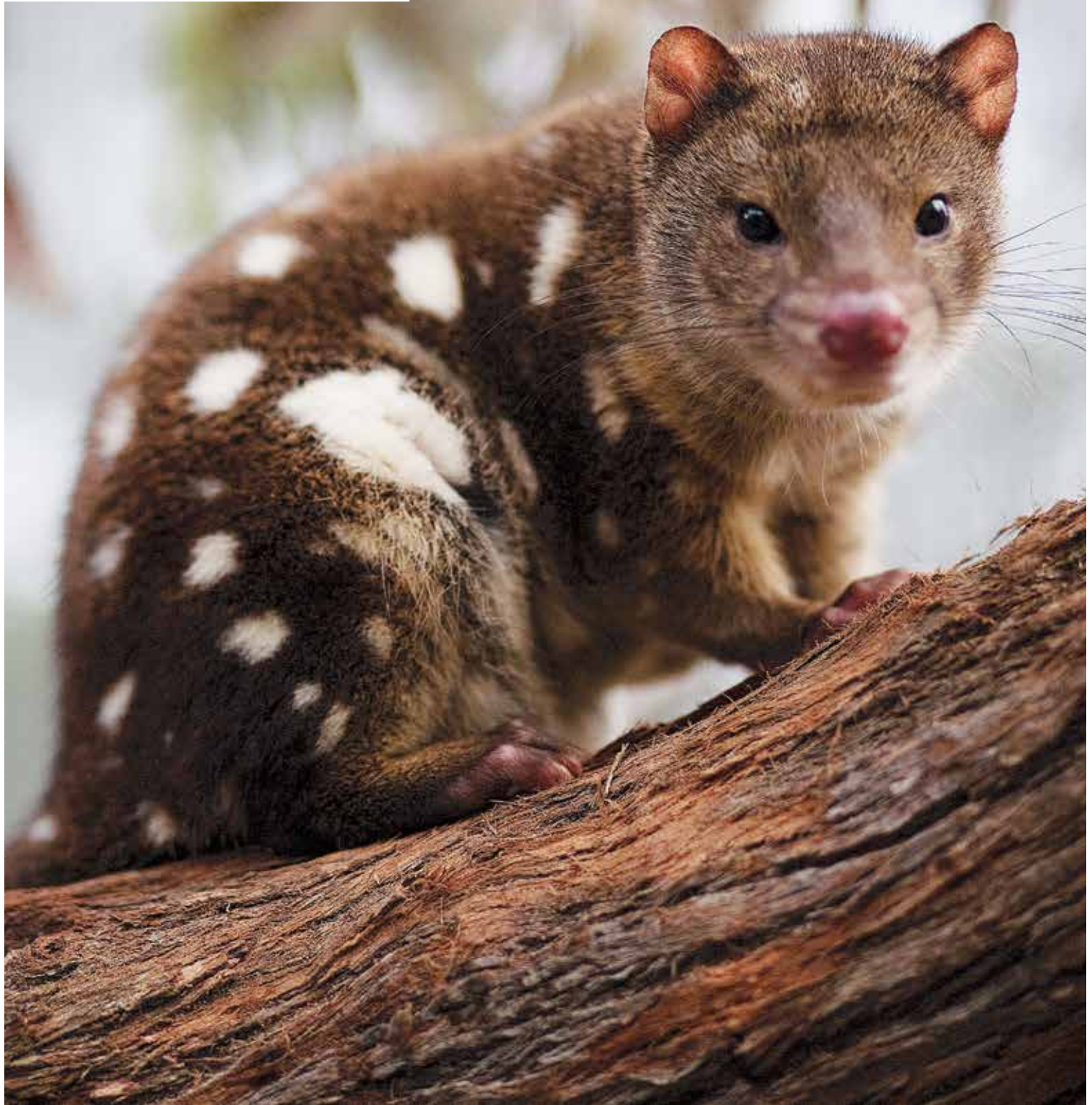


PARK WATCH



REDISCOVERING THE SPOT-TAIL QUOLL
STATE ELECTION 2018
CENTRAL WEST FORESTS
GREAT OCEAN ROAD THREATENED?
DJA DJA WURRUNG JOINT MANAGEMENT
WESTERN PORT BAY AT RISK
PLUS VNPA ANNUAL REPORT 2017-18

SEPTEMBER 2018 NO 274



VICTORIAN
NATIONAL PARKS
ASSOCIATION
Be part of nature



Be part of nature

PRESIDENT Euan Moore

DIRECTOR Matt Ruchel

Level 3, 60 Leicester St, Carlton, VIC 3053

ABN 34 217 717 593

Telephone: (03) 9341 6500

E-mail: vnpa@vnpa.org.au

Web: www.vnpa.org.au

OUR VISION

The Victorian National Parks Association vision is to ensure Victoria is a place with a diverse and healthy natural environment that is protected, respected and enjoyed by all.

Everyone can help in the conservation of Victoria's wild and beautiful places. To find out how you can help, visit www.vnpa.org.au/support or call us on (03) 9341 6500.

EDITOR

Meg Sobey

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Phone the VNPA or email meg@vnpa.org.au

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FRONT COVER

A spot-tail quoll (also known as tiger quoll) has been recorded for the first time in decades at Mount Baw Baw in the Central Highlands. Read all about amazing rediscovery on page 5. Photo: Lucia Griggi, courtesy of the Conservation Ecology Centre.

Park Watch ISSN 1324-4361

Authorised by Matt Ruchel, Executive Director, Victorian National Parks Association.
Level 3, 60 Leicester St, Carlton, VIC 3053.



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From the President

As we approach the state election in November, it is important to consider the state of Victoria's environment and what is needed to protect our unique and diverse flora and fauna. In recent years there have been very few improvements in the protection or management of our natural environment. Protection of areas in threatened ecosystems has stalled, and funding is still not back to the 2011 or 2012 levels, even before we consider the impacts of inflation.

Proper funding and management of our park system could have very real benefits to the community, particularly for smaller communities in regional areas. There was a time when the role of park rangers included liaising with the public and providing information about the park. This encourages people to spend more time exploring the park, and also spend more time in nearby towns where they contribute to economic activity. Additional staff also means additional people in the community and more demand for services such as schools and doctors making these more viable. All this is before we take into account the well-documented community health benefits from spending time in nature. These benefits are greater than the current parks budget.

There is also an enormous unmet need for the control of invasive species across the state (see page 16). Invasive plants and animals occupy both public and private land. They don't distinguish by ownership. We need strong policies, backed by long-term strategies and funding, and enforcement of control measures to reduce their impact. Let us imagine what our state would be like if we were able to remove feral pests such as cats, foxes, deer and other hoofed mammals; quolls, bandicoots, bettongs and the like would have a chance to flourish, as would many of our endangered birds, reptiles and

frogs. Having imagined this future, then let us think big and work towards it so that it becomes reality. If we don't try we are doomed to failure and important species in our environment will continue the slide towards extinction.

The creation of new protected areas has also stalled over the last two governments (see page 8). Currently it is the lowest it has been since the early 1950s, yet there are still many ecosystems where the level of protection is well below international standards. In some cases, such as lowland grasslands, even if all that remains was protected we would still not reach those international benchmarks. When we call for new protected areas, it is often met with a response from opponents calling for 'balance'. Yes we do need balance, but contrary to their complaints, to achieve this balance in these cases would actually involve restoring the many natural areas that have already been damaged through exploitative actions.

We must also move away from inappropriate plans for tracks and buildings within our national and state parks. These are often promoted by those who see an opportunity for private benefit at public expense, and if it all falls over then the public picks up the cost as the promoters walk away. Low impact infrastructure which caters for all walks of society is what is required. The grand designs must be left outside the park where they can rise or fall without public subsidies.

Politicians who really care about their electorates should be advocating for more resources for our protected areas, more staff for our national parks, and ambitious invasive species control programs. They should also be arguing for the protection and good management of our environment for the health benefits that brings (see page 9). • PW

Euan Moore, VNPA President

Community planting a greener future

THANK YOU TO ALL THE VNPA MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS WHO JOINED TWO RECENT COMMUNITY PLANTING EVENTS, PROJECT HINDMARSH AND GROW WEST.

VNPA has been supporting and involved in these two annual events from their inception.

The 21st Project Hindmarsh tree planting extravaganza was held over the 6-8 July weekend and was a great success. Over 100 volunteers descended on Kaniva to take part, planting 12,000 plants at two sites at Dinyarrak, near the South Australian border. The first a remnant grey box - buloke

woodland, the second included a lovely black box swamp and a section of Tatiara Creek.

On Sunday 15 July, close to 200 green thumbs helped plant 5,433 new trees at the 13th Grow West Community Planting Day. This year, the planting day was held at Sheoak Hill, a 552 hectare former cropping and grazing property nestled between Brisbane Ranges National Park and Werribee Gorge State Park, in the Rowsley Valley. The goal of this project is to re-establish a link between the two parks by managing existing vegetation, controlling weeds and rabbits, and revegetating both the flats as well as the shallow and highly erodible hillsides.

Thanks to all the hard-working volunteers of both events! • PW

Logging in national parks ruled out – thanks to your action

Back in March, the logging industry called for Victoria's national parks to be logged (see page 15 *Park Watch* June 2017).

But all your emails to both the state government and the opposition to reject these calls have been successful!

The Victorian Environment Minister Lily D'Ambrosio made a public commitment that: "The Andrews Labor Government has no intention to log in National Parks."

And Shadow Environment Minister Nick Wakeling has responded that: "The Liberal Nationals do not support the logging of National Parks or any public land managed exclusively for conservation or the protection of water catchments."

National parks are the cornerstone of efforts to protect nature and ensure native species survive and thrive. We thank you all for continually standing up for these important natural spaces. • PW

If you would like to further support our work protecting Victoria's national parks, please donate today.

Help stand up for Victoria's nature this election

THE 2018 STATE ELECTION IS ONLY WEEKS AWAY.

There is no sign that political parties are serious about creating new parks for our forests – so we are ramping up our campaign to protect our forests, threatened wildlife and our unique marine and coast.

Our eastern forests are in dire need of protection, with intensive logging continuing in Victoria's Central Highlands, East Gippsland and the Central West in critically endangered wildlife habitat, old growth forests and rainforests.

Now logging is taking place in western Victoria in the last small fragments of forests that remain, including Mount Cole near Ballarat.

There are many threats to Victoria's coast, including the public beaches of Belfast Coastal Reserve being invaded by commercial racehorse trainers.

We need to put the pressure on right now and let the government know that voters in marginal electorates and across Victoria want better protection for nature across the state.

Will you join the campaign? There are lots of ways to get involved. We need you to help us:

- Letterbox in your local area.
- Letter box in strategic seats (some suburban travel involved).
- Hand out fliers at train stations.
- Help in the office to prepare materials.

We can't do it without you! Contact Sarah (sarah@vnpa.org.au) to find out more or visit www.vnpa.org.au/state-election-2018 to sign up straight away.

Can you show your support for the creation of the new Great Forest National Park by displaying this sign in your front yard or window in the lead up to the election? Please email vnpa@vnpa.org.au or call (03) 9341 6500 • PW





PHOTO: JOSHUA CUNNINGHAM, FLICKR CC

A spot-tail quoll.

Milan Stupar was guided by intuition and historical hints when he began searching for an elusive native animal in the Central Highlands.

His hunch resulted in the lawyer and keen bushwalker taking the initiative to set up remote sensing cameras in just the right place.

On 25 April this year, he finally saw what he had been looking for. His footage successfully recorded a large male spot-tail quoll, *Dasyurus maculatus*, in the forests of the Central Highlands, near Mount Baw Baw.

The species has not been reliably recorded in the Central Highlands for decades, and has not been systematically surveyed for evidence of a remnant population.

Milan is a Biological Science graduate from Monash University, but it was his strong personal interest in these mysterious marsupials that motivated his actions.

"My love for nature developed early in my life, when I used to spend a lot of time in my grandparents' village, high up in the remote and pristine mountains of northwest Bosnia,

Rediscovering a rarity

AN AMAZING STORY OF INDIVIDUAL
PERSEVERANCE IN THREATENED
SPECIES PROTECTION IS SHARED
HERE BY **BERNIE MACE** AND
MILAN STUPAR.

where wolves still howl in the mountains and brown bears are numerous," Milan says.

"This connection with nature continued when I came to Australia as a refugee at twelve years of age. I continued to immerse myself in nature, by heading out into our parks and state forests at most opportunities, exploring and photographing my experiences.

"I became fascinated with the quoll a few years ago, and the more I read the more I realised just how rare these animals are, particularly here in Victoria.

"I decided to purchase a remote sensing camera and try my luck in photographing this cryptic marsupial.

"After trying a few different locations, over a period of six months, from Mount Samaria State Park, Strzelecki Ranges and Toorongo Plateau, I was able to finally photograph one near the southern slopes of Mount Baw Baw in Erica State Forest."

There were only historical records of the spot-tail quoll in the area. The entire Victorian population of the species is

Continued overleaf

Continued from previous page

critically low. Anyone who has tried to find them anywhere in the state knows just how hard it is to get a glimpse of the elusive creatures, even in known habitat areas, when their numbers are now so limited.

On hearing of this successful recording, Bernie Mace, a retired Materials Scientist with a long-held interest in carnivorous marsupials, was prompted to contact Milan. With personal experience sighting quolls in Victoria and Tasmania, Bernie lives in Toolangi and has been collecting evidence (mainly anecdotal observations) for years, particularly since the horrific experience of the Black Saturday bushfires in 2009.

This latest verification of the continued existence of this very rare animal in the Central Highlands forests has signalled the need for exhaustive efforts to study and conserve this important remnant population.

What is a quoll?

The spot-tail quoll is a marsupial carnivore, and in fact, the largest surviving example of this genre on the Australian mainland. This species is also known as the tiger quoll. The spot-tail quoll is distinctive because of its strongly spotted coat, and has this feature continuing along the tail. Other species of quoll, such as the eastern quoll *Dasyurus viverrinus*, do not have spots on the tail, so are instantly distinguishable from this largest member of the family.

The spot-tail quoll is the most arboreal of the *Dasyurus* family, with sharp claws, clasping toes and serrated pads on the feet to assist in tree climbing. It also has very powerful jaws, can prey successfully on animals heavier than itself, and has been described as very agile in pursuit of prey, such as possums, in the forest canopy. It has a well-deserved reputation for ferocity in its hunting behaviour. On the Australian mainland, the spot-tail quoll is the top-order marsupial predator, however in the most part there are insufficient individuals to effectively perform this vital role on a landscape scale.

It is mainly nocturnal in its habits, which helps to explain its 'secretive' reputation. It has huge home ranges, needing large areas of intact habitat.

Conservation status

The spot-tail quoll is listed as endangered under the national *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

However, the native forest timber industry is exempt from these national environmental laws due to Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs).

These animals are incredibly cryptic in their behavior and, consequently, can be easily overlooked in areas subject to logging or other threatening human activities. The Erica State Forest and Toolangi State Forest are cases in point, where remnant populations have been hanging on largely



IMAGE: JOHN GOULD, F.R.S., MAMMALS OF AUSTRALIA, VOL. I
PLATE 52, LONDON, 1863. PUBLIC DOMAIN

There are only historical records of *Dasyurus maculatus* in the area.

unrecognised, acutely in danger of being lost. In such areas, appropriate action could save them from local extinction.

Under state law of the *Fauna and Flora Guarantee Act 1998* and forestry regulation in the Central Highlands Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) region, the species requires a 500-hectare Special Protection Zone (SPZ) where logging operations will be prohibited. This requirement has been acknowledged by VicForests and the Minister of the Environment Lily D'Ambrosio in the media. However, the state government has decided to use a weaker Special Management Zone (SMZ) which covers a larger area of 1,000 hectares, but allows for half of it to be logged in the future.

An intended logging operation, less than two kilometres from the spot where the quoll was found, was suspended, but is still on the logging schedule. Months later we are still waiting for this permanent protection to be put in place.

We look forward to seeing details of action to implement these protection measures around this most recent sighting location.

As well as the major and ongoing threat of habitat loss, regular programs of poison baiting in wide-spread areas of Victoria are potentially devastating for this animal. It is admitted in official government documents that females and juvenile quolls can be killed by 1080 doses designed for fox and wild dogs.

The first image is of Erica State Forest, near where the spot-tail quoll was recorded. The second is a logging coupe in close proximity to the site.

A different approach is needed, and surely human ingenuity can find a way to remove fox from the environment without wiping out the dwindling population of our magnificent spot-tail quoll.

Some lessons to be learned from this timely discovery are:

1. There is much to learn about the complexities and components of ecosystems, and this spot-tail quoll, an adult male, represents a species whose presence in this region we could only speculate about prior to obtaining this photographic evidence.
2. It was photographed in an area of mixed age and mixed species native forest, containing many large mature trees. This helps to illustrate the value of maturing native forests, with remnant stands of old growth, for the biodiversity they can support. We know from past studies of the spot-tail quoll that it prefers to live in mature forest, containing tree hollows that represent den sites for daylight security, as well as supporting a rich compliment of resident prey species that are necessary dietary options for a hungry quoll.

What action is needed to help the quoll to survive?

Their needs are simple: habitat, particularly old growth forests with plenty of hollow-bearing trees and good connectivity across the landscape; food supply from healthy populations of prey species; and an absence of threats such as poison baiting programs, predation or competition from feral predators, and human disturbance.

Local extinctions are stepping stones to diminishing gene pools, and ultimately, to total extinction.

Consequently, saving them requires the following responses as a minimal starting point:

- We must retain all old growth forest, in all areas where this precious habitat remains.
- We must minimise all processes that are destructive to native forests, particularly clear fell logging, and transition the timber industry into plantations.
- We must put an end to, or greatly refine, poison baiting as employed in feral predator control programs.
- We must increase public (and official) awareness of the existence and significance of these beautiful animals.
- We must prioritize the need for action to protect them, including stronger environmental laws at both state and federal level, and immediate introduction of a 500-hectare special protection zone around the recent sighting at Mount Baw Baw.



PHOTOS: MILAN STUPAR

Much has been said about the extinction of the thylacine, and how stupid we were to lose such a significant and obviously threatened species, despite strong warnings from concerned scientists. The eastern quoll has already been lost from mainland Australia, from an extremely healthy population base at the turn of the 20th century. Let us learn from these tragic errors and take appropriate action to not only save the spot-tail quoll from extinction, but to ensure its return to a healthy population.

Australia's deplorable record of mammal extinctions is well known, and our leaders must take responsible action to reverse the previous negative trends. A genuine respect for nature and for its effective stewardship must be prioritized at this time.

As the necessary scientific advice is now overwhelming and being more urgently communicated, there are no longer any excuses for inaction.

Milan and Bernie hope more action to protect the spot-tail quoll and its habitat is forthcoming.

"We hope that the Victorian community can band together and figure out a way to protect the species for future generations now that we have evidence of their ongoing existence in the Central Highlands." • PW

Take Action:

Write or email the Victorian Environment Minister and ask for better protection for spot-tail quolls and the immediate introduction of a 500-hectare Special Protection Zone around the recent sighting.

The Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio MP
Level 16
8 Nicholson Street
East Melbourne
Victoria, 3002

lily.dambrosio@parliament.vic.gov.au

National parks creation needs a jump start

IN NOVEMBER 2017, THE ANDREWS GOVERNMENT WAS TRACKING AS THE WORST PERFORMER IN TERMS OF PARK CREATION OVER THE LAST 60+ YEARS. NOW, WITH ONLY WEEKS TO GO BEFORE THE NEXT ELECTION ON NOVEMBER 24, HAS THE SITUATION CHANGED?

In November last year, VNPA strategically highlighted the failing of the state government to add to the national parks and protected area estate. The analysis compared the track record of governments over the last several decades (see pages 6-10 *Park Watch* December 2017).

On 14 July 2018, Victoria's Environment Minister Lily D'Ambrosio, and Gunaikurnai Traditional Owner Aunty Doris Paton, formally announced the creation of the Brataualung Forest Park in the Strzelecki Ranges. A new 2,390-hectare forest park is the first package of land, and a total of 8,500 hectares will be gradually handed back over the coming years.

This package was originally announced under the Brumby Labor government. However, Forest Parks, a type of reserve created under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978*, are not officially counted as part of the formal protected area estate. While they do outlaw large-scale industrial logging, they have less restrictive provisions for recreation, allow fire wood collection and, in some cases, selective or speciality timber logging.

If this new park was included in the calculations, the government would have created 9,560 hectares of new parks in this term, still 358 hectares short of the previous Coalition government's total (though on a 'days in office' basis they would be slightly ahead).

On 27 March 2018 the Victorian Government announced that a total of 2,500 hectares of the Kuark Forest, north-west of Orbost, will be set aside as a Special Protection Zone where logging is banned. The official zoning does not yet appear to have been

changed, and these types of zonings are not permanent protection and cannot be counted in any calculation of additions to the national protected area estate. Conservation groups welcomed the announcement but called on the government to incorporate the Kuark Forest into the adjacent Errinundra National Park. This has not been committed to.

Protected areas are defined by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as follows: "A protected area is a clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values". They have a

formal role in fulfilling Australia's commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), an international treaty that must be taken seriously.

It is clear that the Andrews government and the previous Baillieu/Napthine Coalition government are now neck and neck as the worst performing governments on national park creation over the last half century. With a benchmark gap of around 1.5 million hectares in public conservation areas (a larger gap if private land is included), all political parties need to do better. While it is too late for this term, committing to creating a Great Forest National Park, new parks around the Emerald Link, the Strathbogies, Central Western Victoria or even new marine parks would be a very good place to start. • PW

Period	Parks created under the National Parks Act or equivalent. (Ha)	Days in office	Ratio: New parks per day in office (Ha)
1882-1955	108,036		
1955-1972 (Bolte)	98,450	6,288	15.66
1972-1982 (Hamer/Thompson)	781,932	3,508	222.90
1982-1992 (Cain/Kirner)	1,961,097	3,837	511.10
1992-1999 (Kennett)	127,864	2,570	49.75
1999-2010 (Bracks/Brumby)	364,473	4,060	89.77
2010-2014 (Baillieu/Napthine)	9,918	1,464	6.77
2014 -Aug 2018 (Andrews Govt) *	7,170	1,376 (31 Aug 2018)	5.2, or 6.9 if Brataualung Forest Park is counted.*

*Calculation 1: 7,170 ha / 1,376 day = 5.2 ha per day. Calculation 2: 7,170 ha + 2,390 ha = 9,560 ha/ 1376 days in office = 6.9 ha per day in office at the end of August 2018.

* Assumes days in office to 2017 anniversary of state election. Historical days in office were obtained from VEC www.vec.vic.gov.au/Results/results-historical-vicpremiers.html

**Calculation of ratio assumes Anglesea Heathlands addition to Great Otway National Park, which is currently before parliament and the addition of the 650 ha Woowookarung Regional Park (Canadian Regional Park), near Ballarat, which is not reserved under the National Parks Act, though some of the provisions of the Act apply and it is managed by Parks Victoria.

***This table includes only reserves created under the National Park Act and its predecessors and does not include other types of conservation reserves. The data for this analysis largely uses the creation of parks data from Parks Victoria plus recent additions parkweb.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/639857/Creation-of-Parks.pdf

Nature's Needs

OUR DIRECTOR **MATT RUCHEL** OUTLINES TEN CONSERVATION PRIORITIES FOR THE 2018 VICTORIAN STATE ELECTION.

VNPA has produced a detailed policy document which has been provided to all major political parties. The document, *Natural Victoria: Securing Nature for Victorian Families – Nature Conservation Policy Ideas for the 2018 Victorian State Election*, outlines over 40 individual policy recommendations, addressed within four themes:

- **Protecting special places:** a world-leading national parks and conservation estate for Victorian families.
- **Managing nature for future generations:** making Victoria a world-leading conservation manager.
- **Growing a strong and healthy community:** Victorians active in nature.
- **Securing a natural future:** legislation and policy that can guarantee the survival of our natural heritage.

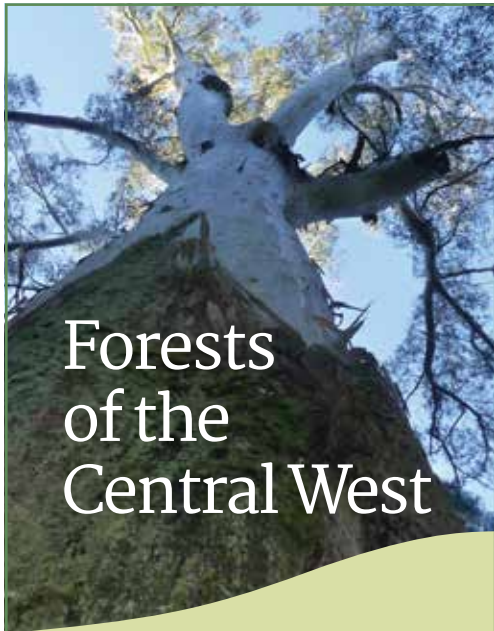
A snapshot of ten 'Conservation Priorities' for the Victorian state election are outlined here.

We are realistic. While it is unlikely that any of major parties would adopt all of these policies in full, the document provides a framework and suggestions for policy which would help protect and enhance our unique natural heritage. If fully implemented, the package would cost between \$300 – \$400 million over four years. Currently the state spends around two to three per cent of its total budget directly on management of the environment, water and planning. The required extra investment would increase this expenditure by around half a percent. By comparison, the budget for North East Link freeways is \$16.5 billion. • PW

Ten Conservation Priorities for the Victorian state election

- 1) **New national parks and conservation areas in eastern Victoria (east of the Hume Highway),** including the Great Forest National Park, East Gippsland Emerald Link, Strathbogie Fores. Also include Mount Stirling in to the Alpine National Park. Comprehensively review and replace the outdated and obsolete Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) for Eastern Victoria, and abolish VicForests.
- 2) **New national parks and conservation areas in western Victoria (west of the Hume Highway),** including completing the VEAC investigation into Central West Victoria to better protect the Wellsford, Wombat, Mount Cole and Pyrenees forests. There should also be a new assessment carried out in the far south-west in the area between the Little Desert and Grampians national parks. Abolish the antiquated Western Regional Forest Agreement. Establish the long-promised Murray River Park and remove cattle grazing from the Murray shores.
- 3) **Private land conservation:** Dramatically increase capital in the Trust for Nature Revolving Fund by between \$30 – \$40 million. A ramped up Victorian Revolving Fund is a financially effective way of scaling up private land nature protection to around 60,000 – 70,000 additional hectares over four years. An increase would allow for priority land across the state, including coastal, urban fringe or large agricultural holdings, to be acquired, protected (covenanted) and resold.
- 4) **Natural Melbourne:** Fast track delivery of the western grassland reserves by increasing upfront funding for acquisition of grassland in the 15,000-hectare area on Melbourne's western and northern fringe. Create a Naturally Marvellous Melbourne Plan, which would add smaller high-conservation areas to the metropolitan and regional parks network.
- 5) **Marine and coastal protection:** Drop the ban on creating new marine national parks and undertake a review of the comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness of Victoria's marine protected areas. Protect beaches and shore-nesting birds by banning commercial horse training on all beaches, including on Belfast Coastal Reserve. Establish new coastal parks under the *National Parks Act 1975* at key sites such as the Moolap wetland.
- 6) **Core national parks funding:** While Parks Victoria manages about 18 per cent of the state and some of the state's key urban parks, as well as waterways and local ports, it receives less than 0.5 per cent of the state budget. A core funding increase of \$50 million per year, with subsequent annual increases of at least \$15 million in core government funding (non-tied) in forward estimates, would bring Parks Victoria back up to speed. This would enhance funding for hundreds of skill-based positions such as rangers, as well as resourcing improved long-term land management programs.
- 7) **Stop the invasive invasion:** Commit to a statewide control and containment strategy in parks and across the landscape to reduce or end the impact of feral game species, especially deer, and other problem pest animals. This needs a specific program that engages integrated control of these pest species, including eradication in key areas, listing deer as a pest species, improving research funding for targeted baits and other control methods.
- 8) **Wandering Victoria one short walk at a time:** Enhance the approach to the regional visitor economy and protect the integrity of the parks estate by focusing on the hundreds of day, half-day and shorter walks in parks, instead of developing new large-scale multi-day walks and associated infrastructure. This would focus on attracting people to accommodation in and around existing towns and villages.
- 9) **Act on extinction:** Commit to being a leader in the protection of threatened species, with a new approach developed by an independent commission of inquiry to frame new legislation, and set up programs and institutions needed to reverse the decline.
- 10) **Protect wetlands and riversides:** Continue to fund and implement the regional riparian action plan to improve management of public and privately-owned riparian land for at least \$15 million per year (\$65 million over four years), and systematically review and identify freshwater areas (refugia) likely to facilitate survival of organisms under threat from climate change.

You can read more detail these points and our state election policy and advocacy work on our website: www.vnpa.org.au/state-election-2018



Forests of the Central West

HIGHLIGHTING VICTORIA'S 'OTHER' FORESTS WORTHY OF PROTECTION.

Some are home to endemic and vulnerable species, others contain habitats that if protected would fill gaps in the formal reserve system. In 2010 we released our report *Better Protection for Special Places* which assessed many of these forests of the Central West as being suitable for protection under the National Parks Act.

VNPA welcomes the recommendations in the draft Central West Investigation released by the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) on 31 August (see overleaf for detail).

The recommendations more than triple the total area within national and state parks in the Central West, adding to Victoria's conservation estate and protecting more than 350 threatened species.

No everything is rosy though, as there are some significant shortcomings around Mount Cole and Mount Lonarch forests, with only minor additions to the conservation estate.

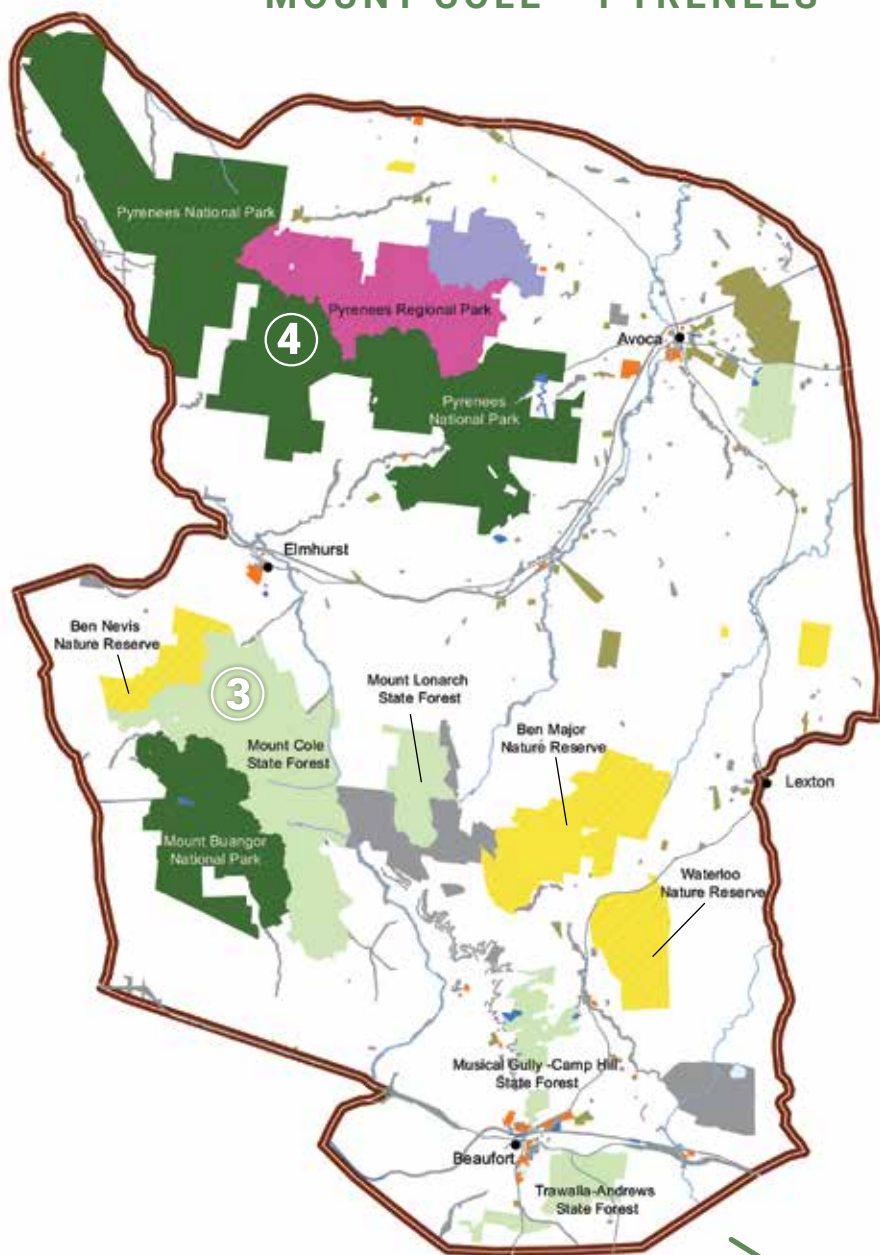
We must ensure the next government, whoever that may be, commits to implementing VEAC's recommendations.

**Submissions close
31 October 2018**

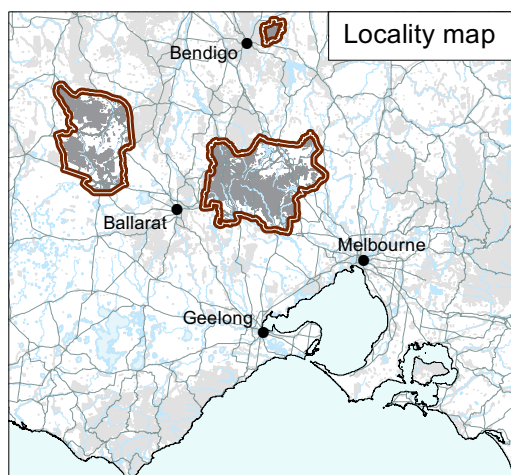
More information for making a submission on our website:
www.vnpa.org.au/veac-central-west

Draft recommendations

MOUNT COLE – PYRENEES

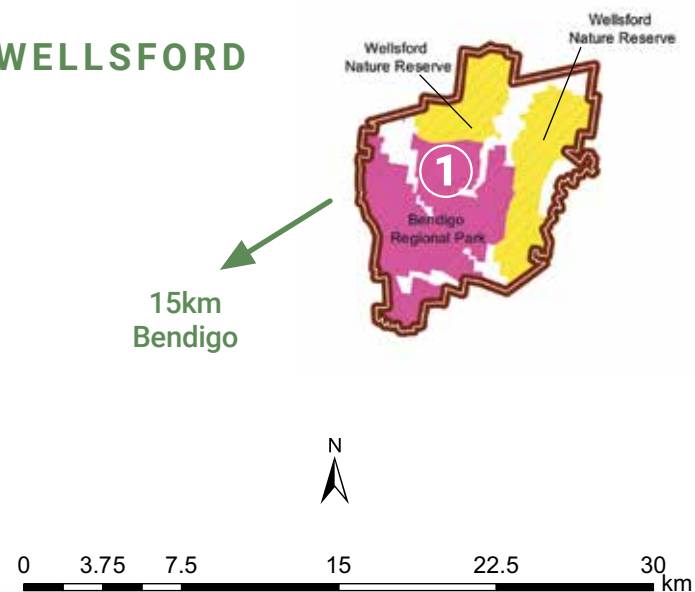


45km
Ballarat



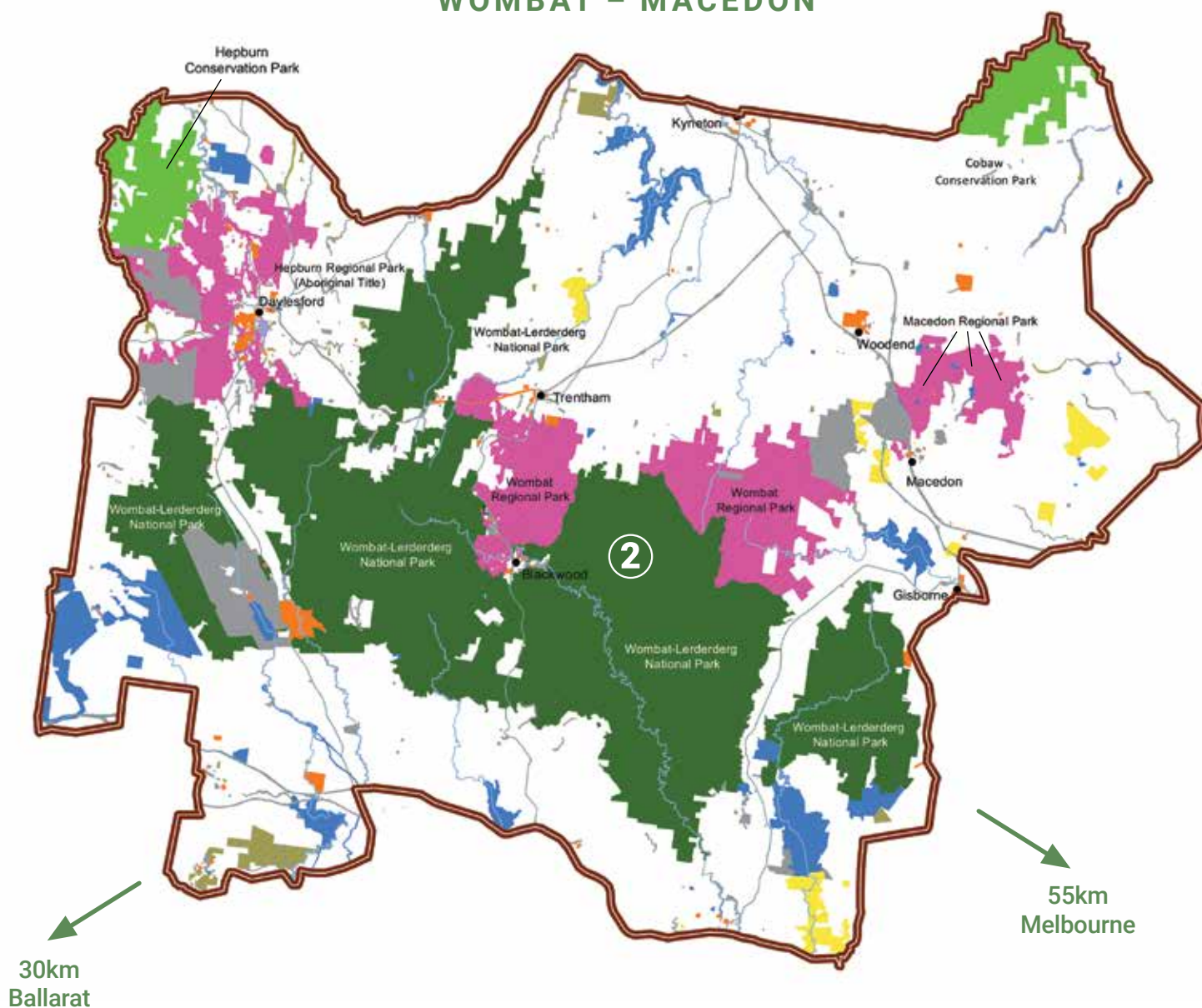
For more detailed map, visit
www.veac.vic.gov.au/investigation/central-west-investigation/maps

WELLSFORD



- Public land use category**
-  National park, State park
 -  Conservation park
 -  Regional park
 -  Nature reserve
 -  Bushland reserve
 -  Historic reserve
 -  State forest
 -  Water production reserve
 -  Community use reserve
 -  Other public land
 -  Investigation area boundary
 -  Recommended change in public land use

WOMBAT – MACEDON



1 Wellsford Forest (7,122 hectares)

Where: Just 15 kilometres north-east of the historic goldfields town of Bendigo.

Values: Dominated by eucalypts, wattles and wildflowers, it's a place to explore and enjoy Victoria's box-ironbark forests as they recover from a long history of logging. The forest provides important habitat for threatened wildlife: brush-tailed phascogale, diamond firetail, grey-crowned babbler, speckled warbler, and the nationally endangered swift parrot. It offers excellent examples of recovering forest, and contains native bushland of high conservation significance, linking patches in the north and south.

Threats: Logging operations with seven areas scheduled (including one with swift parrot records); gold mining/prospecting; poorly maintained and illegal tracks causing erosion; and rubbish dumping.

VEAC recommends:

Wellsford Forest to include an addition of 3,950 hectares to the Bendigo Regional Parks and the creation of a 3,160-hectare Wellsford Nature Reserve which would cover almost half of the Wellsford Forest.

2 Wombat Forest (45,100 hectares)

Where: Between Daylesford, Woodend and Ballan.

Values: Large, beautiful forest with huge diversity including over 360 indigenous plant and 180 native animal species. The Wombat bossiaea and Wombat bush-pea occur nowhere else but Wombat Forest. Contains 25 rare, vulnerable or threatened plants and 15 threatened fauna species such as the spot-tail quoll, growling grass frog, powerful owls, and brush-tail phascogale.

Threats: Logging operations with 50 logging areas scheduled; gold mining/prospecting; feral animals; weeds; poorly maintained tracks and signage; and poorly-planned prescribed burning.

VEAC recommends:

Wombat Forest to have significant additions, with an increase in the protection of around 28,000 hectares in a new Wombat-Lerderderg National Park and 9,000 hectares in a new Wombat Regional Park located in two parts.

3 Mount Cole Forest (9,000 hectares)

Where: Just off the Western Highway, 25 kilometres from the township of Beaufort, and an hour west of Ballarat.

Values: Small patch of forest (around 9,000 hectares), rising to almost 900 metres where snow gums can be found. It is home to one of Victoria's most popular walking tracks, the Beeripmo Walk. Its forest harbours over 130 different native birds, nine threatened fauna species, 13 threatened flora species, three endangered vegetation types and two vulnerable vegetation types, under-represented elsewhere in Victoria's formal reserve system.

Threats: Forty per cent of the area is zoned for some sort of logging including clearfell. Little of the accessible high production timber forests at Mount Cole have been protected in national parks or other reserves. See more overleaf.

VEAC recommends:

Mount Buangor National Park to be extended by 1,406 hectares, incorporating under-represented EVC Grassy Dry Forest, protecting endangered Mount Cole grevillea. Also well as creating a 1,088-hectare Ben Nevis Nature Reserve on the northern flanks.

Mount Cole and Mount Lonarch are the big losers in the draft recommendations, with much of the area left open to logging. The recommendations fail to even protect the integrity of the Beeripmo Walk or the headwaters of the Wimmera River.

4 Pyrenees Forest (15,790 hectares)

Where: 180 kilometres from Melbourne and 70 kilometres north-west of Ballarat in the popular wine region.

Values: This high conservation value forest is home to 240 species of native plants and over 100 bird, 15 mammal and 16 reptile species including legless lizards, bearded dragons and tree goannas. A range of threatened species have been recorded including powerful owls, brush-tail phascogales, diamond firetails and a significant old tree site.

Threats: Logging operations, with 18 areas scheduled (including one with powerful owl records); gold mining/prospecting; poorly maintained and illegal tracks causing erosion; and stock grazing.

VEAC recommends:

Pyrenees Forest upgraded to a new Pyrenees National Park of 16,076 hectares, and a new Pyrenees Regional Park of 4,160 hectares.

Smaller reserves (8,420 hectares +)

Values: A raft of smaller state forest areas all have important natural values, including over 100 different plant species and records for threatened fauna species. These small but important areas include Cobaw Forest, Waterloo Forest, Trawalla Forest and Musical Gully Forest. Some have endemic species such as the unique Ben Major grevillea (also called the drooping grevillea) restricted to a small area north of Beaufort, near Waterloo. Others such as Cobaw include highly significant habitat with threatened fauna such as eastern pygmy-possum, powerful owl, brush-tailed phascogale and brown treecreeper.

VEAC recommends:

Creation of a new Cobaw Conservation Park (2,453 hectares); new Hepburn Conservation Park (2,714 hectares); new Waterloo Nature Reserve (1,695 hectares); and new Ben Major Nature Conservation Reserve (3,229 hectares), combining the existing Flora Reserve with adjacent bush. Dozens of new and expanded Bushland Reserves.

Walking the Beeripmo clearfell trail?

DO YOU KNOW THE EXTENT OF LOGGING AT MOUNT COLE?
MATT RUCHEL REVEALS WHAT IS GOING ON OUT WEST.

Mount Cole has long been a popular bushwalking, camping and picnic spot for generations of people from Ballarat and Melbourne. But its amenity, ambience and ecology are being wrecked by an industrial logging trial.

It is also currently being assessed as part of the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's Central West Investigation.

Just off the Western Highway, Mount Cole State Forest is 25 kilometres from the township of Beaufort and an hour west of Ballarat. This small patch of forest (around 9,000 hectares) rises to almost 900 metres.

The Beeripmo Walk is one of Victoria's most popular walking tracks. It can be done as a day or overnight walk, and rewards walkers by winding through cool fern gullies and tall forests, taking in views across the surrounding hills of both Mount Cole and Mount Buangor. Lying on the edge of the Pyrenees wine region there is potential for increases in tourism.

Mount Cole State Forest was identified as having high conservation values under VNPA's Small Parks Project in 2010. There are 130 species of birds, nine threatened fauna species and thirteen threatened flora species occurring in the forest.

87 per cent of Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs) in the forest are under-represented in the Central Victorian Uplands bioregion. Mount Cole contains small patches of three endangered and two vulnerable vegetation types.

Timber harvesting with axe and cross cut saw began during the mid 1840s. It was closed to logging in 1918 due to over harvesting. Timber harvesting was reopened from 1947, by the Forests Commission, until it was merged with the environment department in 1993.

According to the 2012 Department of Sustainability and Environment (now Department of Land, Water and Planning): "... in the 2000's timber harvesting was significantly scaled back and is largely a by-product of land management activities."

This is certainly not the case six years on.

In 2014, on the eve of the Victorian state election, the former Napthine government controversially gave the government logging agency VicForests control of logging operations in the west of the state, including Mount Cole. VicForests licensees are currently harvesting around 1,000 cubic metres in Mount Cole as part of its 'community forestry' program.

The *Timber Utilisation Plan* released by VicForests in mid 2017 identified 47 logging coupes at Mount Cole. Of the 36 used for timber production coupes covering 1,267 hectares, 19 are flagged as 'multi-staged management', which is a type of selective logging. 17 coupes covering 330 hectares are flagged as 'even-aged management' – essentially clearfell industrial logging. This is the equivalent of 186 MCG football grounds being razed to the ground. See the photos www.vnpa.org.au/protect/logging-mount-cole

A team of VNPA staff recently travelled to the site to assess the situation. We found at least five of the 17 clearfell coupes have been logged in the last few years, assumably as part of VicForests three-year trial – two had been logged in the past six months, with at least one just finished. Some of the future areas flagged for clearfell logging have significant conservation values. They need to be retained to ensure long term ecological health of the area.

The VEAC recommendations for Mount Cole fall short, with much of the area left open to intensive logging, and the Wimmera River headwaters lacking any protection. See our website for more information about making a submission into VEAC's Central West Investigation:

www.vnpa.org.au/veac-central-west

• PW

A 25-hectare area logged within the last six months.



Plucking the goose that lays the golden egg?

THE TOURISM INDUSTRY EYES OFF THE GREAT OCEAN ROAD, AS THE COALITION ANNOUNCES A NEW AUTHORITY TO MANAGE CROWN LAND, REPORTS **MATT RUCHEL**.

The Great Ocean Road is more than a road; it delivers spectacular access to some iconic land and sea scapes, including the Twelve Apostles, but also the Great Otway National Park with its lush forests and beautiful beaches. It features some of our most important national parks and protected areas.

In 2016-2017, direct tourism along the Great Ocean Road was worth \$495 million (up 18.7 per cent compared to 2015-16), and indirect tourism was worth an extra \$498 million to the Great Ocean Road economy.

The tourism industry argues that the 'jewel in the crown' of our natural assets, the Great Ocean Road, is now operating at the edge of capacity. (www.tourismisvictoriasbusiness.com.au)

The tourism lobby is calling for the state government to invest \$150 million in stage two of the Shipwreck Coast Master Plan. They are also calling for \$3 million for further planning of four iconic Victorian walks, including the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing and a Croajingolong Coastal Wilderness Walk.

Great care needs to be taken to ensure that the integrity of the natural areas is protected and enhanced.

Port Campbell National Park, the home of the Twelve Apostles, is for most of its extent a very narrow coastal strip of land between 150 metres and 700 metres wide. That means its coastal heathlands (home to rare and threatened species like the rufous bristlebird and metallic sun orchid) are especially vulnerable to pest plant and animal invasions, as well as sudden coastal erosion. Those impacts are predicted to increase under climate change, not to mention visitors and tourism infrastructure. The park is largely backed by cleared private land.

According to the tourism industry, the investment will reposition the Shipwreck Coast as a world-class tourism destination. To jobs-and-growth obsessed political parties in the lead up to a likely close state election, the Great Ocean Road 'golden goose' could draw a lot of attention – indeed it already is.

In early August, the Coalition fired the first shot, announcing that it would create a new Great Ocean Road Authority "to manage designated Crown Land along the Great Ocean Road".

Their media release of 3 August 2018 states: "This new authority will replace existing organisations including local government, Parks Victoria, Department of Land, Water and Planning and the

Great Ocean Road Coast Committee (GORCC) that currently manage Crown Land along the coast."

"The Great Ocean Road is an iconic Victorian landmark and is home to some of the state's most significant environmental assets including the 12 Apostles, Bells Beach, and the Otways." (www.vic.liberal.org.au/News/2018-08-03/liberal-nationals-to-create-new-authority-to-protect-the-great-ocean-road)

While VNPA supports sensitive moves to increase tourism opportunities along the Great Ocean Road, we assert strongly that it must not happen in a way that compromises the integrity of the important national parks and other areas of high conservation value in the process.

There is around 110,000 hectares of public land within five kilometres of the coast (both land and sea) between Geelong and Warrnambool. The bulk of this, about 87 per cent, is managed by Parks Victoria, of which just under 80 per cent is protected under the National Parks Act (75,000 hectares of terrestrial parks and 12,000 hectares of marine national parks and sanctuaries). The rest is a range of smaller coastal, bushland and nature conservation reserves protected under the Crown Land (Reserves) Act.



PHOTO: TRAVELLERS TRAVEL PHOTOBOOK, FLICKR CC

The other public land managers include the Department of Environment Land, Water and Planning, who control 9,771 hectares, much of it Otway Forest Park, but also a range of coastal reserves such as Bells Beach Coastal Reserve and various river frontages.

There are a large number of smaller areas (over 70) ranging from coastal reserves to tennis clubs managed by Committees of Management, either community-based, local council, or even other government departments, totalling about 4,000 hectares dispersed over the planning area.

VNPA would be deeply concerned, and opposed to, any change of tenure or management responsibility for 'designated crown land' in high conservation areas. This would include reserves under the National Parks Act, Crown Land (Reserves) Act, and other coastal reserves. After all, it is the natural beauty and integrity of the landscape and its ecology which makes the Great Ocean Road such as special place popular with visitors and tourists. Parks are the best way to protect and manage this.

We have met with and written to the Coalition seeking clarification, including a clear statement that the proposal:

- rules out changing management and control by Parks Victoria of any national parks and other high conservation value crown land under their care.
- rules out allowing large scale private development or long-term development leases in national parks and high conservation value crown land.

We have also written to the Andrews Government to seek understanding of their position. The Coalition policy was welcomed by some local tourism groups, but little has been said publicly by the Labor Government.

Land protected under the National Parks Act is not just done on a whim, but usually after an extensive consultation process, and requires legislation to pass through both houses of parliament. It also helps fulfil various national and international commitments. The delisting of a national park is rarely if ever done, except for minor boundary changes. A change to national park tenure and management would be akin to delisting, which would cause widespread community concern and take some years to resolve.

There is ample opportunity for encouraging a suitable range of major and minor tourism developments on private land. While we acknowledge there may be a role for better coordination and planning along the Great Ocean Road, it is important that it is managed by Parks Victoria, an appropriately qualified and constituted management agency dedicated to the difficult job of maintaining and improving the health and integrity of our remaining natural areas (see page 27).

Of the almost \$1 billion in economic benefit generated in the region, much can be attributed to its natural values – the vast majority currently managed by Parks Victoria. The maintenance and enhancement of a healthy natural landscape – the goose that lays the golden tourism egg – is inadequately funded. Surely, some of the revenue generated from these natural drawcards should be invested back into park management. Instead of duplicating Parks Victoria, presumably at considerable expense, it would be better to fund the existing park management body properly. A healthy, well looked-after goose will continue to lay golden eggs for many decades to come, as well as ensuring our great natural heritage is protected. • PW

We can deal with deer

THERE ARE REAL SOLUTIONS TO VICTORIA'S DEER PROBLEM, BUT IT WILL NEED COMMITMENT FROM GOVERNMENT VNPA'S PARKS PROTECTION CAMPAIGNER **PHIL INGAMELLS**.

It seems an insurmountable problem: up to one million deer in Victoria, the population growing by 200,000 to 300,000 thousand a year, and an apparently powerful lobby group demanding protection for a 'quality hunting experience'.

But two things are emerging to change this situation.

First, widespread dismay over the many impacts of deer is growing. Secondly, effective and humane control methods either exist or are well into development.

Support for deer control is growing fast

Farmers across Victoria, from far East Gippsland to the Mallee, are dealing with large numbers of deer invading their land. That invasion is attracting a plethora of rogue hunters after an easy 'drive by' hunt. And they, in turn, are placing a burden on country police who are now being called out at night to deal with them.

Landcare groups working for many years replanting creek-sides and natural corridors with native species have seen their hard-won gains trashed by feral deer, and peri-urban councils are uniting against the growing menace on Melbourne's fringe.

An ever-increasing range of threatened plant species is being seriously impacted, causing dismay amongst Victoria's botanists and ecologists. Even one of Gippsland's



PHOTO: LINDA MULDOON

The Kurrajong, the seed pod pictured here, is one of Gippsland's most stately trees, but is now seriously threatened by the Victoria's deer plague.

most characteristic trees, the stately kurrajong, is now in trouble. The adult trees are fine, but deer are feasting on any regenerating seedlings and destroying young saplings.

Deer are causing road accidents, and due to their size, the accidents are serious. A survey by the Invasive Species Council of deer accidents in just the Illawarra region of New South Wales has shown that, of 107 accidents recorded in recent years, 28 resulted in injuries to people and one resulted in death.

Control tools are here, or on the way

Effective control of deer has happened before. In 1924, an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in California quickly spread from cattle to native white-tail deer in the forests of the Sierras. A sense of urgency produced real action. Some 43 separate camps were set up in the rugged mountains, housing a few hundred hunters. It took about nine months, but more than 22,000 deer were killed and the outbreak was quarantined.*

We can make a very good start in Victoria by earnestly employing highly professional hunters, able to act humanely, in the most vulnerable areas of the state. In the Alpine National Park, for example, aerial

shooting (already employed for deer in South Australia, Canada and New Zealand) should be used to keep deer from Victoria's High Plains.

But the ultimate control tool is a targeted and humane bait. It will enable strategic action across the landscape, potentially removing deer from many areas, decreasing impacts in others, while still allowing recreational hunting. A number of researchers are already working on this, supported by some federal funding. What is needed now is a funding boost, maybe \$1 million a year for the next three years, to enable the control we need.

That might seem a lot of money, but it's a very cheap solution to a growing feral pest animal problem that has the capacity to invade the rest of the country. No one would blink at a \$3 million solution to the cane toad problem, but the deer issue is rapidly approaching the same scale. We should act before the problem gets very expensive indeed.

Victoria will soon release its draft Deer Management Strategy. • PW

** Managing a National Crisis: The 1924 Foot-and-Mouth Disease Outbreak in California by Kendrick A. Clements. California History. Vol 84 Number 3, Spring 2007.*

Community call to protect the Strathbogie Forest

A DEDICATED COMMUNITY AROUND THE STRATHBOGIE RANGES HAS FOR THE LAST FIVE YEARS BEEN FIGHTING TO PROTECT THEIR UNIQUE PATCH OF FOREST, WRITES **BERT LOBERT** AND **MATT RUCHEL**.

They are now united in seeking better protection of this special place from logging, poorly planned fuel reduction burning and other threats in the lead up to the November state election.

The Strathbogie Ranges are approximately 150 kilometres north-east of Melbourne, separated from the main part of the Great Dividing Range by the Goulburn and Broken Rivers, east of Euroa and north of Mansfield.

Their isolation from the main range, their geology and topography, together with their proximity to arid, inland Australia, have combined to develop a unique combination of landforms; a characteristic biota that is notably different to the adjacent ranges to the east and south has evolved as a result.

In the last 150 years, the Strathbogie Ranges have lost 74 per cent of their native forest cover. Two mammal species, the spot-tailed quoll and yellow-bellied glider possum, are thought to have become locally extinct in the Strathbogie Ranges in the last 20 years.

The 24,000-hectare Strathbogie Forest in the east is by far the largest remnant of native forest remaining in the Strathbogie Ranges. The Strathbogie

Forest represents only secure habitat in the entire Strathbogie Ranges for the long-term survival of hundreds of forest-dependent species.

- A total of 34 flora and fauna threatened species are known from the Strathbogie Forest including: greater glider, squirrel glider, eastern pygmy possum, brush-tailed phascogale, powerful owl and barking owl.
- The Strathbogie Forest supports one of the healthiest known populations of the greater glider in Victoria.
- Less than two per cent of the Strathbogie Ranges is permanently protected in reserves. Only 3.5 per cent of the Strathbogie Forest has permanent protection.
- The Strathbogie Forest contains more than 13,000 hectares of unreserved herb-rich foothill forest and 3,800 hectares of unreserved grassy dry forest that would address the shortfall in the protected area network in the Central Victorian Uplands bioregion, as identified by the Victorian Environment Assessment Council.

in the entire Strathbogie Ranges. The logging of both Parlours' Creek and Barjarg Flat coupes, in 2016, 2017 and 2018, respectively, brought conflict and confrontation. The plan to log another 360 hectares in core greater glider habitat in the coming years highlights the incompatibility of native forest logging and threatened species conservation.

Local community and businesses are supportive of better protections for the Strathbogie Forest. Both Liberal and Labor parties have previously recognized the need for improved protections for the Strathbogie Forest, but are yet to deliver.

Save Our Strathbogie Forest Campaign (formerly the Strathbogie Sustainable Forest Group) is calling for commitments from all political parties and a future Victorian Government for the formal protection of the Strathbogie Forest under the National Parks Act. The new park should encompass all of the existing state forest and other associated public land. They have, with the support of VNPA, produced and released a new report, *Protecting the Strathbogie Forest: A Community, Biodiversity & Policy Imperative*. It can be viewed here: www.strathbogiesustainableforests.wordpress.com • PW



PHOTO: SAVE OUR STRATHBOGIE FOREST CAMPAIGN

Significant areas of the forest have not recovered from logging and the subsequent forest regeneration attempts. The greatest threat is the deliberate logging of the highest conservation value areas remaining



HEALING LAND

GRAHAM ATKINSON IS CHAIRPERSON
OF THE DHELKUNYA DJA LAND MANAGEMENT BOARD.

*Manyanggurr ngulumbara dhelkunya
Djandaki murrupi: We meet together to
return good health to Country and Spirit.*

On the 30 August 2018, in Bendigo, on Dja Dja Wurrung Country, an important milestone for the Dja Dja Wurrung People of Central Victoria was quietly marked with the Dhelkunya Dja Land Management Board adopting the first *Joint Management Plan (JMP) for the Dja Dja Wurrung Parks*.

These are the Greater Bendigo and Kara Kara national parks, Kooyoora and Paddys Ranges state parks, Hepburn Regional Park and Wehla Nature Conservation Reserve.

Together with many partners we have delivered, for the Minister's approval, a sophisticated and comprehensive parks management draft plan, which will protect natural, historic and cultural values in these six Victorian parks, empower the Traditional Owners in the joint management of

the parks, and provide recognition to Dja Dja Wurrung People in the cultural landscape.

It has been a long journey to attaining this recognition of our People's rights and responsibilities to care for Country, a cherished aspiration of the Dja Dja Wurrung People. For me it has involved nearly two decades of persistent work in the land justice space.

The Dhelkunya Dja Land Management Board (DDLMB) worked in close collaboration with the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation (DDWCAC), Dja Dja Wurrung Enterprises (trading as Djandak), Parks Victoria, and Conservation Management to develop our plan. CSIRO brought to the process an innovative and empowering model of participatory planning and working with Aboriginal Communities that provided opportunities to shift the paradigm of parks management in Victoria.



PHOTO: DHELKUNYA DJA LAND
MANAGEMENT BOARD

Joint management here recognises that the Traditional Owners have a significant connection to their Country, and in turn, have inherent rights and responsibilities to care for their Country. It listens to the voices and wisdom of the Traditional Owners in managing the parks estate in Victoria.

Dhelkunya Dja means 'Healing Land' or 'to make good Country' in the Dja Dja Wurrung language. Country is understood on many levels with signs of particular culturally significant species and interaction with them. It is these

Left: For Dja Dja Wurrung, the wedge-tailed eagle, or Bunjil, the creator being, bestows the laws and ceremonies that ensure continuation of life on Jaara, the people.

PHOTO: ED DUNENS, FLICKR CC

species that signify the cues for ceremonies, hunting, gathering, breeding times and movements, with the transition of seasons interpreted through cultural values and beliefs. This is where new fire regimes, built on the knowledge of old fire regimes, can be trialled to reach a benchmark in biodiversity and use this important tool in reshaping the land for future generations. This is where traditional ecological knowledge and modern-day science can bridge to shape a methodology to manage Country in a way that is inclusive, evolutionary, sustainable and holistic.

My family traces our ancestors to before European colonisation; I am a descendant of Dja Dja Wurrung Ancestor Caroline Malcolm, and since 24 October 2013, I am recognised as a Traditional Owner of my Country. As a Dja Dja Wurrung Person, I feel a strong spiritual and cultural connection to Country and am bound to the land by our traditional belief system that has its origins in our Dreaming and Song Lines. Today, Dja Dja Wurrung descendants continue in the footsteps of their ancestors and proudly assert their culture, customs and abide by Bunjil's lore – without conflicting with any Australian laws.

The need to connect and care for Country is the force that drives the journey towards land justice for Aboriginal People in recent decades. In the bigger picture, addressing past injustices is the journey towards reconciliation and healing the Nation, and remains an ongoing journey as we deal with unfinished business and closing the gap between Indigenous and mainstream Australia.

The Dja Dja Wurrung People lodged their first Native Title claims in 1998 and 1999 in response to the passing of the *Native Title Act 1993*. The claims only covered four small areas of crown land.

When two of these didn't pass the registration test, I became actively involved in the claim. In 2000, the individual claims were successfully amalgamated into 'Whole of Country Claim', but progress was slow until the

Native Title Services Victoria (NTSV) was established in 2003. This was the same year I was elected as its first Chairperson. NTSV adopted a proactive engagement with Traditional Owner groups across Victoria, and the work resulted in the introduction of the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act* in 2010.

The Traditional Owner Settlement Act offers a streamlined approach to settling native title claims by allowing claim groups to negotiate their claims *directly* with the state government. We didn't want the Federal Court telling Traditional Owners who was and who wasn't a Traditional Owner over their ancestral land. The new Act meant that settlements could be reached and implemented sooner and that stronger working relationships are built up with the state government which in turn enables better management of state land in Victoria.

After lengthy negotiations, the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation signed the historic *Recognition and Settlement Agreement (RSA) 2013* with the state of Victoria.

A cornerstone of this is the Joint Management Plan for the Dja Dja Wurrung Parks, which sets out a plan for the six parks that have been granted to the Dja Dja Wurrung People as Aboriginal title. This is a new form of title in Victoria, and although a form of freehold, the holders of Aboriginal title cannot sell or transfer the land, and the state retains the right to "occupy, use, control and manage the land".

Joint management of the parks must be consistent with the legislation under which the parks were created e.g. the National Parks Act. Aboriginal title does not change the uses for which the public lands have been set aside for recreational and conservation purposes in the broader sense. We consulted widely to engage a broad range of community input to shaping the plan, and worked hard to get the balance right for all park users, while ensuring that the environment, history and culturally significant values of the parks are protected. The potential to enhance

"Dja Dja Wurrung Country is a cultural landscape that is more than just tangible objects; imprinted in it are the dreaming stories, Law, totemic relationships, songs, ceremonies and ancestral spirits, which give it life and significant value to Dja Dja Wurrung People... Their Country is shaped from the belief system that all things have a murrup (spirit) – water, birds, plants, animals, rocks and mountains. The Dja Dja Wurrung People see all the land and its creatures in a holistic way, interconnected with each other and with the people (RSA 2013)."

visitor experience in the parks through the sharing of Dja Dja Wurrung culture is just one of the outcomes hoped for from the implementation of the plan.

Like its development, the implementation of the plan will also require great collaboration, which the Dja Dja Wurrung people welcome. We have great optimism for the future of these parks under joint management. We also hope future plans will continue with these innovations. • PW

The draft *Joint Management Plan for the Dja Dja Wurrung Parks* is available at: www.dhelkunyadja.org.au

Graham will be our guest speaker at VNPA's Annual General Meeting on 9 October 2018.





PHOTO: CHRIS SMYTH

Racehorses galloping up Belfast Coastal Reserve.

THE FINAL MANAGEMENT PLAN HAS BEEN RELEASED FOR THE BELFAST COASTAL RESERVE – AND IT'S NOT GOOD, REPORTS NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER **SHANNON HURLEY**.

The *Belfast Coastal Reserve Final Management Plan* (see: www.engage.vic.gov.au/belfast) entrenches the race horse industry on our public beaches.

The plan allows 175 racehorses or more per day ploughing up and down these beaches between Warrnambool and Port Fairy. This number more than doubles what the current interim license allows for, which is only up to 65 horses per day.

The Andrews Government has set a terrible precedent for essentially commercialising Victoria's public beaches.

Commercial racehorse training will take place at four locations within the reserve – Levys Beach, Hoon Hill, Rutledges Cutting, and Killarney Beach. These include important breeding and nesting sites for shorebirds including the nationally threatened hooded plover. The plan itself identifies the impact on coastal dune vegetation and shorebirds from "habitat degradation from disturbance of horse training activities" as high – even after management action.

This clearly shows that commercial racehorse training is too great a risk, and should not be permitted within the reserve.

To accommodate the increase in commercial racehorse training, to meet Occupational Health Safety Requirements and other rules, the racing industry will be required to build new infrastructure such as carpark expansions for a greater number of horse floats, installation of fencing, barriers and other structures.

Horses can be trained at purpose-built facilities, but our shorebirds, like the sensitive Aboriginal cultural heritage sites in the reserve, can't be relocated.

The plan is unbalanced and incompatible with protecting the original purposes of the reserve, which is to conserve its natural, cultural and recreational values.

It's a coast, not a race course. It is hard to see how the beach amenity and threatened species habitat will be protected under this plan.

The Andrews Government is blatantly ignoring community concern, as submissions suggested that commercial horse training was not supported by the majority of the local community.

Entrenching and expanding commercial racehorse training in the reserve is a concern for the wider Victorian community. It sets a terrible precedent for Victoria's coastal planning and management, reflecting poorly on the Andrews Government.

VNPA supporters from across Victoria have already delivered over one thousand letters and petitions on this issue to relevant ministers.

We are currently looking at all options to overturn the damaging parts of the plan.

You can act by contacting the ministers who have the power to change the course of the plan. They need to know you are disappointed in the final plan, and want commercial racehorse training in the reserve overturned. For help doing so, visit: www.vn timer.org.au/our-beaches-are-not-racetracks.

There is still much work ahead to protect this highly significant coastal reserve, its threatened species and their habitats, and its cultural values; and to ensure our beaches remain a place for Victorians to safely enjoy. • PW

LNG tanker transferring LNG to FSRU.
This is what the Gas Import Facility
could look like.

AGL'S PROPOSAL FOR A HUGE
PERMANENT FLOATING LNG SHIP IN
WESTERN PORT BAY COMES WITH HUGE RISKS,
EXPLAINS SHANNON HURLEY AND THE
SAVE WESTERNPORT GROUP.

AGL'S PLAN TO INDUSTRIALISE WESTERN PORT BAY

Western Port Bay is a unique tidal bay and wetland with remarkable environmental and recreational values right on the fringe of Melbourne – including the protected areas of French Island, Churchill Island and Yaringa marine national parks. The bay has an exceptionally high productivity of marine vegetation that supports a very wide range of invertebrates, fish and marine mammals.

Western Port Bay contains one of the most southerly extents of mangroves in the world, and the largest remaining saltmarsh areas for Victoria. It is also an internationally significant Ramsar site, recognised for protecting over 10,000 migratory shorebirds, including the critically endangered eastern curlew that feeds on its extensive intertidal mudflats and wetlands.

It is for this reason VNPA is not alone in standing for its protection. Local community groups spanning Western

Port and the Mornington Peninsula are up in arms about a potentially disastrous gas project which could put it all at risk.

What is the project?

The AGL Gas Import Facility project proposes to permanently moor a gigantic 300-metre long floating storage and regasification unit (FSRU) at Crib Point jetty, right in the waters of this ecologically sensitive bay. Liquefied natural gas (LNG) would be imported by similarly sized foreign-owned bulk tankers. The LNG is unloaded into the FSRU for regasification.

But there's more ...

From Crib Point, there would need to be a new gas pipeline built – 60 kilometres worth all the way to Pakenham. A pipeline easement 15 metres wide would pass through significant vegetation of Warringine Park (south of Hastings) and through farmland.

Continued overleaf



PHOTO: PARKS VICTORIA

Continued from previous page

The beautiful Duchers Swamp, French Island National Park, Western Port Bay.

Why the concern?

- The process to convert LNG to pressurized gas for transportation via pipeline requires 450 million litres of organism and plankton-rich seawater to be sucked in, sterilised, and chlorinated, and then returned into the bay up to seven degrees colder than the surrounding waters. Fish, penguins and even seals could be trapped on the intake grills and drown.
- Chlorine will be released into the surrounding seawater as a by-product of the process to prevent the build-up of marine organisms on the facility. This could have potentially devastating impacts on the surrounding marine life.
- The increased number of ships coming into Western Port Bay increase the potential for incidences of spills and collisions with marine life. VNPA has done previous work on the impacts of oil spills on bird life, mangroves, seagrass and saltmarsh, including video simulations here: www.vnpa.org.au/save-western-port
- Increasing greenhouse gas emissions could contribute an additional 150,000 tonnes of extra carbon dioxide to the environment, at a time when we should be transitioning to renewable energy.
- In fact, the bay should be protected for its immense value for 'blue carbon' – Western Port Bay seagrass and mangroves store up to 40 times more carbon than a tropical rainforest! (www.thebluecarboninitiative.org/new-manual-for-measuring-assessing-and-analyzing-coastal-blue-carbon)
- There are a number of threatened species that could be affected from both aspects of the project. From the pipeline these include: the endangered southern brown bandicoot and coastal saltmarsh (listed as a threatened community under *The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999*). From the Gas Import Facility: two species of ghost shrimp, and critically endangered migratory birds such as the far eastern curlew and curlew sandpiper.
- Impacts on the local community and farmers through the building of new infrastructure and risk of explosions.

Where does the project sit politically?

The project has so far been openly criticised by federal ministers and the state opposition, but has been welcomed by the Andrews Government. It has the potential to be the latest political skirmish in the national energy debate.

AGL argue that this is about addressing shortfalls of gas supply and driving down gas prices for Victoria. The Andrews Government has welcomed this, despite repeatedly claiming that Victoria has no shortage of gas. Australia's Energy Market Operator confirmed in their report released in June 2018 that there is no gas shortage in Victoria (www.aemo.com.au/gas/national-planning-and-forecasting/gas-statement-of-opportunities). Media reports also quote latest research from Macquarie Equities saying importing LNG into the south-east could further boost east coast gas prices rather than lower them.

Either way, it appears that the AGL proposal is an opportunistic project, with relatively short-term horizons, which could have real long-term impacts on Western Port Bay.

What's next?

VNPA along with other state and local conservation groups will be working to stop the project from going ahead. At the very least we are urging for the project to be subject to a full and thorough environmental assessment at both state and federal levels before a final decision is made. • PW

Further information about the project:
www.vnpa.org.au/western-port-bay-risk

CHRIS AND LOUISE FROM THE LOCAL SAVE WESTERNPORT GROUP REPORT BACK FROM THEIR COMMUNITY.

AGL comes with huge risks to our special Western Port Bay wonderland. But not on our watch.

Local communities of Crib Point, Bittern, Balnarring and Somers, have been out in force opposing AGL's plans. So far we have:

- Had over 200 people turn out at AGL community meetings in Balnarring and more than 100 people at Crib Point.
- Rallied 450 people at the Hastings foreshore.
- Presented to local councils on our concerns.
- Collected 2,250 signatures on petitions to deliver to state parliament.
- Individuals are displaying their opposition with 'No AGL' signs on their fences.

At first very few local residents knew about the community meetings, and many areas did not have meetings at all. But this was soon turned around. As a result of the hard work and persistence by many concerned locals we spread the word far and wide through the broader community and additional information sessions were held.

The increasing frustration and outrage of residents at each meeting is clear. Very basic questions about lighting, noise, exact route of the pipeline and vegetation clearing, exclusion zones and gas tankers remain unanswered.

There is also concern about the risk to our local economy, with estimates of tourism providing 5,000 full time equivalent jobs – a third of all employment in the Bass Coast council area. The Gas Import Facility will provide just 43 specialist jobs.

Our Western Port Bay is too precious to risk. This is why so many of us are standing together in the face of potentially detrimental projects until our concerns are addressed. Our community will not stop until Western Port Bay is safe.

To find out more visit us at savewesternport.org and follow the links to Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.



Hands up at a community meeting to opposing AGL's plans for Western Port Bay.

450 concerned community members turned out to rally.



Meet our new campaigner

SHANNON HURLEY
HAS HIT THE GROUND
RUNNING AS OUR
NEW ADVOCATE FOR
VICTORIA'S NATURE.



I am very excited to have recently joined VNPA as the new Nature Conservation Campaigner, and I cannot wait to meet you!

I grew up swimming at Victoria's stunning beaches and picnicking among the spectacular Mountain Ash trees in the Dandenong Ranges National Park on weekends away with my family. This is what first sparked my love for nature.

As I grew older, I started to see first-hand and hear stories about how our

much-loved native animals and their environments were declining. I also loved working with people, which lead to my first job in the environment sector as a Park Ranger. This took me across the state to Wilsons Promontory, Queenscliff and the Mornington Peninsula to share my love for our Marine National Parks and Sanctuaries.

I then took on a role as a marine project officer with Parks Victoria, which took me back to the pristine

Prom, working with scientists, tourism operators and community groups to eradicate marine pests.

After spending the past two years working to protect our Great Barrier Reef with the Australian Marine Conservation Society, I saw the importance of working with communities and how they could use their voice to enact change at the government level to protect our environment. My highlights from this role were an trip to Poland to shine an international spotlight on the GBR at the World Heritage Committee Meeting, and leading a roadtrip to train volunteers in community organising for the reef.

I am excited to return back to Victoria – my home. I am thrilled to be working with the VNPA, which includes all of you. To empower the Victorian community to take action to achieve change at the local and government level is my biggest mission.

I hope to meet many of you along this adventure we have together in protecting the incredible nature Victoria has to offer. • PW

MARINE NATIONAL PARKS POLICY ADRIFT

WE MUST KEEP
ADVOCATING FOR
VICTORIA'S MARINE
PROTECTED AREAS SAYS
SHANNON HURLEY.

PHOTO: SHANNON HURLEY

In 2002, Victoria took a grand environmental stand that inspired the world and influenced a nation, following almost two decades of science, consultation and debate.

The Bracks Labor government proclaimed 13 new marine national parks and 11 marine sanctuaries, protecting 5.3 per cent of Victorian marine waters and their unique marine life.

But how the politics have drifted on marine protection since.

Victorians are extremely lucky – around 90 per cent of the plants and animals in Australia's southern waters are found here and nowhere else on the planet. The diversity of these waters is even greater than in the celebrated Great Barrier Reef.

Yet despite the high value of our southern waters and their need for protection, the future of new marine parks in Victoria uncertain.

Where are we at now?

The original designation of the Victorian marine protected areas network was an outcome of the recommendations from the Environment Conservation Council's Marine Investigation 2000 (which

preceded the Victorian Environment and Assessment Council (VEAC)).

Their management has never been perfect, and there are still significant gaps.

A 2012 VNPA assessment found at least 20 additional areas of high conservation significance worthy of protection, and many shortfalls in the existing reserve design.

Similarly, VEAC's May 2017 State-wide Assessment of Public Land, stated that "...it is evident from preliminary assessments based on available information that the existing system of no-take marine protected areas has some gaps in representation, and individual marine protected areas may not meet the adequacy criterion."

VEAC's Recommendation 21, that "Victoria's marine environment be reviewed for the comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness of its marine protected areas ..." was essentially rejected by the Andrews Government, which instead agreed to do a broader values assessment. The Andrews Government's response on the 12 December 2017 explicitly ruled out new marine national parks: "The review will not include recommendations to expand Victoria's marine protected area

system. It is current government policy that no new marine national parks will be created".

Both major parties have previously stated their support for a ban on new marine parks. The ALP policy was announced at the 2014 election as part of their aim to target one million recreational fishers, in response to a policy announcement from the Coalition.

Banning something that provides enormous ecological, economic and social benefits simply does not make sense. In the case of the Andrews Government, it undermines decades of leadership in this area. What is particularly perplexing is that around this same period the federal Gillard government announced the world's largest network of marine protected areas in Australia. While this was later wound back by the Abbot government, it nevertheless begs the question, what has happen to Labor's vision and leadership in this space?

The Victorian Branch of the ALP 2018 Platform, (a document signed off at the state party conference) notes: "Labor has a proud record of achievement in Victoria with the creation of marine national parks" and commits to "maintain existing Marine National Parks and reserves". What it lacks is the commitment required to complete the reserve system in Victoria, and instead commits to "... continue to investigate measures to protect marine biodiversity".

It is even more disappointing that we have lost of sense of leadership for our diverse marine places when a only a mere 5.3 per cent of the coastline lies within no-take area marine parks in the first place.

Globally, there is a goal of achieving 10 per cent protection of coastal and marine areas by 2020 (CBD Aichi Biodiversity Target 11. www.cbd.int/sp/targets)

Public support is high for Victoria's marine national parks and sanctuaries, with a 2013 assessment commissioned by the Victorian Coastal Council finding that 93 per cent of respondents support them.

Discovery Bay Marine National Park

Nursery grounds for Southern Right Whales

Twelve Apostles Marine National Park

Rugged cliffs and spectacular rock stacks

Point Addis Marine National Park

Haunt of the mysterious Weedy Sea Dragon



The value of Victoria's marine network

The wild beauty of Victoria's southern coast and marine environment draws millions of visitors each year – to stroll on beaches and peer into rock pools, to watch seabirds riding coastal breezes, to surf and paddle, and explore underwater reefs and sponge gardens.

These attractions reflect the great diversity of habitats – sandy shores and muddy flats, estuaries, saltmarshes, cliffs, rocky reefs, seagrass meadows, kelp forests – inhabited by a multitude of life forms, many unique to Victoria. We have a richer diversity of species in our coastal backyard than most other temperate seas worldwide. Our waters have the world's greatest diversity of red and brown seaweeds, sea mosses, crabs, shrimps and sea squirts.

From Discovery Bay in the west, protecting deep reefs dotted with colourful sponge gardens, to Cape Howe in the east that protects both cool and warm-water species – Victoria offers countless experiences of exceptional coastal and marine environments. Port Phillip Bay provides some of the most accessible right on Melbourne's doorstep, with Ricketts Point the perfect place to introduce kids to the wonderland of life living among sandstone rock pools. And Western Port Bay's immense value for 'blue carbon storage', with seagrass and mangroves, as found in Yaringa and Churchill Island Marine National Parks, stores up to 40 times more carbon than a tropical rainforest!

Beware Reef Marine Sanctuary

Tremendous biodiversity with over 80 fish species

Ninety Mile Beach Marine National Park

Vast underwater plains rich in sea life

Wilsons Promontory Marine National Park

Underwater caves and sponge gardens

Importantly, recreational fishers nation-wide are in support of marine sanctuaries:

- 91 per cent of NSW fishers think sanctuaries are a good idea;
- 88 per cent of fishers surveyed gave support in principle to the establishment of sanctuaries in Western Australia;
- 66 per cent of South Australian fishers believe sanctuaries are a good idea just months after the establishment of that state's marine park network.

Looking ahead

When it was created, Victoria's marine network was claimed to be a "world-class marine protected area network". How will the world look back on Victoria's leadership in this space?

There are certainly no shortage of threats faced by our marine communities. We cannot resist adaptation and resilience at a time when our species need it the most, and protected areas are a key tool to achieve

this. Even if Victoria's marine protected areas were doubled – to bring us closer to international benchmarks of 10 per cent protection – 90 per cent of our state's marine waters would still be available for fishing.

Many of the recreational fishing groups have been coy so far in the lead up to the state election. The Peak Fishing body, VRFish, do not mention marine national parks in any of their election requests, but seek "...to protect access to our fishing locations, gain access to closed areas and address conflict". The Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party has been pushing the 'right to fish' legislation and have a long-held stance against national parks – marine or terrestrial.

A formal policy banning new marine national parks is much like agreeing with the coal lobby on climate change – at its core it is a rejection of science. Let's hope the major parties see sense and leave the door open to once again making Victoria a leader in marine protection. • PW

Should alternative truths capture Buffalo?

A PROPOSAL FOR MEGA DEVELOPMENTS ON MOUNT BUFFALO NATIONAL PARK HAS MISREPRESENTED WELL-ESTABLISHED PRINCIPLES AND PLANS FOR PARK MANAGEMENT, SAYS **PHIL INGAMELLS**.

The Mount Buffalo Destination Advisory Group's plan for developments includes a highly intrusive, and quite unnecessary, aerial walkway over The Gorge, one of the plateau's finest natural attractions.

PHOTO: PHIL INGAMELLS

When the self-appointed Mount Buffalo Destination Advisory Group published their 'Vision for Mount Buffalo' last year, they claimed they had 'ticked all the boxes'.

Over two full pages, they proudly outlined how their scheme for a plethora of spa hotels, bars, shops and assorted other commercial developments they proposed for the park was aligned with 13 state and local government plans and strategies.

But their claims of compliance were largely waffle, or just plain wrong.

The claim, for example, that the proposals are in line with *Victoria's Climate Change Adaptation Plan* (2017-2020) was based on statements like: "The Mount Buffalo Vision is for a resilient, adaptable and diverse range of products and services to become established which will reduce the region's otherwise high vulnerability to climate change". Really?

Sometimes a quote or two from a peripheral paragraph was cited as compliance with a document, ignoring that document's clearly stated core objectives.

For example, they claimed their proposal is in line with Tourism Victoria's *Nature-based Tourism Strategy* (2008-2012), because it would "heighten nature-based tourism awareness". But that strategy actually opposes major developments inside parks, stating instead that "in general, significant built infrastructure should be located adjacent to a park, and sited and constructed in such a way as to be compatible with the conservation objectives of the adjoining park".

And they claimed they were addressing Victoria's *High Country Destination Management Plan* (2013) by "incorporating various forms of short stay accommodation". But while that plan asks for revitalisation of the historic Mount Buffalo Chalet, it does not call for additional developments within the national park. Indeed, the plan grew from the *North East Victoria: Tourism Gap Analysis* (2012), which cited eight examples of luxury eco accommodation that could be emulated in the region, such as: Kangaroo Island's Southern Ocean Lodge; Sweden's Treehotel; Germany's Baumgefluester Resort; and Victoria's Dunkeld Eco Lodges. But all of the eight examples cited are actually situated on public land adjacent to parks, or in private bushland.

Critically, there is one document Buffalo's would-be developers failed to refer to at all: the current Victorian Government's *Tourism Leases in National Parks: Guidance Note*. Perhaps it was omitted because it would be hard to create an alternative interpretation of its core objective:

"Rather than encouraging developments inside national parks, tourism developments will be encouraged to be sited on private or other public land outside parks, in locations that are more likely to bring economic benefits directly to regional towns. This is consistent with the worldwide trend for resorts and largescale tourism developments to be located outside national Parks."

There is one more government strategy that doesn't get mentioned: the *Victorian Visitor Economy Strategy Action Plan* (2016-2020). It called for a Visitor Experience Plan for Mount Buffalo, and it was commissioned by Parks Victoria, but was inexplicably dumped before it went out for public consultation.

It's time to revert to Parks Victoria's well-conceived plan to simply restore the majority of the main Chalet building. Then we can concentrate on the important task of looking after the park, its plants and its animals, in line with one more document the group ignored: Victoria's National Parks Act. • **PW**

Mount Buffalo National Park will now be managed by a new Parks Victoria, acting with unambiguous responsibility to administer the clear conservation objectives of Victoria's *National Parks Act*. Fire management policy, however, remains with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

Will power go to Parks Victoria's head?

'HOPEFULLY IT WILL', SAYS **PHIL INGAMELLS**, REPORTING ON A CHANGE OF LEGISLATION THAT COULD HAVE FAR REACHING BENEFITS FOR OUR NATIONAL PARKS AND RESERVES.

Parks Victoria was brought into the world in 1996 under the parentage of the Kennett government. Its birth was in line with that government's 'purchaser-provider' model for public institutions: the Secretary of the environment department would be responsible, under Victoria's *National Parks Act 1975*, for our national parks and reserves, but Parks Victoria would be engaged as the provider of management services.

The former National Parks Service was amalgamated with Melbourne Parks and Waterways, and the new statutory authority, Parks Victoria, was fully fledged in 1998, operating under its own *Parks Victoria Act 1998*.

Parks Victoria was effectively contracted to manage 4.1 million hectares of the state's Crown land, most of which was under the National Parks Act, with several thousand smaller reserves managed under a series of other Acts – not to mention a range of waterways, piers and jetties.

But the child was wilful and its guardian preoccupied. Expectations of improved performance and economy, and stronger accountability, faded fairly quickly. In a few years Parks Victoria had established a degree of independence, in some years scarcely communicating with the various iterations of the environment department, located only a kilometre or two away but seemingly at times in another country.



PHOTO: PHIL INGAMELLS

Under successive governments Parks Victoria's budget dwindled as its responsibilities grew. Its ambition to successfully manage Victoria's biodiversity became lowered, and the environment department's obligations to mandate the standard of management, required by its obligations under the National Parks Act, weakened.

The 'purchaser-provider' model for improving management of Victoria's conservation estate may have been an inspired notion in principle, but it faded to a chimera in practice.

A big change for park management

Now, under a radically revised *Parks Victoria Act 2018*, responsibility for implementing the strong conservation objectives of the National Parks Act rests squarely and unambiguously with Parks Victoria. The new PV Act also transfers a range of responsibilities under a number of other Acts directly to Parks Victoria, such as the *Crown Land Reserves Act 1987* and parts of the *Port Management Act 1995* that relate to waterways.

The new arrangement has a few important features:

- It enables the Environment Minister to issue a 'statement of obligations' to Parks Victoria, setting out the broad expectations of the Minister.

- A few responsibilities remain with the Secretary of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, most notably fire management.
- Arrangements for Traditional Owner co-management of parks, wherever that has been or will be determined, remain unchanged.

In the minister's speech to Parliament outlining the reasons for the changes to the Act, she said:

"A strengthened Parks Victoria ... will help better realise the benefits to the environment and the community of well-managed parks and reserves, and will enable it to be a world-class park management agency equipped to tackle the increasing management challenges of the twenty-first century."

VNPA asked for a new structure for Parks Victoria in our influential *Nature Conservation Review 2014*. We pointed out that "Parks Victoria, a separate authority with responsibility for management of protected areas, is unable to set its own policies and priorities, despite having the greatest knowledge of protected area management. (www.vnpa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/NCR-Chapter5.pdf)

The new changes are an improvement, and hopefully they will lead to better management of our prime natural areas. But Parks Victoria will also have to claim, and be given, the funds and expertise needed to fulfil its important role. • **PW**



VNPA MEMBER **GEOFF LACEY** TAKES US FOR A WALK ALONG AN ECOLOGICAL CORRIDOR IN CENTRAL VICTORIA.

Ecological corridors

Our parks and reserves are the main reservoirs of biodiversity in Victoria. But these are not isolated. The rural countryside is criss-crossed by corridors rich in remnants of the original ecosystems. The corridors run along rivers and creeks, roadsides and railway reserves, forming a rich ecological network that connects the reserves of intact bushland.

These corridors make possible the spread of indigenous plants and the daily foraging and migratory movements of mammals and birds. Patches of remnant bushland on farms enhance their benefit.

An interesting example of a corridor in central Victoria is the reserve along the Coliban Main Channel (an open gravity water channel built in the late 1870s) from Fryers Range State Forest (near Elphinstone) to Mt Alexander Regional Park and the Greater Bendigo National Park.

Moons Lane to South Gap

In August 2016 I walked with a friend along the Coliban Main Channel and some adjacent quiet roads. It was a cold but sunny day. We started from Moons Lane, Sutton Grange (not far from where the channel goes under the Calder Freeway) and headed north.

The channel reserve is a 100-metre wide strip of woodland, bordered by open farmland. (This section is not open to the public and permission is required to go there.) The land is gently undulating, with soils of fairly low fertility on a bedrock of granodiorite. There are wineries on the higher and steeper land towards Mount Alexander to the north.

The overstorey trees include candlebark, yellow box, red stringybark and cherry ballart. At the time of European settlement this undulating granitic country was covered in open woodland that included the eucalypt species present today.

There is a great charm in walking along this beautiful lane and I felt at home in such country. The appearance of the woodland varies continually along the walking track. Sometimes one tree species dominates and then another. The tree trunks come in untidy textures from white on the candlebark to dark grey or mottled, in sunlight and shadow.

The ground is covered in rich green grasses, or else low shrubs or leaf and bark litter. Sedges grow dense in the waterlogged patches.

Some of the adjacent farms have retained plenty of trees, including mature red stringybark – isolated or as remnant woodland. The trunk of one stringybark leans well over, with a long forked branch extended down as if to protect it.

This linear reserve supports a variety of bird species. We saw many crimson rosellas; also the kookaburra, grey



Left:
Candlebark and red stringybark dominate the ecological corridor along the Channel.

Top right:
Old yellow box along Burgoyne Lane. The paddock on right is completely cleared.

Bottom right:
Granitic outcrops and ecological corridor on the slopes of Mount Alexander.



PHOTOS: GEOFF LACEY

shrike-thrush, yellow robin, superb fairy-wren, white-eared honeyeater, striated and spotted pardalotes, willy wagtail, magpie and welcome swallows. Pallid and fan-tailed cuckoos proclaimed the spring.

We crossed a branch of Sandy Creek and noted small granitic outcrops on the hillslopes to the north-west. In the creek bed, we examined a fractured block, part covered with moss and lichen. Some farms to the north have been cleared and are grassy. Others retain mature trees.

We crossed McKittericks Road where the channel winds its way through steeper granitic hills. The channel crosses over Myrtle Creek which is lined with dense wattles and eucalypts, including candlebark and swamp gum. There is a large patch of remnant vegetation on the west side of the channel, and some big yellow box on farmland. Ten kangaroos passed by.

Along country lanes

At South Gap we left the aqueduct and walked uphill to the west along Faraday–Sutton Grange Road. We had lunch on a high spot with splendid views of the southern slopes of Mount Alexander, with their grassy groundstorey, large granitic outcrops and belts of trees here and there, including a continuous belt along the road. We came across additional bird species, including the common bronzewing, yellow-tufted and yellow-faced honeyeaters.

We then headed south, away from the aqueduct, along McKittericks Road. This is lined with manna gum, candlebark, yellow box, drooping sheoak, blackwood, black wattle and Sydney green wattle, which was in bright flower. A beautiful sight was an ephemeral wetland with sedges and rushes, bordered with mature manna gums and candlebarks.

The ecological condition of the farmland varies. Some farms have retained much of the woodland, but others have largely cleared it. We continued south into Burgoyne Lane. There are some large clusters of narrow-leaf peppermint along the road and in one farm paddock. These are rare in this district. A big old yellow box, with twisted branches and ragged bark, stands nearby. We passed patches of silver wattle in bloom, a clump of blackwood and, in places, a groundstorey of native grasses.

The pattern of connections

While the channel provides a major north-south corridor in the region, there are many elements in the ecological network. Branches of Sandy Creek have intermittent cover, that becomes denser downstream to the east as it approaches the Coliban River. Myrtle Creek has good cover and flows north, then east into the Coliban. The tree-lined roads provide good corridors that link up with the channel and with branches of the two creeks.

The old trees are of special importance in these remnants. They provide a protective environment for the small plants, birds and other animals.

Walking along such ecological corridors is a wonderful experience; it leads us into a deeper appreciation of the land. We can more readily perceive the structure of the landscape, with its ridges and drainage lines – how it all holds together. We can observe the pattern of the vegetation and the importance of the connection for mammals and birds. And we experience the joy of their presence. • PW

For more information on the trees, see B. Slattery, E. Perkins & B. Silver, *Eucalypts of the Mt Alexander Region*, Friends of the Box-Ironbark Forests (2016).



Push for threatened species reform

PHOTO: CAITLIN GRIFFITH

THE LIST OF THREATENED SPECIES IS GROWING AT AN ALARMING RATE, AND THEY NEED BETTER PROTECTION AT BOTH FEDERAL AND STATE LEVELS, SAYS **MATT RUCHEL**.

The golden sun moth is listed as endangered in Victoria. Ever-increasing urban development puts more and more pressure on its grassland habitat.

Over 2,000 species and ecological communities are listed as threatened with extinction nationally.

In the last 200 years Australia has had one of the worst extinction records in the world.

In Victoria, the situation is worse. Since European settlement over half of the state's native vegetation has been cleared, and 18 species of mammal, 2 birds, 1 snake, 3 freshwater fish, 6 invertebrates and 51 plants have become extinct.

Between one quarter and one third of all of Victoria's terrestrial plants, birds, reptiles, amphibians and mammals, along with numerous invertebrates

and ecological communities, are considered threatened with extinction.

Threatened species are allegedly protected through a web of legislation at national and state levels that has been developed over the last 50 years.

So far our country's threatened species laws appear to work only if there is not a commercial interest wanting to use the same space. In reality, they are weak, inconsistent and subject to a great deal of political discretion.

Decisions often ignore science and ecological health objectives if a commercial interest is involved. Notably, industrial logging of native forests is exempt from national environmental laws and have their own special set of

rules to implement state laws, through the Code of Forest Practice. In another example VNPA is campaigning on, the horse racing industry gets special access to public land at the Belfast Coastal Reserve, and interests of threatened species that live there like the beach-nesting shore bird the hooded plover, are put second. The hooded plover is listed as one of the federal government's 20 priority bird species, and as vulnerable under the federal and Victorian law.

Need for stronger national nature laws

There is an ongoing push by conservation groups across the country, including VNPA, calling on federal parliamentarians to strengthen our national environmental laws.

The **Places You Love** alliance has developed a four point plan.

1) **Create strong national environment laws that genuinely protect Australia's natural environment.**

The Australian Government must retain responsibility for, and effectively protect, current Matters of National Environmental Significance. National oversight must be expanded to a broader set of matters to ensure more effective and efficient environmental protection of:

- Australia's national parks and reserves;
- Critical habitat and climate refugia for threatened species;
- Impacts from land clearing;
- Greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution;
- Water resources; Ecosystems and wetlands of national significance;
- Protecting against invasive species;
- National biodiversity hotspots; and
- Vulnerable ecological communities.

2) **Establish an independent National Sustainability Commission.**

The Commission will be responsible for developing plans, setting standards and reporting on performance.

3) **Establish an independent National Environmental Protection Authority (EPA).**

The EPA will conduct transparent environmental assessments and inquiries as well as undertake monitoring, compliance and enforcement of environmental conditions and standards.

4) **Guarantee community rights and participation.** Strengthening community rights and increasing participation is critical to improving the accountability of, and access to, environmental decision-making.

More detail here: www.placesyoulove.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/PYL-policy-briefer-June2018.pdf

The Australian Senate is currently holding an inquiry into Australia's faunal extinction crisis. This includes the wider ecological impact of faunal extinction, the adequacy of Commonwealth environment laws, existing monitoring practices, and a range of other matters.

You can see our submission here: www.vnpa.org.au/publications/submission-australias-faunal-extinction-crisis

Thank you to all our supporters who also made submissions (now closed). And thank you to everyone who joined VNPA, our fellow national parks associations from other states, and other environmental groups and organisations from across the country in Canberra earlier in September for the Stand Against Extinction Rally.

Meanwhile in Victoria flora and fauna protection flops

Amendments to Victoria's key piece of threatened species legislation *The Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* have been introduced to state parliament. While the FFG Amendment Bill 2018 has passed the lower house, it is unclear with the current backlog of the upper house if it will pass there. The Greens have also moved amendments.

In its current form it will prove inadequate in addressing the scale of our extinction trajectory.

The problems with the current FFG Act are well documented, and the consultation undertaken to date highlights the need for better legislative protection to be put in place.

The Andrews Government's 2014 election policy was to "...review the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act", and the ALP party platform 2014 was to "modernise threatened species protection to adopt world's best practice".

The review was undertaken by the Department of Land, Water and Planning in a parallel process to developing the statewide *Biodiversity*

2037 strategy. The process included one round of public submissions and a series of meetings with stakeholders. According to the summary of submissions: "The submissions received in response to the Consultation Paper indicated a strong appetite among contributors for even broader-scale reforms to biodiversity regulation in Victoria". Unfortunately, this appetite was largely ignored.

The amendments at best can be described as a 'neatening up', and fall well-short of strengthening legislation to address the extent of the problem or match the scale of the issue. The Bill is in many ways a missed opportunity. It retains many of the same powers, and remains largely discretionary, subject to political winds and whims. More work needs to be done to strengthen the legislation, and more resources to combat the problem on many fronts.

The biggest change has been to the process for listing of species. The current FFG Act largely only lists species as 'threatened'. The common assessment method, which is used in federal legislation and many other jurisdictions, has subcategories – extinct; extinct in the wild; critically endangered; endangered; vulnerable; and in the case of a taxon of fish, conservation dependent.

The review of the FFG Act by the department had a narrow scope, lacked substantive consultation and was largely undertaken without an eye to what was really needed to deal with the extinction crisis. Perhaps a leaf should be taken out of the EPA review process, and an independent review undertaken by appropriately qualified experts to scope the real reforms needed to protect our unique flora and fauna.

Likewise, if states cannot regulate adequately enough, perhaps the federal government will be forced to take a stronger leadership role. In reality, both jurisdictions need to act to stop extinction, through both stronger laws and proper funding. • **PW**

Introducing our new NatureWatch Coordinator

LEADING OUR LAND-BASED CITIZEN SCIENCE PROGRAM IS THE PERFECT ROLE FOR **SERA BLAIR** WITH HER EXTENSIVE BACKGROUND IN THREATENED SPECIES CONSERVATION AND COMMUNITY-LED PROJECTS.



PHOTO COURTESY SERA BLAIR

I am very excited to be the new NatureWatch program coordinator! I am a long-term follower of VNPA and have immense respect for the amazing job such a small, dedicated group of people do.

I came to Australia from Canada 19 years ago, following my Australian husband. Before I moved here, I spent many years living in Borneo studying wild orangutans. I was also lucky enough to spend time caring for orangutans who were orphaned by poaching of destruction of the rainforest. This work galvanised my passion for threatened species conservation, so when I arrived at our new home in Healesville, I set to work learning about local threatened species. As a forest ecologist, my husband taught me about Leadbeater's possum. I was amazed to learn their conservation issues were so similar to those of orangutans – both losing habitat to paper production.

My first job in Australia was at Earthwatch and, ironically, I managed the Leadbeater's possum project where volunteers went into the field with scientists to monitor the species and their habitat. This introduced me to the amazing value of citizen science in conservation. Realising forest planning was failing to protect Leadbeater's

habitat, in 2005 I started Friends of Leadbeater's Possum. This group brought together amazing people with a shared passion and dedication to saving this species and their forest habitat. We battled industries, governments, bushfires and leeches to fight for their survival while engaging the broader community in the issue. I left the group after ten years, and it is still going strong and is now part of an amazing networks of community-led projects working to save Victoria's amazing mountain ash forests and all the biodiversity they contain.

I went on to complete a PhD investigating community attitudes towards a range of issues in threatened species conservation in Victoria. I learned that extinction is not acceptable to Victorians, that we want our government to be acting to save species, and that the community believes they have many roles in conservation as landowners, pet-owners and voters. With this knowledge and my experience coordinating and participating in citizen science projects, I jumped at the chance to work with VNPA's NatureWatch program. It is a perfect fit for me and I have instantly felt at home with such a wonderful group of

people. I look forward to meeting other keen VNPA citizen scientists out in the field! • PW

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THE POWER OF ONE (or two)

A RETIRED OPTOMETRIST CHANGED THE WAY WE THINK ABOUT GRASS-TREES, SHARES PHIL INGAMELLS.

From time to time, individual native species become listed as threatened under Victoria's Flora and Fauna Guarantee (FFG) Act. But that only happens when someone nominates a species, and backs up that nomination with compelling evidence.

When Wangaratta optometrist Peter Curtis retired some years ago, he spent much of his time assisting his wife Helen with flora surveys in the Warby-Ovens National Park.

Peter, according to his son, had a remarkable set of qualities: he was community minded, restlessly intelligent, and obsessive. For many years these qualities had made him prepared to 'rattle the cage' and challenge conventional wisdom.

Noting the impact of a control burn that escaped through a stand of very old grass-trees in the 'Warbies', he engaged in a twenty-year obsession that led eventually to a PhD from La Trobe University.

He established that the grass-trees of the Warby Ranges were not your everyday austral grass-tree, but the similar grey grass-tree (*Xanthorrhoea glauca*), which was once widespread in north-central Victoria but now

survives in scattered, highly fragmented populations.

He also found that, unlike many other grass-trees, the grey grass-tree could be highly susceptible to fire, actually showing 42 per cent mortality after one observed fire event. This meant they should be protected from planned burns.

Even more disturbingly, he could see their gradual decline through spreading infestations of root-rotting *Phytophthora*.

By 2013, his research had significantly contributed to the listing of the grey grass-tree as threatened under the FFG Act. But he didn't stop there.

He researched the application of 'phosphonate', a chemical known to protect plants from *Phytophthora*, establishing that an appropriate strength, with consecutive applications one-two months apart, could safely and effectively be applied and would not harm nearby plants.

Late last year I visited Peter, who was spending the last months of his life bedridden in a Wangaratta nursing home. He had every reason to rest on his laurels, but he was determined to do what he could to protect these



Top: Peter and Helen Curtis in their beloved 'Warbies'.

Inset: Long unburnt grey grass-trees, soon after a mass-flowering.

vulnerable plants. Most particularly, he was distressed that Parks Victoria had neither the finances nor the staff to administer the saving protective dose he knew could help the Warby Range grass-trees.

Phoning and writing from his bed, he was determined to pass on his knowledge to anyone who would listen, or anyone who might do something to get the park's managers to act.

Hopefully, the many years and countless volunteer hours Peter and his wife Helen spent building our understanding of nature and working to protect it will be rewarded by action from Parks Victoria. It is, after all, the agency the community has appointed as nature's custodian.

Peter Curtis was posthumously awarded an OAM in this year's Queen's Birthday honours list. • PW

David and Trish Curtis contributed to this story.

Terrick Terrick National Park



GEOFF DURHAM REVISITS THE ONLY NATIONAL PARK IN THE VICTORIAN RIVERINA BIOREGION.

Terrick Terrick National Park, 225 kilometres north-west of Melbourne, has a split personality. The split is three ways – land with trees and rocky outcrops, flat grassland with very few trees, and Bendigo Creek.

The name Terrick Terrick is of Aboriginal derivation, although there is uncertainty about its meaning. The country is the territory of the Dja Dja Wurrung people and associated clans. There are about 200 indigenous archaeological sites including middens, rock wells, and scarred trees.

Terrick Terrick State Park (2,493 hectares), covering the forest and woodland area, was created in 1988 as a result of the 1985 Land Conservation Council Murray Valley Area Final Recommendations. Extended to the north-east by the addition of former farmland, Terrick Terrick National Park (3,770 hectares) was created in 1999. Following the Environment Conservation Council

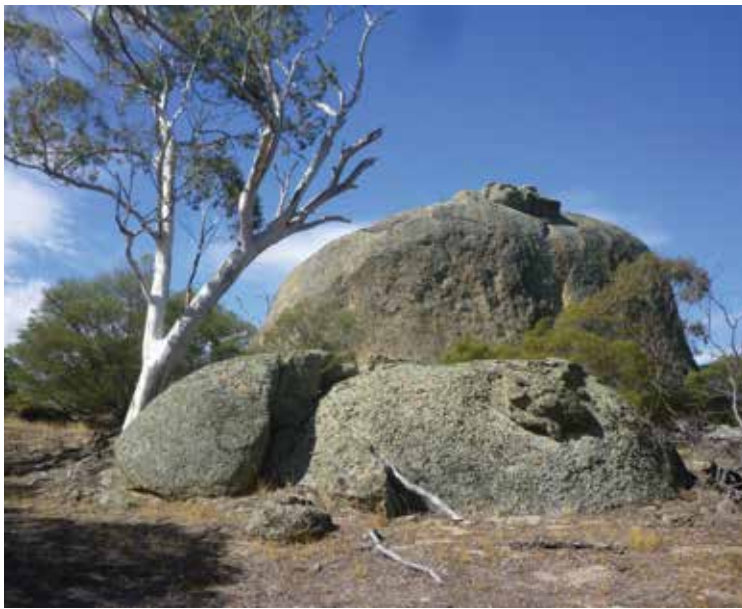
Box-Ironbark Forests and Woodlands Investigation, further additions, including twelve scattered outlying nationally-significant grassland paddocks, have increased the area to 6,390 hectares. The farmland purchases have been made with Commonwealth and state funds.

The original section of the park includes Palaeozoic granite outcrops, notably Mount Terrick Terrick, Bennetts Rock and Reigels Rock, with outwash slopes and evidence of gravel extraction and erosion control works. The vegetation prior to European settlement was a mosaic of grey and yellow box eucalypts and white cypress woodlands with some buloke. Now it is mostly an open forest-woodland of white cypress pine, due largely to extensive regeneration following a wildfire in the 1880s, and subsequent silvicultural activities that have reduced the density of grey and yellow box. This is the most significant area of white

cypress pine in Victoria. It is crossed by a network of gravel tracks with seasonal closures and includes a 100 hectares Reference Area. Download the Parks Victoria Visitor Guide for a map.

The park's grasslands, complemented by Trust for Nature covenanted farmland, are of national significance. They have numerous endangered flora and fauna species, notably annual buttons and pepper grass, the hooded scaly-foot legless lizard and the quail-like plains-wanderer, listed as critically endangered nationally and at number four on the world's most important bird list.

Bendigo Creek is often dry, although it usually retains pools of water. It runs generally north, and ends in Kow Swamp. This section in the park is a narrow strip of streamside reserve meandering through grassland from Hopper Road to Balderstone Road, a distance of about 15 kilometres as



Clockwise from left:

Reigels Rock. The original section of the park includes Palaeozoic granite outcrops.

One of the nationally-significant grassland paddocks.

There are about 200 indigenous archaeological sites including this scar tree.

Views from the top of Mount Terrick Terrick.



PHOTOS: GEOFF DURHAM

the crow flies, but probably about three times this. It is a riparian woodland wildlife corridor with river red-gum, black box and tangled lignum, and is habitat of the threatened species carpet python, barking owl and the Victorian endangered grey-crowned babbler.

My first visit was an Easter walk in the state park in 1994. In 1997, on a National Parks Advisory Council inspection of the grasslands, we were caught in the open in a sudden violent squall, with wind so strong I had to clutch a fence post to avoid being thrown to the ground. We retreated to the bar of the Mitiamo Hotel to dry out. In 2006 I attended the first meeting of the Friends of Terrick Terrick National Park at the Davies homestead and was fortunate enough to see plains-wanderers. My most recent visit was in April this year. It was very dry and not the season for wildflowers. In spring, the everlastings (and Paterson's curse) can be spectacular. In 24 hours the only overnight campers had seen 40 species of birds.

The picnic area, at the base of Mount Terrick Terrick, has an information shelter, tables and composting toilets, but no water and no fires. Camping is free at the adjacent camp ground. A short, steep walking track leads to the trig point from which there is a 360 degree view. Pyramid Hill (187 metres) is about 15 kilometres north-west, Mount Hope 20 kilometres north, and the silos of Mitiamo five kilometres south. Mount Hope and Pyramid Hill were named and climbed by Major Mitchell in 1836.

The Mitiamo Silos are still operating, but the Swan Hill passenger train no longer stops at the railway station. It is a sign of the times that the hotel has not only closed, but has been removed, as has the police station, and the school is now a private residence. A general store (with fuel) survives.

The township of Pyramid Hill is a contrast to Mitiamo. The train stops here with twice daily service to and from Melbourne. It has industries –

13th Annual Friends Weekend Terrick Terrick National Park

Davies homestead site

2.30pm Friday 5 October to noon Sunday 7 October 2018

All invited. Free event. Camping sites available.

- Wildflower display and nature walks
- Presentations
- Working bees
- Mini-bus tours

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Part of the 2018 Naturally Loddon Spring Festival

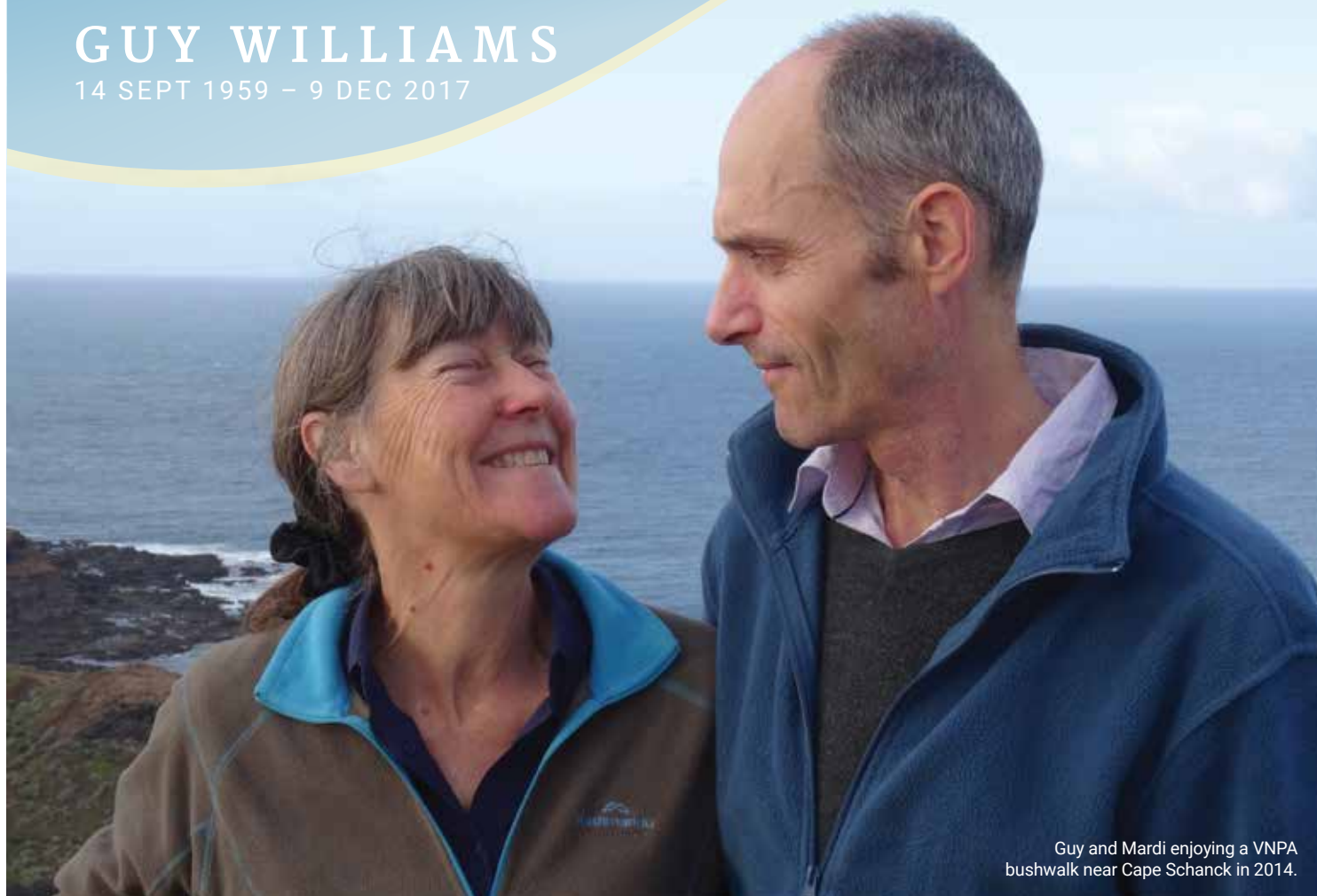
piggeries, pet food factory, salt works and quarry. Filipino families are an integral part of the community. There are shops, a café, a well-maintained museum and many community organisations. We stayed at the old-style, friendly, Victoria Hotel.

If your interest is in national parks, car touring, walking, birds or grassland ecology, you should visit Terrick Terrick National Park. There is no other like it in the Victorian parks system. • PW

Tribute

GUY WILLIAMS

14 SEPT 1959 – 9 DEC 2017



Guy and Mardi enjoying a VNPA bushwalk near Cape Schanck in 2014.

PHOTO: SUE O'BRIEN

While enjoying a quiet Saturday afternoon walk with his partner Mardi, and dog, Jamie, Guy Williams was killed in a shocking car accident in the lower Yarra Valley. Mardi was critically injured, airlifted to the Trauma Unit at Royal Melbourne Hospital and did not leave hospital for over one hundred days. Thankfully she is now progressing towards restored health.

Guy had planned and led bushwalks under the auspices of the Victorian National Parks Association over a period of at least ten years. He and others particularly enjoyed the weekend base camps, and the Christmas – New Year base camp.

It was on one of these events that he met Mardi. Together they earned the respect and affection of fellow bushwalkers, many of who became repeat attendees on Guy's sometimes fast-paced walks. While some of his companions on walks enjoyed conversations and even bird watching, Guy was fit and enjoyed the walking. Of more recent times the requests to slow his pace a bit had started to have a slight effect.

Guy was a man who lived his life by his strong principles and beliefs. He cared very much about protecting the

environment, not being wasteful, self-competence and personal responsibility. At times these values might make his life appear quite abstemious or stringent, but there was little place in Guy's life for what he might consider self-indulgent costly pleasures, experiences or material goods.

Although basically living with only the company of his dog amongst the dry bush on the hill in Steels Creek, he very much enjoyed company, especially when it was accompanied by good food and good wine. He enjoyed conversation about current affairs and politics, having a good memory for details and a strong opinion on the competence (or not) of politicians.

Guy presented as a quiet, self contained man – but he certainly had a good sense of humour. He leaves memories of a man comfortable in his own skin, with considered values and opinions – a man who was deeply committed to the protection of the environment and considerate enjoyment of the bush. He was both respected and liked.

He will be missed. • PW

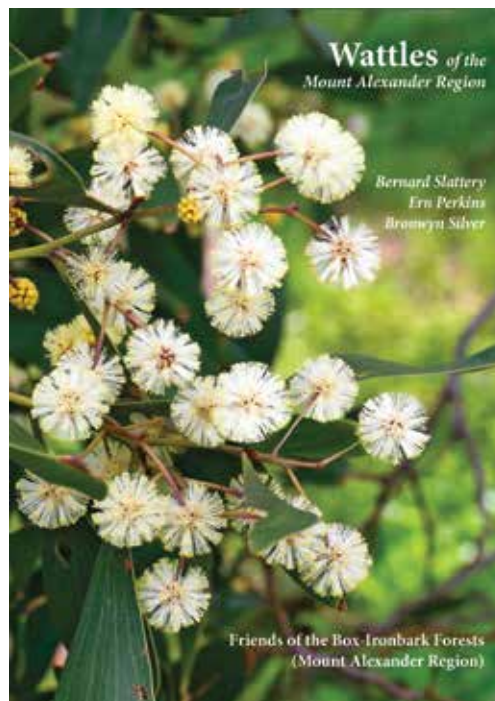
Written by Sue O'Brien. A celebration of Guy's life was held on 7 April.

Wattles of the Mount Alexander Region

BY BERNARD SLATTERY, ERN PERKINS AND BRONWYN SILVER, FRIENDS OF THE BOX-IRONBARK FORESTS, 2018. PAPERBACK, 112 PAGES, RRP \$10.00 PLUS \$3 POSTAGE AND HANDLING. ENQUIRIES AND SALES: PO BOX 322, CASTLEMAINE, 3450 OR WWW.FOBIF.ORG.AU

Adding to their popular guides to mosses and eucalypts, Castlemaine-based VNPA member Bernard Slattery and his co-authors and helpers have produced a most attractive and useful pocket guide to 20 species of wattles found in the local bushland. Many have a much wider distribution.

The wattle descriptions, in concise, friendly and non-technical language, are complemented by excellent colour photographs and drawings that really help you identify and appreciate the species. There's a 'quick look' box for



each, plus notes on similar species and where to see them. The full-page photos are really beautiful.

As well, there are interesting sections on introduced wattles and weeds, five reasons for having wattles in your garden and how to grow them, origins of the names 'acacia' and 'wattle', and more.

A terrific, well-designed book that every plant enthusiast should have and/or give as a present! • PW

Review by Michael Howes

Explore Karijini National Park and the Ningaloo Reef over 9 incredible days

on a pack free, comfortable camping, small group walking tour!



Adventure awaits around every bend on this tour! Enjoy scrambling in and out of ancient gorges in the remote Karijini National Park, relaxing by tranquil jade waterholes and snorkeling on the iridescent Ningaloo Reef. In the evenings, sit back under a star filled sky as your guides prepare a delicious meal.

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Diving in to ReefWatch!

NICOLE MERTENS JOINS THE TEAM ON OUR MARINE CITIZEN SCIENCE PROGRAM.



Over the years I've had many people ask what my dream job would be. I would have to say it's a pretty difficult question to answer, but I knew it would be something that involved engaging people with our marine environment in exciting and meaningful ways. That's why I'm so very thrilled to be involved in ReefWatch and to join the fantastic team at VNPA.

My lifelong love for our temperate seas led me to study marine ecology from an undergraduate degree through to a PhD at Adelaide University. I was interested in how human impacts at the local (e.g. nutrient pollution) and global (e.g. climate change) level impacted on marine ecosystems and shifted the balance between key players in these communities. I found it fascinating how very little attention is given to our southern coasts and reefs compared to their northern counterparts, despite being just as important, beautiful, and diverse.

During my studies I worked for a Marine Discovery Centre based at Henley Beach in South Australia, and it was here that I discovered my passion for environmental education, science communication and outreach. I really enjoyed working with community and school groups on citizen science projects, including stormwater monitoring and marine debris. To help spread the message around marine debris I developed a litter survey incursion for schools, focusing on the links between our land and coasts. It was very rewarding to see the positive ideas and real changes that sprung forth from the data we collected and discussed with our schools and volunteers.

I see citizen science as a valuable tool not just for plugging gaps in our knowledge, but for creating a connection to nature and a desire to protect it. I'm very excited for our ReefWatch's OysterWatch and Sea Slug Census projects in particular as I think it's great to shine a spotlight on the status of our weird and wonderful invertebrates which often get overlooked, but are vital to the health of our oceans. I hope I see you out there, whether it's for a rock-ramble whilst hunting nudibranchs or getting ready to join in on the Great Victorian Fish Count! • PW

Nicole will be working in the position of ReefWatch Project Officer alongside ReefWatch Coordinator Kade Mills.



'Best image' award winner in the Sea Slug Census.

PHOTO: NICK SHAW

Join Nicole for two upcoming ReefWatch projects!

Sea Slug Census returns

The inaugural Melbourne Sea Slug Census was held on the weekend 21-22 April in Port Philip and Western Port bays, and had the largest turnout ever involved in the six years the Sea Slug Census has been running in locations around Australia. The best image taken during the census was awarded by Bob Burn (Victorian nudibranch expert) to Nick Shaw, (pictured above). Congratulations also go to Rebecca Lloyd who spotted the most sea slugs over the weekend – 17! All the results can be found here www.vnpa.org.au/programs/sea-slug-census. Get ready for the second Melbourne Sea Slug Census will be held from 12-15 October!

Great Victorian Fish Count 2018

Following the success of 2017's Great Victorian Fish Count (read the full report here: www.vnpa.org.au/programs/great-victorian-fish-count), planning for the 2018 event is well underway, with the splash off date set for 17 November – 16 December.

For both these events, join the ReefWatch mailing list to be the first to know where and when you can join in: www.vnpa.org.au/reefwatch/sign-up



Teeny, tiny nature

On your next family adventure, a great way to get really involved with your environment is to try to find teeny, tiny things – including animals, rocks and plants.

Because the smallest insects and flowers might only be two millimetres in size, you need to look closely to see them. This activity is a great opportunity to discover detail and things you might not normally see.

Optional things to take:

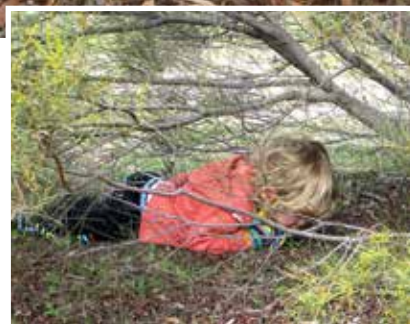
- a ruler to do some measuring.
- a magnifying glass so you can get a closer look.
- a camera with a macro function.

Some things to consider before starting:

- Where would be a good place to look for each of these things?
- What will we do to make sure we are safe?
- How will we care for this place and the plants and animals who live here?

Always remember to consider safety on your outdoor adventures, always keep your hands and feet where you can see them, and don't handle wildlife.

More about Wild Families: www.vnpa.org.au/wild-families • PW



<p>See if you and your family or group can find the very tiniest of the following things:</p>	<p>In the bush:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insect • Bird • Plant • Flower • Leaf • Fungi • Rock • Animal home 	<p>By the sea:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sea snail • Crab • Shell • Rock • Fish • Plant/algae 	<p>Things to think about or discuss for each of your tiny findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How big is it? • Where was it? • What was it doing? • How did it get here? • Is there anything here that might eat it? • What is good about being this size? • What would be difficult about being this size? • What can I do to make sure it is safe? • What else did you find while looking for tiny things?
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Victoria's National Parks

NEED A
strong advocate

BACKED BY
many voices

CAN YOU HELP?

PHOTO: ED DUNENS

Thank you for being the kind of person who cares about protecting our national parks for current and future generations – **thank you for being a Member of the Victorian National Parks Association.**

Some of our most loved creatures are on the verge of extinction, our precious natural places under threat – if we don't protect our endangered species today we will lose them forever. Charities and organisations speaking up for the environment and other public issues are under attack from governments.

But you can help – and that's why today I'm asking you to invite one of your friends to become a Member of the Victorian National Parks Association.

As a VNPA Member, you know membership is as much about putting your values into practice as it is about enjoying the great outdoors through bushwalking and other activities.

You know that when important environmental campaigns are won, that you were there; that you helped. When I walk into meetings with government to argue the case, you're with me – standing up for what's right.

Choosing to become a Member makes a statement about your values – it's about standing up for the kind of world you want to live in.

Please contact a friend today and invite them to join us as a VNPA Member.

Enclosed in this edition of *Park Watch* is a brochure you can give to a friend. It's got a membership form inside, and the return postage is free.

– **Matt Ruchel**
Executive Director, Victorian National Parks Association