from Horsham to Nhill.

Overall, it's always a very successful weekend. Some of the students have already said that they'd like to come along this year. I'm looking forward to it already. • PW

Water was pumped into Hattah-Kulkyne NP in 2009 to help drought-stressed vegetation and wildlife. Under the Basin Plan more environmental water should be available.

# The Murray Darling Basin Plan

## *What's happening?*

**NICOLA RIVERS, LAW REFORM DIRECTOR AT THE ENVIRONMENT DEFENDERS OFFICE (EDO), EXPLAINS THE STORY BEHIND THE PLAN AND WHAT LIES AHEAD.**

**After more than three years of heated negotiation, the Basin Plan finally came into force on 22 November 2012. The weeks before sign-off saw a flurry of activity as last-minute changes were made.**

Since then public attention has slipped away from the Plan, but important developments continue behind the scenes.

So what happens now?

The Plan requires 2750 gigalitres (GL) of water to be returned to the environment from human use across the Basin. Over 50% of this has already been recovered through buybacks by the Commonwealth Government and water efficiency measures paid for by the Commonwealth.

The most significant change to the Plan was the addition of a 'sustainable diversion limit (SDL) adjustment mechanism' which allows the government to increase the SDLs as long as there are no additional social or economic impacts (i.e. via efficiency projects rather than buybacks), or decrease them if efficiency measures mean that the same environmental outcomes can be achieved with less water.

The Water Act specifies that adjustments can be no more than 5% of the SDL (approx. 500GL). Just before the Plan was finalised the government announced it would spend an extra \$1.77 billion to provide an extra 450GL for the environment through this mechanism. Projects that could lead to an adjustment of the SDL will be



PHOTO: PARKS VICTORIA

assessed for inclusion in the Plan in 2016.

The States and the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) now have a huge task ahead of them to implement the various aspects of the Plan. The MDBA is negotiating implementation agreements with all States to determine how all the requirements of the Plan will be achieved. They are developing a plan to remove rules-based or physical constraints that prevent the delivery of environmental water.

The MDBA is also developing priorities for environmental watering which must be finalised by June. And all States are working on developing water resource plans for each region in the Basin – the key instrument that will ensure the States are complying with the Plan.

In Victoria the Basin Plan won't take full effect until 2019. By 2019 Victoria must

have all its laws and policies in place to ensure it is complying with the Plan, and it must be in full compliance with the sustainable diversion limit.

The Victorian Government is currently reviewing the Victorian Water Act, partly as a modernisation exercise and partly to determine whether legislative changes are needed to comply with the Basin Plan. Unfortunately the Government has given little indication of what changes are being considered under the review and there is very little consultation occurring. A draft Bill is expected in October.

Although there is much 'Basin Plan fatigue' within the community, it is critical that people concerned about the environment in the Basin stay engaged in its implementation to ensure that the Plan delivers on its environmental promises.

The EDO will continue to work on implementation and keep people informed of critical issues that arise. • **PW**



# The Sustainable Firewood Guide

A handy consumer guide for firewood and firewood alternatives widely and readily available in Victoria



**DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR FIREWOOD COMES FROM?**

• What's the most sustainable wood to burn?

• Where do I find it?

• How do I tell 'good' firewood from bad?



VICTORIAN  
NATIONAL PARKS  
ASSOCIATION  
*Be part of nature*

# A burning issue: what's the best firewood to burn?

**C**onservative estimates put the amount of firewood consumed by Victorians at more than half a million tonnes a year. That's more wood than we export as woodchips!

Such enormous use is environmentally unsustainable from current firewood sources. The same forests that supply much of our firewood are also some of the most important forests in Victoria. They harbour threatened plant and animal species which need these forests to survive.

The bulk of firewood burnt by Victorian homes comes from native forests both here and in NSW. Victorian forests, such as red gum forests at Gunbower, and the Wombat, Wellsford and Mount Cole forests in central and western Victoria, are exploited for firewood.

There is no genuine environmental accreditation for firewood sourced from these forests, so the wood you burn may be contributing to the loss of habitat for our threatened wildlife.

But there are sustainable alternatives. Farm-grown firewood, particularly in largely cleared landscapes such as Victoria's Goldfields and the Riverina, has a range of benefits for both the natural environment and the health of farming communities.

It creates much-needed habitat, can provide shelter for sheep and cattle, and helps keep salinity in check.

Farm-based woodlots purposely grown for firewood are also likely to reduce demand for firewood sourced from our precious native forests, leaving these areas more intact as healthy habitat for threatened species.

## AIR QUALITY

When burnt properly, using firewood from sustainable sources to warm your home can be less polluting and more environmentally sustainable than other methods.

- An efficient firewood burner produces less carbon dioxide than other forms



## Firewood myths busted

Weight for weight, all eucalypt species have approximately the same calorific (heat) value.

Density is the factor that tends to determine preference for different species. Roughly half as much wood with a high density such as Grey Box (1121kg/m<sup>3</sup>) is required to produce the same heat as a lower density species like Alpine Ash (600kg/m<sup>3</sup>).

Wood that forms glowing coals radiates more heat than wood that burns quickly. Quick-burning wood gives off heat in the form of hot gases that often pass up the chimney and are wasted. Modern wood heaters are becoming better at utilising this heat.

of fossil fuel energy, but to minimise pollution your firewood must be dry – less than 20% moisture content is recommended.

- Firewood burners must be correctly flued, ventilated and operated.
- Burning firewood in small, hot fires produces less air pollution than large, smouldering fires containing large firewood logs.
- Wood with high moisture content, burnt in a poorly ventilated heater, can cause high levels of particulate matter to be emitted.

## THE CARBON IMPACTS OF FIREWOOD

Most fuels used to produce energy (gas, oil, coal and wood) release CO<sub>2</sub> emissions into the atmosphere that are helping to drive dangerous climate change.

But unlike the other three energy sources, burning firewood from renewable plantations is greenhouse neutral. The carbon released from burning the wood is taken back in (sequestered) by the plantation trees as they regrow.

In terms of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, wood

can be classified as a renewable energy resource, but only when accompanied by a tree replacement program. VNPA supports the use of wood grown in woodlots and through private farm forestry in existing agricultural areas.

## HOW DOES YOUR WOOD STACK UP?

To help Victorians choose environmentally sustainable firewood, the Victorian National Parks Association has picked six of the most easily obtainable firewood and firewood alternatives on the Victorian market today and tested how they compare in their environmental impacts.

The products we have chosen come from a range of sources:

- Traditional firewood from native forests.
- Farm-grown firewood from sustainably managed plantations.
- Compressed native forest waste products.
- Compressed forest waste product derivatives imported into Australia.

We have used a range of factors to determine the environmental sustainability of these six firewood





IMAGE: © iStockphoto.com/coleematt

| PRODUCT   | SOURCE   | MADE FROM                                       | BUY FROM  | RATING           |
|---|--|---|---|------------------|
| <b>Enviro Firewood (grown in Victoria)</b>                    | 100% plantation grown Blue Gum from western Victoria.  | Australian hardwood.                            | BP service stations and some garden suppliers.                          | <b>Excellent</b> |
| <b>Eco Logs (Victoria based)</b>                              | Native Victorian forest kiln dried mill waste, predominantly from central highlands and red gum forests.   | Compressed sawdust.                             | Selected hardware stores, service stations.                             | <b>Poor</b>      |
| <b>Red Gum, Box Ironbark and other native forest firewood</b> | Entirely from native forests in Victoria and NSW.  | Australian hardwood.                            | Widely available.   | <b>Bad</b>       |
| <b>Ekoflame Firelog (WA based)</b>                            | Saw dust and waste oil (Canola/soy/animal fat blend).<br>Wood waste sourced from kiln and naturally dried mill operations, largely from native forests in Malaysia.                                | Sawdust from Asia combined with other products. | Bunnings.   | <b>Poor</b>      |
| <b>Eko log (WA based)</b>                                     | Wood waste sourced from kiln and naturally dried mill operations, largely from native forests in Malaysia.   | Compressed sawdust from Asia.                   | Bunnings.   | <b>Poor</b>      |
| <b>Hotrox woodlogs</b>  | Timber-mill sawdust and waste woodchips from furniture factories.  | Waste wood and sawdust.                         | Bunnings.   | <b>Poor</b>      |
| <b>EcoBriquettes</b>  | Made from 100% recycled timber, salvaged from Australian demolition sites. Each briquette is dry shredded timber compressed under 200 tonnes of pressure and contains no additives or accelerants. | 100% recycled timber.                           | Some BP service stations, independent hardware stores and supermarkets. | <b>Good</b>      |

| HOW WE RATED EACH PRODUCT                           | ENVIRO FIREWOOD | ECO LOGS | RED GUM, IRON-BARK & OTHER NATIVE FOREST TIMBERS | EKOFLAME FIRELOG | EKO LOG  | HOTROX WOODLOGS | ECOBRIQUETTES |
|---|-----------------|----------|--|------------------|----------|-----------------|---------------|
| <b>Sourced from outside native forests</b>          | 3               | 0        | 0  | 1                | 1        | 1               | 3             |
| <b>Victorian product sustainably produced</b>       | 3               | 1        | 0  | 0                | 0        | 0               | 2             |
| <b>Tree replanting program</b>                      | 2               | 0        | 0  | 0                | 0        | 0               | 0             |
| <b>Plantation based or woodlots on private land</b> | 3               | 0        | 0  | 0                | 0        | 0               | 0             |
| <b>RATING</b>                                       | <b>11</b>       | <b>1</b> | <b>0</b>   | <b>1</b>         | <b>1</b> | <b>1</b>        | <b>5</b>      |

**Rating system: Excellent 10-12. Good 5-9. Poor 1-4. Bad-0.**

Note: This analysis is based on available product information in stores and on company websites. The analysis is not scientifically based, but is the most comprehensive on these products to date.

products, each factor being rated on a scale of 1 to 3. The higher the score, the better the product is for the environment.

While not exhaustive, the assessment is the most comprehensive to date of the impacts individual firewood products have on the health of our forests.

Choose wisely when buying your firewood. Ask your supplier, service station or hardware store for the most sustainably produced firewood. Our analysis clearly identifies Enviro Firewood as the best available firewood choice in terms of environmental impact in Victoria.

## AN UNSUSTAINABLE NATIVE FOREST FIREWOOD INDUSTRY

Significant quantities of wood are suspected of being harvested illegally from roadsides and public native forests. These forests provide wood for domestic use and commercial firewood sellers.

Sadly, most of this firewood is logged unsustainably from poorly managed forests, despite claims from the logging industry and government.

Many current forest management

plans and regional forestry agreements are outdated, or subject to changes by the Victorian Government, which has weakened environmental safeguards protecting forests and threatened species.

The removal of a permit system for firewood collection in Victoria's state forests – previously in place since 1958 – has also increased pressure on traditional firewood sources.

Unregulated firewood collectors have moved in, stripping forests of fallen timber, and leaving some rural communities that rely on firewood as their only source of heating short of fuel.

# Don't send their homes up in smoke!

**C**ollecting firewood from the forest is a great Aussie tradition, but what we see as 'dead wood' and fuel, birds, mammals and insects use as shelter and food sources.

Across Australia 21 species of native birds are considered threatened by firewood collection – 19 of them are found in Victoria.

Victoria's hollow-nesting Brown Treecreeper, for example, forages mostly among standing dead trees and logs, searching out insects that hide in fissures and hollows.

In River Red Gum forests, densities of the Brown Treecreeper have been found to be substantially higher in areas where fallen timber on the ground exceeded 40 tonnes per hectare.

In our Box-Ironbark forests, bird numbers have been found to be nine times greater, and the number of bird species present three times higher, in areas containing piles of fallen timber.

Mammals also need 'dead wood' in the form of hollow-bearing trees, both dead and alive, for shelter and nesting.



SQUIRREL GLIDER

## Firewood from our forests

- If left on the ground in a forest, fallen branches form valuable shelter for native species. Removing them for firewood results in habitat loss.
- Taking firewood from native forests particularly threatens reptiles, birds and mammals. It can impact upon threatened species such as the Squirrel Glider, Carpet Python and Brush-tailed Phascogale (Tuan).
- Firewood harvesting from native forests can destroy native understorey plants and introduce weeds.
- The use of firewood from native forests threatens the viability of other sustainable firewood producers such as farm-based woodlots.
- Firewood sourced from native forests is largely unregulated and poorly monitored.

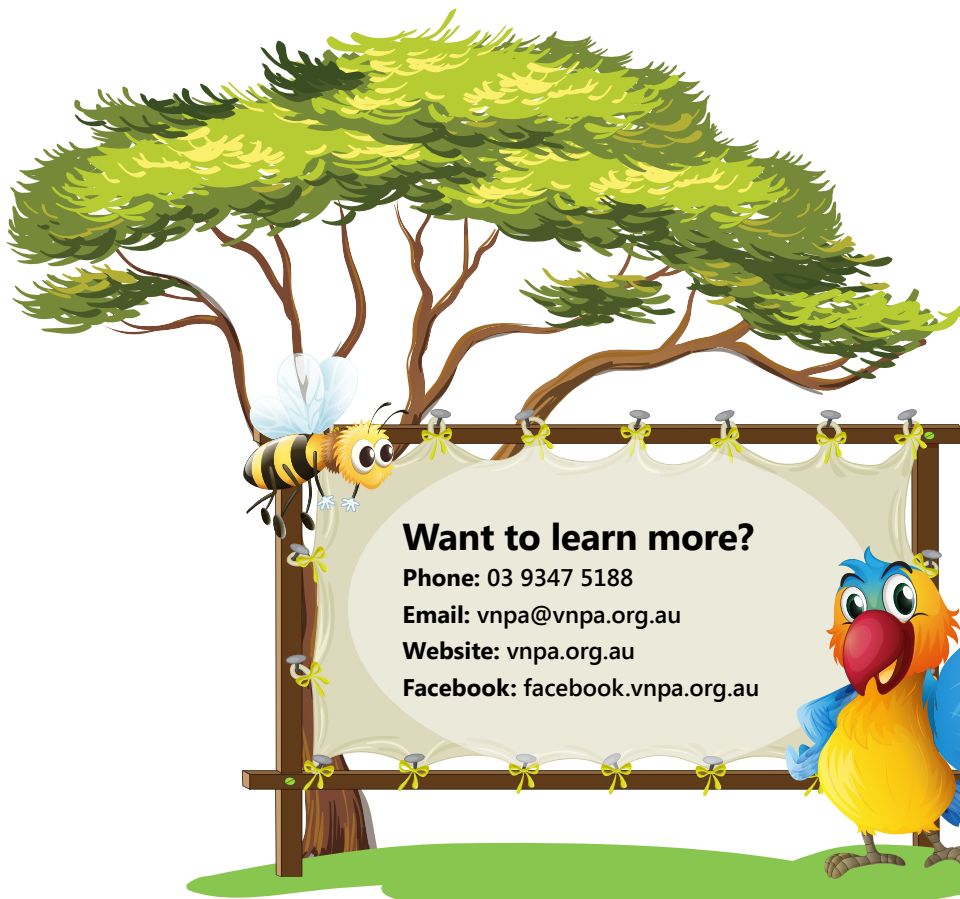
The removal of wood from the forest floor exposes soil to wind and water, potentially leading to an increase in soil erosion and sedimentation.

It also has negative impacts on our

native plants. Nine Victorian plant communities likely to be affected by firewood harvesting are listed under the state's Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act (FFG), which lists our most vulnerable species.

At a federal level, three ecological communities likely to be affected by firewood harvesting are listed under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC). And about 60 plant species that occur in forests or woodlands of concern are listed under the EPBC, FFG or both.

Source: *Ecological Impacts of Firewood Collection* – Department of Sustainability and Environment, May 2013



### Want to learn more?

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Facebook: [facebook.vnpa.org.au](https://www.facebook.com/vnpa.org.au)

IMAGE: ©iStockphoto.com/cole matt

The Sustainable Firewood Guide is published by the Victorian National Parks Association, a not-for-profit community conservation organisation and Victoria's leading voice on protection of the natural environment.



NPAQ member and park volunteer Don Marshall in the 17,000 ha Nairana National Park in northern-central Queensland, where he is assisting with weed control. The vulnerable Squatter Pigeon is found in this park, one of five parks in which cattle grazing will be permitted.

## Tragic day for Queensland's national parks

**On 21 May the Liberal National Party state government introduced legislation to permit grazing in five Queensland national parks, and this number could increase.**

National Parks Association of Queensland Executive Coordinator Paul Donatiu said it was a tragic day for Queenslanders and national parks.

“Cattle grazing will threaten the survival of at least 20 rare animals and plants that occur in the five parks, including the vulnerable Squatter Pigeon and the endangered Julia Creek Dunnart,” he said.

NPAQ completely rejects the arguments justifying grazing: that these places were grazed previously, that they are degraded, and that grazing will do little or no damage.



PHOTO COURTESY PAUL DONATIU

Paul said that for decades until the mid-1990s, many parts of Queensland were extensively cleared.

“In that period, countless thousands of native animals and birds suffered horrible deaths during and after clearing.

“A few properties with intact parcels of bush remained uncleared because of the stewardship of past owners, and also because the land was too poor or too inaccessible for grazing,” he said

Some of these areas became national parks. Since the 1990s, rangers, conservation groups and volunteer organisations have worked to rehabilitate degraded areas within recent park acquisitions.

“Cattle will spread weeds, trample the habitat of native animals, and destroy waterways in these parks,” Paul said.

“That a government should seek to compromise the integrity of our national parks, which cover less than 5% of the State, when grazing occupies 65%, is beyond belief.” • PW

## New hunting authority no solution for feral animal control

**Feral animal control in Victoria could be undermined by the \$8.2 million Game Management Authority announced in the state budget if it is modelled after the NSW Game Council, the Invasive Species Council has warned.**

“The NSW Game Council is a failed model that should not be replicated in Victoria,” the ISC’s CEO Andrew Cox said.

“The Council consistently puts the desires of hunters for a hunting experience ahead of effective feral animal control.

“Hunters want sustainable populations of animals to hunt, not the removal of feral animals. Hunters in Victoria, NSW and Tasmania have blocked deer from being declared a pest species.

“In spite of a huge community backlash and no evidence for effectiveness in feral animal control, Game Council hunters are going to be allowed to hunt in 77 NSW national parks.

“The ISC is concerned that the new Victorian authority will advise the State Government on the control of pest animals – advice that could undermine science-based pest control programs.

“The Victorian Government already has the expertise to control feral animals. What it needs to become more effective is a better budget.

“The new body must not be dominated by hunters, and it must remain under the control of government.

“Voluntary shooters can play a role in feral animal control, but only as part of properly managed and coordinated programs.

“The burgeoning populations of deer in Victoria demonstrate the failure of hunters in feral animal control.

“Hunters only ever kill a fraction of the yearly deer population increase, and they deliberately avoid using the most effective methods such as spotlighting at night.”

Sambar Deer are listed as a ‘key threatening process’ under Victoria’s threatened species legislation. Yet there is no effective control program in place. • PW

For more information on hunting and conservation, see [www.invasives.org.au](http://www.invasives.org.au)



# Fishing for improvements

THE VNPA HAS PUBLISHED A REPORT INTO RECREATIONAL FISHING IN VICTORIA, AND IS CALLING FOR MORE FOCUS ON SUSTAINABILITY. VNPA MARINE AND COASTAL CAMPAIGNER SIMON BRANIGAN REPORTS.

PHOTO: MATT RUCHEL

Whether casting a line into fresh or marine waters, buying a feed at the local fish shop or diving below the surface and watching them, Victorians love fish.

But there are clear warning signs that all is not well when it comes to the management of recreational fishing.

The Victorian Auditor-General's office recently took a swipe at the performance of the Department of Primary Industries (now the Department of Environment and Primary Industries, DEPI) over its management of freshwater recreational fisheries.

The Auditor-General went as far as saying that:

*"DPI is not effectively discharging its legislative responsibilities to deliver balanced and sustainable outcomes for recreational freshwater fisheries. While it is demonstrably delivering improved recreational freshwater fishing outcomes, it is not paying sufficient attention to the protection and conservation of ecological processes, habitats and supporting ecosystems in these fisheries."*

These findings have serious long-term implications for the future ecological sustainability of freshwater fish, their habitats—and fishing. They also mirror some of the findings of a major report that the VNPA has recently published about marine waters, *The State of Recreational Fishing in Victoria*.

Another of the Auditor-General's major criticisms of the DEPI's performance was the major imbalance in decisions about the management of freshwater fisheries. Those decisions, the Auditor-General said, focused on catering for recreational fishers and not on the health of the environment.

Once again there are parallels with the management of recreational fishing in marine waters. The Victorian Government's recent budget announcements included \$1 million for the construction of a giant artificial reef off Anglesea, and eight others in locations such as Westernport, Port Phillip Bay and elsewhere. But there were next no budget dollars for what underpins the natural productivity of the fishery – healthy habitats.

## Report

Considering the Auditor-General's findings, the public release of *The State of Recreational Fishing in Victoria* was timely. This report, an Australian first, was prepared by two independent marine scientists who identified current knowledge gaps and proposed ways of improving the management of marine recreational fishing in Victoria.

The authors included a review of scientific research and case studies on recreational fishing published both in Australia and overseas.

The VNPA commissioned this literature review to address the great uncertainty about the scale and extent of recreational fishing, and to assess the often-promoted notion that it has little to no ecological impact.

## Findings

The findings establish beyond doubt that recreational fishing can indeed have a significant impact on the marine environment. In summary, the findings include the following:





PHOTO: JULIAN FINN

**Clockwise from left:**

A peaceful scene on the Murray. But how well managed is recreational fishing?

Senator Wrasse at Popes Eye.

Blue-spotted Flathead in Port Phillip Bay are prized by recreational fishers and also commercially fished.

Fisheries surveillance needs more funding and resources from the government.



PHOTO: CPSU



PHOTO: CPSU



PHOTO: MARK NORMAN

- Recreational fishing has many impacts, including direct impacts on fish stocks (e.g. the substantial catch of Elephant Fish in their key breeding area within Westernport Bay, bycatch (i.e. accidental catch of non-target species like rays), entanglement of seabirds, dolphins and seals from lost fishing line, and damage to fish habitats.
- Recreational catch levels can be as high as or even greater than commercial ones. For example, the estimated recreational catch of nine different fin fish species is equal to or more than the commercial catch, snapper being seven times and flathead four times higher.
- Port Phillip Bay is clearly one of the most important places for recreational fishing in Victoria. 55% of fishers who hold a recreational fishing license nominated the bay as their most frequented location, and 88% of the total Victorian catch comes from the bay.
- Maintaining a healthy marine environment is one of the most effective ways of ensuring healthy fish

populations and a positive future for recreational fishing.

- Compared to other states, Victoria has made good progress in the monitoring of recreational fishing, but its frequency and scale need to be broadened and lead directly to better management outcomes.
- Recreational fishing is difficult to manage because of the large number of fishers and their dispersed effort (at least 572,000 in Victoria and around 5 million Australia-wide). In addition, the erosion of capacity, resources and research staff is hobbling Fisheries Victoria's ability to manage the fishery effectively.
- The report has a comprehensive list of recommendations in the areas of licensing and monitoring, stock assessments, stock enhancement, invasive pests and fishing gear, institutions, and fishery-specific management.

Specific recommendations include:

- a proposal to gradually introduce biodegradable hooks and fishing lines

- implementing a conservation program that identifies and better protects important fish habitats
- compulsory (but free) recreational fishing licences for those currently not required to have them, to enable better measurement and monitoring of participation levels.

**VNPA calls for action**

To support the implementation of the recommendations, the VNPA:

- urges the Victorian Government and Fisheries Victoria to implement the report's recommendations
- asks the Victorian Auditor-General to bring forward the proposed audit of the DEPI's management of recreational fishing in marine waters
- calls on the Victorian Government to rebuild the capacity of Fisheries Victoria by increasing support, resources and funding so that recreational fishing and the marine environment are better managed. • PW



**Top left:** The Purple Jelly Disc fungus (*Ascocoryne sarcoides*) forms masses of pinky-purple discs on fallen logs.

**Above:** *Hypholoma australe* is an important wood-rotting species.

**Left:** Growing in wet forests, the Tall Mycena (*Mycena cystidiota*) produces long root-like mycelial extensions called rhizomorphs.

PHOTOS: ALISON POULIOT

## Fungi and biodiversity conservation

PHOTOGRAPHER AND ECOLOGIST ALISON POULIOT INTRODUCES US TO THE WONDERFUL, AND VITAL, WORLD OF FUNGI.

Go for a wander through a forest, woodland, desert or pretty much any terrestrial habitat and you'll be stepping into what may be a less familiar realm – that of the fungi kingdom.

Although we're mostly only aware of fungi when mushrooms appear in autumn, fungi are present within the soil throughout the year.

The familiar mushrooms represent just one small part - the fruiting body - of the fungus. The actual fungus 'body' exists as an often vast matrix of interwoven filaments, called *hyphae*, comprising the fungal mycelium, hidden beneath the soil, in leaf litter, in wood or even within animals.

Fungi are often elusive, not only because of the ephemeral nature of their fruiting bodies but also because we have largely neglected them in our representations of biodiversity.

Fungi rarely feature on the websites of environmental organisations

or in the management plans of Australian national parks. And on the rare occasion when they appear in the media, it's often in the context of agricultural losses due to fungal pathogens, or human fungal poisonings.

Both of these are issues of concern, but such portrayals, which convey only the negative aspects of fungi, can bias public perceptions of their importance and hinder conservation.

It seems that fungi rarely enter our consciousness, although many of us come into regular contact with them through fungal products in our cuisines, beverages and medicines.

Although fungi have been overlooked in many aspects of Australian biodiversity management, getting them on the conservation agenda is vital not only to their own survival, but also to the healthy functioning and resilience of ecosystems.

### Fungi of the Wombat Forest and Macedon Ranges

Wombat Forestcare (WFC) has been actively promoting the treasure trove of fungi to be found in the Wombat Forest through its website and newsletters.

WFC launched a new pocket-sized 'quick guide' in April. It covers 108 species commonly found in the area, along with information on their nutritional modes, the substrate types in which they grow, and a list of more comprehensive field guides and resources.

Many of the species in the guide are also 'target' species from the Fungimap scheme. Target species are those that are being mapped using distribution records from the community. These records provide vital baseline data on species distribution that then feed into fungal conservation.

Currently only one non-lichenised fungus species is listed in Victoria under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act. At a national level, two are listed under the Environment



Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. However, these two species are not listed in the context of requiring protection, but as species representing a threat.

While we can acknowledge the seriousness of the threats they pose, the fact that fungi are only listed in this context, while none are recognised as themselves requiring protection from threats, reflects the lack of recognition of their importance in ecosystem functioning.

### Little recognition

A recent review of the Management Plans of forty Australian national parks revealed that 30% made no reference to fungi. Of those that did mention them, over 90% made reference to pathogenic species, that is, again, only in the context of being a threat.

Only 25% referred to fungi not as pathogens, but usually only as an acknowledgement of their existence or of the need for further research. This was generally only a single reference, compared to an average of 109 references for plants and 83 for animals. We clearly need to explore options to get fungi on the conservation agenda.

As with all biodiversity conservation, conserving fungi requires information such as species distribution, biology, ecology and population dynamics.

But in addition to scientific data, conservation also relies on mobilising public interest and support.

Public concern for environmental issues that affect biodiversity drives political interest and the instigation of conservation policies.

This is especially important given that existing biodiversity conservation measures may not be adequately conserving fungi. Most biodiversity conservation has been developed in consideration only of flora and fauna, rarely addressing the complex interrelationships with fungi.

While a small fold-out guide such as the new Wombat Forest and Macedon Ranges one may be limited in its capacity to provide information for the accurate identification of species, it does increase awareness of the existence and tremendous diversity of fungi.

Since the Macedon Ranges and Wombat Forest have a diversity of habitats, ranging from wet forests to grassy woodlands to

heathy dry forests, the region also contains a corresponding diversity of fungi.

Among the better-known species are the agarics – those with a typical mushroom stipe-and-cap arrangement with gills beneath the cap. Agarics exist in an amazing array of forms, from the tiny delicate members of the genus *Mycena* to the mostly large and prominent members of the genus *Amanita*.

Other fungi produce fruiting bodies in a range of unusual forms such as jellies, discs, lattice-balls, corals and the almost extra-terrestrial-looking earthstars.

### Roles of fungi

As well as adding great interest to an autumn stroll, fungi are busy at work maintaining soil ecologies in the subterranean.

Fungi are the primary decomposers of organic matter as they can break down persistent compounds such as lignin and cellulose, thereby making nutrients available to other organisms.

Other species assist plant growth through beneficial associations known as mycorrhizal symbioses. In these mutually beneficial relationships, fungal mycelia interact with the tiny rootlets of plants by either forming a sheath around them or directly penetrating the rootlet cells.

The fungus effectively acts as an 'accessory root system', expanding the plant's own root system and hence its capacity to access greater volumes of soil and access to water and nutrients.

### Threats to fungi

Like all organisms, fungi are affected by disturbance to ecosystems. While some

fungi are extremely resilient and tolerant to environmental extremes, others are highly sensitive to even minor disturbances.

Ecosystem health is inextricably associated with the activities of fungi through the myriad ways in which they maintain soil health and water retention, decompose organic matter, and support flora and fauna.

Habitat degradation, fragmentation and loss all represent major threats to fungi. The State Government's proposals to reintroduce timber extraction in the west of the State and to dilute conservation policies further threaten Victoria's biodiversity, including fungi.

Public recognition of the importance of fungi is vital to their conservation. Next time you go for a wander in the Wombat or any of Victoria's diverse ecosystems, introduce yourself to some of the fascinating members of the fungi kingdom. • PW

### Further information

*Fungi of the Wombat Forest and Macedon Ranges* is available through Wombat Forestcare at [www.wombatforestcare.org.au](http://www.wombatforestcare.org.au)

Fungimap, the national hub for fungal enthusiasts, aims to address the lack of understanding of fungal ecology, diversity and distribution through various initiatives and resources. To join a foray, contribute a species record or learn more about fungi, visit [www.fungimap.org.au](http://www.fungimap.org.au)

The VNPA has copies of Ian McCann's useful guide *Australian Fungi Illustrated* available at the special member price of \$22.00.

See more of Alison's outstanding photographs at [www.alisonpouliot.com](http://www.alisonpouliot.com)



Golden Jelly Bells (*Heterotextus peziziformis*) grow on wood in both native and exotic forests.

PHOTO: ALISON POULIOT

# Good apart from the bats

## The VNPA 1999-2002

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR DON GARDEN'S FIFTH ARTICLE ON THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY HISTORY OF THE VNPA LOOKS AT THE EARLY YEARS OF THE BRACKS GOVERNMENT.

An article by VNPA Research Officer the late Jenny Barnett in the June 2001 edition of *Park Watch* deplored recent actions by the Minister for Environment and Conservation, Sherryl Garbutt.

The Minister had rejected the advice of the Scientific Advisory Committee under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act and had authorised a cull of the threatened Grey-headed Flying-foxes that were inhabiting (and badly damaging) the Melbourne Botanic Gardens.

But such discontent over an action by the Bracks Labor government in its early years of office was a rarity.

Overall, it was a period of significant pushbacks and advances after the disappointing years of the Kennett government (1993-99). When the VNPA celebrated its 50th birthday in late 2002, it was able to do so with an enhanced sense of satisfaction at what had been achieved.

Jeff Kennett's election defeat in September 1999 came as something of a surprise, but generated much relief among environmentalists. There had been few environmental advances and several steps backward; notably, plans to promote commercial activities in national parks had caused some of the biggest public protests (see *Park Watch*, March 2013).

Within a relatively short time the new government began to reverse some of the worst excesses. It cancelled plans for a large resort at Wilsons Promontory,



PHOTO: JOHN GASKELL

modified proposals for intrusive facilities at Port Campbell and Point Nepean, and returned 285 ha that had been excised from the Alpine NP.

The three main reforms or achievements came more slowly and only after drawn-out battles in the media and in the parliament, where the government faced a hostile Opposition majority in the Legislative Council.

Nevertheless, by late 2002 the Bracks government had established the long-overdue marine and box-ironbark national parks, and had created the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC).

### Marine conservation

The VNPA had been fighting for protection of the most vulnerable regions of Victoria's coastal and estuarine waters for decades. In the late Kennett years the ECC undertook an investigation and made preliminary recommendations, but its final recommendations were long overdue.

The Marine, Coastal and Estuarine final recommendations were tabled soon after the 1999 election. They fell far short of VNPA wishes but were a distinct advance on what had been offered in the past, especially in that they recommended national park protection and status for some areas.

Because of ongoing opposition from the coalition parties, the Herald Sun, industry interests and other groups

such as anglers, progress was slow. The first attempt at legislation in mid-2001 had to be withdrawn because of amendments in the Legislative Council.

Redrafted legislation in autumn 2002 was again significantly amended on such matters as boundaries and compensation, but Labor preferred not to lose the Bill again and accepted them. The Bill was passed in June and the parks were declared on 16 November 2002.

Victoria now had thirteen marine national parks and eleven new marine sanctuaries covering over 5.3% of state's waters. The largest national park was in the waters off Wilsons Promontory. Victoria could boast the most significant system of protected marine, estuarine and coastal areas in Australia.

### Box-ironbark parks

By the 1990s, 85% of Victoria's box-ironbark forests and woodlands had been cleared since colonisation and the remainder was being degraded or disappearing. Some of Victoria's most vulnerable fauna lived in what was left.

The ECC draft box-ironbark recommendations in May 2000 caused outrage among environmentalists. VNPA President James Ensor described the report as a 'nonsense' and 'dismal' because only 7% of the remaining box-ironbark vegetation was to be protected in new national parks, while most of the rest would be available for mining, prospecting, eucalyptus oil production and timber cutting.



Left: Verco's Nudibranch, colourful inhabitant of Victoria's marine national parks. ('Nudibranch' means 'naked gills'.)

After the final recommendations, there were long delays in presenting legislation, but when this was done in September 2002 there had been some significant improvements. Events moved surprisingly quickly. The legislation passed and the parks were proclaimed in October, just before the 2002 election.

A range of protected areas was established including five new or extended national parks (69,000 ha) and five new or extended state parks (27,000 ha). The largest national parks were Greater Bendigo (17,000 ha) and St Arnaud Range (13,900 ha). Disappointingly, some exploitative and 'multi-use' activities were to be allowed across the range of the new parks.

### VEAC

The Environment Conservation Council (ECC) that had suddenly replaced the Land Conservation Council in 1997 had proved not to be satisfactory in its resourcing and responsibilities. Labor was elected on a platform that promised to replace it.

The VNPA had discussions with the government over the proposed Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC). These focused on such matters as an enlarged membership with a range of specialist qualifications. VNPA also wanted the new body to have broader responsibilities, notably the capacity to make recommendations regarding private land.

The legislation to establish VEAC faced a tortuous process in the Legislative Council after it was introduced in spring 2000. The National Party particularly objected to VEAC having any say in private land, and the Bill was lost in mid-2001.

Redrafted legislation, leaving out private land, passed both Houses, and VEAC came into existence in 2002.

VEAC's role was (and still is) to conduct investigations at the request of the Minister into 'the protection and ecologically sustainable management of the environment and natural resources of public land'. It has tighter parliamentary reporting provisions and timetables than its predecessors, and greater public participation opportunities than the ECC.

In general, it has been a successful body.

The VNPA celebrated its 2002 jubilee with a sense of satisfaction. • PW

## Walking boots and working boots

By Don Garden

The VNPA has not focused solely on politics, lobbying, research and writing. There has always been a good deal of hands-on (or boots-on) activity – through the Bushwalking and Activities Group, and Friends groups.

A major VNPA contribution has been to take members and others into the bush. In the 1950s it ran periodic excursions. As these proved very popular they became more frequent, and in the 1960s some evolved into longer, more organised walks and overnight camps.

In the 1970s bushwalking increased further. In 1978 an Activities and Bushwalking Group organised 20 walks.

By the mid-1980s there was a walk virtually every weekend, and Geoff Durham had begun introduction days that became known as Walk, Talk & Gawks – special guided walks with rangers and other experts.

Another development in the 1970s and 80s was the establishment of Friends groups in national and other parks. The first was formed in 1971 to rehabilitate the new Organ Pipes National Park.

Other Friends groups followed. By 1982 there were ten, and by 1990, 39. There are now more than 100.

Geoff Durham was the major force within the VNPA in the development of Friends groups, both while he was President and subsequently as VNPA Coordinator of Activities.

A Friends committee was formed in 1986 with Geoff as convenor, formalised in 1991 as the independent Friends Network committee (now the Victorian Environment Friends Network). The Network produces a newsletter and holds biennial conferences to educate and coordinate groups – the next is in September 2013.

For those who wish to see the work of one Friends group, an excellent DVD is available – *Wyperfeld 100: a traverse in time*, produced by the Friends of Wyperfeld.

This DVD won the Best Multimedia History Award at the Victorian Community History Awards in October. The VNPA has copies available for \$15.00. • PW

Friends of Wyperfeld National Park prepare guards for the trees and shrubs they are about to plant.



PHOTO: GEOFF DURHAM



# Habitat hub



PHOTO: LEON COSTERMANS

Aerial view of the 1964-65 Australian Scout Jamboree, attended by more than 15,000 Scouts, in the Dandenong Police Paddocks Reserve. Churchill NP in background.

**GEOFF DURHAM** TAKES US TO A NATIONAL PARK AND A HISTORIC RESERVE IN MELBOURNE'S SOUTH-EAST THAT ARE IMPORTANT PARTS OF A HABITAT CORRIDOR.

**'Embarrassing' best describes my first visit to Churchill National Park.**

It was late December 1964, and I was the organiser of activities for Senior Scouts at the 7th Australian Scout Jamboree in the Dandenong Police Paddocks.

One evening activity was a paintball-style 'battle' in the adjacent Churchill NP, arming the combatants from with over-ripe tomatoes. The result was an irate park ranger; we spent the 'morning after' cleaning up the park's bespattered picnic ground.

**Police Depot and Protectorate Station**

In 1837 Port Phillip District Magistrate William Lonsdale set aside 100 square miles on the Dandenong Creek, known to the Aboriginal people as 'Nerre Warren', for a native police depot. From 1840 to 1844, Assistant Protector of Aborigines William Thomas ran a Government Protectorate Station on the site.

The Native Police Corps operated intermittently under Captain Christian De Villiers until 1839, and from 1842 to 1853 under Captain Henry Dana. The site then became the stud for police horses from the early 1850s (hence Stud Road) until 1931, when it moved to Bundoora. The Black Tracker branch of the police force was stationed here from 1884 until the move.

In the 1920s an SEC powerline easement was created and an aqueduct supplying water for Dandenong was constructed. Over the years various portions of the original reservation were sold as private land, and in 1930 the remaining 1,750 acres (708 ha) were proclaimed a public reserve known as The Police Paddocks. Grazing, quarrying and firewood cutting went on in the 1920s and '30s.

**Churchill National Park**

Covering 271 hectares, Churchill is Victoria's second-smallest national park. The only national park established in the 1930s (the depression

years) and the '40s (World War II and immediate post-war years), it resulted from a prolonged public campaign.

Historian Ellen Coulson writes in *The Story of the Dandenongs 1838 -1958*: "It was largely due to the persistent efforts of Sir James Barrett that the then Minister for Lands (Hon. A.E. Lind) agreed on 29 November 1939 to reserve 477 acres (193 ha) of the hilly north-eastern portion of the Police Paddocks as a national park. The area was proclaimed as the 'Dandenong National Park' on 20 October 1943, but on 10 February 1944 the name of this historic area was altered to 'Churchill National Park', as a tribute to Britain's wartime leader ..."

In 1941 a 'tented' camp was established there as a training centre for the army, and the road now called Army Track was constructed.

Before the establishment of the National Parks Service in 1971 the park was managed by a Committee of Management. In the early 1960s, because of shooting, rubbish dumping



and firewood removal, it was surrounded by a high cyclone fence, and a brick house (since demolished) was erected for a ranger.

The only vehicular entrance, off Churchill Park Drive (Melway 82 C11), leads to the picnic area, with toilets and a shelter. The gate is closed from 4.00 pm to 10.30 am at weekends but pedestrians have access. Camping, dogs, horses and trail bikes are not permitted. Cyclists can use all tracks except those for 'walkers only'.

The network of tracks offers opportunities for a variety of easy and easy/medium one- or two-hour walks. A ten-minute Nature Walk at the picnic area passes through a grove of Muttonwood.

The park is popular with bird watchers, but there are now no Bellbirds along Bellbird Track. In the north-east extension, Woodland Walk takes you down into a pleasant Manna Gum gully and up to Lysterfield Park with a worthwhile short diversion to the Lysterfield Hills Lookout at a Trig Point on granite boulders.

Common trees are Narrow-leaved Peppermint and Black She-oak, with Yellow Box and Swamp Gum on lower slopes. Along the northern boundary is a stand of Messmate. Large areas have a ground cover of Spiny-headed Mat-rush and Saw-sedge (*Gahnia*). Spring is a good time for orchids.

The easement, now with seven transmission lines dating from the early 1950s, cuts a wide band of modified vegetation across the park. Despite ongoing control efforts, weeds, notably Sweet Pittosporum, boneseed and blackberry, persist. Cinnamon Fungus (*Dieback*) is present.

The population of Eastern Grey Kangaroos has bred from eight kangaroos released in 1969. The small

population of Black Wallabies was augmented with wallabies from The Lakes National Park, and wombats were unsuccessfully introduced.

### Police Paddocks

On the south side of Churchill Park Drive is the 499 ha Dandenong Police Paddocks Reserve, which does not have the protection of the National Parks Act or a Management Plan. Parks Victoria's rating is 'low' for both Levels of Protection and Levels of Service.



Churchill NP has wildlife (and power lines), offers fine views and is popular for picnics, walks, jogging and bike riding.

Parks Victoria's Park Notes (2006) refer to 'a diverse combination of bushland, cultural heritage and sporting areas'. This was the site of the 7th (1964-65) and 11th (1976-77) Australian Scout Jamborees; tracks are named after previous Jamborees.

The Park Notes say it is 'one of the most significant heritage places in the Melbourne Region', but the only

interpretation is a plaque at the site of the (demolished) police depot buildings.

The main entrance is at the end of Brady Road (Melway 81 K11), leading to the 'Nerre Warren' Picnic Area. Vandalism and rubbish dumping are big problems – the toilets are closed and the barbecue and interpretation signage have been removed. There is a 700 metre Woodland Walk and a degraded 1km Wetland Walk.

Dogs are permitted on leads, with some off-lead areas, but not trail bikes or horses.

Unfortunately, a once active Friends Group has languished.

### Habitat corridor

In 1995 Churchill National Park and Lysterfield Park were linked, with the addition of 78 ha to Churchill and 125 ha to Lysterfield. The Land Conservation Council in 1994 recommended that these parks be managed as part of an integrated unit, and the Parks Victoria 1998 Management Plan is for both parks.

The parks are the hub of a habitat corridor linking the Dandenong Valley Parklands with the Dandenong Ranges through Birds Land and Monbulk Creek.

I have visited several times in recent months. Recreation areas, roadsides and fire breaks are mown, some blackberries have been sprayed, and there is some rabbit and fox baiting, but there are many indications of limited management.

When John Brookes was Director of National Parks in the 1970s, he preached 'the pursuit of excellence', and Jeff Floyd, as CEO of Melbourne Parks and Waterways and then Parks Victoria in the 1990s, proclaimed the guiding philosophy as 'World's Best Practice'.

Because of the current inadequate resourcing for parks, it seems to me that Parks Victoria's present CEO Dr Bill Jackson's edict to staff is 'Prioritise, and do the best you can!' • PW

PHOTOS: GEOFF DURHAM



PHOTO: MICHAEL WRIGHT

# ROYAL PARK

## *Past, present ... and future?*

Royal Park is a natural retreat for city people, and wildlife.

VNPA MEMBER VICTORIA STRUTT, A TEACHER OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE, WORKS AS A VOLUNTEER IN THE VNPA OFFICE.

**Royal Park, 180 hectares of open space just beyond the northern edge of the CBD, is perhaps taken for granted by many Melburnians.**

When I moved into Parkville in 1996, I became more aware of its history – that Burke and Wills set off from there, that it housed an army base (Camp Pell) during the Second World War, and more – and its many other values.

Since the 1980s Melbourne City Council has been implementing a forward-thinking plan to replace most of the park's exotic vegetation with indigenous trees, shrubs and grasses. This project is now largely complete, and many more native birds and other wildlife are attracted to the park. There have even been occasional reports of echidnas!

How Royal Park has been used, and abused, is a more complex story. Let's look at some recent and important developments, one positive but the others much less so.

### **The upside: wetlands and water capture**

The need to drought-proof Melbourne and its parks will become even more critical as global warming gets a tighter grip.

With this in mind, the Melbourne City Council developed a wetlands area in Royal Park near the Tullamarine Freeway in 2005. This has greatly reduced the amount of domestic-quality water needed there.

The Council estimates that 380 megalitres of 'captured' water have been used in the park since 2005. The water is also used to hand-water newly planted trees and shrubs throughout the city.

As well, the wetlands benefit both wildlife and people.

#### **How it works**

A reed-bed – or more technically, treatment pond – takes stormwater from gutters in the nearby suburbs of West Brunswick and Parkville. The wide, curved shape of the pond means that water flows

slowly through it and the vegetation and sunlight gradually filter and purify the water as it goes on its way.

Storage tanks beside the Capital City Trail bicycle path hold water from the treatment pond that is used for irrigating the Royal Park Public Golf Course and other sports grounds and parkland, as well as the elms along Royal Parade.

Any water over the storage capacity of the reed-beds and tanks (6 million litres) is directed back into the adjacent Moonee Ponds Creek and finally into Port Phillip Bay.

#### **Benefits**

The wetlands' size (5 ha), location and appearance also mean that many people can enjoy what feels like a totally natural environment. A boardwalk and earthen pathways take you around the water's edge.

Some of these paths are off-limits to dogs, given that a wide range of birds uses the wetlands to feed and nest in. In fact nearly 300 species of birds have been sighted here over the course of a year.



As it is close to the Capital City and Moonee Ponds Creek bike paths, many cyclists and others also use the area.

A quiet space like this wetland area allows us city dwellers to benefit from visiting a natural 'retreat'. This helps our mental resilience and well-being. Such natural retreats will increase in value as global warming and urbanisation ramp up.

The wetlands have many benefits, and seem secure. Elsewhere, the park faces immediate and serious threats.

## The downside: slashed up?

The proposed East-West Link tunnel under (or through) Royal Park is by far the biggest threat.

An actual tunnel bored under the park might not be so bad, but we have recently learned that a 'cut and cover' method may be used. Who knows how long the 'cover' part might take to complete? How often has a plan been amended and timelines extended through lack of funding?

To get some grasp of the impact of the cutting that would be needed, look at the Upfield train line through the park. At Royal Park Station this line goes into a deep and wide cutting that divides the parkland. The freeway would be much wider than this, as four traffic lanes are planned. The Eastern Freeway cutting through Yarra Bend Park is perhaps a better comparison.

The tunnel itself would not be the only thing infringing on the park. Its ventilation shafts would affect surrounding temperatures and air

quality, with impacts on bird and animal life as well as people and landscape. Noise would also be an issue.

Royal Park is being seen as an obstacle in the way of cars and trucks. Are money and vehicles our only measures? Are there no other values that should take precedence?

Building more highways has never solved transport congestion problems anywhere. They make them worse.

As well, Royal Park's role in protecting and providing clean air and a quiet environment for inner Melbourne would be seriously compromised by so many cars, with noise as well as air pollution.

## Gnawed away over time

The park's 180 hectares are a fragment of its original size. Governor Latrobe allocated 1,036 hectares for a park in 1854. Places and facilities we now take for granted as belonging to and identifying Melbourne, like the Melbourne Zoo, University High School, the Royal Children's and Royal Melbourne hospitals and the attractive Victorian houses in The Avenue are on land originally allocated to Royal Park.

More recent examples of 'gnawing' include the State Netball and Hockey Centre between the Upfield railway line and the zoo.

But the most recent example is the plan not to restore to parkland the 7 ha of land that was the site of the old Royal Children's Hospital.

In 2007 an Act of Parliament stated that this land was to be returned to grassland and open woodland that would merge with and be reintegrated into the park. Now the Melbourne City Council wants to use one hectare to construct a large playground.

Other parts of the seven hectares may be used for a toilet block and a carpark, even though the area is already well provided with parking. There are also plans for shops, reducing the seven hectares to a mere remnant.

Local residents have understandably objected strongly.

## A clash of values

The tunnel and the co-opting of the 7 ha of hospital land are not only local issues. They represent the values of a government and community which appear to judge everything in terms of short-term commercial value and monetary profit.

Royal Park has become a mere vestige of what was originally planned, suggesting that the approach has been "We'll let this be a park until we can think of something better (i.e. more profitable) to use it for."

Can you imagine the people of New York allowing large chunks of Central Park to be dug up or built on? That park was opened in 1857 and it is still its original size. Given this, any argument that La Trobe's decision was made so long ago that you couldn't reasonably expect it to remain unchanged does not hold.

So why are cars, cash and convenience the deciding values? Why do our political decision-makers measure the worth of land only in relation to these things? • PW



Wetlands with Tullamarine Freeway landmarks in background.



Bird watching site in the wetlands.



# Bringing birds back to the Strzeleckis

*Article dedicated to the memory of Peter Human*

CARA BRAMMAR RECENTLY GRADUATED FROM LA TROBE UNIVERSITY WITH A BA HONS IN OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION. MEETING THE EDITOR AT PETER HUMAN'S FUNERAL LAST YEAR (PETER WAS MARRIED TO CARA'S GRANDFATHER'S COUSIN) LED TO THIS ARTICLE ABOUT HER HONOURS PROJECT.

PHOTO: CARA BRAMMAR

Remnant native vegetation in the Strzeleckis.

**Starting in the 1870s, European settlers radically transformed the landscape of Victoria's western Strzelecki Ranges. Large areas of old-growth wet forests containing tall trees with trunks large enough to house a horse and cart were felled, mainly for agricultural purposes.**

Clearing of the forest and its replacement with pasture led to a host of environmental problems, such as soil erosion and the removal of habitat for native animals and birds. Sadly, once common species of native birds such as the Superb Lyrebird are now confined to a few uncleared forested areas like Mount Worth State Park (near Warragul).

With only a small number of public reserves in the district, conservation on private property is crucial. Some private land owners, including my own family, have used revegetation as a way of restoring habitat.

Ever since I was two years old, I have been involved (in some form or other) in rehabilitating steep gullies with

indigenous plants. Some plantings and I have grown up together, although the eucalypts have grown far taller than I could ever dream of doing!

In such a rapid growth region, I was always interested to find out if (and how quickly) our revegetation was providing environmental benefits. And as a bird enthusiast, I was particularly interested in investigating the role of revegetation in helping to sustain and enhance the local native bird populations of the region.

An Honours year in 2012 presented itself as the perfect opportunity for me to undertake such an investigation. This led to the birth of a research thesis titled 'Your land, my habitat: Bird response to revegetation ageing in the western Strzelecki Ranges'.

I conducted the project on thirteen private property sites. Two cleared pasture sites and two remnant forest sites were compared with nine revegetation sites ranging in age from one year after planting through to thirty years after planting.

Due to time constraints, surveying for bird presence and activity was carried out over the winter/early spring period.

It was quite adventurous! I often found myself traipsing through loads of mud and risked sliding down steep slopes into blackberry thickets. Despite this, however, I thoroughly enjoyed the field work. Nothing beats having an early morning cup of tea outdoors and listening to a variety of native bird calls in what was previously a bare paddock.

I was pleased to find about sixty different bird species within the thirteen sites – not bad for such a fragmented landscape!

Although my research came up with results similar to those of previous studies (many of which had been conducted in drier regions), it also included important findings such as:

- the early threshold age at which the revegetation provided habitat for an increased number of forest bird species





PHOTOS: CARA BRAMMAR

**Clockwise from top left:** Assistant in the field; Healthy young revegetation; Birds use isolated trees as 'stepping stones'; Cara checks out the birdlife.

- the role that the ever-present woody weeds (such as blackberries and hawthorns) play as native bird habitat in the absence of native species
- the contribution of long-ungrazed pasture and scattered trees as bird habitat in the western Strzelecki Ranges.

The results were generally encouraging for private landholders and contributed to the understanding that even early-age revegetation is playing a key role in minimising and reversing bird decline.

However, much work still needs to be done to sustain and diversify native forest bird populations over the longer term in such a fragmented landscape.

To start with, revegetation needs to be securely fenced off from livestock. The presence of cows or sheep in revegetated areas contributes to the loss of understorey plants and organic matter within a site, which many native forest birds rely upon for feeding and breeding.

Also, weeds need to be controlled in conservation sites, not only in the initial stages of site preparation but each year to reduce competition with more desirable native plant species.

In the short term, though, it was obvious that where present, woody weeds can play a useful role as bird habitat. In this case, where such weeds are present within a site, they should be removed over a period of time, being replaced with native shrubs as they are removed, to minimise the impact on native birds.

Furthermore, isolated trees (or scattered trees as they are more commonly known) not only shelter livestock but are used by many birds as stepping stones across the landscape, allowing them to move into areas they would not otherwise be able to access, including isolated revegetation sites.

In such a cleared landscape, I found that isolated native trees in pasture were frequently used by open-country birds such as magpies and Grey

Butcherbirds, and also by a variety of forest birds including the Red Wattlebird, Golden Whistler and White-throated Treecreeper, and by waterbirds such as Australian Shelducks.

Unfortunately, the western Strzelecki Ranges area is lacking in scattered native trees, many of the older specimens dying and not being replaced.

I strongly urge landowners to plant single native trees more extensively in paddocks, and to fence off and protect from livestock any that already exist.

In conclusion, revegetation in the fragmented western Strzelecki Ranges needs to be more extensive, and replanting techniques improved. Nevertheless, it was pleasing to find that the existing revegetation is making a significant contribution to native bird conservation.

I would like to acknowledge the valuable input that private landholders have made in achieving this, and encourage this good work to continue! • PW

# An Australian first

The First National Park

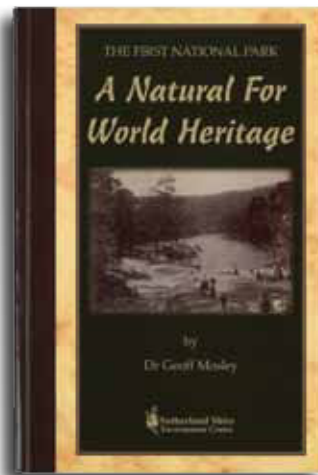
## A natural for World Heritage

By Geoff Mosley. Envirobook, Sutherland Shire Environment Centre, Sydney 2012.

Available from Envirobook, Box 589, PO Sutherland, 1499 NSW for \$29.95 including postage, and free online at [www.firstnationalpark.org.au](http://www.firstnationalpark.org.au)

**This book sets the foundations for three areas south of Sydney to receive World Heritage listing. These are Royal National Park (Australia's first national park, declared in 1879), Garrawarra Conservation Area and Heathcote National Park, collectively called the Royal Reserves.**

The book's five chapters present detailed data on the reserves' physical



environment, including their geology, climate, fauna, flora and history, and the World Heritage criteria they need to satisfy.

There are also four detailed appendices, evidence for how extensively this area has already been documented.

In reading about the reserves' history one is reminded of how environmentalists have had to fight the same battles repeatedly. In the late

19th century and throughout the 20th, conflict arose over different uses for the park, for example for mining and cattle grazing. Sound familiar?

The book profiles the role of bushwalkers in lobbying for maintaining the park in as pristine a form as possible. In the late 1880s, one drive overtook the others, at least for a time: conservation should take precedence over recreation. This may seem forward thinking, but the decision was made more for pragmatic than environmental reasons.

The history of the reserves is a window on changing views about the natural environment, introduced species and the exploitation of land.

The book gives a firm basis for lobbyists seeking World Heritage status for this area. All NSW and federal members of parliament have been sent a copy. They should take up the cause.

The inclusion of excellent coloured maps and photographs helps significantly in putting the case. • PW

Reviewed by Victoria Strutt.

## *In memory of the Barnetts and Aherns*

Long-time VNPA staff member Jenny Barnett, her husband John and their renowned biologist neighbours Leigh and Charmian Ahern were among the unfortunate victims of the 2009 Black Saturday fires at Steels Creek.

On a sunny Saturday in May, family, friends and colleagues of the Barnetts and Aherns placed objects in a time capsule beneath a seat constructed in their memory. The VNPA included Jenny's thorough submission to the government inquiry into the earlier 2006 fires, and some of her photographs.

We believe her submission and its insights into fire management, though criticised at the time, will still be valid when the time capsule is opened in the distant future.



PHOTO: RICHARD FORSE



PHOTO: JENNY BARNETT

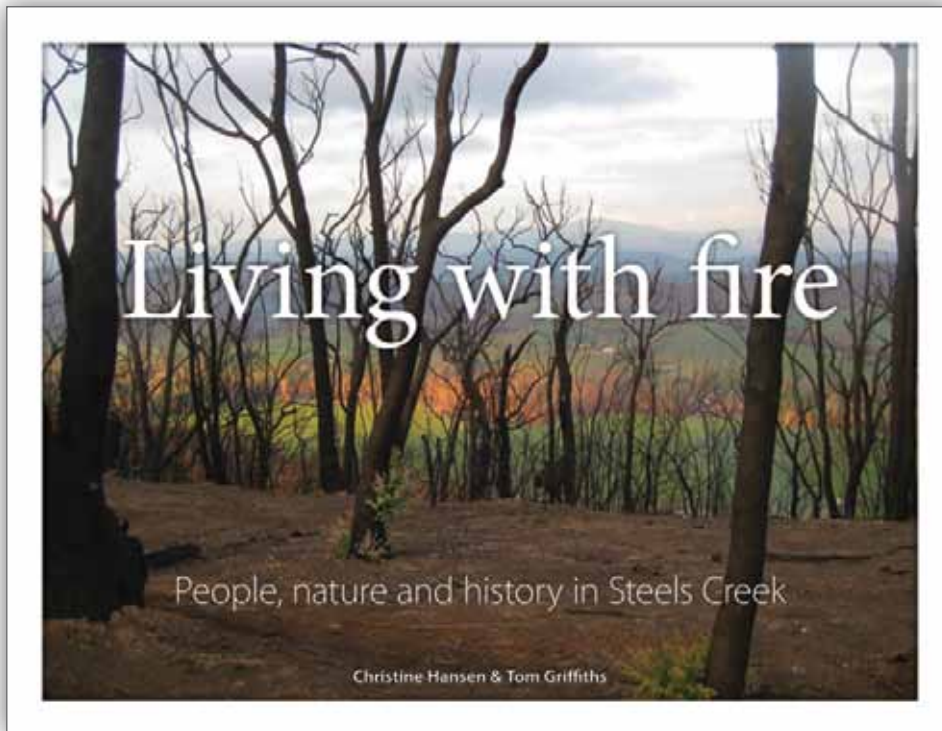
Jenny and John left their estate to Bush Heritage Australia and Trust for Nature, in the interests of conservation. In May this year a property was purchased in their memory: 190 hectares of threatened grassy woodland in northern Victoria.

John and Jenny had worked as volunteers on this block, surveying mammals and erecting nest boxes. Jenny also found a species of bull-ant there which, years earlier at Long Forest, she had actually discovered. • PW

### Phil Ingamells

Top left: Dale Ahern and friends replace the top of the seat containing the time capsule articles.





## Can we learn to live with fire?

### Living with fire

People, nature and history in Steels Creek

By Christine Hansen and Tom Griffiths. CSIRO Publishing, November 2012. RRP \$49.95.

**This is a must-read book, exceptional in many ways. It takes you into the lives of the people of Steels Creek (near Kinglake NP), their experiences of the 2009 firestorm, and their responses.**

For the VNPA, this is a personal story. Our much-loved Jenny Barnett, and husband John, died in the firestorm in spite of excellent preparation and knowledge of fire. Ten people died at Steels Creek; 67 houses were burnt, leaving 250 people homeless. Malcolm and Jane Calder, who both have long and strong connections to VNPA, were burnt out but managed to save their house.

An untallied number of pets and an unimaginable number of native birds and animals – many of them much-loved wild friends of the valley community – also died.

But this book goes much further than local stories and magnificent art and photos. The authors give us the social and environmental history of the area, including what is known of Wurundjeri connections to the land, its fire history, and the relationship of fire with Mountain Ash forests.

While aspects of the 2009 firestorm were unique, it was not a rare event. Fire has threatened or entered the area at least 19 times since 1851.

Using Steels Creek as an example, the authors discuss the lessons of this history and what we, the residents of this fire-prone continent, have learnt (or not yet learnt) in our relatively short time here.

Have we taken on board that fires are frequent events? That 'dugouts' are necessary refuges when, as inevitably happens, people are caught in their homes? What happens when a generation or more hasn't experienced a fire?

Finally, the policy responses – especially 'stay or go', which said if you stayed and were prepared, your home would be safe while the fire passed over – are dissected, and the evidence challenged strongly. Do houses explode in a fire? Personal stories say yes, others say no. If they do explode, your house is not a safe place in a firestorm.

This book is a rare combination indeed: local knowledge and experiences set in the discipline of research and linked

to policy. It shows brilliantly the potential for significant insights when researchers recognise the value of local experiences and the historical context which are then linked to policy.

Living with fire must generate discussion. Some statements can be challenged, but the book must not be ignored. It is a major step in our learning to live in this amazing land.

There is, however, a broader picture. Surely our biggest challenge is whether we can learn to live with fire without destroying the indigenous species with which we share this continent. The extent of clearing and control burning happening now is another nail in their coffin.

Somehow, making bunkers compulsory for residents in fire-prone areas seems easy compared to coming to grips with our fear of fire. I suspect Jenny Barnett would agree. • PW

**Reviewed by Karen Alexander.**

The VNPA has copies of this book for sale at the special member price of \$39.95 plus \$5.00 postage.



# Bogong refuge

**LAURENCE MCDONALD**, SON OF VNPA MEMBER GERARD MCDONALD, IS A KEEN PHOTOGRAPHER AND ALPINE ADVENTURER.

Cleve Cole Hut sits in a majestic position in the Alpine National Park, overlooking a gentle valley and not far from the open plain that leads to the summit of Mt Bogong (1986 metres).

It commemorates alpine pioneer Cleve Cole, who attempted the first winter crossing of the Bogong High Plains and perished there from hypothermia during a blizzard in 1936. The hut, built in 1938, has served as a hub for skiers and adventurers ever since.

Cleve Cole Hut is well-equipped with all the necessities to survive up there in harsh conditions. Run by dedicated members of the Mt Bogong Ski Club, it's constantly maintained.

When filled with willing volunteers for a working bee it feels like an old country pub transplanted into the middle of alpine bushland.

It's a stunning landscape up there, with alpine flora and sheer open space on top



**Top:** Alpine panorama from Hell Gap.  
**Middle:** Working bee at Cleve Cole Hut.  
**Right:** Inside the hut looking out.

of the high plains. We approach via Eskdale Spur walking track; it's a 6km walk that takes about 2-3 hours.

You have to be aware of the weather and unexpected strong winds, especially on Hell Gap, a ridge that is completely exposed and steep on both sides.

My wife and I are looking forward to experiencing the winter up there.

Nothing else seems to matter when you're there – you just breathe in that crisp alpine air and take in the pristine surroundings of Mt Bogong. • PW



PHOTOS: LAURENCE MCDONALD

## BWAG Social Nights

The VNPA Bushwalking and Activities Group hosts Social Nights on the second Wednesday of most months in the ground floor meeting room at 60 Leicester St, Carlton. Doors open 7pm with a presentation at 8pm. A \$2 entry charge includes wine, tea, coffee and biscuits.

Everyone is welcome - members, friends and the general public. Speakers are experts in their fields and enhance our knowledge of the natural world.

Put these dates in your diary!

**WEDNESDAY 7 AUGUST:**  
**Reef Watch – citizen science for the marine environment**

*Presenter: Wendy Roberts, VNPA Reef Watch Coordinator.*

Citizen science is the new frontier for the natural sciences. With advances in technology, divers can now record, document and upload their underwater discoveries to national databases such as the CSIRO's Bowerbird site. Come and find out how you can be involved both above and below the surface.

**WEDNESDAY 11 SEPTEMBER:**  
**Wyperfeld 100 – a Traverse in Time**

*Presenter: Jim Noelker, Friends of Wyperfeld NP.*

This is the title of an award-winning DVD produced by the Friends celebrating Wyperfeld National Park and the people who cherish its beauty and diversity. The film has historic and current footage of the park and the people who have enjoyed and looked after it. • PW



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For more details contact Jenny:

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