

PARK WATCH



WIN FOR WESTERNPORT!

OPEN LETTER TO ANDREWS GOVERNMENT
TIME TO RETHINK FIRE
CAMPING WITH COWS?
LIVING GIANTS
THE PROM NEEDS A PLAN
EXPLORING THE GREAT FOREST
BIRDWATCHING FOR BEGINNERS

JUNE 2021 NO 285



VICTORIAN
NATIONAL PARKS
ASSOCIATION
Be part of nature



Be part of nature



PRESIDENT Bruce McGregor
DIRECTOR Matt Ruchel
Level 3, 60 Leicester St, Carlton, VIC 3053
ABN 34 217 717 593
Telephone: (03) 9341 6500
Email: 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

PUBLISHING POLICY

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

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

GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

You're always welcome to contact the editor to discuss ideas for articles. Phone the VNPA or email meg@vnpa.org.au

COPY DEADLINE for September 2021 *Park Watch* is Friday 6 August.

DESIGN South Star Design **PRINTING** Adams Print

FRONT COVER

We stopped AGL's plans for a gas import terminal in Westernport Bay – cause for celebration! Turn to pages 4–7 to read all about it. Photo of dolphin by Ed Dunens, Flickr CC.

Park Watch ISSN 1324-4361

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

The Victorian National Parks Association acknowledges the many First Peoples of the area now known as Victoria, honours their continuing connection to, and caring for, Country, and supports Traditional Owner joint-management of parks and public land for conservation of natural and cultural heritage.

Our office is located on traditional land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. We offer our respect to Elders past, present and future.

Park Watch is printed on FSC certified paper.

CONTENTS

3	From the President
4-7	Win for Westernport!
8	Updates
9-11	Dear Andrews Government
12-13	Camping with cows?
14-15	Time to rethink fire
16-17	Living Giants
18-19	Barmah horse management gets a feral response
20-21	Give me a reserve among the factories
22	How will Spider Crabs fare this season?
23	The Prom needs a plan
24	Grow West Community Planting Day 2021
24	Meet our new campaigner
25	Book Review: Native Peas of the Mount Alexander Region
26-27	In Parks: Bundoora Park
28-30	Exploring the Great Forest
31	Divided by time
32-33	Explorer's Corner: Birdwatching for beginners
34	Spider Crab colouring in
35	Wild Families: National Park word find

From the President



The internationally significant biodiversity values of Westernport Bay have been spared from the destructive effects of a proposed liquified natural gas (LNG) import terminal. The Victorian Planning Minister announced that the environmental impacts were unacceptable. This is a great victory for the local and broader community who have been working hard to block AGL's plans – and of course, a wonderful outcome for nature. On behalf of all Council Members, a warm thank you to all in the VNPA community who contributed to this terrific outcome – your generous financial support, persistent messages to the decision-makers and sharing of social media and petitions, and other actions has made this win possible.

VNPA staff and the various partner organisations and community groups are also to be congratulated for their dedicated work, which organised thousands of people to give the state government a clear message about protecting areas that are supposed to be protected already.

The unhelpful fashion in some political and economic circles to ignore the previously-agreed-to commitments to protect the sensitive seagrass meadows and migratory bird habitat of the Ramsar-listed Westernport Bay threatens the existence of such critical habitat. The Victorian Government needs to carefully examine their budget allocation priorities and processes so that our natural heritage is sustainably managed with sufficient staff and operating budgets. Victoria now needs better long-term protection for Westernport Bay, so the community does not have to keep fighting off these types of proposals.

Turn to the next page to read all about the success and next steps.

Our community has also been letting the Andrews Government know that Victoria's Central West forests, including the Wombat, Wellsford, Mount Cole and Pyrenees Ranges forests, need to be protected as recommended by the Victorian Environment Assessment Council (VEAC). It is more than 18 months since VEAC made their clear recommendations for protection. As described in the last *Park Watch*, investment in nature protection shows that benefits range from \$2.30 to \$4.80 for every dollar invested. And this excludes many critical benefits such as water supply, carbon storage and improvements in the mental health of the wider community. VNPA continues to call for the Andrews Government to accept the VEAC recommendations – turn to pages 9–11 to add your name to the open letter.

VNPA strongly advocates for improved funding for nature, so we welcome the increases announced in this year's state budget (announced just before *Park Watch* went to print). We welcome the small funding increases for Parks Victoria, Trust for Nature, for weed and pest control, and biodiversity and wildlife programs. However, funding for nature and the environment were at the bottom of the list of priorities – which does not fit well with the priorities of Victorians, nor the increasing need for investment.

Recently I visited far East Gippsland to catch up with an old family friend, Bob Semmens, whom we met 40 years ago on a citizen science trip in the deserts of the Northern Territory. 'Bushie Bob' is a well-known nature

lover living in Mallacoota. With Bob, we visited the regenerating forests devastated in the 2019–20 bushfires. Bob's photos show that by October last year the bush was struggling to recover, with the ground still covered in ash. Six months later, in May, many areas of the bush were lush with saplings above head height and the ground well covered with a myriad of plants. The prolific growth of numerous herbs and small shrubs produced a riot of leaf shapes, textures and colours. Many species of pea plants were fixing nitrogen, essential for the growth of the larger plants. On a wonderful sunny day, the blue sky contrasted surreally with the tall black trunks of Melaleuca trees and the dense green understory. One must marvel at the resilience of our birds, as the next day, over 100 mm of rain drenched the region. But this did not deter the Galahs, White-throated Treecreepers, Superb Lyrebirds, Rose Robins and other species from hunting for food in the rain.

In the past month, the VNPA Council and senior staff met face-to-face for the first time in over a year, to continue to refine our internal strategic plan. Changes to our society and the way the government functions mean we also have to adapt our ways of doing business. There are many critical challenges for nature in Victoria and where VNPA should focus our work in the years ahead. We cannot do our work without the essential support from our members, donors and our philanthropic partners. If you are able, I encourage you to support our end of financial year fundraising by making a tax-deductible donation – please refer to the back page of this edition. • PW

Bruce McGregor, VNPA President

WIN FOR WESTERNPORT!

Mangroves at Crib Point in Westernport Bay.
A special place, protected.

Thank you!

We are absolutely elated with the success of saving Westernport Bay! AGL's plans to build a destructive and polluting gas import terminal in this sensitive marine and coastal environment have been defeated.

This is a win for nature – for the Ramsar wetlands, marine national parks and conservation reserves, and all the migratory waterbirds, dolphins, whales, seals, penguins, fish, invertebrates, seagrass and mangroves that call this special place home.

And this is a win for community – we should all feel proud of our shared achievement, but also conviction in our ability to come together to fight for what we love and know in our hearts to be important.

Congratulations to everyone who helped protect our beautiful and beloved bay!

NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER
SHANNON HURLEY CELEBRATES AND EXPLAINS WHAT
THE DECISION TO REJECT AGL'S GAS IMPORT TERMINAL
MEANS FOR THE FUTURE OF WESTERNPORT BAY.

It was late Tuesday morning on 30 March when we got word that the Victorian Planning Minister had made his decision on the future of Westernport Bay.

Would it be full of wildlife – or full of gas? After more than three years of sweat and tears, this was the question we were waiting to be answered.

It all came down to this moment. A message on my phone said the Premier's Office had made a statement

The headline of the media release read, "Gas proposal ruled out due to environmental impacts". It continued:

"The Andrews Labor Government today ruled out a proposal to establish a gas import terminal at Crib Point in Western Port and construct a pipeline from the terminal to Pakenham.

Minister for Planning Richard Wynne concluded marine discharges from the proposed AGL and APA project would have unacceptable effects on the environment in Western Port, which is listed as a Ramsar wetland of international significance".

Now, these are the kind of words you want to read in an email! I must admit, I had to read it a few times to make

sure I understood correctly. I may have even pinched myself to make sure I was awake.

Many of us on the campaign jumped on a video call. At first, there was silence. Some of us were smiling, some were in shock and lost for words – and from others, there were various expletives exclaimed!

For the past three years VNPA had been involved, but this had been a much longer battle for the communities and groups who call Westernport Bay home.

For many, their livelihoods were at stake, with their businesses dependent on a healthy nature playground close to Melbourne. For others, it was

their way of life, where they grew up, where they live, where they have raised families, and they couldn't bear to see their backyard destroyed. For countless more, it was simply a beautiful place to go on the weekends, fishing, camping, kayaking, swimming or bird watching.

So many passionate people came together to stand against the threat to Westernport Bay. They wrote letters, engaged their communities on social media, starred in videos, were interviewed by the media, organised 'paddle-outs' and rallies, gathered on parliament steps, spoke at public hearings – many had never done anything like this before.

Continued overleaf



PHOTO: KEVIN MCKERNAN, FLICKR CC



PHOTO: MICHAEL SALE, FLICKR CC

Little Penguins and Australian Fur Seals are just some of the wildlife that have cause for cheer in Westernport Bay.

The community showed endless dedication and determination in the campaign – now it is time to celebrate!

Continued from previous page

And our many thanks to those within the VNPA community who also made generous donations to power our part in the campaign. Thousands of hours were invested in reading and analysing reports, monitoring weeks of public hearings, working with barristers to prepare presentations, and defending and arguing the science.

But it all paid off. It is truly amazing what people are capable of when we come together with a shared vision and choose to step out of our comfort zone and care for what we cherish.

What an absolute honour to work alongside such dedicated and determined community members and other groups and organisations, including Save Westernport, Environment Victoria, Environmental Justice Australia, Westernport Peninsula Protection Council, Friends of French Island, Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, and many more.

This tight collaboration of groups and individuals working closely was a real strength of the campaign, with such diversity of voices from a range of backgrounds and interests all speaking out together.

VNPA sends a massive congratulations and thank you to the local community and the groups and organisations for your endless efforts; to our supporters for making submissions, contributing financially, and for your continued backing of the campaign over the years; to our experts who worked tirelessly to communicate the science – to everyone who has been involved or taken action in some capacity. We also thank the Victorian Government for taking bold and historic action to protect one of Victoria's most incredible wildlife havens and for putting nature and the health of the community first.

Since the Planning Minister made his decision, AGL has revoked their application to the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and under the federal *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

It was all officially over on 3 May, when AGL put out an official media release announcing their pursuit of Westernport was over: "AGL Energy Limited (AGL) today has confirmed it will cease any further development of the proposed liquified natural gas (LNG) import jetty at Crib Point."



PHOTO: JUSTALLIMAGES

This is a truly historic decision to protect the future of these wild and wonderful wetlands.

This campaign (and many others that have come before it) demonstrates the passion the community have for protecting Westernport Bay. This should be a clear message that this sensitive marine and coastal environment is off-limits to risky and dangerous industrialisation.

So now the question is, how do we make sure Westernport Bay is protected forever?

To take a brief glimpse back to the history of industrial threats to Westernport Bay:

- **1960s:** Victorian Premier Henry Bolte states that Western Port will become an industrial heartland, "Victoria's Ruhr Valley".
- **1963–66:** BP Australia establishes oil refineries at Crib Point.
- **1967:** Nuclear power station on French Island proposed – plan abandoned.
- **1968:** Phillip Island Conservation Society forms in response to proposal for marina at Rhyll Inlet –community campaigned against and stopped it.
- **1970:** Esso opens gas fractionation plant at Long Island Point.

- **1971:** Westernport and Peninsula Protection Council forms in response to proposal for refinery at Bittern.
- **1986:** Canal development at Ventnor proposed – community campaign against and stopped it.
- **1987:** Ammonia–Urea plant at Crib Point proposed – community campaigned against it.
- **1992:** Oil import terminal at Crib Point proposed – community campaigned against it.
- **2007:** Bitumen Plant at Crib Point proposed – community campaigned against and stopped it.
- **2010:** State government announces Port of Hastings will be Australia's biggest container port – stopped by a huge community campaign with involvement by VNPA.
- **2018:** AGL proposes gas import terminal at Crib Point. Save Westernport forms in response. And we now know how that ended!

The industrial base at Westernport is declining, with fewer than 150 ships per year using the port. But the temptation for many is to only see this place as a port, not for the natural environment that it is. Without better protection, we will end up fighting the same battle over and over.

We need to take this victory and use the momentum we have all created to

achieve longer-term protection of this unique tidal ecosystem and all the rich diversity of plant and animal life and habitats it contains.

Options include advocating for the expansion of current or new marine national parks, applying for national heritage listing, or using the new Victorian planning tool of marine spatial planning. An Environmental Management Plan (EMP), like the one Port Phillip Bay has, would be a good start.

According to Victorian Government reports, "the new *Marine and Coastal Act 2018* now provides a mechanism to develop a comprehensive EMP for Westernport". However, we are not aware of any development process for this important document. Now is the time.

VNPA will continue to work alongside others to pursue this. If you have any bright ideas, we would welcome hearing them (email shannon@vnpa.org.au).

To finish, and on behalf of many of us, we send waves of gratitude to nature for the incredible diversity and richness of wildlife and wild places and to the elements that make living in and visiting Westernport Bay possible and precious. • PW

Some words from the community and other organisations:

Jane Carnegie, Save Westernport:

"Science and good sense have won out. The government has listened to us and to the thousands of people in our community who have worked tirelessly to save our beautiful environment from a potential catastrophe.

Save Westernport hopes this decision paves the way for greater environmental protections over Westernport, and we look forward to working with the Andrews Government to make that happen."

Environment Victoria CEO Jono La Nauze:

"We congratulate the Andrews Government on listening to the community and the science and rejecting this polluting and completely inappropriate development for Westernport Bay."

Phillip Island Conservation Society president Jeff Nottle:

"This is excellent news for Phillip Island's economy, environment, eco-tourism income and local jobs.

Our economy is dependent on a healthy environment. AGL's plan would have ruined the reputation of Westernport Bay, costing the local tourism industry tens of millions of dollars in lost visitor expenditure."

Westernport and Peninsula Protection Council Secretary Karri Giles:

"WPPC welcomes Minister Wynne's decision to disallow AGL's proposal to import gas at Crib Point and pipe it to Pakenham. We had a chance to save Woolleys Cove, an important fish and squid nursery, and we took it. We stood up against the building of the pipeline with a 171-hectare footprint. Congratulations to all supporters."

French Island Community Association secretary Linda Bowden:

"French Islanders have consistently opposed this project since its announcement, and today we are very relieved that the Minister has listened to the overwhelming community outcry and will act to protect the fragile ecology of the Bay for the wildlife it supports, the community that loves it and the sustainable businesses that rely on its health."

None of VNPA's work would have been possible without the support and generosity of our donors and members.



PHOTO: @JULIAN MEEHAN

Staff update

Our Manager Community Learning and Engagement Caitlin Griffith has set off on Long Service Leave traveling around Australia experiencing all the natural wonders our country has to offer. She will return in April 2022.

In Caitlin's absence, our NatureWatch Coordinator Sera Blair will step in to cover her management role, and our Conservation Project Officer Nicole Mertens will take on the Wild Families program.

A new NatureWatch Project Officer Rachel Nalliah joined us in May and will implement the Life After Fire project and conduct fieldwork to monitor wildlife in East Gippsland (see next edition for an introduction to Rachel).

And Adrian Marshal has also started as the Facilitator of the Grassy Plains Network, hosted by VNPA on behalf of the Grassy Plains Network and Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association. Turn to page 24 for a full profile on Adrian.

We are pleased to welcome these new members to the VNPA team, and very grateful to the donors and philanthropic organisations who have helped ensure we have extra staff at a time when nature in Victoria especially needs our efforts. • PW

Winter 2021 Bushwalking and Activities Program



PHOTO: MARY FERLIN

For the Winter 2021 program there is no printed version but you can easily find all of the upcoming activities available at www.vnpa.org.au/adventures.

If you would like to receive updates, you can join the dedicated email list at www.vnpa.org.au/bwag-sign-up • PW

Annual General Meeting – ADVANCED NOTICE

VNPA's 70th Annual General Meeting will be held on **Tuesday 12 October 2021 at 6.30pm**. Location and format to be confirmed. • PW

Nominations for VNPA Council are now open

Nominations for the VNPA Council are now open to members who would like to participate in the governance of the organisation. The Council play an important role in the life of VNPA – establishing policy guidelines, approving annual budgets and undertaking strategic planning for the association.

Elected councillors are unpaid volunteers and are asked to participate in six Council meetings and relevant committees (usually around two hours each) over the course of the calendar year.

The Annual General Meeting elects the volunteer Council and includes a president, vice-president, honorary secretary, honorary treasurer and up to nine councillors.

To nominate for Council, you must be a current financial member and indicate your intentions by writing to the Executive Director Matt Ruchel, via mattruchel@vnpa.org.au by 5pm on Tuesday 14 September 2021.

More information on our Council, please visit www.vnpa.org.au/about • PW

An open letter to The Andrews Government: It's time to act for nature in Central Victoria

We write to you about the importance of implementing recommendations for new central west National Parks.

In 2017 the state government requested the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) to undertake an investigation into public land in central Victoria. The areas include the public forests of the Wombat, Wellsford, Mount Cole and Pyrenees Ranges.

The purpose of the investigation was to identify the natural and cultural values, and make balanced recommendations about how to best conserve and enhance them. Following the two-year expert investigation, VEAC recommended large areas of these forests become National or Regional Parks to:

- Provide vital habitat for over 380 rare and threatened animal and plant species
- Store millions of tonnes of carbon, significantly helping our efforts to mitigate climate change
- Create critical water security for farms and communities, by protecting the headwaters of rivers that flow from these forests
- Support rural and regional visitation and nature-based tourism
- Support joint management of new parks with Traditional Owners

It is now four years since the VEAC investigation began and in that time the long list of threatened species in Victoria has increased. The VEAC report was tabled in parliament over 18 months ago, yet the Victorian Government has found time to approve mining exploration leases and logging coupes in sensitive wildlife habitat, while ignoring the recommendations and missing legal requirements to respond. A decision is now 12 months overdue.

Creating new National Parks isn't just about saving wildlife and safeguarding beautiful places. It's about clean air and water, a liveable temperature and people's livelihoods.

These recommendations present an incredible opportunity for the Andrews Government. Communities would have new parks to explore. Wildlife would have security and protection. Instead we're losing valuable time, and some of the most unique and vulnerable nature in our state.

The organisations listed below, representing hundreds of thousands of Victorians, call on the Andrews Government to protect these natural areas of central Victoria and immediately accept and implement the VEAC Central West Investigation recommendations.

ACF Community Bendigo District
Australian Plants Society (Victoria)
Bacchus Marsh Platypus Alliance
Ballarat Environment Network
Bendigo Family Nature Club
Bendigo Field Naturalists Club
Bendigo & District Environment Council
Bendigo Sustainability Group
Biolinks Alliance Inc
Birdlife Australia
BirdLife Castlemaine District Branch
Bush Heritage Australia
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.
Doctors for the Environment Australia
Environment Victoria

Environmental Justice Australia
Euroa Environment Group
Field Naturalists Club Ballarat
Friends of the Earth
Friends of the Box-Iron Bark Forests
Friends of the Brisbane Ranges
Friends of the Canadian Corridor
Friends of Crusoe Reservoir & No. 7 Park
Friends of Werribee Gorge & Long Forest Mallee
Hepburn Wind
Humane Society International Australia
Malmsbury District Landcare
Moorabool Environment Group
The National Trust Australia (Victoria)
Newham & District Landcare Group

Project Platypus
Save our Strathbogie Forest
St Arnaud Field Naturalist Club Inc.
Strathbogie Ranges CMN
Trentham Sustainability Group
The Wilderness Society (Victoria)
WWF Australia
Wellsford Forest Conservation Alliance
Werribee River Association
Wombat Forestcare Inc.
Victorian National Parks Association



Sign the letter CREATENEWPARKS.ORG.AU



PHOTO: SANDY SCHEITEMA

Gayle Osborne from Wombat Forestcare is over waiting to finally see her local forest protected.

Dear Andrews Government: Less talk, more protection for nature

IT IS WELL AND TRULY TIME FOR ACTION TO CREATE NEW NATIONAL PARKS IN THE CENTRAL WEST FORESTS, WRITES **SHANNON HURLEY**.

You may have seen our most recent push in the long campaign to have some of Victoria's most species-rich areas in the Central West fully protected in national and regional parks.

It is the latest in what began over ten years ago when efforts started to protect large areas of public forests of the Wombat, Wellsford, Mount Cole and Pyrenees Ranges.

Following a two-year expert investigation by the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC), and now over 12 months past the Andrews Government's legal deadline for a decision on the recommended new parks, understandably conservation groups are deeply disappointed.

While losing patience, wildlife, habitats and faith in our elected leaders to take

these issues seriously, over forty (and counting) state, national and international groups are taking a stronger stand.

This mighty collaboration of groups, representing hundreds of thousands of Victorians, and coordinated by local community conservation group Wombat Forestcare, are calling on the Andrews Government to hurry up and get on with creating and implementing new parks for Victoria.

These strong calls are demonstrated through a series of full-page open letters to the Andrews Government in six papers across key regional centres of Ararat, Bendigo, Ballarat, Beaufort, Castlemaine, Moorabool, Daylesford, Macedon (see previous page).

But this does not stop there. With the launch of a digital version as well, new groups and individuals are also invited to add their name

to the open letter by visiting www.createenewparks.org.au

Existing signatory groups include leading national groups like WWF, Doctors for the Environment Australia, the Wilderness Society, Humane Society International Australia, Friends of the Earth, Bush Heritage, Birdlife Australia, key state groups including National Trust of Australia (Victoria), Environment Victoria, and of course VNPA, and regional groups such as Biolinks Alliance Inc, Friends groups, Field Naturalist clubs and Landcare networks.

Gayle Osborne (pictured) from Wombat Forestcare, a guardian of the Wombat Forest (and inspiration to many of us), has been ardently advocating for its many values, including the headwaters of six major rivers, many rare and threatened species, and the storage of carbon.

"How long do we have to wait for the Victorian Government to take nature protection issues seriously?" she asks.

Particularly when the state government's *Biodiversity 2037* Strategy includes statements like "The Victorian Government has an ambitious environmental agenda and is prioritising the care and protection of our natural environment".

Yet this sentiment is merely nice words on glossy paper until we see real commitment to protecting these special places.

Wendy Radford, a local from Bendigo and representative from the Wellsford Forest Conservation Alliance, has also been a long-term advocate for her local forests. She has seen how COVID-19 has shown how valued our forests and natural places are to the community.

"People in Bendigo have overwhelmingly said that they want the Wellsford Forest protected from logging and mining," she says. "What is the holdup?"

Yet while we still wait for a decision, the Andrews Government has still found time to approve mining exploration leases and logging coupes in sensitive wildlife habitat, while ignoring the expert recommendations and missing legal requirements to respond.

The clock is ticking very loudly for many of our most vulnerable native wildlife. If the Andrews Government is to leave a legacy in this term of government and improve their track record of poor national park creation, they are running out of time.

These recommendations present an incredible opportunity for the Andrews Government to create new parks close to Melbourne. Communities would have new nature spaces to explore, and wildlife would have security and protection. They would provide clean air and water, protect vital habitat for over 370 rare and threatened animal and plant species, and support joint management with Traditional Owners.

Enough talk; now we need action.

Latest: In response to the advertising blitz, an Andrews Government spokesperson was reported in the *Bendigo Advertiser* (28 April 2021) that it would "advise on timing for finalising its response to VEAC's report shortly. But this comes on the back of a similar previous statement late last year that an announcement would be made before Christmas 2020 – but that never happened either.

As of 20 May, over 44 groups and 1050 individuals (and counting) have signed on to the open letter. Join them here: www.createenewparks.org.au • PW

You can help power this campaign by making a tax-deductible donation using the form on the back page of *Park Watch*. • PW

CAMPING WITH COWS?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR **MATT RUCHEL** WRITES ABOUT THE FUTURE OF RIVER FRONTAGES.

A significant dispute has broken out over the last few months between farmers, recreational fishing groups, local conservation groups and the government over a poorly thought through election promise.

Much of Victoria's landscape is densely woven with rivers and streams – the greatest concentration of waterways on Australia's mainland. This includes many heritage rivers, high-value wetlands and floodplains, and important bird and biodiversity areas.

Of 170,000 kilometres of river frontage, 18 per cent are publicly owned; these are known as 'Crown water frontages'. This approximately 30,000 kilometres of Crown water frontage is a unique feature to Victoria that was put in place in the 1880s.

About 8,000 hectares of this land is now in national parks or conservation areas, and a further 5,000 hectares is a mix of different reserves managed by local councils and other land managers. The remaining 17,000 kilometres of waterway frontage is largely managed by the adjacent landholder via approximately 10,000 agricultural or riparian licences issued by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP).

In 2018 the Andrews Government made an election commitment as part of their Fishing & Boating Policy to "guarantee access to fishing and camping on Crown land that has grazing licenses and river frontage".

But this was not a properly thought through policy, and there was no consultation with groups like the VNPA who have been working on riverside land issues for some years. The government subsequently passed legislation to implement the policy and has now moved to create regulations to try and manage the largely open camping access to Crown water frontages. But the scheme has many significant problems.

The draft Land (Regulated Watercourse Land) Regulations essentially allow camping access to grazing licensed waterways, with some exceptions and various vague rules. The draft regulations say that camping may be excluded in areas of regulated land to "preserve or protect natural values", "protect or allow revegetation or restoration", or "preserve or protect cultural values". However, it provides no mechanism to do this and makes no reference to the scale of assessments required. Rather it's a bit of a blank cheque with camping allowed until decided otherwise.

VNPA does not see the attraction of 'camping with cows', which is essentially what the regulations propose, especially where it could lead to conflict with adjoining

landholders, impact on sensitive ecological areas, or simply be unsafe.

Without proper regulation and well-informed planning, 'open camping access' has the potential to result in an intensification or introduction of threats and risks directly associated with camping activity (whether legal or not), including for example:

- Increased pollution and litter along riparian land and adjoining private land.
- Public health and safety risks arising due to conflicts between people and livestock.
- Increased risk of wildfires caused by campfires.
- Conflicts between pet dogs and livestock.
- Biosecurity risks, both agricultural and ecological.
- Damage to riparian vegetation and habitats from camping, firewood collection, vehicles, four-wheel driving, and trail-bike riding.
- Damage to riparian vegetation, habitats and river banks from gold prospecting and fossicking.
- Increased risks of accidental injury due to increased hunting activity in agricultural landscapes.
- Death or injury of campers or wildlife or livestock due to the increased likelihood of simultaneous mixed use.

Crown water frontage management is made more complex because much of it has not been formally surveyed and the boundaries are uncertain between private and public land. Adding to the confusion is the dynamic nature of waterways, sometimes changing their course during floods or gradually through erosion. Without knowing 100 per cent whose land is whose, there will be a great deal of conflict between campers and adjacent landholders. The regulations will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to properly enforce without detailed boundary surveys, clear fencing and access points.

There is also a real danger that the scheme will undermine riparian land restoration initiatives to the detriment of the environment and broader community benefits. VNPA has long highlighted the impacts of cattle on river frontages, but we also acknowledge the stewardship of many adjoining landholders, especially those reflected in the uptake of riparian licences.

Currently, DELWP may issue a licence for a Crown water frontage to an owner or occupier of the adjoining private land for grazing, cropping or riparian management. Grazing and cropping licences are largely peppercorn rents (average \$80 for five years). However, as of 2010, grazing licences can be converted to riparian management licences, which have a focus on protection of the riparian environment, rather than production.



The bulk of Crown water frontages are still licenced for agricultural purposes. We estimate between 15–23 per cent (2,000–4,000 kilometres) is covered by the protection-focused riparian management licences, leaving roughly 13,000–15,000 kilometres of publicly-owned river frontage open for cows – and now camping. The draft regulations and many stakeholders agree that camping should not be allowed on areas with riparian licences, which is sensible, but must be clearly entrenched in the new regulations.

To add insult to injury, the government recently spent \$40 million between 2016 and 2020 on a very successful and dedicated Regional Riparian Action Plan, which was cut in the last state budget. Key outcomes of this program included the protection and improvement of (both Crown and privately owned) water frontages, including:

- nearly 3,500 kilometres of riparian land (140 per cent of the five-year action plan target)
- over 53,000 hectares of riparian land (190 per cent of the five-year target)

VNPA actively supports ecologically appropriate, well planned and safe access to nature – rivers and waterways are key ecotones and are attractors for wildlife and people alike.

Appropriate camping should avoid sensitive and significant habitats, and should be practical and avoid conflict.

Camping access for Crown water frontages should be the exception and not the norm. It should only occur in areas that have had a proper boundary survey and an assessment for ecological impact.

Victoria's freshwater ecosystems have great diversity and complexity and support more than 100 waterbird species, over 50 freshwater fish, 40 crayfish, 38 frogs, and a large number of freshwater invertebrates. Many of Victoria's frogs, freshwater fish and crayfish are threatened with extinction, as well as the recent listing of our state's most iconic riparian specialist species, the Platypus. Additionally, more than 800 vascular plants are associated with Victoria's wetlands.

We have not treated them well – less than 50 per cent of assessed river length with riparian vegetation is in good condition. More cows and camping will make this worse if we do not have careful planning and proper ecological assessment.

The current draft regulations lack precision in definitions, and the legislative amendments have resulted in a blunt and largely blind instrument that is in need of a significantly more detailed assessment and analysis before proceeding. • PW

Time to rethink fire

EVIDENCE AGAINST VICTORIA'S FUEL REDUCTION PROGRAM IS CLEAR, YET BURNS ARE INCREASING. CALLS FOR A PAUSE AND RE-ASSESSMENT OF FIRE MANAGEMENT ARE GROWING LOUDER, SAYS PHIL INGAMELLS.

The most alarming thing about “fuel reduction” burning is that it is often fuel production burning.

The next most alarming thing is that the state government department that plans and performs those burns doesn't monitor what actually happens afterwards. Anyone marketing a car, a vaccine, or building cladding would be expected to know how it performs over time, whether it's safe, and, of course, if it actually works.

However, Victoria's Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) doesn't return to the site of its fuel reduction burns and record what has eventuated – not after one year, not two or, most importantly, not a decade or so into the future.

That's not just alarming, it's downright puzzling, because DELWP boasts of the efficacy of its 'Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting' framework; the department claims it monitors performance and learns from what it does, allowing it to improve performance.

It might seem odd to say that a fuel reduction burn increases fuel. But then it once seemed odd to say that the earth wasn't flat, but a ball floating in space.

The first clear statement of this situation came from Judge Stretton's Royal Commission into the 1939 Black Friday bushfire that roared through some two million hectares of forests and scrub.



Barely two years after the Black Saturday fire, there is a dense regrowth of Ash seedlings.

Referring to the common practice at the time of burning open forests and woodlands to produce green pick for cattle and sheep, Stretton said:

“The fire stimulated grass growth, but it encouraged scrub growth far more. Thus was begun the cycle of destruction which can not be arrested in our day. The scrub grew and flourished, fire was used to clear it, the scrub grew faster and thicker, bush fires, caused by the careless or designing hand of man, ravaged the forests; the canopy was impaired, more scrub grew and prospered, and again the cleansing agent, fire, was used. And so today ... the wombat and wallaby are hard put to it to find passage through the bush.”

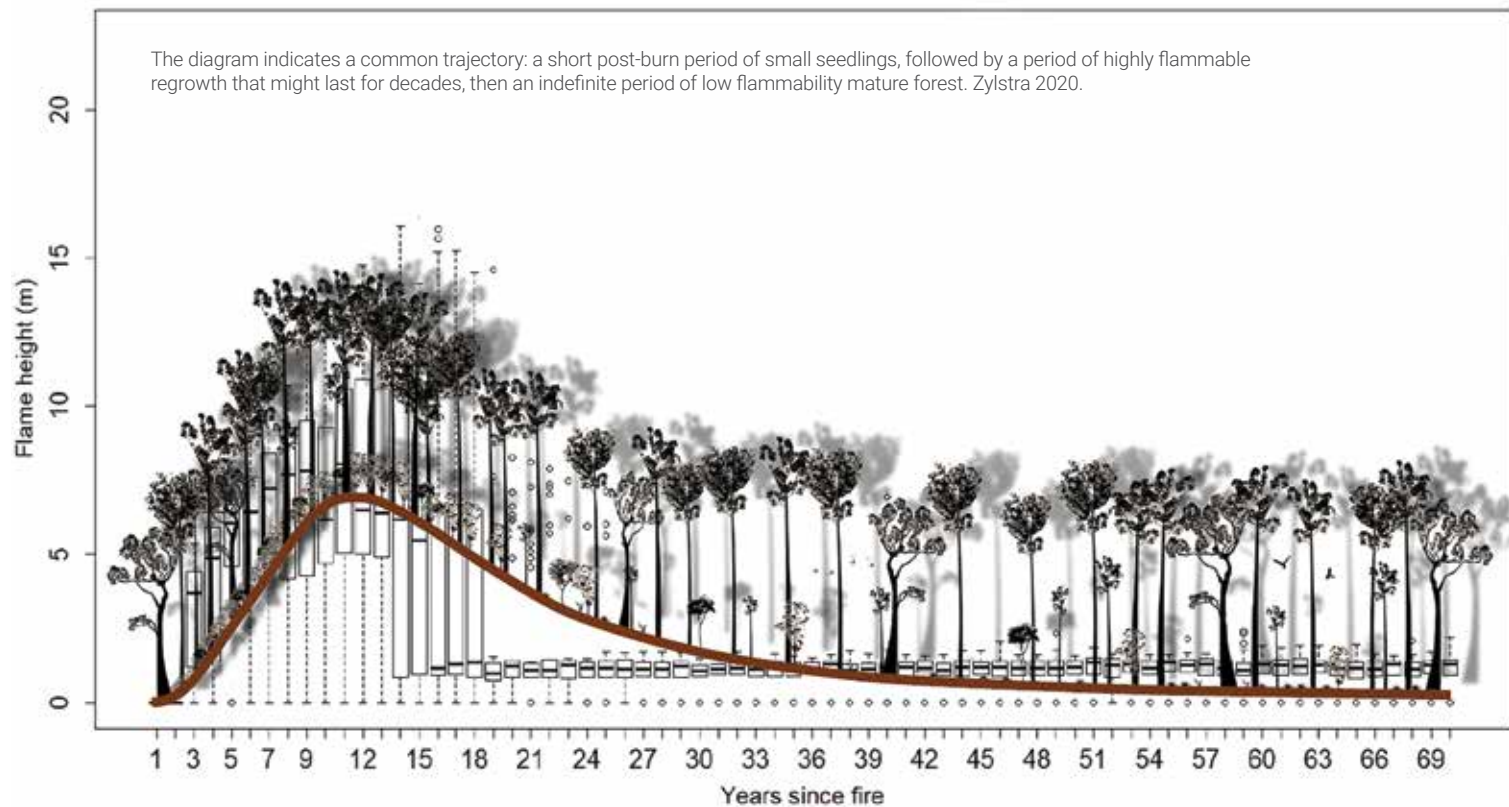
That was pretty controversial at the time, but in 1946 Stretton reinforced his

claim in a second Royal Commission, this time into forest grazing. On his recommendation, the right to burn was taken away from those holding a grazing licence. Burning was to be the sole responsibility of the government's Forest Commission.

But since those days, a land management body that primarily practised the burning of ridgetops to protect a timber supply has transformed itself into a large, heavily equipped, paramilitary organisation that seems intent on frying the state.

And this organisation, charged with protecting our lives and nurturing our natural heritage, has largely been left to report on its own performance.

Last year, however, following the third time in 20 years that a one-million-



hectare wildfire tore through Victoria's bushland, two independent inquiries have brought DELWP's management into question.

Among issues raised in the Inspector General for Emergency Management's report was the observation that:

“Even with an extensive fuel management program, bushfire risk remains as the vegetation regrows.”

That statement is quite scathing of DELWP's burn operations, and can be strongly backed up by recent independent research.

In a submission to last year's Federal Royal Commission into Natural Disaster Arrangements, Associate Professor Philip Zylstra, Professor David Lindenmayer and colleagues illustrated their argument with a diagram showing how fuel flammability can actually increase for 30 years or more after a fuel “reduction” burn.

The bush responds in complex ways to fire, as changes in species and forest structure depend on many factors, but empirical evidence now supports long-standing observations that burns can increase understorey flammability for decades.

In a parallel inquiry by Victoria's Auditor General, another astonishing statement appeared:

“With the exception of some isolated cases studies, DELWP does not know the effect of its

burns on native flora and fauna”. (See *Park Watch* December 2020 or www.vnpa.org.au/recommendations-for-fire-management for more statements from fire inquiries.)

DELWP has been relying on its ever more sophisticated computer modelling to manage fuel, protect lives and save our natural heritage, but recent burns show a serious lack of response to old fashioned, on ground observation.

After the Black Summer of 2019–20, when vast areas of East Gippsland went up in flames, DELWP's biodiversity arm called for the protection of remaining wildlife habitat refuges in the east.

But rather than scaling back burns, DELWP's fire management arm continued or even increased its program. And logging also continued apace. (See *Park Watch* March 2021 or vnpa.org.au/after-the-fires)

Perhaps the most striking example of DELWP's data-based blindness was when, despite clear calls to protect remaining unburnt Sheoak stands, the seeds of which are essential food for Glossy Black Cockatoos, and despite plenty of advice from ornithologists that Glossy Blacks were highly dependent on any remaining food source, DELWP decided to continue its planned burn of a remaining stand. Or rather it burnt half the stand, on just one side of the road, because a

Glossy Black was only recorded on its database on the other side of the road.

We need regular independent scrutiny of DELWP's fire management. And we need a department that has the will and capacity to implement real change. • PW

Ecotours and walking in the High Country, East Gippsland and beyond

Are you curious about the natural world? Imagine immersing yourself in nature while we share our love and knowledge of the environment with you.



Let us arrange the accommodation, the driving, the walks and talks. Even your meals appear like magic. Enjoy the companionship of a small group of like-minded nature lovers and return home refreshed, informed and invigorated.

Gippsland High Country Tours

Phone (03) 5157 5556

www.gippslandhighcountrytours.com.au

Advanced Ecotourism Certification. Est. 1987

Living Giants

UP IN THE MOUNTAINS, GIANTS CAN STILL BE FOUND. THEY HAVE
STOOD IN PLACE FOR HUNDREDS AND HUNDREDS OF YEARS.
JORDAN CROOK SHARES THEIR STORY.

On the east side of Mount Baw Baw in Victoria are some of the largest trees on mainland Australia.

On the traditional land of the Gunaikurnai people, these old trees have been there since before Europeans even thought of this southern land.

One of these giants is an Errinundra Shining Gum (*Eucalyptus denticulate*) known as the Whitelaw Tree. It stands 57 metres tall, with an impressive girth of 14.9 metres at its widest – it is the fifth largest tree by volume in the country.

This iconic tree stands among other large old trees beside the Whitelaw Creek, dotted among the understory of Myrtle Beech and very occasional Southern Sassafras.

It can be accessed via a signed track and is visited regularly by tourists.

The Whitelaw Tree is one of a group of trees listed on the National Trusts of Australia's Register of Significant Trees as being of 'state significance'. Trees on the Register of Significant Trees are assessed by an expert committee and measured against the best examples in the state. But this listing doesn't have any statutory protections for the trees.

And now the fate of these exceptional trees is under imminent threat from the ever-increasing footprint of the gluttonous timber and pulp industry. The state-owned logging company VicForests plans to conduct logging within 30 metres of these forest giants this year.

Logging and associated activities such as post-logging burning are known to kill large old trees in the immediate vicinity of coupes.

Logging has already made a mess of this part of Mount Baw Baw. VicForests have even logged very close to the Whitelaw Tree in the past. We inspected it in mid-April this year and found it had lost a large limb and has epicormic shoots growing from the trunk on the side closest to recent logging operations. This suggests the tree is under stress, likely caused by the destruction of its surroundings and subsequent changes in wind load.

Further logging around the Whitelaw Tree and its neighbouring large old trees would severely compromise the health of these astounding trees and lessen their resilience to adapt to changes such as climate change, drought and fire.

In 2018 the Victorian Environment Minister Lily D'Ambrosio announced trees with a diameter of 2.5 metres or greater would be "protected". But the 'Field Guidelines – Identification and Protection of Large Trees' still allows logging operations within three metres of such trees, and doesn't set any firm protections for them – the best they get is damage "should be avoided".

'Giant trees' in East Gippsland with a greater than four metre diameter at breast height (DBH) get some extra considerations from logging operations including post-fire burns and are listed on a Giant Tree Register. But there is no detail on what is required on ground other than not allowing woody debris to build up within three metres of trees and that trees should be retained in patches, not stating what sizes those patches should be.

Not to mention it relies on VicForests to adequately survey areas for large trees.

In suburbia, many local councils require a Tree Protection Zone (TPZ) based on the 'Australian Standard Protection of Trees on Development Sites AS 4970-2009'. It uses the calculation of tree diameter at the height of 1.4 metres (DBH) multiplied by 12 to work out a protection zone. This method maxes out at 15 metres for trees in urban areas.

But suburban trees have likely been planted or have grown alone, unlike large trees in forest environments that depend on the surrounding vegetation to protect them from wind load, fire severity and root damage.

As a qualified arborist, I would suggest a minimum protection zone for these large trees should be 100 metres of vegetated buffer zone per tree to avoid heavy machinery damage to the trees and their roots, to maintain local hydrology levels that the trees have grown relying on, and save surrounding vegetation to shelter the trees from strong winds.

Many large old trees also succumb to the effects of post-logging burning used to remove remaining parts of trees that the logging industry has no use for – branches, bark, and root flares. I would suggest a further 150 metre buffer zone around a first 100 metre vegetated buffer zone where the logged area is not burnt to protect the tree from the radiant heat of these post-logging burns.

With an Andrews Government promised 2030 phase out of native forest logging in Victoria, it is foolish to jeopardise the health of these living giants and any potential of making these trees tourism assets for regional areas.

VNPA and the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) have written to the Acting Premier and the Minister for the Environment, urging the government to protect this stand of giant trees, including the Whitelaw Tree.

We shouldn't be logging anywhere near our living natural heritage. • PW

Our gratitude to citizen scientist Jan Corigliano who alerted VNPA to the Whitelaw Tree being under threat; thank you for your vigilance and care for the big trees.

The awe-inspiring
Whitelaw Tree at
Mount Baw Baw.

PHOTO COURTESY NATIONAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA (VICTORIA)



Sign outside Barmah National Park, including Yorta Yorta elder (we have blurred out faces in photos).

PHOTO: JORDAN CROOK

Barmah horse management gets a feral response

IT'S TIME TO RESPECT THE INTEGRITY OF BARMAN NATIONAL PARK'S JOINT MANAGEMENT PLAN AND 'PROTECTION OF FLOODPLAIN MARSHES' STRATEGY, SAYS **PHIL INGAMELLS**.

Land management issues are often divisive, but surely it's best to know who is primarily running an ideological argument, and who is running an evidence-based one.

This is particularly the case when you have an area as important as Barmah National Park, internationally recognised for its truly remarkable wetlands and also for Indigenous cultural heritage. The park's natural and cultural heritage are, of course, inseparable.



Ute with intimidating sign parked outside Yorta Yorta offices.

PHOTO: JORDAN CROOK

Plans by Parks Victoria to remove feral horses from Barmah National Park are based on scientific studies going back decades. Those studies were drawn on when the Barmah floodplain wetlands were given international protection as a Ramsar listed wetland. And the same and other studies were employed when the Victorian parliament passed legislation protecting Barmah's extensive Red Gum forests and wetlands as a national park.

The pre-European Box Woodland of Barmah forest, brimming with wildlife.



ILLUSTRATION: BRIAN BAINBRIDGE

More recently, even more studies into wetland wildlife, pest animal and plant invasion and other issues were employed in the development of a Joint Management Plan for the park, a process developed by the Yorta Yorta Traditional Owners with Parks Victoria. A similar evidence-based process produced the 'Protection of Floodplain Marshes' Strategic Action Plan required for the Ramsar wetland.

Importantly, all of the above processes also involved extensive public consultation.

And all of those processes reinforced the extraordinary natural values of the park, and the need for far more vigilant control of pest animals, especially the damaging impact of hard-hooved grazers.

Unfortunately, some haven't been able to accept the extensive evidence that a growing population of feral horses are damaging the wetlands, threatening native species, and severely shrinking the extent of Barmah's remarkable Moira Grass plains.

Opposition to horse management has now become personal and vindictive, attacking Parks Victoria, which is legally obliged to manage the land to protect its many threatened species, and attacking individual members of the Yorta Yorta community, who are just trying to offer their voice to protect the small amount of their once-large territory that they now, legally, have joint management responsibility for.



Barmah's forests, woodlands and wetlands are all impacted by feral horses and other hard hooved animals.

PHOTO: JORDAN CROOK

Bullying people is not a useful way to support good management of public land, and claims that farm animals somehow belong in Barmah's wetlands are spurious and unhelpful. Indeed, it is largely that opposition that has led to the unfortunate need to cull these animals, as there are now far too many horses to successfully rehome.

It's time to accept that the horses have to go from the park. • PW

Give me a reserve among the factories

NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER
JORDAN CROOK TAKES US TO VISIT OUR
MOST AT RISK ECOSYSTEMS.

Amongst the existing suburbs and factories of the western suburbs of Melbourne, the wind sweeps through fields of Kangaroo Grass, and Striped Legless Lizards scurry on through the volcanic rocks and cracked soil.

In these special places between the concrete and bitumen, the land is still alive and home to species that have evolved and lived in these grasslands for many millennia.

These small remnants of the volcanic plains grasslands of Victoria, despite the odds, exist and provide a home for a raft of insect, animal and plant life among the ever industrialised and suburbanised landscape of the city's west. It is astounding that these areas have quite literally narrowly avoided complete destruction since the colonisation of Victoria.

These last urban grasslands hold some of the most intact and high-quality examples of Natural Temperate Grasslands of Victoria's volcanic plains that once stretched from the western suburbs to the South Australian border, much like the savannah of Africa or the prairie of North America. These urban sites still provide suitable habitat for threatened grassland species such as the Striped Legless Lizard and Southern Tussock Skink as they have escaped the plough and de-rocking exercises of past agricultural land use.

As you may have read in *The Age* in mid-March this year in the article "It's deplorable: Call to halt loss of Melbourne's native grasslands", community groups, grassland scientists and VNPA has been inspecting sites around Burnside (near Deer Park), Altona and Sunshine.

Through the work of community groups and scientists, we are finding some beautiful and significant sites

Left: Kangaroo Grass.
Above: Striped Legless Lizard.

scattered around the suburbs, with some blocks over 40 hectares and containing threatened species such as the Spiny Rice Flower (FFG Act Vulnerable/EPBC Act Critically Endangered) and Striped Legless Lizard (FFG Vulnerable/EPBC Vulnerable). Most are outside the area covered by the controversial Melbourne Strategic Assessment, which was heavily criticised by the Victorian Auditor-General last year (See www.audit.vic.gov.au/report/protecting-critically-endangered-grasslands)

The sites are scattered across private land between factories in industrial zones, along bike tracks, on development sites that were once paddocks, like the Burnside development near Deer Park.

The Burnside site had its fate sealed a few years ago by the federal and state governments, and will now become part of the surrounding housing estate, despite repeated concerns by local conservationists and grassland ecologists that the site could contain a large and healthy population of the Striped Legless Lizard.

The first time I inspected the Burnside site in 2020, fields of Kangaroo Grass swayed in the breeze as we climbed over large volcanic rocks embedded in the soil, indicating the site had not been disturbed and would most likely contain significant populations of threatened species. Surrounded on two sides by the Kororoit Creek, the lost potential of the Burnside site for a fantastic reserve and open green space for the surrounding housing estate highlights the need for better planning and proactive conservation of these significant sites.

Continued poor planning is leading to the loss of these high-quality native grasslands in urban areas that are still valuable habitat for threatened species. It is pivotal that we don't lose what is left. The urban planning boxes are being ticked with no real outcomes for threatened species.

Plan Melbourne, the main strategic guidance document for the metropolitan area which was released in 2014 (with various updates), acknowledges the importance of natural areas in urban areas:

"There is a critical need to maintain and improve the overall extent and condition of natural habitats, including waterways. Natural habitats need to better protect native flora and fauna, enhance the community's knowledge and acceptance of wildlife in areas they live, enhance access to nature and recreational opportunities across urban areas and make Melbourne an attractive place to live and visit."

The plan includes a number of clear policies, including:

"Policy 6.5.1: Create a network of green spaces that support biodiversity conservation and opportunities to connect with nature."

This seems good, but when the rubber hits the road for the Melbourne 2030 implementation plan, the key drivers only focus on a range of measures around the protection of waterways, climate change mitigation, coastal hazard reduction plans – but nothing which explicitly addresses nature within the urban context for unique natural areas, such as native grasslands, or provides a vehicle for policy 6.51 to be implemented. This, combined with the continued failure of the Melbourne Strategic Assessment, means more needs to be done if we have any hope of stabilising the decline of these once widespread ecosystems.

VNPA and community groups are calling for a stocktake and thorough independent survey of remaining high-value grasslands and threatened species habitat in the outer Melbourne region, to protect threatened species where they are currently living as the suitable habitat already exists.

We are calling on the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) to be proactive in seeking protection of these high-quality grassland sites prior to planning for development and bulldozers start rolling in.

With less than five per cent of native grasslands remaining, the need for proactive conservation of grasslands is vital to protect this amazing ecosystem and the wonderful species that call them home – not to mention also protecting the open space, stored carbon, and stormwater benefits native grasslands perform in the urban environment.

I acknowledge the importance of grasslands to First Nations communities and their ongoing connection to these areas of natural and cultural significance. • PW

Grassland among urban sprawl – the Burnside site from above.



People come from far and wide to admire this internationally recognised tourist attraction.

How will Spider Crabs fare this season?

STEPS IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION, BUT MORE BOLD ACTION NEEDED TO PROTECT THIS GLOBALLY IMPORTANT MARINE PHENOMENA, EXPLAINS **SHANNON HURLEY**.

VNPA has been supporting the Save Our Spider Crabs Alliance to protect the world's largest migration of Spider Crabs here in our very own Port Phillip Bay from environmental and social concerns around recent and intensive harvesting.

Last October, over 2,000 of you took action to call for a safe harbour for Spider Crabs.

Despite much opposition via submissions and letters, on 1 February this year, the Victorian Fisheries Authority changed the catch limit for Spider Crabs across Victorian waters from 30 reduced to 15 per day.

While this move could be seen as a small step in the right direction, VNPA and other groups, tourism operators, educators and individuals decided to oppose the proposed catch limit change for a number of reasons. We felt that this management change would not be in the crab's best interest, nor for all the people who come from far and wide to admire this internationally recognised tourist attraction.

Instead, we have been advocating for stronger protection measures for a no-take period for April to July, the peak seasonal times of their life cycle when they are most vulnerable and seeking safety in numbers to complete their moult – at least until we know more about the science of these creatures.

Over a series of meetings in 2020 with the Victorian Fisheries Authority and other interested stakeholders, it was not clear that the catch limit

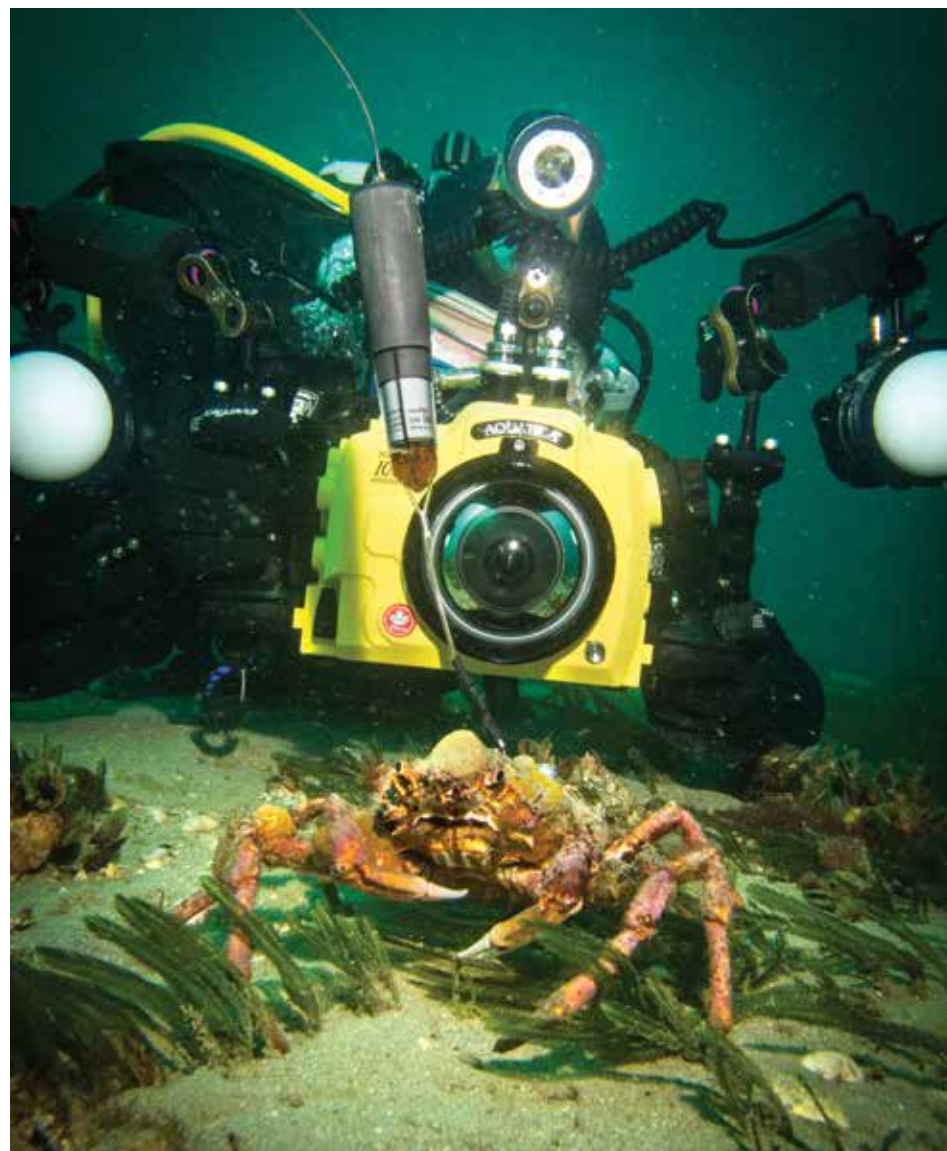


PHOTO: PT HIRSCHFIELD

reduction would actually do anything to protect the crabs, or address the swathe of environmental and social impacts of harvesting experienced the past two seasons. Pollution (including chicken carcasses) littering the piers and seafloor and crab pots floating this way and that is not our idea of the ideal way for admirers to experience the aggregation event in all its glory.

How many Spider Crabs there? Where do they come from? Where do they go? Are they males and females? How many come to the shallows to moult each year? Do they get the chance to breed before being harvested? These are the type of questions that need answering before their population is deemed ready to be opened up as a fishery.

Otherwise, we risk wiping out one of the world's greatest marine spectacles.

We are told by the Victorian Fisheries Authority there will be education of fishers, along with some management measures, including additional fisheries compliance officers support and bins at the piers.

Will this be enough to combat the environmental damage, let alone the eye-sore?

We have our doubts, but this season will tell.

We will be watching and continuing to advocate for better protection measures for the Spider Crabs, a thorough science monitoring program to obtain an accurate understanding of their population numbers and dynamics, and for a harmonious enjoyment of such an incredible marine event. Until this happens, we still believe the best solution is the no-take period. • **PW**

On another slightly cheerier note, get your creative crabs on and enjoy a colouring illustration designed by well-known Australian artist Peter Trusler on page 34.

Dusk at Tidal River, Wilsons Promontory National Park.

The Prom needs a plan

A LOT OF GOOD THINGS ARE FLAGGED FOR WILSONS PROMONTORY NATIONAL PARK, BUT WITHOUT A CURRENT MANAGEMENT PLAN THERE IS NO CLEAR FRAMEWORK FOR DECISIONS, WRITES **PHIL INGAMELLS**.

The Prom is arguably Victoria's most loved national park, and in 1898 was more or less equal first to be given protection in our state along with Mount Buffalo National Park.

Since that time, it has been variously cared for and abused. It has had to weather fire, logging and mining industries, military occupation, and development. But it has also long had the support of ecologists and the general community, keen to protect this magical pile of granite that projects from the Australian mainland into the wild waters of Bass Strait.

To handle the contested space that parks inevitably become, Victoria's *National Parks Act 1975* requires a management plan that clarifies the actions and priorities needed to ensure that the prime purpose of each national and state park – the protection of natural heritage – is not compromised.

The most recent management plan for the Prom was finalised in 2002, and it has served the park well, but as plans are generally considered relevant for only 10–15 years, it is seriously in need of revision.

One hold-up has been the lack of resolution of native title claims, but that may not happen for some time. Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park is in a similar situation, but in that case Parks Victoria consulted with those Aboriginal groups in the understanding that resolution will

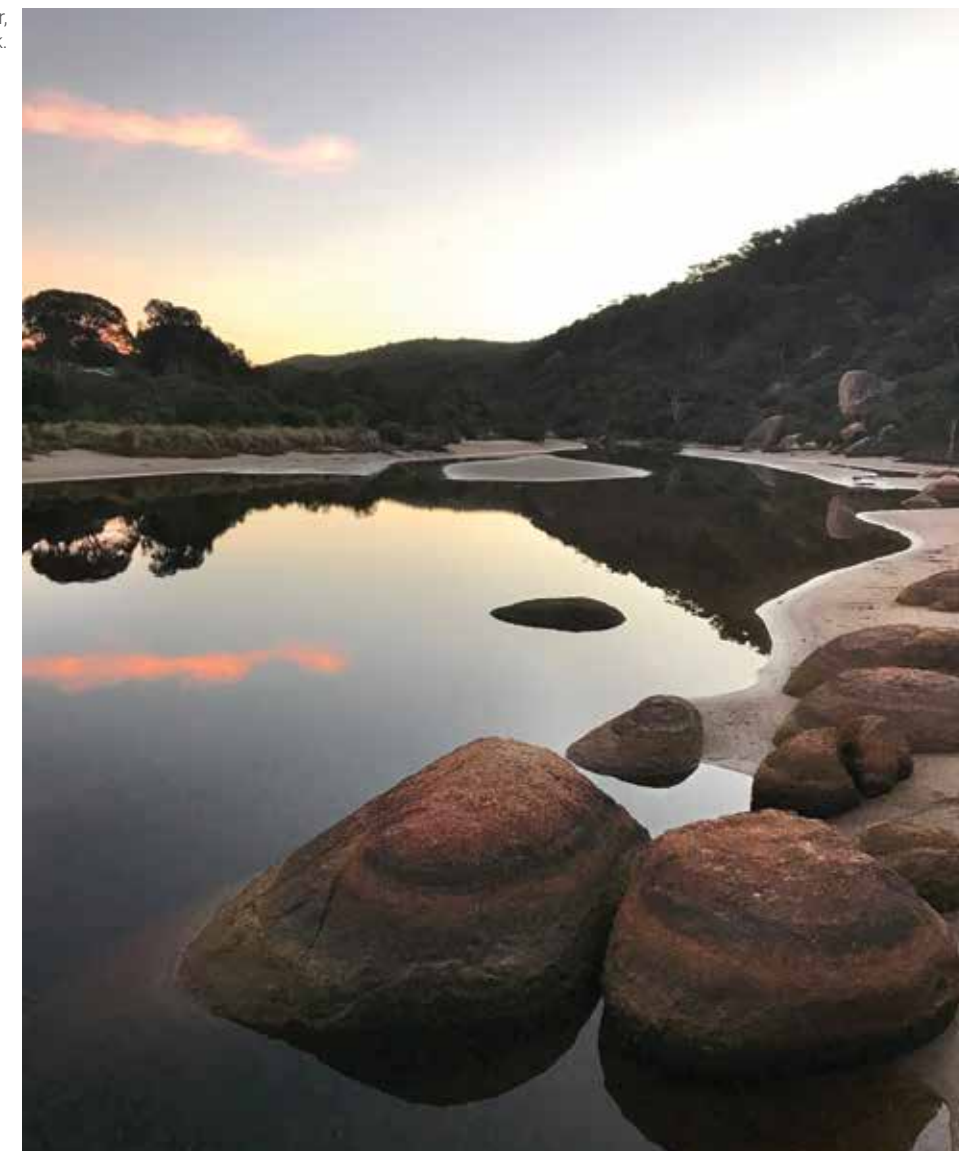


PHOTO: PHIL INGAMELLS

come. The new Greater Gariwerd Landscape Management Plan is now close to finalisation.

The Prom has been promised significant funding in a couple of important streams. One is a large capital works program that can potentially allow everything from toilet blocks and carparks to a new visitor centre, walking tracks and accommodation.

The other funding stream kicks off the Prom Sanctuary proposal, starting with the building of a long predator-proof fence across the Yanakie Isthmus that will allow effective pest animal control in the park, and then the reintroduction of lost native fauna.

Inevitably, all sorts of bids and proposals are being put forward and starting to be assessed outside the context and guidance of a well-considered management plan. That can lead to actions that park

managers, and the people of Victoria, might come to regret.

Most contentious are likely to be proposals for greatly increased public access to the Prom. Vehicle numbers are already far above those proposed in the 2002 plan, and will inevitably grow even without pressure from tourism bodies to expand experiences for visitors.

There are plenty of projects the Prom can go ahead with that are consistent with the old plan: such as new walking tracks to Darby Saddle and Telegraph Saddle, the sanctuary fence, a new visitor centre, a revamped research facility, and upgrades to deteriorating tracks.

New proposals, however (and there are many), should wait for the planning process required by the National Parks Act. We need a plan that will protect the Prom and its unique experiences for the years to come. • **PW**



PHOTO COURTESY GROW WEST

Meet our new campaigner

Adrian Marshall joins our nature conservation team as Facilitator for the Grassy Plains Network. He is campaigning for the protection of our critically endangered grasslands, with an emphasis on the Western Grassland Reserve and the grasslands being impacted by Melbourne's urbanisation. His position is hosted by VNPA on behalf of the Grassy Plains Network and Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association.

From Adrian:

About 14 years ago, I'd just found the site for my honours project in landscape architecture. It was this fascinating leftover-seeming area of derelict land beyond the Ring Road, spanning the Merri Creek and its flood plain, surrounded by industry, quarries and poorly designed residential subdivisions, with 4WD tracks cutting through it and stone-walled remnants of farming and kangaroos. That landscape turned out to be the hugely important grasslands of Galada Tamboore and was the beginning of my grasslands journey.

A few years later, I approached VNPA as a volunteer and, with a huge amount of help from the grasslands community, brought together *Start with the grasslands*, guidelines for how to support native grasslands in urban areas – how to design the city to help these precious remnant patches.

And to raise awareness of grasslands amongst urban design professionals, I ran bus tours to examples of the quirky and the magnificent and the desperate conditions grasslands are subject to across the city. It's incredible only two per cent remains of the critically endangered Natural Temperate Grassland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain, and of that two per cent most is heavily degraded, and much is right in or next to Melbourne.



After *Start with the grasslands*, I worked at the University of Melbourne co-editing a hefty multi-author book on managing and restoring grasslands, *Land of sweeping plains*. I liked hanging out with the ecologists there so much I decided to do a PhD in urban ecology.

Ecology in cities has been quite overlooked but is very important. More than half the world's population lives in cities, and for many, cities are where they interact most with nature. Cities tend to be built in places where there is high biodiversity, and urban growth is directly responsible for 16 per cent of global habitat loss. At the same time, cities support many threatened species, and there are even some threatened species found *only* in cities. My PhD ended up looking at a far stranger sort of urban grassland than Galada Tamboore – the nature strip. It turns out more than a third of our urban public open space is nature strip, but that's another story ...

Now, after some teaching at Melbourne Uni and RMIT in landscape architecture and urban ecology, I'm back at VNPA, excited to be facilitating the Grassy Plains Network. The GPN was founded in 2018 and represents ecologists, community and neighbourhood groups, academics, researchers and professionals concerned about the catastrophic decline in the flora and fauna of the grassy plains.

It's time to respect, protect and reconnect our grasslands. • PW



Native Peas of the Mount Alexander Region

BOOK
REVIEW

BY BERNARD SLATTERY AND
BRONWYN SILVER

FRIENDS OF THE BOX-IRONBARK
FORESTS (MOUNT ALEXANDER REGION)

100 PAGES. \$10 PLUS \$3 POSTAGE AT
www.fobif.org.au

This is the latest in a series of remarkable identification books published by the local group Friends of the Box-Ironbark Forests.

If you have ever been baffled by the array of plants commonly called "eggs and bacon", this is the book for you. It is beautifully and comprehensively illustrated. Each plant has an average of six carefully chosen photographs, so you can see the general shape of the plant and close-ups of buds, flowers, leaves and seed pods.

Clues to flowering time, habitat, and precisely where to find them in Central Victoria, as well as a note on broader distribution, all help the novice and specialist. And perhaps most useful of all, there are a few words describing a "first impression" – what makes each species distinctive from a bit of a distance.

Plants are listed under both common and scientific names, usually with an added translation of those mysterious "Latin" names. A useful introduction takes you into the mysteries of the pea family.

This is an admirable addition to the Friends of the Box-Ironbark Forests series which already boasts excellent guides to the region's wattles, mosses, and eucalypts.

You'll never say "eggs and bacon" again. • PW

Grow West Community Planting Day 2021

If you missed getting close to nature during 2020, come help plant 4,000 native plants in Bacchus Marsh at the 15th annual Grow West Community Planting Day – to be held on World Environment Day, Saturday 5 June.

The annual planting day is one of Grow West's biggest events and is an important opportunity to rejuvenate and restore local landscapes. It was sadly cancelled last year due to Covid-19 but is back this year bigger and better than ever.

The planting day will be held at Kel Shields Flora Reserve in Bacchus Marsh. The five-hectare reserve forms an important urban biolink, connecting the escarpment with the Werribee River that runs through town.

The day will run a bit differently to previous years, with volunteers being split into morning session (9.30am-12pm) and afternoon session (1.30pm-4pm). Volunteers can select their preference when registering.

For more information and registrations go to growwest.com.au/plantingday2021

Project Hindmarsh in 2021

The 2021 Project Hindmarsh planting weekend has unfortunately been cancelled due to Covid-19 and ongoing uncertainties around hosting large community events. The Hindmarsh Landcare Network board felt we couldn't risk the planting weekend, volunteer and community health, given the recent snap lockdowns in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Perth. Hugely disappointing, but we will still get the plants in the ground, using contracting planters. Hopefully everything will be okay next year, our 25th year, and we can have an extra-large celebration planting weekend. Many thanks for the ongoing support of VNPA, and we look forward to seeing you in 2022. • PW

Bundoora Park

PHOTO: SCOTT, FLICKR CC

GEOFF DURHAM VISITS 'MELBOURNE'S MOST DIVERSE PARK'.

The 180-hectare Bundoora Park, 15 kilometres north of Melbourne, is promoted as 'Melbourne's most diverse park'. It is Crown land managed by the City of Darebin.

The main entrance to Bundoora Park is off Plenty Road, and the park is bounded on the east by it and on the west by Darebin Creek. Along the creek is the concrete Darebin Creek Trail, while in the park is the Darebin Creek Bushland Track – a pleasant dirt path walk if you are not troubled by the weed-infested creek bed.

From the end of the path, you can walk up to Mt Cooper, an old volcano that first erupted about nine million years ago. A sign at the edge of the car park near the summit proclaims that Mt Cooper is '137 metres – The highest natural point in metropolitan Melbourne'. At the actual summit is a fenced water tower enclosure. It was probably named after Horatio Cooper, who was an assistant to surveyor Robert Hoddle. He lived in a wattle and daub dwelling on the

west side of Darebin Creek. On some early maps, Mt Cooper is shown as Mt Prospect, and it does offer expansive views.

The park is Wurundjeri land. There is a fenced scar tree in the park.

Les Blake in *Place Names of Victoria* says of the origin of local names:

"Bundoora'... in 1837 George Langhorne told Robert Hoddle that Keelbundoora was name of local Wurundjeri tribesman, eldest son of Jika Jika ... Abor, bundarra, plain where kangaroos live or where one may camp. 'Darebin' ... swallows (birds)."

The land was part of the 1835 John Batman/Port Phillip Association aborted 'purchase'. The area was surveyed by Hoddle in 1837 and auctioned in 1838/39. In 1877 Samuel Gardiner purchased an allotment and called it 'Bundoora Park'.

In 1899, J. V. Smith, a leading horse breeder, bought 'Bundoora Park' and built a two-storey 14-room red-

brick mansion, thoroughbred stables, studmaster's cottage and associated buildings.

The property was acquired by the Commonwealth of Australia in 1919 for the Repatriation Commission and became the Bundoora Convalescent Farm, the first psychiatric facility in Victoria for returned servicemen.

In 1930, an area of 182 acres was allocated for use by the Victorian Mounted Police, and it operated as the police stud until 1952. After vacation by the police, it passed to the City of Preston for parkland. Municipal amalgamations in 1994 created the City of Darebin.

Park precincts

This is a park of precincts, presenting the City of Darebin with a range of management challenges.

- Expansive mown grass areas dotted with trees, notably old River Red Gums, and picnic shelters, BBQs, toilets, exercise stations and playgrounds. A spacious All Abilities



PHOTO COURTESY DAREBIN CITY COUNCIL



MATHIAS APPEL, FLICKR CC

Clockwise from top left:
The Bundoora Park Farm; resident Emus;
playgrounds and city views; the nearby
Bundoora Homestead
Arts Centre; old River Red
Gums throughout the park.



PHOTO: SCOTT, FLICKR CC



PHOTO: GEOFF DURHAM



PHOTO: JOHN TORCASIO, WIKIMEDIA CC

Play Space is next to the Visitor Centre and Café. From here, for a fee, there is access from 10 am to 4.30 pm to the fenced Farm, Wildlife Reserve and Heritage Village.

- Bundoora Park Farm has enclosures and buildings for a range of farm animals that can be observed close up in this urban setting. It has an education centre, a community garden, the Wurundjeri garden, and a bird hide overlooking a lake. Some activities, and the Wildlife Reserve Ride, have been unavailable due to Covid restrictions.
- The Wildlife Reserve contains Emus and both Red and Eastern Grey Kangaroos.
- The Cooper Settlement Heritage Village incorporates the Smith stud complex with blacksmith and farrier sheds and displays of old farm machinery and engines. The Victorian Railways pre-fabricated fettlers' hut was installed by the police as accommodation for two Aboriginal trackers. (Some readers will be aware of my involvement with the Trust for Nature property, 'Wanderslore', at

Launching Place, where 'The Studio' is an identical building.) Relocated are a one-teacher school house, and a chapel which can be hired for weddings. The Riding for the Disabled Centre has a covered arena.

- The Bundoora Park Public 18-hole par 72 golf course is maintained by the council, but the golf shop and bookings are privately operated.

Art Centre

Not part of the park, but adjacent to it, is the Bundoora Homestead Art Centre. The Repatriation Commission modified and extended the mansion with various outbuildings. With the assistance of the Commonwealth Government through the Federation Fund, Darebin City Council restored the homestead and opened it as the Bundoora Homestead Art Centre in 2001. Access is via Prospect Hill Drive. There is free entry Wednesday to Saturday from 11 am to 4 pm.

The centre has galleries, a café, ornamental gardens and a small heritage orchard. Nearby are some

particularly imposing River Red Gums. The mansion is on the Victorian Heritage Register, which states: "The Bundoora Park Homestead is an extraordinary, rare and essentially intact building of a Queen Anne building type".

Biodiversity values

The old River Red Gums throughout the park have many nesting hollows. In contrast to the mown-grass areas, at the park entrance is a bushland enclosure with dense regenerating gums demonstrating what happens when grazing and mowing are excluded. Over the years there have been many native plantings. The park has patches of native grasslands, bushland, dams and wetlands, providing varied habitats.

Bundoora Park is particularly popular for family and group picnics. Surrounded by suburbia, during Covid lockdown it was inundated with visitors. With its differing precincts, 'diverse' is an apt description for the park.

Access to car parking from Melway Map 19 ref. F4 or stop 61 of the no. 86 Bundoora/RMIT tram. • PW

Exploring the GREAT FOREST



Experiencing the wonders of Cement Creek temperate rainforest on the Cambarville Tour.

NATUREWATCH COORDINATOR SERA BLAIR TAKES US ON TOUR.

In March and April, we ran two fantastic tours to introduce VNPA supporters to the forests and community groups involved in the campaign for the creation of the Great Forest National Park. We set out to show the incredible areas of relatively intact forest within protected areas juxtaposed with the impacts on unprotected areas and highlighting community efforts to protect these forests from further destruction.

Both tours started and ended in Healesville and were led by Steve Meacher, forest educator, activist, and President of Friends of Leadbeater's Possum. Steve's knowledge of these forests, and the fight to save them, is immense. He shared his insight into how these forest ecosystems work, why they are under threat, the benefits of protection, and the community-led campaigns.

Steve Meacher leading the tour at WirraWilli.



PHOTO: KIRSTEN GABEL

Friends of Leadbeater's Possum has been working since 2002 to save this flagship species for all hollow-dependent animals in Mountain Ash forest. Recently they won a historic court case against state-owned logging company VicForests, proving they had not complied with state and federal laws to protect 66 areas of critical habitat for Leadbeater's Possum and Greater Gliders.



PHOTO: VNPA

This old tree is large enough to fit at least 40 people at its base.

We were also joined by Jordan Crook, VNPA Nature Conservation Campaigner and member of Wildlife of the Central Highlands (WOTCH), a group of volunteers who tirelessly survey for threatened species, in particular Leadbeater's Possum and Greater Gliders, in planned logging coupes to trigger important habitat protections where animals are present.

Both tours included a citizen science component, with stagwatching and spotlighting led by Lachie McBurney from the Australian National University. He leads the long-term ecological monitoring project of Professor David Lindenmayer's in these forests.

Animal sightings from the spotlighting walks have been uploaded to the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas.

Toolangi Tour

Our first tour in March took us through the Toolangi State Forest and the Yarra Ranges National Park. We visited the WirraWilli Rainforest Gallery to learn about some of the remarkable rainforest ferns and trees like Southern Sassafras and Myrtle Beech.

After WirraWilli, we continued a short distance to Yea Link Road to compare the iconic Leadbeater's Possum old growth forest habitat, protected in their reserve system, with the logged forest across the road. Within this area of forest, there are some very large, rare old-growth trees that have been monitored by the community – their presence has stopped further logging in the area. One tree, pictured above, is known as the 40-person tree because you can fit at least 40 people in the cavity at the bottom!

We continued on to visit the Kalatha Giant, a massive tree that was found by the community in a planned logging coupe. It has been protected and is now a tourist attraction with a short boardwalk to visit the tree and see its peers in the forest. Across the road from the Kalatha Giant, in the same forests of remnant old growth habitat trees and a creek with threatened native fish, the Barred Galaxias, another logging coupe was stopped by community protests in March 2020.

After seeing the amazing diversity of the largely intact areas of forest, we visited a recent logging coupe to witness how clear fell logging destroys habitat. This really brought home the need for protecting



PHOTO: KIRSTEN GABEL

what is left of these forests, particularly those with old trees with hollows, which provide key habitat for wildlife.

After a picnic dinner, we headed up Mount St Leonards to Monda Track, another rare area of massive old Mountain Ash trees. The first 50 metres is cleared underneath the trees as a firebreak, before the old growth forests with towering tree ferns and a complex under- and mid-storey of trees begin. Here we were positioned in the forest with upward views of the massive Mountain Ash 'stag' trees to 'stagwatch' –for possums and gliders at dusk. Most of us heard noisy Mountain Brushtail Possums emerging for their evening forage. Then the distinctive loud shriek followed by a series of gurgles and throat rattles announced the arrival of a couple of Yellow-bellied Gliders on to the site. A lucky few saw them glide across the firebreak

area into a research site. It was an exhilarating evening, followed by a cuppa and a chat and a spotlighting walk along the road where more Yellow-bellied Gliders were seen gliding across the road.

Cambarville Tour

In April, we headed out again for forest exploring. This time we went south-east from Healesville up Mount Toolebewong and along one of the most beautiful forest roads to Mount Donna Buang. Climbing up the tower for a view of the vast forest estate, we then discussed the realities of fire and logging impacts. The age of our Mountain Ash forests has decreased dramatically in the last few decades. We now have very little old growth forest with habitat elements like tree hollows. Over the next 50 years, the trees with hollows that formed from the 1939 bushfires, and have been key habitat for the last few decades, will all

Continued overleaf



PHOTOS: KIRSTEN GABEL

Getting a close up look at rainforest vines and ferns at WirraWilla.

Continued from previous page

be lost to decay. The trees that grew out of the 1939 bushfire regeneration would be the next large cohort of mature trees, but they still need another 50–100 years to be mature enough to form hollows – and they are the target trees for the timber industry. Essentially, we have already lost our future old growth forests that can support the diversity of wildlife that have adapted to old forests with adequate tree hollow availability.

Continuing on our adventure, we descended the mountain to explore the Cement Creek Rainforest Gallery to learn more about Victoria's temperate rainforest species and the physics behind how Mountain Ash trees can get so tall.

Driving up the Acheron Way, we moved through a mosaic of forest, from protected national park to state forest subject to intense logging. The impacts of logging are most noticeable from an aerial perspective as most coupes do not come right up to the road, rather leaving a small buffer of trees to hide them. We visited one very large coupe that was logged after Black Saturday and is currently regenerating. We discussed the timber industry's clear fell and seed tree harvesting techniques that take most of the trees on site. More logging was evident as we continued up the Acheron Way, through Marysville up along Woods Point Road to Cambarville.

Cambarville is a very interesting place historically, ecologically and socially for those people involved in the conservation of these Mountain Ash forests. You may not guess it with a quick visit to the picnic ground area, but this is the site of the rediscovery of Leadbeater's Possum in 1961 by Eric Wilkinson. It's also an early forest reference area where a lot of scientific research has informed much of our knowledge of forest possums and gliders and their habitat use. It was exciting to share the stories and hidden values of this area with people who were not familiar with it.



PHOTO: VNPA

Steve Meacher discussing the habitat values for Leadbeater's Possum along Yea Link Road on the Toolangi Tour.

We conducted two spotlighting surveys at Cambarville – and were not disappointed. The first, along the Big Tree walk off the picnic area, was ideal Greater Glider habitat, and we saw eight in a distance of about 300 metres. Across the road, along the track to Cora Lynn Falls, the forest had a denser understorey, making it great habitat for many possums and gliders. In a 400 metre walk we saw and heard Mountain Brushtail Possums, Sugar Gliders, Ring-tail Possums, Greater Gliders, Yellow-bellied Gliders and even a fleeting glimpse of a Leadbeater's Possum. It was fantastic to see all of these animals returning to forests that burnt in the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires. It is a testimony to the ability of these forests to recover after fire and demonstrates how when old forest is burnt, it creates new habitat values as it recovers, unlike young forests where trees are not mature enough for hollows to form after fire.

Not only were the tours a wonderful time in the forest, led by knowledgeable and inspiring community leaders, they were an excellent opportunity for VNPA supporters to see first-hand the challenges of forest conservation

and the campaign for the Great Forest National Park to protect them. We hope to run more tours in the future, but you can also visit all of these areas on your own. Come spring, we encourage you to head out and explore these forests for yourself. If you would like a copy of the guide book and maps for either tour, please get in contact at sera@vnpa.org.au

Learn more about our Great Forest tour partners at:



Friends of Leadbeater's Possum
www.leadbeaters.org.au



Wildlife of the Central Highlands
www.wotch.org.au

ANU
www.nespthreatenedspecies.edu.au/projects/adaptive-management-for-threatened-mammals-in-the-victorian-central-highlands



Tours supported by an Impact Fund Grant from Bank Australia

REEF
WATCH

DIVIDED BY

TIME

OUR REEFWATCH COORDINATOR **KADE MILLS** CONTRIBUTED TO LATEST RESEARCH SHOWING WEEDY SEADRAGONS IN VICTORIA ARE VERY DIFFERENT FROM THEIR RELATIVES ON THE EAST COAST OF AUSTRALIA.

About 30,000 years ago, an ice age began, causing sea levels to drop 120–130 metres lower than today. The Bassian Isthmus was populated by Aboriginal people who moved back and forth between what we now call Victoria and Tasmania. When the ice slowly melted (this process took 6000 years), the waters of western and eastern Victoria joined, and Bass Strait formed, becoming an impassable barrier to foot traffic about 12,000 years ago.

The separation and isolation of western Victoria waters by this former land bridge is the reason Weedy Seadragons in Port Phillip and Westernport bays are genetically distinct from Weedy Seadragons on the eastern side of the country. In fact, they are so different that they should be considered a distinct population (potentially subspecies) and managed separately.

This is hardly surprising considering the biology and life history of Weedy Seadragons. They are weak swimmers, unable to migrate or move long distances, and live in a small area throughout their life. The eggs are carried on the tail of the males and hatch as fully-formed miniature Weedy Seadragons; as such, they are less prone to being dispersed by currents compared to fish that hatch in larval stage. In short, seadragon biology restricts the mixing of genes between populations.

The results of the recently published study have important implications for the management of Victoria's marine state emblem. Currently, the Weedy Seadragon is protected under the Australian *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999)*, is 'Protected Aquatic Biota' in Victoria, and is currently considered

"Least Concern" but "Decreasing" on the IUCN Red List (2017). If, however, as the study suggests, this endemic species is formed of highly differentiated populations with overall low genetic diversity and little to no interbreeding, the management of Weedy Seadragons needs to address the isolation of the populations accordingly.

ReefWatch, using data collected by citizen scientists for our Dragon Quest project, is currently working on a report providing baseline information on populations of Weedy Seadragons at the popular recreational diving locations of Portsea and Flinders piers. Knowledge of population size is important for ensuring our iconic Weedy Seadragons are managed and conserved in the future. • PW

The full text of the study is available here: www.journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0243446

PHOTO: SAM GLENN-SMITH

Explorer's corner

TIPS AND TRICKS FOR GETTING IN TO NATURE

Colour and shape are important things to note when observing your bird.



Beak and leg shapes can be very useful to note when identifying a bird.

One of the wonderful things about watching birds is that it brings you into the present moment. If a bird appears, now is the time to observe it because it could be gone in a moment.

Birding is such an engaging way to bring new excitement to your adventures in nature. If you are keen to give birdwatching a go, think of 'watching birds' as your starting point. Try these tips to make it easier and fun:

Spotting birds

- If a bird pops by on your daily comings and goings, stop and watch it. Take time to admire it.
- 'Watch with your ears first' – you will likely hear birds first. If you hear a bird, have a look for it.
- If you notice bird-like movement, e.g. shadow overhead, fluttering in the trees, see if you can spot it.
- You can look for birds anywhere from your backyard to forests and the coast. Your best bet is to look where their food and water is. Areas such as wetlands and open waterways can be good for seeing larger birds which can be easier to spot.
- When actively trying to spot birds, keep still and quiet.
- Don't be afraid of binoculars. While you don't have to use binoculars to watch birds, it will open up a new world when you get a clear view of birds in the distance. If you are having trouble, be patient. Do a little research on using them correctly and keep practising. For tips on using binoculars, check out www.vnpa.org.au/explorers-corner

Noticing the features of birds

Once we have our eyes into spotting birds, we can pay attention to their features. This helps with identifying what they are. Features to pay attention to include:

- Location of the bird – this means where in the world, what type of habitat and whereabouts in the habitat. For example, the bird might be near Ballarat, in a forest, on the ground.
- Shape – body, beak, legs, wings, in flight.
- Size – compare with a nearby known bird or object for relative size.
- Colours and patterns.
- Sound of their call.
- Behaviour – what are they doing? How are they flying/moving? Are they interacting with others, e.g. in a noisy flock or solitary and quiet.

Birdwatching for beginners

Being a birdwatcher isn't actually about having all the special gear and knowing all the birds. Birdwatching really is just watching birds!

Having special gear and knowing birds well is great and can take the experience to another level, but the simple act of watching and admiring birds can make you a birdwatcher too.

Identifying birds

Once we have taken time to notice and admire the features of a bird, we can use this information to identify them. There are many books and apps with details on Australia's birds. These resources generally guide you through identifying your bird. They include information on the geographic area where the bird is known to live and bird features.

Apps

1. Pizzey and Knight Birds of Aus
2. The Morcombe & Stewart Guide/Morcombe's Birds of Australia
3. Merlin Bird ID by Cornell Lab

Books

1. *The Field Guide to the Birds of Australia* by Graham Pizzey and Frank Knight
2. *The Australian Bird Guide* by Peter Menkhorst and others
3. *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia* by Nicholas Day and Ken Simpson

Recording bird sightings

Keeping a simple list of the birds you see is a great way to really focus on birdwatching and will help you learn about the birds in your area. Just a basic written list is all that you need. Some national parks or local councils have a list or guide to local birds available online. These lists can be used as a checklist.



PHOTO: EUAN MOORE

Once you are able to identify birds correctly, you can even start to submit your records to a range of databases, including birddata.birdlife.org.au, and be a part of building our collective knowledge of birds.

Let's go birding

So if you are keen to give birdwatching a go, try spotting, observing and identifying five different species of bird on your next adventure – then you can step it up over time.

For more tips and tricks on getting into nature, see www.vnpa.org.au/explorers-corner. We've also included a handy section on how to use binoculars. • PW



PHOTO: EUAN MOORE



PHOTO: EUAN MOORE

Watching the behaviour of birds can be joyous and gives us clues to help us identify them.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY TRACE BALLA

Spider Crab colouring in

Fun Facts:

- Spider Crabs have to undress their old shells to grow bigger.
- They can stick seaweed on their backs for camouflage.
- They like to huddle in large groups to moult each winter in Victoria's shallow waters of Port Phillip Bay.

Artwork courtesy of the well-known Australian artist, Peter Trusler.



WILD FAMILIES

Do you recognise the national park that features these beach boulders? Hint on page 23. Answer at bottom of this page.

What is a national park? See how many you can find!

Have you ever visited one of Victoria's incredible national parks? National parks are precious places that have been protected for the plants and animals that live there and other natural or cultural wonders. Luckily we also get to visit these national parks and experience their amazing forests, huge rocky cliffs, wildflowers, birdlife, families of kangaroos, grasslands, nightlife and wild adventures.

There are lots of special national parks around Victoria. Some of them are rainforests, some are under the water, some are in dry sandy places, some are high mountains.

National parks word find

See if you can find some of them in this word find (some are extra tricky and spelled backwards!)

- Grampians Gariwerd
- Wilsons Promontory
- Little Desert
- Greater Otway
- Dandenong Ranges
- Alpine
- Kinglake
- Murray Sunset
- Mount Buffalo
- Baw Baw
- Warby Ovens
- Croajingolong
- Point Addis
- Corner Inlet



When you are done, you could do some research to see if you can look up where each of these national parks are in Victoria. You could even plan a trip to visit one of them! • PW

R	T	G	H	C	O	R	N	E	R	I	N	L	E	T	X	C	F	T	G
P	I	O	R	F	T	G	X	B	N	W	A	R	B	Y	O	V	E	N	S
C	A	F	S	J	K	L	W	F	H	Q	E	R	W	A	Y	J	R	B	U
R	G	R	A	M	P	I	A	N	S	G	A	R	I	W	E	R	D	A	S
O	S	G	A	G	A	T	B	G	A	B	H	K	L	M	D	J	D	B	L
A	K	B	D	R	H	T	E	A	G	S	G	N	S	B	M	D	H	S	D
J	K	D	S	H	O	L	O	P	W	E	E	T	O	Y	J	S	D	N	A
I	Y	K	P	O	L	E	L	J	N	B	N	V	N	V	T	J	D	L	T
N	F	I	O	D	G	D	E	E	H	A	A	I	S	D	D	B	P	B	E
G	R	N	L	P	F	E	G	X	P	C	E	W	P	K	O	I	N	C	S
O	R	G	A	S	S	S	H	S	G	F	S	E	R	H	N	A	F	R	N
L	P	L	F	K	G	E	P	B	N	I	L	L	O	E	O	H	K	H	U
O	P	A	F	W	D	R	H	E	D	E	U	E	M	J	D	A	A	F	S
N	M	K	U	E	O	T	M	D	M	I	E	N	O	N	B	P	O	R	Y
G	D	E	B	M	O	E	A	N	M	N	D	W	N	R	R	V	D	E	A
L	B	G	T	R	M	T	K	L	Y	O	F	O	T	I	I	O	P	O	R
E	T	Y	N	E	N	G	R	E	A	T	E	R	O	T	W	A	Y	Q	R
I	H	G	U	I	D	G	H	L	P	O	I	T	R	U	P	O	O	U	U
K	L	R	O	E	R	F	R	H	D	S	H	W	Y	G	N	Y	J	I	M
L	K	P	M	H	S	E	G	N	A	R	G	N	O	N	E	D	N	A	D

Answer to question in photo caption:
Wilsons Promontory.



PHOTO: JUSTIN CALLY

Powerful Owls, like this juvenile, have recently been re-discovered in the Mount Cole forests. Though these forest giants are powerful predators, they're endangered, and their habitat needs to be protected.

The forests of the Central West are still being logged – even in areas inhabited by wildlife threatened with extinction. But your gift today can help win the campaign to finally protect these forests in new National Parks.

☒ **Yes – I'll help win the campaign to protect our Central West forests as national parks.**

Here's my gift of: ☐ \$25 ☐ \$55 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$250 ☐ \$1,000 ☐ \$_____ My choice
☐ Please make this a regular monthly donation.

My contact details

Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms/Other _____ First name _____ Surname _____

Address _____

Suburb/Town _____ State _____ Postcode _____

Phone _____ Email _____ Date of birth ____ / ____ / ____

Payment method

☐ **Cheque/money order** payable to 'Victorian National Parks Association' is enclosed.

☐ **Credit card** ☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard

Card no _____ / _____ / _____ / _____ Expiry Date ____ / ____

Cardholder name _____ Signature _____

Please post with payment to Victorian National Parks Association, Level 3, 60 Leicester St, Carlton VIC 3053, call us on **03 9341 6500** or visit **vnpa.org.au/new-parks**

Many supporters just like you have made the generous decision to leave a gift in their Will to VNPA, to protect nature for generations to come.

☐ Please send me information about leaving a gift to VNPA in my Will

☐ I have already left a gift to VNPA in my Will

Authorised by Matt Ruchel, Executive Director, Victorian National Parks Association, May 2021.
 Level 3, 60 Leicester St, Carlton VIC 3053 | **PH:** 03 9341 6500 | **EMAIL:** vnpa@vnpa.org.au | **WEB:** vnpa.org.au
 All donations over \$2 are tax-deductible. ABN 34 217 717 593 C147