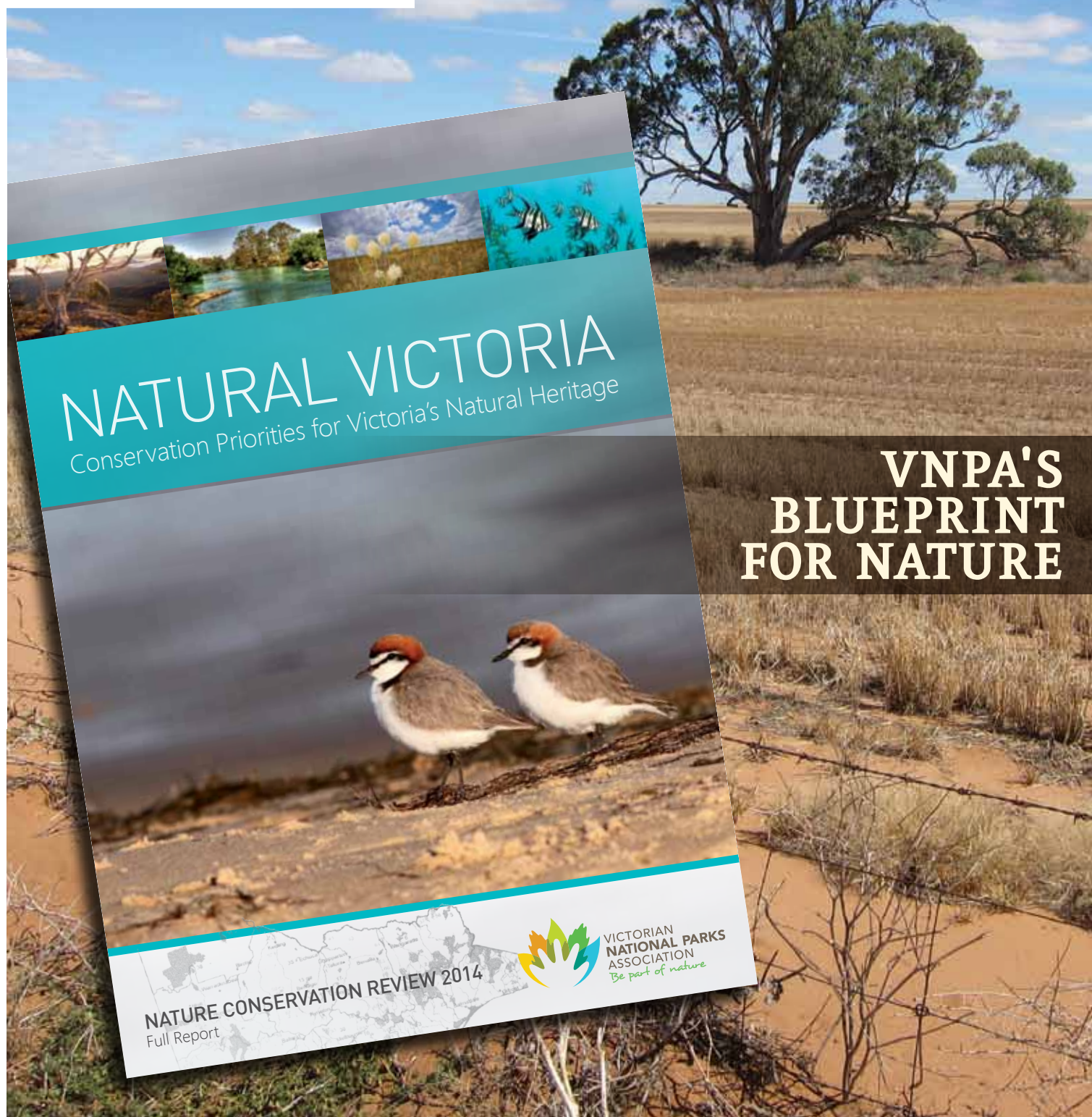


# PARK WATCH



## VNPA'S BLUEPRINT FOR NATURE

**NATURE CONSERVATION REVIEW**  
MORE TO LEARN ABOUT FIRE  
**MARINE ISSUES AND ACTION**  
RIPARIAN GRAZING  
**WATTLES AND WELLSFORD**  
HATTAH RABBIT SURVEY  
**PLUS 2013-14 VNPA ANNUAL REPORT**

SEPTEMBER 2014 NO 258



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



Be part of nature



## For your diary

**TUESDAY 7 OCTOBER**

VNPA Annual General Meeting  
From 6.30pm.  
60 Leicester St, Carlton.

**PRESIDENT** Russell Costello

**DIRECTOR** Matt Ruchel

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### VNPA'S VISION

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

### EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Matt Ruchel, Philip Ingamells, Michael Howes.

### ADVERTISING

Emily Clough, [Emilyc@vnpa.org.au](mailto:Emilyc@vnpa.org.au)

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

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

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

**COPY DEADLINE** for December 2014 *Park Watch* is 31 October 2014.

**DESIGN** Mary Ferlin **PRINTING** Adams Print

### FRONT COVER

Cover of the VNPA's newly-released fourth Nature Conservation Review against a background of a single tree in a cultivated paddock. Photo: Yasmin Kelsall.

### NCR BANNER PHOTO

Photo: It's a Wildlife (pages 5, 7 and 9).

### BACK COVER

Ausfeld's Wattle (*Acacia ausfeldii*) in the Wellsford Forest near Bendigo. See p. 20. Photo: Rodney Orr.

**Park Watch ISSN** 1324-4361



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## From the President

### Changing the rules

Yet more bleak news, I'm afraid. The Victorian Government has continued its attacks on our environment by making it easier for developers to clear habitat in our national parks and public estate.

After legislating 99-year leases to effectively privatise land for commercial development in parks, the Government has now handed itself an exemption from the need to get a planning permit for native vegetation clearing (such as 'defendable space' bushfire protection on public land, including national parks) where approved in writing by the Secretary of the Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI).

This extends the exemption from permits to anyone managing Crown land, so long as the Secretary approves.

There is no requirement to follow any due process or public consultation, and applies to clearing of any extent and for any purpose. It could be for hotels, roads, powerlines, pipelines, race tracks, sports grounds, whatever.

So what brought this about? Perhaps it was the VNPA's opposition to the

Mt Buller – Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board's intent to build a bus-friendly bitumen 'highway' from the summit of Mt Buller to that of Mt Stirling, under the guise of fire safety for Mt Buller.

As a fire escape, the road makes no sense. Why evacuate people from a developed area with good fire-fighting services to an isolated natural peak with no escape and in the path of most bushfires? We suspect the real reason is so that Mt Stirling can be developed with overflow lodges for Mt Buller or something similar.

The VNPA took the Alpine Resort to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) for, among other things, failing to meet even the pathetic requirements of the Government's new, weakened clearing controls. We had a good case. However, Minister Guy, in a highly unusual move, 'called' in the appeal for his decision before VCAT could review it. He then changed the rules.

Assuming the Secretary provides the exemption, and because building a road is an as-of-right use in that zone, there are now fewer grounds to hinder the Minister from giving approval.

A footy team would just love to have the rule-maker on the team. "No, I've changed the rules. That kick out-of-bounds is a goal because – err – the wind interfered unfairly. My team won."

Legally, it's now easier to develop a tourism facility on public land than

on private land. And how likely is this Minister to require an Environmental Effects Statement for vegetation removal exempted from a planning permit by his Secretary?

While private land developers have to go through all the rings and hoops, the agencies developing the public estate can do so in private.

In better news, the Minister 'for' Environment failed in his attempt to enshrine in legislation horrific new rules for offset native vegetation clearance. The Bill was so complex, indecipherable and ecologically bereft that the Legislative Assembly had to go into committee mode, a very rare event, just to try and figure it out.

The really big problem was the intended legislative entrenchment of the highly dubious native vegetation assessment methodology, with attendant mathematical formulae and central control requirements beyond the capability of DEPI. In the end, the House was tied and, embarrassingly, the Speaker voted the Act down.

So what now? Perhaps, whichever way the state election goes, we will have a new environment minister who actually cares for the environment.

I would love to enthusiastically welcome big new initiatives, such as the creation of a Great Forest National Park to protect Leadbeater's Possum and other threatened species, instead of despairing at the minimalist and negative approach of the current government. • PW

**Russell Costello, VNPA President**



## From the Editor

A few weeks ago I had a shock while returning from the Hindmarsh Landcare weekend. We went through a massive area of 'industrial farming' – gigantic paddocks of wheat and

other crops stretching to the horizon, with hardly a tree or other native vegetation to be seen. Not even on the roadsides!

We all felt good because we'd just helped plant 12,000 native trees and shrubs north of Rainbow. But this landscape showed what a huge challenge Victoria faces in restoring and protecting its native species.

Fortunately there's now a comprehensive guide for doing this: the VNPA's *Natural Victoria*, our new Nature Conservation Review. In this *Park Watch* we summarise

some of its major findings and recommendations, and encourage you to check it out on the VNPA website.

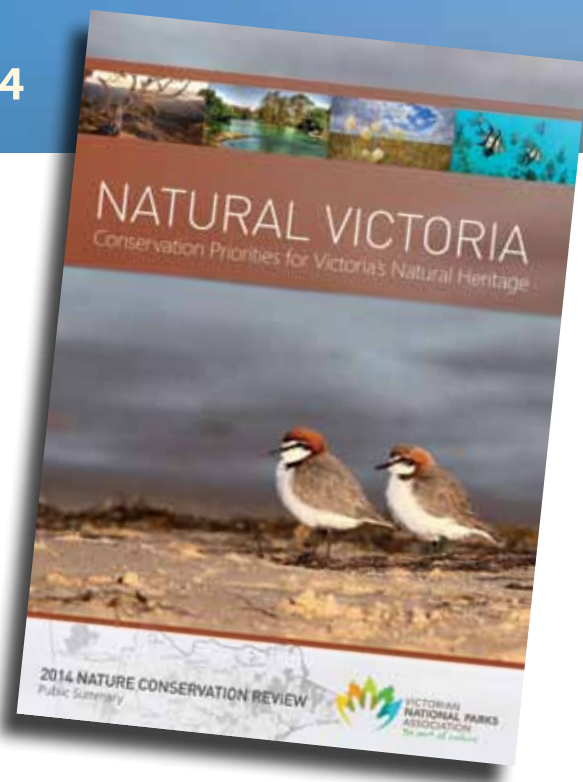
With the state election approaching, we're also calling for a renewed focus on environmental governance and action by all political parties.

Thanks to all our contributors for their wide range of interesting articles. Of course, we're always happy to receive more! • PW

**Michael Howes**

# Celebrating our new blueprint for nature

SIX YEARS IN THE MAKING, THE VNPA'S FOURTH NATURE CONSERVATION REVIEW, *NATURAL VICTORIA – CONSERVATION PRIORITIES FOR VICTORIA'S NATURAL HERITAGE*, IS NOW COMPLETE. THANKS TO VOLUNTEER **EVELYN FELLER** FOR HELPING DEVELOP THE FOLLOWING SIX-PAGE SUMMARY.



**This new review highlights the urgent need for a renewed focus by all political parties on environmental governance if Victoria's natural areas and biodiversity are to be healthy and protected into the future.**

Its objectives are:

- to review new information, knowledge and approaches to nature conservation as applied to Victoria
- to identify priority areas for nature conservation and national parks
- to review threatening processes and identify reforms to improve nature conservation in Victoria.

The review's primary focus is the state government, since that government is the primary administrator of the laws, policies and programs that influence people's actions in the Victorian environment.

The 300-page full report, available on the VNPA website under 'Publications', identifies key priorities for nature conservation, and has 163 detailed recommendations covering gaps and issues such as fire management, completion and management of the national park estate, native vegetation protection, invasive species, forestry, biosecurity, and stewardship and restoration programs.

The detailed chapter on environmental governance focuses on failings like inadequate data, weak laws, poor

leadership and coordination, inadequate enforcement, and lack of transparency and funding.

As well as the full report, there is a 50-page Public Summary also available on the VNPA website.

When our first Nature Conservation Review was published 43 years ago, only 1.2% of Victoria's land area was protected in national parks. There were no marine parks, the annual management budget for protected areas was just \$141,000, and little was known about the state's biodiversity.

We know a great deal more now, and about 17% of Victoria's land area and 5% of state waters are protected in the national park estate.

But pressures on nature have also grown. On current trajectories they condemn our seas, lands and waters to growing biological poverty and ecological dysfunction.

For this fourth review, the VNPA commissioned seven expert reviews of Victoria's environmental history and of conservation values and issues in marine, coastal, terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems.

The report synthesises those reviews, supplemented by information from a wide range of other publications, and with recommendations developed by a VNPA reference group.

After a brief outline of Victoria's environmental history and major trends and drivers of environmental change, the Public Summary focuses on values, conservation gaps and priorities, and future recommended directions for marine, coastal, terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems. Details relating to these ecosystems will be featured in future *Park Watch* editions.

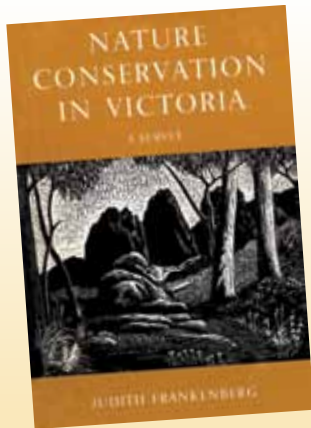
The Summary concludes with an analysis of the flaws in environmental governance that underpin Victoria's failure to arrest environmental decline, and proposed reforms. • PW

## Acknowledgements

The preparation of this fourth Nature Conservation Review began in 2008. It is the product of the work and expertise of many people over a long period. Key people were Andrew Cox (project management, research, analysis and maps), Carol Booth (text, research and layout) and Matt Ruchel (oversight and guidance). There is a complete list of acknowledgements at the front of the full report on [www.vnpa.org.au](http://www.vnpa.org.au)

The Nature Conservation Review 2014 was generously supported by The Dara Foundation.

# Previous VNPA nature conservation reviews



## Nature Conservation in Victoria: A Survey (1971)

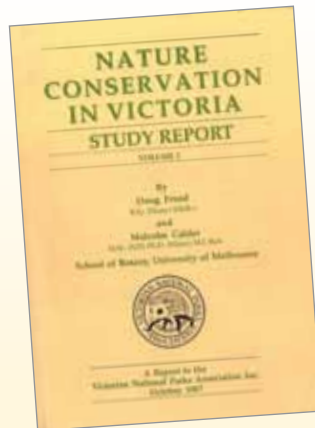
At the time of the first review, by botanist Judith Frankenberg, Victoria had few protected areas, and little was known of their values or the status or biology of the state's wildlife.

Frankenberg compiled the first systematic description of vegetation communities in Victoria, listing 62 'vegetational alliances' and recording their distribution. About 40% were assessed as reasonably well protected, while 27% required 'urgent measures'.

She warned that it could be difficult to locate 'relatively undamaged examples' of some communities, especially grasslands. She also found that 39% of native plants were not recorded in any reserve.

Highlighted threats included fire, fertilisers, invasive species, pollution, spear fishing, river improvement schemes, dams, and grazing in alpine areas.

The review recommended the establishment of large reserves in 11 regions, new and enlarged national parks, and marine reserves. • PW



## Nature Conservation in Victoria: Study Report (1987)

The second review, by Doug Frood and Malcolm Calder, again assessed the adequacy of the reserve system and identified species and communities in need of further protection.

By this time, the Land Conservation Council (established in 1971) had completed its first round of regional studies and made over 4000 recommendations for public land. Most high priority areas identified in the 1971 review had been protected in national parks.

Frood and Calder reviewed major management issues such as fire regimes, timber harvesting, grazing, introduced species and disturbance factors. Priorities for protection were grasslands and grassy woodlands, mallee woodlands, saltbush scrublands, wetlands and riparian communities. • PW

## Nature Conservation Review Victoria 2001

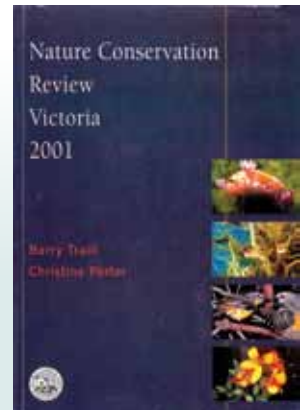
The aim of the third review, by Barry Traill and Christine Porter, was to identify gaps in the reserve system and in conservation policies and programs, and recommend reforms to slow and reverse biodiversity losses.

Clearing controls on private land, introduced in 1989, had reduced native vegetation losses from about 15,000 hectares to 3000 ha annually. But despite this and other new measures, extinction processes were continuing largely unabated.

Less than a fifth of ecological vegetation classes (EVCs) were adequately protected and more than half were threatened or extinct. Urgent protection was needed for vegetation remnants in south-western Victoria, riverine forests and woodlands, the Strzelecki Ranges, and box-ironbark woodlands and forests.

Action was also needed to address invasive species, and climate change threats and impacts on freshwater systems.

Only 600 hectares of Victoria's marine waters were then protected. The review recommended that 20% of each major marine habitat be protected within a minimum of two national parks in each bioregion. • PW



## Progress since 2001

Although the majority of recommendations from the 2001 review have not yet been implemented, some important progress has been made:

- regulatory and policy reforms to reduce clearing
- establishment of 13 marine national parks and sanctuaries, protecting 5.3% of state waters
- new national parks declared, including those protecting box-ironbark woodlands, red gum woodlands, East Gippsland forests, grasslands and the Otways.

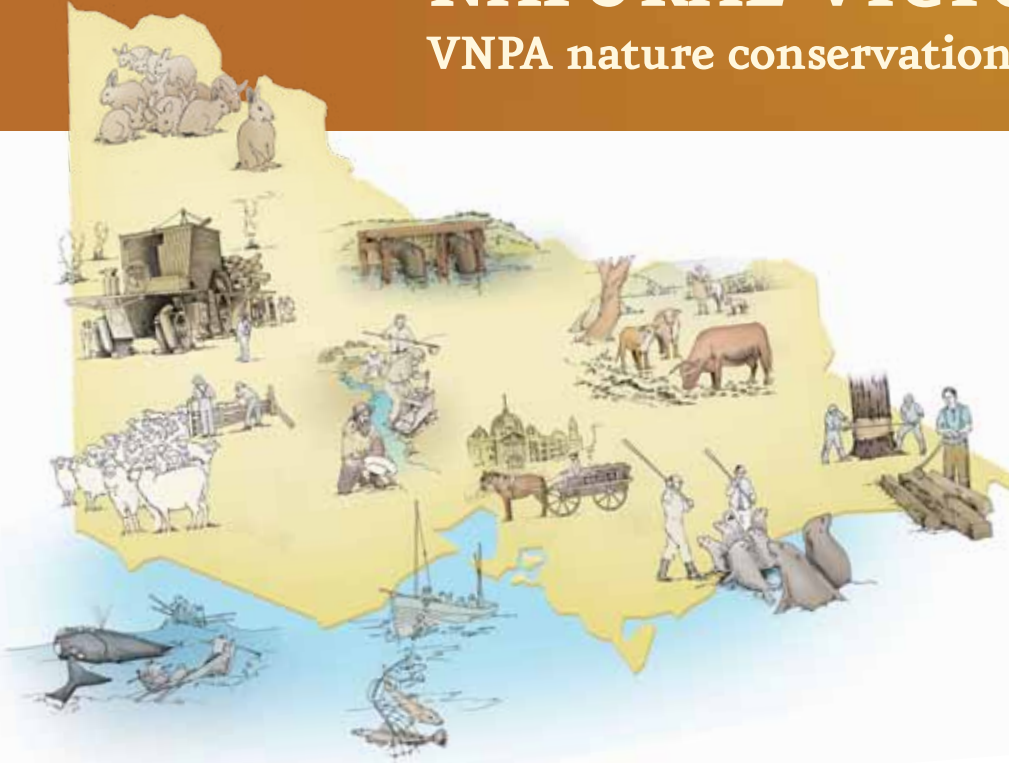
However, since the 2010 state election many environmental reforms have been reversed or abandoned, including the 2009 White Paper for protecting biodiversity under climate change.

Controls on land clearing, forestry, firewood collection and planning have been weakened, and national parks are being opened to damaging exploitation. And cattle grazing in parks is an ongoing issue. • PW



# NATURAL VICTORIA:

## VNPA nature conservation review 2014



## Victoria: a short environmental history

The nature conservation review starts with an historical perspective, for many of today's problems are legacies of the past.

This is not to blame our pioneers, but to recognise that conserving Victoria's natural heritage is about managing the dramatic impacts European settlement has had in the past, as well as the impacts of what we do now.

This 'ecological debt' is profound in Victoria and is one we need to address,

particularly in the face of a changing climate, if future generations are to enjoy the bush and its wildlife as we do.

Below is a summary of the stages of Victoria's development since the early 1800s. The complete account by environmental historian Don Garden is in the full review.

You might like to ask a young family member or friend to match the graphics on the map with the stages of development listed. • PW

### Traditional Owners

Although the review concentrates on the period since European occupation, the VNPA acknowledges the many Traditional Owners of Victoria's natural areas as follows:

*"Aboriginal people occupied Victoria for tens of thousands of years before their communities were decimated by European occupation.*

*Their relationship to the land was both profound and clever. They used fire to clear pathways, hunt animals and promote the abundance of useful plants, significantly changing some*

*natural systems in local areas. They promoted the growth of many food plants, and in places transformed natural waterways to harvest eels and other foods. Their links to the land were driven by spirituality as well as practicality, and they were strongly protective of the natural world.*

*This fourth VNPA nature conservation review acknowledges the long history of Indigenous occupation, and respects the ongoing roles and responsibilities of Victoria's Traditional Owners in caring for country."*

## European colonisation 1800-1970

### 1800s–1840s: sealing and whaling

These industries drove themselves to extinction by the 1840s as seal and whale populations crashed through over-exploitation.

### 1834–1851: pastoral settlement

By 1850 sheep and cattle were grazing over much of Victoria's central and western plains. Land degradation soon became apparent.

### 1851–1870: the gold era

Gold mining caused great environmental damage, especially in central Victoria. Creeks were dammed and diverted, vast woodlands stripped for timber. The Wimmera and Mallee, the dense Gippsland forests and the alps remained largely unoccupied.

### 1870–1901: selection, agriculture and Marvellous Melbourne

Under selection laws, land used for grazing was subdivided for small farms. By 1900, millions of acres had been cleared, particularly in the Northern Plains, Goulburn Valley and Wimmera. Melbourne's population reached half a million.

### 1901–1945: closer settlement, irrigation, forestry

Large areas cleared, particularly in the Mallee. Irrigation was developed and the area under crops more than doubled. Timber cutters worked their way into the hills and mountains surrounding Melbourne. Bird protection and bushwalking became popular.

### 1945–1970: prosperity, technology and environmentalism

Post World War 2 brought more clearing and degradation, but also movements for nature protection. The VNPA was formed in 1952 and led advocacy for the 1956 National Parks Act. The 1960s Little Desert campaign was followed by the creation of the Land Conservation Council, resulting in many more national and other parks. • PW



## Drivers and trends: current and future threats to nature

Victoria is still far from having a comprehensive, adequate and representative national park and conservation system, and most major threats to nature identified in past reviews are still very much with us – habitat loss and degradation, invasive species, harmful fire regimes, over-grazing, modified water flows.

Victorians must prepare for a more difficult future. Major current trends increase the urgent need to strengthen protection for nature.

**Climate change:** Already significantly affecting life in Victoria, climate change will drive multiple cascading changes – in temperature and rainfall patterns, extreme weather events, sea level rise and ocean acidity – and exacerbate many other threats, particularly severe fire events and invasive species.

There needs to be a concerted effort to build the resilience of ecological and human communities and their potential for adaptation.

**Population growth:** Precious habitat remnants are being bulldozed for urban expansion or roads. More people are emitting more greenhouse gases, consuming more natural resources and introducing more invasive species. By mid-century Victoria's population is predicted to reach 8.7 million.

At the same time, a more indoor lifestyle is severing many Victorians from nature, undermining their health and wellbeing as well as their interest in conservation.

**Land-use intensification:** The majority of land in Victoria, and much of the sea as well, is subjected to intense human exploitation. Increasing intensification of land-use, primarily for agriculture, involves clearing, simplifying habitats and increasing inputs of water, fertilisers and pesticides.

Aspirations to increase Australia's food exports are likely to drive further intensification. However, some former agricultural lands are being used for other purposes, some detrimental and some beneficial for conservation.

Some 60% of Victoria's land area is used for agriculture; about 80% of this land has been cleared. • PW

*Narrow-leaved Peppermint (E. radiata),  
Wombat State Forest. Our native forests  
need more protection.*

*Short-headed Seahorse,  
Port Phillip. Marine  
conservation is  
a priority.*



PHOTO: JOHN GASKELL

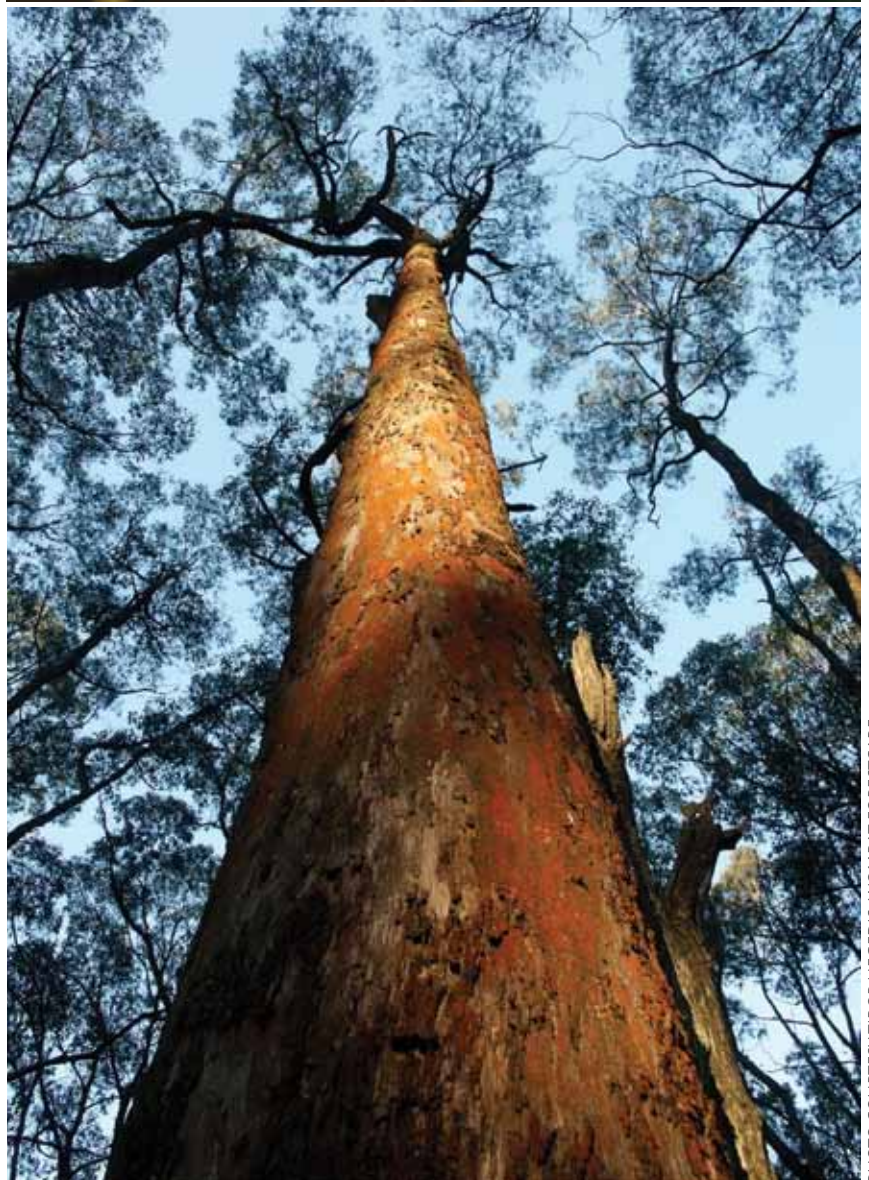


PHOTO COURTESY TIBOR HEGEDIS, WOMBAT FORESTCARE



# NATURAL VICTORIA:

## VNPA nature conservation review 2014

### Getting to grips with the NCR

CHAPTER 1 OF THE REVIEW SETS THE SCENE. CHAPTERS 2 TO 5 DETAIL VICTORIA'S NATURAL ECOSYSTEMS AND HOW THEY SHOULD BE MANAGED AND PROTECTED. THESE FOUR CHAPTERS ARE BRIEFLY SUMMARISED BELOW.

#### Marine and coastal ecosystems (Ch. 2)

This chapter recognises the need for integrated management of these two environments. The area covered is waters under Victorian government control (5.5km seaward from the high water mark), and land within 500 metres of the shoreline.

Section 2.1 describes the natural, social and economic values of these ecosystems. 2.2 outlines the status of biodiversity and protected areas, and the condition of bays, inlets and estuaries, and 2.3 details major threats – particularly climate change, coastal development, invasive species and fishing.

Section 2.4 identifies bioregional priorities for new and expanded marine national parks and sanctuaries. For coastal subregions, section 2.5 has an analysis of values, threats, and priorities for upgrading the reserve system.

The chapter concludes with policy gaps and priority reforms in three major areas: improving knowledge; creating a comprehensive, adequate and representative national park and conservation system; and strengthening management of marine and coastal environments.

#### Terrestrial ecosystems (Ch. 3)

The focus is terrestrial biodiversity, particularly native vegetation and the national park and conservation system.

The first section highlights the natural, social and economic values of Victoria's terrestrial ecosystems and describes the major habitat types. The second outlines the current state of biodiversity, native vegetation and public and private protected areas.



*Large areas of Victoria's old-growth forest need permanent protection under the National Parks Act.*

Section 3.3 is a gap analysis of the national park and conservation system in its protection of subregional ecological vegetation classes, applying criteria defined for this review. 3.4 describes and exemplifies four major categories of threat to terrestrial biodiversity and ecological processes: climate change, habitat loss and degradation, invasive species, and altered fire regimes.

The last two sections identify major policy gaps and high priority reforms in the national park and conservation system; in protection of native vegetation, including forests; and in management of bushfires and invasive species.

#### Freshwater ecosystems (Ch. 4)

Chapter 4 focuses on rivers, streams, wetlands and aquifers, in particular riparian and floodplain habitats. Estuarine and coastal ecosystems such as mangroves and salt marshes are covered in chapter 2.

Section 4.1 describes the natural values of Victoria's freshwater ecosystems and the major habitat types; 4.2 characterises important ecological processes, particularly natural flow regimes; and 4.3 describes the current state of biodiversity and habitats in freshwater ecosystems. Section 4.4 outlines major threats, in particular disruptions to flow regimes and degradation of freshwater habitats.

Finally, gaps and priority reforms for policies and action programs are identified in six major areas: environmental flows, riparian habitats, freshwater protected areas, wetlands, groundwater, and catchment management.

#### Environmental governance (Ch. 5)

Environmental governance is the system of laws, implementation mechanisms, accountability regimes and institutional arrangements necessary for environmental protection and biodiversity conservation.

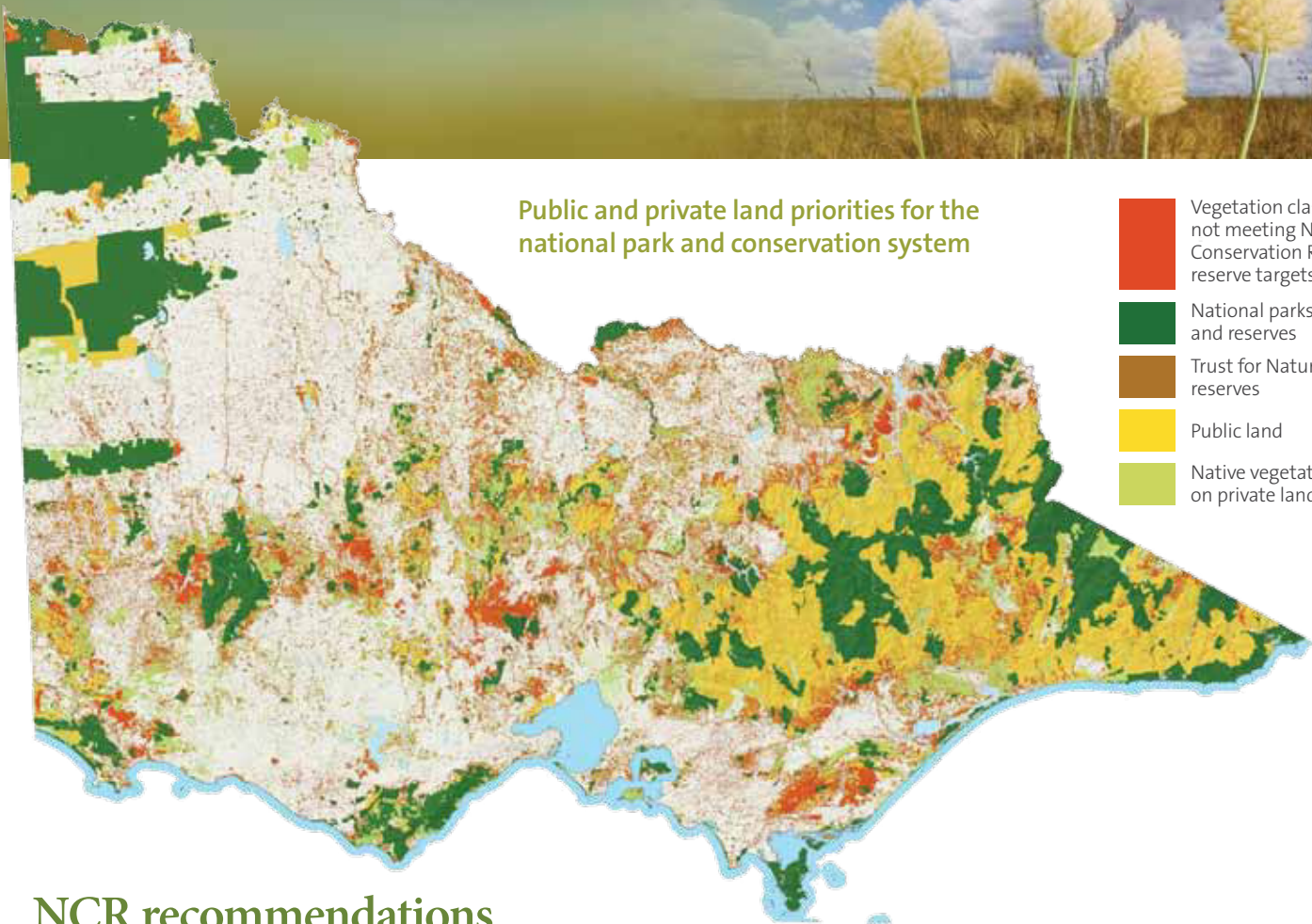
Governance is not the same as government. It also encompasses communities, businesses, NGOs and more. But the focus is primarily the Victorian government, as the main administrator of the laws, policies and programs concerning the Victorian environment.

Modernising and integrating environmental laws and institutional arrangements are emphasised, along with broad areas of reform such as adapting to climate change, protecting threatened biodiversity, and managing invasive species.

Section 5.1 outlines the patterns of governance failings in Victoria; 5.2 covers the priority reforms needed for environmental laws, institutional structures and processes, federal involvement in protected areas, planning, climate change adaptation, funding and knowledge.

The third section identifies and describes five priority landscape clusters for nature conservation (the SW, central Victoria, Melbourne metro, Gippsland Plains and Strzeleckis, East Gippsland) and the fourth summarises the recommended reforms. • PW





Public and private land priorities for the national park and conservation system

- Vegetation classes not meeting Nature Conservation Review reserve targets
- National parks and reserves
- Trust for Nature reserves
- Public land
- Native vegetation on private land

## NCR recommendations

### Environmental governance

The Review notes that Victoria has the knowledge, wealth and capacity to arrest most threats to nature and restore environmental health.

But because of flawed government systems, as well as wilful anti-environmental choices, the processes and measures to achieve environmental objectives have not been implemented.

A new structure is needed for Victoria's environmental and sustainability agencies. These agencies should be based on the following principles:

- lines of responsibility should be defined so that each agency has clear objectives, functions and targets
- regulatory roles should be separated from policy setting and management
- environmental regulators should be independent
- ecological sustainability and biodiversity conservation should be core principles in all government departments
- accountability should include regular reporting and independent audits.

The Review proposes three new state agencies: Nature Victoria to look after parks and biodiversity, Communities

and Landscapes Victoria to manage fire, water and other public land, and Production Victoria for fisheries, farming, forestry and mining.

Local governments now have considerable environmental responsibilities, so they too should receive the funding and resources to implement their obligations.

Because the Commonwealth has no direct legal means to intervene when state governments undermine the integrity of national parks, we recommend that national parks should also be protected under federal environmental laws, and receive federal government funding for special park management programs.

### Funding

The failure to invest sufficient public funds to arrest environmental decline in Victoria is exacting enormous economic as well as environmental and social costs.

There needs to be much greater recognition that the natural environment provides essential services, and directly and indirectly sustains the Victorian economy.

Only a small proportion of the Victorian budget goes to support nature conservation, and government agencies are unable to meet their fundamental environmental obligations. Parks Victoria receives just 0.6% of the state budget.

There is a great need for funding to improve knowledge of Victoria's biodiversity and how to manage it. The review proposes the establishment of a Victorian Biodiversity Fund to support programs necessary to build the resilience of Victoria's ecosystems.

### Priority Landscape Clusters

The Review makes many recommendations, and priorities need to be identified. Certain areas in Victoria (shown red on map) stand out as having very high conservation values and facing high levels of threats.

Over the next 10-20 years the following outcomes are sought for each of these clusters:

- completion of the reserve system on public lands
- improving conservation management for private lands
- involving the community in advocacy, on-ground works and citizen science. • PW





# THERE'S MORE TO LEARN ABOUT FIRE

VNPA PARK PROTECTION CAMPAIGNER **PHIL INGAMELLS** SAYS THERE ARE BETTER WAYS OF REDUCING BUSHFIRE RISK THAN EXCESSIVE CONTROL BURNING.

**For three years now, Neil Comrie, the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission's independent monitor, has strongly advised the Victorian Government to abandon one of the Commission's recommendations: the call to burn 390,000 hectares of public land annually for fuel reduction.**

Yet Environment Minister Ryan Smith is sticking to that target and, even more puzzling, DEPI plans to increase the annual target to an extraordinary 450,000 ha in the coming years.

Former police Chief Commissioner Comrie understands the importance of

fuel reduction, but he sees the target as unachievable, and that it compromises a strategic burn program.

He says in his last (and final) report that it "will not necessarily reduce the bushfire risk to life and property, and may have adverse environmental outcomes".

That's an expensive lose/lose situation.

Minister Smith says he is listening to the latest science, but is he?

Five leading fire behaviour scientists in Australia, Canada and the USA

have demonstrated that managing the ignition point of a fire is more effective in reducing the extent of fire than fuel reduction.

Managing the ignition point can happen through a combination of means, such as increased capacity for rapid attack at the source of a fire, by closing public access to remote areas during high fire danger days, and also through public education.

And other published papers from leading Australian fire scientists and ecologists convincingly show that fuel reduction burns are most effective





PHOTO COURTESY OF WWW.WILDFIRESAFETYBUNKERS.COM.AU

Above: The only commercially available approved household bushfire shelter. More information at [www.wildfiresafetybunkers.com.au](http://www.wildfiresafetybunkers.com.au)

Left: Satellite photograph of management burns across eastern Victoria (over 50 are indicated in red) in March 2011. Fuel reduction burns are at unprecedented levels in Victoria.

Mallee region of Victoria, NSW and South Australia, involving more than 20 biologists and ecologists as researchers and collaborators, produced some alarming results.

It seems that frequent burns in the Mallee will harm wildlife, and the now rare long-unburnt Mallee country is quite crucial for many species.

And it's not just the Mallee that's causing concern.

Victoria's 2013 *State of the Environment Report* raised concerns about the level of burning across the State, saying that "40% of native vegetation [was] estimated to be below minimum tolerable fire intervals" already, that there is only around 3% of very long-unburnt bush left, and that many species were at risk.

Importantly, fuel reduction burning isn't by any means the only way to reduce the bushfire risk, and certainly not the best way to save lives.

A proven, practical way to survive a severe bushfire is to have your own well-designed bunker at your home. Unfortunately that crucial fact wasn't strongly emphasised in the Royal

Commission's final recommendations, and the reason is truly unfortunate.

The Commission considered some things so urgent that it put out a preliminary report, asking that an Australian Standard for private bunker design be developed urgently. That happened, so the call for private bunkers lacked emphasis in the final recommendations.

Since then, the issue has largely slipped off the radar. Hardly anyone knows of the Standard, it's difficult to find advice recommending installing a bunker at your home, and only one design is commercially available (illustrated here).

We need to develop a more comprehensive strategy for bushfire management and direct more attention to the whole range of available tools, including significantly boosting Victoria's rapid attack capability, encouraging well-designed bunkers in existing homes, and developing a far more strategic burn program.

Lives would be saved, and our great natural heritage would benefit. • PW

This is a longer version of an opinion article published in the *Weekly Times* on 27 August 2014.

when performed close to the assets they are meant to protect.

This is the sort of strategic effort – small, difficult and expensive local burns – that Neil Comrie says is less likely to happen when managers are struggling to sign off on a large area target.

Other studies are showing us that we now have very little long-unburnt bush left in Victoria, and that the impacts on native wildlife are serious and growing.

A series of recent studies by La Trobe and Deakin universities in the Murray

PHOTO: NASA

Participants in the scenario-planning workshop for Westernport held recently at the Newhaven Yacht Club, Phillip Island.

## Westernport futures considered

**The Victorian Government is planning to build an international container port at Hastings, on the western shore of Westernport Bay, which could significantly change the economy and ecology of the region.**

Following the release of the Australian Conservation Foundation's preliminary study into the ecological values of Westernport, Professor Robert Costanza, a world-leading ecological economist from the Australian National University, recommended a scenario-planning workshop to look at the alternative futures for the Westernport Bay region.

Scenario planning explores and evaluates plausible futures, and can be used to guide regional development, corporate strategy, political transition and community-based natural resource management.

A scenario-planning workshop was held on Phillip Island from 28 July to 1 August 2014, organised by Preserve Western Port Action Group and the VNPA, facilitated by the ANU and generously supported by the Bass Coast Shire Council.

Academics, key regional decision-makers, strategic planners, scientists, business people, local councillors and members of community groups, 75 people in all representing 40 organisations, attended the workshop

and analysed potential future scenarios that could secure or undermine the economic, social and environmental future of the Westernport Bay region.

After a series of presentations on Day 1, workshop participants were divided into four groups, each with the task of developing a plausible scenario for the region in the year 2040.

The narrative of each scenario depended on the extent to which policies for conventional economic development and UN sustainable development goals were implemented in and beyond the region.

The four groups each developed a 2040 scenario for the Westernport Bay Region.

**1. The WesternFreePort scenario** for 2040 pursues regional economic growth, supported by the conventional economic development policies at state, federal and international levels and with little concern for its environmental impact. This scenario presumes that the planned major development of the Port of Hastings has proceeded.

**2. The Beacon scenario** has the region's community resisting the conventional economic policies of the Victorian and federal governments to ensure sustainable regional development. The Port of Hastings is smaller than it is now, and is used by small domestic and international vessels and those for local cruises, dive tourism and training.

### We need your views!

Key outcomes of the scenario planning workshop are an interim report and a pilot survey on people's views about the four scenarios developed.

The results of the survey, along with other feedback, will be incorporated into a final report on scenario planning for the Westernport Bay region.

The interim report and survey are on the VNPA website. We'd really appreciate it if you could take the time to complete the online survey.

- 3. The Creative Growth scenario** has technocratic and top-down promotion and management of development using innovative technology to monitor and regulate compliance with sustainable development goals within a locally conventional economic framework. The Port of Hastings is redeveloped on the existing footprint to allow small container ships to load and unload without the need for channel or port deepening.
- 4. The Lagom scenario** is a community-based and collectivist approach to implementing sustainable development goals with the full support of the Victorian and federal governments and international agreements and frameworks. The Port of Hastings is retrofitted to allow use by small, fuel-efficient vessels.

Each group presented its scenario to a plenary session on Day 5 of the workshop.

The next step is to conduct a public opinion survey to determine how the broader community ranks the scenarios and scenario features. • PW



Port facilities at Hastings are fairly modest now, but the government talks about enormous expansion.

PHOTO: MATT RUCHEL

PHOTO: 'RED NECKED AVOCETS' BY FRANKZED (CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE/WWW.FLICKR.COM)

# Hastings: build it, but will they come?

ASIDE FROM ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS, VICTORIA UNIVERSITY TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS EXPERTS QUESTION WHETHER HASTINGS IS A FEASIBLE LOCATION FOR A MAJOR NEW CONTAINER PORT.

The Victoria University Institute for Supply Chain and Logistics (ISCL) recently released a comprehensive paper that assesses issues and options for the location of Melbourne's next container port.

The report, *Build it - but will they come?* by the ISCL's Dr Hermione Parsons and Peter Van Duyn was independently funded by Victoria University.

Dr Parsons said that past and present Victorian Governments have held a preference for Hastings over alternative port locations, but that this preference needs to be reviewed in relation to the commercial realities of maritime and landside logistics and supply chains.

The report says: "Governments have stated the crucial reason for the development of the Port of Hastings is that a deep water port is needed to cater for much larger ships with a draft of 16 metres.

"Today, however, many industry experts suggest these mega ships may not come to Australia and Victoria."

A 2009 Port of Melbourne study showed that about half of all import and export containers passing through the Port originated in, or were destined for, the crescent of industrial land on both sides of the Western Ring Road

*Red-necked Avocets at Westernport highlight the area's natural values and environmental importance.*



between Altona and Laverton in the west and Hume in the north.

65% of total containers are transported less than 22 km in the first and last transport legs via the Port of Melbourne.

"Based on 2011-12 container volumes, mathematical modelling by ISCL shows a shift to the Port of Hastings would cause a doubling of truck operating costs, increased travel time and emissions, and air quality degradation," the report continues.

"If a significant proportion of the businesses to the west of Melbourne's central business district remain in their present locations, the potential freight transportation impact could be significant.

"When the Port of Hastings reaches its planned capacity of 9 million containers in 2050, the landside task could potentially involve the movement of 4.5 million containers annually to and from Melbourne's main western industrial district.

*"This would require 1.5 million B-double trucks, or 50,000 freight trains carrying 90 containers per train, per year. That's over 4,000 trucks or 140 trains a day moving across Melbourne's road and rail network between Hastings and the city's industrial west and north.*

"The freight logistics industry and the Victorian government recognise that the current freight rail network cannot cope with this substantial increase in traffic.

"Given the current road and rail infrastructure and distribution of import/export containers, over 70% of all containers would have to work their way through the Melbourne metropolitan area to reach Hastings.

"The current road network would require substantial improvement and development to cope with the increased traffic and truck trip distances."

Dr Parsons says that ISCL is able to offer a considered voice based on independent research into supply chain issues. She believes a discussion which is free of political bias is required in order to achieve the best supply chain and logistics outcomes for Victoria and south-eastern Australia. • PW

Western Port shoreline at low tide, showing mudflats and mangroves.

# Wonders of Westernport

**JULIA PICKWICK OF BWAG** RECENTLY LED A WALK, TALK AND GAWK ALONG THE WARRINGINE BOARDWALK. PARTICIPANTS ENJOYED IT SO MUCH THAT THEY SAID SHE HAD TO WRITE IT UP FOR *PARK WATCH*!

One of the best kept secrets on the Mornington Peninsula, the Warringine Park Coastal Wetlands boardwalk is unique as the only site in Westernport where you can walk through mangrove forests, saltmarshes, estuarine lakes and seagrass meadows.

Winding its way from Hastings to Jacks Beach, the boardwalk lets you discover just what makes these coastal wetlands so special.

Before European settlement, the wetlands extended virtually uninterrupted along the fringes of Westernport. Extensive seagrass beds supported numerous marine species, mangrove forests were up to 100m wide and salt marshes stretched almost 1km inland.

Today coastal development, dredging, altered water regimes and increased sediment loads have impacted greatly on these significant but fragile ecosystems.

However, Westernport is still an internationally recognised RAMSAR wetland site with important foraging areas, roosting sites and breeding grounds for many waterbird species, including migratory waders. It also protects significant remnant vegetation which includes floristically diverse salt marshes and some of the world's southernmost mangroves.

The coastal wetlands of Westernport are protected from strong currents and wave action, and are either temporarily or permanently inundated by both tides and freshwater run-off. Filtering out pollutants and keeping waters clean, they support a broad range of flora and fauna perfectly adapted to living in a highly saline environment.



PHOTO: MELANIE DAUMAN



PHOTOS: JULIA PICKWICK

*Beaded Glasswort in saltmarsh.*

*Seagrass bed.*

*Mangroves and pneumatophores.*

The saltmarshes occur in the muddy upper intertidal zones of the coastal wetlands, protected from the sea by mangrove forests. Characteristically stunted, saltmarsh plants are highly adapted to tolerating full sun, frequent saltwater inundations and soils up to 25 times saltier than the ocean. Once widespread, saltmarshes now cover less than 10% of Westernport.

Mangrove forests fringe many parts of the ocean side of the Westernport coastline, serving as a buffer zone. They survive twice daily tidal inundations, excreting excess salt through leaf pores, and at low tide breathing through exposed roots called pneumatophores. The only mangrove found in Victoria is the White Mangrove, and over 50% of these are found in Westernport.

Seagrasses form large aquatic meadows in the shallow protected waters and estuarine lakes of Westernport. The meadows control erosion, stabilise sediments and recycle nutrients. They also offer valuable habitat and refuge for birds, and are nurseries for juvenile fish, crustaceans and molluscs.

Seagrass is extremely vulnerable to increased disturbance and sediment loads. Since European settlement there has been a huge decline in Westernport's once-extensive seagrass beds. This in turn has seen a fall in bird and fish populations that depend on the meadows.

Significantly, a recent IUCN study found that mangroves, seagrasses and saltmarsh plants are extremely efficient carbon sinks, absorbing carbon from the atmosphere and storing it in the soil. According to the report, these plant communities store ten times more carbon in their soils per hectare than temperate forests, and 50 times more carbon than tropical forests.

The value of Westernport lies not only in its amazing biodiversity but also in the abilities of the coastal ecosystems to store carbon. With increased awareness of the potential impacts of climate change, it's more important than ever to protect what we have left of these extraordinary ecosystems. • PW

The Warringine Park Coastal boardwalk is located in Bittern on the Mornington Peninsula. It can be accessed from Jacks Beach in Bittern or Salmon St in Hastings.



# Southern Rock Lobster study shows value of MPAs

VNPA MARINE CAMPAIGNER  
SIMON BRANIGAN REPORTS.

A study has found double the amount of rock lobsters within the Merri Marine Sanctuary (MS), near Warrnambool, compared to fished areas outside. They were also 3-5 times greater in terms of biomass.

Average lengths of both male and female rock lobsters were greater within the Merri MS compared with sites outside, and there was a greater aggregation of larger males inside the Sanctuary. This is of ecological significance, in that larger males result in higher fecundity and breeding success within the population.

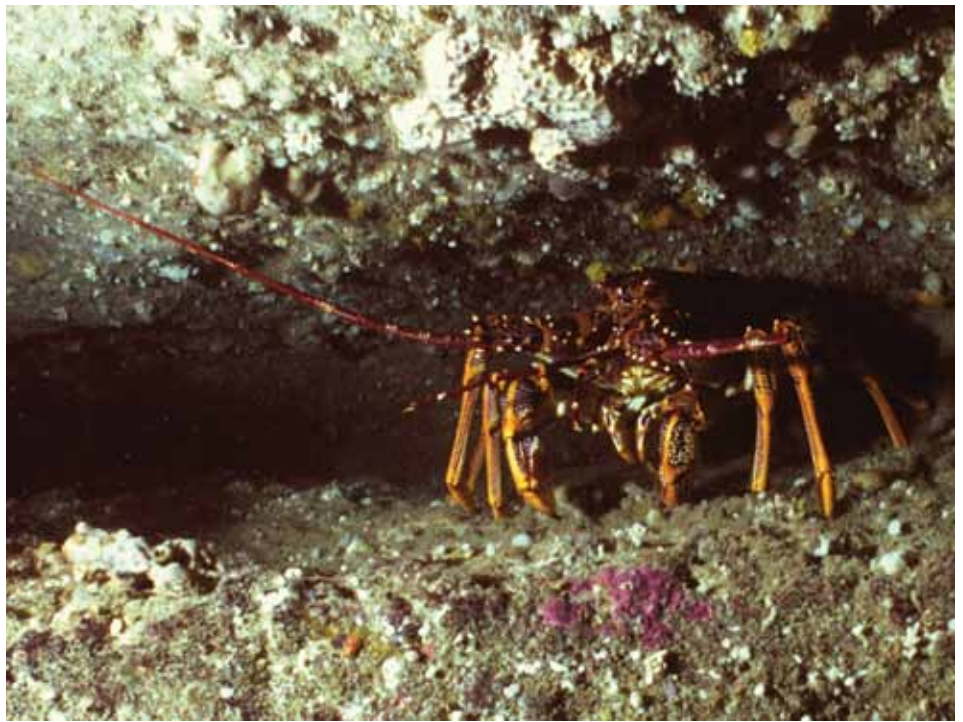
Southern Rock Lobsters are a key indicator of healthy and functioning reef systems. The observed changes in the population suggest that the Merri MS may be a significant scientific reference area for understanding natural reef ecosystem processes.

As research in Tasmania has shown, larger lobsters can limit intrusions of sea urchins (such as the invasive *Centrostephanus rodgersii*) and provide ecological resilience.

The survey results could also suggest changes in abundance in rock lobsters in other marine national parks in Victoria (e.g. Port Phillip Heads MNP).

These increases in abundance and size are consistent with changes expected from reduced fishing pressure.

Non-fished Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are valuable for examining and understanding important natural ecosystem-level processes.



Top: Southern Rock Lobster in crevice.

Above: Hauling up a lobster pot.

Left: Measuring a lobster's carapace.

PHOTOS: COURTESY PARKS VICTORIA

Monitoring and assessing lobster populations in MPAs is valuable as well in meeting the primary objective of protecting biodiversity, and in informing the management of reef biodiversity outside Victoria's MPAs.

This pilot survey by Woods and Edmunds (2013), the first of its kind anywhere in the state, is part of Parks Victoria's ongoing sub-tidal reef monitoring program.

A sample population of the rock lobsters surveyed was tagged and released for follow-up research.

Deakin University also took genetic samples of the rock lobsters surveyed, with the long-term goal (depending on funding) of assessing connectivity and levels of recruitment of rock lobsters inside and outside the Sanctuary. • PW





# Five more years of grazing?

VNPA RIVER RESCUE COORDINATOR **NICK ROBERTS** SAYS THAT  
THE LONG-STANDING ISSUE OF CATTLE GRAZING ON RIPARIAN PUBLIC LAND  
NEEDS URGENT ATTENTION.

*Cattle on the water's edge, Barmah area. Cattle grazing is a risk to human health as well as to riverside flora and fauna.*

**It's that time again. The five-yearly renewal of grazing licences for Crown Water Frontages (CWFs) will be upon us in October this year.**

In other words, five more years for licences allowing cattle to graze, pollute, and trample riverside (riparian) land along many of Victoria's rivers and creeks.

Both sides of Victorian politics have consistently failed to take decisive action on removing cattle from CWFs so far. But the case for good public policy has never been stronger.

Impacts on biodiversity, native vegetation, water quality and river health from domestic stock are well known, and accepted by all governments.

Following significant work by the VNPA on human health-related

impacts of cows polluting rivers, the Victorian Department of Health has also identified risks to people's health from cattle accessing waterways.

Governments have traditionally argued that they are 'working on this', but the rate of change is glacial. Under current program funding levels it will take over 85 years to remove cattle from public riparian land across Victoria!

Ironically, a recent Auditor-General report found major flaws with one potential funding source for fixing the problem, the Environmental Contribution Levy (ECL), saying "...there are deficiencies in [the Department of Environment and Primary Industry's] management of the ECL. In particular, there are weaknesses in [its] processes for selecting and prioritising proposed projects, articulating the levy's strategic priorities and costs, evaluating the effectiveness of the levy and public reporting of the ECL."

Additionally, massive amounts of money have been wasted by the Office of Living Victoria (OLV) – the water agency controlled by Water Minister Peter Walsh. This money could have been invested in riparian works and measures.

Widespread irregularities and wastage have been reported within OLV. "*One of the biggest cabals of mates looking after mates this state has seen*" is how a senior Victorian public servant described OLV to *The Age* newspaper.

The end of five-year grazing licences should be the ideal trigger for implementing a new, accelerated program to reward good land managers, at the same time removing poor management practices from riparian land. After all, this is public land, not farmland.





PHOTO COURTESY NICK ROBERTS

*Above: Creek and banks severely affected by grazing, trampling and erosion.*

*Left: Degraded stream frontage near Numurkah.*



PHOTO COURTESY NICK ROBERTS

The bigger picture should include the Napthine Government delivering on its promise to conduct a Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) investigation into freshwater ecosystems across Victoria. One of the few environmental policies announced before the 2010 election, this has yet to be delivered.

With a new election rapidly approaching, both sides of Victorian politics have an opportunity to commit to making this happen. Our rivers, streams and riparian land, their flora and fauna, and the communities that rely on clean and fresh water from Victoria's rivers and streams, will certainly thank them for it. • PW

### FAST FACTS

- More than 30,000 km of Victoria's publicly-owned land abut inland waterways.
- The 2004 Index of Stream Condition assessment reported that only 21% of major rivers and tributaries in Victoria were in good or excellent condition.
- The same assessment also showed that 14% of major rivers and tributaries had riparian vegetation in good condition.
- Throughout much of regional Victoria, riparian land represents a substantial proportion of all remaining native vegetation.
- Cattle effluent pollutes fresh water, destroys fish breeding cycles and encourages the proliferation of disease organisms and algae.
- Cattle faeces contain pathogens (infectious agents or germs) that can be transmitted to people.



*Sealers Cove, Wilsons Promontory National Park. We have much to be proud of in Victoria's park system.*

# How did it happen?

PHOTO: DAVID NEILSON

PHIL INGAMELLS WONDERES HOW THE WORLD PARKS CONGRESS, ORIGINALLY TO BE HOSTED IN MELBOURNE, ENDED UP IN SYDNEY.



**On 12 November this year, several thousand park managers, ecologists, recreation planners, health specialists and Indigenous leaders will arrive in Sydney from the far corners of the globe.**

They'll be there for the World Parks Congress, a once in every ten years event that brings together people with ideas, and concerns, about how best to manage the world's great protected areas.

Organised by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the event was originally planned and won for Melbourne.

But in a bizarre decision by the incoming Baillieu Government, the Melbourne venue was abruptly cancelled. Sydney stepped in to save the day.

We still have no idea why the Liberal/National coalition didn't want this huge event for Melbourne.

Were they worried about drawing attention to plans to re-introduce cattle grazing to the alps? Or about international visitors planning excursions to Victoria's poorly funded national parks?

Whatever it was, Victoria has missed out on a week or more of full bookings for its hotels in Melbourne and B&Bs around the state, and missed an unrepeatable chance to promote our national parks and other attractions to the world.

It might have meant a bit of investment in park infrastructure, and sorting out a few blatant underfunded management issues, but the benefits to Melbourne and regional Victoria would have been considerable and long-lasting.

The USA has long considered national parks its greatest invention, but Victoria must now be viewed around the world as the place that is too embarrassed to show anyone its national parks – for no good reason.

So now, through that week in November, the global gaze of anyone involved in protecting natural areas will be on Sydney.

Over 40 speakers and a host of workshops and other events will explore issues around protecting ecosystems, climate change impacts, health and well-being, improving park governance, respecting traditional cultures and, importantly, inspiring the next generation of park managers.

## World Parks Congresses

Since its first staging in 1962, the World Parks Congress has substantially influenced the way in which the world views systems of protected areas.

- 1962 – Seattle, USA
- 1972 – Yellowstone / Grand Teton National Park, USA
- 1982 – Bali, Indonesia
- 1992 – Caracas, Venezuela
- 2003 – Durban, South Africa

You can find out all about the World Parks Congress at [www.worldparkscongress.org](http://www.worldparkscongress.org)

Marine conservation will feature, opportunities for World Heritage will be discussed and a 'New Social Compact' to achieve successful and socially just conservation will be drafted.

In the meantime, back in Victoria, the government feels free to reduce the staff and expertise of the agencies managing our parks, free to encourage commercial developments in parks with the lure of 99-year leases, free to indulge the spurious claims of cattlemen to be expert conservation managers, and free to engage in an unprecedented burn program across Victoria's conservation estate against expert advice.

If the Victorian government was proud of the way it is treating our great parks and other natural areas, it would have welcomed the attention of the world.

But it chose to hide. • PW



# Plan for nature?

IS VICTORIA'S PARK PLANNING IN CRISIS? PHIL INGAMIELLS LOOKS AT THE DRAFT GREATER ALPINE NATIONAL PARKS MANAGEMENT PLAN.

**In 2008, Parks Victoria proudly announced its planning process for what it called the Greater Alpine National Parks: all of the national parks in the State's alpine region, and a few historic reserves.**

It was to be a ground-breaking process, a new future for management planning and a radical overhaul of public engagement in the process.

It was due to be completed by 2009, but the development of the plan wasn't initially put in the hands of experienced park planners or park managers.

Parks Victoria went to the public, engaging in a bizarre and fruitless wiki-based web process whereby the public were invited to name their favourite places in the alps, and say how they would like them managed. And somewhere along the line even the prime legislated purpose of the park, the protection of nature, came up for reassessment.

Skip forward to early 2013 when a draft plan was finally given some shape and presented to the Environment Minister for release to the public.

It seems to have sat with him for some months, until the Minister decided to reinvent it. He appointed a new Alpine Advisory Committee (the period of appointment for the earlier one had expired), but this one was to be chiefly made up of long-time supporters of the mountain cattlemen, and champions of radically increased fuel reduction burning.

It was after that extraordinary intervention, and the endorsement



PHOTO: DAVID NEILSON

*The Crosscut Saw, Alpine National Park.*

of the skewed advisory group, that a draft plan was finally release for public comment in June this year.

Not surprisingly, the draft celebrated the long history of cattle grazing in the park without even a hint that grazing had caused any damage, and it called for the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria (MCAV) to "participate in operational management" of the park, and that an agreement be formalised with them to "share knowledge and foster strong working relationships."

Further, it enshrined the highly contentious Wonnangatta Valley grazing trial in the plan, while not specifically detailing any other scientific studies.

More importantly, perhaps, it's pretty much implied throughout the plan that scientific knowledge is to be ranked with 'community' or 'local' knowledge. It's a bit like the climate change problem, where every man and his dog is asked whether they 'believe' the science, and if they don't, well, the science must be suspect.

Perhaps the fundamental problem with the plan is that Parks Victoria, understaffed and under attack from anti-park groups in the community, went a bit weak at the knees and sought to 'bring the community in' through its fairly exhaustive, and financially exhausting, process of consultation.

But maybe what the community really wanted was to know that Parks Victoria had the expertise, the resources and the commitment to take control of park management, to produce a draft plan drawing on their expertise, and based on evidence dawn from the decades of scientific studies in the region.

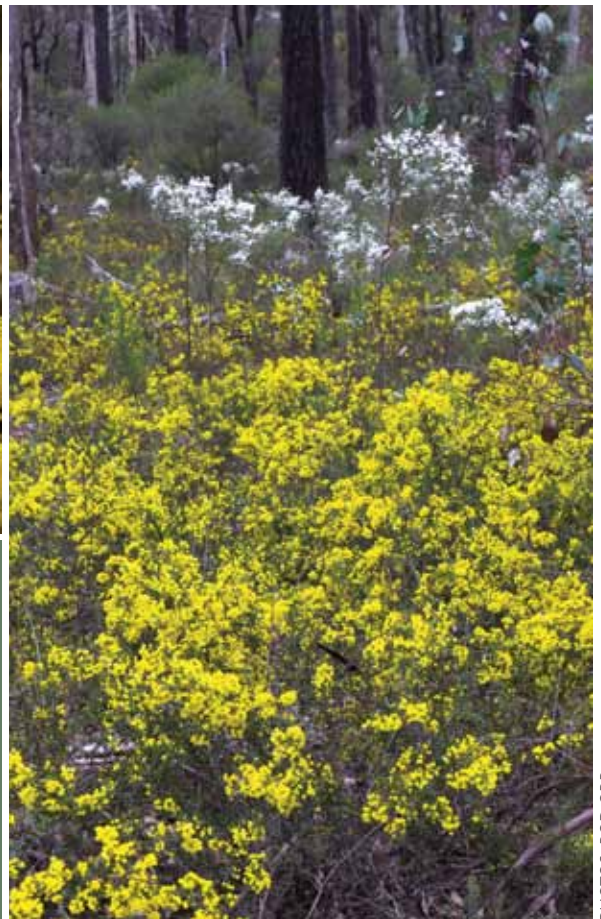
We could have had a draft plan that was securely focused on the individual parks involved, and on the legislated prime objective of national park management: the protection of nature.

We could have had a draft plan worthy of our park management agency, and deserving of public scrutiny.

There are many worthy people in Parks Victoria, with a lot of management experience, and many aspects of the plan are creditable and reflect their input. But as a whole, Parks Victoria, DEPI and the Minister seem to have gone somewhat astray in their planning processes this time around.

Perhaps we can find hope in the words of Tolkien: "Not all those who wander are lost". • PW

The VNPA's full response to the draft *Greater Alpine National Parks Management Plan* can be found at [www.vnpa.org.au](http://www.vnpa.org.au). Just go to Publications/Submissions.



PHOTOS: ROD ORR

## Wattles and Wellsford

Top: Whirrakee Wattle grows in Victoria only in the Bendigo area.  
Bottom: Spreading Wattle has pale flowers.

Above: Gold-dust Wattle and Cypress Daisy growing with ironbarks.

BENDIGO NATURALIST AND PHOTOGRAPHER **ROD ORR** ENCOURAGES US TO HEAD TO BENDIGO TO SEE A FANTASTIC DISPLAY OF WATTLES IN BLOOM.

**After all those wonderful rainy, but dull, winter days we deserve a bit of colour in our lives!**

Fortunately Bendigo is blessed with an impressive diversity of wattles, many of which are flowering now in our surrounding forests.

Our forests are well worth a look in August and September for this spectacle alone, although you can't fail to appreciate many other aspects of the natural values of the forests while you're admiring the wattles.

Late winter is a surprising time to expect a couple of our rarest wattles to flower, but that is their season. Woolly Wattle (*Acacia lanigera*) can be found in a few southern areas, and Bent-leaf Wattle (*Acacia flexifolia*) begins its floral display in the Whipstick.

You'd be lucky to find either of these unless you were taken to the best locations, but other more common wattle species are also flowering, and are much easier to find.

Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*), at its best in August, is especially impressive in the Wellsford Forest, where you'll also notice that Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) has fully developed buds and many plants flowering. This looks like being a very good year for Whirrakee.

Wonderful Wellsford is always worth visiting in any season, but its diverse display of flowering wattles shouldn't be missed.

In September, the rare and beautiful Ausfeld's Wattle (*Acacia ausfeldii*) suddenly shows itself – unmissable when it flowers, but easily overlooked at other times of the year.

The keen observer would notice that Spreading Wattle (*Acacia genistifolia*) has been flowering for several months and is no longer at its best, although a few plants will still manage a few flowers, even until early summer. It's one of our most commonly occurring wattles.

Rough Wattle (*Acacia aspera*) and Gold-dust Wattle (*Acacia acinacea*) are two other very common and widespread species which begin to flower in August and September. In good years (and this promises to be one), both of these wattles turn their patches of forest bright yellow.

Don't miss out. Make an effort to visit Bendigo's native forests to appreciate their impressive natural beauty in spring.

The photographs show something of our good fortune to live in this city, surrounded by forest, much of which is now protected in regional and national parks.

Bendigo naturalists are working with the VNPA and other groups to protect more, particularly the Wellsford Forest.

Don't forget the Wellsford! Until recently its natural values have been overlooked by comparison with other forests, but you'll quickly come to appreciate its great beauty if you visit during spring. • PW



# ANNUAL REPORT 2013-2014



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

VNPA PRESIDENT RUSSELL COSTELLO

My second year as President has been another challenging one for the VNPA, but I'm pleased to say we have steadied the ship and can report a small financial surplus this year.

However, if it weren't for our many supporters, both financial and volunteer, there would be very little to report.

I especially want to thank all our members and our donors, large and small – those who responded to our appeals and those who decided to join the regular giving scheme. You are the reason we can still make a difference.

I said last year that the budget had been tight, with so much to do and defend. The same has been true of this year. Your Council has again deeply appreciated the special efforts and sacrifices by Matt and his staff.

The VNPA is a rare beast. Aside from the mighty efforts of the staff, a large portion of our output comes from the dedicated efforts of our volunteers, including all the members of the Council and its committees, the volunteers who work in the office and those who support the VNPA's campaigns and activities. I thank you all.

A highlight of the past year is the completion of our fourth Nature Conservation Review. This has taken a huge effort by staff, volunteers and consultants, and is our most comprehensive review yet. Congratulations to all those involved. It will be an invaluable guide for us over the coming years.

We also produced a major review of coastal conservation priorities. Chris Smyth's report, *The Coast is Unclear*, is a great contribution to understanding our unique coastal environment.

Our 'Hands Off' human sign at the Prom last November saw some 1200 people attending to 'Shine a Light' for parks. It was a massive effort to send a message that parks are for nature and the future. Our message was supported by over 20 eminent Victorians, who called the Government's development proposals 'a betrayal of public trust'.

In the Supreme Court, we are challenging the lawfulness of the State Government's reintroduction of cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park under the guise of 'research'. This is in many ways a test case, representing a 'line in the sand' against the Government's continued undermining of national parks.

This is a State election year, so it's perhaps timely to reflect on the 'achievements' of the past four years of government.

On the conservation front, this government has been uninspired and uninterested. We welcome its continued support for Landcare, but successive governments have done this. The Two Million Tree initiative allows no understorey planting, so the result is often weedy plantations. Some Crown land has been reallocated to the Yellingbo reservations and a tiny amount of Mountain Ash forest reserved to protect the State's emblem Leadbeater's Possum.

But on the down side, in addition to alpine cattle grazing, it's a long list:

- 99-year leases for private developers in national parks
- handover of the historic Point Nepean Quarantine Station to developers
- 25,000 additional hectares of parks opened up for fossicking and prospecting, even though VEAC found there were significant impacts
- attempts to resume logging in the new red gum parks
- abandoning the creation of a River Murray reserve
- watering down of native vegetation rules
- significant cuts (of over 100 staff) to Parks Victoria
- resumption of logging in the State's western forests, and logging of much of the last remaining Central Highlands Leadbeater's habitat
- significant inroads into Melbourne's Green Wedges, and sell-outs on conservation strategies for the development precincts
- new and increased camping fees to deter visitors to our national parks

- rigid adherence to the 390,000 ha (5%) fuel reduction burning target, devastating easy-to-burn areas like the Mallee parks that pose little threat to people or property rather than control burning high-risk areas near towns
- a major threat to Westernport Bay from the proposed huge port development in this highly sensitive Ramsar wetland

At the national level, we also have Minister Hunt wanting to turn over his powers under the Commonwealth environment legislation to the State. These have been the only effective environmental laws to hold the State back from rampaging over much more of the developable but ecologically valuable land around Melbourne, particularly in recent years.

Whatever lies ahead in this election year, I am sure the challenges will keep coming. On your behalf, we will continue to campaign for a better deal for our parks, for nature conservation and for people to be able to enjoy them in eco-sensitive ways.

## COUNCIL MEMBERS

**President:** *Russell Costello* (Executive, Membership & Marketing, Conservation)

**Vice President:** *Euan Moore* (Executive, Conservation)

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

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

*Ann Birrell* (Executive, Governance Policy & Legal)

*Russell Bowey* (Executive, Bushwalking & Activities Group)

*Andrew Dodd* (Executive, Membership & Marketing) – to 15 May 2014

*Michael Feller* (Conservation)

*Deborah Henry* (Education & Events, Bushwalking & Activities Group)

*Kyle Matheson* (Finance)

*Heather Macauley* (Membership & Marketing) – to March 2014

*Libby Smith* (Membership & Marketing)

*Note: Committee memberships in brackets*



PHOTO: MARTIN BENNETT

## THE YEAR IN REVIEW VNPA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MATT RUCHEL

As always, the VNPA continued to stand up for nature and our national parks estate. This year again we have defended them against a series of threats and backward steps.

### Hands off Parks!

The Napthine Government continued with plans to open parks for commercial operations. We received welcome support on this front when a group of eminent Victorians condemned these moves as 'a betrayal of public trust'. We followed this with our successful 'Shine a Light' activity at the Prom in November. Over 1200 members and supporters travelled down to send a clear 'Hands off Parks!' message.

### Alpine grazing again

The cattle grazing 'trial' in the Alpine NP was resurrected after being blocked by the previous federal government. It received swift approval from new federal Environment Minister Greg Hunt, and commenced for just a few weeks before the cattle were removed with the onset of winter. We have now taken the bold step of challenging the lawfulness of this grazing 'trial' in the Victorian Supreme Court.

### Fossickers get fossicked

The Coalition quietly announced before the 2010 election that it would increase access to national parks for fossickers and prospectors. VEAC investigated this, the government requiring it to identify additional places in parks for such activities. VEAC's report found that these activities have adverse environmental impacts and do not fit with the objectives of national parks. 25,000ha in additional parks were found for fossicking and prospecting, but motorised water pumps used by fossickers have been banned.

### Port of Hastings

There has been much political noise about developing Hastings into a mega container port, with up to 3000 ships per year. We released a series of reports on this, including detailed modelling of impacts from minor oil spills on seagrass fish nurseries, penguins and migratory bird species. We also held a series of well-attended public briefings.

### Coastal conservation

We released a detailed assessment of coastal conservation priorities in the report 'The Coast is Unclear: an uncertain future for nature along the Victorian coastline', which highlights the unique natural attributes of our fantastic coastline and the issues facing it.

### Burn target

The evidence against a simplistic 5% statewide fuel reduction target continues to build. Scientists, the community and many in government departments are questioning this policy, which has profound impacts on the state's biodiversity. We hope there will soon be moves to review and modify it in a strategic way.

### Great Forests National Park

The proposal for a new and extended national park in the Central Highlands gained momentum through the year. The VNPA is actively supporting the push to protect significant areas to ensure the survival of Leadbeater's Possum and other threatened species, and water catchments.

### Habitat protection

The Napthine Government's changes to native vegetation clearing rules continued to be implemented, even as further flaws were highlighted. However, partly due to the very close numbers

in parliament, the Opposition defeated the Government's native vegetation bill, putting it off indefinitely – or at least until after the coming state election.

### Bandicoot battles

The Commonwealth – State Strategic Assessment, which looked at protecting native grasslands and species impacted on by urban development, was largely approved the day before the federal election. The part of this plan relating to the survival of Southern Brown Bandicoots in Melbourne's SE had still to be delivered. The Napthine Government then produced a new minimalist plan for approval by the Abbott Government. We understand the plan has now been approved, with some welcome amendments, but it is still far from as good as the original draft plan released in 2010.

### Community monitoring and outreach

Our NatureWatch program goes from strength to strength. The Caught on Camera project, now in its third year, is starting to deliver some surprising results. We recorded for the first time the elusive Brush-tailed Phascogale (or Tuan) in the Wombat Forest, and surprised even local rangers in Bunyip State Park with photos of Southern Brown Bandicoots. Reef Watch continued to engage people in Victoria's underwater world, and we celebrated the 10th annual Great Victorian Fish Count.

Many thanks to our dedicated staff, volunteers and supporters who help keep the show on the road. We really appreciate and rely on your ongoing support!





# ANNUAL REPORT 2013-2014



## BUSHWALKING AND ACTIVITIES GROUP

First, thanks to all our volunteers, including walk leaders, Emergency Contacts, leader mentors, event coordinators and committee members. They made it possible to organise over 250 activities (including 30 overnight walks and base camps) and social events for the year.

Thanks also to all participants for supporting the activities, which covered all areas of the state from suburban parklands to beaches, cliff walks to high country hikes, paddling down the Goulburn to skiing over Stirling, and much more.

Some leaders deserve a special mention. Larysa Kucan and Jan Lacey have done a wonderful job coordinating the coach excursions. Geoff Durham has continued his Easy-going Ambles, and Ruth Stirling and Sue Parkhill have excelled with their Monday walks.

We increased the number of Walk, Talk and Gawk leaders and offered 20 WT&Gs, nearly double the previous year.

BWAGers also participated in conservation activities including Hindmarsh, Grow West and Reef Watch, and many headed down to the Prom to support the VNPA's 'Hands off Parks!' human sign.

Congrats to Richard Tagg for his initiative in promoting BWAG activities through the social media website *MeetUp*. There's been positive feedback and we'll extend the trial into next year. We've also continued our *Bring a Friend for Free* initiative.

Rob Argent organised a well-attended dinner for leaders and Emergency Contacts to show our appreciation to these volunteers. Sixteen leaders did first-aid training, supported by a grant obtained through the VNPA office.

Our club social nights covered local environmental projects as well as international adventures. Wendy Roberts explained Reef Watch and Citizen Science; Jim Noelker presented the video *Wyperfeld 100*; John Bales showed highlights of his VNPA trip to national parks in western USA. There were many other great presentations.

We had an evening with talks on light-weight hiking and successful packing, and a gear night where members



donated surplus gear for sale to eager purchasers. Thanks to those who donated; we raised \$350 for the night.

Other social activities were the regular Christmas and mid-year dinners, monthly Under 35 dinners and the U35 Alumni dinner. Sue Catterall organised our very popular inaugural Odd Ball, for which 19 attendees donned formal attire with a twist!

BWAG contributed \$10,000 to the VNPA with income from walks and other activities.

Finally, I'd like to thank the committee for making all this happen. Rob Argent, Terese Dalman, Gayle Davey, Geoff Durham, Sue Catterall, Deb Henry and Julia Pickwick have all done a great job.

**Russell Bowey, Convener**

## EXCURSIONS GROUP

We conducted 10 day trips in 2013-14, all led by volunteer leaders. All were well attended, with a total of 412 members and visitors.

Places visited included Mt Worth, the Grampians, Mt Alexander, Creswick, Nagambie, Inverloch and Shepparton. Members enjoyed walks in national parks and along rail trails, picnics, farmers' markets, historic homes and galleries.

VNPA has been using the services of McKenzie's Coaches since the early 1960s, and we thank them for their continued support. Their expert bus drivers greatly contribute to the success of the excursions.

As a result of these trips the group contributed \$5299 to VNPA, up from the previous year's \$4065.

Many thanks to the trip leaders and all who participated in the excursions.

**Larysa Kucan, Convenor**

## VOLUNTEERS AND COMMITTEE CONVENORS

### VOLUNTEERS

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

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

**Grow West & Project Hindmarsh:**

John Stirling (*Convenor*) and Terese Dalman plus VNPA team leaders and planters.

**Marine & Coastal:** Matilda Reynolds, Jackson Leon-Holland, Natalie Manahan, Chris Smyth.

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

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

**Publications:** Euan Moore, Geoff Durham, Evelyn Feller.

**Nature's Voice & Park Watch Mailout Team:**

Murray Bird, Pat Cooper, Betna Dryden, Jan Gay, Brian Groom, Jo Groom, Margaret Hattersley, John Hutchinson, Kelvin Kellett, Keith Lloyd, Ian McDonald, Elsebeth Murray, Sheina Nicholls, Joan Phillips, Barbara Prouse, Lorraine Ratcliffe, Paul Stokes, Wally Thies, Graham Trigg, Pat Witt.

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

### VOLUNTEER COMMITTEE CONVENORS

**Bushwalking & Activities Group:**

Russell Bowey.

**Conservation & Campaigns:** Euan Moore.

**Executive:** Russell Costello.

**Excursions:** Larysa Kucan.

**Finance:** Gary Allan.

**Membership, Marketing & Communications:** Russell Costello (acting).

**Community Education & Engagement Working Group:** Russell Costello (acting).

### HOSTED NETWORK

**Victorian Environment Friends Network**

**Committee:** Ray Radford, Maelor Himbury, Sue Wright, Michael Howes, Robert Bender.

## FINANCIAL REPORT

**Abridged Audited Special Purpose Financial Report for the year ended 30 June 2014.**

### Statement by Members of the Council

The members of the Council have determined that the Association is not a reporting entity and in our opinion the abridged special purpose financial report set out below presents a true and fair view of the financial position of VNPA as at 30 June 2014 and its performance for the year ended on that date.

At the date of this statement there are reasonable grounds to believe that the

VNPA will be able to pay its debts as and when they fall due for payment.

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

*Gary Allan (Treasurer) & Matt Ruchel (Executive Director) dated this 4th day of September 2014*

INCOME STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2014		
REVENUE	2014	2013
<b>Operating Activities</b>	\$	\$
Appeals, Donations & Bequests	847,167	602,169
Grants & Partner Contributions	159,527	181,089
Membership Fees	116,668	107,448
Interest Income & Sundry Sales	62,304	91,085
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>1,185,666</b>	<b>981,791</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>		
Employment Expenses	712,957	772,243
Campaigns, Projects, Activities & Education	89,114	103,091
Office & Administration	164,656	183,539
Printing/Publications/Web	70,032	61,492
Accommodation & Insurance	103,246	103,843
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>1,140,004</b>	<b>1,224,208</b>
<b>OPERATING (DEFICIT) SURPLUS BEFORE TRANSFERS (TO) FROM RESERVE FUNDS</b>	<b>45,661</b>	<b>(242,415)</b>
<b>Transfers from (to) Reserve Funds</b>	<b>(20,089)</b>	<b>138,717</b>
<b>OPERATING (DEFICIT) SURPLUS AFTER TRANSFERS FROM (TO) RESERVE FUNDS</b>	<b>25,572</b>	<b>(103,698)</b>

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 30 JUNE 2014		
ASSETS	2014	2013
<b>Current</b>	\$	\$
Receivables and Inventory	142,414	31,486
Cash and Cash Equivalents	748,088	756,679
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>890,502</b>	<b>788,165</b>
<b>Non-Current</b>		
Fixed Assets at Written Down Value	32,421	20,163
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>922,924</b>	<b>808,328</b>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>		
Current and Non-Current	368,406	299,472
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<b>368,406</b>	<b>299,472</b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>	<b>554,518</b>	<b>508,857</b>
<b>Funded by:</b>		
Association Funds	554,518	508,857
<b>TOTAL ASSOCIATION FUNDS</b>	<b>554,518</b>	<b>508,857</b>

**NOTE:** Independent Audit Report: As in previous years, the Auditor's have issued a qualified Audit Opinion on the annual financial statements on the basis that it is not feasible for organisations such as VNPA to implement accounting controls over all cash collections from donations prior to their initial processing in the accounting records.

The full Independent Auditor's Report will be tabled at the forthcoming Annual General Meeting as part of the Audited Financial Statements and the full text of the Report will be available at [www.vnpa.org.au](http://www.vnpa.org.au).

VNPA BWAG ACTIVITIES ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2014		
The operating accounts for the Bushwalking Group have not been consolidated into the general accounts above and are reported separately as follows:	2014	2013
	\$	\$
<b>Opening Bank Account Balance</b>	<b>4,142</b>	<b>2,265</b>
Income	9,365	11,851
Expenditure	(382)	(974)
Funds Contributed to VNPA	(10,000)	(9,000)
<b>CLOSING BANK ACCOUNT BALANCE</b>	<b>3,125</b>	<b>4,142</b>

## VNPA SUPPORTERS, DONORS AND PARTNERS

The VNPA acknowledges and thanks our key supporters, donors and partners for their generous support.

### Donors

- Alf and Meg Steel Fund, a subfund of the Australian Communities Foundation
- The Arnold Foundation
- Coastcare Victoria
- The Dara Foundation
- Field Naturalists Club of Victoria
- Grants to Voluntary Environment, Sustainability and Heritage Organisations (GVESHO)
- Gras Foundation Trust
- Foundation for National Parks & Wildlife
- Helen Macpherson Smith Trust
- Loftus-Hill Fund, a subfund of the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation
- Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation
- Parks Victoria
- Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority
- Tree Pot

### Project partners

- bankmecu
- Ecology Australia
- Environmental Justice Australia
- Museum Victoria
- Practical Ecology
- The Wilderness Society
- The University of Melbourne
- Volunteering Western Victoria

### Community project partners

- Blue Wedges Coalition
- Grow West
- Hindmarsh Landcare Network
- Friends of Bunyip State Park
- Preserve Westernport Action Group
- Westernport & Peninsula Protection Council
- Wombat Forestcare

### VNPA EMPLOYEES

**Executive Director:** Matt Ruchel

**Fundraising Manager:** Emily Clough

**Direct Marketing Officer:** Maxine Hawkins

**Finance & Operations Manager:** Heath Rickard

**Administration Assistants:**

Charlotte Kandelaars, Irina De Loche

**Marine & Coastal Project Officer:** Simon Branigan

**Nature Watch/Community Projects**

**Coordinator:** Caitlin Griffith (to 1/1/14 - maternity leave)

**Nature Watch/Community Projects**

**Coordinator:** Christine Connelly (from 1/1/14)

**Park Protection Project Officer:** Phil Ingamells

**Red Gum & River Rescue Project**

**Coordinator:** Nick Roberts

**Reef Watch Coordinator:** Wendy Roberts

**Park Watch/Nature's Voice Editor & Publications Officer:** Michael Howes

**Victorian Naturally Alliance Project Leader:** Karen Alexander (to 1/12/13)

**Central Victorian Biolink Project Officer:** Sophie Bickford (to 30/06/14)

**Conservation Review Project Coordinator:** Andrew Cox



# Wellsford Forest – give it a rest!

LOCAL BENDIGO WRITER AND ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORIAN DR ROBYN BALLINGER CALLS FOR THE PROTECTION OF A MUCH-ABUSED FOREST.



PHOTO: ROD ORR

Recently the Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) released its Wood Utilisation Plan for Western Victoria, a three-year State Government plan for commercial timber production for the supply of sawlogs, residual log, firewood, chop logs, posts, poles, specialty timbers and minor produce.

The plan proposes to locate twelve coupes within the Wellsford State Forest near Bendigo: seven for commercial use and five for firewood production – a total area of 1,126 hectares.

The Wellsford Forest has had a long history of supplying resources to meet human needs. Over thousands of years, the forest provided Dja Dja Wurrung Aboriginal peoples with food, housing and equipment for most of the year. After squatters took over the country in the late 1830s, the forest was used for grazing.

With the discovery of gold on Bendigo Creek in December 1851, rapid and irrevocable change came to the land and its people.

The box-ironbark forests of the Bendigo region supplied massive amounts of timber for mine props and shaft linings, and in later years fuelled the steam engines of the mines. Trees were removed for railway sleepers,

bridges, house timber, telegraph poles, firewood for domestic and industrial use in the growing cities of Bendigo and Melbourne, and for fuelling the steam locomotives of the Victorian Railways.

After public concern over the significant degradation of the creeks and forests of the goldfields, timber reserves and state forests were set aside from 1866 for 'the protection and growth of timber'. Timber reserves were to be used by settlers until the supply was exhausted, while state forests could only be used by approved, licensed timber millers and fellers.

The Wellsford State Forest was reserved in 1874, but locals complained about ongoing illegal felling of timber within its boundaries. An 'Old Bushman', a correspondent to the *Bendigo Advertiser* in June 1879, wrote:

*The destruction of young timber is now being carried on at a rate hitherto unparalleled ... even one of our public institutions (the Bendigo Hospital) is being supplied with two-foot wood, nearly all ironbark saplings ... Again, in the fenced portion of the Wellsford forest, parties are frequently seen cutting the young timber and throwing it over the fence to be taken away at leisure, while in other parts where the wires have been cut drays with men and boys are to be seen daily passing in cutting and*

*The Wellsford Forest Conservation Alliance recently took local MPs and academics to see one of the forest's ancient Red Ironbarks (Eucalyptus tricarpa). From left: Jacinta Allen MP (Bendigo East), her daughter Peggy, Dr Glenda Verrinder (Senior Lecturer in Community Health, La Trobe University), Dr Robyn Ballinger (environmental historian and author), Stuart Fraser (member, WFCFA), Maree Edwards MP (Bendigo West).*

*taking away beautiful young timber without hindrance.*

So extensively were the trees felled that by the early 1900s the forests of Bendigo could no longer provide firewood to the local population. In 1902-03, 386,172 tons of firewood were consumed, and all forests were closed to woodcutters for four months of the year from 1904.

With the recently published Wood Utilisation Plan, the felling of trees is set to continue. Alarming, one of the coupes put aside for commercial timber production is located in the area where a number of enormous Red Ironbarks grow. Estimated to be over 400 years of age, these trees are treasures of another, long gone forest.

The Wellsford forest has paid its dues. It has given more than its fair share. We do not need to take any more trees from its already radically altered environment.

It's time to protect the Wellsford State Forest and its towering Red Ironbarks by bringing it into the Greater Bendigo National Park. • PW

## INVITATION – Nature in the Dark conference: perceptions of animals at the intersection of the arts, science and conservation

This conference will examine our relationship to animals in a wider ecological context. It will conclude with a panel discussion on the future of the Wellsford Forest.

**Saturday 4 October 2014, 11am – 6pm**

**Visual Arts Centre,  
La Trobe University Bendigo**

121 View St, Bendigo, Vic 3550  
(where the *Nature in the Dark* exhibition is still on show).

For more information, contact Jan Hendrik Brueggemeier, curator CCA, email [info@centreforcreativearts.org.au](mailto:info@centreforcreativearts.org.au), phone **0432 486 793**.

Attendance is free but RSVP required. Please see: [www.centreforcreativearts.org.au/nitd-conference](http://www.centreforcreativearts.org.au/nitd-conference)

Group studying grassland wildflowers,  
Terrick Terrick NP, October 2013.  
Terricks Ridge in background.

# Grassland and cypress-pines

PHOTO: KEITH STOCKWELL

KEITH STOCKWELL, SECRETARY OF FRIENDS OF TERRICK TERRICK NATIONAL PARK INC, DESCRIBES THE PARK AND THE WORK OF THE FRIENDS, AND INVITES YOU TO THE ANNUAL ACTIVITIES WEEKEND ON 4-5 OCTOBER.

**Better known to locals as Mitiamo Rock, Mt Terrick Terrick is one of several low granitic outcrops rising above the flat riverine plains at Mitiamo, north of Bendigo and west of Echuca in northern Victoria.**

Some 5000 acres of the forested country surrounding these rocky outcrops was reserved from sale in the 1890s, largely because of pressure from surrounding land-holders.

In the following decades, the forest was grazed and subjected to logging, but mining activity ended. Much of the middle- and under-storey vegetation was badly affected by grazing.

The Terrick Terrick forest contains the largest stand of White Cypress-pine (*Callitris* sp.) in Victoria. The pine is interspersed with box eucalypts, and in places with casuarinas.

Since grazing ended, ground-cover plants such as everlastings have recovered well, but in most of the forest recovery of the middle layer has been slow.

In 1988 the forest became Terrick Terrick State Park. Ten years later, 1262 ha of

grasslands conservatively grazed by the Davies family for many decades were added to form Terrick Terrick National Park, covering over 6000 ha.

## Refuge

Most of Victoria's native grasslands have been cultivated and lost. The rarely ploughed Davies paddocks acted as a refuge for such rare or endangered flora and fauna as Annual Buttons, Pepper Grass, Plains-wanderer, Fat-tailed Dunnart, Striped Legless Lizard and Hooded Scaly-foot.

Some plants that survive on the Terricks grasslands appear to be extinct elsewhere. The Fat-tailed Dunnart colony is Victoria's largest.

Since 1998, a number of 'satellite' grassland paddocks on the Patho Plains have been added to the park. One of these contains a wetland area that sometimes supports several near-threatened waterbird species.

In spring, there is usually a brilliant display of wildflowers on some of the satellite paddocks.

Recent rainfall has resulted in a thick biomass that threatens the survival of the

endangered Plains-wanderer and other grassland fauna. The Plains-wanderer population appears to have fallen by about 90%. Appropriate management techniques – possibly including ecological grazing, ecological burns and fence realignment – are called for.

The ex-Davies paddocks are still lightly grazed at times and appear to be in far better condition than grassland paddocks that have not been grazed or burnt for at least two years.

## Friends and projects

About 10 years ago, encouraged by Bernie Fox and the VNPA, the Friends of Terrick Terrick NP group was formed to promote the park and assist Parks Victoria. The group has enjoyed an excellent rapport with contact ranger Mark Tscharke.

Friends projects have included removing barbed wire from the top of fences because Sugar Gliders and other fauna were being caught on the wire, removing unwanted fences, planting local area trees and shrubs, and building pathways from the picnic area and camping ground to the





PHOTOS: KEITH STOCKWELL

*Clockwise from top left: The abandoned Davies homestead. The base for the annual Activities Weekend is an adjacent machinery shed; vegetation in the park east of the Mitiamo Cemetery is in near-pristine condition; base of Mitiamo Rock with new information shelter.*

(relatively new) toilets. Members assist with regular night-time grassland fauna surveys.

The group has also lobbied for road repairs and better signage, and for sheep to be reintroduced onto the satellite grasslands over winter if Parks Victoria feels this to be desirable. In years of average rainfall, the group supports the withdrawal of sheep in spring when native grasses are flowering and setting seed.

### Attractions and facilities

One of the latest additions to the park is a length of Bendigo Creek that flows through the Davies grasslands and projects to the south and north. This adds another vegetation community, one that includes more than just lignum, red gum and Black Box, to the park, as there are a few semi-permanent waterholes along this reach of the creek.

Relatively few people visit or are familiar with the park. But those who are passionate about grassland plants and/or native birds are frequent visitors. Many regard it as one of Victoria's best bird-watching locations, and the forest is ideal for bushwalking.

There is a picnic ground and an overnight camping area with toilets at the base of Mitiamo Rock. A short walking track leads to the summit, from which there are extensive views. The nearest township with a store is Mitiamo, and nearest accommodation is in Pyramid Hill or Gunbower. Echuca-Moama is a 50-minute drive away.

To promote the park, the Friends run a free Activities Weekend on the first weekend of October each year – see box. There will be a temporary campsite at the Davies homestead site (no pets or generators). • PW

### INVITATION: Wanderslore Sanctuary Open Day

Friends of Wanderslore Sanctuary Open Day, **Sunday 26 October** 10am–4pm.

Wanderslore is at 2180 Warburton Highway, Launching Place, behind the hotel.

Nature walks, art exhibition, sausage sizzle, tea, coffee & cake. All welcome, free admission.

### INVITATION: Terrick Terrick NP Activities Weekend

On the weekend of **4-5 October**, the Friends are hosting their annual Activities Weekend.

The base for all activities is the Davies Homestead site, Mitiamo – Kow Swamp Road, Terrick Terrick. The machinery shed used for displays and presentations has electricity and running water.

Activities include working bees, presentations (on local geology and history, flora and fauna), displays, sheep-shearing, mini-coach tours of the park, nature and wildflower walks and bird-watching.

This is a free event. BYO everything (camping equipment, drinking water, food, plates, etc), but we will supply afternoon tea on the Saturday.

You are welcome to attend. Please help us spread the word about the weekend, e.g. on Twitter and Facebook.

The Activities Weekend is part of Loddon Shire's *Naturally Loddon Festival Calendar*.

For more information, email Keith Stockwell on [stocky@mcmedia.com.au](mailto:stocky@mcmedia.com.au) or leave a message on **5480 9254**.

# Daisy chain links the centuries



*The Plains Yam Daisy is a modest but significant plant.*

Detailed knowledge about this plant disappeared with the forced removal of Aboriginal people from their land, their language and their traditional way of life.

This lost Aboriginal knowledge might have shed light on the botanical puzzle facing scientists in the second half of the 20th century.

## Rare

Since 1800, different forms of yam daisy had been collected and named from different parts of Australia and New Zealand. In the 1970s, when fresh collections of plants were made, it was discovered that a skinny-flowered kind once found across the basalt plains north and west of Melbourne had become extremely rare ... and it was getting rarer.

The plants survived at a few sites in the Merri Creek valley north of Melbourne, but were they thriving or dwindling? The daisy is difficult to see among the many similar grassland plants.

Its seed was easy to raise in nurseries, but by the late 1990s the Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) had repeatedly attempted and failed to re-establish the species in protected grassland reserves. We needed lost knowledge about the life cycle of the plant in its natural grassland environment.

## Kalkallo

In 2010, with the assistance of the VNPA, the Wurundjeri Tribe (traditional owners of this area), Hume City Council and volunteers, MCMC began to mark and record the growth of a small population at Kalkallo Common Grassland in the mid-Merri catchment.

Since 2011 a five-year Communities for Nature grant has allowed MCMC to investigate and manage threats to this species at most of the known sites in the Merri Creek valley.

From 30 plants tagged in 2010, MCMC's crew and community volunteers have now identified over 200 plants at the Kalkallo site. This probably reflects better search techniques as well as a positive response to management (such as fire) applied to the site.

Now in 2014, almost all the original marked plants survive, indicating that wild growing plants may have an indefinite lifespan, in contrast with the often short-lived cultivated plants.

**BRIAN BAINBRIDGE**, ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION PLANNER WITH THE MERRI CREEK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE, TELLS THE STORY OF THE PLAINS YAM DAISY – A STORY IN WHICH VNPA NATUREWATCH VOLUNTEERS PLAY AN IMPORTANT PART.

**This modest indigenous plant links us to thousands of years of this land's traditional custodianship and to conservation challenges facing current and future generations.**

In May 2014, a community survey added another line to the story.

For thousands of years, the daisy's sweet, fat roots were a staple food for local Aboriginal people. The abundance

of Yam Daisy reported by early European explorers was probably the result of careful tending of the land to sustain important food plants.

The introduction of sheep in 1835 broke this age-old relationship. On the grassy plains around Melbourne, sheep ate the daisies and then dug up and ate the roots. Within a few years the plant was decimated.

PHOTO: BRIAN BAINBRIDGE



Knowledge gained about microhabitat, timing of flowering and response to fire has helped us rediscover two populations, at Thomastown and Wallan, where the species hadn't been reported for some years.

### Re-introduction

Our better understanding of microhabitat has also helped us identify potential re-introduction sites.

A seed orchard developed in conjunction with the Victorian Indigenous Nurseries Cooperative in 2011 has provided a reliable and genetically diverse source of seed for reintroduction trials. Reintroductions in succeeding years have begun to yield a small but increasing number of seedlings, as well as important information on germination and establishment.

In July 2014 the Plains Yam Daisy vanished again, but this time from the botanical literature!

Some recent references have lumped together all Australian *Microseris* (Yam Daisy) species as a single species. However, the Victorian Herbarium holds to the opinion there are three distinct species in Victoria, including *M. scapigera*, the skinny-flowered 'Plains Yam Daisy'.

Botanists will probably continue to disagree on Yam Daisy classification – they have been doing so for nearly 200 years. But regardless, the distinctive Yam Daisy of the basalt plains warrants our continued efforts to maintain its survival into the future.

We are still waiting to see if our most recent reintroduction efforts will bear fruit (or roots!). Our ultimate goal is to identify reliable techniques to foster and re-establish abundant populations in grassland reserves.

Community participation in surveys and monitoring is playing a valuable role in this unfolding story. (For instance, listen to 3CR's radio coverage of a community survey.)

Thanks go to the VNPA's NatureWatch program and all our volunteers. We hope to see you in the field again in 2015! • PW

Thanks to Neville Walsh of the Victorian Herbarium for advice on this article.

Marking Plains Yam Daisy plants in recently burnt grassland near Kalkallo.



PHOTO: BRIAN BAINBRIDGE

Volunteers monitoring yam daisies and other wildflowers.



PHOTO COURTESY CAITLIN GRIFFITH

## Sign up for NatureWatch!



Grass-tree monitoring.

PHOTO: CHRISTINE CONNELLY

The Plains Yam Daisy project is part of the VNPA's NatureWatch program.

Would you like to be involved with other NatureWatch projects for the rest of this year? There are plenty of opportunities. Caught on Camera is running in Bunyip State Park until mid-November, and we'll be starting our spring grass-tree monitoring in September.

If you'd like more information, or to sign up as a volunteer, contact Christine Connelly on [christinec@vnpa.org.au](mailto:christinec@vnpa.org.au) or 9341 3510 (Thurs/Fri).



# Stirling's road to ruin

CHARLES STREET, VNPA HON. SECRETARY AND LONG-TIME CAMPAIGNER FOR MOUNT STIRLING, UPDATES US ON A VERY DUBIOUS ROAD PROPOSAL.



Flame Robin in the snow at Mount Stirling.

PHOTOS: CHARLES STREET

*Mount Stirling should retain its low-key family-friendly nature, not become another Mount Buller.*

## Remember the mid-1990s campaign to save Mount Stirling from development?

Well, it's all happening again now, with a proposal to build a road from Mount Buller to Mount Stirling via the north face of Corn Hill and through undisturbed old-growth alpine forest.

It's purportedly an 'emergency access route' in case of bushfire. More like a road to nowhere, in our view.

The first record of such a suggestion was made to the Stirling Panel of Inquiry in 1996. The Panel thought it 'inappropriate'. Despite that, there were attempts to build the northern road in 2008, 2010 and 2013.

Recently, the VNPA examined the permit application documents at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). We found that various government departments had serious concerns about the potential for the proposed road to contribute to contamination of water supplies for settlements and towns along the Delatite River.

They were also concerned about the high risk of land slippage, potentially leading to loss of life, and about loss of

habitat and connectivity for threatened species.

Indeed, local authorities noted that a referral to the federal environment department was necessary in relation to the critically endangered Barred Galaxias fish. The VNPA could not find any evidence of such a referral.

Recent photographic evidence shows that snow on the north side of the mountains really does melt earlier than snow on the south side, putting the kybosh on the claim that the new road would double as a 'nordic ski trail' in winter. But then everyone knew that claim was bunkum.

The VNPA is yet to be satisfied that the Country Fire Authority has seriously considered the fitness of the proposed road for its stated intended purpose: emergency access.

And we add to these concerns the lack of a completed Strategic Plan for Mount Stirling, and the steadfast refusal of the Alpine Resort Management Board to publish a Business Case for the road.

The day after the VNPA examined the documents at VCAT, the Minister for Planning ordered the VCAT process stopped, without explanation.

It smells.

For the six years that Mount Stirling had its own Alpine Resort Management Board (1998-2004) Stirling received over \$1.4 million in direct subsidies, and still lost about \$250,000. As an alpine resort, Stirling is an economic failure.

The solutions fall into two categories.

One is to make it earn more income by converting it into a Mount Buller lookalike.

The second is to make it national park, where its monetary value is calculated in relation to its economic contribution to the region, rather than just earnings within its borders.

We have a choice. We can let the Minister approve the road behind closed doors, probably as soon as the ground is firm enough to support heavy earthmoving machines.

Or we can tell the Minister that Mount Stirling needs to be conserved as a natural wilderness for our children and grandchildren and their descendants, in perpetuity.

We have a choice. • PW





Prom'n'Aides group among dead banksias, Yanakie.

PHOTO: PARKS VICTORIA

# Why are Prom banksias dying?

A RESEARCH PROJECT IS UNDER WAY TO DISCOVER WHY COAST BANKSIA TREES ARE DYING ON THE YANAKIE ISTHMUS AT WILSONS PROMONTORY NATIONAL PARK.

**The Yanakie Isthmus is the narrow piece of sandy country that joins the Prom to the mainland.**

It was once full of wildflowers, native grasses and magnificent Coast Banksias (*Banksia integrifolia*). Now it's choked with invasive Coast Tea-tree, and the banksias are in serious decline.

They have been gradually succumbing to dieback for over 30 years, but research to date hasn't revealed why.

One possibility is that there is a genetic defect in the species which causes the chlorophyll to drain out of the leaves, giving them a yellowy look.

Parks Victoria and the Friends of the Prom Nursery group are working together on a scientific restoration program to test this theory. With help from the Friends of Wonthaggi Heathland, banksia seed was collected from the Yanakie Isthmus, Sandy Point,

the mouth of the Powlett River and Point Nepean.

The group propagated forty seedlings from each area, and these were planted out in mid-June by the Prom'n'Aides Friends group, which concentrates on citizen science research. These Friends will monitor the seedlings each year until maturity to test if there's any difference in the health and vigour of plants from the various provenances.

"The trees will be checked for height, trunk diameter, leaf colour and capacity to produce viable seed," says Jim Whelan, Parks Victoria's Operations Manager for the Yanakie Isthmus Coastal Grassy Woodlands Restoration Project.

"Only 50% of the seedlings will have tree-guards on them, so we can also assess the impact of browsing animals like wombats, deer and wallabies.

Coast Banksia in flower, May 2010.



PHOTO: JIM WHELAN, PARKS VICTORIA

"Seedlings from outside the Prom will be removed once the research is completed. Current thinking is that plants from outside local provenance should not be introduced into natural environments, so the plan at this stage is to remove the introduced ones before they can fully establish.

"Having said that, though, researchers from Monash University are exploring the concept that broadening the banksia gene pool may be beneficial as insurance against climate change. This may bear further consideration

"Once we establish the cause of the dieback, we can look for solutions. This will probably take around eight years, but if we can identify the problem it will be worth the wait." • PW

From Parks Victoria





# VNPA volunteers monitor rabbits in Hattah

PHOTO: MICHAEL FELLER

DROUGHT, EARLY TIMBER CUTTING, KANGAROO OVER-POPULATION AND WEEDS ARE ALL PROBLEMS FOR HATTAH-KULKYNE NP. VNPA COUNCILLOR EUAN MOORE EXPLAINS HOW THE VNPA IS HELPING WITH ANOTHER ONE: RABBITS.

*Searching for rabbit warrens among Porcupine Grass clumps.*

Over the last Queen's Birthday weekend a group of 21 VNPA members travelled to Hattah-Kulkyne National Park, where we spent two days working as volunteers for the park's rabbit control program.

This volunteer work could be regarded as off-track bushwalking in relatively easy country, but with a purpose that went beyond pure recreation.

We had a very enjoyable weekend. Some were visiting Hattah-Kulkyne for the first time, so a short bushwalk on the Monday, from Lake Mournpall to the lookout, was a chance to see more of the park.

This activity was carried out with the Mallee Catchment Management Authority (CMA), the Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) and Parks Victoria.

It was our second year helping with the rabbit control program. Last year a smaller group searched the dune country immediately north of Lake Mournpall. It was a learning

experience where we worked out the most effective method of covering the area without leaving gaps between searchers.

This year, with a larger group, we searched an area north-west of Lake Kramen. The eastern boundary of the search was the Kramen Track, which runs along the junction of the Black Box and mallee vegetation communities. The western boundary went through the mallee area about a kilometre west of Kramen Track.

## Organisation

The volunteers were divided into two groups, as we found last year that ten or eleven people was the maximum for a line before it broke up, or people got too far ahead or behind to maintain full coverage.

When the line started there was a 10 metre space between each person on the line. Every alternate person had a GPS, and we had UHF radios at the centre and ends of the line. The radios were essential for communication along the line.

The people carrying the GPS units maintained the line direction (grid east

or west) while moving either side to GPS rabbit warrens that had been spotted.

Some rabbit warrens in the open ground on the eastern edge of the search area had recently been ripped. There had obviously been a lot of rabbits in this area, and we still saw quite a few during the survey.

This was where we found most of the warrens and bolt-holes, mainly just inside the Black Box woodland or near cypress-pines. Some holes were concealed under saltbush shrubs.

Although this was a very weedy area we did not find any of the priority weeds that we had been asked to look for.

Within the mallee there were fewer rabbit warrens. Those we did find were mainly on the southern side of east-west running dunes, and usually near cypress-pines.

## Wildlife

During the survey we saw other wildlife, including two emu nests, one with eight



and the other with 12 eggs. One group also found and GPS'd two Malleefowl mounds, while another person saw a Western Bluetongue lizard.

A highlight of the walk on Monday morning was a reasonable view of a Malleefowl walking a few metres to the side of the track.

There were also quite a few plants in flower throughout the mallee. The sweet smell of Scented Mat-rush (*Lomandra effusa*) was prominent in some areas. Scattered plants of Fringed Daisy-bush (*Olearia rudis*) were already in full flower, several weeks earlier than their normal flowering time.

### Tracks and scats

Participants were also able to learn about the larger wildlife present and how to recognise signs of their presence. We saw tracks of kangaroos, Malleefowl, emus, goats, pigs, rabbits and foxes, and also an area of damage caused by pigs rooting for tubers and underground invertebrates.

A collection of scats (droppings) enabled us to see the differences between the scats of various animals.

It was exciting to see the lakes so full of water as a result of the pumping of environmental water into the system. This was reminiscent of another time, more than two decades ago, when they were full and birdlife was breeding throughout the system.

We hope this flooding event will rejuvenate the lakes and increase their resilience in the face of ongoing environmental pressures.

### Opportunities

Activities such as this offer VNPA members an opportunity to learn more about the natural environment while contributing to the management of our national parks and protected areas.

For this weekend participants provided their own transport, food and camping equipment. Those working full time took Friday off for the drive to Hattah. People shared transport where practical to reduce the costs to individuals.



PHOTO: JENNIFER ROLLAND



PHOTO: EUAN MOORE

Top: Morning volunteer briefing.

Centre: Lake Little Hattah is benefiting from environmental water flows.

Below: Mallee colour: a Fringed Daisy-bush flower (*Olearia rudis*).

In addition to this activity, the VNPA has a long involvement with Project Hindmarsh and Grow West. It also runs the NatureWatch program, where volunteers monitor threatened flora and fauna or use motion sensing cameras to record the presence of wildlife.

We're always interested in new projects that will allow our members to make a practical contribution to conservation at the same time as enjoying and learning about the natural environment.

And we're happy to continue our involvement with the Hattah rabbit control program in future years. • PW



PHOTO: EUAN MOORE



# WYPERFELD NATIONAL PARK

## *Jewel of the Mallee*

Scorched River Red Gum,  
Wyperfeld NP, June 2014.

PHOTO: GEOFF DURHAM

GEOFF DURHAM REVISITS THE MALLEE AND VICTORIA'S THIRD-LARGEST NATIONAL PARK.

I have visited the Wonga campground area of Wyperfeld NP (361,770 ha) twice this year – in March to see how it was affected by the January fires, and in June camping with the Friends of Wyperfeld.

There was still bare earth in burnt areas in March, but by June the ground was verdant green. With good rain, the recovery from the fires was dramatic.

In six days in June I did not see a rabbit. They have not been eliminated but are under control – I observed their scratchings, and also goat hoofprints. The kangaroo population is also controlled.

The result is good natural regeneration of Slender Cypress-pine, a feature of the park, and the trees do not now have the browse line which in the past has been an indication of high kangaroo numbers.

Former Director of National Parks Don Saunders, who has been visiting Wyperfeld regularly for 50 years, says that along the 9km drive from the southern entrance to Wonga campground, the park has never looked better.

The 3.7km gravel road to Black Flat has been resurfaced, but there are signs of inadequate resourcing in the park. The office at the entrance remains vacant and there is no longer a public pay-phone; the substantial depot buildings have been demolished or removed, and the depleted staff now operate out of Rainbow. And the Washing Block is without water!

### Fire

Fire, flood and frost are periodic events that have a profound influence on the park's vegetation. In mid-January this year, 17 lightning fires were recorded in the Mallee; two of them burnt into Wyperfeld.

These fires were unusual in that they came from the south and drove north with winds reaching 60 km/h.

The larger western fire burnt 56,543 ha from Lake Albacutya, travelling over 60km through Wirrengren Plain to the northern border of the park, missing Casuarina campground and skirting around Pine Plains Lodge.

The narrow eastern fire burnt 3,871 ha from Paradise Flora and Fauna

Reserve south of the park through Wonga campground and Black Flat for about 20km. Remarkably, none of the infrastructure at Wonga was burnt, probably because the rangers had kept the grass well mown.

On the flat west of the Information Centre most of the long-dead standing River Red Gums were incinerated, but struggling live trees survive. In the mallee vegetation the fires were very hot, leaving scorched earth and black stems, but on the Black Box flats and the cypress-pine dunes, and along Outlet Creek, the fires were patchy.

The impact on fauna is severe. The loss of old red gum, Black Box and cypress-pine trees means the loss of nesting hollows. The mallee vegetation will recover, but Peter Stokie of the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group says it will be about 15 years before there is enough ground litter for Malleefowl incubation mounds.

### Flood

Summer fires in the mallee vegetation are frequent if irregular, but floods are increasingly rare. The southernmost of the 16 lakes in the park along Outlet Creek were last flooded by waters from





*Clockwise from top left:  
Burnt Black Box and cypress-pine,  
March 2014.  
Friends gather for refreshments  
at the park Information Centre,  
June 2014.  
Planting and some playing at the  
Snow Drift, a large sand dune in  
the north of the park.  
Wonga Hut and burnt landscape  
at Wyperfeld, March 2014.*



PHOTOS: GEOFF DURHAM

the Wimmera River in 1976; the northern ones (except Wirregren Plain, at the end of the creek) in 1918.

Prior to the diversion and damming of Grampians water for the Wimmera-Mallee Stock and Domestic water supply system, which distributed water by open channels to farm dams (with a loss of over 85% though seepage and evaporation), water flowed into Wyperfeld about every 20 years.

The replacement of 17,500km of channels with the completion of the Wimmera-Mallee Pipeline Project in 2010, earlier than expected and below budget, is a remarkable engineering and political success story that has not received the recognition it deserves.

One-time park ranger Barry Clugston, past chair of Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water and long-time Friends of Wyperfeld member, says the pipeline might just be in time to secure the future of the region's communities. Our drying climate may still reduce the possibility of flood water reaching Wyperfeld, but we are closer to this than we have been for over a century.

It will require a build-up of water runoff in the upper catchments, and both Lake Hindmarsh and Lake Albacutya to overflow. At present, Lake Hindmarsh contains little water.

## Frost

During our camp in June we had one frost. Winter frosts are common in Wyperfeld, and prolonged severe frosting affects plants. For example, it kills Desert Banksia, which regenerates only if a fire releases its seeds. This year to the end of July the occasional frosts had been mild.

## Friends of Wyperfeld

This was the 38th consecutive year that the Friends have camped in the park over the Queen's Birthday weekend. A feature was cold starlit nights with good company around a fire – campfires still being permitted in the park.

The Friends have carried out many projects, notably Horehound control and the planting of many thousands of cypress-pines, some of which were destroyed in the January fires.

This year they planted 200 assorted species near the 'Snow Drift', a large bare dune in the north; oiled the timber of the Eastern Lookout tower; removed old exclusion plot fences; replaced steps on the Desert Walk and the replica Dog-leg and Chock and Block fence destroyed by fire; installed more 'lift-the-lid' interpretation boxes on the Discovery Walk; and refurbished the displays in the Information Centre.

The Friends published the book *Wyperfeld, Australia's First Mallee National Park*, now available on the VNPA website, and produced a 50-minute DVD, the award-winning *A traverse in time – Wyperfeld 100*. For a copy, email [friendsofwyperfeldnp@yahoo.com.au](mailto:friendsofwyperfeldnp@yahoo.com.au). The Friends contact is Chris Gamgee, phone 9569 9135.

With its information centre, an architectural gem open 24 hours every day, the 15km James Barrett Nature Drive and a selection of self-guided walks at the spacious Wonga campground, Wyperfeld is the best-interpreted Victorian national park.

Wonga is reached via Rainbow or Hopetoun, and Casuarina campground in the north via Patchewollock. There is a 48km 4WD track from Wonga to Casuarina. The western wilderness has longer, more challenging tracks. There are many opportunities for walking, and exceptional bird watching.

The park is not as well known as it should be, probably because it is about 450 km from Melbourne. But I urge anyone who has not visited to give it a go. Camping at Wonga is an 'away-from-it-all' experience, or you can stay in Rainbow.

Before the heat of summer is the best time to visit, and the expectations are for a great wildflower display this spring.

Don't wait for the lakes to fill! • PW





PHOTO: EVELYN FELLER

# *Hiker's joy* YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

VNPA MEMBER AND VOLUNTEER **EVELYN FELLER**, WHO WITH HUSBAND (AND VNPA COUNCILLOR) MIKE LIVED FOR MANY YEARS IN CANADA, RECENTLY VISITED THIS MAGNIFICENT PARK, WHICH IS CELEBRATING THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF ITS PROTECTION AS A WILDERNESS.

*Yosemite NP – the Sierra Nevada and Half Dome.*

As we headed up the asphalted trail to the thundering Vernal Falls in California's Yosemite National Park, we were fascinated by the diversity of our fellow hikers.

There were Latin Americans, turbaned Sikhs and women in saris, Asian students, seniors, and youngsters in strollers. There were very fit family groups who raced ahead, and some hikers who were gamely struggling upwards despite their apparent lack of fitness.

The scene certainly makes one reflect on how John Muir, the legendary wilderness advocate who was involved in the establishment of the park, might have reacted.

And I was wondering what lessons might be learned from our Yosemite experience that related to our parks in Victoria.

The Vernal Falls trail is rated the most popular in the park, especially in the spring, when the falls are spectacular with spring run-off. To reach above them and to the next falls (Nevada Falls), the trail becomes a steep staircase carved into the rock, with narrow walkways.

The spectacle and noise of the pounding water is well worth the effort, although you're guaranteed a good soaking from the spray. The trail is also the start to opportunities to get away from the crowds and explore the wilderness of the Sierras that Muir loved.

On returning from Vernal Falls we visited the park visitor centre and the Ansel Adams gallery (Adams' exceptional photographs are a powerful voice for wilderness). We also saw some of the park's less appealing features, like the massive fixed-tent city and the

crowded food store, gift shops and parking lots.

## Sentinel Dome

The next day was a hiker's joy. There were few people on the trail we took, which climbed over 1300 metres to the top of Sentinel Dome. On the shady side of the valley, this is a well-graded switchback US National Park Service (NPS) trail.

As we hiked we watched the imposing face of El Capitan, and other Yosemite landmarks like Yosemite Falls, recede below us.

Close to the end, you have to confront a large car park and crowded popular lookout area before making the final ascent of the dome. But there you're rewarded by a panoramic view dominated by the massive, sheer Half Dome and other lesser domes and valleys, all carved out by glaciers.



Here the real value of parks was reinforced for me by a conversation with an excited Welsh tourist. He was totally astounded and thrilled by the wilderness stretching before him. His enthusiasm and joy at being there were contagious.

Yosemite was the first area in the world to be protected as a wilderness. Abraham Lincoln signed the Yosemite Grant in 1864.

The initial protected area took in just the main valley and Mariposa Grove, with its many fine giant sequoia trees. But 25 years later Yosemite was declared a national park – the third to be designated in the USA.

John Muir was involved in drawing up the new park boundaries, which cover a far greater area of the Sierra Nevada range.

### World Heritage

Because of its rugged glacial features, grand waterfalls, magnificent forests and beautiful valleys and lakes, Yosemite was declared a World Heritage area in 1984. Today 95% of the park is designated wilderness.

The huge walls of Yosemite have become a magnet for climbers. Many legendary ascents have been made, particularly of the precipitous face of El Capitan, over 1100 metres sheer.

Today the park has nearly 4 million visitors annually, the majority from the USA. To meet their needs, the valley has four hotel-style accommodation facilities and 1504 campsites, catering for the amazing total of 9372 people.

It's advisable to book sites months in advance, but a couple of campgrounds are reserved for those who haven't make advance bookings.

As well as accommodation, there are concessions, stores, cafes, dental and medical services, several churches and even a magistrate to deal with park infractions such as drugs and driving or biking while intoxicated. Most of this development is concentrated in the main valley.

### Lessons for Victoria

So what can we learn from Yosemite in terms of some of the issues facing Victorian parks?

One issue is park fees. US national parks do have entry fees, but they are quite reasonable. For \$US40 you can purchase a yearly pass to the park, and for \$80 a pass to all the US parks. These passes are free for seniors, veterans and people with disabilities.



Above:  
El Capitan,  
Yosemite's  
famous  
climbing cliff.

Left: Walkers  
on the Vernal  
Falls Trail.

PHOTOS: EVELYN FELLER

Camping fees too are quite low in Yosemite – \$20 a day for a regular campsite – though charges for fixed tent accommodation can be much higher. These fees are much lower than the new camping charges in parks like Wilsons Promontory, and those proposed for the long-distance Grampians trail.

Yosemite Park managers can boast a budget of over \$29 million, and a lot of funding and volunteer work comes from non-government organisations such as the Yosemite Conservancy. This organisation does everything from trail rehabilitation, visitor welcoming and providing bear-proof food containers to delivering interpretation programs, and it has been in operation for over 100 years. Clearly there will be continuing and growing opportunities for our park Friends groups.

Today there is trend for the US NPS to move as many as possible non-essential activities, such as gas stations, bike and raft rentals and some swimming pools, out of the park. The Service is also promoting the use of shuttle buses in the

park, to reduce traffic jams and pollution.

Citizen groups wanting even greater protection of Yosemite Valley, and better management, have successfully challenged park management plans in court, and the NPS was forced to redraft the plans.

In Victoria we can avoid having to remove inappropriate activities and facilities from parks by not establishing them in the first place. Court action can be an effective tool.

As for what John Muir might think of the crowds in Yosemite, he had already an apt comment:

*"The regular tourist, ever in motion, is one of the most characteristic productions of the present [i.e. early 20th] century: and however frivolous and inappreciative [sic] the poorer specimens may appear, viewed comprehensively they are a hopeful and significant sign of the times, indicating at least a beginning of our return to nature: for going to the mountains is going home."* • PW



## Birds and Plants of the Little Desert: a photographic guide

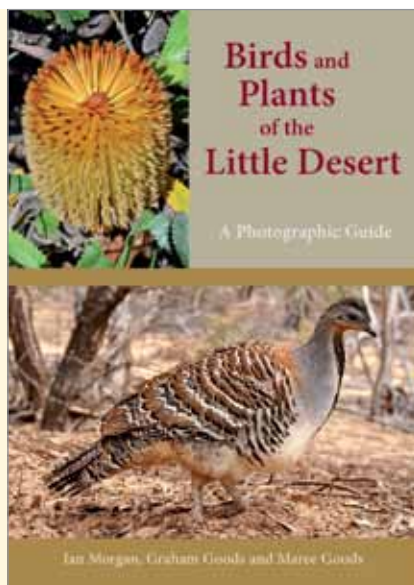
By Ian Morgan, Graham Goods and Maree Goods

Published by the authors, supported by Dr Geoff Handbury AO, the Norman

Wettenhall Foundation and Wimmera CMA. Paperback, 330 pages. RRP \$50.00; VNPA members special price \$40.00, plus postage and packaging \$10.00.

**The focus of one of Victoria's defining conservation campaigns, Little Desert National Park is home to a wide variety of birds and an extensive range of brilliantly coloured native plants.**

This new 'photographic guide' will inspire you to head to the Desert and



discover its extraordinary range of plants and wildlife for yourself.

More than a field guide, the book has over 950 beautiful photographs, showing some 200 birds and 430 plants of the Little Desert. Many of the photos show the intricate details of individual species; others depict the general vegetation and various habitats.

Virtually every Little Desert bird is shown, and nearly two-thirds of the plants officially recorded for the park.

The text is simply written, with few scientific terms, making it accessible for anyone interested in the Little Desert.

The book is a family affair, resulting from the joint efforts of Ian Morgan from Rupanyup, his sister Maree Goods and her husband Graham, both from Kalkee.

Ian began photographing birds in the mid-1970s at the same time as Graham started his photographic collection of Little Desert plants, with Maree joining him later. All three are well known throughout western Victoria for their immense knowledge of local plants and birds.

The book can be purchased directly from the publishers at [littledesertbook@gmail.com](mailto:littledesertbook@gmail.com), phone 0427 340 552 or 0427 832 249, or from the VNPA at the special member price of \$40.00. • PW

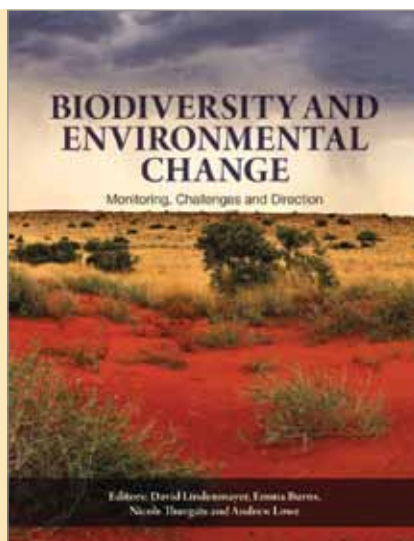
**Michael Howes**

## Biodiversity and Environmental Change – monitoring, challenges and direction

Edited by David Lindenmayer, Emma Burns, Nicole Thurgate and Andrew Lowe

CSIRO Publishing, 2014. Hardback, 624 pages. RRP \$120.00.

The indefatigable David Lindenmayer and his fellow editors have brought together a remarkable number of contributors (over 80 of them) to compile an important and attractive book that shows the value of existing long-term ecological research and datasets in Australia, and their



importance for monitoring and understanding the current and future state of our environment and biodiversity.

It also explains how to design effective ecological research and monitoring, and how this can be used to enhance environmental policy and management.

Many of the researchers involved are associated with the Terrestrial Ecosystem Research Network (TERN) and are responsible for managing long-term plots or establishing new ones. They document important trends and changes, giving new insights that were previously poorly understood or unknown.

The data chapters cover the whole range of Australia's terrestrial environments: tropical rainforests, alpine ecosystems, heathlands, temperate eucalypt woodlands, tall eucalypt forests, tropical savannas, deserts, chenopod and acacia shrublands, and grasslands.

The book's target audience is government at all levels, and the research, conservation and ecological communities, but it clearly has much to offer environmental groups and individuals as well. • PW

**Michael Howes**



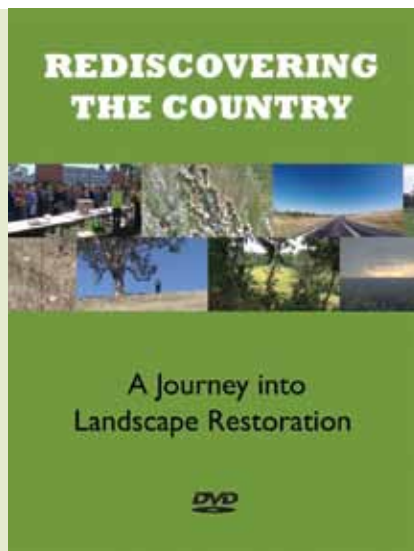
## Rediscovering the Country – a Journey into Landscape Restoration (film)

By Australian Forest Growers and Sheoak Films (freely available for download from [www.rediscoveringthecountry.org](http://www.rediscoveringthecountry.org)).

Films about restoring forests to cleared areas, especially ones dealing with Australian landscapes, are rare.

This wonderful film gives an overview of the reasons for undertaking restoration and some of the ways in which it might be done.

It begins with an old film clip from the 1950s about land clearing that serves to emphasise just how attitudes can change, even within a generation. It then outlines, through interviews and examples, how work is now being



carried out to restore forests to farms and across many rural landscapes.

The film makes the point that most restoration will have to be done on private land, but that landholders are often assisted by the broader community. The advantage of involving the community is that knowledge can be shared more widely, and community aspirations and priorities for the landscape as a whole can be taken into account.

One of the questions faced by those undertaking restoration concerns the type of reforestation to implement. Is the purpose to grow just timber

trees, or is it to generate a broader environmental benefit?

Interviews with various landholders show that motives vary, but that most are keenly interested in generating a conservation benefit whether or not they also obtain any financial gain.

The film shows different approaches being used in different situations. It also includes material filmed in Sri Lanka, where landholders face similar dilemmas.

I hope this is only the first film to be made by this partnership and that more will follow. Increasing numbers of forest restoration projects are being implemented across our rural landscapes, and there's still much that the rest of us can learn from these as they develop. • PW

Review by forest ecologist **David Lamb**, who taught at the University of Queensland. He is the author of *Regreening the Bare Hills: Tropical Forest Restoration in the Asia Pacific Region* (2011) and *Large-scale Forest Restoration* (in press; Earthscan/Routledge).

## Introduction to the Sustainability Street Approach

By Frank Fitzgerald-Ryan, Ian McBurney & Sharyn Madder.  
Ebook: use Google to find it.

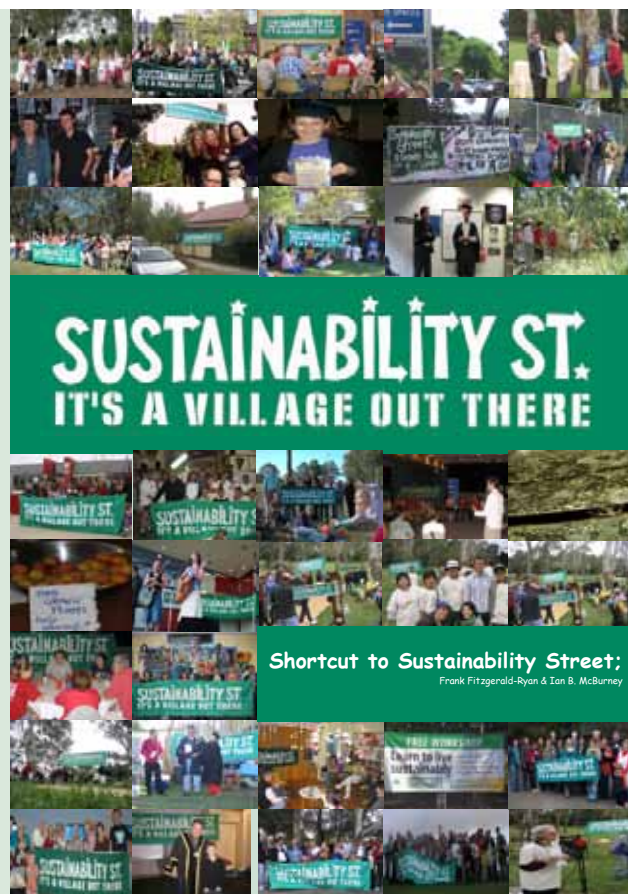
The central idea of the Sustainability Street Approach (SSA) is that we come together as local communities, learn a little about ecological sustainability and then do what we can to encourage, assist or teach other individuals or communities to join the groundswell.

This ebook aims to be a primer in ecologically sustainable living for individuals, households and, best of all, local communities working together. It is an amalgam of science, the state of the global environment, threads of sociology and psychology, humour, plus tips and information.

However, the main aim of the SSA is to trust Common Sense! It's *the* major ingredient of living sustainably.

DIY, Do It Yourself, suggests that the task at hand is achievable without the input of 'the expert'. The SSA is beyond DIY. It is DIO – Do It Ourselves. You don't have to travel solo. • PW

Frank Fitzgerald-Ryan







## Sam (Alan Max) Bruton 1927–2014

PHOTO COURTESY KAVE HARRIS

From Rob Youl

*Sam was always happy to work with people of different abilities.*

Saturday 7 June at Portland was wild and wet, but that didn't stop the celebration of the life of long-time forester, ranger and all-round environmentalist Sam Bruton, who died on 15 May, aged 87, twelve months after his beloved wife Joan passed away.

Following an interment at Narrawong cemetery, Sam's family held a commemoration at Portland's historic Uniting Church under Rev. Denise Naish. The glorious pipe organ led the congregation in three rousing hymns, each of which Sam had often sung to himself as he went about his day.

Sons Arthur and Nevan, backed by daughter Kaye (Harris), spoke of Sam's love of the bush, his skills, his active support of Koorie causes and his total involvement in community affairs, from scouts to concerts to brass bands.

They recalled his postings at Orbost, Myrtleford and Portland (via the Forests

Commission and National Parks Service, later Parks Victoria), his love of sport and the rich family life he created over his 87 years – there are now 15 grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren.

They praised the friends from all over Victoria who kept in touch with him by phone in his last years, as his health declined rapidly. Their news, shared from time to time, excited and sustained him.

Former Portland High School principal Bill Golding followed – brilliantly. He and Sam had worked together to develop the Great South West Walk, which loops 200km from Portland to Nelson along forested ridges and the Glenelg River, and back along the coast.

It had been Sam's idea, and he saw it through with a flair for fund-raising, politics and finding untapped

resources he could employ on creating and maintaining the track.

Bill had many stories of Sam's nerve in tight spots, his gutsy approach to plant operation and his sensitivity to the landscape's beauty and need for protective management.

Underlining these words, Arthur Bruton read out a hand-written letter from Victorian premier and local member Denis Naphine, praising Sam, with whom he had worked in the public service, and later on regional developments like the GSWW.

Everyone repaired to Narrawong Hall for a country afternoon tea (courtesy of the CFA), at which several other speakers contributed recollections.

In addition, ex-foresters/sappers Oliver Raymond, Greg Wallace and I described his skills as a sergeant in 91 Forestry Squadron, besides underlining the great respect he had earned in the forestry and national parks communities.





*Sam with Victorian premier Jeff Kennett at a bridge opening on the Great South West Walk, ca 1995.*



*Sharing bush knowledge.*



*Sam matched actions to words.*

PHOTOS COURTESY KAYE HARRIS

## Geoffrey Thomas Luke 1922-2014

A keen botanist, camper and conservationist, a “vibrant, erudite man who touched all who met him” and a VNPA member since 1976, Geoff Luke passed away on 10 February, aged 92.

As a member of the Society for Growing Australian Plants, he was an early campaigner to save the Little Desert from clearing in the Bolte era.

His care for the bush led him to purchase and covenant 600 hectares of land adjacent to the Little Desert through Trust for Nature. This will stand as a long-term tribute to his tireless efforts to imbue all who knew him with his enthusiasm for ‘the Bush’.

The VNPA sends sympathy and thanks to the families of both Geoff Luke and Sam Bruton. • PW

Thanks to Geoff’s son Andrew Luke for sending us these details.

### From Nevan Bruton

Sam was a forester in East Gippsland from the late 1940s, and with supportive workers developed fuel reduction burning to reduce the risk of wildfire. Up to the mid-1960s many isolated communities were saved from fire by back burning from hand-cut breaks.

He moved to Myrtleford in 1966, when logs were still hauled out of the pine plantations with the help of big Clydesdale horses. Sam developed more regular plantings, encouraged mechanisation and introduced outrow thinning so that the trees grew taller and bigger.

But he wanted to preserve the bush instead of cutting it down or burning it, and became a Chief District Ranger with the National Parks Service. Moving to Portland in 1976, an early challenge for

him was the preservation of the beautiful Melba Gully near Lavers Hill. His work on the indigenous culture and natural values of SW Victoria is still recognised.

In 1978 Sam met up with the travelling NPS works crew headed by Graham Williamson. They became good mates and planned many projects for the SW parks. Eventually Sam secured funding to open up the Lower Glenelg NP into the fantastic park it is today. He also focused on Mount Eccles, Mount Richmond and Discovery Bay parks.

Sam had to drag the bureaucracy kicking and screaming the whole way through his entire career, and the public and his staff liked him for it! • PW



### Old photos requested

The Friends of Organ Pipes NP are looking for old photos of the park. Perhaps you visited 30 years ago and took some photos? If so, please contact [robert.irvine@mail.com](mailto:robert.irvine@mail.com) or phone **9744 6395**. Or just scan and email the photos to him. This will help record the park’s history and development and will be much appreciated.



Amy Coetsee and family release an EBB at Woodlands.



PHOTO: TRAVIS SCICCHITANO

## Woodlands: a park to call home

TRAVIS SCICCHITANO REPORTS ON A RECENT RELEASE OF ENDANGERED EASTERN BARRED BANDICOOTS.

### EBB update

Zoos Victoria and volunteers ran two trapping sessions recently (3-5 and 15-19 August) to catch and release Eastern Barred Bandicoots at Woodlands. The results were amazing! Over seven nights:

- the team caught 56 individual adults (34 males, 22 females)!
- 31 of these were new animals born in the wild
- almost all females had pouch young – others had elongated teats, suggesting young had just left the pouch
- the team counted 56 new young in their mothers' pouches
- two females found with four young each in the pouch – a very large and rarely seen number
- some males caught weighed over 1 kg – very big and healthy for an EBB!

### Eastern Barred Bandicoots have returned to Woodlands Historic Park near Melbourne Airport!

From July 2013, 47 bandicoots were released into the park. Some were 'wild', translocated from Mt Rothwell near the You Yangs and from Hamilton; others came from the captive breeding program at Melbourne Zoo. So we were off to a great start with a good number of animals on the ground.

Monitoring straight after the first release was a huge success, 26 of the original animals being caught. Weights were good and breeding was on the way. Plus the EBBs were finding new habitat and moving throughout the fox-proof and cat-proof Back Paddock.

A planned monitoring session in December to catch our first bandicoots

born and bred on site was a success. We caught a little female weighing only 170 grams, around the size of a small house mouse. So exciting!

But it gets even better.

The next monitoring session was planned after summer in April 2014. After a very long and incredibly hot and dry summer, anticipation was up to see how the animals had coped. The great news is that they thrived.

All animals caught had significant weight gain. They were all classified with good body condition, and surprisingly had been breeding. Bandicoots will often slow down their breeding over summer, as conditions and food sources can be poor. But not at Woodlands.

Seven of the eight females caught were carrying a total of eleven pouch young!

So it looks as though the bandicoots have settled incredibly well into their new home.

The other great news is that the original EBBs released are now grandparents, as two females born at Woodlands have been caught with pouch young.

Thanks again to all the wonderful volunteers who toiled away through winter and spring last year. They did a great job planting around 9,000 grasses to create new bandicoot habitat. With such a hot summer, endless days were spent watering the plants to keep them alive.

Volunteers also continued the weeding program, broke down rabbit warrens and did many other tasks. • PW

From the newsletter 'Warron', July 2014

## Endangered Spotted-tailed Quoll sighted in Otways

An endangered Spotted-tailed Quoll has been sighted in Great Otway National Park for the first time in 24 years.

Also known as the Tiger Quoll, the animal was photographed on a remote camera set up by Parks Victoria to monitor the park's native mammal



PHOTO COURTESY PARKS VICTORIA

population. This followed the recent discovery of a hair sample.

Parks Victoria Chief Executive Dr Bill Jackson said it was an encouraging sign that fox control programs in the park were helping protect native species.

Ranger Gary Summers said the park is lucky to have such a range of species, from tiny ground-dwelling mammals such as the White-footed Dunnart to potoroos and bandicoots and larger predators like the quoll.

The discovery follows sightings of the Spotted-tailed Quoll in Grampians NP over the past year, after the species was thought to be extinct in the area for over 140 years. • PW



# 'BARCODING'

## A VNPA benefit exhibition

22 OCTOBER TO 8 NOVEMBER • OFFICIAL OPENING SATURDAY 25 OCTOBER

For more information, see enclosed flyer or phone 0407 317 323.

VNPA members and friends are invited to a free exhibition of innovative paintings depicting native flora and fauna by artist and VNPA member Sylvia Mair.

The exhibition invites us to consider the value placed on Australia's flora and fauna by ourselves, our government and the general public. While acknowledging a generally undervalued perception of our natural world, we can join together here in celebration of its true worth.

To be officially opened by VNPA director Matt Ruchel on **Saturday 25 October** at the Stephen McLaughlan Gallery in the Nicholas Building (Level 8, 37 Swanston St, cnr of Flinders Lane), the exhibition runs from **22 October to 8 November**.

All sales income will be donated to the VNPA.



## Willis's Walkabouts

### Build Up & Wet: Our Most Dramatic Seasons



**Our water is warm!** Southern Australia has nothing like our tropical seasons. We can't do them justice in this small space. All we can do is suggest that you check out our Build Up and Wet Season pages.

[www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/buildup.shtml](http://www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/buildup.shtml)

[www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/wet.shtml](http://www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/wet.shtml)

We want more of you to experience these amazing seasons so **we will give a minimum of a \$500 discount** to anyone who quotes this ad and books one of our trips beginning between October 2014 & March 2015. Please ask us for details. *Photo: Walking in the Bungle Bungles in the Wet.*

[www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au](http://www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au) [rrwillis@internode.on.net](mailto:rrwillis@internode.on.net) Ph: 08 8985 2134



### Gabo Island Discovery December 15-19, 2014

A refreshing island holiday at the far eastern tip of Victoria. Explore on foot, discovering a rich human history, birds and many wonderful secrets for curious nature lovers. Fully accommodated.

### Alpine Walking Tour March 10-13, 2015

A guided walking holiday enjoying the beauty of Victoria's alpine region. Lodge accommodated, good moderate grade walks every day experiencing snowgum woodlands, plains and exposed ridges with superb views. Relax and recharge!

For more details contact Jenny—

**Gippsland High Country Tours**  
Phone (03) 5157 5556

Email: [jennyghct@netspace.net.au](mailto:jennyghct@netspace.net.au)  
[www.gippslandhighcountrytours.com.au](http://www.gippslandhighcountrytours.com.au)

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