

PARK WATCH



SHINING A LIGHT AT THE PROM
RETURN TO LAKE MOUNTAIN
GROW WEST AND HINDMARSH
MARINE AND COASTAL UPDATE
YARRA RANGES NP
CAMPING FEES IN PARKS
CATTLE IN THE ALPS – AGAIN

DECEMBER 2013 NO 255



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



Be part of nature

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

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

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FRONT COVER

Sending a message from Tidal River beach, Wilsons Promontory NP, Saturday 2 November.
Photo: Cloud9 Photography (Andrew North) from a remote-controlled 'blimp'.

BACK COVER

Creeping Fan-flowers carpet the ground at Lake Mountain, December 2012. See page 6. Photo: Annette Muir.

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From the President

Environmental achievements

It's the end of the year already and the start of my second term as President. I'd like to welcome new councillors and committee members and say a big 'thank you' and 'Happy Christmas!' to our brilliant staff, dedicated volunteers and generous supporters who have helped us achieve so much in a difficult year.

And speaking of brilliance, wasn't the 'Shine a Light for Parks' demonstration at the Prom fantastic? To see the YouTube video, search for 'Shine a Light for Parks' at www.youtube.com.

As usual, the government responded that this was an over-reaction on our part. It doesn't intend to use its new 99-year commercial lease legislation to promote hotels and other major commercial tourism resorts in parks, it says. Yeah, right! If that was the case, why pass the legislation at all?

This seems a good time to reflect on some of the environmental achievements of past Coalition governments and compare them with those of the current government. For example, the Bolte Government of the 1950s and 60s initiated new legislation to protect and manage national parks, and established the Soil Conservation Authority and the Land Conservation Council (LCC).

The Hamer Government of the 1970s, with Bill Borthwick as the first Conservation Minister, was a most progressive government for the environment. It established the basis of our current National Parks Act in 1975 and created the first parks under LCC recommendations. It developed Melbourne's system of Green Wedges as the 'lungs' of the city. It established the EPA, the Ministry for Conservation and the Victorian Conservation Trust Act (the legal basis for the Trust for Nature). It also created regional planning

authorities within environmental agendas, such as protecting the Yarra Valley and Westernport. Its Garden State Committee was the forerunner of all incentive schemes for re-establishing native habitat on freehold land.

Sounds like a lot? Well, the Hamer Government had many other environmental highlights – too many to list here.

In the 1990s, the Kennett Government launched Australia's first approved Biodiversity Strategy, in which it created the concept of managing native vegetation to create a 'net gain' in extent and quality. It initiated the native vegetation management framework, and established the Catchment & Land Protection Act 1994, and ten regional catchment boards (now CMAs) to plan, manage and monitor Victoria's rivers and catchments.

On the down side, that government also stripped resources for conservation and many other services, and had some funny ideas about five-star hotels in national parks – sound familiar? But it had great achievements too.

Now let's list the current State Government's significant environmental achievements during its first three years ...

Well, that was easy. And I don't have space to list all the negatives.

Anyway, I would rather finish on a more positive note. With an election due next year, the polls not looking so good and poor environmental performance being a factor, perhaps we can look forward to a better 2014.

Perhaps the Government will even consider dropping its ridiculous plan to base decisions about clearing native vegetation on computer-generated statewide mapping, which has as much relationship to reality at site scale as some publications by J.K. Rowlings.

This mapping puts 97% of vegetation on private land in what it calls 'low risk-based pathways', including some biosites and other sites of ecological significance. In these areas, councils have no planning scheme support to refuse or even reduce the amount of clearing applications up to one hectare of clearing, even on land protected by environment significance and vegetation protection overlays.

It will be a much happier New Year if the Napthine Government draws back from some of the ridiculous and environmentally destructive positions we've seen over the past three years.

The health and protection of the environment really should be a bipartisan issue. With an election looming in under 12 months, and if we continue to work hard and speak up for nature, maybe it will become one. • PW

Russell Costello, VNPA President

From the Editor



Well, I think our President has summed up the political situation very comprehensively!

I would like to thank everyone who has sent in articles, reviews and photos during the past year. Without your contributions, there would be no *Park Watch*. And I thank our capable and creative designer Mary Ferlin.

I'd also like to draw your attention to our special offer for the new book *Coastal Guide to nature and history – Port Phillip Bay*, an excellent gift for any walker and outdoor enthusiast. See page 34 for details.

And I wish all our members and supporters a happy and safe Christmas and New Year. • PW

Michael Howes

MEGAPHONE DIPLOMACY

SHINING A LIGHT FOR PARKS

VNPA PARK PROTECTION PROJECT OFFICER PHIL INGAMILLS DESCRIBES THE 2 NOVEMBER PROTEST AT THE PROM AND THE RESPONSE TO IT. CHECK OUT THE VIDEO ON YOU TUBE!



As dusk gathered, torches lit up the 'Hands off Parks!' message. The event was organised by the VNPA, Friends of the Prom and the Prom Campers Association.

The message

When over 1200 people turned up at Wilsons Promontory National Park on Saturday 2 November to 'draw a line in the sand' against commercial developments in parks, there was a significant organisational problem.

Sunset would be at 7.50pm, when the 12,000 odd torches that people had brought would light up a HANDS OFF PARKS! message on the beach at dusk.

But *The Age* newspaper was featuring a Melbourne Cup weekend wrap-around and had cancelled its second print run. They wanted a picture by 6.30pm – the very time we had asked people to gather at the beach car park for a pre-event briefing.

The original plan was to interview some participants on video before methodically moving everyone to the beach. We would then do a few practice runs before photographing and filming the event towards dusk.

Instead we had to coerce everyone immediately onto the beach and into formation ... and ask them to stay there till sunset, about an hour and a half away.

A megaphone was very useful at the time, but the enthusiasm, warmth and determination of the participants

were the real ingredients that made the event possible.

And I'd like to acknowledge here the courage and determination of a few elderly and infirm participants who managed to sit, stand and sit again and again over that hour and a half in the sand. It was a noble effort!

The *Sunday Age* got its photograph. We also appeared on Sunday's Channel 7 and ABC news, Monday's Prime TV news and various radio programs and local news outlets.

A video of the event can be found on YouTube if you look for 'Shine a Light for Parks'. (The 'Parks' word is important – there seems to be quite a lot of light-shining on YouTube.) Check it out, and share it!

The response

The government's reaction was brief but telling: it simply said we were 'scare-mongering'.

Well, 99 year leases for private developers in parks are scary, and our concerns are real.

There is no need for private developments in parks. They cause problems in those few parks around the world where they do occur, and they're generally being wound back wherever possible.



PHOTO: MARTIN BENNETT

Right: VNPA Councillor Ann Birrell counted off the numbers of message participants heading down to the beach.

The guidelines the government has issued for developments are inadequate, largely relying on unmeasurable buzzwords like 'sustainable' and 'minimal impact'.

And even if the guidelines were impeccable, they have no long-term legislative clout. A commercial operator holding a 99-year lease in a national park won't give a hoot for those guidelines in 20 years' time.

Our event may have been megaphone diplomacy, but it was a call from the community that must be heard. If it's not, the message will inevitably be broadcast again and again.

We know there are many government members who understand the responsibility they hold as custodians and protectors of our national parks.

No government has ever come to harm for recognising the importance of protecting our great natural areas, for progressing well-informed park management or for encouraging the community to experience our national parks at their best.

In the long term it will be to the government's and the community's lasting credit if this generation accepts, with enthusiasm, its important role as protector of our natural heritage. • PW



PHOTO: EMILY CLOUGH



Return to Lake Mountain

PLANT ECOLOGIST ANNETTE MUIR, WHO LIVES IN THE DANDENONG RANGES AND ENJOYS BUSHWALKING AND CAMPING, IS GLAD TO HAVE SEEN THE HOPE OF NEW LIFE AFTER THE BLACK SATURDAY FIRES.

Above: (after the fire) Echo Flat late December 2012.
Note resprouting Snow Gums in background.

Right: (before the fire) Echo Flat mid-January 2009.


Mixed feelings

I woke to the sounds of creaking and clattering above the tent.

The sound had intermittently caught my attention since the previous afternoon when we had set up camp next to the ruins of Boundary Hut at Lake Mountain. A gentle wind was causing the dead branches of Snow Gums to rub against each other and long streamers of bark to flap against the trunks.

The forest of dead stems was a legacy of the terrible February 2009 fires that burnt over 400,000 hectares north-east of Melbourne. We were back for the first time in summer since we last camped at Lake Mountain, a few weeks before Black Saturday.

The morning sun lighting our east-facing tent tempted me out of my cosy sleeping bag. From a nearby granite boulder there was a view of a receding



series of blue-tinted mountain ranges, with white fog filling the valley below.

For as far as I could see, dead grey tree-tops were silhouetted on ridges where the fire had burned through nearly four years ago.

I had come on the overnight hike with mixed feelings. Every January we

make a little pilgrimage to the alps near home, mostly to Baw Baw, the precious remaining unburnt jewel of Victoria's alpine country.

But we have a long history of visiting Lake Mountain, mostly in winter to ski, but also in summer to reacquire ourselves with familiar Snow Gums, seasonal flowers and mossy tarns.

PHOTO: ANNETTE MUIR

PHOTO: ANNETTE MUIR

I still carried the sadness of knowing I wouldn't see the landscape of my memories again, but over the weekend the country revealed to me that nature was healing itself in its own time-frame.

Regeneration

During our walks, all the plants at or below eye-level were engaged in riotous regeneration. From the base of every Snow Gum multiple stems had re-sprouted from the hardy lignotubers. These stems were now above head height and as thick as a baby's wrist. I guess they will be proper Snow Gum trunks, streaked with oranges, pinks, tans, greens and greys, at some time in my son's life.

There were also dense crops of Mountain Hickory Wattle, as well as many other shrub species either growing from seed or re-sprouting. Some, like the Alpine Mint-bush and Alpine Shaggy-pea, were already flowering to produce the next generation.

The ground was a thick bright-green carpet of Snow-grass tussocks. As we walked with our eyes down, a rhythmic pattern of fine Snow-grass leaves and the round discs of Pennywort alternated under our feet.

At the side of the tracks there were our old favourites the Grass Trigger-plants. As usual we stopped and pretended to be insects, tickling the throat of a pink flower with a twig until the column snapped across to dust the 'insect' with pollen.

A surprise to us this year was the proliferation of Eyebright covered in mauve flowers.

Water

On the way to our campsite we stopped to collect water in the headwaters of one of the many streams that rise on the plateau. First we had to push our way through the tangled and blackened stems of dead shrubs. Here too the ground was covered in the new green growth of shrub seedlings and re-sprouting sedges and rushes.

Mats of Creeping Fan-flower covered the bare areas of ground, the pink flowers like tiny outstretched hands.



Walking track shaded by Snow Gums, Jan. 2009.

We carefully picked our way down the valley, trying to avoid the spongy Sphagnum Moss underfoot, conscious of both the long recovery time it needs and its essential role in absorbing water and regulating its slow release downstream.

We heard the water before we saw it, trickling underneath the vegetation. The topography showed us the way to the water, subtle drainage lines converging to form rivulets until we reached some rocky cascades where we filled our water bottles with naturally filtered water.

Home away from home

Our campsite by the ruins of Boundary Hut had all the home comforts we needed. The thick grasses formed a soft mattress under our tent, and I got the longest night's sleep I've had in ages.



Top: Purple Eyebright (*Euphrasia collina*) proliferating, Dec. 2012.
Bottom: Campsite at Boundary Hut, Lake Mountain, Dec. 2012.



Not much shade yet, but the Snow Gums are resprouting. Dec. 2012.

The waist-high remnant stone walls of the hut made a perfect kitchen. Built of the same granite rocks that surrounded us, but softened by mosses and lichens, they felt like part of the landscape. The hut floor had a covering of bright green Pennywort, and conveniently shaped rocks served as seats and a bench to cook on.

The walk back to the car reminded us of how hot the sun can be without a tree canopy for protection. I kept remembering the original unburnt Snow Gums, which seemed more real than the dead grey trunks I saw every time I looked up.

I still feel sad at the radical change to a favourite and familiar place, but I'm glad to have gone back to see the hope of new life. • PW



Above: Regenerating vegetation along a creek, Dec. 2012.



PHOTO: ELAINE BEASLEY

The Grow West planters gather for a group photo.

Let them plant trees and eat cake!

Grow West planting day 2013

For the past ten years, the Grow West project, in which the VNPA is an important partner, has been restoring the landscape around Bacchus Marsh, working with local communities to plant 1,000 hectares, or nearly 2500 acres, with indigenous trees and shrubs.

Marking this significant ten-year milestone, the annual Grow West Community Planting Day, hosted by Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA), was held on Sunday 21 July.

Volunteers, including many VNPA members and friends, came from all parts of Melbourne and regional centres to join locals and brave the chilly conditions at CVA's property in Myers Road, Myrniong.

This 30 ha property is an important habitat link to the W. James Whyte Island Reserve and Werribee Gorge State Park, as it forms a buffer to the State Park and protects the junction of the Werribee River and Myrniong Creek.

By the end of the day, 6,000 indigenous seedlings had been planted over ten

hectares, proving that even cold winds and rain can't deter an enthusiastic bunch of volunteers, particularly when there is celebratory birthday cake involved!

Driving to Ballarat, you can see the planting on your left as you climb through the Pentland Hills west of Bacchus Marsh past the remarkable flat-topped hill known as The Island.

Helena Lindorff, Environmental Projects Coordinator at Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority (PPWCMA), said: "We kicked off this year's Community Planting Day with a huge planting target, and we're thrilled that through the help of the 200 volunteers who came along, we were easily able to achieve this.

"This brings the grand total of seedlings planted to 200,000 since work began at the W. James Whyte Island Reserve in 2007.

"This year we were fortunate to have the Federal Minister for Regional Australia, Local Government and Territories Catherine King, local MP

Don Nardella, and Councillors David Edwards and Tonia Dudzik along to volunteer their time, and we thank them for their support."

Helena also thanked the many volunteers and supporters of the Community Planting Day and the Grow West project over the past ten years.

Grow West Planting Day partners include:

- Australian Government Clean Energy Futures Biodiversity Fund
- PPWCMA
- VNPA
- Friends of Werribee Gorge and Long Forest Mallee
- CVA
- Victorian Mobile Landcare Group
- Bacchus Marsh Lions Club
- Pentland Hills Landcare Group
- Grow West Implementation Committee (Melbourne Water, Southern Rural Water, Moorabool Shire Council, Parks Victoria, Moorabool Landcare Network). • PW

For more information on Grow West, contact Helena Lindorff on 9971 6502 or see www.growwest.com.au



Above, left and right:
Young planters hard at work.

Below: These young Indians were part of a group of 48 planters belonging to Dera Sacha Sauda, one of whose aims is 'to provide a green cover across the globe'. See www.derasachasauda.org. Note bare hills in background – a future planting site?



The next wave of attack on Victoria's coast

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANT **CHRIS SMYTH** WARNS THAT OUR MUCH-LOVED COAST FACES GROWING THREATS.

For millennia the Victorian coast has been at the mercy of waves rolling in from the Southern Ocean and Bass Strait.

The result: a magnificent 2 000 km coastline of beautiful beaches, windswept sand dunes, sheer and rugged cliffs, wistful estuaries and iconic bays.

But it's not just ocean waves that have attacked the Victorian coast.

For nearly two centuries agricultural development, population growth, industrialisation, pollution, poorly sited infrastructure, invasive pests and now climate change have taken their toll.

Wetlands have been drained, sand dune scrub cleared for housing and pasture, and mangroves and saltmarsh pushed aside for industrial development. Coastal habitats have become displaced, degraded and severely fragmented, with many now officially regarded as endangered or vulnerable.

Animals that depend on those habitats, including the Orange-bellied Parrot, Eastern Bristlebird and Hooded Plover, are now also threatened.

What habitats remain are found in very narrow strips of public land—96% of the coast is in public hands—and the conservation reserves established at places like Port Campbell, Wilsons Promontory and the Gippsland Lakes.

Some of those strips are only a few metres wide, squeezed between the shoreline and roads, housing, industry and cleared land, and increasingly under threat.

These strips and conservation reserves are now squarely in the sights of the



PHOTO: JAMES THYER

Coastal outrage: construction work begins at Bastion Point, Mallacoota.

government's development drive—the next wave of attack along the coast.

Bastion Point at Mallacoota is one of the first places where that wave has struck the shore. On Remembrance Day 2013, giant earth-moving machines began work to bury the significant landscape, the town's only safe swimming beach, archaeological sites and a rare surfing break beneath tonnes of concrete, asphalt and rubble.

What may appear as a one-off ministerial decision to approve a development has much deeper significance. The government is driving fundamental changes to the way planning works in Victoria.

It has weakened planning zones and native vegetation management, is pushing ahead with destructive port construction in Western Port, and has placed no height limit on new buildings at Point Nepean.

The fast-tracking of commercial developments in some of our most beautiful, and until now protected, coastal places, is deeply concerning.

So too have been the ministerial interventions to support inappropriate rezonings and residential development at Port Campbell and Cape Paterson respectively, in the face of strong community opposition and after independent planning panels have recommended against them.

The government's decision to bury Bastion Point appears part of an emerging pattern with dire

consequences for our much-loved coast.

This is not to say that the previous Labor government is blameless. But the current Victorian government has raised the desire for coastal development to an entirely new level. The nature of the coast will suffer.

What is at stake if the Victorian coast continues its decline? Is it the pleasant summer seaside holiday on the beach, the dropping of a line for a feed of fish, a sunny retirement? All these things and more; the coast underpins our economy and lifestyle.

With population growth, climate change and a government with a development ethos, the coastal decline is likely to continue, and possibly accelerate.

The Bastion Point decision, the commercial development of coastal national parks and the Port of Hastings expansion in Western Port Bay are proof that no part of the Victorian coast is safe.

The 2013 draft of the Victorian coastal strategy, currently out for review, will when completed guide coastal planning and management for the next five years.

Could it become so compromised by bureaucratic and government interference that it becomes meaningless?

Or might it become the catalyst for a new political commitment to coastal conservation? • PW

Chris Smyth is the author of *The coast is unclear*, a comprehensive review of Victoria's coastal conservation, planning and management released in December 2013 and available for download on the VNPA website.

Great Victorian Fish Count 2013



PHOTO: MARK NORMAN

Weedy Sea-dragons at Flinders Pier.

THE ANNUAL FISH COUNT HELPS US FIND OUT WHICH FISH SPECIES LIVE IN VICTORIA'S TEMPERATE COASTAL WATERS. OVER 350 VOLUNTEER DIVERS AND SNORKELLERS FROM AT LEAST 25 GROUPS THROUGHOUT VICTORIA TOOK THE PLUNGE FOR THE 2013 COUNT, WHICH FINISHED ON 8 DECEMBER, WRITES **SIMON BRANIGAN**.

We chose the Common or Weedy Seadragon (*Phyllopteryx taeniolatus*) as the symbol for this Fish Count, replacing last year's popular Blue Groper. The seadragon represents the unique and fascinating marine life endemic to Australia's southern waters, and has been Victoria's official state marine faunal emblem since 2002.

As with their seahorse and pipefish relatives, it's male seadragons that brood the eggs, after the female has laid up to 300 eggs underneath the male's tail.

This animal is very difficult to breed in captivity, but the Melbourne Aquarium has succeeded. Captive breeding is important as it reduces the stress on wild populations that might otherwise be illegally collected for use in aquariums.

The species is protected nationally under the EPBC Act and classified as 'Near Threatened' on the IUCN Red List. However, it has only recently been added to the list, because of insufficient data in the past. More information on population trends and areas of occupancy is still needed.

This shows the importance of programs such as the VNPA's Reef Watch and Great Victorian Fish Count, which contribute to a greater understanding of the distribution, abundance and movement patterns of marine life in Victoria.

The big bonus for this year's event was the participation of new groups in Gippsland, thanks in part to a Coastcare grant which provided funds for Wendy Roberts to hold a Reef Watch workshop there. An extra 'hook' for divers to take the plunge this year was a photo competition with prizes donated by Scubapro.

Stay tuned for the next edition of *Park Watch* to find out how many Weedy Seadragons we spotted, and whether more abundant species like the Blue-throat Wrasse and Six-spine Leatherjacket again featured prominently. We're also keeping a lookout for favourites like the Blue Groper and Blue Devil fish to see how they're tracking. • PW

VEAC Marine Protected Area investigation – have your say!

The draft proposals paper for the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's investigation into marine protected areas (MPAs) has been released, and it's critical that people involved in Victoria's marine environment engage in the next public consultation phase.

This is the last public consultation opportunity before final proposals and recommendations are submitted to the Victorian Environment Minister in early to mid 2014.

Input from the marine community in the previous submission period was largely disappointing. We need to change that this time to make sure our existing MPAs remain intact and we achieve better management of the entire marine environment.

To find out more, including some handy hints for your submission, visit the VNPA website.

Save Bastion Point: what you can (still) do

Even though construction work has started on the Bastion Point beach at Mallacoota, the Save Bastion Point group says it's critical that we continue strongly lobbying the Napthine Government with protest messages and demands to protect our coast. You can do so by any or all of the following methods:

- write an eletter (hosted on the VNPA website)
- sign the online avaaz petition
- write a letter to Premier Napthine, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne, 3002
- send the Premier a message via his website contact form
- 'like' Save Bastion Point on facebook to view daily updates and to share info.

For more information see www.savebastionpoint.org.au

Proposed coal ports threaten coastal and marine environments



PHOTO: NICK ABERLE

McGaurans Beach on the 90 Mile. Great place for a coal port? How about no!

DR NICHOLAS ABERLE, SAFE CLIMATE CAMPAIGNER WITH ENVIRONMENT VICTORIA, REPORTS THAT AT A TIME WHEN THE WORLD NEEDS A RAPID TRANSITION TO A ZERO-EMISSION ENERGY SUPPLY, THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT IS PLANNING TO DEVELOP A BROWN COAL EXPORT INDUSTRY. AND THAT WOULD REQUIRE NEW PORTS.

Because of its high flammability and low energy density, Victoria's brown coal is unsuited to export. Proposed new technologies claim to address these two concerns, principally by removing much of the moisture that can comprise up to 60% of brown coal, thus opening the door to export.

The consequences of allowing these projects to go ahead are numerous and worrying. First, the coal from these projects, once exported and burnt, will still contribute large amounts of greenhouse gas to the atmosphere. One of the proposed drying technologies claims to reduce emissions by up to 50% compared to normal brown coal, but this makes it only as 'good' as black coal.

Secondly, there is a risk that local farms around Gippsland will be acquired for coal mines. In the meantime, landholders whose land is

subject to a coal allocation will live in total uncertainty about their future.

In the past, similar coal projects have failed to materialise, but their ultimate failure, while a win for the environment, puts massive stress on the local communities.

Thirdly, the State Government will need to identify a location for a new export terminal. Government documents received by Environment Victoria show that the first several million tonnes of coal per year would be exported from either Melbourne or Geelong, meaning coal trains or trucks rumbling through West Gippsland and the suburbs of Melbourne and Geelong.

If the industry takes off, though, the government is planning to build a new coal port at one of Hastings, the Ninety Mile Beach, or Corner Inlet (next to Wilsons Promontory). Each of these locations is close to important marine

ecosystems: Ramsar-listed wetlands at Corner Inlet and Westernport, and the Ninety Mile Beach Marine National Park.

Additionally, both Corner Inlet and Westernport would probably need extensive dredging to be suitable for large bulk freighters. The spread of pest species from ballast water is another potential threat.

A decision is imminent from the State Government on whether to give these coal projects both an allocation of the Latrobe Valley's coal reserves, and up to \$90 million of taxpayers' money. This money would be better spent on genuinely low emission technology.

To voice your opposition to these plans, we urge you to contact your State MP, and the Minister for State Development Peter Ryan. You can also sign the 'No Coal Exports' petition on Environment Victoria's website. • PW



PHOTO: MARY FERLIN

VNPA questions park camping fee increases

The State Government is proposing to charge camping fees for parks even where no facilities are provided, such as here near Mt Magdala in the Alpine NP. It also proposes to increase existing camping fees.

ON 22 NOVEMBER THE VNPA LODGED A SUBMISSION WITH THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT IN RELATION TO ITS PROPOSAL TO INTRODUCE CAMPING FEES ACROSS VICTORIA'S NATIONAL PARKS, AND RAISE EXISTING FEES. **MATT RUCHEL** REPORTS.

We see this proposal as a cost-shifting exercise that will disadvantage and discourage many potential visitors to our national parks, and at the same time create a dangerous precedent of moving core park funding away from government.

The proposal includes new fees for dispersed (unserved) camping areas, such as parts of the Barmah and Alpine national parks, which are extensively used by many Victorians as a low-cost holiday option.

The VNPA believes that the management of national parks should be funded from general revenue, except where quite special services are provided. We do not support any new fees which could undermine access to Victoria's national parks.

The proposed increased fees for camping at Wilsons Promontory NP, for instance, are excessive. The current cost for a two-week camping stay at the Prom in peak season is \$462. This would double to \$922, pushing many lower-income campers out of the picture.

One of the prime aims of the park system is to encourage people from all sectors of the community to make use of parks and experience the great outdoors.

We do not believe that the proposed fee structure facilitates that aim.

Rather, it is likely to discourage visitation in many circumstances and by many people, including groups such as clubs and schools as well as individuals and families.

We believe that there are few benefits from the proposed changes, and they don't outweigh the disadvantages. Generally speaking, proposals to pay for park management through a 'user-pays' scheme fail to achieve their objectives, often taking as much to administer as they bring in in returns.

We also question the validity of many of the revenue and expenditure estimates in the government's proposal.

Victoria's national parks already generate far more in economic terms, through ecosystem services like clean water, erosion control and carbon storage, and through tourism, than they cost to manage.

Public investment in good management of parks is returned in abundance to the community. • PW

For the full VNPA submission, see our website under 'Submissions'.

Help shape the future of Victoria's parks

Parks Victoria is conducting a survey over summer to find out what people think about the present use and future management of parks and other public land. We recommend that you take the survey and have your say about how you use parks and what you think about activities such as grazing and mining in parks.

You need to complete the survey at www.parksvictoria.net by 31 January. And as a reward for doing it, you can choose to receive a credit to make a \$10 tax-deductible donation to the VNPA! How good is that? (There are other reward options too.)

For more information, see flyer sent with this *Park Watch*.



IN
PARKS

Locked up?

Yarra Ranges National Park

MUCH OF THIS PARK IS CLOSED WATER CATCHMENT, BUT **GEOFF DURHAM** EXPLAINS THAT IT STILL OFFERS A NUMBER OF DELIGHTFUL DRIVES AND WALKS AMONG TOWERING TREES AND RAINFOREST.

Forest, mist and rock at Ben Cairn on the Donna Buang Road.

Some people complain that our national parks are 'locked up'. It is a ridiculous assertion: every person has equal access to all parks. However, one Victorian park does have substantially restricted access.

Over 95% of Yarra Ranges National Park is not accessible to the public because of the closed water catchments protecting Melbourne's water supply – something the general public has long accepted and appreciated.

The park includes forests of Mountain Ash, mixed species, rainforest and alpine vegetation. The majority of the park was burnt in the February 2009 bushfires and some of it has subsequently undergone fuel reduction burns.

The wildfires killed extensive areas of Mountain Ash trees. Now is an interesting time to visit the park to observe the impact of fire and forest regeneration.

Bounded on the north, east and south-east by State Forest, the park has four distinct geographical areas

with short, narrow connections. These are treated as management zones in the Parks Victoria 2002 Management Plan.

Although the protected catchments and the four Reference Areas within them are out of bounds to visitors, there are many opportunities to experience the park, particularly by car. Note that camping, dogs and shooting are not permitted in the park.

Highlights

Maroondah Catchment (western) Management Zone

- The Acheron Way between the Warburton and the Maroondah Highways goes through the park and State Forest.
- Myers Creek Road from Healesville to Mt St Leonard, with a 2 km return walk to its huge communications tower and lower viewing platform.
- Donnelly Weir and Badger Weir Picnic areas, with associated walks.
- The Black Spur section of the Maroondah Highway, including the picnic areas at Fernshaw (impressive exotic trees and modern toilets) and

at Dom Dom Saddle (open grassed area, ageing information shelter and toilets in poor condition). The picnic areas are joined by a 9 km walking track.

- On the Donna Buang Road between the Maroondah Highway and Warburton:
 - a 1.6 km return walk to Ben Cairn, a rock slab with views of the Yarra Valley and rock climbing. Also on this road is a hang-gliding ramp.
 - Mt Donna Buang with winter snow and a 21 m lookout tower, the Mt Donna Buang Skywalk and the 500 m Rainforest Gallery walk through Myrtle Beech trees, ferns and mosses of the rainforest.

O'Shannassy Catchment (central) Management Zone

80% of this catchment was old-growth forest, 93% of which was burnt in the 2009 fire.

- On the Woods Point Road: 14 km and 15 km respectively east of Warburton, the Little Peninsula and Big Peninsula Tunnels diverting the Yarra (similar to the tunnel at Pound Bend in Warrandyte State Park) and the 9 km Goldfields Walking Trail.

PHOTO: GEOFF DURHAM



PHOTOS: GEOFF DURHAM

Top left: The Big Culvert on the Marysville – Woods Point Road, built around 1870. **Lower left:** October snow on Lake Mountain. Note slow regeneration of vegetation after the 2009 fires. **Right:** Ferns and forest on the Cumberland Walk.

- On the Marysville – Woods Point Road: the impressive masonry Big Culvert built about 1870 and still supporting the road, the neglected Cambarville Historic Township walk, and the 4 km circuit Cumberland Walk which takes you to ‘The Big Tree’, a 85m high Mountain Ash, the tallest tree in Victoria and not burnt in the fires, the recently collapsed ‘Sitka Spruce’, the Cora Lynn Falls, and along an old water race to Sovereign View lookout.

Lake Mountain (northern) Management Zone

- There is an entry charge in the snow season to the Lake Mountain Alpine Resort, which is not in the national park. At other times the cross-country ski trails are available for walking. The café is open year-round.
- Lady Talbot Drive out of Marysville to Keppel Falls and Phantom Falls.

Upper Yarra Catchment (eastern) Management Zone

- All closed catchment, it is bounded on the west and north by the Warburton – Woods Point Road and on the east by the Nine Mile Road. The adjacent Upper Yarra Dam Reservoir Park allows camping.
- The 30 km O’Shannassy Aqueduct Trail along the decommissioned aqueduct is now open to walkers, cyclists and horse riders from Parrot

Road near Woori Yallock to the O’Shannassy Reservoir beyond Warburton East. There is vehicle access at Parrot Rd, Ewerts Rd, Dee Rd, Yuonga Rd and Cement Creek Rd. It is delightful walking, with steepish sections at some access points.

You will see the damage caused by Sambar Deer. Parks Victoria is doing nothing to control deer of various species which have invaded many parks.

LCC recommendations

In 1994 the Land Conservation Council, in recommending a 75,900 ha ‘Ash Ranges National Park’, specifically rejected the VNPA submission for a 290,000 ha ‘Central Highlands National Park’, because the LCC wished to ‘ensure that sufficient timber resource is available to meet the needs of the timber industry’ and because it considered its proposed park and other parks contained ‘a wide and comprehensive representation of the diverse and important plant and animal communities and other major natural and cultural attributes of the Central Highlands’.

The Government substantially accepted the LCC recommendations but changed the name to ‘Yarra Ranges National Park’. The area of the park is now 77,190 ha.

Proposed larger park

The VNPA and The Wilderness Society have revived the VNPA proposal for a larger park. Prof. David Lindenmayer and his team have studied Victoria’s endangered fauna emblem, Leadbeater’s Possum, for 30 years, and have concluded that ‘an expanded national park is essential to protect remaining habitat and connect other areas of presently fragmented forest’. (See article over page.)

Prof. Lindenmayer has suggested the extended park be named ‘Giant Forest National Park’.

When in the USA years ago we visited the Muir Woods National Monument near San Francisco to see the giant redwoods – a huge tourist attraction. Our Mountain Ash forests with their towering trees and lyrebirds have the potential to be a similar attraction.

This tree is the world’s tallest flowering plant (redwoods are conifers), and visitors can hear a male lyrebird’s repertoire of mimicked bird calls and other bush sounds in what Graham Pizzey says is ‘perhaps the most powerful of all songbird voices’.

In a mature Mountain Ash forest I am in awe; it is a humbling, cathedral-like experience.

The closed water catchments have given us a national park with minimal human disturbance, which is what national parks should be. • PW

Why Victoria needs a Giant Forest National Park

PROFESSOR DAVID LINDENMAYER OF THE FENNER SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY AT THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY SAYS THAT A LARGE NEW NATIONAL PARK IS NEEDED TO PROTECT OUR MOUNTAIN ASH FORESTS AND THEIR ENDANGERED WILDLIFE FROM CLEARFELLING AND BUSHFIRES.

The Central Highlands of Victoria are home to the world's tallest flowering plant, the Mountain Ash eucalypt, and one of Australia's most endangered mammals, Leadbeater's Possum. Both are threatened by ongoing clearfelling and bushfires.

To ensure their survival, I would argue we need to create a new national park, not only to protect possums and forests but also carbon stocks and water supplies, and to lower the risk of bushfires. Here's the evidence.

Extinction and collapse

The Central Highlands region is located around Healesville, Warburton, Marysville and Woods Point. The region includes the vast majority of remaining (and declining) Mountain Ash and Leadbeater's Possums, and supplies a large proportion of Melbourne's drinking water.

But the Mountain Ash forests are threatened by recurrent and widespread industrial clearfell logging, and major fires (including the Black Saturday fires of 2009).

The result is that we now have just 1,886 hectares of old growth forest left, spread across 147 different patches. This is estimated to be just 1.5–3% of the historical area of old-growth forest.



PHOTO: LACHIE MCBURNEY

The population of large old hollow-bearing trees has collapsed. These are a critical habitat for the animals that use them, including Leadbeater's Possum. There is a high risk that the possums will become extinct in the next 20–40 years.

And as forests regrow from logging, they are at increased risk of re-burning at high severity.

Leadbeater's Possums and Mountain Ash forests have persisted for tens of millions of years, including through major wildfire events. But in just the last few decades, the possum has come to be at risk of extinction, and the forests are at risk of ecological collapse.

The threat of clearfelling

The one factor that has demonstrably changed this ecosystem in the past century, and created these risks, has been intensive and widespread industrial clearfell logging.

Clearfelling has a number of significant detrimental effects in Mountain Ash forests. It kills animals outright, and for over 150 years makes logged areas unsuitable for animals that depend on hollow-bearing trees.

Logging also accelerates the loss of tree hollows, and we know that these hollows can't be replaced by nest boxes. It stops old-growth forest regenerating, and makes the forests more fire-prone.

A bigger reserve needed

To preserve Leadbeater's Possum, and in fact the entire Mountain Ash forest ecosystem, we need a bigger national park in the Central Highlands. There are already reserves and national parks in the area, but these need to be expanded and connected.

The new national park is important as it removes the key process - industrial clearfelling - that is threatening both Leadbeater's Possum and Mountain Ash forest.

Why do we need to expand our reserves in the area?

First, the current reserve system is too small to support a viable population of Leadbeater's Possums, particularly if there are more fires in the next 50–100 years.

Second, a large ecological reserve provides a greater chance for natural fire regimes and growth of large old trees to be restored.

Third, as Mountain Ash forests store vast amounts of carbon, a new national park will be critical to maintaining carbon stocks. The park would therefore be critical to any policy to reduce carbon emissions.

Our studies clearly indicate that clearfelling significantly depletes carbon storage in Mountain Ash forests, whereas allowing stands to grow through to a mature or old growth significantly increases carbon storage (even in the event of a major wildfire).



The Big Tree, an 85m Mountain Ash on the Cumberland Walk. It takes about 150 years for Mountain Ash trees to develop hollows suitable for Leadbeater's Possums and other animals.

PHOTO: GEOFF DURHAM

Fourth, water yields from Mountain Ash catchments are maximised when forests are dominated by old-growth stands.

Location, location

The new park needs to connect key areas of habitat for Leadbeater's Possum, and also connect existing reserves. Connectivity like this promotes the dispersal of the possums through the forests, including those recovering after wildfire.

The national park must encompass areas of existing old-growth forest and areas where environmental modelling indicates that old growth will develop in the future.

It must also be big enough to be larger than major disturbance events such as wildfires. This will ensure there is sufficient habitat to support viable populations of Leadbeater's Possum.

At the same time as creating the park, pulp and timber yield from the Mountain Ash forests must be reduced. Mountain Ash forests have already been over-cut, and maintaining sustained yield from the forests as well as setting aside the Giant Forest National Park would even further increase over-cutting. This is because it would concentrate industrial clearfelling on a reduced area of available forest.

Economic benefits

A new Giant Forest National Park could be a major economic boost for Victoria. It could be particularly helpful for regional economies like those around Marysville still rebuilding after the 2009 wildfires.

Victorian governments have never seriously advertised the fact that, within an hour and a half's drive from the MCG, you can find the world's tallest flowering plants and some of the most stunningly beautiful environments on the Australian continent.

The park will need some seed funding to establish and maintain walking tracks, huts, caravan parks and other visitor infrastructure. The benefits of such investment, when done strategically, have been documented by many authors over the past few decades.

Moreover, investments in tourism would be in stark contrast to the significant loss-making native forest paper pulp and timber industries in eastern Australia.

Large ecological reserves are at the core of any credible approach for forest biodiversity conservation planning. This is particularly true in the case of Victoria's Mountain Ash forests.

The new federal government's policy on forests is broadly to 'stop any further lock-ups' of forests.

But the scientific and other evidence supporting the need for a new national park in the wet ash forests of the Central Highlands of Victoria is both overwhelming and compelling.

Moreover, there are strong social and economic arguments to establish a new Giant Forest National Park. • PW

This is an edited version of an article by David Lindenmayer in *The Conversation*, 30 September 2013.

Kalatha Giant Tree Boardwalk opens

On 28 July Toolangi community members and their supporters gathered in the Tanglefoot picnic area for a celebration.

With funding from the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund, members of the Toolangi and Castella District Community House had built a boardwalk with attractive signage around the Kalatha Giant Tree (a Mountain Ash 73m high, 16m in girth and over 400 years old). The tree with its fire-scarred trunk is seen as a symbol of resilience and survival.

After a traditional welcome to country by Taungurung elder Uncle Roy Patterson, and a smoking ceremony, the crowd assembled at the start of the boardwalk. Here, former Federal Environment Minister Mark Butler

(at left in photo), Cindy McLeish, MP for Seymour, and community leader Steve Meacher, who did much of the organisational work, cut a ribbon to open the boardwalk.

We hope visitors will be inspired to protect these magnificent but critically threatened forests, which contain some of the world's tallest trees.

The wonderful afternoon tea was a welcome respite from the blockades, court cases, forest tours, submission writing and fundraising undertaken to protect the giant trees.

To visit the Kalatha Giant Tree Boardwalk, take Myers Creek Road out of Toolangi. Turn left onto Sylvia Creek



PHOTO: EVELYN FELLER

Road, passing Tanglefoot Picnic Area on the right after about 10km. Follow the first main left fork (Kalatha Creek Rd) for about 2km. After you cross Kalatha Creek, the boardwalk is about 30 m on the left (marked with signs). • PW

Evelyn Feller

Leadbeater's Possum: threats and solutions



PHOTO: STEVE KUITER, MYENVIRONMENT

A Leadbeater's Possum peers at the camera.

THE GUEST SPEAKER AT THE VNPA'S 2013 AGM ON 8 OCTOBER WAS LACHIE MCBURNEY, A MEMBER OF DAVID LINDENMAYER'S FIELD TEAM. HE SPOKE ABOUT THE TEAM'S 30 YEARS OF RESEARCH ON MOUNTAIN ASH FORESTS AND LEADBEATER'S POSSUM. THIS IS A SUMMARY BY VNPA VOLUNTEER EVELYN FELLER.

The team has set up 161 study plots in the forest, and since 1983 more than 800,000 scientific measurements have been made. A special recent focus has been on the impact of the 2009 fires. This extensive research has resulted in 183 peer-reviewed papers and seven books.

The research has involved many community volunteers as well.

In relation to Leadbeater's, the research has shown that:

- virtually no Leadbeater's Possums were found on burnt sites, irrespective of fire severity. Animals were lost from sites where they had previously occurred
- on burnt sites there was high mortality of the animals, and massive loss of old trees with hollows
- even on unburnt sites, there was loss of animals where the surrounding areas were burnt.

The important finding of the research is that Leadbeater's Possums are more fire-sensitive than previously appreciated. Because unburnt sites are critical for their protection, landscapes with unburned areas are especially important, and hollow-bearing trees are a critical part of the possums' habitat.

Another aspect of the research has been on stagfall research (i.e. dead and fallen trees and branches) and the dynamics of hollow-bearing trees. Here trees have been marked and mapped on 161 sites from 1997 to 2012 (pre and post fire).

The results of this research demonstrated that:

- over 80% of large living trees on burned sites died
- 50-70% or more of large dead trees were consumed on burned sites
- even on unburned sites, 23.5% of the trees died between 1997 and 2009 as a result of temperature and rainfall impacts
- logging increases the loss of hollow-bearing trees by cutting, burning during regeneration burns, wind throw due to lack of protection, and regrowth competition. Living tree death has been significantly higher on logged and regenerated sites.

The research overwhelmingly demonstrates that there is a crisis in large tree numbers, and therefore a habitat crisis for Leadbeater's Possum.

Drastic action needs to be taken to save the forests and its wildlife. The recommendations of Lindenmayer et al. include:



PHOTO: LACHIE MCBURNEY

Lachie radio-tracking Leadbeater's Possums.

- protecting all known Leadbeater's Possum locations with a 1 km buffer
- protecting all large old trees with a 100m buffer
- widening all streamside reserves to 100m
- increasing the area of old-growth forest to 30% of all forest blocks
- reducing sustained yield of pulp and sawlogs
- ceasing all clearfelling by December 2013
- establishing a new national park. • PW

The complete text of Lachie McBurney's presentation can be found on the VNPA website.



Hannah's vigil for Leadbeater's

FEWER THAN 2,000 LEADBEATER'S POSSUMS REMAIN IN THE WILD TODAY, BUT LOGGING IN THE MOUNTAIN ASH FORESTS CONTINUES UNABATED. HANNAH PATCHETT IS TAKING ACTION TO STOP THIS. HERE'S HER STORY.

Intrepid climber Ben Campbell of The Wilderness Society descends Hannah Patchett's tree.

My view from the Little Red Toolangi Treehouse is at once awe-inspiring and sobering. I'm living 25 metres above the ground in a little house suspended from a sturdy Mountain Ash tree that reaches skywards.

The treetop hollows of this forest are home to the tiny, notoriously shy Leadbeater's Possum.

That these forests are still being clearfell logged for woodchips is a tragedy. So I've begun my vigil in the trees because real action must be taken to protect the forests.

More than 98% of the Mountain Ash forest growing when Europeans arrived has already been cleared. We've done so much to change the Victorian landscape.

The forest below my treehouse is unlogged, lush and green. But just a few hundred metres down the road, the ranges are scarred with clearfell logging coupes.

I want to see Victoria's magnificent forests protected from logging, and I want real action taken to protect the remaining habitat of Leadbeater's Possum.



A photographer from The Age drops in on Hannah's Little Red Toolangi Treehouse. Hannah has vowed to stay in the treehouse until clearfelling is ended and the forest is reserved for its intrinsic values.

Decades of over-logging and the catastrophic Black Saturday bushfires have significantly impacted the species. Fewer than 2,000 individuals are estimated to remain in the wild today, but logging continues unabated.

Prof. David Lindenmayer has written a suite of new forest management prescriptions, informed by his 30 years of research. These have been provided to the Napthine Government.

If it's serious about the plight of Leadbeater's Possum, the government will heed the advice of this eminent expert. The first step to prevent Leadbeater's slide into extinction is for logging to cease.

But acting against advice from its own Leadbeater's Recovery Team, the Napthine Government continues to support ongoing logging.

I think they've got their priorities wrong. These forests belong to all Victorians. They are the only home that Leadbeater's Possum has.

It is up to all of us to make sure this last vestige of habitat is protected. Prof. Lindenmayer has called for an end to clearfell logging in the Mountain Ash forests of the Central Highlands to prevent their certain extinction.

From my Little Red Toolangi Treehouse, I echo his call. • PW

PHOTO: COURTESY BERNARD MACE

PHOTO: COURTESY BERNARD MACE

What's in a plan?

PARK PLANNING IS IN A REAL QUANDARY, BUT IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE THAT WAY AT ALL, WRITES PHIL INGAMELLS.

Victoria's Environment Minister Ryan Smith has had a draft of the Alpine National Park management plan with him since early this year, but it's caught up in a strange land: the Minister has presumably referred it to his secretly appointed Alpine Advisory Committee, largely made up of mountain cattlemen supporters.

This is a real pity, because the plan (in fact a single plan for all of the Victorian Alps National Parks: Buffalo, Baw Baw, Snowy River, Errinundra and the Alpine National Park, the Avon Wilderness and some smaller parks) has been in development since 2008.

It initially faced a couple of serious obstacles. The first was the unworkable proposal to develop it on a 'wiki' website, where anyone and everyone would help to write the plan.

The next, or actually simultaneous, obstacle was the rather bizarre situation that DSE, the agency ultimately responsible for producing park management plans, wasn't speaking to Parks Victoria, the agency that actually writes them.

That relationship seems to have improved somewhat, but we're still in the situation of unnecessary political interference in park planning. And we're still wrestling with the problems of producing park plans while staff numbers and expertise are dwindling, and managing nature across the landscape while also giving parks the attention each deserves.



PHOTO: PHIL INGAMELLS

Ceremony held to mark the granting of Native Title over Mount Eccles National Park in 2007. The draft management plan recommends changing the name of the jointly managed park to Mount Eccles Budj Bim National Park. The VNPA's submission to the draft can be found on our website: www.vnpa.org.au

At the other end of the Victoria, there's the adventurous plan for Victoria's south-west parks, including Lower Glenelg and Mt Eccles National Parks, Discovery Bay Coastal Park and the new Cobboboonee National Park. It takes in more than twenty protected areas of one sort or another.

Appearing as the *Ngootyoong Gunditj Ngootyoong Mara South West Draft Management Plan*, it was recently released for public comment.

It is the first park management plan that significantly recognises areas under Indigenous joint management, such as Mount Eccles NP, and also brings Aboriginal-owned properties (Indigenous Protected Areas or 'IPAs') under the same planning umbrella. Aboriginal cultural input has been significant.

Unlike the long-thwarted alpine parks plan, it has progressed quietly and surely, as if it actually knows where it is going.

But both plans fall short of what we should have.

The National Parks Act calls for a management plan for each national and state park, and the words 'plan' and

'each' have the same meaning in law as they do in common language. A 'plan' means saying what you actually plan to do, and 'each' means each park, not just a general intention across all parks.

Those words were put into the Act for good reason, but they have largely been ignored. The South West draft plan reads well as a strategic document, but it's remarkably short on detail. And while bravely claiming that management progress will be measured, it fails to tell us how.

The development of national park plans should primarily be in the hands of experienced park managers, ecologists and other people with real understanding and expertise. Public consultation can then take place in a framework of real knowledge, and ministerial involvement need only be minimal.

We don't expect politicians, or the general public, to design bridges or declare what techniques should be used to treat cancer, but we seem to have decided that the management of our great natural areas is the domain of those who shout loudest, but maybe care for them the least. • PW

The Wonnangatta Valley, centre, with the Howitt High Plains to the left. The valley, once Wonnangatta Station, is a large isolated river flat in the heart of the Alpine National Park. A bushfire reached the valley in 2007, long after grazing had been removed, but stopped halfway along the grassy plains. Even if the valley was covered in concrete, it would have no effect on any alpine fire at a landscape scale.



Wonnangatta Valley is one of two sites in Victoria where the Pale Golden Moths orchid can be found. It is listed as vulnerable in State and Federal law.

Wonnangatta Station

Can this be true? Cows again!

YES, VICTORIA'S MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, THE PERSON ENTRUSTED BY LAW TO PROTECT THE REMARKABLE ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES OF VICTORIA'S ALPINE NATIONAL PARK, IS PLANNING TO PUT CATTLE BACK INTO THE PARK AGAIN. PHIL INGAMELLS REPORTS.

The Minister has been secretly planning a three-year scientific trial with 60 cattle in the beautiful Wonnangatta Valley, a low- elevation river flat in the heart of the Alpine National Park. The aim, we are told, is to discover the effectiveness of cattle for fire control.

For a start, that would appear to be an admission that cattle don't belong in the high country.

But even at this lower elevation a grazing trial is scarcely a sensible way to spend valuable fire research dollars.

The cattlemen are already bellowing that the Wonnangatta Valley has been seriously neglected by park managers since the original cattle station was purchased to go into the park in 1988.

But a very large effort, backed by significant funding, has gone into managing the highest priority weed at Wonnangatta: Cape Broom. Blackberry infestations (which were there before the valley was included in the park) have also been treated, and fire has been used to replace introduced pasture grasses with native Kangaroo Grass.

One beneficiary of the native grasslands is the valley's rare, and very pretty, Pale Golden Moths orchid. It's listed as vulnerable under both State and Federal law, and as far as we know it exists in only two locations in Victoria.

But what about fire?

Well, the government still has the problem that no publicly transparent planning process has ever identified alpine cattle grazing as a priority for fire research funds. It wasn't mentioned by the Bushfires Royal Commission, and hasn't been mentioned by the Commission's Independent Monitor since that time.

Extensive tracking of the 2003 bushfire showed that cattle grazing had no significant impact on either the spread or the severity of fire.

That was followed by a research project of the Bushfire Co-operative Research Centre's High Fire team, but it was abandoned after three years when it was decided that *"the combined effects of fire and grazing may take decades to be fully apparent"*.

The government has not funded all-important research into fire shelter design, which clearly can save lives. Yet it's wasted hundreds of thousands of dollars on this flawed cattle and fire research.

Now the cattlemen are appearing on radio claiming that they are following a hundred years of tradition originally inherited from the Aboriginal occupants of the high country. If they have special knowledge, it's about time they told everyone what it is. In the meantime, they really shouldn't be making such increasingly outrageous claims.

The Environment Minister, Ryan Smith, has filed an application to the Federal Minister, Greg Hunt, for permission to run the trial. But the application, though backed up by 21 documents of various sorts, fails to put forward either a scientific design for the trial, or an environmental management plan. That's bizarre!

Go to our website www.vnpa.org.au for more up-to-date information, and suggestions for ways to help sort out this silly situation. • PW



New life from the ashes

PHIL INGAMELLS REPORTS ON PART OF THE LEGACY OF JOHN AND JENNY BARNETT: THE PURCHASE OF A DAMAGED AREA AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO RESTORE IT TO A MORE NATURAL STATE.

PHOTO: PHIL INGAMELLS

Looking over Bush Heritage's Barnett Block, formerly a sheep farm.

It was as if I had stepped back in time.

I was being shown around a bush block by Bush Heritage's Victorian reserve manager Jeroen van Veen, and it was a journey strongly geared to the future.

Yet I had the strange feeling I was visiting a national park 30-odd years ago, when rangers were mostly out and about; when they understood why the birds were doing what they did; when they knew which weeds were winning their battle with native plants, and where they were losing.

Jeroen was simultaneously a man with knowledge and a sharp student hungry for more, with eyes keen for the detail as well as the grand landscape we were wandering through.

It's not that there aren't park rangers like that any more, but they are fewer and seem to be so thinly scattered over the park system that they rarely have the time to be out and about.

And certainly from the VNPA's point of view, we most commonly engage

with park managers now through roundtable discussions, contractors' reports and submissions.

There was another reason I was very pleased to be out and about on this block of land a little north-west of Wedderburn in central Victoria.

The land had been purchased with a bequest to Bush Heritage and Trust for Nature from John and Jenny Barnett, who died at their Steels Creek home in the maelstrom of the Black Saturday fire

Jenny was a long-time VNPA staff member, and a tireless campaigner on many issues. She had an impeccable understanding of planning laws and regulations and a similarly comprehensive knowledge of the State's threatened plants and animals.

She was also our expert on issues of fire ecology and fire behavior, making her death by fire both tragic and bizarre.

Jenny and John spent much of their spare time volunteering with the

Mammal Survey Group, adding to their own and everyone else's understanding of many cryptic creatures of the bush.

That work took them around the State, including to the very property their bequest would eventually purchase.

Now known as the Barnett Block, it forms part of Bush Heritage's Nardoo Hills Reserve, a private conservation reserve adjacent to Parks Victoria's Wychitella Nature Conservation Reserve.

Unlike the State-owned land, Nardoo Hills Reserve will not be open to the public other than on special occasions, allowing its management to be dedicated entirely to nature conservation.

This is a good thing, because the reserve needs a lot of healing. It has been a farm for many years; it is sheep-scarred in places and partly infested with weeds like Wheel Cactus and Capeweed.

Manager Jeroen has already used herbicides effectively on the cactus, but has decided to do little or nothing with

the Capeweed. That overly-bold yellow daisy, it seems, generally only carpets areas where sheep grazed heavily, and the removal of that disturbance and its accompanying high nutrient load leaves the plant without a competitive advantage.

On the neighbouring block, purchased some years earlier by Bush Heritage, Capeweed has largely lost its hold.

There is plenty of other work to be done though, as many of the Yellow Box, Grey Box and Yellow Gum trees have been cleared over the years, and there is an immediate need to restore the once common Drooping Sheoaks.

All of that will happen in time, and woodland birds like the Hooded Robin and Brown Treecreeper will have a

chance to strengthen their numbers. Indeed these grassy woodlands support around 110 bird species, including the nationally endangered Swift Parrot.

It is entirely fitting that Jenny and John's bequest should go towards the protection of a recovering threatened woodland ecosystem. And it is appropriate that that land should now benefit from science-based, knowledge-based management.

While private conservation reserves under the stewardship of Bush Heritage and similar organisations don't have the long-term protection of laws such as the National Parks Act, they do have another advantage: their management is outside the reach of the whims of politicians and the push and pull of the political cycle.

That's not a call for privatisation of the park system – far from it. It is a call for park management decisions to be returned to professional park managers, for a return to well-informed planning based on the clear objectives of national park legislation.

We would be rightly alarmed if politicians made decisions on cancer treatments, or lobbied for particular types of steel to be employed in bridge building. Yet we seem to have accepted that they are the arbiters of conservation issues, for everything from climate change to fire ecology and invasive species management.

That situation must change if we are to get the best value for the taxpayer's investment, and if we are to reverse declines in the quality of critical habitat across Victoria. • PW

Top left: An Age photographer gets down to wildflower level. Wildflowers are returning now that sheep grazing has ended. **Bottom left:** A eucalypt that has resprouted from the stump of a tree cut down for timber or firewood. **Right:** A journalist, with photographer, interviews reserve manager Jeroen van Veen (centre).



'Crack Team' leader Brett Hedger (left) gives the drill to the planting team at Haines' property.



PHOTO: KIRSTY REID

Another big weekend for Hindmarsh



MORE THAN 200 VOLUNTEERS, MANY OF THEM VNPA MEMBERS AND FRIENDS, JOINED LOCAL WIMMERA RESIDENTS ON THE WEEKEND OF 17-18 AUGUST TO HELP PLANT 14,000 TREES. HINDMARSH LANDCARE FACILITATOR STEVE HEMPHILL REPORTS.

This was the 16th annual Project Hindmarsh planting weekend.

Sites at Dimboola, Gerang Gerung and Tarranyurk (near Nhill) were planted on the Saturday, and on Sunday a site at Sandsmere near Kaniva.

Despite a dire forecast for the weekend, the weather wasn't too bad, and the rain that did fall didn't dampen the planters' spirits.

On Saturday night everyone enjoyed a hot roast meal (prepared by local groups), and listened to interesting talks by three local farmers on their approaches to farming, and an address by the VNPA's Caitlin Griffith on the 'Caught on Camera' animal monitoring

Brett and friends take a photo break.



PHOTO: KIRSTY REID

project. We were then entertained by the Lazy Farmers Sons band.

The annual planting is a great event where city and country people can join together to work for the environment and learn about the people who live on the land.

Volunteers came from all over Victoria, and from SA and NSW. A visiting Japanese Landcarer also joined in and

was excited to be part of the weekend.

Since the first weekend in 1998, more than a million trees have been planted, the biolink between the Big and Little Deserts has been completed, and many properties across the region have had paddocks, shelter belts, swamps and other areas planted with local native trees and grasses.

But there is still much more work to be done!



Tree planting is a family affair.



Some of the planting rows were kilometres long (well, we thought so).

A weekend like this is not possible without the support of many organisations and businesses. Sponsors for this year included Luv-A-Duck, Lowan Whole Foods, GWM Water, Little Desert Nature Lodge and ACE Radio network. Major sponsor The Handbury Trust has donated \$350,000 so far to the planting weekends, and has committed a further \$30,000 to next year's event.

During these weekends, many local businesses and organisations receive support for their work in providing meals and other services. Special thanks go to the SES volunteers for first aid support, and to the Victorian Mobile Landcare Group. • PW



Making tree guards is an important job.

PHOTOS: KIRSTY REID

Fun and achievement

PENELOPE CANNATA, A YEAR 10 STUDENT AT PRESENTATION COLLEGE WINDSOR, SAYS THE HINDMARSH WEEKEND WAS INCREDIBLE.

The first thing I did when I heard about the Hindmarsh camp was to sign up for it. I had known about the weekend since I was in Year 7, and every year the girls who go on the camp rave about it.

I thought it would be great fun to spend the weekend with my friends planting trees in the country.

This year two Year 12 students from last year came back because they enjoyed the weekend so much.

The adventure began on Friday 15 August on a five-hour bus ride to Nhill. We cracked open some bags of lollies, as well as a bag of carrots (because we're so healthy), and then most of us fell asleep. We arrived at the Little Desert Lodge at 6pm.

When we woke up on Saturday morning, we were greeted by about ten kangaroos,



Presentation College students with friends at the planting.

PHOTO: SALLY BORRMAN

just chilling outside our cabin. They didn't really notice us until we started walking up to them, at which point they all hopped away. I was slightly offended but decided not to let it ruin my first day of tree planting.

After a brekkie of bacon and eggs, another bus ride and a good old tree planting demonstration, the fun began.

In all honesty, I'm not an outdoorsy person. But the sense of achievement I felt when looking back on all the trees we'd planted was so good, I wasn't even worried about the dirt under my nails!

And it was fun. We all got to talk to some amazing people while we were planting. I think the best thing was the way complete strangers worked together, and by the end of the day you weren't strangers any more.

On Sunday, we trooped out despite gale-force winds and planted the remaining 600 trees. With everyone helping, and because it was so bitterly cold, our plantings took under an hour.

The whole trip was incredible, and I'll never forget the experience, or the people. It's something I'd be happy to do every year, and I probably will. And a big thank you to Ms Borrmann for organising the event. • PW



PHOTO: IAN LUNT

Dying Red Stringybarks (Eucalyptus macrorhyncha) at Mt Barambogie in north-east Victoria in April 2013.

Climate change and tree dieback

IAN LUNT IS ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR IN THE SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES AT CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY, ALBURY. MOST OF HIS GROUP'S RESEARCH IS IN NATIVE GRASSLANDS AND GRASSY WOODLANDS IN SOUTH-EASTERN AUSTRALIA. IN THIS ARTICLE HE LOOKS AT THE ISSUE OF TREE DEATH AND DIEBACK.

The latest IPCC report on climate change reinforces messages made in earlier reports: the earth is getting warmer, we're causing it, and climate change will have a big effect on human society and natural ecosystems.

One noticeable impact of climate change is the death of dominant trees due to drought and heat stress.

All trees die sooner or later, so mortality as such isn't a problem. But widespread tree death can have long-lasting impacts on ecosystem structure, function and biodiversity.

In 2010, the 'first global assessment of recent tree mortality attributed to drought and heat stress' was published (Allen et al. 2010). The authors collated examples of tree die-off (or mortality) from around the world and concluded: *'studies compiled here suggest that at least some of the world's forested ecosystems already may be responding to climate change, and raise concern*

that forests may become increasingly vulnerable to higher background tree mortality rates and die-off in response to future warming and drought, even in environments that are not normally considered water-limited'.

Given that pessimistic prognosis, it's worth asking 'how are trees faring here, in our own backyard?' Earlier this year, many enthusiastic observers submitted reports of dieback – including tree death and declines in canopy health – to my blog site (www.ianluntecology.com). The following observations summarise some of these records (words in italics are from observers; words in plain type are mine).

Most reports of dieback were from dry hill slopes, and occurred in summer 2012-13. In north-east Victoria, one reader noted *conspicuous bands on north and west aspects where major die off occurred over the summer of 2012-13 ... mostly*

Stringybark and Red Box. Another saw similar changes in the Strathbogie Ranges: there has been considerable, albeit patchy, dieback in the Strathbogies, most notably amongst stands of Messmate Stringybark (E. obliqua) on shallower soils and sheet rock.

Further west, *On western slopes abutting Mount Tarrengower in nearby Maldon there has been considerable dieback of mature eucalypts and wattles, including both natural regeneration and planted stock that had thrived under the wet conditions of 2010-11 ... It appears that successive dryness over spring-summer-autumn 2012-13 has notably impacted native vegetation in grassy woodland and dry forest vegetation types throughout Victoria, from casual observations.*

Trees didn't die only in the hills. *Across western Victoria there has been considerable dieback of Banksia marginata stands, many of truly veteran status ... the phenomenon appears to be widespread and apparently associated with dry conditions.*

Hungry bugs

In their global review, Craig Allen and colleagues found that *'tree mortality commonly involves multiple, interacting factors, ranging from particular sequences of climate stress and stand life histories to insect pests and diseases'*.

Notably, many readers found that dieback was exacerbated by insects: *In the Daylesford area... the most noticeable change after the big wet was an explosion of cup moth caterpillars. We are having another explosion ... currently and the canopies of Messmates, Long-leaved Box and Candlebarks are looking pretty bad.*

Another reader wrote: *I live in Box-Ironbark country in Taradale.... The forest suffered from a massive cup-moth infestation and consequent leaf loss last spring, during the driest 6 months – i.e. lowest moisture levels on record ... worse than any time during the 12 year drought that ended in 2010. The stringybarks are now looking very sick, many covered with brown leaves or more advanced stages of dying. It's looking a lot worse than in the 1982 drought. I wonder what future there is for stringybarks in this forest.*

Rainfall data from Malmsbury Reservoir in central Victoria shows that spring 2012 to autumn 2013 was one of the driest nine-month periods in the last 30 years. There were similar dry spells in 1982 and 1994, and during the long drought in 2006 and 2009. Fortunately, winter rainfall this year was above average, providing respite for the drought-stressed trees.

How will the forests change in the future? Unfortunately, we have very few long-term studies of how alternating dry and wet periods affect Australian ecosystems.

The late Dr David Ashton found that dry rocky slopes on Mt Towrong in the Macedon Ranges were hit by six droughts in 25 years. The vegetation waxed and waned during the dry and wet periods. On shallow soils, the most drought-sensitive species, Messmate Stringybark (*E. obliqua*), died back in each drought, re-colonised in the next wet period, then died off and re-colonised again.



PHOTO COURTESY TIM BARLOW

Tree dieback at Mt Wombat in the Strathbogie Ranges

Many of the observations above mention dieback of stringybark species. The fate of the stringybarks will depend on how well they recover in future wet periods. As climate change intensifies, we can expect drought-sensitive species like these to decline and be replaced by more drought-tolerant species. Perhaps that's already occurring in some places.

To make these observations really useful, we need to record how the forests continue to change.

We often notice short, sharp changes, especially deaths, but tend to overlook slow, gradual changes between the

periods of dieback. Will dying trees recover or will they die off completely? Will new plants re-colonise the dry slopes in wet years? If so, which species – the same ones, or new species?

As global warming continues, drought-induced dieback is expected to be more frequent, intense and widespread.

Unfortunately, we have no long-term real-time monitoring system to document how forests and woodlands will change. We need to develop such a system so we can move beyond local observations to gain a comprehensive view of how climate change is altering our natural ecosystems. • PW

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the many keen observers who submitted observations to my blog site earlier this year.

Further reading

Allen CD & colleagues (2010). A global overview of drought and heat-induced tree mortality reveals emerging climate change risks for forests. *Forest Ecology and Management* 259(4), 660-684.

Ashton DH & Spalding DK (2001) The ecology of a stressful site: Mount Towrong, Central Victoria 1967-1997. *Australian Forestry* 64, 143-150.



Adding value to tree plantings

IAN PENNA OF BALLARAT REGION TREEGROWERS DISCUSSES THE PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE OF 'ANALOGUE FORESTRY' AND 'BIORICH PLANTATIONS' THAT MAY ENCOURAGE MORE TREE PLANTING.

Some of the commercial forestry trees growing at BRT's biorich plantation.

A great little video on the web called 'The Matrix in Ecology' describes the importance of the changing characteristics of land surrounding remnant native vegetation for the flora and fauna that live in those remnants.

It also illustrates a prime issue in getting more 'bush' back onto the private land between these vegetation blocks: the economic imperative for farmers and others in the way they manage these lands.

How to tackle this economic imperative and blend it with the environmental objectives of reforestation and land restoration has been a concern of Ballarat Region Treegrowers (BRT, the local branch of Australian Forest Growers) for some time.

A lot of farmers don't want to plant trees of any kind, because they simply see them as restricting their potential income.

For the last few years, BRT has been promoting the integration of environmental landcare-type plantings with commercial timber trees as one way of overcoming this barrier.

This concept fits under the labels of 'analogue forest' and 'bio-rich plantations'.

An 'analogue forest' is a human-created, tree-dominated ecosystem that mimics the structure and function of a site's original climax or sub-climax forests.

However, in mimicking the role of the original forest, and to provide short- and long-term commercial value, analogue forests may include species exotic to that site.

Analogue forestry seeks to address both the genetic and cultural issues of biological loss.

Village gardens in Sri Lanka

The concept was developed in Sri Lanka by modifying traditional village gardens. The originators wanted to tackle the social and environmental problems resulting from exploitative land management, including shifting cultivation and monocultural industrial agriculture.

They wanted to recognise the value of lost ecosystems, restore productive capacity to the land, bring in genetic diversity, establish protective vegetation layers, and give local people more control over their way of life and natural resources.

BRT coined the term 'biorich plantation' for the kind of tree and shrub cover that could be created here in Australia by applying the 'Blueprint for Sustainability' score sheet for landcare plantings. This was developed by Teesdale nurseryman Stephen Murphy as a guiding 'blueprint' to overcome the deficiencies he saw in landcare-type plantings.

The score sheet has ten design principles that address four issues important to the long-term ecological value of plantings: Diversity, Structure, Long-term species survival and Connectivity.

The physical and biological characteristics of a planting are weighted according to the points available for each design principle, so the higher the score, the more the planting is considered to have 'ecological value' and 'survivability'.

Landholders can use the index to modify a planting design and so optimise the planting's score and 'sustainability'.

BRT worked with Stephen to turn his ideas into a book - *Recreating*



Above: Kamal Melvani of Sri Lanka's Neosynthesis Research Center in an analogue forest, Serukele in Sri Lanka.

Top right: Part of the 'biodiversity corridor' created at Jane Nona's forest garden in Sri Lanka.



the Country (Murphy, 2009). A substantial part of the book discusses how traditional timber plantations can be made more 'environmentally friendly'.

Model biorich plantation

With the help of a 'Caring for Country' grant and support from Imreys Minerals Australia, Central Highlands Water and others, BRT embarked on its own project in 2010 to establish a model biorich plantation around an old clay mine.

Plantings were designed by Stephen Murphy and BRT farm foresters. They contain a diverse mix of species predominantly endemic to the area, with as many layers as possible – grasses and shrubs through to larger understorey and canopy trees.

Plant species were clumped to help pollination and create vegetation layers, and natural regeneration of local species is encouraged. Commercial trees were also established in groups along a track in anticipation of future removal.

We have had successes and failures in this effort on a tough, weedy site. The first year's plantings grew well aided by a wet summer, although subsequent frosts knocked some commercial species. They will be replanted with hardier species.

The second year's trees struggled, with failed weed control and two dry summers. Even the success of replanting was poor, so the future of this plot is unknown.

Film project

But these problems don't challenge the basis of the biorich plantation concept. BRT is now making a 25-minute film promoting land restoration and reforestation, including the establishment of analogue forests and biorich plantations.

The film will examine several major community-led revegetation projects in southern Australia to see how they are working to improve the land, wildlife habitat and local human communities.

These projects have locally developed objectives, such as returning rare animal species, helping local farmers, linking remnant vegetation and repairing degraded land, and were all generated out of action by concerned and committed community groups or individuals.

The film will also show how community activism in Sri Lanka modified traditional village gardens to create Analogue Forests that have improved the well-being of small farmers, as well as recreating tree cover, wildlife habitat and clean water.

The 'analogue forestry'/'biorich plantation' perspective brings out the common aspects of the issues facing land restoration in Sri Lanka and Australia.



The entrance to BRT's biorich plantation near Lal Lal, Victoria.

As Victoria Mack of the Secretariat for International Landcare said recently on ABC Radio National:

"I think while we need the top-down, we need awareness at the highest levels of world governments, we [also] need the people on the ground to understand what they can do and how they can actually sustain themselves because no-one else is going to sustain them. So it really is up to each of us to look after our own little patch that we can actually manage."

So, I think it is a great partnership; governments should realise that the farmers and the landholders, if they are engaged in this way, it will help them to do their job and achieve the successes they actually want." • PW

More about BRT, its model biorich plantation and the film project can be found at www.biorichplantations.com and www.igg.me/at/brtfilm.

Tiger Quoll spotted in the Grampians

You can just make out the spots on the Tiger Quoll in this motion-sensing camera photo.

THOUGH PRESUMED LOCALLY EXTINCT FOR 140 YEARS, A TIGER QUOLL HAS BEEN FILMED ON A REMOTE DIGITAL CAMERA IN GRAMPIANS NATIONAL PARK.

Also known as Spotted-tail Quolls, Tiger Quolls are carnivorous marsupials native to Australia.

The animal was captured on 25 September on cameras set up to monitor the Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby population.

Parks Victoria ranger Ryan Duffy says scientists had to verify the photo.

"When I first saw it I was incredibly excited," he said.

Ben Holmes, manager of Parks Victoria's Grampians Ark fox control program, said: "I honestly couldn't believe my eyes when the photos were sent through from our field crew. But there's no mistaking the spotted body colour, which can only be a quoll."

The sighting is the first confirmed live record of a Tiger Quoll in the Grampians since 1872, when an animal was killed at the headwaters of the Glenelg River.

Grampians National Park Ranger in Charge Dave Roberts said this was an exciting find for all staff who had worked on conservation programs in the Grampians over the years.

"We have been undertaking extensive fire management, fox control and other conservation works for decades and this sighting adds to our knowledge and importance of our work to conserve these species," he said.

"Having a native predator in the system is a great sign that the park is supporting a healthy functioning ecosystem."

Tiger Quolls are endangered in Victoria, with the south-east Australian population endangered nationally, and are listed as 'near threatened' on the International Union for Conservation of Nature red list.

Parks Victoria will now refine camera monitoring techniques to try to build a better picture of how widespread the population is across



Grampians NP Ranger Ryan Duffy checks a camera. VNPA NatureWatch volunteers set up similar cameras for monitoring wildlife.

Grampians National Park, following several unconfirmed sightings over the years.

Parks Victoria Chief Executive Bill Jackson said: "This is an extremely exciting rediscovery after such a long time, which highlights the critical role parks play in conserving Victoria's unique biodiversity.

"Victoria's parks conserve examples of over 80% of Victoria's plants and animals.

"This rediscovery confirms Grampians National Park as a stronghold for biodiversity conservation." • PW

From Parks Victoria

PHOTO: PARKS VICTORIA

PHOTO: PARKS VICTORIA

Hattah Lakes program wins top environmental award

IN RECOGNITION OF ITS VALUABLE INNOVATIVE WORK, THE HATTAH LAKES ENVIRONMENTAL WATERING PROGRAM HAS RECEIVED THE 2013 BANKSIA SUSTAINABILITY AWARD FOR WATER. **LAUREN MURPHY** OF THE MALLEE CMA REPORTS.

The Banksia Sustainability Awards recognise and promote innovative sustainable development and practice throughout Australia.

The judges noted that the Hattah Lakes project “demonstrated how to manage a long-term, multi-objective project while achieving environmental and social gains”.

The Mallee Catchment Management Authority (CMA) entered the program in the Banksia Awards to acknowledge the ongoing and important involvement of partner agencies, organisations and community groups in the protection of this iconic lake system.

The CMA coordinated the environmental watering program on behalf of the Victorian Government and in partnership with the Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries, Parks Victoria and the Murray Darling Basin Authority.

Local people were involved throughout the project.

The Hattah Lakes system is part of the 48,000 hectare Hattah-Kulkyne National Park, 60 km south of Mildura. Murray River regulation and a changing climate mean the lakes now fill naturally less often and for shorter periods than in the past.

Emergency action was taken in 2004 (during the drought) to help return water to the Hattah Lakes. These early



Top: Aerial view of the Hattah Lakes.

Centre: Water brings life to the lakes.

Right: Mallee birds: male (above) and female Regent Parrots.

works were conducted with temporary pumps on the river bank but, over the following decade, local knowledge and innovative thinking helped to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the environmental watering program.

Completed during 2013, an infrastructure of levees, regulators and a pump station makes it possible to use available environmental water effectively when river flows alone are not sufficient to reach the lakes.

The infrastructure will be used to deliver water to fill the lakes every two to three years, with more extensive watering to reach the floodplain every eight years, subject to natural conditions and water availability.



Gaining further recognition, the Hattah Lakes watering program also won the Environmental Protection category of the Premier's Sustainability Awards for 2013. • PW

PHOTOS: MALLEE CMA



PHOTO: EVA KLUSACEK

A winter walk at Mount Alexander

VNPA MEMBER EVA KLUSACEK VISITED THE MOUNTAIN NEAR CASTLEMAINE THAT GAVE ITS NAME TO A GOLDFIELD AND THE BUSY ROAD IN MELBOURNE THAT THE DIGGERS FOLLOWED TO REACH IT. SHE SENT US THIS ACCOUNT AND SOME GREAT PHOTOGRAPHS.

Right: Steep slopes of Mt Alexander.

Postponed from June due to consistent heavy rain, the VNPA Under35s Mount Alexander walk was moved to mid-July this year. We had our fingers crossed that we'd be second time lucky with the weather.

As it was, the atmosphere was cold and foggy, but this turned out to be a photographer's dream.

I'd never been to Mount Alexander before, and saw this trip as the perfect opportunity to explore a place that was new to me.

The hike partially followed the Great Dividing Trail. Even in the misty conditions, it was a scenic walk through the old goldfields. The circuit around the mountain led us to Langs Lookout, Dog Rocks and Leanganook Enclosure.

The low temperatures forced us to make our breaks as short as possible, and to keep moving to stay warm.

Not having been on a bushwalk for a while before this trip, I felt that, without realising it, I'd really been missing the connection to nature.



PHOTO: EVA KLUSACEK

It was so nice to breathe in fresh air, hear bird calls, admire the different textures and colours of tree trunks, feel insignificant next to massive granite boulders, and take in the sight of tall trees towering above us. And the fog made the hike even more special for me.

The 13km walk was capably organised and led by Alison Fogarty, and it was great to share the experience with others from the U35s group.

Finding that the track we followed is just one section of the Great Dividing Trail, I'm now keen to see what gems the rest of the trail has to offer! • PW

Victorian Water Act review concerns

The Victorian Water Act, which has been in operation since 1886, provides the framework for allocating surface water and groundwater across the state.

It's also an important piece of environmental legislation. It sets up the environmental water reserve, which gives rivers a legal right to a share of their own water, and has important safeguards for assessing whether any long-term reduction in water availability is shared equitably between water users and the environment.

As all the evidence is pointing towards a drier future in Victoria, this safeguard is really important.

The Napthine Government is currently reviewing the Water Act. This is necessary to enable implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and

also the government's new strategy for urban water management, *Melbourne's Water Future*. In addition, the Act has become very long with repeated amendments over the years.

However, we are concerned that the review may enable the government to undermine some of the Act's environmental safeguards, and further entrench the priority it gives to consumptive use over environmental use.

The draft legislation is due to be released for public consultation before the end of the year. Environment Victoria and the EDO will be studying it to see what it means for our rivers and wetlands, and we'd like you to join us in making sure that environmental protection is maintained and strengthened. • PW

Please contact me in January 2014 (juliet.lefeuvre@environmentvictoria.org.au or 9341 8106) for details of what's proposed and how to comment.

Juliet Le Feuvre

Healthy Rivers Campaigner
Environment Victoria



Part of the pumping system that supplies water to the Hattah Lakes from the Murray. We must ensure that Victorian environmental water allocations are safeguarded.

Best Friends of 2013

THE VNPA CONGRATULATES THE FOUR BEST FRIENDS FOR 2013, WHOSE AWARDS WERE PRESENTED AT THIS YEAR'S FRIENDS NETWORK DISCOVERY WEEKEND, HELD IN SEPTEMBER AT MT EVELYN.

RHONDA COFFEY

*Friends of Barwon Bluff
(Barwon Heads)*

Rhonda is an enthusiastic educator who is able to communicate effectively with a wide variety of people. She has developed three acclaimed guide booklets, beautiful postcards, and the Banksia Award-winning 'Living on the Edge' website and CD.

NOEL AND DUDLEY GROSS

*Friends of Wright Forest
(near Cockatoo)*

Noel and Dudley have organised monthly working bees in the Forest since 1989. They have also kept regular photographic records and notes, and compiled the Friends' monthly newsletter 'The Wright Stuff'.

MAX ROSS

Friends of Mt Worth (near Warragul)

Travelling from Melbourne to tree planting, track clearing and weed removal working bees each month, Max has made a major contribution to the Friends and the park over the past 25 years. He takes on any task required and has a down-to-earth and common-sense approach to solving any problems. • PW

PHOTO: MALLEE CMA

BOOK REVIEWS

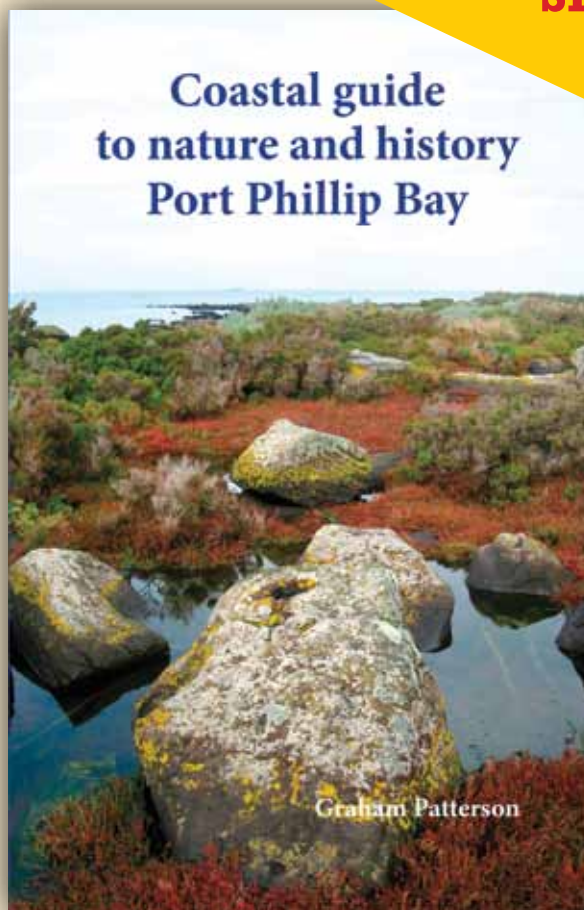
Coastal guide to nature and history – Port Phillip Bay

By Graham Patterson.
Coastal Guide Books, 2013.
Paperback, 172 pages. RRP \$30.00.

It's hard to think of a better present than this attractive new book for any friend or family member who loves walking and finding out more about the natural and human history of our very own Bay.

Graham Patterson covers all these topics and more. He gives useful preparation and safety tips and a very good summary of the human history of Port Phillip and its environmental health, then launches into a detailed description of the area between Point Lonsdale and Geelong.

Walks in and between each of the townships along the coast here are described and illustrated with



Melway map extracts and excellent photographs, both contemporary and historical.

Other parts of the Bay covered in the same way are Avalon to Williamstown,

SPECIAL OFFER
to VNPA members:
\$22.50
(plus postage \$5)

Port Melbourne to Frankston, and Mount Eliza to Point Nepean. A valuable section on coastal plants and animals follows, with good colour photos of the more common species (which can be supplemented by the VNPA's *Life on the Rocky Shores*) including coastal weeds.

The book concludes with the best geological history of the Bay I've read, a look at coastal management and a list of references and books for further reading.

The author is to be congratulated for producing this book, a great resource for raising awareness of the Bay's many values and the need to protect them. • PW

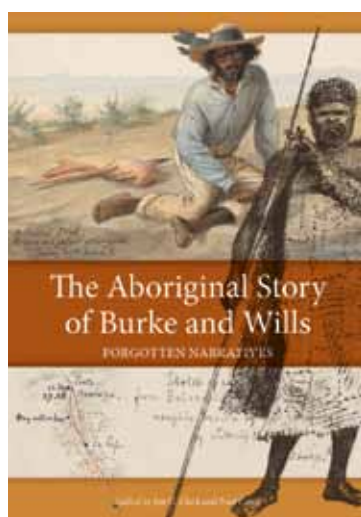
Reviewed by Michael Howes

The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills

Ian D. Clark and Fred Cahir (eds).
CSIRO Publishing, 2013. 314 pages,
hardback. RRP \$59.95.

The result of the second of two projects initiated by the Royal Society of Victoria for the 150th anniversary of the Victorian Exploring Expedition of 1860-61, this book focuses on the associations of various Aboriginal peoples with the Burke and Wills party and subsequent relief expeditions, and how these encounters have been remembered by later generations.

The widely varying backgrounds of the expedition participants and the range of Aboriginal peoples they met are reflected in the variety of approaches and source material used by the volume's contributing authors.



I particularly enjoyed Deirdre Slattery's challenging argument for alternative versions of the Burke and Wills narratives as potential tools to help 'develop relevant and productive practices for living in Australian conditions as custodians rather than as conquerors or settlers,' and Leigh Boucher's examination of the ways

in which the Howitt relief expedition's dependence on Aboriginal knowledge was rewritten to support a narrative more consistent with the needs of settler nationhood.

Admirably multidisciplinary and generously illustrated, the book introduces readers to the Yandruwandha and their life-saving hospitality towards John King; to Watpipa the 'old man', who acted as guide to Hermann Beckler and his party; to the 'brave and gallant native guide' Dick and his countryman Peter, who rescued Alexander McPherson and Myles Lyon from starvation; and to Mr Shirt, a canny diplomat who perished after leading an attack against expedition members at Bulloo. These are forgotten narratives worth remembering. • PW

A longer version of this review appeared in *Historical Records of Australian Science*, 24 (2013): 350-351, online www.publish.csiro.au/paper/HR13005.htm.

Reviewed by Hilary Howes

The Green Desert: the many and spectacular faces of Lake Eyre

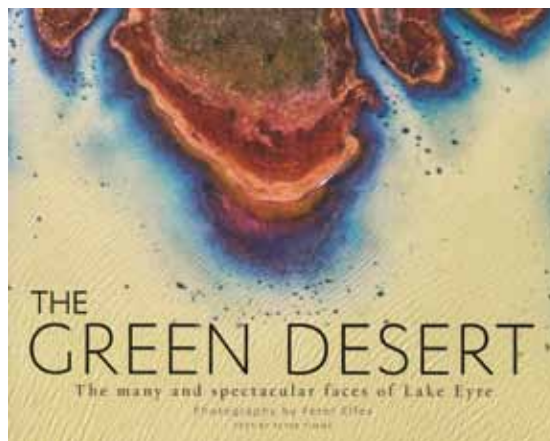
By Peter Elfes (photography)
and Peter Timms (text).

ABC Books, 2013. 240 pages,
hardback. RRP \$59.99.

**A green desert? Only in Australia,
and even here it's rare. But so
extraordinary when it comes.**

This large-format book documents the remarkable event of the flooding of Lake Eyre that took place from 2009, not just for one year but for three.

Timms is well known as an art critic and for his writings on our relationship with the bush, so his perspective on Elfes' amazing photographs adds



to the sense of what this flooding phenomenon might mean for us as Australians.

How do we even 'see' Elfes' photos? Are they patterns of an ancient land? Do they give us a sense of vastness, maybe a sense of being overwhelmed or even fear of such an alien landscape? Or humility?

Maybe we should see them just as works of art? Maybe they add to our connections to this ancient continent and its apparently random weather?

The Arabunna people, for whom Lake Eyre (or rather Kati Thanda, to give the lake its now-official Aboriginal name) is their ancestral home, would no doubt 'see' Elfes' photos very differently.

Elfes documents his time with the Arabunna and the influence this had on how he saw and appreciated the landscape, and also covers the official return of the lake and its lands to their traditional occupiers.

Coming to grips with the Australian landscape is a long journey for those of us who arrived in the last 200 years. Art helps us explore this relationship, and *The Green Desert* is a welcome addition to this exploration – in spite of how we might feel about what appear to be digitally enhanced images with too great an intensity of colour. • PW

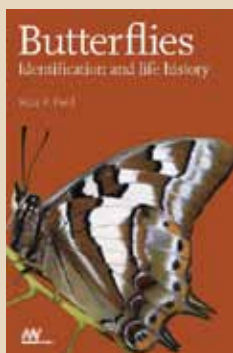
Reviewed by Karen Alexander

Butterflies

By Ross P. Field. Museum
Victoria, 2013. 324 pages.
RRP \$29.95.

**Ross Field was responsible
for the Butterflies and
Moths section of an
earlier Museum Victoria
field guide, Melbourne's
Wildlife (2006).**

In this guide he covers all the 128 species of butterfly recorded in Victoria.



The book starts with short sections on butterfly biology and the structure of adult, egg, larva and pupa; classification; nomenclature; natural enemies; distribution and habitats; the study and conservation of butterflies; and a section explaining the guide's scope, key terms, abbreviations, and so on. At the end are a checklist of Victorian butterflies, a

glossary, a short further-reading list, and indexes of scientific and common names.

The remaining 270 pages contain descriptions and photos (almost all taken by Field himself) of the butterflies and their eggs, larvae and pupae.

Each of the five families into which Australian butterflies fall is given a general two-page introduction, and there are two full pages for each species. This gives us a book of 315 solid pages, which weighs some 800 grams – perhaps a trifle heavy for a field guide, but it is nice to have *all* Victoria's butterflies, with details, in one reasonably small book. • PW

Reviewed by Marian Maddern

Sponges

By Lisa Goudie, Mark Norman
and Julian Finn

A Museum Victoria Field Guide.
Paperback: 144 pages. RRP \$19.95.
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*Available from the Melbourne Museum
online store www.museumvictoria.com.au/shop or at the Museum Shop and
other good bookstores.*

**Beautifully illustrated with
underwater photographs, this guide
brings to life the rich and abundant
sponge fauna of our southern seas.**

Sponges form the most conspicuous component of our southern reef fauna, and in terms of biomass, abundance and species diversity are possibly also the most significant component.

Identifying and documenting our marine fauna generally has taken on a new sense of urgency with the looming impact of global warming and increased stresses imposed by urbanisation.

The species illustrated in this guide were all verified by histological



examination of sections taken from the sponges photographed. The authors have produced an authoritative guide that will be an important resource for sponge identification.

This guide deserves a place on the bookshelves of the amateur naturalist and professional scientist alike. It has been very

well produced and is well worth the modest price tag. • PW

Reviewed by David Staples

From alps to ocean

Robert (Bob) Jones
1946–2013

FORMER DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL PARKS **DON SAUNDERS** PAYS TRIBUTE TO A HIGHLY RESPECTED COLLEAGUE.

In their tribute to Bob Jones, his Creswick forestry colleagues described his work as 'a rich and productive career in land management'. How true!

Robert Alan Jones, known to all as Bob, graduated from the Victorian School of Forestry in 1967, then Melbourne University in 1971. In the years between he worked as a forester in various activities such as recreation management, resource assessment and fire management.

He must have impressed the top brass of the Forests Commission, because in 1972 he was hand-picked to be Resort Manager of Mt Buller Alpine Resort – a very challenging job for a recent graduate.

In 1978 he was appointed to the position of District Superintendent, South Gippsland, with the National Parks Service. Bob, with his wife Mary and their small family, lived in Wilsons Promontory National Park; their son David recalls that it was a great place to grow up.

It can be difficult living next door to the boss, but ranger in charge Jim Whelan said there was a sense of camaraderie among the neighbours; they enjoyed good times together and Bob was a very fair and highly respected leader. This was at a time when there was a major redevelopment of Tidal River camping ground and new parks such as Baw Baw were being added to the District.

The years 1982-93 saw Bob return to the High Country as Resort Manager at Falls Creek Alpine Resort, and then Coordinator of Statewide Technical Services for the Alpine Resorts Commission.

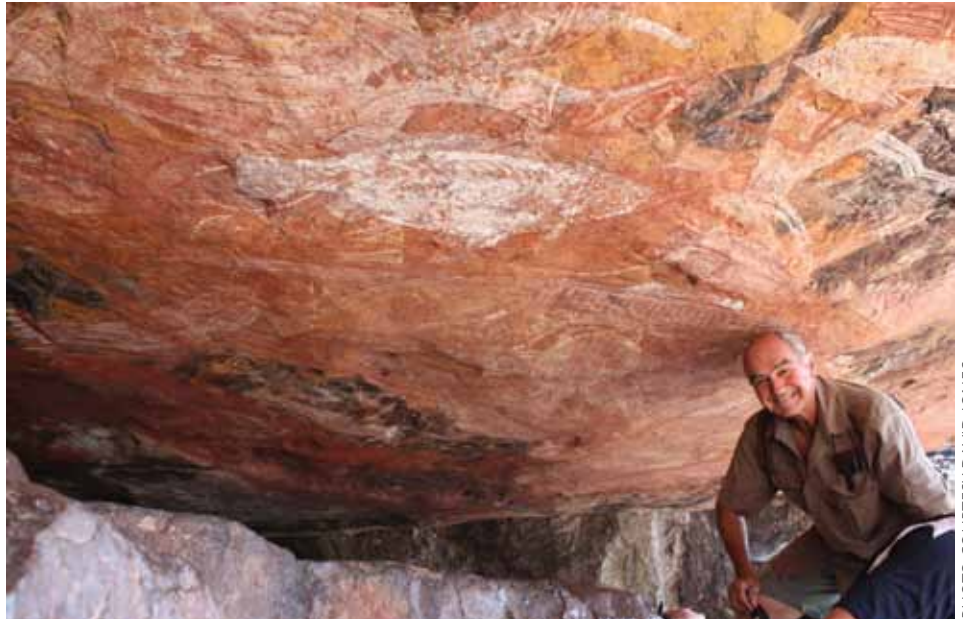


PHOTO COURTESY DAVID JONES



PHOTO COURTESY DAVID JONES

Above: Bob at Aboriginal rock art site in Kakadu NP, 2010.
Left: Bob as many remember him: cheerful and firm.

When the National Parks Service was restructured in 1993-94 to create 19 Chief Ranger positions across the State, it was logical that Bob, with such extensive, high-level experience in alpine management, should be appointed Chief Ranger Alpine, based at Bright – a position he held for five years.

Throughout his career Bob proved to be a Mr Fix-it, always ready to take on the most difficult tasks. So when there was controversy about renewal of grazing licences in the Alpine National Park following the Caledonia fire in 1998, it was Bob's role to fix this and other grazing issues across the State.

In the latter stages of his career in parks Bob became very involved with indigenous issues: initially as Cultural Heritage Coordinator for East Region, and then with the comprehensive assessment of indigenous artefacts and heritage following the 2003 alpine fires. His empathy with people and his

excellent negotiating skills really came to the fore during this work and it was very significant that messages of gratitude from indigenous groups with which he had been involved were read out at the funeral service.

This was further emphasised in a letter to Bob from the Chief Executive of Parks Victoria on Bob's retirement: "You have contributed an enormous amount to public land management in your career, but in my opinion none more important than your role in the last few years as Cultural Heritage Coordinator ... The results you have achieved in building ties with the Indigenous communities, and in working with and mentoring local Parks Victoria Indigenous employees, have been outstanding".

In fact, it is interesting how often 'mentoring' was mentioned during the funeral service. The three senior-level parks staff who spoke – Rocky Barca, Peter Jacobs and Jim Whelan, who all worked alongside Bob in the field – said that his mentoring skills were exceptional, as were his negotiating skills. Indicative of the huge respect for Bob was the attendance of many national park employees, past and present, and at the end of the service 'parkies' formed a long guard of honour.

Bob died on 29 August as a result of mesothelioma, most probably due to home renovations which he carried out many years ago. It was very obvious from the service that he was deeply devoted to his family and a great contributor to his local community, Mt Beauty. He will be greatly missed by many people in many places and parks. • PW

Dora Vaughan Lee

1922–2013

Long-time VNPA member and bushwalker Dora Lee died on 30 September, aged 91.

Born to a pioneer farming family in the Atherton Tablelands, Queensland, Dora always loved nature, the bush and adventure.

During World War 2, with the threat of Japanese invasion, Dora and her mother and sisters were sent to Melbourne, where she completed her nursing training. After a stint at Mt Isa as a midwife, she and nursing colleague Betty travelled extensively in the late 1940s and early 50s, including a droving trip from north-west Queensland down to Alice Springs on which they were the only females, and motor-scooting 8,000 miles around Europe.

On returning to Melbourne, through a motor scooter club Dora met and married David Lee, a like-minded adventurer and nature lover. In their early married years Dora, David and their four children were active campers and animal and plant cataloguers with the Field Naturalists Club and the Conservation Council of Victoria. Through these talks and camps, Dora developed her passion for native plants and bushwalking, becoming an enthusiastic member of the Society for Growing Australian Plants.

A VNPA member from 1984, Dora thoroughly enjoyed many bushwalks around Victoria with fellow VNPA members, keeping her (now adult) children entertained with stories of her latest adventures. Her youngest son recalls accompanying Dora (then in her 70s) on an outer city walk where other walkers told him she was nicknamed 'EverReady Batteries' and 'bionic lady'. The walk left him with a headache and wanting to go home, while Dora was still full of energy!

In her 70s Dora caravanned around Australia with some of her co-walkers, as well as walking NZ's Milford Track twice. In her early 80s she could still walk up to 16km per day – one of her last walks was a Mt Buffalo base camp walk with the Bayside bushwalking club. For a long time she was also emergency contact for many VNPA walk leaders.

Her enduring passion remained the VNPA's causes and campaigns, which she would support whole-heartedly by donations, writing to ministers, or lobbying her family and friends. The cause she was most passionate and vocal about recently was the VNPA's stand against cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park. She even put a 'stop alpine grazing' sticker on her walking frame to get people to ask about the issue!

Dora was well organised – as a mother of four she had to be. She even organised her own funeral. Her wish was to have her grandchildren bear symbols of her love of family, the garden and the bush.

Wherever 'bushwalking heaven' is, she has found peace and rest there. • PW

Jenny Lee



Dora Lee at Mount Buffalo NP, 2002.

PHOTO COURTESY JENNY LEE

Arthur Smith

1935–2013

Arthur and I met at a little country dance in October 1997 and discovered that we shared a common interest – bushwalking.

His previous bushwalking had been with his family on camping trips to Mt Buffalo, Falls Creek, the Snowy Mountains and elsewhere. I had been a VNPA member since the mid-1980s and a member of Bayside Bushwalking Club since 1991, so I decided to join Arthur up.

We walked with both groups until moving to Dromana in 2000 and finding that it was impractical to drive such long distances to walks, so we joined the local U3A and walked with their Bushwalkers and Happy Wanderers groups.

During the time he was a VNPA member, Arthur and I took part in Hindmarsh tree plantings and attended Margaret Hattersley's boneseeding working bees at Arthurs Seat once or twice. We were often away caravanning around Australia and walking during the months when these VNPA activities took place.

In 2010 Arthur was diagnosed with metastatic melanoma in his left lung, and then in his brain, resulting in 15 radiotherapy treatments. Then in March 2012 his right shoulder fell victim to the disease – cruel for someone who was right-handed and loved gardening and fixing things.

In February this year, a regular scan found more lesions on his brain, but the final blow came in June when the cancer got into the hip/pelvis area. The bone pain he suffered left him severely physically handicapped, and from that time his quality of life deteriorated.

It was a very sad time seeing him suffer so much during the three months up to his passing. At least he is now out of pain.

Arthur leaves his wife Beth, three children, six grandchildren and one great-grandson of his own, and three adoring step-children and six step-grandchildren. • PW

Beth Smith (Little)



Arthur Smith was a keen walker.

PHOTO COURTESY BETH SMITH



DR GRAINNE
MAGUIRE
OF BIRDLIFE
AUSTRALIA
REPORTS ON
PROGRESS IN
PROTECTING
THREATENED
SPECIES LIKE THE
HOODED PLOVER.



PHOTOS: BIRDLIFE AUSTRALIA

Hooded Plover nest at Black Rock beach.

Hooded Plover chicks.

Sharing our beaches with birds

Summer is just round the corner and the beach is coming to mind.

But while it's a favourite destination for people, it's also a habitat for wildlife. Beaches offer abundant food in the form of seagrass and seaweed, and often the carcasses of fish, crabs and seals. Decomposing seaweed is a habitat for invertebrates, which in turn are food for shorebirds and seabirds.

Our Victorian ocean beaches are so bountiful that some birds fly 16,000km to access our shores. In spring and summer, enormous flocks of migratory shorebirds are busily foraging here, gaining strength and energy to fly north to breed again.

Any extra risk-taking or energy expenditure can compromise the return flight. Think of the hundreds of dead Muttonbirds (shearwaters) that line the shores in November each year; these birds were just short of the energy needed for the journey.

Human beach visitors can help by minimising any disturbance to birds. Keeping away from flocks of shorebirds, and selecting alternative beaches and estuaries for recreation, particularly dog walking or boat launching, can make a major difference to their survival.

For other birds, our shores and beaches are a permanent home. Shorebirds like the Hooded Plover, and seabirds like Fairy Terns, are some of Australia's most threatened species. These species breed on our beaches, facing a highly changeable environment with wild storms and tidal surges, and sand temperatures that can top 80° Celsius.

And they must dodge predators ... and people. Their well-camouflaged eggs and chicks are easily trodden on by unsuspecting visitors. This is where BirdLife Australia's dedicated volunteers come to the rescue by putting up signs and fencing vulnerable

nests so that people can safely avoid breeding areas.

Hooded Plover conservation efforts are working and the breeding success of the birds is gradually increasing. If you visit surf beaches this summer, look out for signs and fenced areas, and pass these by along the water's edge.

Avoid staying near or in front of the fenced area. And most importantly, if you have a dog with you, please have it on a leash.

These tenacious little birds are true survivors, and with a helping hand they are managing to persist on popular beaches. But we don't have enough volunteers to monitor such a dispersed species, and many popular beaches, like Squeaky Beach at the Prom, may have nests that go unprotected. • PW

If you do see evidence of breeding, please report it as soon as possible to BirdLife Australia's Beach-nesting Birds Team (hoodedplover@birdlife.org.au).

Eastern Ground Parrot survey

Parks Victoria is looking for enthusiastic hikers and birdwatchers to help find evidence of the Eastern Ground Parrot in the Northern Wilderness Area of Wilsons Promontory NP, Nooramunga Marine and Coastal Park and Cape Lipton Coastal Park.

Parks Victoria Operations Manager Jim Whelan said the survey will continue through 2013-14.

"Eastern Ground Parrots are shy and elusive and not usually seen unless flushed out from cover. They are bright grass-green with black and yellow markings and have a prominent pale yellow wing," he said.



PHOTO: PARKS VICTORIA

Jim Whelan surveys the northern Prom.

Hikers and birdwatchers are asked to keep to formed walking tracks at all times and avoid disturbing nests and juvenile birds.

Jim said protected areas of coastal heathland in South Gippsland are vital

to the survival of the parrot, threatened by land clearing and degradation.

"If hikers in these areas do not see or hear any Eastern Ground Parrots, this information is also useful to our survey," he said.

"We're also interested in receiving photographs or other natural history observations - this helps us build a better picture of local wildlife in remote areas." • PW

Survey forms can be downloaded from www.parks.vic.gov.au

For more information please phone 13 1963 or contact Jim directly on jim.whelan@parks.vic.gov.au

From Parks Victoria



Orange-bellied Parrot Calendar

*Limited edition 2014 calendar,
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