

PARK WATCH

SHINE A LIGHT FOR PARKS

AT THE PROM ON 2 NOVEMBER



OPEN LETTER TO THE PREMIER
GREEN EDGE FOR MELBOURNE

WESTERNPORT FEARS

FERAL HORSES

FIRE POLICY

BUNYIP'S BANDICOOTS

PLUS: VNPA ANNUAL REPORT 2012-13

SEPTEMBER 2013 NO 254



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



Be part of nature

PRESIDENT Russell Costello

DIRECTOR Matt Ruchel

Level 3, 60 Leicester St, Carlton, VIC 3053

ABN 34 217 717 593

Telephone: (03) 9347 5188

Facsimile: (03) 9347 5199

E-mail: vnpa@vnpa.org.au

Web: www.vnpa.org.au

VNPA'S VISION

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

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Matt Ruchel, Philip Ingamells, Michael Howes.

ADVERTISING

Emily Clough, Emilyc@vnpa.org.au

GETTING INVOLVED IN VNPA

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

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

PUBLISHING POLICY

All advertisements should be compatible with VNPA policies. Publication of an advertisement does not imply endorsement by the VNPA Inc. of the advertised product or service. The VNPA reserves the right to refuse any advertisement at any time.

Park Watch may be quoted without permission provided that acknowledgement is made. The opinions of contributors are not necessarily those of the VNPA Inc.

GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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

COPY DEADLINE for December 2013 *Park Watch* is 21 October 2013.

DESIGN Mary Ferlin

PRINTING Adams Print

FRONT COVER

Tongue Point, Wilsons Promontory National Park.

Photo © Dr Robin Williams.

BACK COVER

Leadbeater's Possum, Central Highlands.

Photo: Steve Kuiter.

Park Watch ISSN 1324-4361



CONTENTS

| | |
|-------|--|
| 3 | From the President |
| 3 | From the Editor |
| 4-6 | Open Letter to the Premier of Victoria: Privatising Our National Parks |
| 6 | Shine a light for parks at the Prom! |
| 7 | A resort near the Prom – Tom's vision |
| 8-9 | A Green Edge for Melbourne |
| 10-11 | Lerderderg River rambling |
| 12-13 | Can Leadbeater's Possum be saved? |
| 14-15 | Missed opportunity for threatened species |
| 16-17 | An oil spill disaster in the making? |
| 18-19 | The Silver Brumby did it |
| 20 | Yellingbo report – a strong voice for cooperation |

| CENTRE PAGES | VNPA Annual Report 2012-2013 |
|--------------|---|
| 21 | National parks show biodiversity benefit |
| 22-23 | VNPA rabbitohs hit Hattah |
| 24 | Cameras reveal eleven native mammal species |
| 25 | A brighter future for Bunyip's bandicoots |
| 26-27 | The fire next time |
| 28-29 | Do you support marine protected areas? |
| 30-31 | A recent volcano: Mt Eccles National Park |
| 32-33 | Book review – Linking Australia's Landscapes |
| 32-33 | Book review – Australian Native Plants: the Kings Park Experience |
| 34-35 | Book review – Biodiversity: integrating conservation and production |
| 36-37 | TreeProject grows biodiversity |
| 38 | Come and enjoy Victoria's wildflowers |
| 38 | VMRG Training Weekend |
| 39 | VNPA BWAG Excursions |



From the President

I can't believe the year has flown past so quickly. And what a difficult year it has been!

In a time of financial constraint, we have faced a government that is determined have private industry build hotels and other major developments within our national parks, undermine native vegetation clearing controls, minimise protection for the many conservation values in the vast extensions it has allowed to Melbourne's expanding urban fringe, and is trying to allow grazing, logging and fossicking in national parks in which they are currently not permitted.

Without the enthusiasm of VNPA staff and our many volunteers, we would not have achieved a fraction of what we have accomplished over a very difficult 12 months.

It's reported that the State Government is blaming our campaign, together with the Labor Party's opposition to the legislation, for its failure to secure any tenders to date for major developments in national parks. And of course we could not have mounted such an effective campaign without the financial contributions from you, our members and supporters.

Although to date the government has not been successful, we must continue the campaign until this legislation is revoked. To that end, we are planning a 'Hands off our Parks' event centred around Wilsons Promontory NP on Melbourne Cup weekend, so please give this your support.

We also found that the Department of Environment and Primary Industry did not intend to make any changes to its watering-down of native vegetation clearing controls. At a meeting last month, their staff informed the VNPA that they had made no changes to

their proposed amendments to the controls despite the many submissions that they received earlier this year. They did say that the submissions were useful in helping them to explain their changes better.

They also explained why they are doing away with the three-step approach to approving clearing applications for low-significance vegetation (that is, 'avoid, minimise, offset').

They said that Councils (which administer planning permits) frequently abused this process by requiring applicants to avoid clearing native vegetation of negligible or unsustainable ecological value from a State perspective. Local government will now be obliged to allow small areas of clearing with appropriate offsets unless the State's statewide computer-generated mapping says the vegetation is important or the Council has changed its own local policy.

As we head towards the last quarter of 2013, your Council is finalising its

revised strategic plan for the next five years and beyond. Although much of our work is ongoing, some of the new directions have been identified through the work that has gone into the fourth version of the VNPA's Nature Conservation Review, due to be released this year.

I would like to thank all our Councillors and committee members for their hard work over a difficult year, and remind members that there are opportunities for members or interested people to serve on the VNPA council (the organisation's governing body).

We are particularly looking for a diverse range of people with different skills to help make VNPA a stronger organisation. If you have a marketing, communication, business or scientific background and want to get more involved with the VNPA, nominations for Council are now open. Please contact the VNPA office to find out more. • **PW**

Russell Costello, VNPA President

From the Editor

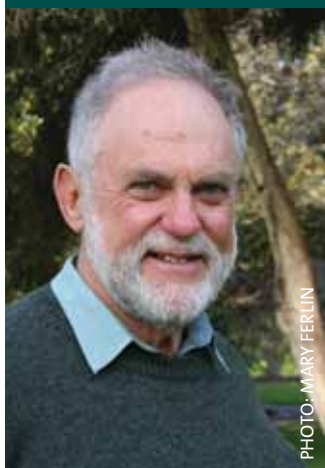


PHOTO: MARY FERLIN

It's easy to get depressed about the state of our natural environment, but there are still good things happening. Have a look at Sam Ford's delightful story on p. 10, and Euan Moore's on p. 22.

Positives like these help buoy our spirits to deal with the many challenges we face.

We try to keep a balance between positive and challenging articles in *Park Watch*. Have you got a positive nature experience or story to share?

Many thanks to all who contributed words and photographs for this issue, and particularly to Dr Robin Williams for his magnificent Prom images. We hope they'll help inspire you to go to the Prom over the Cup weekend and join the 'Hands Off our Parks!' rally. See p. 6. • **PW**

Michael Howes



HANDS OFF OUR PARKS!

THE FOLLOWING OPEN LETTER TO VICTORIAN PREMIER DENIS NAPTHINE FROM 21 EMINENT VICTORIANS, INCLUDING LEADING ACADEMICS, A NOBEL PRIZE WINNER, FORMER CHIEF SCIENTISTS AND A FORMER STATE GOVERNOR, APPEARED IN *THE AGE* ON 19 AUGUST. THE LETTER EXPRESSES THEIR DEEP CONCERN ABOUT THE LEGISLATION THAT WILL ALLOW AREAS IN VICTORIAN NATIONAL PARKS TO BE LEASED TO COMMERCIAL INTERESTS FOR 99 YEARS.

OPEN LETTER TO THE PREMIER OF VICTORIA

PRIVATISING OUR NATIONAL PARKS

A BETRAYAL OF PUBLIC TRUST

Australian national parks are very special places. They contain the outstanding examples of our natural and cultural heritage remaining after the major settlement and development phases of our past.

Australia's first national park, Royal National Park south of Sydney, established in 1879, was the second national park in the world, the first being Yellowstone in the USA. Our national parks are recognised internationally by world authorities

not only because of their diversity and quality of the natural systems they protect, but also because of the way they have been managed over the past 135 years.

Until now our national parks have been securely protected under State legislation, having been created after thorough scientific assessment and extensive comparative studies.

Why then is it now proposed to introduce uses into our internationally

acclaimed national parks that are inimical to the very reason for establishing them? National parks have **NOT** been set aside for grazing by cattle, logging, prospecting, hunting or commercial development. These activities, to be permitted in national parks in a number of States, are incompatible with the fundamental reasons for creating national parks – protecting our natural and cultural heritage. Such uses compromise and diminish the reasons for visiting national parks – to enjoy the beauty



PHOTO © DR ROBIN WILLIAMS

Panorama of Tidal River area, Mt Oberon and Norman Bay from Tidal Overlook, Wilsons Promontory NP.

of natural landscapes and to relax in natural settings removed from the complexities and stresses of modern living.

The most insidious of all these intrusive uses are the proposals of the Victorian government to lease areas within our national parks for up to ninety-nine years to encourage commercial development by private corporations.

In reality, a 99-year lease transfers ownership of a public asset, something we all own and can share, to a private benefit enjoyed by a privileged few. Once the private sector develops resorts and associated infrastructure the return of this land to the public will never occur. Thus, with long term leasing provisions embedded in national parks legislation as is now occurring through the *National Parks Amendment (Leasing Powers and Other Matters) Bill*, most land in our national parks is vulnerable, as leased areas can be readily expanded. Indeed, the Bill currently before Parliament makes it clear that up to two thirds of the land in our national parks could be placed under long-term leases.

Of further concern is the provision in the Bill that allows the decision to lease land in our national parks for

99 years to be made by the responsible Minister. A 99-year lease would essentially remove land from the park and transfer tenure and management to the private sector. Currently, such an action can only occur by a decision of the parliament to pass an amendment to the *National Parks Act*.

New resort development within national parks is now recognised internationally as undesirable and in conflict with the very things that national parks are established to protect. Resort developments established in the 19th and early 20th century in Canada and the USA by the railroad barons are today substantially constrained, with only modernising and replacement now occurring. Closer to home, the new visitor development together with camping ground at Cradle Mountain National Park in Tasmania has been built outside the park, as is the Cradle Mountain Lodge. Recently the calamitous Seal Rocks development at Phillip Island cost taxpayers \$55million in compensation when the private development foundered. There was also the proposal, to the dismay of many, to develop a resort on the sand dunes of our much-loved national park

at Wilsons Prom. Such a possibility becomes increasingly probable with statutory provisions in the *National Parks Act* permitting leases of ninety-nine years.

We cannot understand why the government would wish to pursue high risk policies that threaten the security of our national parks when low risk, attractive development could be encouraged in outstanding locations just outside our national parks.

Bill Borthwick, the Liberal MP who was Victoria's first Minister for Conservation, held grave fears about commercialising our national parks. In 1992 he said: "The Americans all know that they made that dreadful mistake years and years ago of allowing concessionaires in and taking over. I implore, whether it be Liberal or Labor government in the future, don't fall for the fast buck concessionaires within national parks."

His deeply felt concerns then are just as real today.

Government policy that starts the journey of incremental privatisation and commercialisation of national parks would be a betrayal of public trust.

Signatories overleaf...

SHINE A LIGHT FOR PARKS AT THE PROM!



WE DID IT IN 1996

Let's do it again, only with lights!



On **Saturday evening, November 2**, we need you to join more than a thousand people to make a human sign on the beach at Tidal River, Wilsons Prom, a sign the Victorian Government can't ignore.

Help us spell out the message 'HANDS OFF PARKS' on the beach, using a thousand torches at dusk. **(Be there by 6.30 pm!)**

We want to send a clear message to the Victorian Government that private developments in our national parks are not welcome.

JOIN US AT THE PROM ON MELBOURNE CUP WEEKEND!

To help us plan this event, we are asking you to register:

- Preferably fill in the registration form on the VNPA website www.vnpa.org.au
- Otherwise email us at vnpa@vnpa.org.au or call us on (03) 9347 5188

This will give us an idea of how many people will be coming, and what we need to do to make sure the event runs as smoothly as possible. We will send you a reminder email closer to the event with more information, including payment instructions for bus bookings for those taking that option.

You have a few options for the weekend:

1. Travel down for the day

- Car share with some friends.
The Prom is about three hours from Melbourne, and you will be travelling back in the evening.
- Or book a place on a chartered bus for the day (\$45 return). Full details about departure times and payments for the bus trip will be available at a later date.

2. Book a campsite at the Prom for the weekend

Bookings for Tidal River campsites over the Melbourne Cup Weekend are conducted online at www.parkweb.vic.gov.au. You might have to be quick to get a campsite!

3. Book some nearby roofed accommodation

There are lots of good B&Bs, caravan parks and self-catering accommodation very close to the Prom. Go to www.promaccom.com.au for ideas and booking.

We look forward to seeing you there!

Warm regards,
Matt Ruchel, Executive Director

Continued from page 5...

SIGNATORIES TO THE OPEN LETTER

Professor Graham Brown
Foundation Director,
Nossal Institute for Global Health

Professor Michael Buxton
Professor, Global Urban and
Social Studies, RMIT University

Professor Peter Doherty AC
Professor, Microbiology and
Immunology, Melbourne University;
Nobel Prize Winner in Physiology
or Medicine.

Mrs Alicia Fogarty

Justice John Fogarty AM
Judge, Family Court (retired)

The Hon. David Harper AM, QC
Judge, Court of Appeal (retired)

Professor Barry Jones AO
Former Minister,
Australian Government

John Landy AC, CVO, MBE,
Governor of Victoria 2001-06

Dr Margaret Leggatt AM
Founder of SANE Australia; Founding
Director Schizophrenia Foundation

Dr Mick Lumb OAM
Adjunct Professor RMIT University;
former Director, Land Conservation
Council

Duncan Malcolm AM, JP
Honorary Fellow, Monash
University; former Chair, Rural
Water Corporation and Victorian
Environmental Assessment Council

Professor Rob Moodie
Professor, Public Health,
Melbourne University

Sir Gus Nossal AC, CBE
Former Director, Walter and
Eliza Hall Institute; former President,
Australian Academy

Lady Lyn Nossal

Professor Margot Prior AO
Department of Psychology,
Melbourne University

Professor Dimity Reed AM
Professor, Urban Design,
RMIT University (retired)

Don Saunders PSM
Former Director of National Parks

Dr Helen Sykes AM
Chair, Future Leaders and
Chair, Australian Collaboration

Associate Professor Geoff Wescott
Associate Professor, Marine and
Freshwater Science, Deakin University

Professor David Yencken AO
Former Chair, Australian Heritage
Commission; former Secretary,
Ministry for Planning and
Environment; former Head,
School of Environmental Planning,
Melbourne University

Professor Spencer Zifcak
Professor of Law and Director
of the Institute of Legal Studies,
Australian Catholic University;
former President of Liberty Victoria • PW

A resort near the Prom – Tom's vision

Wilsons Promontory National Park is the major tourist attraction in South Gippsland, and as such is very important to local enterprises.

As seen in recent years, if it is closed at any time because of bushfires, flooding or road collapses, local businesses suffer.

Locals want to protect the park for future generations but also want to expand the visitor-carrying capacity of both the park and the district.

Ten years ago Melbourne man Tom Tootell, who first visited the Prom in 1962, bought a run-down 100 hectare dairy farm at the park entrance, with the aim of forestalling commercial developments within the park.

Tom is not a property developer. He wants to leave an enduring legacy that ensures the park is protected and also accessible for all visitors.

He wants to develop a 'comfort in nature' resort on the former farm with accommodation lodges, hotel, restaurant and bar/bistro offering quality local food and beverage produce. He hopes

the resort will also be a training and employment facility for local people.

Unlike Tidal River with its risk of fire and flood, limited water and power supplies and lack of space, and other problems (apart from the whole issue of commercial developments in parks), Tom's property is 10-25m above sea level and has woodland and wetlands to encourage birds and other wildlife.

"Tourism in Victoria should be for Victorians first and foremost. A successful development will attract interstate and international visitors as well," Tom says.

"The biggest thing is to have a vision to build something that is capable of expanding in the future. This is a major issue within a national park, but on private land it can be planned for and accommodated."

A resort at the entrance to the park will require a visionary park transport policy – something that the park also needs. Car parking and wildlife road deaths are problems in the park, as is access for people without cars.

Tom's proposal has strong support from local people, the Shire Council, Parks Victoria and Tourism Victoria. It has the potential to be a tourism icon for the state and environmentally acceptable as well.

But the State Government seems to be ignoring its potential, instead promoting 99-year leases in Victoria's national parks – which are owned by the whole community.

The VNPA believes that this is the sort of tourism infrastructure project that delivers for tourism but also protects parks, and should be a priority for government policy – a point supported by the Victorian Efficiency and Competition Commission.

We believe this is a visionary and viable proposal that ticks all the boxes, and we hope that a developer will come forward to enable the idea to become reality. • PW

For more information, and to contact Tom, see www.wilsonspronatureretreat.com.au

Michael Howes

Picnic Bay, Wilsons Promontory NP.



A GREEN EDGE FOR MELBOURNE

A GREAT CITY DESERVES A GREAT NETWORK OF NATIONAL PARKS. **MATT RUCHEL** PRESENTS THE VNPA'S VISION.

The photo above was the cover image of a 1993 VNPA brochure calling for the creation of a large Central Highlands National Park.

Melbourne is renowned for its arts, sport and culture, and is the capital of a great state.

We are also blessed with a unique and diverse natural environment. In fact Melbourne is surrounded by natural environments.

A great city can also be a naturally marvellous city.

Within a 90 minute drive of central Melbourne are habitats of national and international conservation significance, only some of which are protected in national parks.

These landscapes range from grasslands to tall forests. There are also unique marine environments.

Protecting nature is not just good for nature – it's good for people.

Our forests supply clean water to our reservoirs; our rivers and streams take away stormwater; our bays supply seafood as well as countless recreational opportunities.

Importantly, parks offer people opportunities, within easy reach of Melbourne, for respite from the urban jungle. They are key places for sustaining and improving people's physical, mental and spiritual health.

An expanded park system in the tall forests to Melbourne's north-east and the foothill forest to the north-west, and new grassland reserves to the west and north, would create a green edge to the city's growth, offer protection for key conservation areas and water catchments, and become playgrounds for the city's residents and visitors.

If the recent federal election campaign is anything to go by, there's a distinct lack of any big ideas or vision in Australian politics at both federal and state levels.

The Hamer Liberal Government's 'Green Wedges' vision of the 1970s still has resonance today. A 'Green Edge' for Melbourne could be the legacy of the present generation of leaders. • PW



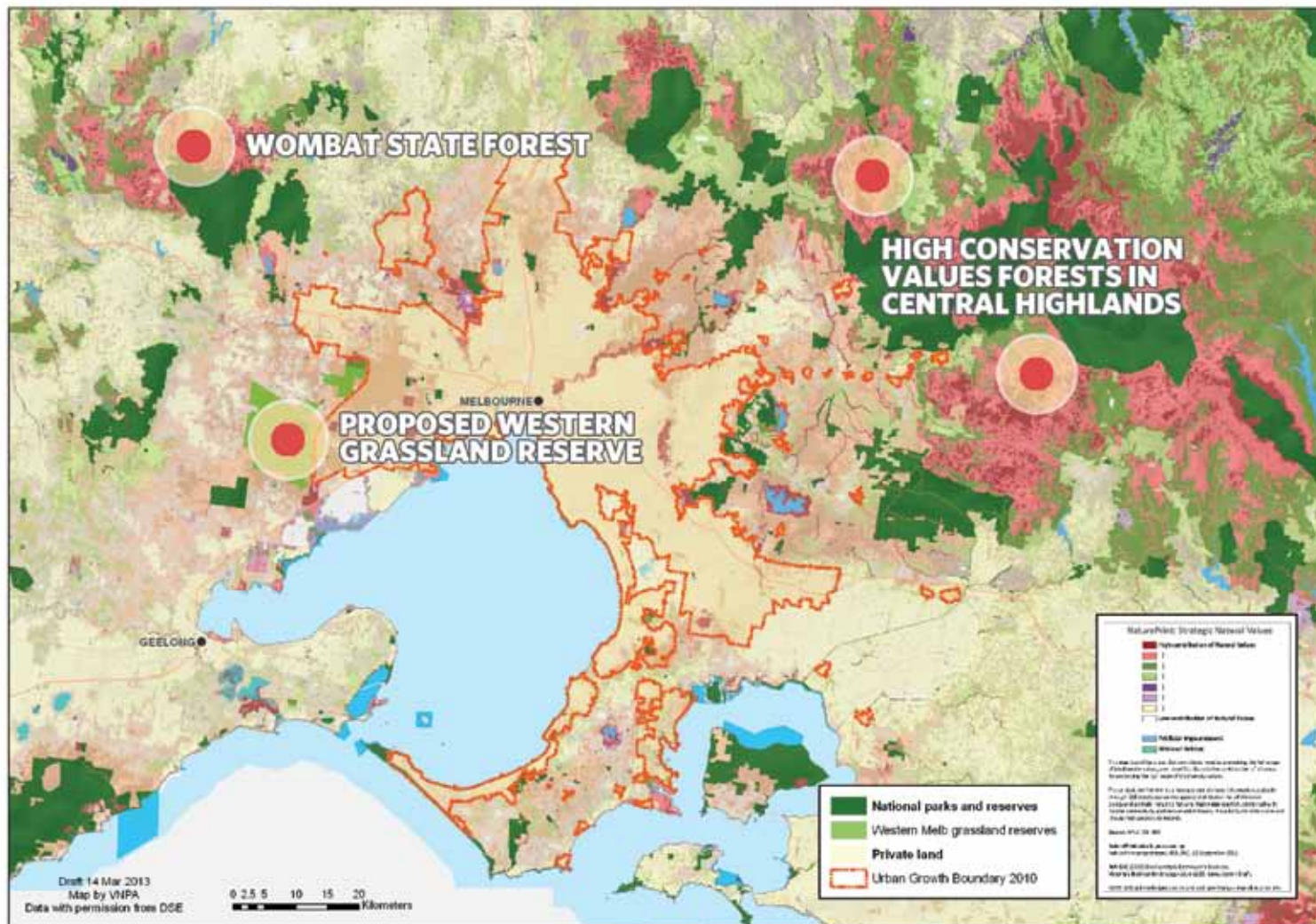
Kangaroos at Ngarri-djarrang Grassland in Reservoir. Nature could be a special feature of urban growth areas.

A 'Green Edge' for Melbourne – establishing a network of national parks and other protected areas in high conservation areas around greater Melbourne.

Key elements:

1. Create a national park in the Central Highlands, covering Greater Yarra Ranges and linking existing parks, protecting water catchments and habitats for threatened species such as Leadbeater's Possum.
2. Release an implementation plan to establish the proposed Western Grassland reserves (north of You Yangs Regional Park) within four years.
3. Protect the Wombat State Forest under the National Parks Act.

PHOTO COURTESY
MERRICREEK
MANAGEMENT
COMMITTEE
PHOTO: VNPA



The dots are not to scale and are indicative locations only. The base map is the State Government's Nature Print Map, which highlights strategic natural values. The red areas outside existing parks indicate high natural values.

VALUES AND THREATS Grasslands

- On the edge of the western suburbs are some of the last remnants of the great Victorian grassland, which once extended almost to South Australia. It is now threatened by urban sprawl – planned new suburbs will destroy around 5,000 ha of what remains
- As part of the Federal-State Strategic Assessment process, there is a proposal for a large Western Grassland reserve to be developed as part of the proposed program of clearing offsets. The VNPA has worked with local groups since 2009 to reduce the amount of clearing. We understand that the final proposal has been approved by the (Labor) Commonwealth environment minister. The formal establishment of the reserve is an urgent priority.

VALUES AND THREATS Wombat Forest

- The 45,000 ha Wombat State Forest near Daylesford is home to threatened fauna including the Powerful Owl, Spotted Quail-thrush and Square-tailed Kite, the nationally endangered Spot-tailed Quoll, the nationally vulnerable Growling Grass Frog and the state endangered Masked Owl. Also present are at least 20 rare and threatened plant species.
- It was logged for almost a century, but while commercial logging has mostly now stopped a new threat has emerged: mining. There are proposals for open cut gold exploration in the heart of the forest and mining leases over a large part of it.

VALUES AND THREATS Central Highlands

- The forests of the Central Highlands are home to the majestic Mountain Ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*). These trees are a home for Victoria's faunal emblem, the globally endangered Leadbeater's Possum (*Gymnobelideus leadbeateri*) which, along with 40 other animal species, lives and nests in the hollows and crevices in large old trees.
- The forests include stands with the highest reported above-ground biomass in the world, which store large amounts of climate-damaging carbon. They also cover Melbourne's water catchments, helping keep the city's drinking water pure.
- Worldwide, forests with big old trees are disappearing. And sadly, because of decades of logging and fire, only a small area – less than 2000 ha, or 1.16% – remains of Victoria's original area of Mountain Ash forest.
- The VNPA proposed a major park linking Yarra Ranges NP in the 1990s, but was unsuccessful because of pressure from the logging industry. Local communities and leading scientists have proposed a new reserve, which the VNPA supports as a great opportunity to help threatened species survive, store carbon, protect Melbourne's water catchments and provide for people's health and enjoyment.
- Local community organisations such as the Healesville-based MyEnvironment Inc have developed a comprehensive reserve proposal which the VNPA supports. See www.myenvironment.net.au

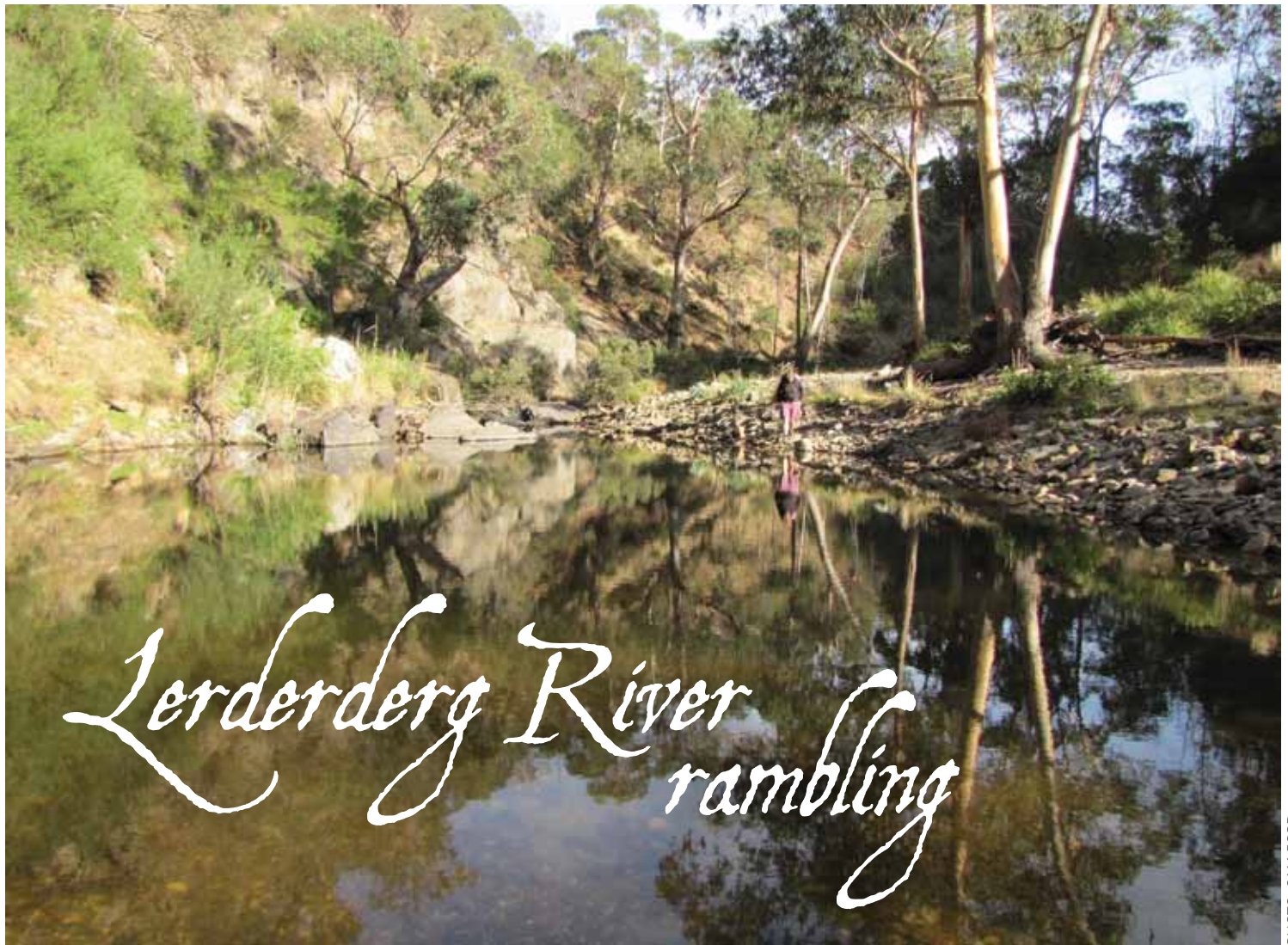


PHOTO: SAM FORD

Tranquil pool on the Lerderderg River.

SAM FORD IS A TEACHER AND OUTDOOR EDUCATOR WHO LIVES AND WORKS IN THE MACEDON RANGES. HE ENJOYS EXPLORING WILD PLACES WITH HIS FAMILY, FRIENDS AND THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF CANDLEBARK SCHOOL, AND HIS ARTICLE SHOWS HOW IMPORTANT PARKS ARE FOR PEOPLE.

For the past few years, we've lived in places where Victoria's parks have been an extension of our own backyards. We feel at home in nearby Macedon Regional Park and Wombat State Forest.

Adjoining these parks is Lerderderg State Park - which includes a deep gorge with fascinating rock formations. Walking tracks run along the Lerderderg River, and around the spurs and ridges above.

Finding it hard to imagine a better place to spend a few days with our two young children, Banjo and Daisy, we decided it was time for an adventure.

Bushwalking with small children has added new dimensions to our outdoor adventures. We walk a little less, but see a little more.

We have a greater appreciation for the simple things - like food after a long

walk, and sleeping in a tent. For our children, these are still things they're experiencing for the first time, and their excitement is infectious.

Another notable change is that there are more unknowns. This makes our journeys feel more adventurous than they were before, when we had a good idea of what might eventuate before leaving home. Now, we are continually learning what is possible, and what is enjoyable, by going places and doing things with our ever-growing, ever-changing children.

Perhaps the biggest unknown of this particular trip was whether all the stuff in our car would actually fit into our backpacks. And if it did, would we be able to carry them beyond the picnic area?

We ponder these questions as we make our way along picturesque roads to our starting point. "I can't believe we've never been here before," my partner Krista says.

We guess where the road will end and the walking track will begin. To the delight of the kids in the back, we soon reach a car park surrounded by grassy lawns with picnic tables - MacKenzie's Flat.

We're five minutes from Bacchus Marsh. One local family has arrived on bikes. The parents are keen for a chat. Together we watch our boys follow each other over rocks. They mention that they would like to camp in the gorge themselves one day. "But we mostly get distracted by the plants, and the kids collecting rocks, so we move slowly," says the father. We smile. This is something we can relate to.

Our own slow walk to Graham's Dam is a pleasant one. There are new things to discover around each bend. The track is mostly flat, but the gorge walls are steep in places. We pass rock walls with small, rippling corrugations. For a while, we're surrounded by a symphony of bird calls.



Above: The Lerderderg is a Heritage River.
Above left: Sam, Krista, Banjo and Daisy take a break.
Left: Banjo explores a natural rock wall.

PHOTOS: SAM FORD

At lunch we're overtaken by another young family. A small boy rides on his father's shoulders. Around the next bend, we come across them again. Looking down a straight stretch of river, we see the smoke from their fire first. Then we smell their sausages, cooking in a pan carried specially for the occasion.

It's a delightful spot to stop for lunch. The gorge is lined with places like these.

The path soon becomes rockier and more difficult, especially for the smaller legs in our family. Our map shows a beach and we discover an established campsite nearby. We drop our bags and set up camp.

From the campsite, a hidden track leads through tall grasses to the beach. The beach is scattered with rocks that are ideal for skimming across the water. Our best efforts clear the pool and bury into the sand on the far side. Just as fun as skimming rocks is listening to the sounds, and watching the splashes they make, when they land in the water.

Other walkers pass by late in the day. They camp just around the bend. It's

such a nice campsite we decide they must have been there before – people return to places like these.

The following morning, first light reveals a mess of bodies across the tent floor. The slippery surface of our sleeping mats, combined with plenty of wriggling, means Banjo is now somewhere near our feet.

Our curiosity draws us further into the gorge. We follow the path of the riverbed as it winds and stretches. Nestled snugly in a backpack, Daisy takes in all she can, before falling asleep.

We reconstruct a fire circle that had been a mound scattered with rocks when we arrived. We light the fire using wood collected from a huge stack deposited by flood waters. It's hard to imagine there being so much water here that deposits like this could occur. The nearest water is four metres below. Perched on top, Banjo looks like a bird in a nest.

The next day is cool, so we climb a narrow spur that leads up from our campsite. High above the gorge, we gain a different perspective. Up here, the

landscape is dry and rocky. Further up the valley, misty rain falls lightly.

On our final morning, we pack our things knowing that we'll unpack them here again in the future. This is one of the great joys of having places like this so close to home – it's easy to come back. The hidden gullies, inviting spurs, and seemingly infinite bends in the river will still be here when we return.

Walking out, we pass a teenage boy carrying a backpack, and two armfuls of camping gear. Four more boys follow, then another three. We're impressed that they've made the effort to get here, and that this is how they choose to spend their time.

Light rain falls as we cross the riverbed for the final time. "These are the best stepping stones in the whole world," Banjo announces, as he launches himself from one to the next. The picnic area soon appears.

There are people everywhere. The car park is full, and still more people are arriving as we leave.

It seems we're not the only ones enjoying what lies just beyond our own backyards. ● PW

Can Leadbeater's Possum be saved?

A TEST CASE OF
ECOLOGICALLY
SUSTAINABLE FOREST
MANAGEMENT



PHOTO: STEVE KUITER

PROF. DAVID LINDENMAYER OF THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S LEADING CONSERVATION BIOLOGISTS. HIS 30-YEAR RESEARCH IN VICTORIAN WET FORESTS IS CONSIDERED TO BE SOME OF THE BEST OF ITS KIND GLOBALLY. THE VNPA STRONGLY SUPPORTS HIS CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT LEADBEATER'S POSSUM IN NEW AND EXTENDED NATIONAL PARKS.

Leadbeater's Possums (Gymnobelideus leadbeateri) are nocturnal, small (10cm long) and fast-moving. They occupy the upper storey of tall forests, living in colonies of up to 12 individuals who sleep together in a nest made of shredded bark in a tree hollow. Note the distinctive tail shaped like a baseball bat

With old-growth trees over 95m in height, Mountain Ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*) is the tallest flowering plant on earth. Victoria's spectacular Mountain Ash forests are also home to one of Australia's most enigmatic and charismatic animals, Leadbeater's Possum.

Leadbeater's was first discovered in the 1860s, but only six specimens were collected until 1909 and the species was not seen again for more than 50 years. It was presumed extinct.

But then it was rediscovered in 1961, about 10km from Marysville – one of the towns devastated in the 2009 Black Saturday wildfires.

The species is virtually confined to the wet ash forests in a 60x80km area known as the Central Highlands of Victoria. It has one of the most restricted distributions of any Australian mammal.

Leadbeater's Possum is a very special part of the psyche of Victorians and one of the State's faunal emblems. It has also been the focus of a 30-year long research and monitoring program by ANU researchers.

Today it is one of the best known and understood animals in Australia, if not worldwide. We now have a detailed understanding of which parts of a forest are suitable habitat for Leadbeater's and how the species shares its forest environment with other spectacular animals like Greater and Yellow-bellied Gliders and Mountain Brushtail Possums.

Researchers from the ANU have also shown that Leadbeater's is highly sensitive to the effects of clearfell logging as well as the impacts of wildfires – particularly those in 2009, which destroyed more than 42% of the known forest habitat for the species.

Since its 'rediscovery' more than 50 years ago, Leadbeater's Possum has become one of the world's most controversial animals. This is because its habitat in Mountain Ash forests is highly sought after for producing timber and paper, creating substantial and still unresolved conflicts between conservationists and the industry.

Indeed, archived documents from the 1960s show that the Forests Commission of Victoria was so concerned about the loss of areas to cut that its Director instructed that places close to where Leadbeater's Possum was discovered should be logged. Since that time, repeated scientific studies have demonstrated that clearfelled forests remain unsuitable habitat for the possum for up to two centuries.

Widespread clearfelling, repeated wildfires and post-fire 'salvage' logging



*Images this page:
Tall Mountain Ash
forest and logging
operations in the
Central Highlands
near Toolangi.*

PHOTOS COURTESY SARAH REES, MYENVIRONMENT

have combined to put Leadbeater's on a pathway to extinction. It is now listed as globally endangered, but there are proposals to have it uplisted to Critically Endangered.

Yet despite its 'endangered' listing, successive federal and state governments have done very little to try and prevent Leadbeater's from becoming extinct. Indeed, the reverse is now true, with recently approved logging policies that guarantee clearfelling in rapidly diminishing areas of unburned forest highly likely to actually lock in its extinction.

Moreover, areas of known suitable habitat are again being targeted for logging through the watering-down of survey standards – which are to be used by poorly trained and ecologically inexperienced field staff from the Victorian Government.

What needs to change if Leadbeater's Possum is to have any hope of survival? The species can be saved if major reforms are implemented urgently.

First, scientific analysis clearly indicates that the current reserve system for Leadbeater's is inadequate, especially if

another wildfire were to occur in the next 50 years. An expanded national park is essential to protect remaining habitat and connect other areas of presently fragmented forest for the species.

This expanded park must also be significantly larger than the average size of wildfires, so that in the unfortunate event of another fire, some patches of suitable unburned forest will remain for the possum.

Second, the amount of forest being logged, and the highly damaging way it is cut (by clearfelling), have massive negative effects on Leadbeater's Possum. This must change. Far more stringent prescriptions must be implemented (and then properly policed) to better protect the species in forest landscapes that are broadly designated for logging.

These prescriptions include:

- excluding logging from at least 50% of each forest block to allow it to grow through to an old growth stage
- protecting all big old trees (which provide nest sites for Leadbeater's Possum) with a 100m buffer of uncut forest

- widening streamside reserves to protect areas of potentially suitable habitat
- immediately banning clearfelling.

These changes, coupled with the establishment of a new national park, mean that the logging industry will be far smaller than it is now. State and federal governments must provide compensation packages to ensure that loggers permanently exit the forest.

Since 1991 we have argued that logging in Victorian forests cannot be regarded as ecologically sustainable if it results in the loss of biodiversity. The conservation of Leadbeater's Possum is therefore a major test case of the ability of governments to practise ecologically sustainable forest management.

As a result of 30 years of intensive research, we know what is required for ecologically sustainable forest management and to conserve Leadbeater's Possum.

The time is well and truly overdue for state and federal governments to grow a spine and ensure that yet another iconic Australian animal does not fade into extinction. • PW

*Blue Devils (Eryngium
ovinum), an indigenous
grassland plant.*



PHOTO: BRIAN BAINBRIDGE

*Growing Grass
Frog in Merri
Creek, Somerton.*



PHOTO: BRIAN BAINBRIDGE

*Cooper Street native grassland north
of Melbourne. Lemon Beauty-heads
(Calocephalus citreus) in foreground.*



PHOTO: MICHAEL WILLIAMS, IT'S A WILDLIFE

Missed opportunity for threatened species

MATT RUCHEL AND YASMIN KELSALL REPORT ON THE BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION STRATEGY FOR MELBOURNE'S URBAN GROWTH AREAS. IT'S GREAT FOR DEVELOPERS BUT NOT SO GOOD FOR NATURE CONSERVATION.

After almost four years, in May this year the State Government released the final report for the Melbourne Strategic Assessment (or Biodiversity Conservation Strategy, BCS) for Melbourne's urban growth areas for approval by the Federal Environment Minister under national environmental laws.

Despite strong submissions from the VNPA, along with 15 local environment groups from across Melbourne's growth areas, urging the Federal Government to significantly increase the conservation measures from those in the final BCS, we understand that recently appointed federal Environment Minister Mark

Butler approved the strategy with few changes before the election.

In many ways this strategy will dictate the future of some of Australia's most threatened species and ecological communities – such as the critically endangered grasslands and grassy woodlands of the Victorian Volcanic

Plain, and federally listed species including the Growling Grass Frog and Golden Sun Moth.

The approval gives the green light for development in three of the four growth areas (north, north-west (Sunbury) and west), leaving out approval for issues affecting the Southern Brown Bandicoot in the south-east growth area (Cranbourne-Pakenham area).

As it was one of the first Strategic Assessments in Australia, as well as one of the largest and most complex so far, the outcomes of this process will be a precedent for future assessments under the EPBC Act 1999.

The process began in 2009. In 2011 we were supplied with draft BCSs. They included a large offset scheme for native grasslands, where around 5,000 ha of grassland will be cleared for urban development, with developers paying an offset fee to the government to purchase land for, and establish, a new Western Grasslands Reserve.

In various submissions the VNPA and local and regional groups have tried to limit the levels of habitat clearing – particularly for grasslands and for Growling Grass Frog (GGF) habitat along waterways.

Unfortunately, the final strategy removed or weakened protection for many of the areas set aside for conservation in the draft. Between the draft and the final strategy we lost 35% in conservation areas in the new urban growth area.

Furthermore, little extra land was put aside for the newly listed (and critically endangered) Seasonal Herbaceous Wetlands community.

We argued strongly in a joint submission with local environment groups and the Environment Defenders Office that **the final strategy does not ensure adequate protection for all matters of national environmental significance.**

- In particular we are concerned that the conservation areas proposed for the GGF, Striped Legless Lizard and Australian Grayling are inadequate and will lead to local extinctions. Early indications of the intended conservation measures for the Southern Brown Bandicoot are also likely to lead to local extinctions.

- Similarly, the Critically Endangered ecological communities *Natural Temperate Grassland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain*, *Grassy Eucalypt Woodland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain* and *Seasonal Herbaceous Wetlands (Freshwater) of the Temperate Lowland Plains* are not adequately protected.



PHOTO: EMILY JORDAN

The current proposal is to clear the vast majority of Grasslands and Seasonal Herbaceous Wetlands within Melbourne's growth areas and offset the clearing by protecting 15,000 ha of grasslands north of the You Yangs. However, this offset site has been shown to consist mainly of very poor-quality grassland, while other patches of high-quality grassland and key wetlands will be cleared.

The proposal does not meet the obligations committed to in the agreed Program Report, the guiding (and binding) document for the Melbourne Strategic Assessment for protecting nationally significant species. This includes:

- The commitment that 80% of all Grassy Eucalypt Woodland will be protected within the growth areas. In fact only 61% is proposed for protection.
- A commitment to engage an independent monitor to oversee the development of the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and then to oversee its implementation. This has not yet occurred.

The final conservation strategy is a great deal for property developers – but not for the environment. It is a high-risk approach to managing nationally threatened species and habitats.

A key example of this is that the corridors for protection of GGF habitat have been significantly reduced (by 42%) between the draft and final strategies. This leaves the sustainability of the frogs precariously reliant on untested methods (compensatory frog ponds). If these fail there will be insufficient adjacent land to ensure adequate breeding opportunities.

Likewise, the delivery of the Western Grassland Reserves involves many risks. The government has to raise the money from clearing, organise to purchase the land, and then manage the areas intensively over many years to retain and restore their grassland values (where many of their restoration techniques are untested). This is likely to take decades and create many uncertainties.

We need to see rock-solid commitments from government to ensure that the grassland reserves are delivered quickly, so they can form an effective part of the Green Edge for Melbourne.

Although the so-called 'strategic assessment' approach appears very popular with government, and has been a huge windfall for property developers in this case, the future for the proposed conservation outcomes is less clear. The process was poorly designed. Parts of it were rushed, then other parts delayed or decisions made behind closed doors.

If these sorts of strategic approaches are to be used in the future, there needs to be a considerable overhaul of the legislation that guide them so that the community can have some certainty. Clear timelines for consultation and decisions based on robust science are needed as well, along with the capacity to modify approaches and plans if the situation changes or there is new information.

Although this part of the process to protect Melbourne's most threatened species and communities appears to be over, the focus will move to local community groups in responding to the threats in each growth area as planning and development commence. Their efforts will be limited by their members' resources in time and energy. • PW

To download our final submission and to find out what else you could do to help (especially if you live in or near a growth area and can assist a local group to protect its patch) see www.vnpa.org.au/page/nature-conservation/urban-sprawl

Duchers Swamp, French Island NP. The shores of French Island and Phillip Island would be highly vulnerable to oil spills in Westernport.

AN OIL SPILL DISASTER IN THE MAKING ?

NEW RESEARCH SHOWS THAT MASSIVE DEVELOPMENT PLANS FOR VICTORIA'S WESTERNPORT BAY WILL EXPOSE ITS GLOBALLY SIGNIFICANT MARINE AND COASTAL WETLANDS TO POTENTIALLY HUGE DAMAGE FROM OIL SPILLS. VNPA MARINE CAMPAIGNER **SIMON BRANIGAN** REPORTS.

The VNPA and the Westernport and Peninsula Protection Council, a community group that has been campaigning against threatened port expansion for 42 years, recently commissioned a research project into exposure risks due to oil spills from shipping in Westernport Bay.

Its findings have sparked calls for the Federal Government to launch an immediate environmental assessment, under national conservation laws, of the Victorian Government's port expansion plans.

The research found that even relatively small amounts of oil spilled from shipping traffic in Westernport could reach local shorelines within minutes, and high conservation areas in less than six hours.

And we're not talking about oil tankers, but rather heavy fuel oil and diesel

spills from container ships and port support vessels.

The research modelled six credible oil spill scenarios based on 27 previous oil spill accidents across Australia since 1970. Computer modelling tracked the spills over a two-week period from two locations within Westernport Bay.

The modelling shows that Phillip Island Nature Park is vulnerable to oil spill contamination, and French Island Marine National Park is at high risk. It also highlights the fact that once oil is in the water, it will be hard to stop.

Both these parks, and many other parts of the bay, are home to key roosting, feeding and breeding habitats for waterbirds including annual migrants that breed in Russia, China, Japan and Alaska, spending the summer months feeding in the bay.



The report was commissioned in response to the Victorian Government's proposal to expand the Port of Hastings into an international container port, increasing shipping traffic from under 100 ships a year to more than 3000.

Such an increase in shipping is likely to heighten the risk of oil spill.

All of Westernport Bay is listed under the international Ramsar Convention. It is home to 32 species of migratory birds protected by international agreements, making its waters and shorelines subject to national environmental laws.



PHOTO COURTESY GREENPEACE

Cleanup volunteer and oil spill at at Ao Phrao beach, Thailand. This could happen on the shores of Phillip or French Islands.



Common Seadragon at Flinders Pier. An oil spill in Westernport would threaten such marine animals and the seagrass meadows they depend on.

PHOTO COURTESY MARK NORMAN, MUSEUM OF VICTORIA

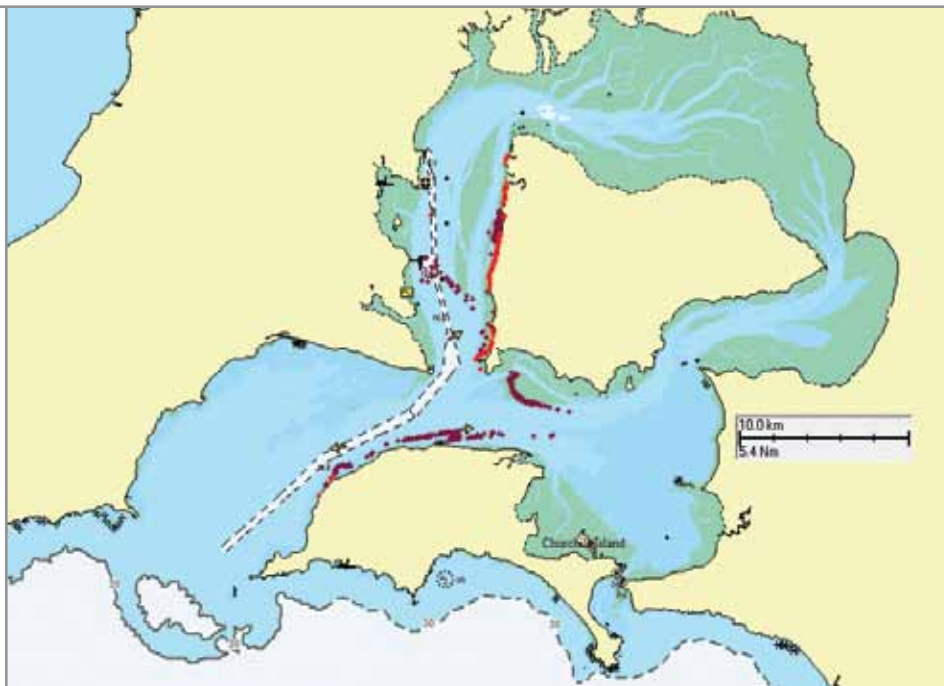
SHIPPING OIL SPILL IMPACTS ON WESTERNPORT BAY

Examples of heavy fuel oil & diesel spills

Modelling of heavy fuel oil spills show that over 80% of the oil mass could wash ashore over periods of days to a few weeks.

- Projections of oil spill hitting the shoreline
- How a projected oil spill would move through the channel and be pushed around by winds and tides

NOTE:
Fully animated modelling can be seen at www.savewesternport.vnpa.org.au



For diesel spills from Long Point Jetty, forecasts show that during summer, French Island Marine National Park is likely to have the highest potential of exposure to oil. During winter both French Island Marine National Park and Phillip Island Nature Park are shown to have the highest probability of exposure to surface film.

Westernport is one of Victoria's richest marine and coastal environments.

The VNPA and the Westernport and Peninsula Protection Council are calling on federal Labor and the Coalition to commit to a comprehensive and independent assessment using the full force of national environmental laws before any further work or money is spent on expanding the port.

"Westernport is Victoria's marine playground, a unique tidal bay and wetland of international importance with remarkable environmental and recreational values right on

the doorstep of Melbourne," said Westernport and Peninsula Protection Council spokesperson Chris Chandler.

"We are very concerned that the State Government's plans to turn Westernport into an international container port will expose the bay to a spill disaster, threatening the area's rich biodiversity including its beautiful beaches, seagrass meadows, native wildlife such as Little Penguins and Black Swan, as well as highly prized recreational fishing species King George Whiting and Snapper."

Both groups fear the port expansion will require major dredging, the

clearing of mangroves to fill in parts of the bay, and road and rail transport corridors through Gippsland, the Mornington Peninsula and suburban Melbourne.

Expanding the Port of Hastings poses unacceptable dangers to Westernport's unique environmental, social and recreational values.

Any proper assessment must consider environmental impacts, all risks and alternative port locations with links to national transport planning. **• PW**

See www.savewesternport.vnpa.org.au for the report and campaign video, and for actions you can take.



The Silver Brumby did it

PHOTO: BILL KOSKY

THE VNPA'S PARKS CAMPAIGNER **PHIL INGAMELLS** TELLS THE STORY OF HOW FERAL HORSES TOOK OVER VICTORIA'S ALPINE NATIONAL PARK.

Typical Alpine National Park wetland at mid bog, Rocky Plains.

"Thowra is a creamy-silver stallion, son of the chestnut stallion Yarraman and the creamy mare Bel Bel. Being born in a storm, his dam named him the Aboriginal word for 'wind' not only for the gale outside when he was born, but because she was worried he would have to be as fast as the wind to remain free. However, there is always the ever-present threat of man, and at the end of the first novel, Thowra is forced to pull off a seemingly suicidal trick to stay free. There is some indication that he can shapeshift into a white hawk and a whirlwind."

So runs part of the 3,500 word Wikipedia entry for Elyne Mitchell's *Silver Brumby* books, a dozen of which she produced for her keen readers throughout the latter half of the last century. The books were made into a film starring Russell Crowe, and an animated children's TV series.

But the enchanting tales she spun have, it seems, not been kind to horses living their lives in Victoria's high country, nor to the high country itself.

Early last century, there were probably no more than a few hundred wild horses roaming the alpine region of south eastern Australia.

But now there are something like 10,000 feral horses in the Victorian alps alone. On a sweet summer's day, you might see a well-fed mare and her foal galloping through the Snow Gums as if the legend lives.

But all too often the reality is very different. In times of prolonged drought thousands of horses go hungry up there, and many die of starvation. In the fires which swept across the high country in 2003, between 2000 and 3000 horses were burnt to death or died of starvation afterwards. And when heavy snow falls, they suffer yet again.

They are domestic animals which do quite well in fair weather, breeding enthusiastically in good times, but they are ill-equipped for the wild. Climate-wise, the alpine region is probably the toughest bit of wild country in the Australian mainland, and climate change predictions promise more fire, more severe droughts, and wilder winter storms.

Havoc

In the meantime feral horses are creating havoc in the high country, where grassy plains are routinely

chewed down to a wildflower-free stubble; moss-beds, fens and wetlands are trampled and drained, and watercourses fouled.

And proud descendants of that magical stallion Thowra are a bit hard to find these days. After a few decades during which people have dumped countless unwanted horses in the high country, whatever noble breed brumbies might once have been is now quite compromised.

They are a peculiar, mixed and sometimes misshapen mob up there, even more ill-equipped to manage life in the wild.

Nightmare

It's a park management nightmare, and it should never have been allowed to reach this dire situation. For decades now park managers have been scared to deal with horses the way they might deal with other pest animals. It seems the public get outraged, and our park managers and politicians get all a-jitter, when anyone suggests getting rid of the Silver Brumby.

There have been a few strategies developed over the years in NSW and Victoria, and ongoing attempts to rope

Top: Horse-trampled and drained wetland at Rocky Plains, with remains of the Marshwort *Nymphoides montana*.

Bottom: *Nymphoides montana* in bloom.

a few horses or lure them into yards and then 're-home' them, but that has done nothing to stem the exploding population.

Thankfully, Parks Victoria has now set up a process for delivering a wild horse management plan. It is an information-rich process, and PV has produced a series of well-researched information sheets (they can be found on the Parks Victoria website – just scroll down to 'Victorian Alps Wild Horse Management Plan').

They've also appointed a wild horse Community Round Table to advise them and test management options. The first round of public submission has closed, and PV is currently developing a draft management plan for further public comment.

Unfortunately though, the Silver Brumby myth can claim an early victory in this process.

In June, before the Environment Minister would allow the release of the information sheets for public comment, he decided to pre-empt the planning process. He declared that ground and aerial hunting and shooting of wild horses "are not being considered as options for controlling Victoria's wild horses as part of the current consultation".

As *The Age* pointed out, "they are carefully worded comments that leave the door slightly ajar for the shooting of horses to be considered some time in the future".

This is a pity, as even the RSPCA has pointed out that it is more humane to shoot horses on site than to run them down, transport them out for hours over very rough roads, and then kill them. (It is already abundantly clear that you can't 're-home' 10,000 feral horses.)

What has to be done?

The smaller Bogong High Plains population should be removed immediately before it gets too far out of control.

That leaves by far the largest population, centred in the eastern alps



and particularly in the vicinity of the NSW border (from the Cobberas to Suggan Buggan in Victoria, and across to the Pilot Wilderness in NSW). Co-operation between the NSW and Victorian management agencies and their environment ministers is essential.

The program to cull these horses has to be aimed at significantly reducing the main population, otherwise management will become an ongoing drain on park budgets and invariably fail. Research shows that the Victorian population should initially, and rapidly, be reduced from 10,000 to around 2,000, at which point ongoing

management becomes possible and much less costly. This would involve using a range of capture methods, but inevitably include aerial culling by highly professional marksman operating under appropriate guidelines.

Then a second stage should aim at removing horses from the park altogether.

If need be, it would be possible to keep a small 'historical' population for tourism purposes, but that should be outside the park in a place where they could be contained, preferably on private land.

Doing nothing, or doing too little, won't solve anything. The park, and the horses, will continue to suffer. • PW

PHOTO: BILL KOSKY

PHOTO COURTESY OF ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS, SYDNEY



The Helmeted Honeyeater is one of Victoria's two faunal emblems.

YELLINGBO REPORT

A STRONG VOICE FOR COOPERATION

PHOTO: DEAN INGWERSEN

Sometimes good things come in odd packages.

In August 2011, the State government asked the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) to investigate public land in the vicinity of the Yellingbo Conservation Reserve, east of the Dandenongs.

This was an unusually small area of public land for VEAC to investigate, but it happens to contain two critically endangered 'State emblems' of Victoria: the Helmeted Honeyeater and Leadbeater's Possum.

It would, of course, be embarrassing for the government to lose a couple of State emblems, but there are plenty of other issues that should be on the

Environment Minister's 'to do' list. The government's election promise to run a VEAC investigation into the state's rivers and streams, for example, was dumped to make way for the Yellingbo inquiry.

And there were other odd things about this inquiry. For a start, VEAC was only asked to look at the small disjunct population of lowland Leadbeater's in Yellingbo's swampy woodland, not the equally precarious population threatened by logging in the nearby Central Highlands.

But the VEAC investigation has come up trumps.

It has devised a way to enable co-operation between diverse land managers, responsible for a highly compromised fragmented landscape.

The investigation covered 50,000 hectares of the Upper Yarra Valley between the Dandenong and Yarra Ranges, lying roughly between Yarra Junction and Monbulk. Public land totals only about 6,000 hectares of that area, with fragmented blocks connected by streamside or roadside remnants. Nearly 90% of the area's native vegetation is on private land.

The managing authorities include seven government management agencies and several local councils. Also involved are the CFA, Indigenous interests, and community organisations loosely co-

operating under the umbrella of the Woori Yallock Creek Park Alliance.

Understandably, they haven't been in the habit of getting together too often.

Yet the area faces serious environmental problems such as changed water regimes (critically affecting the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve), invasive species, recreational impacts and a range of fire management issues.

What VEAC proposed

VEAC has recommended that:

1. The National Parks Act would be amended to include a new schedule, bringing most of the public land together in a new State Emblems Conservation Area (SECA).
2. Responsibility for each parcel of land under the SECA umbrella would remain with the existing agencies, but co-ordinated by a State Emblems Conservation Area Coordinating Committee made up of the councils, management agencies and community representatives.
3. An independent chair (notionally an eminent citizen) should convene the committee, which should be able to raise the profile of the area and attract funding, taking some of the burden off currently stretched budgets.

Importantly VEAC had very strong support from the local community, which helped to hone the final recommendations.

VEAC may have found a model for strong, coordinated, well-resourced management for the many other fragmented areas in Victoria that harbour threatened species.

These recommendations deserve careful consideration by the government, and support from the broader community. • PW

Phil Ingamells

FORUM Biodiversity in the City

Friends of Westgate Park would like to invite members of the VNPA to this Forum, an event for National Biodiversity Month, on **Wednesday 25 September** from 1pm to 4pm, followed by a guided walk in Westgate Park.

RSVPs essential.

Bookings:

<https://friendsofwestgatepark.eventbrite.com>

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

VNPA PRESIDENT RUSSELL COSTELLO

My first year as President began last year, the VNPA's 60th anniversary. It has been a difficult but successful year for the organisation.

I took over as President from Fred Gerardson, and am very grateful that during his five-year term he managed a total revamp of the VNPA's governance and policy structure, and left me with a vibrant and capable Council. I also thank VNPA Director Matt Ruchel for helping me adapt to the role.

This has been a year when funding has been tight and there has been so much to do and defend. The Council has particularly thanked Matt and his staff for their special efforts and for the sacrifices they have made this year.

And of course we could not have achieved a great deal of what we have accomplished without the dedicated input from many volunteers and supporters. I pay special tribute to all the members of the Council and its committees, to the volunteers who work in the office, and those who work on the VNPA's campaigns and its many activities.

And we couldn't do anything without our supporters. It has been a difficult year financially for many of our major donors, but most have stuck with us and we are very grateful.

To those of you who have taken up the new membership option to donate \$25 per month or more, including membership, you are helping to give us a reliable income so that we can better plan our activities in campaigns. Regular giving helps your organisation and the Council to be less reliant on guessing what we may receive at the end of the financial year.

So I encourage anyone thinking about changing their membership to this option to give it go. However, we are always grateful for any donations, and particularly your continued support for our special campaigns.

Some years we make great steps forward in conservation. This has been mainly one of defending what we have. We have had threats of grazing, logging, fossicking and commercial development in our national and other parks.

One of the biggest threats has been the State Government's push, through its tourism policy and legislation changes, to get private tourism developments within our national parks. The government wants to start with a hotel in Point Nepean National Park. This triggered our 'Hands off our Parks' campaign.

I can't emphasise enough the danger of the government's new 99-year commercial leases for national parks and other reserves. They are virtually the equivalent to privatising land. In Canberra, private housing is on publicly-owned land under 100-year leases that are bought and sold like normal private blocks.

Any private hotel or resort in a park would be a kick in the face to the local towns and tourism providers who rely on the drawing power of these reserves. Our policy of encouraging development outside national and other parks means we have a common goal with these providers in their role of facilitating visits to the parks without destroying their natural beauty.



PHOTO: GEORGIA KERR, PARKS VICTORIA

With the new government in Canberra, it is critical that we strive to make national parks truly national with protection under Commonwealth environmental legislation from the continuing threats to them posed by the State.

We are also preparing for a future time when the state government may be more amenable to doing something positive for the environment, rather than going backwards.

COUNCIL MEMBERS

President: *Russell Costello* (Executive, Conservation).

Vice President: *Maelor Himbury* (Executive, Education & Events, Membership & Marketing).

Secretary: *Charles Street* (Executive; Conservation; Governance, Policy & Legal).

Treasurer: *Gary Allan* (Executive, Finance).

Ann Birrell (Executive; Conservation; Governance, Policy & Legal) – approved leave of absence Feb-Oct 2013.

Russell Bowey (Executive, Bushwalking & Activities Group).

Andrew Dodd (Membership & Marketing).

Deborah Henry (Education & Events).

Kyle Matheson (Finance).

Heather Macauley (Membership & Marketing).

Euan Moore (Executive, Conservation).

Libby Smith (Executive, Membership & Marketing).

Note: brackets indicate committee membership.

VNPA ANNUAL REPORT

2012-2013



THE YEAR IN REVIEW

VNPA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MATT RUCHEL



The past 12 months have been difficult both organisationally and politically, but in our 60th year the VNPA's dedicated staff, volunteers, members and supporters have continued to stand up for their local environment.

The big issue has been the State Government's move to allow 99-year leases for commercial developments in national parks. We have launched our 'Hands off our Parks' campaign, which (like much of our work) will take time, patience and persistence to be successful.

We have been tireless in our efforts to stop the push to weaken environmental protection across Victoria. Challenges have included:

- **Proposals to introduce commercial-scale ecological thinning trials in red gum national parks.** We have managed to slow this down and get the Victorian and NSW governments to assess it under national environmental laws, but it may return.
- **Opening up more parks to fossicking and prospecting.** Our field work revealed both the extent of damage caused by these activities, and the lack of regulation. A final government decision on this is expected in the next few months. We also supported local groups opposed to open cut mining in the Wombat State Forest.

- **New native vegetation rules** introduced by the Naphthine Government. These new rules, which we reviewed and critiqued, are a significant watering-down of existing protections, and in our view will lead to more clearing in the most cleared state in Australia.

- **Plans to hand national environmental powers to state governments.** We worked with allies and partners across the environment movement to oppose this under the Gillard Government, but the Abbott-led coalition went to the election with a 'one-stop shop' policy aimed at handing back both environmental assessment and approval powers to state governments.

- **The strategic assessment of Melbourne's urban growth.** We worked hard with local groups to provide detailed input to ensure maximised protection for threatened species and habitats such as grasslands, Growling Grass Frog and Southern Brown Bandicoot. This process was disappointing and in our view a missed opportunity to get the development/environment protection balance right.

- **Fire management.** We continued to highlight the impacts of excessive control burning on the natural environment.

- **Marine conservation.** We continued to oppose the breakwater plan at Bastion Point (Mallacoota), and released strategic research into the impacts of recreational fishing and the potential impacts of oil spills on Westernport's unique natural values.

In community education and engagement, **NatureWatch** and **Reef Watch** continued to grow in popularity. Exciting new 'Caught on Camera' work in Bunyip State Park highlighted healthy numbers of Southern Brown Bandicoots.

Reef Watch celebrated its 10th anniversary, and the Western Blue Groper, first identified by Reef Watch Volunteers, was given permanent protection under fisheries laws.

Our regular **publications** *Park Watch* and *Nature's Voice*, our website, and emailed alerts and updates kept our members abreast of conservation issues.

On the organisational front, for a variety of reasons our income was down, which meant we had to reduce staff levels in some areas. Doing more with less is always challenging, but we have now stabilised and are continuing our work to build an even stronger VNPA.

A strong community voice for nature is needed more than ever in Victoria. We are very grateful for the fantastic contributions made by our supporters, members, volunteers and partner organisations. And we rely on, and very much appreciate, your on-going support!



BUSHWALKING AND ACTIVITIES GROUP

I'd like to start by thanking all our event leaders for their time and commitment in offering over 250 activities for the year – and thank you to all the participants for supporting them.

These activities are not just enjoyable; they inspire and maintain our appreciation of natural places. Encouraging this appreciation is vital to winning public support to protect our parks.

Local activities covered everything from inner city lanes and parks, popular day trips into the Yarra Ranges and coastal parks, to classic weekends in the Prom, Grampians and Alpine national parks, and there were exciting interstate and overseas visits.

We've tried a couple of new formats with our *Easy Going Ambles* (for those who want the outdoor space without the pace) and *Bring a Friend for Free* walks to help members encourage their friends to enjoy the great outdoors.

BWAG contributed \$9,000 to the VNPA in the past year, with income from walks and the Trivia Night.

Social nights: These featured John Bales with highlights of his Spanish walking trip, Tracey-Ann Hooley and me talking about skiing in the Alpine NP, with photos of recent VNPA snow trips, and an inspirational talk by Geoff Durham on highlights of 30 years of leading over 400 *Walk, Talk and Gawk* trips.

Phil Hart showed us the amazing photos and time-lapse videos from his astro-photography expedition to Canada's Yukon province, and Euan Moore and Wilma van Dijk presented the unexpected natural wonders of Taiwan.

We ran another popular Trivia Night in February, our annual Christmas and mid-year get-togethers, and Under 35 Social Nights - including a well-attended *Under 35 Alumni* dinner for those who can remember the good old days!



PHOTO: LARISSA KUCAN

A VNPA Excursion group enjoys a walk on the Beechy Railtrail near Gellibrand.

Training: Our program included a Navigation Course for members and our first *Walk, Talk and Gawk* training evening. We also ran a navigation course and a leaders training course for two other bushwalking clubs. These helped promote the VNPA and responsible enjoyment of our parks.

Conservation: BWAGers participated in conservation activities including the Hindmarsh and Grow West tree plantings, Reef Watch and Clean Up the Alps. We also had 11 popular *Walk, Talk & Gawks* and lots of NatureWatch activities.

Thank you: I'd like to thank the committee members for donating their time to make all this happen. Bob Argent, Terese Dalman, Gayle Davey, Geoff Durham, Sue Catterall and Fred Gerardson have all done a great job.

Russell Bowey (Convener), August 2013

EXCURSIONS REPORT

The Excursions Group and its volunteer leaders conducted eleven day trips in 2012-2013. Most were well attended, but overall there was a significant reduction in the number of members and visitors and members participating.

Places visited included Lake Eildon, Queenscliff, Taradale, Mt Donna Buang and Maryborough. On the trips we enjoyed walks, picnics, farmers markets, historic homes, galleries and more.

From the trips the group contributed \$4065 to the VNPA, down from last year. We hope improved publicity might help to boost participation in the coming year.

Many thanks to our trip leaders and to all the members who took part in excursions.

Larysa Kucan, Convenor

VOLUNTEERS AND COMMITTEE CONVENORS

VOLUNTEERS

Administration Assistants: Jill Casey, Sandra Cutts, Colette Findlay, Margaret Hattersley, Raimonne McCutchan, Graham Trigg.

Research Assistants: Evelyn Feller, Dianne Marshall, Victoria Strutt.

Education Kit Coordinator: Jill Casey.

Grow West and Project Hindmarsh: John Stirling (*Convenor*) and Terese Dalman plus VNPA team leaders and planters.

Marine and Coastal: Matilda Reynolds, Jackson Leon-Holland, Natalie Manahan.

Native Vegetation & Grasslands: Andrew Booth, Elizabeth Donoghue, Yasmin Kelsall, Adrian Marshall.

Firewood & Grasslands Assistant: Erin Richardson.

Market Research & Advice: Libby Smith.

NatureWatch: (*Office volunteers*) John Kotsiaris, Ann Williamson, Christine Connelly, Beatrix Spencer, Lucy Gow. (*Team leaders*) Christine Connelly, Evelyn Chia, David de Angelis, Marion Shadbolt, Bryant Gagliardi, Ned Surla, Garry and Wilma van Dijk, Michael Longmore, Amy O'Dell, Luke Johnson.

Publications: John Hutchison, Euan Moore, Geoff Durham, Evelyn Feller.

Nature's Voice & Park Watch Mailout Team: Murray Bird, Pat Cooper, Betna Dryden, Jan Gay, Brian Groom, Jo Groom, Margaret Hattersley, John Hutchinson, Kelvin Kellett, Keith Lloyd, Ian McDonald, Elsebeth Murray, Sheina Nicholls, Joan Phillips, Barbara Prouse, Lorraine Ratcliffe, Paul Stokes, Wally Thies, Graham Trigg, Pat Witt.

Victoria Naturally Alliance: Ann McGregor, Bruce McGregor, Libby Smith, Lea Scherl and the many people and groups associated with the Central Victorian Biolinks Alliance, plus Victoria Naturally Alliance colleagues.

VOLUNTEER COMMITTEE CONVENORS

Bushwalking & Activities Group: Russell Bowey.

Caring For Nature Day: Reg Elder.

Conservation & Campaigns: Euan Moore.

Executive: Russell Costello.

Excursions: Larysa Kucan.

Finance: Gary Allan.

Membership, Marketing & Communications: Libby Smith.

Community Education & Engagement Working Group: Maelor Himbury.

HOSTED NETWORK

Victorian Environment Friends Network Committee: Ray Radford, Maelor Himbury, Sue Wright, Michael Howes, Robert Bender.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Abridged Audited Special Purpose Financial Report for the year ended 30 June 2013

Statement by Members of the Council

The members of the Council have determined that the Association is not a reporting entity and in our opinion the abridged special purpose financial report set out below presents a true and fair view of the financial position of VNPA as at 30 June 2013 and its

performance for the year ended on that date.

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

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

Gary Allan (Treasurer) & Matt Ruchel (Executive Director) dated this 29th day of August 2013

| INCOME STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2013 | | |
|---|------------------|------------------|
| REVENUE | 2013 | 2012 |
| Operating Activities | \$ | \$ |
| Appeals, Donations & Bequests | 602,169 | 914,617 |
| Grants & Partner Contributions | 181,089 | 302,940 |
| Membership Fees | 107,448 | 115,045 |
| Interest Income & Sundry Sales | 91,085 | 123,081 |
| Total Income | 981,792 | 1,455,683 |
| EXPENDITURE | | |
| Employment Expenses | 772,243 | 866,115 |
| Campaigns, Projects, Activities & Education | 103,091 | 180,851 |
| Office & Administration | 183,539 | 158,007 |
| Printing/Publications/Web | 61,492 | 75,764 |
| Accommodation & Insurance | 103,843 | 101,540 |
| Total Expenses | 1,224,207 | 1,382,277 |
| OPERATING (DEFICIT) SURPLUS BEFORE TRANSFERS (TO) FROM RESERVE FUNDS | (242,415) | 73,405 |
| Transfers from (to) Reserve Funds | 91,883 | (72,321) |
| OPERATING (DEFICIT) SURPLUS AFTER TRANSFERS FROM (TO) RESERVE FUNDS | (150,532) | 1,084 |

| VNPA – ACTIVITIES ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2013 | | |
|---|--------------|--------------|
| The operating accounts for the Bushwalking Group have not been consolidated into the general accounts above and are reported separately as follows: | 2013 | 2012 |
| | \$ | \$ |
| Income | 11,851 | 8,425 |
| Expenditure | (974) | (984) |
| Funds Contributed to VNPA | (9,000) | (10,000) |
| CLOSING BANK ACCOUNT BALANCE | 4,142 | 2,265 |

| BALANCE SHEET AS AT 30 JUNE 2013 | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| ASSETS | 2013 | 2012 |
| Current | \$ | \$ |
| Receivables and Inventory | 31,486 | 59,603 |
| Cash and Cash Equivalents | 756,679 | 1,059,966 |
| Total Current Assets | 788,165 | 1,119,569 |
| Non-Current | | |
| Fixed Assets at Written Down Value | 20,163 | 18,909 |
| TOTAL ASSETS | 808,328 | 1,138,477 |
| LIABILITIES | | |
| Current and Non-Current | 299,472 | 387,206 |
| TOTAL LIABILITIES | 299,472 | 387,206 |
| NET ASSETS | 508,857 | 751,271 |
| Funded by: | | |
| Association Funds | 508,857 | 751,271 |
| TOTAL ASSOCIATION FUNDS | 508,857 | 751,271 |

NOTE: Independent Audit Report – As in previous years, the Auditor's have issued a qualified Audit Opinion on the annual financial statements on the basis that it is not feasible for organisations such as VNPA to implement accounting controls over all cash collections from donations prior to their initial processing in the accounting records. The full Independent Auditor's Report will be tabled at the forthcoming Annual General Meeting as part of the Audited Financial Statements and the full text of the Report will be available at www.vnpa.org.au.

VNPA EMPLOYEES

Executive Director: Matt Ruchel
Fundraising Manager: Emily Clough
Direct Marketing Officer: Maxine Hawkins
Fundraiser: Lara Hookham (to 6/9/12)
Communications & Marketing: Ann Strunks (to 28/3/13)
Finance & Operations Manager: Shanti Fowler (to 8/2/13)
Finance & Operations Manager: Heath Rickard (from 21/1/13)
Administration & Membership Officer: Amy Dyer (maternity leave)
Administration Assistants: Charlotte Kandelaars, Irina De Loche
Marine & Coastal Project Officer: Simon Branigan
Nature Watch/Community Projects Coordinator: Caitlin Griffith
Park Protection Project Officer: Phil Ingamells
Red Gum & River Rescue Project Coordinator: Nick Roberts
Reef Watch Coordinator: Wendy Roberts
Park Watch/Nature's Voice Editor & Publications Officer: Michael Howes
Victorian Naturally Alliance Project Leader: Karen Alexander
Central Victorian Biolink Project Officer: Sophie Bickford
Conservation Review Project Coordinator: Andrew Cox

VNPA SUPPORTERS, DONORS AND PARTNERS

The VNPA acknowledges and thanks the following:

- Australian Communities Foundation
- Alf and Meg Steel Fund, a subfund of the Australian Communities Foundation
- Anonymous donors
- The Arnold Foundation
- Australian Government's Caring for Our Country
- Grants to Voluntary Environment, Sustainability and Heritage Organisations (GVESHO)
- Gras Foundation Trust
- Helen Macpherson Smith Trust
- Loftus-Hills Trust
- Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation
- Melliodora Fund, a subfund of the Australian Communities Foundation
- Parks Victoria
- Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority
- Sidney Myer Foundation
- The Ian Potter Foundation
- The Dara Foundation
- The R.E. Ross Trust
- Treepot

Support and cooperation from key project partners

- Arthur Rylah Institute
- Biosis Research
- Environment Defenders Office
- Grow West
- Hindmarsh Landcare Network
- Museum Victoria

Victoria Naturally Alliance partners

- Australian Conservation Foundation
- Bush Heritage Australia
- Birdlife Australia – Victoria
- Environment Victoria
- Invasive Species Council
- Greening Australia - Victoria
- Trust for Nature
- The Wilderness Society Victoria

Northern Australia is a haven for biodiversity in iconic areas such as the Kimberley, Cape York and Kakadu National Park.

National parks show biodiversity benefit

ACROSS AUSTRALIA'S TOP END, CONSERVATION RESERVES HAVE BEEN THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY OF MANAGING LAND TO CONSERVE NATIVE ANIMALS, ACCORDING TO A 20-YEAR STUDY.

Researchers studied the abundance and diversity of more than 400 species of birds, mammals, reptiles and frogs from 1988 to 2008, to gauge the effect of different types of land use on biodiversity.

Dr John Woinarski from the Northern Australia hub of the National Environmental Research Program said that 967 sites were sampled across the Northern Territory, including outlying islands.

"We used a variety of systematic trapping techniques, timed searches and spotlight searches at night to measure the abundance and diversity of animals within each site," Dr Woinarski said.

"Our results showed a small but significant 'biodiversity benefit' from conservation reserves compared to other types of land use, particularly for threatened species.

"Sadly, we have seen wide-scale declines of mammals across northern Australia even in conservation reserves, so it's probably more accurate to say that biodiversity loss in reserves has been less than on Indigenous or pastoral lands."

This is not to say that the Indigenous and pastoral lands of northern Australia cannot make a substantial contribution to halting the decline of biodiversity.



Termite mounds, Litchfield National Park, Northern Territory.



Populations of many native northern Australian mammals, such as this Brush-tailed Rabbit-rat (*Conilurus penicillatus*), are in rapid decline.

"In areas like southern Australia, where the landscape has been more severely transformed, conserving biodiversity is far more dependent on a network of conservation reserves," Dr Woinarski said.

"However in northern Australia's savannas, which are relatively untouched, other land can play a major role by buffering and complementing the reserve network.

"Given the relatively small proportion of land currently devoted to conservation across northern Australia, we need to consider strategies that maximise biodiversity benefits across different land uses.

"There are increasing resources available for a blend of Indigenous land management skills and conventional park management, and this type of management has flow-on benefits."

The study was undertaken with support from the Northern Territory Government, Australian Research Council, the Wilderness Society and the Australian National University, and the results are now available in the open access journal *Land*. • PW

Amy Kimber, Northern Australia Hub – National Environmental Research Program.

*Hattah Rabbit Points map.
This satellite image shows the
area searched and the location
of rabbit warrens recorded by
the VNPA searchers.*

VNPA rabbitohs hit Hattah

OVER QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY WEEKEND THIS YEAR, 13 VNPA MEMBERS WENT TO HATTAH-KULKYNE NATIONAL PARK IN THE MALLEE TO WORK AS VOLUNTEERS ON THE PARK'S RABBIT CONTROL PROGRAM. VNPA COUNCILLOR EUAN MOORE REPORTS.

This weekend's activity could be regarded as off-track bushwalking in relatively easy country, but it had a purpose that went beyond pure recreation.

We had a very enjoyable weekend. Some participants were visiting the park for the first time, so we did a short 'real' bushwalk on the Monday to see a bit more of it.

In recent years the Mallee Catchment Management Authority (CMA), the Department of Primary Industries (DPI, now DEPI) and Parks Victoria have been conducting rabbit control operations in the Mournpall Block of Hattah-Kulkyne NP.

The program uses a combination of methods, including ripping of warrens and targeted burning of small patches of dense dead brushwood where rabbits hide above ground. This has significantly reduced rabbit numbers, but more can move in from outside.

With its rich food resources, the Hattah area had been settled and used by Aboriginal people for thousands of years before European settlement, which started in the 1840s. At that time domestic animals were introduced and many trees cut down for buildings or firewood.

Some of the worst-affected trees were the slow-growing native cypress-pines, whose lightweight but durable wood was favoured for fencing and buildings.



MAP: MALLEE CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

Hattah Lakes National Park was declared in 1960 and expanded to include the Kulkyne Forest in 1980, when the park became Hattah-Kulkyne NP.

Rabbit-infested

At this time it was one of the worst rabbit-infested areas in the state. Over-grazing by rabbits was destroying ground-cover plants and the regenerating seedlings of woody plants like cypress-pines.

The loss of vegetation allowed accelerated erosion by wind and water, resulting in further vegetation loss. This in turn had a major impact on native fauna as reptiles, mammals and

birds lost essential habitat and food supplies.

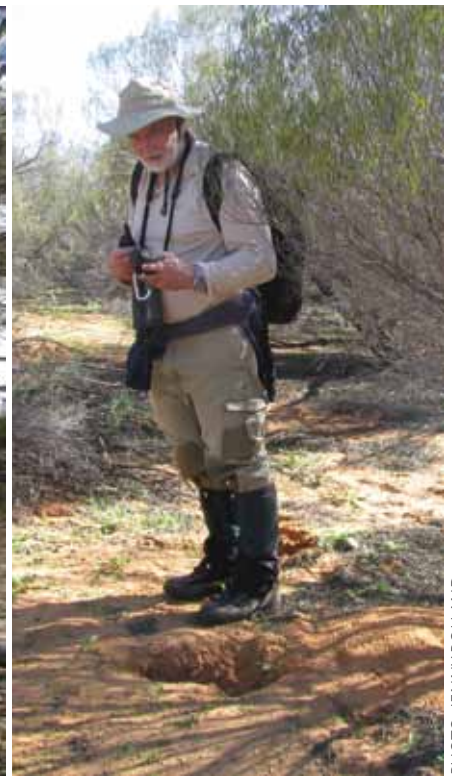
The park's Mournpall Block was particularly degraded by over-grazing and the felling of trees for timber. Some 6,000 hectares were fenced off in the 1980s and rabbit control began.

In recent years feral goats and pigs have been targeted as well, and they have largely been eliminated within the fenced block. Kangaroo numbers in the block have also had to be controlled to prevent mass starvation when food resources run out.

These programs have allowed some regeneration of the native vegetation, but rabbits have remained a problem.



The searchers break for lunch near Lake Konardin.



Euan records the location of a rabbit warren.

At times they have eliminated most cypress-pine regeneration.

Rabbits need to hide from predators, so the burning of rabbit harbour and destruction of warrens are important control measures. But in an area this size it is inevitable that some smaller warrens are missed during control operations. Remaining rabbits will reoccupy warrens that remain open, and also dig out those that have been closed off.

Ongoing action

All rabbit control operations require repeated work to remove rabbits that have escaped previous treatment or have re-invaded. But the effort and costs of further reductions increase as rabbit numbers decrease. Ongoing action is needed if numbers are to remain low; any let-up in activity will see them bounce back.

Earlier this year DPI contacted the VNPA and asked for assistance in searching for remaining rabbit warrens within the Mournpall Block, and we agreed to get a group of volunteers together.

Over the Queen's Birthday long weekend we camped at the Lake Mournpall camping area, within the survey area. We were able to complete all our searches on foot without needing to drive out.

The survey area covers a variety of habitat types, from wetlands through hop-bush shrublands to Black Box and River Red Gum woodlands. Lake Mournpall still had water but other lakes in the search area were dry.

The woodlands and wetlands are open, fairly flat and easy to walk in. The shrublands are on sand dunes where the going is more undulating, but it's still easy walking – although the dense vegetation limits visibility. It was in these shrublands that we found the majority of rabbit warrens.

Line search

We use a line search technique, lining up about 20m apart and walking along a grid bearing using a GPS to track our route. When we found an open warren, we recorded a waypoint on the GPS. We had a total of six GPS units among the 13 participants.

When we reached the end of the transect, the group wheeled around and returned on parallel tracks. In this way we covered a strip about 250m wide with each pass.

People next to each other along the line were generally within easy voice contact, but it was a different story for those at the ends of the line. We used hand-held UHF radios to maintain full communication.

Once our survey was complete, the tracks and waypoints from the GPS units were downloaded to computers at the Mallee CMA and plotted on a satellite image of the survey area. This allows park rangers and rabbit control contractors to see where the warrens are located.

The waypoints are loaded on to GPS units used by the rabbit control team which goes to each warren and destroys it. This saves the contractors from having to spend time searching for warrens.

From the VNPA side this activity allows some of our members to contribute to the protection of a national park in a practical way. For the CMA and the rangers it's a cost-effective way of targeting the rabbit control program.

The Mallee CMA has federal Caring for Our Country funding for the Hattah rabbit control program for another four years. The VNPA will be looking for volunteers to take part in the survey over Queen's Birthday weekend next year and for the remainder of the program. • PW

Please consider joining us next year for what is a fun weekend! Refer to your walks program for details, look for information in the regular VNPA bulletins, or contact the VNPA office.

Cameras reveal eleven native mammal species

VNPA NATUREWATCH
COORDINATOR **CAITLIN GRIFFITH**
REPORTS ON LAST YEAR'S TRIAL
OF THE 'CAUGHT ON CAMERA'
PROJECT IN BUNYIP STATE PARK.

The 'Caught on Camera' project involves working with local community groups and scientists to establish community-based monitoring of fauna using motion-sensing cameras.

The project addressed the question: "What animal species can be found in 'recently burnt' and 'long unburnt' sites in Damp Heathy Woodland and Lowland Forest in Bunyip State Park?" This will contribute to answering the broader question: "What is the impact of fire on native mammals?"

After one season's monitoring in 2012 some trends are emerging, but there's not enough data to attribute these to fire or vegetation communities. However, the monitoring has given us a much better understanding of the mammals living in Bunyip State Park.

We hope the project will continue for at least ten years to help answer these and other questions.

'Caught on Camera' has resulted in a great partnership between the VNPA and the Friends of Bunyip State Park, and the display of data and images from the project on the VNPA's Facebook page has interested and delighted many Victorians and helped raise community awareness of and enthusiasm for the animals of Bunyip.

Researchers have learned how the project can be developed and become more scientifically rigorous. They have



*Top: A Southern Brown Bandicoot (Isoodon obesulus) checks out a bait station.
Centre: You can see why I'm called a Long-nosed Bandicoot (Perameles nasuta).
Bottom: Doing a little bandicooting.*

also learned what works well for citizen science projects.

They recommend that similar projects should be used for topics other than fire effects, such as responses to predator control.

For more about the project's methodology and results, see the study report 'Caught on Camera – a monitoring project in Bunyip State Park' on the VNPA website. • **PW**

Native mammals recorded

Short-beaked Echidna
Agile Antechinus
Dusky Antechinus
Common Wombat
Common Brushtail Possum
Common Ringtail Possum
Eastern Grey Kangaroo
Black Wallaby
Bush Rat
Long-nosed Bandicoot
Southern Brown Bandicoot

Exotic mammals

House Cat
Red Fox
Sambar Deer
Fallow Deer

A brighter future for Bunyip's bandicoots

ARTICLE AUTHOR **DANIEL (DANNY) HUDSON** IS A PARKS VICTORIA RANGER AND TEAM LEADER FOR ENVIRONMENT, LAND & WATER AT BUNYIP STATE PARK. HIS MAIN INTEREST IS THREATENED SPECIES MANAGEMENT.

Following from recent photographic evidence of Southern Brown Bandicoots within Bunyip State Park, the VNPA's NatureWatch 'Caught on Camera' project is making a major contribution to the overall protection of this EPBC-listed species and its habitat in the park.

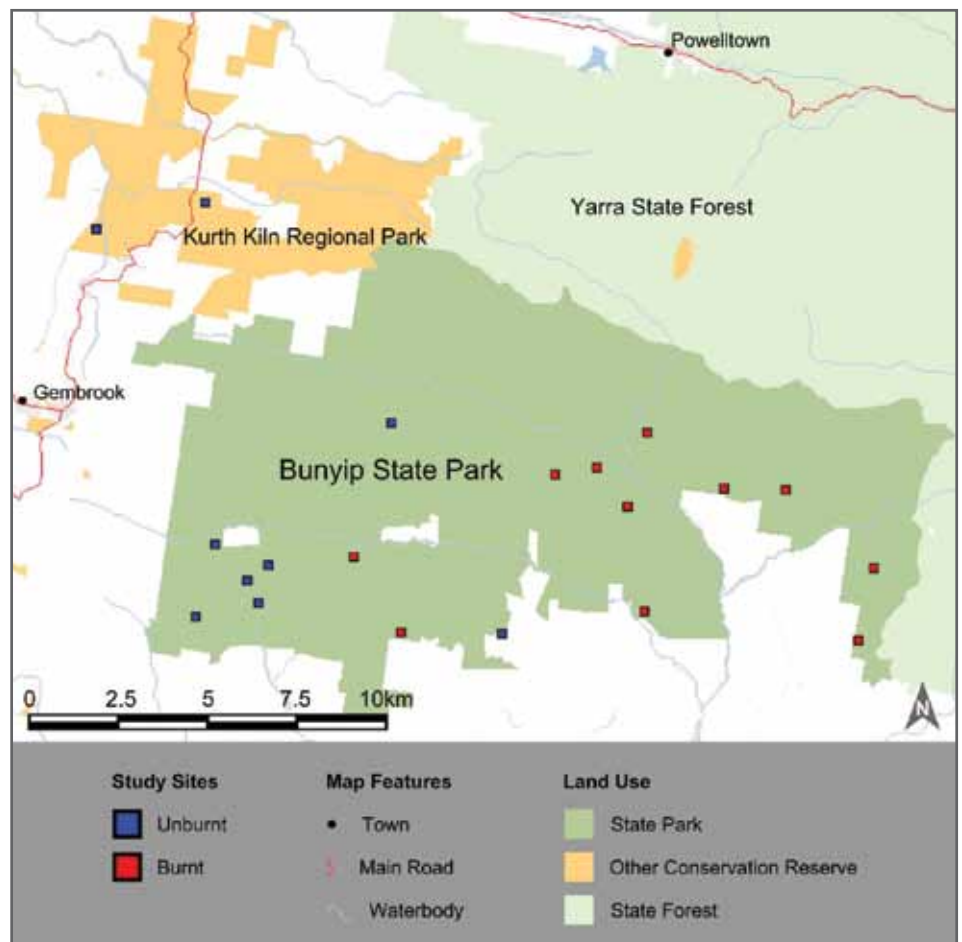
The recent work by VNPA volunteers, Friends of Bunyip State Park and Conservation Volunteers Australia supplied some very interesting footage for Parks Victoria staff at Gembrook.

Although Southern Brown Bandicoots had previously been recorded in the park, according to the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas the last sighting was back in 1981, and before that in 1975.

The bandicoots were photographed recently at eleven different sites throughout the park, mainly in lower altitude Heathy Woodland (below 150m above sea level). It was noted that half the confirmed photo captures came from sites burnt in the Black Saturday Bunyip Ridge fire.

Gaining a much better understanding of the distribution of the species is helping us to target our fox control program on particular areas, and also to identify areas for habitat restoration.

This gave Parks Victoria the opportunity to apply for funding under the Caring for our Country Habitat Protection and Conservation Project run by the



Ranger Danny Hudson at one of the new gates closing off an illegal track in Bunyip State Park. Some tracks have been ripped to help natural revegetation.

This also exposed native seed already in the soil to help with natural regeneration.

In total \$15,345 was allocated to carry out the works. Part of the funding was for follow-up weed control work along the track network.

The work was completed in May this year, the only hiccup being that the fencing contractor injured his knee just before work was to commence.

In a short amount of time, the 'rediscovery' of the Southern Brown Bandicoot has had a positive impact on the park and has been a win-win situation for all involved.

All the volunteers who put so many hours into the project can have a justifiable sense of pride in and ownership of the visible outcomes (and some that are not so visible, such as the pest animal control efforts).

However, the biggest winners out of all this are the Southern Brown Bandicoots and other small fauna species that call Bunyip State Park home! • **PW**

Port Phillip & Western Port Catchment Management Authority (CMA).

One area, very close to where one of the cameras picked up a bandicoot, had long been the site of illegal 4WD and trailbike activity, with a network of informal and illegal tracks running through it.

In consultation with Adam Shalekoff from the CMA, we agreed on a strategy to close the illegal tracks, putting in about a kilometre of fencing and a few gates for management vehicle access, and having a bulldozer rip up over 3 km of illegal tracks that were eroded and heavily compacted from vehicle use.



The fire next time

PHOTO: IAN LUNT

IT MIGHT SEEM OBVIOUS, BUT IT'S WORTH STATING. SOMEONE LIVING IN THE DANDENONGS WOULD PREFER BUSHFIRE SAFETY MONEY AND RESOURCES TO BE ALLOCATED TO A SERIES OF LOCAL FIRE SHELTERS, RATHER THAN WASTED ON FUEL REDUCTION BURNS IN THE MALLEE. **PHIL INGAMELLS** REPORTS.

This rare old Callitris (native cypress-pine) at Terrick Terrick National Park has had natural protection from fire.

This is the sort of issue Neil Comrie, the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission's Implementation Monitor, was concerned about in his latest (and second last) annual report on how the Commission's recommendations are being implemented.

He didn't actually give the above example, but he did make it clear that his job wasn't just to report on each recommendation's implementation. It was also to assess the value of individual recommendations in the context of the whole package.

Last year he called attention to the Commission's *Recommendation 56* to burn 5% (or 390,000 ha) of public land annually for fuel reduction purposes. Recognising that trying to achieve a

large burn target often meant large burns were being conducted in remote areas, he said that "*working towards a pre-determined target may diminish the State's ability to focus on risk reduction in high risk areas*".

In this year's report he went further, saying he was not convinced that the target was 'achievable, affordable or sustainable'. This is not surprising, given that in the entire history of planned burning in Victoria, the 390,000 ha figure has been reported as having been achieved only once, in 1980-81.

And in that case, we are advised, the prescribed burns were largely applied to the forested ridge tops of eastern Victoria, yet the unburnt valleys and slopes were included in the reported burn area.

Importantly, in this year's report Mr Comrie drew attention to the growing dissatisfaction with the 5% target, saying that:

"The overriding need to adopt a more strategic risk based approach to planned burning continued to characterise public debate over the past 12 months. In response to the recent public release of the planned burning achievement for 2012-13, scientists, academics and land managers (both public and private) were still calling for the application of a more strategic approach."

Thankfully fire planners in DEPI, and Environment Minister Ryan Smith, are well aware of the need to move to more strategic planning for the fuel reduction program. Mr Comrie quoted the Environment Minister in this regard:

"We are also doing a lot of work around developing a risk based strategic approach to fuel management on public land... We want to have an approach that helps us make evidenced-based decisions around bushfire management and also allows us to assess the work we have done and make sure that we have the policy objective of reducing the risk of bushfires while having an eye on property and critical infrastructure and certainly on ecosystems."

The Victorian Government currently employs 600 full-time project fire fighters, but during the peak periods for fuel reduction burning across the state, temporary staff push that figure to around 2,500. It is a hugely expensive exercise, and it warrants a serious answer as to the effectiveness of the program, and its impacts. No-one is suggesting that fuel reduction burning shouldn't take place. But Mr Comrie rightly asks whether fuel reduction

programs are happening in the most effective places, and whether a mix of public safety programs is more useful in many areas. He pointed out that:

"... the fact that four years after Black Saturday there is still not one additional CFR [community fire refuge] available to the community as a last resort shelter option is a matter of significant concern. The BRCIM urges the State to maintain a strong focus on this matter."

And that brings us back to the Dandenongs. Those heavily populated ranges at Melbourne's doorstep have burnt before, and they will burn again. But there are limited options for fuel reduction burns in the tall Mountain Ash forests, indeed only the mildest of burns can be undertaken without killing the trees themselves.

And trying to escape a bushfire in the Dandenongs is a perilous occupation.

Most roads leading out of the hills are narrow and double back on themselves as they wind through the forest.

Mr Comrie, rather quietly, noted that DEPI has still not filed a single annual report on the impacts of the burn program on Victoria's biodiversity, as required by the Commission in Recommendation 57. He noted that this report is, yet again, 'in progress', and DEPI has assured us that a limited report on the impacts on biodiversity will be out before the end of the year.

That's really not good enough. The Commission made it clear that, while public safety is the prime objective of fire management, protection of biodiversity is also an important objective, and one that should be achieved. • PW

Neil Comrie will revisit this issue in his final report. That puts DEPI on notice.

What's an old tree worth?



Hollows in old trees are the architecture of the bush. They shelter a great many different species of birds, bats and many other mammals, reptiles and insects. They are so important that Victoria's Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act lists their loss from forests and woodlands as a 'threatening process'.

The critical thing about hollows is that they develop in very old trees, so any loss takes many decades, if not centuries, to replace. That sort of impact on the architecture of the bush should ring alarm bells.

Logging and land clearing have been the traditional enemy of old trees, but fire management is rapidly overtaking them as a practice of considerable concern.

Old trees are being felled for safety reasons after fuel reduction burns and, increasingly, before the burns have taken place. Sometimes 500 trees or more are removed in advance of a single fuel reduction burn, and techniques such as raking around hollow trees to stop them burning are only rarely employed.

PHOTO: RETO ZOLLINGER

Felled hollow tree after a fuel reduction burn in Black Range State Park.

DO YOU SUPPORT MARINE PROTECTED AREAS?

PHOTO: NATALIE MANAHAN

RMIT STUDENTS NATALIE MANAHAN AND MATILDA REYNOLDS PUT THE QUESTION TO A NUMBER OF RECREATIONAL FISHERS.

Throwing a line in, whether from a boat or the shore, is a favourite pastime for many Australians. This comes as no surprise considering that 85% of Australians live within 50 km of the coast.

Although most people probably think the pressure that recreational fishing puts on fish stocks is reasonably small, a recent report by the VNPA (*The State of Recreational Fishing in Victoria, 2013*) shows the significant environmental impacts it can have on fish stocks, non-target species and marine ecosystems as a whole.

This highlights the need for marine protection measures such as the current system of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in Victoria, which at present protect just 5.3% of Victoria's coastal waters.

Despite this small percentage, MPAs are often presented as a threat to recreational fishing. The media depicts the political atmosphere surrounding the issue as very divisive, largely portraying it as 'marine conservation vs fishers'.

Lobby groups and political parties such as the Shooters and Fishers party that are strongly opposed to MPAs are the most likely to get involved in the media debate, but don't necessarily reflect the views of all recreational fishers.



Top: Mosaic leatherjacket Eubalichthys mosaicus, taken around Blairgowrie pier.

Left: Goat fish Upeneichthys vlamingii, taken around Rye pier on a night dive.

Study

Earlier this year, a comprehensive pilot study was conducted in Victoria in order to give a more accurate account of perceptions held within the recreational fishing community. In association with the VNPA, RMIT students investigated the attitudes of Victorian recreational fishers to Marine Protected Areas.

Very little research has been done in Victoria on this issue. This study aimed to develop a better understanding of attitudes towards and support for the Victorian Marine Park network among fishers, as well as their understanding of the health of Victoria's marine environment.

The study involved surveying and interviewing fishers, via online surveying through recreational fishing clubs and by face-to-face interviews at a number of boat ramps in the Port Phillip Bay area.

Findings

The study demonstrated that recreational fishers are in fact largely in favour of Marine Protected Areas, contradicting the common message portrayed by the media. In summary, the findings include the following.

- 72% of the fishers surveyed expressed support for Victoria's MPAs and believed they play a positive role in protecting the marine environment.
- Regardless of their attitude towards MPAs, a large majority (94%) of fishers also considered it important or very important that the health of the marine environment should be protected.
- A significant proportion of fishers surveyed expressed dissatisfaction with Victoria's MPAs, 27% of interviewees being opposed to them. However, their opposition seems to be based more on the MPAs' positions within the bay or their success rate at increasing fish stocks, rather than their major purpose of protecting and maintaining biodiversity.

“We’ve had enough!”



Mallacoota residents (and their White Elephant) give the thumbs down to rate notices.

PHOTO: SAVE BASTION POINT

In far East Gippsland, ratepayers angered by their Council’s decision to go ahead with the controversial Option 3b breakwater development at Bastion Point, Mallacoota, are going on strike.

“Withholding our rates is a tangible way for us to express our lack of confidence in the East Gippsland Shire Council and its ability to manage our funds” said Jenny Mason, spokesperson for the Save Bastion Point Campaign.

“To have proceeded with this oversized, destructive development and committed East Gippsland ratepayers

to the maintenance and operational costs shows gross financial irresponsibility.”

A NSW firm, GPM Constructions, has recently been awarded the contract for the construction phase at a cost of \$5 million.

“Why should ratepayers pay for a facility that most will never use, that isn’t supported by the broader community, and which will permanently ruin an area currently enjoyed by so many?” Jenny asks.

- Support for MPAs was also generally more subdued among fishers who are members of a recreational fishing club or organisation. This seems to be as a result of perceived alienation from the decision-making processes around marine protection in Victoria.
- The actual role and function of MPAs are still largely misunderstood in the fishing community. The personal observations of recreational fishers in relation to fish stock levels appeared to form the basis of their answers and their opinions on the health of the marine environment.

What needs to be done next

There is overwhelming scientific evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of MPAs in protecting and maintaining biodiversity. They have also been shown to benefit adjacent take-zones through adult and larval spillover.

However, this message is not necessarily reaching or getting through to recreational fishers, as the science is not being communicated effectively.

Based on observations during the study, fishers often appear to judge the effectiveness of MPAs and the condition of the marine ecosystem largely on the success of their own fishing trips.

This highlights the need for improved education and communication between government and all relevant stakeholders in the recreational fishing community, in order to facilitate a mindset that extends beyond just fish stock levels and incorporates a more holistic approach to marine conservation.

It’s also important that recreational fishers feel they are adequately consulted in the decision-making process, as this will see them more likely to accept any restrictions implemented.

PROTECTING MARINE HABITAT: a Handbook for Victorian Waters

This new handbook was launched at the VNPA Reef Watch program’s recent 10th birthday celebrations. Detailed and colourful, it describes the natural features of each of Victoria’s marine habitats, where these habitats can be found, the ecosystem services they supply, and what we can all do to minimise threats to them and ensure they are protected and sustained for future generations.

It’s available on the VNPA website, and copies will be distributed to dive groups.



The positives that can be taken from this study are that the recreational fishing community largely supports and is passionate about maintaining the health of Victoria’s marine environment, and is willing to comply with strict protection measures, such as MPAs, if they are justified.

With this overall goal in mind, the fishing community and environmental groups have an opportunity to work together in achieving adequate protection of Victoria’s marine environment. • PW

Scuba diver and photographer Natalie is doing a Masters in Marine Science; Matilda, who takes part in the Great Victorian Fish Count, is studying Social Science (Environmental Science). Both are keenly interested in Victoria’s unique marine biodiversity and in conserving it for the future.

View over Lake Surprise
in the volcanic crater
to Mt Eccles itself.

IN
PARKS

A recent volcano: Mt Eccles National Park

**GEOFF DURHAM RETURNS TO AN
ATTRACTIVE PARK IN AN AREA WITH
SIGNIFICANT ABORIGINAL HERITAGE.**

PHOTO: GEOFF DURHAM

In about 1980 our camp at Mt Eccles National Park was memorable for the koala poo-pellets that rained on our tent, and for the Brush-tailed Possum that caused havoc inside it.

My most recent visit, though, in July this year, brought home to me just what an attractive, interesting and significant park it is.

Major Mitchell's map of his 1836 Australia Felix expedition shows Mount Eeles, which he named after a military associate. Eccles is a misspelling of this name.

The area was settled in the mid-1840s with conflict between the resident Aboriginal people and the intruders. Stone fences from the pastoral times remain. Much older are the walls of the circular Aboriginal huts, a unique feature of the area.

The park is 330 km south-west of Melbourne, near Macarthur. Thirty-two acres encompassing Lake Surprise were reserved as a site for a public park in 1926 at the request of the local Council. It was proclaimed a National Park in 1960 and its area increased to 394 ha in 1968.

Although the 1982 Recommendations of the Land Conservation Council were for a 5800 ha State Park, National Park status was retained. With additions, including land purchased with Commonwealth NHT funding, the park now covers 8375 ha, including the 400 ha Stones Reference Area. Minor forestry ceased in 1984 and grazing in 1995. Apiary sites remain.

The 1996 NPS management plan was for Mt Eccles NP and Mt Napier SP, 20km to the north-east. Parks Victoria has just released a new draft plan covering all SW Victoria's parks – see box below.

South West Draft Management Plan

Parks Victoria has released the *Ngootyoong Gunditj, Ngootyoong Mara South West Draft Management Plan* for public comment.

The draft plan covers all the national, state and coastal parks in SW Victoria, including Mt Eccles NP, several Indigenous Protected Areas including Lake Condah, and some smaller reserves. It is available on the Parks Victoria website, or can be purchased for \$10 from Parks Victoria (phone 13 9633). Public submissions are due by **11 November 2013**.

Co-management

Parks Victoria's Park Note, available at www.parks.vic.gov.au, is for 'Budj Bim – Mt Eccles National Park' and explains that Mt Eccles is Victoria's first co-managed national park. The partnership between Gunditjmara Traditional Owners and Parks Victoria was formalised with the establishment of the Budj Bim Council, part of the 2007 Native Title Settlement Agreement between the Gunditjmara and the Victorian Government.

Gunditjmara people manage the indigenous heritage values of the Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape, including Mt Eccles, through the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation.

The Corporation is seeking to change the name of Mt Eccles NP to Budj Bim NP. (The name of the peak itself would remain unchanged.) Budj Bim, meaning 'High Head', is a Gunditjmara dreaming story. Amendment of the name will be the outcome of a long process involving Victoria's Office of Geographic Names.

Natural values and management

The report *Geological features of the National Estate in Victoria* states: 'Mt Eccles is remarkable both for the variety and excellent state of preservation of the many volcanic features and because it was one of the last volcanoes to erupt in south-eastern Australia' (20,000 - 30,000 years ago).



Top:
Information
Centre at Mt
Eccles NP with
Australian and
Aboriginal
flags.

Left: The Lava
Canal walk.

Right: Steps
take you under
the Natural
Bridge.



**Discover the Mt Eccles - Lake Condah
National Heritage Landscape with
Budj Bim Trails or Budj Bim Tours.**

**Phone 5527 1699 or see
www.budjbim.com**

PHOTOS: GEOFF DURHAM

The scoria cone has a crater and the freshwater Lake Surprise within it. Lava flowed through one side of the cone over 50 km to beyond the present coastline. At the north end of Lake Surprise is a lava cave where molten lava drained out under the flow.

The natural tree vegetation on the basalt is a forest of only two species – Manna Gum and Blackwood. It is prime habitat for koalas, which are also in the many Blue Gum plantations in the region. The south-west extension to the park, on limestone, has a stringybark forest. In April 2012, the then federal environment minister, Tony Burke, listed koala populations in Queensland, NSW and the ACT as 'vulnerable' under national environment law. Victoria was not included.

In this state we have excess populations in remaining areas of suitable habitat such as French Island, Tower Hill and Mt Eccles. The simple, humane and cost-effective approach to reducing populations would be scientifically based controlled shooting, but this is regarded as politically unacceptable.

Between 1999 and 2001 Parks Victoria translocated 4,013 animals from Mt Eccles to other forest areas in south-western Victoria. In July 2003 it undertook an assessment of the available management options, including relocation.

The preferred option was female contraceptive implants, and a three-year trial commenced in 2004 when a survey indicated a population of more than 10,000 animals. It was considered that without intervention, browsing pressure would result in large-scale death of trees and a resulting koala population crash.

Contraception was adopted as an approved management technique in 2007. Between 2004 and 2011, 4279 female koalas were implanted. The population has declined to about 5000, but control is compromised by the immigration of non-implanted koalas from adjacent areas. The treatment is thought to be effective for five years. The Mt Eccles population is believed to be *Chlamydia*-free.

Other larger mammals present are possums, Red-necked (Swamp) Wallabies, Eastern Grey Kangaroos and echidnas. The park has the usual rabbits, foxes, cats, and also, as in so many parks these days, deer, which are not being controlled. Leeches are an annoyance.

Visiting the park

As you approach the main entrance, the scar of an old scoria quarry is prominent. Inside the park, the Information Centre has long been closed, but on its exterior walls are informative panels, and there are

good interpretive signs throughout the visitor precinct.

Two new gas-fired barbecue shelters cater for day visitors. The old toilets near the lookout have been removed but the campground has toilets and hot showers with 22 attractive sites (one reserved for groups). There are fireplaces, and dead 'wind-thrown' wood may be collected for firewood.

You need to supply your own drinking water – blue-green algae is lingering in the lake. There is a self-registration system, although bookings are required for holiday periods – phone 5576 1338. The present fee per night is \$21.20 (off-peak \$16.40).

Established walks are the Lake Walk (45 min., 1 hour) around the edge of the lake, Crater Rim Walk (about an hour) which takes in the summit of Mt Eccles, and the rocky Canal Walk (2-3 hours) in the lava canal and under the Natural Bridge, which also can be reached by road.

It is a 10 minute walk to the Lava Cave – take a torch. You can investigate bush tracks by car.

Mt Eccles NP is recommended both for a day visit and for its excellent camping. It is an ideal base from which to explore an interesting part of Victoria. • PW

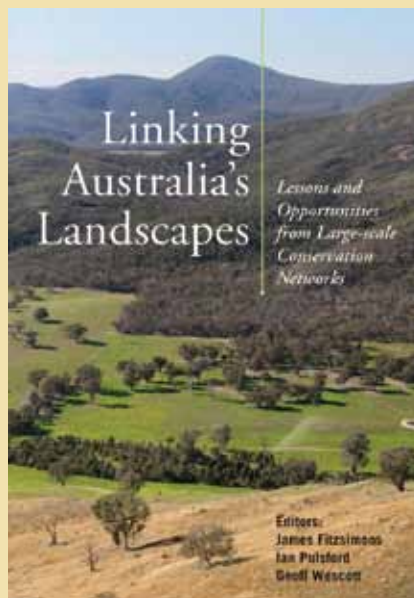
Linking Australia's Landscapes:

*lessons and opportunities
from large-scale
conservation networks*

Edited by James Fitzsimons,
Ian Pulsford and Geoff Wescott.
CSIRO Publishing, 2013. RRP \$89.95.

**We're in the middle of a quiet
revolution, a 'linking landscapes'
revolution.**

Across Australia people are
collaborating and planning for
landscape-scale biolinks. According
to this new book, there is a "surge
in interest in creating networks
and initiatives that aim to 'link up'



habitats and landscapes that have been
fragmented by clearing... ”

The overall goal is to deliver increased
capacity for our wildlife and habitat
to cope with climate change so that
ecological systems can 'self-evolve' in
the face of dryness and heat.

The editors asked those involved in
landscape connectivity initiatives
to describe the project and, very
importantly, the lessons learnt.

Those 'revolutionaries' are driven by
diverse visions, but one is recognition
of the need for habitat conservation and
land management beyond parks and
reserves, and the need to protect existing
connectivity and re-establish linkages.

Readers of *Park Watch* will be familiar
with some of these projects: Habitat 141°
in western Victoria, Gondwana Link in
south-west WA, and Central Victorian
Biolinks.

Others include the SA government's
NatureLinks and the NT government's
Territory Eco-link.

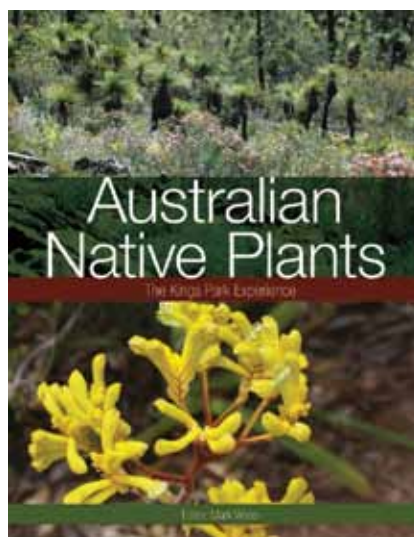
The oldest of all is the Bookmark (now
Riverland) Biosphere Reserve, covering
over 700,000 ha north of the Murray near
Renmark. It has had both major successes
and huge challenges, with significant
lessons for others.

The CMNs – Conservation Management
Networks – are well known to
conservation-minded Victorians.
Wedderburn and Gippsland Plains are
excellent examples. Although much

Australian Native Plants: *the Kings Park Experience*

Edited by Mark Webb.
CSIRO Publishing, 2013.
RRP \$39.95.

**Kings Park, that fantastic hybrid of
beautiful bushland and structured
Australian native botanic gardens
right on the edge of Perth's CBD, has
something for everyone.**



The same can be said of this book.
It hits you initially with the best that
Western Australia has to offer from
its beautiful bounty of wildflowers
and fascinating array of other flora

that have earned it 'biodiversity hotspot'
status.

It then backs this up with the years of
experience and knowledge that only a
dedicated team of botanic gardens staff
and scientists can acquire.

This book will be useful to anyone,
anywhere in Australia, with an interest in
growing Australian natives or indigenous
plants.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on some of the
beautiful plants that are mostly uniquely
West Australian; the remaining chapters
offer first-class information on all aspects
of sourcing, propagating and caring for
Australian plants.

Some of this material is not normally
seen in home gardening books – for
example, arboricultural advice and
information on grafting for Australian
natives, and even information on tissue
culture and crytopreservation!

smaller in scale than landscape-scale projects, their property-level work is the basis of any landscape project.

In NSW the Grassy Box Woodlands CMN is a much bigger affair, extending from the Murray to the NSW-Queensland border.

Slopes to Summit and Border Ranges Alliance are part of the Great Eastern Ranges (GER) initiative that stretches from Cape York to the Grampians, with five focal landscapes in NSW. Each has a full time facilitator, and GER has received \$4 million over four years from the NSW Government's Environment Trust.

Finally, the one purely Queensland example, the Bunya Biolink in south-east Queensland, aims to link the Bunya Mountains to the Conondale Ranges.

So what can we learn from all this extraordinary work? The editors offer a very useful synthesis.

- There are tried and tested planning tools for conservation connectivity

outcomes, though just how this is integrated with social outcomes and climate change is less clear

- Strength and commitment of a project's leadership over long periods is a key factor, with secure and long-term funding for facilitators a huge advantage
- Programs built on trust and openness will be more resilient in hard times, so investing in relationship-building early in development is crucial
- Collaboration and communication across scales are essential
- Governments in all their spheres have several key roles, including management of public land, provision of data, consistent funding and (I would add) policies that help, not hinder.

It's easy to feel depressed about biodiversity loss and the impact of climate change. But this quiet revolution is inspiring. These landscape initiatives are solutions; they bring out the best in a wide

variety of people and partners with an inspiring vision and a 'yes! we can do it!' approach.

Linking Australia's Landscapes helps us understand this revolution and see our piece in the jigsaw – maybe a donation, or covenanting a parcel of land, or a skill or time to contribute. The stories demonstrate that vision, persistence, collaboration, good science, the building of trust and working across scales all tell a great story, and will bring in resources and results.

Money is vital, but in the scale of government funding not all that much is needed.

Big projects need all the ingredients mentioned in this excellent review of the 'quiet revolution'. They also need targets, costings and projected returns on investment.

In this case, the return is nothing less than a resilient landscape in the face of climate change. And it won't cost the earth either. • **PW**

Reviewed by Karen Alexander

I found one of the most interesting sections to be Chapter 8, which covers pests, diseases, disorders and other problems. Here I learnt more about some of the galls, marks and attachments I've seen on plants in my own area.

Others will be interested in Chapter 9, which explains how plants are interbred to produce ornamental cultivars for gardening purposes.

I recently talked to someone who now lives in Melbourne whose family runs a native plant nursery in WA. She observed that she was confounded that Melbourne gardeners really hadn't taken to gardening with their local natives the way that people in WA have.

It seems those Western Australians can teach us a thing or two, and this book is a good start. • **PW**

Reviewed by Yasmin Kelsall



Venus Bay Eco Retreat

eco
CERTIFIED
Advanced
Ecotourism

Sustainable luxury holiday accommodation
in the bush by the sea

T: 03 5663 7525 www.venusbay-ecoretreat.com.au

A unique destination close to Cape Liptrap Coastal Park, Wilsons Promontory National Park, Bunurong Marine National Park and Anderson Inlet. 180 km from Melbourne.

Biodiversity: *integrating conservation and production*

Edited by Ted Lefroy, Kay Bailey,
Greg Unwin & Tony Norton.
CSIRO, 2008. RRP \$89.95.

VNPA MEMBER **BERNARD SLATTERY**
REVIEWS A CSIRO BOOK PUBLISHED
IN 2008 BUT STILL HIGHLY RELEVANT,
PARTICULARLY IN RELATION TO CURRENT
ACTION IN ESTABLISHING BIOLINKS
(SEE REVIEW ON PREVIOUS PAGE).

At a time when fear of fire has cast
native vegetation as a threat to life, it's
as well to re-emphasise that the bush
actually has a role in keeping us alive.

The book under discussion makes that
point by underlining the importance
of biodiversity in sustaining
agricultural production. Arising out
of a 2007 Launceston conference,
it is a collection of case studies
and reflections on the challenge of
integrating agricultural production
with biodiversity conservation.

Peter Hay's introduction sets the
agenda clearly: a bumper sticker which
pugnaciously asserts that 'everything
you own, wear, use, and eat has been
cut down or dug up from the ground'
is correct. We need production, and
dreams of 'rewilding' are unrealistic
and wrong-headed.

But this doesn't mean a downgrading
of the importance of biodiversity,
he says.

*'We must have production and we
must, somehow, contrive to maintain
here with us the species mix with which
we have co-evolved. It will be clear that,
in so contriving, it is the production
systems that must make the necessary
adjustments.'*

Why? He quotes from Edward O.
Wilson's *Consilience*:

*'Recent experimental studies on whole
ecosystems support what ecologists have long
suspected: the more species that live in an
ecosystem, the higher is the productivity and
the greater its ability to withstand drought
and other kinds of environmental stress.'*

The demand that production systems
must adjust to biodiversity requirements
runs counter to what has been happening
over the last couple of hundred years.
Past and present agricultural practices
have simplified the ecosystem to the
point where it can no longer function
without massive and expensive inputs.

Some of the consequences are startling.
Australian soil organic carbon stores
have been depleted by as much as 75%
in the last 200 years. As a result, the
water-holding capacity of Victorian soils
is twenty times lower now than it was at
settlement. Local authorities estimate that
topsoil depths at Ballarat have halved in
the last 25 years.

Farmer action

Farmers are responding to this situation,
although an analysis of farm tree
plantings in the book shows that 21% are
aimed at land rehabilitation, 68% are for
shelter and shade, and only 2% have a

conservation aim. Hence the problem
is only partly being confronted.

The case studies offered here are
responses to this situation.

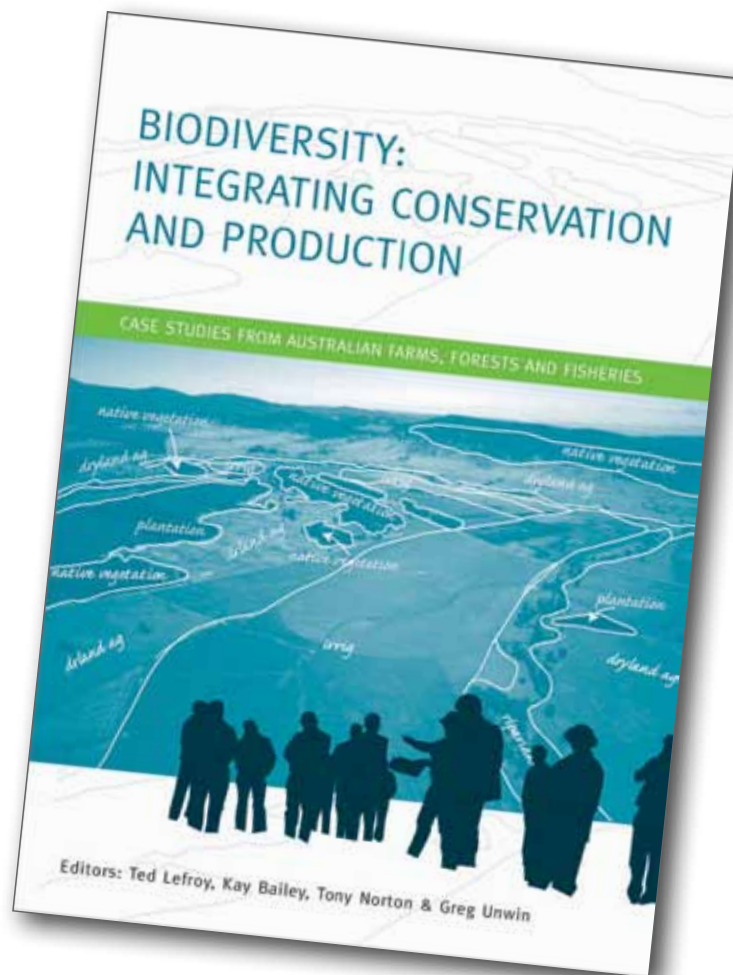
John and Robyn Ive removed nearly
30% of their property in the Yass valley
(NSW) from production to undertake
rehabilitation and conservation work, yet
managed an increase both in quality and
quantity of outputs.

Graham Strong has increased tree cover
in his properties on the Hay plains
(NSW) from 2% to 12% since 1996,
while maintaining wool production and
improving wool quality.

Cam Nicholson cites farmers in SW
Victoria strategically re-establishing native
grasslands around their properties 'as a
refuge and source of beneficial insects.' He
claims that 'integrated pest management'
using beneficial (native) insects can mean
a gain of up to \$30,000 a year in savings on
chemicals and improved production.

Challenges

These and other stories might suggest
that conservation work can easily be
undertaken by farmers without cost. This
is obviously not the case.



Integrating conservation and production may be challenging, but it's happening.

Top: A Grow West planting in the Pentland Hills west of Bacchus Marsh.

Below left: Emus in a planted area at Yanac North in the Wimmera.

Below right: Tree planting is fun and rewarding!



PHOTO: GROW WEST



PHOTO: BERNIE FOX



PHOTO: GROW WEST

Perhaps the most challenging contribution on this point is that by Ian Dickenson. He tracks his efforts to devise a plan for his family's Tasmanian farm which will supply sustainable income for his family through the generations, and he makes his calculations accordingly, focusing on the fate of a 299 ha block of bushland which the family decides to convert mostly to plantation and pasture: the economics simply dictated this decision.

Of his ten-page essay, two-thirds of a page is devoted to biodiversity, and half that to the expense and difficulty of it. The merit of the article is to show an enlightened farmer carefully doing the sums on environmental stewardship. Its conclusion casts a sober light on the positive tone of some of the other articles.

The question of how conservation work might sit with short-term farm viability is one requiring detailed research and

empirical testing, and here we have a problem.

David Lindenmayer tersely highlights the gap between land management and research: *'a check shows over 2000 references to adaptive management in the scientific literature in the last ten years. Yet there are almost no true published examples of adaptive management anywhere in the world.'*

On this subject, Ted Lefroy's concluding chapter, subtitled 'Why practical experience is necessary but not sufficient and science is essential but not always right', makes provocative reading.

Case studies

One of the book's great strengths is its case studies of producers integrating production and biodiversity conservation. The fact that the average return on capital for agricultural enterprises is 2% underlines the difficulty of doing this. Long-term land

health depends on the capacity of farmers to invest in it, and this is constrained by their narrow profit margins (if there are profits).

The conclusion is obvious: *'As a community we must be willing to pay for environmental services provided by individual producers.'* This payment must come either as government support, or through higher prices for primary produce.

At the moment, our standard of living is subsidised by the environment.

It is interesting that the book doesn't deal with the relationship between farms and adjacent public land reserves. There's a history here of tension, most recently related to fire, but the evidence suggests that biodiversity reserves on public land are of immense use in keeping agricultural land viable.

This book should be widely read—though the price tag may mean that many readers might prefer to look for it in a library. • PW

TreeProject grows biodiversity

IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR AN AFFORDABLE WAY OF REVEGETATING YOUR LAND, OR WANT TO PROMOTE BIODIVERSITY BY GROWING INDIGENOUS SEEDLINGS IN YOUR BACK YARD, NOW IS THE TIME TO CONTACT TREEPROJECT! **ELLEN DORWARD** OF THE TREEPROJECT TEAM REPORTS.



PHOTOS: TREE PROJECT

TreeProject is an urban-based, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to combating environmental degradation throughout Victoria.

Established in 1988 by Maggie McLeod and Belinda Gross, the organisation is celebrating its 25th anniversary and going stronger than ever.

Its underlying philosophy is that the entire community is responsible for protecting our natural resources, including the farmland that produces our food, fibres and other items.

Victorian landholders and rural communities no longer need to fight the battle of environmental degradation alone.

We all know that the large-scale removal of native vegetation has caused serious problems such as soil erosion, salinity, loss of habitat and reduced biodiversity, not to mention the impacts on community wellbeing, income, lifestyle and amenity. TreeProject is helping to repair our damaged and fragmented habitats, create wildlife corridors, repair waterways and improve or create wildlife habitats.



Above: Large-scale planting of TreeProject seedlings by ANZ volunteers.

Left: TreeProject Project Officer De Grebner (right) with planters in the Ancona Valley.

Since its inception, TreeProject has made revegetation affordable for landholders and Landcare groups by supplying low-cost indigenous seedlings which are cared for by urban volunteers in their own backyards before being planted in rural areas.

Achievements

TreeProject has an impressive list of achievements, including its long-term participation in Campaspe-Maribyrnong Headwaters biolink projects, the revegetation of the Ancona Valley near Mansfield (with the Ancona Valley Landcare Group), contributing to Melbourne Water's Stream Frontage Management Program, and receiving the 2011 Kookaburra Environmental Award from Parks Victoria.

It has been responsible for the planting of two million native flora seedlings

throughout rural Australia, and has been privileged to have the participation of over 250 enthusiastic and passionate volunteers each year.

TreeProject's first tree planting day in April 1989 was an outstanding success, with 600 volunteers planting over 5,000 trees and shrubs. We have continued to organise tree planting days across Melbourne with an astounding level of participation from our volunteers.

In 1992, we first embarked on the Re-Tree Scheme, in which both urban and regional volunteers propagate and plant out thousands of indigenous seedlings each year for rural revegetation projects, including shelterbelts, creeks and rivers, erosion gullies and wildlife habitat.

Participating landholders benefit by getting low-cost seedlings and assistance in planting them. Time and money

are always constraints to addressing revegetation, but the help of volunteers can make the job that much easier.

They also get to see the level of support and appreciation in urban and metropolitan areas for the good work they are doing, building strong links between town and country people along the way.

"It's a fairly simple idea", says De Grebner, Project Officer for TreeProject.

"By encouraging people in urban areas to become actively involved in caring for the countryside, we are doing something that will help the environment in the long term and take some of the pressure off the landholders.

"There's never been a more important time to get trees in the ground to help fight climate change, restore ecosystems and improve water quality."

Farmers, Landcare groups and other landholders register to have locally indigenous seedlings grown to order. To ensure the seed is in fact local, landholders are asked to supply seed that has been collected from their local area.

Volunteer growers

This seed is packaged up and included in a 'growing kit' containing all the necessary propagation materials. The kit is then taken home by a volunteer grower.

Growers set up their 'backyard nursery', propagating and caring for the seedlings until they are ready to be planted out. They are given detailed instructions and can contact an experienced TreeProject grower for on-going advice and support.

This can be an important and fulfilling experience as it encourages a sense of community and allows volunteers to actively participate in the conservation of Victoria's unique biodiversity.

"It's a system that we've been using for 25 years, and it's been made as easy as possible so most people can successfully propagate and grow their seedlings," says De.

"It's a project where everybody benefits. We are supporting landholders while giving our volunteers the opportunity to contribute their time and energy to a worthy cause.



Left:
TreeProject
planting
extends
a forest.

Below:
Volunteer
grower Liz
with boxes
of seedlings.

PHOTOS: TREE PROJECT



"It gives volunteers immense satisfaction to see the fruit of their labour take off in the field. And there are many other volunteers who just love to get out into the countryside, get their hands dirty and plant some trees."

TreeProject volunteers are a diverse group – old, young, city, suburban and regional, schools, community groups, abled and disabled. Their common thread is that they want to do something tangible to help our rural environment. Along the way they also get to be a part of a real environmental project.

"Being part of TreeProject has always been my way of doing something practical for the environment, by

helping our farmers and Landcare groups revegetate. It's also got me out of the city to some beautiful places I otherwise wouldn't have seen," said one volunteer.

How to register

If you'd like to become a volunteer grower, or are a landholder interested in purchasing provenance-sourced seedlings, register with TreeProject now to receive your growing kit or to place an order.

TreeProject takes orders for indigenous seedlings until the end of September, so place your order as soon as possible. Seedlings are grown from November onwards and are ready for planting the following autumn or spring. An order of 500 seedlings costs the landowner only \$175.00, which includes organising volunteer planters if needed.

We offer continued support and relationship-building for both landholders and growers throughout the process. • PW

For more information, or to register, call TreeProject on (03) 9650 9477 or email us at info@treeproject.asn.au. You can also visit our website at www.treeproject.asn.au

Come and enjoy Victoria's wildflowers!

Angair Wildflower and Art Show:
Anglesea, 21-22 September

Many residents and visitors explore the Anglesea and Aireys Inlet district each year to admire the amazing number of orchids and other wildflowers that grow throughout the area.

The show will be held this year on **Saturday 21 and Sunday 22 September**, 10am to 4.30pm, at the Anglesea Memorial Hall in McMillan Street.

Admission: adults \$5.00, students and pensioners \$2.00, children free. More information: www.angair.org.au

No Grampians Wildflower Show this year

The Grampians Wildflower Show celebrated its milestone 75th birthday at Centenary Hall in Halls Gap in October 2012. This was a great celebration with local artists contributing some fun sculpted wildflowers.

The show committee has decided that this is an appropriate time to sit back

No fewer than 16 Sun-orchid species (*Thelymitra*) occur in the Brisbane Ranges.



PHOTO: CLIVE TRIGG

Golden Grevillea (*Grevillea chrysophoea*) is a Brisbane Ranges special.



PHOTO: CATHY POWERS

and consider the future of the show. There will therefore be no show in 2013 while the committee seeks new blood and new ideas to take the event forward.

The Pomonal Show will be going ahead on Saturday and Sunday 5 and 6 October.

Brisbane Ranges
Wildflower Show: Anakie,
Sunday 13 October

This is a great opportunity to see the wide diversity of the plants of Brisbane Ranges NP on display – and it's only an hour's drive west of Melbourne!

The show's promotion features the rare Golden Grevillea, found only

in the Brisbane Ranges and parts of Gippsland. This and the endemic Brisbane Ranges Grevillea are just a sample of the more than 600 native plant species in the park.

Very popular guided bus tours starting at 10.00am and 1.30pm help visitors to discover the park's wildflowers 'on the ground'. These tours are usually booked out well beforehand, so you need to book online early.

Free workshops on *Fabaceae* (pea family) plant identification at 10.30am and orchid identification at 2.00pm, plus a photographic display and indigenous plants for sale combine to offer a full day. For more information see www.fobr.org.au/wildflowers • PW

VMRG Training Weekend

12-13 OCTOBER 2013

The Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group invites anyone with an interest in malleefowl conservation and a love of the bush to attend its annual Training Weekend at Wyperfeld National Park. This is the prelude to the annual monitoring program during the birds' breeding season.

New and experienced volunteers will be trained to conduct field monitoring of malleefowl nest sites according to nationally recognised monitoring protocols. After the training, volunteers are encouraged to sign up for field monitoring at one of over 40 Victorian monitoring sites.



Joe Benshemesh and volunteers at a Malleefowl mound in 2009.

The monitoring program continues a research project initiated by Dr Joe Benshemesh in the 1980s. It is now recognised internationally as one of the most successful scientific research and conservation projects supported entirely by volunteer effort in the world. • PW

For details, contact VMRG Secretary Ross Macfarlane:

Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group, Inc.
3 Cambridge Road,
Bentleigh East VIC 3165
Phone: 0417 370 371
secretary@malleefowlvictoria.org.au
www.malleefowlvictoria.org.au

PHOTO: VMRG

VNPA BWAG Excursions

Saturday 21 September:

Visit the historic gold town of Steiglitz in the Brisbane Ranges, including the old cemetery.

Leader: Larysa Kucan.

Saturday 19 October:

Enjoy a day visit through green countryside to rugged Grampians NP at the height of the wildflower season.

Leaders: Helen Dooley and Ulla Jones.

Saturday 2 November:

Special excursion to Wilsons Promontory NP in connection with 'Hands Off' demonstration (see page 6).

Saturday 30 November:

Great views and gold rush history on a tour to Mount Alexander (near Castlemaine) and Woodend.

Leader: Glenn King.

Bookings and enquiries:

Larysa Kucan 9347 3733,
or Jan Lacey 9329 8187.

Bibbulmun and Beyond

Experience the best of the Bibbulmun Track
and beyond into the spectacular Stirling Ranges



9-day guided tour departs 12 May 2014

Cost: \$2,700
(twin share)

- Full and half day walks
- Accommodation, meals and transfers
- Guided by the experts



P: (08) 9481 0551 E: events@bibbulmuntrack.org.au

www.bibbulmuntrack.org.au

Willis's Walkabouts

The wet season is NOT
what you might think!!

Don't believe what you see on TV weather reports. Weather symbols designed for temperate climates don't work for the tropics.

January, our wettest month, is far from the hottest. Most rain comes in short, sharp bursts. We average 45% sunny skies compared to Melbourne's 54%. Melbourne gets far more 35° days than Darwin.

Don't believe it? The met bureau links on our wet season web page will let you judge for yourself.

www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/wet.shtml

Why not join us and see why many local people think this is the best time to go bushwalking.



www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au rrwillis@internode.on.net Ph: 08 8985 2134



Birds of the Snowy River 11-15 Nov & 13-17 Jan

A dedicated birdwatching tour to get to know the birds of the Snowy River Valley. Enjoy a wonderful variety of woodland birds plus some that are summer visitors.

Small group, fully accommodated, easy walks.

Seashore Life of East Gippsland 21-25 March, 2014

Enjoy rock pool rambles and beach combing to discover an array of fascinating seashore life.

A specialist guide joins us to help you gain a deeper understanding of seashore creatures. Not just a holiday, an educational experience

For more details contact Jenny:

Gippsland High Country Tours
Phone (03) 5157 5556

Email: jennyghct@netspace.net.au
www.gippslandhighcountrytours.com.au

Advanced Ecotourism Certification. Est. 1987

