

PARK WATCH

*Celebrating 70 years
of protecting
nature together*



FALLS TO HOTHAM ALPINE CROSSING
20 YEARS OF MARINE PARKS AND
THE GREAT VICTORIAN FISH COUNT
BUNYIP'S DECADE OF WILDLIFE MONITORING
REMEMBERING VICTORIA'S GIANT KELP
ACT FOR WESTERN PORT
GRASSLANDS DESERVE OUR TLC

NOVEMBER 2022 NO 290



VICTORIAN
NATIONAL PARKS
ASSOCIATION
70 years protecting nature

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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 natural places. To find out how you can help, visit www.vnpa.org.au/support or call us on (03) 9341 6500.

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Wombat State Forest. Photo: Sandy Scheltema.

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Grampians/Gariwerd National Park, c.1945-1954.
Photo: Victorian Railways/State Library of Victoria.

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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 and honours their continuing connection to and caring for Country. We support 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.

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From the President



One of my earliest childhood memories is of Wilsons Promontory on my first family camping trip, zipped into my hooded green sleeping bag, I awoke before dawn to the sounds of a wombat scratching the tent wall. From that moment, I have loved, enjoyed and appreciated Victoria's natural environment and national parks.

It's VNPA's 70 year anniversary, and reading our history tells the story of the community effort, scientific research, campaigning and lobbying needed to encourage governments to grow, protect and manage our national park system. And the proof is in the pudding: once created, our national parks quickly become iconic, contributing to the protection of our endangered species wildlife and habitats, societal wellbeing, water quality and tourism.

I'd like to thank Bruce McGregor for his passion, insights, dedication and steady hand as President for the last four years, and for continuing his contribution by remaining on Council. I welcome our new Council members, and thank existing and departing Council members for their valuable contributions. Your contributions make it possible for Matt and the VNPA team to continue their important work. Thank you.

Our challenges for the years ahead

The Yarra Ranges Council plan to route 12 per cent of the proposed 177km mountain bike track network through Yarra Ranges National Park, threatening precious Myrtle Beech and Cool Temperate Rainforest and the habitat of endangered wildlife, makes no sense. We have been heavily involved in the

public hearings for the project's Environmental Effects Statement and eagerly await the (very overdue) response from Planning Minister Lizzie Blandthorn.

The proposed development of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing, which includes up to 80 new structures in the Alpine National Park, is another crude example of commercial interests attempting to exploit our national parks. Again, it does not make sense: does the heavily redacted business case for the FHAC stack-up; what level of environmental destruction is required to construct and maintain the 80 new structures; and, what environmental and safety controls, standards and protocols are in place to govern the operations of the commercial (for-profit) operators?

Less than 2 per cent remain of the vast grassy plains that spread from the Yarra River to the South Australia border. The animals that depend on these grasslands are equally diverse and fascinating. The Striped Legless Lizard, Grassland Earless Dragon and Golden Sun Moth are three that live there today, although many others are now locally extinct. One can only imagine how impressive it would have been to see Brolgas, Rufous Ettongs and Eastern Barred Bandicoots roaming, nesting and digging on these plains. We are working with community groups to raise awareness and hold government accountable for their obligations in the Melbourne Strategic Assessment Plan and Biodiversity Conservation strategy.

As this edition goes to print, the state election will be in full swing. Positives from the Andrews Government include: feral horse control in the Alpine and Barmah national

parks; rejecting the proposed AGL gas facility in Western Port; developing the state-wide deer management strategy; the biodiversity response to the 2019-20 bushfires; committing to creating new national parks in central west and commencing a process for new "Immediate Protection Areas" at Mirboo North, Strathbogies Ranges, Central Highlands and East Gippsland; delivering the biodiversity strategy and marine coastal act reforms; and, establishing the Wilsons Promontory Sanctuary plan. The commitment to phase out native forest logging by 2030, was a milestone of sorts, though the transition needs to happen much faster.

But, as the grim Federal Government *State of the Environment* report shows, more action is urgently required. As part of the election campaign we await nature conservation policy announcements: increased funding for our parks; the establishment of the promised new central west national parks (including the immediate cessation of the logging within proposed park boundaries); progressing and accelerating pest control programs; and stopping commercial interests from infiltrating our national parks. These are priority issues that need to immediate solutions.

I invite you to share this edition of *Park Watch* with friends and family who love nature. I'd also encourage you to consider making a donation – there's a form on the cover letter. After a hard-working year, we all need time to relax and recharge. There's no better place to do this than in our magnificent national parks and reserves. • PW

David Nugent, VNPA President

From the Retiring President, Bruce McGregor

Congratulations to the Victorian National Parks Association on its 70th anniversary. What a wonderful achievement. Many community organisations last only a few years, so this 70th anniversary celebrates the significant efforts of so many people over the decades. Thank you for the support, encouragement and contributions that you have made. And what a story VNPA has to tell. This special issue of *Park Watch* provides a snapshot of our many achievements, activities and the people involved. I hope you enjoy the story as much as I do.

Over the past four years as President, I have worked closely with VNPA Council and all our committees to revitalise the way we do our business and to substantially expand our work. Our strategic activities have been clarified and focussed, through a complete review and upgrade of our strategic plan. This entailed a considerable amount of thought, and I thank our Executive Director Matt Ruchel, our staff and committees for their positive contributions and hard work. We have a clearer vision of our challenges, our delivery and what is needed to make our "for purpose business" successful. It is now up to us all, to help realise our vision of Victoria as a place with a diverse and healthy natural environment that is protected, respected and enjoyed by all.

Victoria has a large and growing population. Melbourne received one million new arrivals in the 10 years prior to the pandemic. Many of these people have little awareness of, or connection with our unique environment, plants and wildlife. Indeed, in the broader community it would be fair to say that there is limited ecological knowledge and understanding of Victoria's nature. We need to reach out to the people who are keen to learn and become involved in nature conservation, more than ever before. Consequently, my wife Ann and I have been helping establish the Victorian Nature Stewards program, which was described in the March 2021 issue of *Park Watch*. Nature Stewards provides introductory environmental education over a 10-week course, which also links participants with local groups, managers of natural areas, and other like-minded residents to encourage them to become environmental volunteers. I represent the VNPA on the Nature Stewards Program Advisory Group. Nature Stewards has been hosted by Outdoors Victoria since it formed, but will be moving to a new host organisation: because of the close fit of Nature Stewards to our community engagement objectives and our strategic plan, VNPA has offered to host the program. This is an exciting opportunity for VNPA which I hope will lead to a growing number of environmental volunteers, stronger local groups and a much wider appreciation and protection of our precious environment.

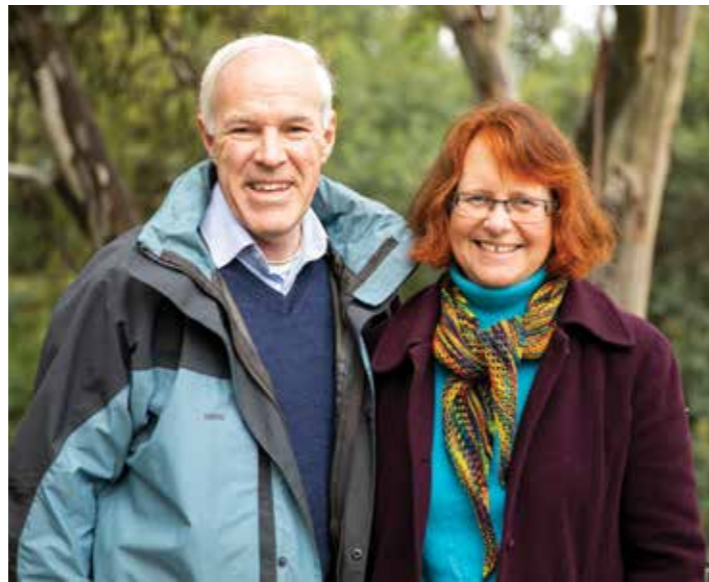


PHOTO: MADELINE BISHOP

The recent review of our strategic plan outlines initiatives to strengthen our fundraising capacity and goals, including establishing an endowment fund to provide ongoing resources to deliver our vision. Along with the Finance Committee, I facilitated engagement between VNPA and the Australian Communities Foundation, with which my family has been connected with for some years. The Australian Communities Foundation works hard to make philanthropy accessible for the average family, and also supports not-for-profit organisations to build an endowment for their long-term sustainability. Consequently, after discussions and appropriate due diligence, VNPA established an endowment fund called the National Parks Community Fund. This Fund has the sole purpose of helping VNPA undertake its work. Donations made into this fund can only be used by VNPA. The Fund increases the options for our supporters and others in the community to assist our work over the longer-term. It provides greater returns than a bank account through pooled ethical investments, and donations are tax-deductible.

As we all re-commit to the VNPA for the next decade, I hope you will join my family in supporting VNPA activities into the future. As part of my family's commitment, we will be making a donation to the National Parks Community Fund, which will provide financial support for the future of VNPA. We consider it a 'living bequest'. There are many ways to support VNPA's future work, including by leaving a gift in your Will.

With a strengthening of our strategic focus, our planning and our staff resources over recent years I am sure that we will have a successful decade ahead and that we will celebrate many more achievements at future anniversaries. It has been a pleasure to serve VNPA, and as I continue my involvement as a council member, I look forward to seeing our generous community of members and supporters at future events. • PW

Give nature a future voice

For more information about our endowment fund or making a gift in your Will.

Please contact: Emily Clough, Fundraising Manager
emily@vnpa.org.au or 03 9341 6501

UPDATES

Sand mining in Western Port

The Coalition have acknowledged the impact of sand mining on Western Port's woodland corridor by announcing a policy to update the 1996 Extractive Industries document for Lang Lang to Grantville including the Gurdies as well as committing to the "highest protection levels for the Adams Creek Nature Conservation Reserve" which is welcomed and highlights the importance of the area for threatened species such as the Southern Brown Bandicoot and tea Tree Finger Fungus. Whether this will protect all the values of the Western Port Woodlands is another matter as all the bush in the corridor need better protection and management.

70th Annual General Meeting

On 11 October we celebrated 70 years of protecting nature together at VNPA Annual General Meeting. Many thanks to those who joined us for this special celebration.

Members elected a new council: David Nugent (President), Lara Bickford (Vice President), Marilyn Crestias (Treasurer), Doug Robinson (Secretary), Michael Feller, Chris Harvey, Dianne Marshall, Bruce McGregor, Gerard McPhee, Askin Morrison and Michael Young.

We were pleased to award Honorary Life Memberships to Ann Birrell and Chris Smyth, in recognition of their outstanding, long-term service to the Victorian National Parks Association. Read their profiles on pages 64 & 65.

Many thanks also to our guest speaker Dr Don Garden, who gave an insightful presentation about our history. We also heard from Matt Ruchel, Executive Director, who gave an update on our current campaigns, and Caitlin Griffith, Manager – Community Learning and Engagement, shared how our community has been enjoying, learning about and protecting nature. You can view presentations at vnpa.org.au/agm

Thank you to all our members, supporters, volunteers and partners for your generous support, which empowers our community to protect nature and parks.

Staff update

Farewell and thank you to Meg Sobey, *Park Watch* Editor and Communications Coordinator (see p. 71), and a warm welcome to Paul Clifton, our new Publications Coordinator. Paul will be looking after all of our publications, including *Park Watch*. His background is in publishing, graphic design and cartography across a wide range of industries – education unions, travel guides, community festivals and small businesses. He loves creating useful and beautiful materials, particularly when they're helping protect our special natural places. He enjoys spending time at Wye River, exploring the cool temperate rainforests in the Great Otway National Park and the rock pools on the Great Ocean Road.

Welcome also to Jacob L'Huillier Lunt, Digital Campaign Producer, as well as Ben Gill and Blake Nisbet who have joined our team as Nature Conservation Campaigners, and Consuelo Quevedo as Youth Team Convener.

Bushwalking activities update

Back on the tracks

We are so excited to have the bushwalking and activities program back on the tracks! Check out the latest activities and join the activities email list at vnpa.org.au/activities

With adventures to suit everyone you could find yourself exploring native grasslands, discovering wildflowers, cruising on a coach excursion, being a citizen scientist, hiking overnight or taking an easy-going amble.

Next steps in the evolution of VNPA bushwalking and activities

We have made some recent changes to how the bushwalking and activities program is to be run. Moving forward, the program will now be overseen and coordinated by VNPA staff (rather than being entirely run by volunteers) with support from a volunteer committee. This change is the next step in the evolution of the program.

Having staff involvement is an exciting opportunity to create closer alignment with other work undertaken by VNPA including our citizen science and education programs, communications and campaigns. This is reflected in the current activities program.

Acknowledging our history

At this stage in our history, and this stage in the evolution of the activities program we would like to take this moment to thank our many committee members and volunteer leaders. These volunteers have contributed to the successes of the program and the personal connections to nature built on experiences at bushwalks and activities. They have contributed to the work of the VNPA has an organisation that as well as standing up for nature also nurtures a love for nature.

Taking people out into nature has been a part of VNPA since our inception. The very first excursion was to Wilsons Promontory. This led to a series of excursions which evolved into the bushwalking and activities program and excursions groups with around 400 activities on offer every year at its peak. This equates to inspiring many thousands of connections to nature over the past 70 years.

Through our history, a volunteer bushwalking and activities committee has (among many things) recruited, trained, mentored and supported activity leaders, compiled and coordinated huge programs, created and run procedures for activity management safety and finances.

Thank you to all of these volunteers for being a part of this journey so far. **We look forward to seeing where our bushwalking and activities program leads us next!**

Victorian Election 2022: Nature Needs Leadership!

IN THIS MONTH'S STATE ELECTION, WE'RE KEEPING OUR EYES ON HOW COMMITTED OUR LEADERS ARE TO PROTECTING NATURE.

In 2020 United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres warned that *"Humanity is waging war on nature... Biodiversity is collapsing. One million species are at risk of extinction. Ecosystems are disappearing before our eyes ... Human activities are at the root of our descent toward chaos. But that means human action can help to solve it."*

More than half of the world's countries, including Australia, have now officially joined the coalition to protect or conserve at least 30 per cent of the world's land and ocean by 2030. This global target aims to halt the accelerating loss of wildlife and protect the vital ecosystems our economic security depends on.

With the impact of climate change increasingly visible, the future our natural world is rising in public consciousness. Report after report warns of dire consequences – reminding us that we are not doing close to enough to support the ecosystems that support life.

This is also true at home here in Victoria. Our state's biodiversity continues to deteriorate. The *State of the Environment 2018* report revealed that a third of all of Victoria's terrestrial plants, birds, reptiles, amphibians, mammals, invertebrates and ecological communities are threatened with extinction.

The Victorian Auditor-General's 2020 report highlighted some of the significant policy failures that have contributed to this disaster. Current Victorian funding levels are seriously inadequate – there are simply not enough resources to halt the decline in threatened wildlife, especially in the face of climate change and continuing habitat destruction. To date governments have funded only the lowest cost bids and tools, demonstrating their lack of commitment to solving these important challenges. Information and expertise provided under state laws, such as *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act*, hasn't been acted on to protect wildlife and required 'Action Statements' are either missing or out of date.

This report was followed by a very comprehensive Ecosystem Decline Inquiry in the Victorian Legislative Council. The inquiry had one of the biggest ever community responses, demonstrating how much Victorians care about the health of our unique natural heritage. The inquiry made 74 recommendations and findings. While the report doesn't deal with all issues, like native forestry, it does provide a sound blueprint for many of the broader biodiversity issues facing the most cleared state in Australia.

Government spending on biodiversity was a recurring theme. The report highlighted the need for on-going dedicated funding to support biodiversity management, restoration and importantly implementing all the legal tools we have available. Various estimates of what's needed range between \$300 million to \$1 billion per year – but even \$1 billion per year still only amounts to a few per cent of the state budget.

Parks are not created until legislated – central west & beyond

Protected areas, including national parks, are still one of the best ways to protect nature from extractive damage.

While the world shoots for 'high ambition goals' of 30 per cent land and sea protected by 2030, there has not been a sense of urgency in Victoria. The process for the central west started in the first term of the Andrews Government and was delayed at least twice. While we did see a commitment to create the new central west parks in 2030, it mind-bogglingly endorsed native forest logging in key areas of these high conservation forests until that time. A similar story is playing out with the 'so-called' Immediate Protected Areas (see article p. 20), but again little has been legislated. While the pandemic and 2019/20 bushfires diverted government attention, the next term needs to focus on delivery, and quickly.

New national parks and protected areas (including in the central west) need to be delivered within six months of the new term of government. Logging must also cease in the proposed park areas. In addition, there needs to be an allocation of at least \$20 million to Parks Victoria to begin managing the Wombat-Lerderderg, Mount Buangor and Pyrenees National Parks. This should include appropriate well-funded joint management arrangements with Traditional Owners.

The immediate protected areas for Strathbogies and Mirboo North need to be formalised and legislated quickly. The larger East Gippsland and Central Highlands immediate protected areas are more complicated and need to be looked at closely to ensure they are working to look after the threatened wildlife they were set up to protect. (See article on p. 66).

We need new marine national parks. Victoria has now the lowest levels of marine protected area of any state in Australia (a mere 5 per cent of state waters). There have been at least two independent inquiries recommending a comprehensive review to expand and fill gaps in the marine reserve system, but these have been ignored. We also need a dramatic increase in funding to support dedicated management of our existing marine national park. (See article p. 44).

What Victoria's Biodiversity Needs To Thrive:

- 1 Deliver new national parks and conservation reserves: Central west forests, Strathbogies, Mirboo North and Yarra Ranges (including creating Great Forest National Park), East Gippsland. Commence an assessment of gaps in the Marine National Park network, and other under-represented bioregions including Southwest Victoria and the Gippsland Plain.
- 2 Dramatically speed up the transition out of native forest logging: Legislating the phase out with transition plans.
- 3 Defend against development: Ensure the integrity of national parks by putting in place clear policies that protect parks from inappropriate development and uses. Reject the Warburton Mountain Bike Track proposal in the Yarra Ranges National Park and the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing proposal.
- 4 Protect Special Places and Habitats at risk: Ramp up climate resilience measures across the state, protect grasslands, Western Port woodlands, Western Port Bay, and riversides.
- 5 A dedicated long-term threatened species program to:
 - Activate all available mechanisms under state threatened species laws to protect wildlife in decline, including using laws to protect critical habitats.
 - Improve prioritisation of threatened species for protection to stop further extinctions for most at risk.
 - Enable enhanced and targeted landscape programs to control key threats state-wide, including feral animals and pests to facilitate recovery.
- 6 Dramatic increase in public funding for land and sea conservation, threatened species laws and programs:
 - Increase funding core ecological management funding for Parks Victoria to at least 1 per cent of state expenditure annually and an enhanced threatened species recovery and action program across all public land across land and sea, including dedicated funding for management for marine national parks.
 - Increase targeted funding for Community Action, Landcare and private land protection.
 - Expanded dedicated resources for Traditional Owner Joint Management on Country.
 - New \$30-\$50 million for a Land Conservation Revolving fund or program to 'purchase, protect, resell' high conservation private land to be run by Trust for Nature.
- 7 Strengthen the Wildlife Act to properly protect all native animals.

Protect Special Habitats at Risk

There are many special and unique places in Victoria with passionate communities fighting for their protection. Some of the threats and areas that need attention include:

Climate change: Climate change is one of the key drivers affecting nature in Victoria. The Victorian Government has made progress on climate change but prioritising nature to help build resilience and aid adaptation for ecosystems has fallen behind.



Grasslands: Victoria's grasslands are among our most critically endangered ecosystems, and more need to be done to deliver on commitments to protect urban grasslands as promised in the Melbourne Strategic Assessment. The remnants that were planned for protection are disappearing by neglect, or in some cases actively being cleared. There is also a need to assess the status of grassland across the whole state.



Western Port Woodlands: This corridor of remnants on the lands of the Bunurong People starts at the gateway to the Bass Coast and is one of the largest intact pieces of native vegetation on the Gippsland Plain. The area needs to be protected from sandmining, with the Holden Proving Ground purchased and added to the reserve system.



Western Port Bay protection: The beautiful bay needs protection from frequent development proposals. A strategic management framework and plan to protect Western Port Bay should be implemented and funded. (See article p. 50).



Riversides and waterways: Riparian land is habitat for to over 100 waterbirds, 50 freshwater fish, 38 frogs, 40 crayfish, 800 plants, and countless freshwater invertebrates. Sadly, many face extinction. These threats are amplified under the current government policy, which has opened Crown land water frontages for camping. Waterways need to be managed for all their values, not just recreation and grazing. Programs to incentivise riparian action through fencing and new types of riparian management licences have been cut and should be reinstated at around \$15 million per annum.



Native Forest logging phase out: The Andrews Government has committed to phase out native forest logging by 2030, but this is too slow and there are no real guarantees. This phase out needs to be dramatically sped up with a proper legislative framework in place to guarantee a fair transition that gives certainty to industry, workers and conservationists. • PW



Maintaining our youth at 70 years old!

In early 2022, a team of eight enthused young adults took part in a field trip to learn about VNPA and take part in ReefWatch and NatureWatch citizen science activities. This was the beginning of our new Youth Team.

The Youth Team was created as an opportunity for a value exchange between VNPA and young adults – a way to engage with and learn from each other. Through bringing together young adults in a range of targeted activities and social media we hope to enable them to love and protect nature and to increase their engagement with VNPA.

The next steps for the Youth Team are on the horizon. We have set up Youth Team Advisory Group who are excited to be taking the lead and carving a path for this project over the next 12 months.

Here, members of our Youth Team Advisory Group share with us why they are excited, what they hope to bring and what they hope to learn through being part of the Youth Team.



Kelly Van

1 Why are you excited about joining the Youth Team?

I am excited to be part of a new and energetic Youth Team that aims to bring young people and nature close together.

2 What do you hope to bring to the team or to VNPA?

After spending too much time indoors during Covid-19 lockdowns, I realised the importance of spending time in nature and protecting it so it can be enjoyed by everyone. I also work in healthcare, so I hope to bring a health perspective to the team as another way to encourage young people to be more engaged in conservation.

3 What do you hope to learn?

I am interested in learning about the different ways that young people (especially those living in metropolitan areas) can contribute to conservation, become more connected to nature, and possibly improve their mental and general health in the process.



Consuelo Quevedo

1 Why are you excited about joining the Youth Team?

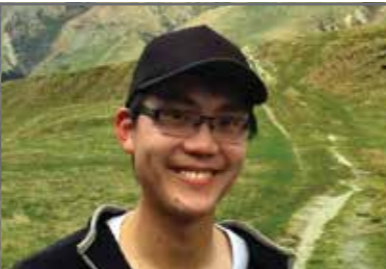
It feels very rewarding to be part of an enthusiastic group of individuals looking to connect more people to our natural environments and promote collective action to conserve Victoria's unique ecosystems.

2 What do you hope to bring to the team or to VNPA?

I will bring enthusiasm, a creative mind, a passion for the outdoors, and a strong desire to co-create. From a professional standpoint, having a conservation biology background has equipped me with various skills in both the natural and social realms that could be useful to the team and VNPA.

3 What do you hope to learn?

First, I hope to learn a lot from the valuable experience that my peers and other professionals within the VNPA may have. Additionally, I would like to learn effective strategies to engage and empower younger generations to take action on local conservation issues, such as the principles of successful campaigns, citizen science, organising events etc.



Michael Loo

1 Why are you excited about joining the Youth Team?

I am excited about the potential that a Youth Team can have in engaging and bringing in a new generation of young adults into the conservation space.

2 What do you hope to bring to the team or to VNPA?

As I have a background in Environmental Science and Environmental Social Sciences, I hope to utilise my knowledge in the physical and social sciences to help translate any research for the VNPA and the Youth Team and communicate it in such a way that the broader community can understand and become more engaged with it. I also hope to use my critical thinking skills to analyse various environmental issues that will benefit the Youth Team and VNPA in any campaigning efforts.

3 What do you hope to learn?

I hope to learn and develop an array of technical and soft skills, including writing grant submissions and policy briefs, fundraising, campaigning, and budgeting. I am also looking to broaden my knowledge around the ongoing conservation issues and how various organisations and government entities engage with advocacy groups like the VNPA.



Annie Preston

1 Why are you excited about joining the Youth Team?

I am excited to be a part of a team that is focused on engaging youth in conservation! It's so important both for the future of our environment, and for us to have fun opportunities like this.

2 What do you hope to bring to the team or to VNPA?

I hope to bring my own unique perspective! We all come from different places in life and our careers, which is what is going to work to create something great for everyone.

3 What do you hope to learn?

I hope to learn more skills I can use both in the industry and in life in general, this is a great opportunity for team-based communication in a conservation focused environment. I also hope to learn more about the VNPA as a whole!

How do I get involved?

Over 2022/2023 there will be a range of special Youth Team activities on offer. These will include citizen science advocacy, presentations and activities out in nature. If you are keen to take part, make sure you follow the Youth Team page at www.vnpa.org.au/youth-team

QUIZ

VNPA 70TH ANNIVERSARY QUIZ

- How many hectares of national parks have been created since VNPA was established in 1952?
- Due to the advocacy of VNPA and many other groups and individuals, when was the world's first network of marine national parks and sanctuaries created?
- In which year was the first Great Victorian Fish Count held?
- What animal was featured on our logo from 1985 to 2012?
- What is the name of the community monitoring program which monitored park tracks and facilities until 2006, and was the forerunner of the current NatureWatch program?
- The campaign for which national park is known as 'Victoria's watershed moment' leading to significant changes to Victorian environmental politics, including the formation of the Land Conservation Council (which later became the Victorian Environment Assessment Council)?
- On which of the following conservation issues we been a voice for nature in the Alpine National Park?
 - original creation of the national park
 - removal of cattle grazing
 - removal of feral horses
 - limiting of private development
 - all of the above
- The Victorian National Parks Association was formed at the same time as the National Parks Act. True/False

Detail of Superb Lyrebird



CAUGHT ON CAMERA

10 years of Citizen Science wildlife monitoring in Bunyip State Park

NATUREWATCH CAMPAIGN COORDINATOR **SERA BLAIR** CHRONICLES A DECADE OF WILDLIFE MONITORING IN BUNYIP STATE PARK AND THE INCREDIBLE CONTRIBUTION VOLUNTEERS HAVE MADE TO THIS CITIZEN SCIENCE PROJECT.

Since 2012, our NatureWatch Caught on Camera project has brought together community groups, land managers, scientists and volunteers in a community-based program for monitoring animals (primarily mammals) in parks. Starting in Bunyip State Park and Wombat State Forest, this long-term project went on to survey wildlife in six areas across Victoria. Each site had its own partnerships and research aims with a common theme of investigating the impact of fire on habitat values for local wildlife.

Project outputs from 2012 to 2021:

- 40 research sites established
- 44 field days installing monitoring equipment
- 448 days (approx. 2,912 hours) of volunteer field work
- 4011+ days cameras were collecting data
- 103,500+ photos taken and analysed
- Hundreds of wildlife records uploaded to the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas

Wildlife species recorded:

- 15 native mammal species
- 24 native bird species
- 1 native reptile species
- 7 introduced mammal species
- 1 introduced bird species

Bunyip State Park

In Bunyip State Park we have built a strong partnership with Friends of Bunyip State Park (FoBSP) and Parks Victoria to deliver this project. We're here to investigate the long-term impacts of control burning on wildlife, create working partnerships with government, researchers and community groups to establish monitoring programs, and



demonstrate the need for ongoing monitoring in response to fire impact on wildlife habitat.

Translating these aims into research questions, the data was analysed to determine the presence/absence of wildlife in relation to different vegetation

Native mammals
Agile Antechinus
Bush Rat
Dusky Antechinus
Swamp Rat
Eastern Pygmy Possum
Common Ringtail Possum
Common Brushtail Possum
Mountain Brushtail Possum
Common Wombat
Short-beaked Echidna
Long-nosed Bandicoot
Southern Brown Bandicoot
Swamp Wallaby
Eastern Grey Kangaroo
Koala

Native reptiles
Lace Monitor

Native birds
Australian Magpie
Bassian Thrush
Brown Thornbill
Brush Bronzewing
Brown Quail
Common Bronzewing
Crimson Rosella
Eastern Yellow Robin
Grey Currawong
Grey Shrike-thrush
Laughing Kookaburra
Pacific Black Duck
Painted Button Quail
Pied Currawong
Red-browed Finch
Rufous Fantail
Southern Boobook
Spotted Quail-thrush
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
Superb Fairy-wren
Superb Lyrebird
Tawny Frogmouth
White-browed Scrubwren
Wonga Pigeon

Introduced mammals
House Mouse
Dog
Domestic Cat
European Rabbit
Red Fox
Fallow Deer
Sambar Deer

Introduced birds
Common Blackbird

types and different categories of 'time since fire', and changes in their presence over the 10-year period of research.

Bunyip State Park was heavily impacted by bushfires in 2009 and 2019 and has a few fuel reduction burns planned within the park each year. The 'time since fire' categories measure the time between the last fire event, bushfire or planned burn, and the survey year and are expressed as 'recent' (0-3 years), 'early' (4-9 years), 'medium' (10-33 years), 'long' (34+ years). Research sites were distributed across fire categories, re-calculated annually.

Research sites were distributed across Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs) including Lowland Forest (EVC16) and Heathy Woodland (EVC48) and combined wetter forests (Riparian, Damp, Wet, and Scrubby Foothill forests, and Riparian Scrub).

The primary survey method was motion-detection wildlife cameras with a bait station lure on a three-week rotation time. When possible, additional survey methods were added, like audio recording, scat surveys and photo points.

Field seasons in Bunyip State Park ran August to December, with occasional adjustments. Seasons started with a community training day presented by all project partners.

Continued overleaf



NatureWatch Project Officer, Rachel Nalliah, pushing through dense regrowth to set up a camera monitoring station.

Continued from previous page

Key Findings:

- Endangered Southern Brown Bandicoots are in serious decline, having not been recorded since 2016. Most likely to be found in Heathy Woodland that is a medium to long time since fire.
- Long-nosed Bandicoot are more stable, persisting primarily in the wetter forests., recorded in all time since fire categories.

- Echidnas were recorded across all EVCs, Koalas and Ring-tail Possums were only recorded in Lowland Forests. Swamp Rats were only recorded in Heathy Woodland.
- Native wildlife recorded every year include Agile Antechinus, Bush Rat, Swamp Wallaby, Eastern Grey Kangaroo.
- Lace Monitors were only recorded, in 'recent' and 'early' time since fire sites.
- Superb Lyrebirds were the most consistently recorded bird species, seen across all EVCs, all time since fire categories and in 9/10 years.
- Introduced animals are widespread within the park, all being recorded on Heathy Woodland sites and all, except rabbits and dogs, recorded in Lowland Forests.
- Sambar Deer, Red Fox and domestic cats were recorded in all time since fire categories.
- Domestic cats were the most common introduced species recorded. Found in all EVCs and 9 out of 10 years.



Swamp Wallaby



Southern Brown Bandicoot



Long-nosed Bandicoot



Red Fox



Domestic cat



Lowland Forest Site – June 2019 – 3 months after fire.



Lowland Forest – Site FR17 – February 2021 – 23 months after fire.



June 2019 – 3 months after fire.



November 2021 – 32 months after fire.

Photopoints

We took photos from the same point on 30 research sites a few months after the 2019 fires and then close to 2 years after the fires to monitor habitat recovery. We couldn't access sites in-between due to COVID restrictions.

The ability of these forests to come back after fire is incredible! While dramatically altered in terms of habitat potential for native wildlife, the forests are recovering.

One Heathy Woodland site showed enormous vegetation growth two years after the fires – so much that it was virtually impenetrable by people or wildlife.

This project is an excellent example of how well we work with community groups and land managers to support improved management of wildlife habitat. Ian Vaskess and Jasper Hails from Friends of Bunyip State Park are incredible advocates for this park, and fantastic to partner with for fieldwork and community activities. The Parks Victoria team at the Gembrook office are a valuable support to this research providing important insight, planning input and field support.

Propelled by a succession of VNPA staff – Caitlin to Christine to Sera – and funded through a variety of government and non-government grants, the project has evolved over the years. Richard Loyn provided scientific direction in the project's development the first five years of

analysis. Many tertiary students, through our student placement program, have assisted with managing the vast amount of data. And the incredible support of the volunteers, some who have come back to help every year, has enabled this work to continue year after year.

Ten years completed, but we are not done yet. We're excited to do more camera monitoring over the next year. Plus, we're adding spotlighting surveys and Community Discovery Days to expand our knowledge of wildlife in the park, and increase community involvement in monitoring wildlife in and around the park.

Visit vnpa.org.au/naturewatch for details and to download the full project 10-year report. • PW



PHOTO: VNPA

Giant Kelp

Big 'trees' in the ocean

ONCE ABUNDANT IN VICTORIAN WATERS, GIANT KELP ARE NOW THREATENED. **KADE MILLS** AND **CONSUELO QUEVEDO** REPORT ON PLANS TO RECORD ORAL HISTORIES TO HELP PROTECT, PRESERVE AND EVEN RESTORE THESE GIANT FORESTS OF THE SEA.

Floating above a forest of Giant Kelp evokes a clear understanding of the phrase 'birds eye view'. Giant Kelp or String Kelp (*Macrocystis pyrifera*) is the largest seaweed in our oceans, growing at a rate of up to half a metre a day as it reaches for the surface from depths of up to 30 metres. At the surface it continues to grow horizontally, floating in large mats that form an enormous canopy akin to terrestrial forests. Snorkelling among the canopy you will share the space with a diverse array of fish and as you dive towards the bottom you encounter crayfish, abalone and maybe even a Weedy Seadragon hiding among the fronds.

Diving among Giant Kelp forests was a common occurrence in Victoria during the 20th century. In fact, many divers recall having to carry a knife with them in case they became entangled in the forest and had to cut themselves free. Prior to this, early maps of the Victorian coast demarcate large swathes of Giant Kelp unsuitable for ships' passage. Ongoing work by Deakin University into Aboriginal uses of seaweeds tells us there is much more to be learnt about historical distribution of seaweeds and Giant Kelp in particular.

A close up of Giant Kelp, *Macrocystis pyrifera*. The air bladder "floats" at the base of each blade are a distinguishing feature of this species.

We no longer find Giant Kelp at many places it was commonly encountered – and it seems even this fact has been overlooked. Maybe it's generational amnesia – the idea that fundamental matters are lost unnoticed and the concept of 'nature' changes with each generation, or maybe it's that until recently seaweeds, and the role they play in our coastal systems, has long been ignored.

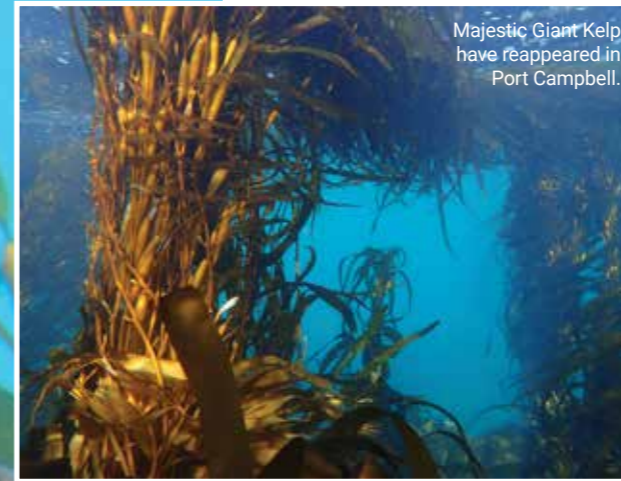
Giant Kelp forests once abundant throughout temperate regions in the southern hemisphere and along the west coast of North America are slowly disappearing. They face

threats from climate change (rising ocean temperatures, range extension of prey animals and increased storm activity) but they may also hold part of the answer to climate change with their ability to grow quickly and sequester carbon. Add to this their ability in minimising coastal erosion and preventing coastal storm damage by reducing wave energy by up to 70 per cent, we have a powerful ally in minimising climate change and its associated impacts.

While work is currently underway to restore Giant Kelp forests in Tasmania, our forests in Victoria have largely been forgotten. That is until Giant Kelp started reappearing in Port Campbell harbour recently. These sightings triggered discussions among 'old timers' about the days when Giant Kelp was so abundant as to be a nuisance in some places, which further triggered a search for records on Giant Kelp distribution in the state. It was during this search that it was realised the records we do have are limited, dispersed throughout maps, books and quite often people's memories.

That's why we're working together with members of the public and various agencies to document and distil the oral histories of experienced people into something that can be used to help protect, preserve and restore the giant forests of the sea.

You can log your Giant Kelp sightings along the Victorian coastline in the iNaturalist project 'Mission Macrocystis' (www.inaturalist.org/projects/mission-macrocystis) and follow their Facebook page for updates (www.facebook.com/MissionMacrocystis). • PW



Majestic Giant Kelp have reappeared in Port Campbell.

PHOTO: KADE MILLS



Giant Kelp canopy at Loch Ard Gorge.

PHOTO: PHIL WATSON



Sightings of Giant Kelp at Port Campbell and surrounds kicked off a search for this species elsewhere in the state.

PHOTO: PHIL WATSON



A diver glides through a Giant Kelp forest.

PHOTO: PHIL WATSON

Hidden Gems

The Great Victorian Fish Count is turning 20!

REEFWATCH CAMPAIGNER KADE MILLS LOOKS BACK AT TWO SUCCESSFUL DECADES OF THE GREAT VICTORIAN FISH COUNT.

Did you know that, depending on their sex or size, some fishes of the same species look quite different? Do you know the name of many fish? If you answered 'Yes' and 'Around 35', there is every chance you have joined ReefWatch to take the dive that counts – The Great Victorian Fish Count (GVFC).

From the humble beginnings of a few divers and snorkellers recording marine life on their local reef, the GVFC has morphed into the largest marine citizen science event in Victoria, attracting over 600 participants each year from across the state. Over the past 20 years tens of thousands of people have jumped in the water to count 25 species of fish and, since 2017, an additional 10 species of sharks and rays.

Because they don't often end up on dinner plates, some of the species we count are often overlooked by science. By that we mean there has been extensive research done on species of commercial or recreational importance (e.g. Snapper, Whiting & Flathead) but many others are under or never studied.

To do the count, divers hit the water armed with illustrations on a waterproof slate and a pencil to record the number of each they see. The list has a selection of commonly sighted species (to get people counting) as well as some that are harder to find (to get people searching) and even some that have rarely (if ever) been sighted in the last few decades (to keep people curious).

Keeping people curious and raising awareness of the diversity of marine life in Victoria resulted in the Western Blue Groper, thought to have disappeared from our waters, being resighted during the Great Victorian Fish Count at Barwon Bluff Marine Sanctuary over 10 years ago. This and other sightings of blue goppers led to the protection of both the Western and Eastern Blue Groper since 2013. Encouragingly, they continue to pop up at various locations and marine national parks during the count each year.

This year's 20th Great Victorian Fish Count serendipitously coincides with the 20-year celebration of the creation of Victoria's network of marine national parks and sanctuaries. We've written about the significance of this network in *Park Watch* throughout the year, and hopefully

some of you have been inspired to visit your local park or sanctuary to see the marine treasures that these areas protect.

Victoria's marine national parks and sanctuaries are beloved by our community of underwater enthusiasts so the theme for 2022's GVFC is 'Hidden Gems'.

Many of the hidden gems in our parks and oceans are not on the GVFC slates so we encourage everyone to record additional species they observe, especially if it's a fish that they wouldn't expect to see in their local patch. These sightings can be useful to the folks at Redmap Australia.

Redmap is another citizen science project with something to celebrate in 2022 – 10 years of a national database mapping the range extensions of marine fish and invertebrates along the Australian coastline. To date, 77 species have been recorded further south than they had been a decade ago. These southward extensions are evidence of species 'on the move' due to warming waters,

“ Bringing people together to have fun and to get to know the fish at their local reef was always the aim of the GVFC. I'm thrilled that 20 years on the fish count is still achieving this, as well as continuing to contribute to our collective understanding of Victoria's beautiful, unique reef fish species and the habitats in which they live. ”

FORMER VNPA REEFWATCH COORDINATOR
WENDY ROBERTS

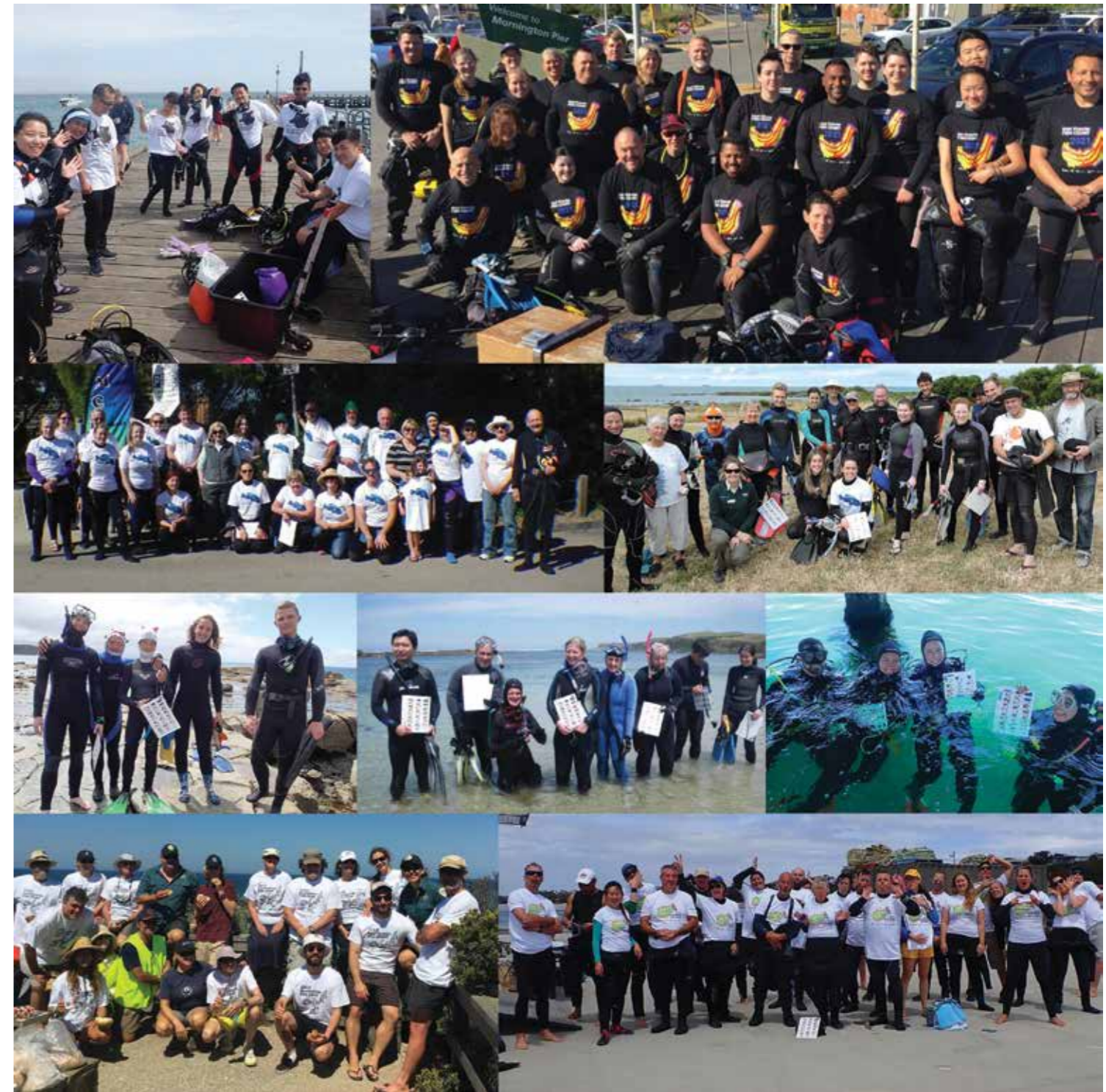


Photo credits (from top row, left to right): Simple Dive; Ocean Divers; Marine Care Ricketts Point; Jawbone Marine Sanctuary Care Group / Marine Care Point Cooke; South Gippsland Conservation Society Inc / Bunurong Coast Education; Parks Victoria / Friends of Mushroom Reef; Dive La Trobe; Parks Victoria / Friends of Barwon Bluff; Dive2U.

and observations from fishers, boaters, divers and snorkellers are proving incredibly valuable for understanding how our marine life is responding to climate change.

With this in mind, we can't understate the value of a photo! We encourage our Fish Counters to bring their underwater camera along for this reason. You can submit your photos directly to www.redmap.org.au, by including them in your Fish Count survey results on the Atlas of Living Australia, or by adding them to iNaturalist (www.inaturalist.org).

Photos can help confirm the identification and location of both target Fish Count species and any fish 'on the move'.

In 2022, the Great Victorian Fish Count is giving you any excuse to party – whether you want to celebrate marine citizen science, the fabulous fish of our coasts, or the marine national parks and sanctuaries that continue to protect them.

Visit www.vnpa.org.au/fish-count to see events near you and join a Fish Count. • PW

Q&A with Catherine Watson from Save Western Port Woodlands



PHOTO: SAVE THE WESTERN PORT WOODLANDS

Catherine Watson, Save the Western Port Woodlands.

1 Can you tell us about a memorable experience of nature from your childhood or younger years.

I had no interest in nature as a child. I lived in suburbia. My most memorable experiences involved moths because they terrified me if they got into my bedroom at night. I grew up in New Zealand so fortunately I didn't encounter Huntsman spiders or snakes.

2 Do you recall any events, people or places that influenced your love of nature? What was their influence?

When I came to Australia I lived in Collingwood for the first 20 years and the only nature I knew was human nature. Then my partner and I bought an old cottage in Wonthaggi next to a bush reserve. I noticed how much my neighbour noticed – she would point out tiny Pardalotes burrowing in a bank, Mayfly orchids, things I would never have seen. One day she even saw a Koala because she was looking up! I started to see more – though at first only the very obvious stuff, like Banksias and Laughing Kookaburras.

3 What was your earliest experience of the Western Port Woodlands?

I was like everybody. For many years my only experience of the woodlands was driving past them. Occasionally, I would wonder what was in the forest on the ridge but there is no obvious way of getting in, no indication that you are passing conservation reserves. I heard stories that two-metre lizards had been seen in The Gurdies. Of course, I didn't believe them.

A friend of mine lives in The Gurdies and she took me for a walk. It actually took me a while to 'get' the woodlands.

It's not magnificent, like a Mountain Ash forest. The trees are quite small. It's the muted grey and olive green of Messmate and Peppermint, with space between so you get the long view. It welcomes you in. It is very tranquil – apart from the sound of mining and sand trucks.

The great irony is that the Western Port Woodlands weren't cleared because it's poor farming country as it's on sand. It's also a very biodiverse environment because of the sand. The lack of nutrients produces the grass trees, the orchids, the wildflowers, the fungi. And now the woodlands are at risk because the state wants the sand for Melbourne's Big Build.

Oh, and a couple of weeks ago I saw my first Lace Monitor – just a youngster, about 1.5 metres long.

4 What drew you to stand up for the Woodlands?

I got dragged into it. I publish an online magazine called the *Bass Coast Post*. I published a couple of articles about the Holden Proving Ground, which GMH had put on the market. A campaign started to try to persuade the State Government to buy the proving ground as habitat. It's almost 1000 hectares of old vegetation with a vermin-proof fence around it.

We only gradually realised the entire forest corridor was under threat from a surge in sand mining. There were already 10 sand mines, including five in nature conservation reserves, with more on the way. Our focus changed from saving the proving ground to saving the woodlands.

You have to understand there was no Western Port Woodlands as such at that stage. One of the real achievements of our campaign has been naming it so it

is now seen as a whole, a 20km forest corridor (with some gaps) stretching from Lang Lang to Bass. Recently I have even seen the name Western Port Woodlands used in ministerial correspondence!

5 How long have you been involved in caring for Woodlands?

Our steering committee met for the first time in early 2020, just as the pandemic started.

But this is the second iteration of the woodland campaign. There was a tireless community campaign back in the mid-1990s, which culminated in the only contract ever signed between the Government, the community and the sand mining industry. It permitted sand mining in less environmentally sensitive areas but ensured a network of conservation reserves would provide habitat and biolinks for threatened species along the corridor.

Unfortunately, once adopted, it was virtually ignored by government and industry. Which shows the community must remain eternally vigilant.

6 If we could all do one thing to care for the Western Port Woodlands, what would you recommend we do?

Abolish the offset bullshit con job! Don't clear significant vegetation for mining, industry or residential development. End of story.

7 What would a healthy, protected and respected Western Port Woodlands look like to you in 5-10 years?

In 2035 the woodlands is a national park co-managed by the Bunurong Land Council and Parks Victoria for the benefit of all Victorians. By then, of course, it's known by a name chosen by the traditional owners to reflect their many thousands of years as custodians. Parks Victoria has enough staff to tackle *Pittosporum* and *Agapanthus* and maintain the tracks. The last sand mines have closed and are being rehabilitated. The mining companies were compensated with land swaps and leases on cleared farmland in Cardinia Shire, and the sand is freighted to a Melbourne hub by rail. The monster sand trucks are gone.

The State Government did buy the old proving ground. The front section is used to road test locally-made EVs. The back section is now used in a recovery program for Southern Brown Bandicoots, Leadbeater's Possums and Strzelecki Koalas. Numbers are booming. • PW

Offshore wind plans gust through Victoria

SHANNON HURLEY WELCOMES MOVES TO POWER OUR STATE WITH RENEWABLE OFFSHORE WIND ENERGY, WHILE URGING LEADERS TO CONSIDER THE IMPACTS ON OUR MARINE AND COASTAL ECOSYSTEMS FRONT AND CENTRE.

Described as a 'world-class offshore wind resource' Victoria is seeing rapid plans for development of the new offshore wind industry, paving the way towards net zero emissions by 2050. While we welcome this direction, the ecological impacts a large-scale rapid transition could have on our seascapes and wildlife raises concerns.

The recent boom of the offshore wind industry has seen moves by the Victorian and Federal state and federal governments to streamline the way forward. Unfortunately, a clear overarching plan for protecting the great values of our seas and shores in the process is sorely lacking.

The State Government released their vision for establishing the offshore wind industry in the *Offshore Wind Directions Paper* in July, while supporting three different projects along our coastline. The furthest along the chain of approvals is the Star of the South, off the coast of Gippsland, with many more offshore wind developers with their sights set for Victoria's windy coastline. Alas, the directions paper did not contain any detail on how they plan to assess, avoid, and minimise the impacts on nature, other than to say 'technical studies' have been done. We had hoped ambitions would have been much higher.

The Federal Government's role as the regulator is to oversee initial access to the seabed in Commonwealth waters for offshore wind infrastructure. The recent announcement of the 'offshore wind energy zone' off the coast of Gippsland is massive, running offshore from Phillip Island, around the Prom

and all the way to the Gippsland Lakes. While it was put out for public consultation to determine the effects of offshore wind development in this zone, we were disappointed to see this zone released with no identification of significant environmental areas. The only 'area to be avoided' was for existing oil and gas titles.

Given that the offshore wind infrastructure is located within both state and Commonwealth waters, it requires collaborative oversight on the impacts on biodiversity from both levels of government. This has so far been done project by project, under standard environmental assessment processes (The Environmental Effects Statement process at the state level and under the EPBC Act at the federal level).

The problem is that this individualised process does not allow for the early identification and avoidance of important ecological areas, and could result in wasted effort for industry, or the environment losing out. While understanding this complex cocktail of governance at the state and federal levels has been no easy feat, one thing is certain: moves to expand the industry require an overarching plan for assessing, avoiding, minimising the impacts on nature early on, before locations are proposed.

An ecologically sound oversight lead by government would include:

- An overarching plan for how the impact on biodiversity will be minimised or avoided.
- Criteria developed to guide the location of offshore wind proposals



PHOTO: SHAUN DAKIN / UNSPLASH

to avoid significant marine features, ecosystems, species and cultural areas. These could be 'no go zones' within offshore wind zones. The criteria should include:

- No infrastructure through marine national parks, high conservation value areas, wildlife breeding, nursery or aggregating areas.
- No construction during critical animal migration pathways.
- Avoiding culturally significant areas.
- Thorough assessment of the impacts from construction and ongoing operation upon biodiversity and important areas (migratory and threatened wildlife, reef habitats, important aggregation, marine breeding nursery areas, marine national parks and Ramsar areas.
- Releasing technical studies and environmental assessments publicly to build support for offshore wind, and transparency in the process.
- As with any development on marine and coastal crown land there needs to be consistency with relevant environmental legislation and policy, such as the *Marine and Coastal Act*, policy and strategy and the EPBC Act, along with their guiding principles. • PW

The Intricacies of Immediate Protection

PROTECTION FOR MIRBOO NORTH AND STRATHBOGIE FOREST REVEALS COMPLEXITY OF FUTURE LAND TENURE WRITES **MATT RUCHEL**.



PHOTO: SUSAN KOCI

As part of the State Government's plan to protect the Greater Glider, Leadbeater's Possum and more than 35 other threatened animals, over 96,000 hectares of forest across the Strathbogie Ranges, Mirboo North, Central Highlands and East Gippsland were given Immediate Protection Area (IPA) status* in 2019.

Since then, the process to formally protect Mirboo North and Strathbogie forests has produced some sound recommendations. But it has also illuminated the unique challenges we face when creating a system that combines the aspirations and rights of Traditional Owners with Western knowledge systems.

Immediate protection not so immediate

Maps released covered 146,000 hectares, not the 96,000 hectares announced. The 96,000 figure equates to a State Forest General Management Zone available for logging and 146,000 hectares included in Special Protection Zones. Coupes in this area were removed from logging schedules.

The four-person Eminent Panel for Community Engagement (EPCE), appointed by the Government in January 2022, included representatives from each relevant Traditional Owner Corporation. They were tasked with providing independent advice and recommendations on the future uses of state forest in eastern Victoria,

starting with the Strathbogie Ranges and Mirboo North State Forest. The process was informed by a Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) assessment report.

Local communities in Mirboo North and the Strathbogies had run strong long-running campaigns. Each area had about 700 submissions backing protection, with over 100 community members attending drop-in sessions at Mirboo North and 25 people at the Strathbogie Ranges.

A key difference between the eminent person process and a standard VEAC investigation and consultation was the representation of Traditional Owners on the panel.

The long road to realising a community vision in Mirboo North

Preserve Our Forests Mirboo North ran a successful 5-year community campaign against VicForests' plans to log tiny remnant areas (440 hectares in one of the 10 most cleared parts of Victoria, the Strzelecki Ranges bioregion). This small area supports Greater Gliders, Powerful Owls and Narracan Burrowing Crayfish, endangered damp forest and warm temperate rainforests. Why VicForests is even allowed to even consider these small patches for logging is another question entirely.

Mirboo North final report recommendations:

- Mirboo North's IPA becomes a Conservation Park managed under the National Parks Act. It also considers consolidating it with the adjacent Mirboo North regional park, "initial assessment suggests the values of the surrounding regional park areas outside the IPA may warrant increased protection commensurate with the Conservation Park category, subject to further assessment."
- Gunaikurnai joint management, development of cultural overlays, a Reading Country assessment, development of a comprehensive management plan, and resourcing for local staff and a Gunaikurnai Ranger.

Broader assessment of landscape connectivity throughout the Strzelecki Ranges bioregion and an assessment of the Strzelecki Koala as genetically distinct. *The report noted "... the forest is supporting higher than usual levels of species and that expanding protections throughout the region is critical to maintain and enhance biodiversity.*

Strathbogie Ranges – a longer road to protection

Save our Strathbogie Forest is an active community group that has produced reports, organised meetings, conducted citizen science and protests in support of protecting Strathbogie State Forest.

The Strathbogies IPA is approximately 24,000 hectares, currently classified as state forest, 5000 hectares of which is currently Special Protection Zone. The conservation areas extend the connectivity of protected forest areas. The forests are habitat for an abundant population of Southern Greater Gliders, Powerful Owls, Murray Spiny Crayfish and Brush-tailed Phascogales. Plants including centuries old trees, the listed Lima Stringybark and tall leafy Greenhood Orchid.

The challenges and tests of creating new parks

The proposed legal categories 'Conservation Park' and 'Cultural Reserve' do not currently exist under the *National Parks Act* (or other legislation). They emerged in the VEAC State-wide Assessment of Public Land 2017 and were adopted during the Victorian Government's recent public land legislation review.

With new complex legislation needing to be drafted and pass through both

houses of parliament – unlikely during the remainder of this term of government – further delays in the realisation of the parks are certain. Some would say it's hard to implement something that doesn't yet exist!

One part of the recommendation we have reservations about is the vehicle for joint management, which includes '...consideration of a Committee of Management' for Mirboo North and recommendations for Taungurung Land & Waters Council as a Category 1 Committee of Management in the Strathbogies.

We support joint management but examples of committees of management in the past have been problematic as they can lack access to core funding from state agencies like Parks Victoria or Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. Over time, squeezed of resources and left in the lurch, some in the past have resorted to extractive industries to pay for management. If this model is pursued there needs to be dedicated long term funding provided to support traditional owner management.

The proposed 'Cultural Reserve' is an attempt at making real some of the aspirations of the Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Landscapes Strategy. This is a departure from existing joint

management arrangements in place in central Victoria and parts of Gippsland, where the park designation applies in conjunction with Indigenous title.

The Strategy also proposed reserves be consistent with IUCN categories V Protected Landscape/Seascape & VI Protected area, with the sustainable use of natural resources. We support the rights of Traditional owners to use natural resources, for traditional or cultural purposes. Our concern is a lack of clarity on what constitutes 'appropriate use'. For example, VicForests argue that their current regime of industrial logging is 'suitable use,' which begs the question if something is legally 'protected', no matter the manager, can it be properly looked after under such significant and subjective clauses?

What's next?

The second part of the process for the larger and more complex Central Highlands and East Gippsland immediate protected areas was expected to begin later in 2022, once the reports for first two reserve are completed. It is difficult to see how this process will commence or continue as the state election looms and state agencies drift into caretaker mode. • PW

* Immediate Protection Areas (IPAs) are a new political construct, created by the Andrews Government, as part of the plan to phase out native forest logging by 2030.

Strathbogie final report recommendations:

- Strathbogie Ranges IPA be managed in accordance with the principles and purposes of a new Cultural Reserve public land category, identified in the Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Landscapes Strategy.
- Enduring arrangements for a Cultural Reserve are developed as part of the current renewal of Victoria's public land legislation, in partnership with all Traditional Owner Groups.

The panel noted ... "It is critical in the application of a Cultural Reserve over the Strathbogie IPA that these forests are afforded a level of protection providing community surety that commercial timber harvesting has ceased, and other harmful activities are managed." and "the importance to community that the Strathbogie be incorporated into the National Reserve System. The interaction between the proposed Cultural Reserve and the National Reserve System is an area for further consideration and development, including taking into account the confluence of two knowledge systems."
- The appointment of Taungurung Land & Waters Council as a Category 1 Committee of Management. This includes funding to support a new governance model and resources for collaborative management plan and delivery of cultural and conservation works and monitoring. The panel suggested interim management arrangements progress quickly.

TIME TO RESCUE THE ALPINE NATIONAL PARK – AGAIN!



Mt Feathertop

PHOTO: MARK DARRAGH

PARKS VICTORIA'S FLAWED SCHEME FOR THE FALLS TO HOTHAM ALPINE CROSSING FLOWS FROM ITS FUMBLING LACK OF CLARITY OVER HOW AND WHY OUR NATIONAL PARKS SHOULD BE MANAGED, SAYS FORMER PARKS PROTECTION ADVOCATE PHIL INGAMELLS.

The proposal to build around 80 commercial structures in the core of Victoria's Alpine National Park should have been knocked off at the first hurdle. That an initial stage has actually been funded by government to the tune of \$11 million is outrageous.

The alpine region of south-eastern Australia seems large, but it's actually a tiny percentage of the continent, and protects a vast range of specialised plants and animals highly vulnerable to climate impacts and other threats.

Since its formation in 1952, VNPA has been fighting hard for protection of Victoria's precious high country. That effort has included campaigning to end logging and cattle grazing, avoid unnecessary infrastructure and, most critically, winning legislated conservation protection for the bulk of Victoria's alpine region in national parks.

The Alpine National Park is one of Victoria's most important protected areas; it is one of very few also awarded National Heritage status. That listing speaks strongly of the importance of Australia's alpine parks, as "... one of the most important areas in the southern half of Australia for endemism and species richness". The listing also notes that the "powerful, aesthetic inspirational qualities of the landscape ... have been recognised over a long period of time".

The heritage listing specifically draws attention to Victoria's magnificent Mt Feathertop and the sublime moss-bedded Bogong High Plains in this regard, both of which will be significantly impacted by Parks Victoria's development proposal.

What exactly is the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing (FHAC)?

An overnight adventure trek across the southern Bogong High Plains, between the Falls Creek and Hotham alpine resorts, has been popular with minimal-impact bushwalkers for many years. It's usually achieved in a couple of days.

Tourism interests now want to 'upgrade' that experience, and have proposed a five-day walk featuring four commercially operated accommodation 'hubs' along the way. Existing tracks will be widened, and new tracks constructed. The walk will also be diverted up the steep and treacherous Diamantina Spur Track to take in views from Mt Feathertop.

The four new overnight accommodation hubs will each feature up to nine catered huts for 2-3 people, a dozen rentable tent platforms, a separate large building (for 50-80 people!) for group gatherings and meal preparation, as well as communal toilets and additional accommodation for tourism operators. These hubs will be constructed near the historic Cope and Tawonga Huts on the Bogong High Plains, on the Diamantina River at the base of Mount Feathertop, and at the remote High Knob near Feathertop's imposing summit.

According to Parks Victoria's Preliminary Environmental Assessment, **the impact zone of this government-funded development will total around 45 hectares, equal to 22 times the area of the MCG oval.**

It is a massive imposition of tourist infrastructure on the park and runs contrary to the far more enlightened park management practices emerging around the world. Park managers in the USA, for example, are removing

troublesome infrastructure from parks such as Yosemite as visitor pressures and other management problems grow.

Why is the State Government funding this scheme?

It's a good question!

It has been Victorian Government policy for several years now that "tourism development will be encouraged to be sited on private or other public land outside national parks", a policy that was recently reaffirmed on the floor of our parliament.

Importantly, when Bogong National Park was proclaimed in 1981, the park boundary carefully excluded both the Falls Creek and Hotham Alpine Resorts. The idea was to constrain future developments to those areas, leaving the national park free from development pressures. Less than a decade later, when Bogong was absorbed into a larger Alpine National Park, those strategic borders remained in place.

And when the 650 km Australian Alps Walking Track (AAWT), from Walhalla in Victoria to the ACT, was developed in the 1970s and 80s, the promise was made that this would not mean the introduction of built accommodation to the remote areas the track traversed.

Indeed, the recent Australian Alps Walking Track Strategy 2021-2025, agreed to by the park agencies of Victoria, NSW and the ACT, re-affirms that policy by saying "track users are expected to be self-sufficient" and "not reliant on huts for shelter". It adds that "walkers often choose to make use of commercial accommodation at resort areas or nearby settlements along the AAWT".

It seems over-enthusiastic tourism ideologues (some inside and some outside government) have ignored these long-standing policy positions, to stake their claim on a prime piece of public real estate in one of our state's most precious natural areas.

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What about equity of access to national parks?

Despite the fact that tourism statistics show that national parks already contribute substantially to tourism (they generate far, far more for regional economies than they cost to run), and though the overwhelming majority of park visitors are seeking day or half-day walks, the pressure has been on to develop 'icon' multi-day walks for the 'comfort-in-nature' tourist.

The claim is made that national parks should not just be available to people who want to carry a pack and sleep in a tent. But pretty much anywhere on the proposed FHAC route can be accessed as a day or part day walk from either the Falls Creek or Hotham alpine resorts. Each resort boasts a wide range of comfortable to luxury accommodation that is largely unoccupied throughout the summer months.

The FHAC proposal would swing the balance almost entirely in favour of the luxury traveller, as the long-favoured campsites of self-sufficient hikers would be replaced with a complex of huts, offered at a rate somewhere between \$440 and \$1,000 per person per night.

How do these schemes get credibility?

Despite Victorian Government policy to keep commercial developments out of parks, despite the crystal-clear objective of our National Parks Act for park managers to focus on biodiversity priorities, and despite federal law and the international Convention on Biological Diversity mandating that same priority, Parks Victoria repeatedly falls easy prey to half-baked schemes for unnecessarily invasive tourist developments in our parks.

Take the locally generated development proposals for Mt Buffalo National Park a few years back: construction of a spa bath and hotel, shopping mall, roller-skating rink and wedding chapel actually won project development funding from Tourism Victoria. Bizarrely, the local Alpine Shire,

which has no management responsibility for the park, was entrusted with evaluating the scheme.

More recently, Yarra Ranges Shire grabbed federal funding for a mega bike track threatening many rare plants and animals as well as cool temperate rainforests in Yarra Ranges National Park, even though (here we go again) it has no responsibility or accountability for the management of any national park.

What's needed?

The Environment Minister must ask Parks Victoria to establish a clear box-ticking process for consideration of any tourism-related endeavours in our national parks and other conservation reserves, consistent with legislation and current government policy.

Anyone proposing developments should be well-informed at the outset that developments should be adjacent to, rather than within, national parks.

This would encourage planning certainty for private and/or government proponents, and provide clarity to any organisation approached to fund projects. It would save vast amounts of time and money for developers, funding bodies, the general public and Parks Victoria itself.

Well-defined and well-understood clarity in this regard will enable long-standing protection for our remaining natural areas. This is how we make sure all of us will be able to enjoy them, at their best, for generations to come. • PW

Parks Victoria's public consultation has been a sham

Some six years ago, when the public was first asked to comment on the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing, nearly 90 per cent of submissions were **opposed** to the construction of huts and lodges in the park. But that response was misrepresented by Parks Victoria, which claimed the proposal had broad public support.

Parks Victoria has never publicly corrected that false claim, an outrageous situation for a government agency charged with investing public money on high conservation value public land.

Around five years ago, a report into Public Participation in Government Decision-Making by the Office of Victoria's Auditor-General (VAGO) made it clear that: *"It is important to recognise that public participation is not the same as public relations or communications, which have the objectives of maintaining a favourable image."*

VAGO added that public participation *"is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process"*.

And importantly, VAGO mandated that the public be provided with *"the information they need to participate in a meaningful way"*.

In the current public consultation process for the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing, Parks Victoria has failed this last criterion miserably:

1. The Preliminary Environmental Effects Statement is an indigestible 233 pages long, with no objective summary of impacts.
2. The *Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment study* is misleading, with all visual impacts assessed from several kilometres away from proposed development sites.
3. The Business Case is a highly redacted document, and makes no comparative assessment of less impactful options.
4. It is silent on important processes like Traditional Owner consultation.
5. The questions addressed to the public on the Engage Victoria website are trivial, and based on the assumption that the project already has strong public approval. There is no invitation to comment on the project as a whole.

It's time the Government and Parks Victoria injected some integrity into public engagement in the management our most precious protected areas. • PW

Wombat Forest Update

We have continued to investigate how the scheme was established using Freedom of Information Requests and letters to decision-makers. We've been particularly concerned about the government's failure to implement the recommendation they agreed to in response to the final VEAC report.

A commitment to actioning recommendations straight away (rather than waiting for legislation to create new national parks and reserves) is a long-standing practice of Victorian governments. This practice is given legislative force in sections 25 and 26A of the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001*. These reflect a requirement to action recommendations, and date back to the original *Land Conservation Act 1970*.



PHOTO: SANDY SCHELTEMA

It's clear that VicForests is a law unto itself, particularly in the west of the state. Both the environment and agricultural ministers have delegated most of their oversight powers for control of logging schedules directly to VicForests. It is clear that this delegation made under the previous Coalition Government in November 2014 during caretaker mode (a few weeks before they lost office), has not be changed or reviewed in two terms of the Andrews Government.

If we want real leadership to protect and restore our unique natural places, all political parties should have comprehensive nature protection and conservation policies.

Will you help support our campaign to persuade our elected representatives to fulfill their pledge to legislate the promised national parks? Visit vnpa.org.au/new-parks

PROTECT NATURE NOW

CREATE OUR CENTRAL WEST PARKS



Authorised by Matt Ruchel,
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70 years of the Victorian National Parks Association



Philip Crosbie Morrison (left) with Committee of Management members at Mt Buffalo National Park, 1957.

PHOTO: COURTESY DSE HISTORIC PLACES

DON GARDEN HAS COMPILED AN EXTENSIVE HISTORY OF VNPA. THIS IS A BRIEF SUMMARY, COVERING THE YEARS 1952 TO 2010.

Crosbie Morrison and the formation of the Victorian National Parks Association

Many people were involved in the formation of VNPA in 1952, but the most important public figure was Philip Crosbie Morrison (1900–1958).

To read Crosbie Morrison's biography by Graham Pizzey is to be almost overwhelmed by his activities and achievements: a keen amateur naturalist, zoologist, journalist, founder of natural history and conservation magazine *Wild Life*, a radio broadcaster and popular public speaker.

The steady loss of flora and fauna in Victoria, under pressure from agriculture, development and

introduced pests, was a profound source of concern for Morrison and other conservationists in the middle of the 20th century. Even the so-called 'national parks' were in severe decline from inadequate legislative protection, poor administration and no government funding.

Wilson's Promontory National Park was seriously degraded by military use during WWII and by fire and rabbits, while across Victoria park management committees (where they existed) resorted to leasing parks for grazing, timber cutting and quarrying in order to raise revenue.

In 1946 Morrison called for a 'New Deal' for the parks and reserves. Between 1946 and 1952 he chaired four conferences of about 20 conservation and nature organisations that recommended legislation

to protect national parks and establishment of a National Parks Authority.

The conference also decided there should be a new and permanent organisation to continue its work, comprising organisations and individuals interested in the preservation of areas of scenic, historical or scientific interest.

Getting established

At a meeting on 26 November 1952, the Victorian National Parks Association was formally established, and its Council appointed, with Morrison as President. Morrison's chief ally was J. Ros Garnet. While Morrison was the figurehead and public voice, Garnet was the main driving force and organiser behind the scenes.

The Council consisted of 15 members, with only one woman (Miss M. Wigan), plus 15 Corporate Members (naturalist, bushwalking and bird watching clubs and scientific societies) and about 80 individual members.

The official public launch of VNPA was at a meeting held in the Lower Melbourne Town Hall on 23 July 1953 – so many people came that 'hundreds' were turned away.

Frustration

The first three years were intensely frustrating for VNPA as it sought to have legislation passed to put national parks on a proper footing. Morrison and Garnet continued tirelessly to push the cause.

Finally, in October 1956 Henry Bolte's Liberal government passed the *National Parks Act*, and in May 1957 the National Parks Authority (NPA) was created, with Morrison as its first director. Morrison resigned as VNPA President to take up the position.

For a brief period, it looked like a great victory, but cracks soon appeared. The NPA proved, despite Morrison's best efforts, to be weak and flawed in its powers, authority and finances. All this took a toll on Morrison, who tragically died, aged 58, of a cerebral haemorrhage in March 1958.

Morrison's work was still far from complete, but he will be long remembered and appreciated for what he achieved in a life devoted to the preservation and protection of the environment, and especially our national parks. It is fitting that he has a building named after him at the National Botanic Gardens in Canberra.

The weaknesses of the NPA meant that the battle was renewed, both to protect existing parks and to have new ones created, as well as the broader battle to protect Victoria's natural heritage.

J. Ros Garnet and scenery preservation

In December 1958, VNPA Council discussed what it saw as necessary amendments to the Victorian National Parks Act.

J. Ros Garnet's suggestion was to rename the legislation as the National Parks and Scenery Preservation Act. 'Scenery preservation' was already a dated concept in 1958. In the 19th and early 20th centuries the reasons behind nature reservations were essentially anthropocentric – to preserve places for human enjoyment (such as the preservation of grand scenes) and for future human scientific research or other benefits.



Ros Garnet at Suggan Buggan, eastern Victoria, in 1970.

PHOTO: COURTESY JOHN GARNET

But by the 1950s, educated and aware environmentalists looked beyond human benefits and were at least equally concerned about the 'rights of nature', biodiversity and ecosystem preservation.

So why did Garnet, who seems to have been so acutely aware of such issues, support scenery preservation? The reason appears to be that 'scenery preservation' was both a reflection of his love of nature and part of his strategic thinking to protect Victoria's natural heritage. In various writings Garnet referred to the beauty and joy of scenery as part of what he wanted to preserve.

At the same time, he was aware that there were benefits to be gained by extending the concept of nature protection beyond national park boundaries. To advance 'scenery preservation' might enable the consideration of adjacent wider areas.

Ros Garnet (1906-1998) was a most interesting character and one of the most important individuals in the foundation and early years of VNPA. Because Morrison died prematurely, Garnet's role was longer and more influential.

A keen naturalist, with a special interest in indigenous botany (notably orchids), he was particularly interested in Wilson's Promontory and Wyperfeld National Parks, and wrote booklets about their natural and human history.

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Wilson's Prom.



PHOTO: ALAN JORDAN/SLV



Grassland community day.

PHOTO: ITS A WILDLIFE

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In 1966 he was awarded the Australian Natural History Medallion and in 1982 was given an Order of Australia (AM) for services to conservation.

Few have done as much for VNPA, Victorian conservation and 'scenery preservation' as that most committed activist, Ros Garnet.

Grievances to garden party – the 1960s

The 1960s were a fractious time in the relationship between the environmental movement and the Bolte Government. Early optimism after Bolte had passed the 1956 *National Parks Act* had turned into disappointment and then anger and distrust, culminating in the Little Desert dispute of 1969-70.

Much of VNPA's effort in the 1960s was devoted (generally unsuccessfully) to encouraging the government to establish new national parks and to expand existing ones. However, it was also often on the back foot, fighting defensively for gains that it had already won or defending areas that it hoped would become national parks.

In essence, much of the decade was spent putting out the spot fires, many which have continued over succeeding decades. Many of the challenges and events that were faced back then have been repeated since, notably the expectations of the timber industry and mountain cattlemen and the pressures for the commercialisation of national parks.

The Little Desert and Bolte's departure

Henry Bolte and his ministers, while paying some lip service to 'conservation', were essentially supportive of development and growth economics, and gave little support to the environmental movement or the extension of the national park system. Over the decade the relationship between Bolte and VNPA soured.

What brought matters to a head was the 1968 plan to develop for farming most of the Little Desert in western Victoria. VNPA campaigned from the late 1950s to have most of this area declared a national park, especially as it was one of the few areas where the Mallee Fowl was still relatively numerous. Lands Minister Sir William McDonald, who saw the land as wasted and useless if it were not being made productive.

The Little Desert plans coincided with another government proposal to allow pine plantations in the Kentbruck Heath region of south-western Victoria, where VNPA had been seeking declaration of a Lower Glenelg National Park.

Environmental groups united to fight these causes, especially the Little Desert, and formed the Save Our Bushland Action Committee (SOBAC) in which VNPA President Gwynneth Taylor played a major role. SOBAC received strong support from *The Age* and the wider public.

So strong was this community and political backlash that a change of direction began to emerge in Bolte's policies and administration, such as the establishment in 1970 of the Land Conservation Council (LCC) to advise on the 'balanced' usage of public land, and the creation of the Environment Protection Authority.

When Bolte retired in August 1972 and was replaced by Dick (Sir Rupert) Hamer, a new era commenced. And the new Premier even invited VNPA to a garden party at Government House.

Developments at Mt Buffalo

The only alpine area included in the 1956 Act was the long-standing reservation at Mt Buffalo where the Victorian Railways ran the Chalet. Defending this national park became a constant problem.

The main challenge at Mt Buffalo was over the perceived role of a national park. On the one hand, environmentalists argued that once declared, reservations should be permanent and that human activity needed to be tightly controlled in order to protect natural systems.

But outside the environmental movement there was another view – national parks were sometimes seen as little more than temporary reservations of recreational areas that could and should change and adapt to meet the needs of free enterprise, tourism and community recreation.

In 1960 the government legislated to enable areas within national parks to be leased for commercial purposes. Soon after, plans for a tourist development were announced for Mt Buffalo and in 1964 the Tatra Inn was opened.

VNPA staunchly opposed the leases and the presence of commercial enterprises within national parks, and while it failed initially at Mt Buffalo it took a stronger and ultimately successful stand against similar proposals at Wilsons Promontory.

At Mt Buffalo, however, there was periodic revival over the next eight years of a desire to create a recreational lake near the Inn, and in 1971 to undertake a major expansion of the premises. VNPA fought these all the way, and finally in 1972, after Bolte had retired, the Hamer Government announced that it would not allow any further development. In 1975 the lease was bought back.

Peaks and valleys – the 1970s and 1980s

Over the last 70 years VNPA has struggled up steep climbs to elated successes, interspersed

with deep plunges into frustrated disappointments as it has campaigned to protect nature in Victoria.

The years between 1970 and 1990 were particularly mountainous because of the charged political atmosphere and the crucial role played by the LCC. The LCC consisted principally of senior public servants, notably the Forests Commission of Victoria (FCV) which fought bitterly to reserve access of forests for the timber industry.

The main issues in these two decades included advocating national parks in the Alps, Grampians, Otways and East Gippsland, and resisting the woodchipping of old-growth forests.

An alpine national park?

One of VNPA's major ambitions was the creation of an Alpine National Park, but there were many interest groups opposed to the concept.

Local government bodies feared that national parks would damage the industries upon which their communities depended. Together with the Forests Commission and the timber industry, they opposed national

parks that would significantly curtail logging in alpine regions.

Over the years, the Forests Commission built an extensive network of access and firefighting tracks through sensitive alpine areas, much to the horror of the environmental community. Another source of concern, although more in East Gippsland, was the emergence in the late 1960s of the woodchipping industry.

Mountain cattlemen resisted any reduction of their leasing of mountain areas for summer cattle grazing. The Mountain Cattlemen's Association assured VNPA that cattle did not cause erosion, and that offroad vehicles and trailbikes were a greater problem. In the latter they may have been correct, for as affluence and mobility increased there was major influx of offroad vehicles in the 1960s.

Tourism more broadly, and snow skiing in particular, brought higher visitation and greater exploitation of alpine regions. Areas that VNPA hoped to have included in a national park were developed as ski resorts and tourist attractions, with all the accompanying road and accommodation impacts.

One of VNPA's principal contributions to the campaign and to public awareness was commissioning Dick Johnson to write *The Alps at the Crossroads*, an assertive assessment of the various threats to the Alps and the need for a national park. He was assisted by a team of VNPA people including Sandra Bardwell, Geoff Edwards and Ann and Lindsay Crawford. The book was published in 1974, quickly selling 10,000 and eventually 23,000 copies. It had a considerable impact on public knowledge and concern.

The LCC presented its first recommendations on the Alps in mid-1978 but, to the horror of environmentalists, only small areas were recommended for protection and there would be no significant new national parks. This was one of the deepest periods of disappointment.

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Mt Buffalo Big Walk



PHOTO: DARREN MCCLELLAND

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Regathering their strength, VNPA members prepared their response and threw themselves back into the campaign. The final LCC recommendations in 1979 were a minor improvement, including four small new national parks in the east and Alps: Wonnangatta-Moroka, Bogong, Cobberas-Tingaringy and Snowy River. There was also to be an Avon 'Wilderness' and other lesser extensions and creations.

However, grazing, mining and hunting were to continue in many areas, and others were to be logged before they were declared part of a protected area or national park. The latter concession was accepted by VNPA in order to get sufficient political support for the parks.

Premier Hamer accepted virtually all of the LCC recommendations and, in the face of intense lobbying by opponents, in 1981 the legislation establishing these parks was passed.

By then, faith in the Liberals had waned among environmentalists and a resurgent Labor Party had developed a promising environmental policy that included the large contiguous Alpine National Park that the VNPA craved. In 1982 the Labor government of John Cain was elected, and within weeks the new Minister, Evan Walker, directed the LCC to reopen a Special Investigation into the Alps.

Anticipation and success

VNPA spirits rose rapidly and it quickly produced a submission and looked forward with anxious anticipation for the LCC recommendations. When they were published in 1983, they included much of what VNPA wanted, and when the government accepted them there was a peak of elation.

Political reality then set in and there were another six years of political battle before the Alpine National Park was legislated for and declared. The main reasons for the delay were the opposition of the Liberal Party, National Party and Mountain Cattlemen, and



Hooded Plover at Belfast Coastal Reserve.

PHOTO: PATRICK KAVANAGH



Skiing at Feathertop.

PHOTO: ED DUNENS



Twelve Apostles.

PHOTO: JOHN BURNETT

Labor's difficulty in passing legislation through the Legislative Council.

Nevertheless, Minister for Conservation, Forests and Lands Joan Kirner, a keen supporter of the environment and the Alpine NP, used other means to promote the Alps. She undertook a cooperative management arrangement of the Alps with the NSW and ACT governments, and offered support for nominating the Australian Alps for World Heritage status.

Finally, the Liberal Party moderated its stand. Shadow Minister Marie Tehan was able to persuade her party to accept the Alpine Park legislation when it was presented by a new minister, Kay Setches, in 1989. After a long debate, many amendments and much negotiation the bill was passed in May and the Alpine National Park was declared on 2 December 1989.

This was one of the highest peaks reached by VNPA in its history.

The 90s: Keeping what we'd fought for

Political neutrality was very difficult in the 1990s as the Kennett Government was a far cry from the progressive stance on environmental matters of some earlier Liberals. The Kennett neo-liberal faith in small government and market forces, and its utilitarian view of the natural environment, eroded the values that had created the national park system. Government decisions frequently threatened environmental degradation through inappropriate tourist developments, commercialisation and privatisation. In the words of Doug Humann, the Director for most of the decade, the period was 'tumultuous' and 'like stepping through a minefield'.

While much VNPA time, energy and resources were devoted to filling gaps in the national park system, only 127,864 ha was added in these 7 years, while a significant outlay was required to fight a rear-guard defence of what had been won since the 1950s.

Filling the gaps

Victoria's Box-Ironbark Woodlands. By the late 20th century about 85 per cent of box-ironbark woodlands had been destroyed and most of the severely degraded remnant was in a few small forest areas. A campaign was led by Charlie Sherwin and Barry Traill and in 1996 the LCC began an assessment. It worked very slowly and its Report was not released before Kennett's defeat in 1999. It was left to the new Bracks Labor Government in the new century to legislate for protection of box-ironbark areas in 2002.

Central Highlands/Yarra Ranges. Since 1987 the LCC had been assessing this region, but most of its 1993 recommendations for a national park included land already in closed catchments around reservoirs. Led by Anne Casey, VNPA campaigned for a much greater area, but when Yarra Ranges NP was officially opened in December 1995, 80 per cent was made up of water catchments. It was only a quarter of what VNPA recommended and left 465,000 ha available for logging.

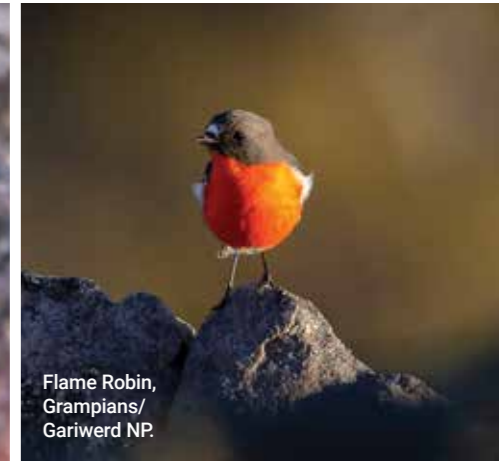
Marine, Coastal and Fisheries. Protection and conservation of coastlines and seas had been on the VNPA agenda since the 1970s and they were the ecosystems still least protected in the 1990s. The campaign was mainly led by Nicci Tsernjavski, Kate Brent and Tim Allen. In 1993 the LCC commenced work on an investigation but it became a complicated and drawn-out issue with a great deal of fishing and angling resistance. Here too, the final recommendations of the LCC and its successor, the Environment Conservation Council (ECC), had also not been released before the change of government in 1999.

Grasslands. Only remnants of previously widespread grassland ecological communities were extant across Victoria. VNPA's grasslands campaign, largely led by James Ross, encountered indifference



Tambja verconis, Blairgowrie.

PHOTO: IAN SCHOLEY



Flame Robin, Grampians/Gariwerd NP.

PHOTO: ED DUNENS



Chocolate Lily (Arthropodium strictum).

PHOTO: MARGARET MACDONALD



Alpine tree frog (Litoria verreauxii alpina).

PHOTO: MATT RUCHEL



Wombat State Forest.

PHOTO: SANDY SCHELTEMA

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(because the ecological value of grasslands was seldom recognised) and resistance (because of the value of the land for residential and other purposes). Finally, in 1997, 1277 ha of privately owned grassland at Terrick Terrick was acquired and added to the 2493 ha state park which in 1999 was declared Terrick Terrick National Park. The campaign was not over.

Defending what had been won

Overwhelmingly, during the Kennett years, VNPA was forced to defend what had been won in previous decades, because of government desire to commercialise and privatise parks and services. There were two issues in particular that were fought by VNPA.

Wilsons Promontory National Park. In November 1996, the government announced plans for the development of a 150-bed three star licenced 'lodge' at Tidal River plus other commercial developments. There was an immediate public backlash led by VNPA, with Karen Alexander managing the campaign, working with Doug Humann. Most notable was a gathering of volunteers on the Tidal River beach on 29 December 1996 where some of the 2000 in attendance shaped themselves into



Hands off the Prom protest, 1996.

PHOTO: JERRY GALEA, COURTESY OF THE AGE

the words 'Hands Off!', photographed from the air. In the face of public disquiet the government shelved the lodge and some of its ambitions but the potential threat remained, and VNPA maintained its campaigning until the change of government.

The Alps and the Alpine National Park. In 1996 Victoria entered the longest period of drought and high temperatures in its recorded history, which lasted until 2009. There was alarm at the impact on

fragile ecosystems, notably alpine regions which were already under the onslaught of clearing, logging, 4WD and bush bikes, cattle grazing and ski resorts. The most dramatic new threats were generated by pressure to expand and service ski resorts, notably a new resort at Mt Stirling, and the excision of land from the Alpine NP to add to the Falls Creek resort.

VNPA fought these and was successful in fending off the Mt Stirling plans but was aghast at the precedent set by the excision of part of a national park. Added to this, in 1998 the government reissued cattle grazing licences in the Alpine NP for another seven years.

A new century and a changing climate 1999 to 2010

A dominant issue from 1997–2009 was that much of eastern Australia was in sustained and profound drought with rainfall in Victoria below the long-term average and temperatures in the top 10 per cent. One result was three of the worst periods of bushfires since colonisation, in January–March 2003, December 2006–February 2007 and February–March 2009. Climate change

had arrived, although not everyone in the community was convinced.

Politically it was a more amenable and productive period. In 1999 the Kennett Government was defeated by Labor's Steve Bracks. Bracks was succeeded by John Brumby, and the Liberals did not return to government until Ted Baillieu won office in December 2010.

Labor fulfilled many of VNPA's aspirations, thanks substantially to two consultative and determined Ministers: Sherryl Garbutt to 2006 and then John Thwaites to 2007. Some gains/advances were rapid, others slow and watered down largely because the Liberals and Nationals controlled a hostile Legislative Council. Nevertheless, the Bracks/Brumby period added 364,473 ha to Victoria's parks. As gaps in the parks system were filled, wider environmental challenges drew VNPA into landscape-wide environmental issues.

1999–2002: Three frustrating but successful years

The new government's first achievement was a National Parks Amendment Bill in June 2000 to return the 285 ha that had been excised at Mt Mackay back into the Alpine NP. Soon after, the government introduced legislation to replace the ECC with the Victorian Environment Assessment Council (VEAC) but met stronger resistance, particularly because the new authority was to be able to consider private land. The opposition parties refused to compromise and the government was forced to concede that VEAC would be limited to Crown land. The legislation was passed in December 2001 and the VEAC Council appointed in July 2002.

Marine Parks. After two decades of agitation by VNPA and 7 years of assessment, in early 2000 the LCC released marine recommendations. There followed nearly three years of campaigning by VNPA (led by Chris Smyth) to combat resistance from

fishing and other interest groups and the Opposition. At one point the government withdrew legislation because of the impasse. Finally, on 13 June 2002 bipartisan support passed a Marine Parks Bill. The parks were formally gazetted on 16 November 2002. The achievement was groundbreaking as Victoria was now a world leader in having a network of marine national parks and protected areas. A sobering realisation was that only 5 per cent of relevant waters were yet protected.

Box-Ironbark Parks. The box-ironbark campaign followed a similar trajectory. The long-delayed LCC recommendations in 2000 and 2001 were deeply disappointing, providing for only 6% of this greatly reduced and threatened ecosystem. Only 17 per cent had survived since colonisation and most would still be left open to further exploitation for timber and mining.

A political standoff continued until about ten weeks before November 2002 election, when the government introduced legislation. Under considerable public pressure the Liberal Party supported the legislation which passed in October 2002. It provided for 69,000 ha of national parks, 27,000 ha of state parks,

7,000 ha of national heritage parks and 59,000 ha of nature conservation reserves. This was a very large total, but fell short of the ideal level of protection in many areas. The parks were proclaimed on 20 October 2002.

Battles still to be won

Fiery Climate, the Alps and Cattle Grazing. As the drought worsened, there was increased concern about impacts on Victoria's natural systems from future climate change including heat stress, reduced rainfall, water shortages and bushfires. Among many areas, the Alpine NP and Grampians/Gariwerd NP were badly burned. Damage to the Alpine NP made it even more important to remove cattle grazing and in the face of trenchant opposition a major campaign led by Phil Ingamells, Charlie Sherwin and Tom Guthrie ensued. Finally, legislation to stop the practice passed through the Legislative Council in June 2005 – after 50 years of campaigning. However, the Liberal and National Parties threatened to return the cattle once re-elected.

Red Gum Forests. The red gum forests and wetlands lining the Murray River and tributaries were unprotected and increasingly stressed by the

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Hindmarsh
Landcare
Network.

PHOTO: HEATHER DRENDEL

Tidal River, Wilsons Prom



PHOTO: JACOB DYER / UNSPLASH

Continued from previous page

drought. VNPA conducted a long campaign that saw Nick Roberts, Phil Ingamells and Geoff Lacey work with local groups including, most importantly, the Yorta Yorta traditional owners. In 2005 a VEAC study commenced on the stretch from Yarrowonga to Swan Hill. Its interim report in 2007 was described by VNPA as 'outstanding' and 'visionary'. After much opposition and delay, legislation was passed in November 2009 to protect 100,000 ha of red gum forest including four new national parks: Barmah, Gunbower, Lower Goulburn River and Warby Range-Ovens River. The parks were declared in June 2010.

A small number of new or enlarged parks was established during this decade, including, the Greater Otway NP, Point Nepean NP and Cobboboonee NP. Less successful overall were the campaigns to protect Victorian remnant grasslands, despite the efforts of James Ross and John Sampson. A joint federal-state process called the Melbourne Strategic Assessment resulted in some limited grasslands protections in the Melbourne region.

As gaps were filled, VNPA was determined to respond to the impacts of climate change and mounting recognition of the extent of damage to the environment since European arrival. Victorian ecosystems were under enormous stress, both within and without supposedly protected areas.

Declaration of a park or reserve was not sufficient to ensure its long-term health. There was a need for a landscape-scale approach to protecting and repairing what was left of Victorian ecosystems and VNPA worked on numerous environmental issues. Much effort was focussed on the protection or rehabilitation of 'remnants' – small areas of valuable ecosystems, often isolated and vulnerable, on government and private land. For a number of years Karen Alexander ran the Remnants Project to address these issues.



River Red Gum at Neds Corner on Potterwalkagee Creek.

PHOTO: PAUL SINCLAIR

VNPA increasingly worked with other organisations in 'networks' (e.g. Victoria Naturally) and recruited large numbers of volunteers for working bees to plant, weed and other rehabilitation activity in such as Project Hindmarsh and Grow West. Monitoring programs such as ReefWatch and NatureWatch were cooperative activities using volunteers.

Inevitably, there were spotfires to be put out or small conflagrations to deal with, some of which included: the fruit bats in the Melbourne Botanic Gardens, wind farms, a proposed toxic waste facility near Nowingie and the Hattah-Kulkyne NP, channel deepening in Port Phillip, and a high speed train through eastern Victorian forests. • PW

A full version of the updated VNPA History, by Don Garden, will be published in coming months.

70 YEARS OF *Park Watch*

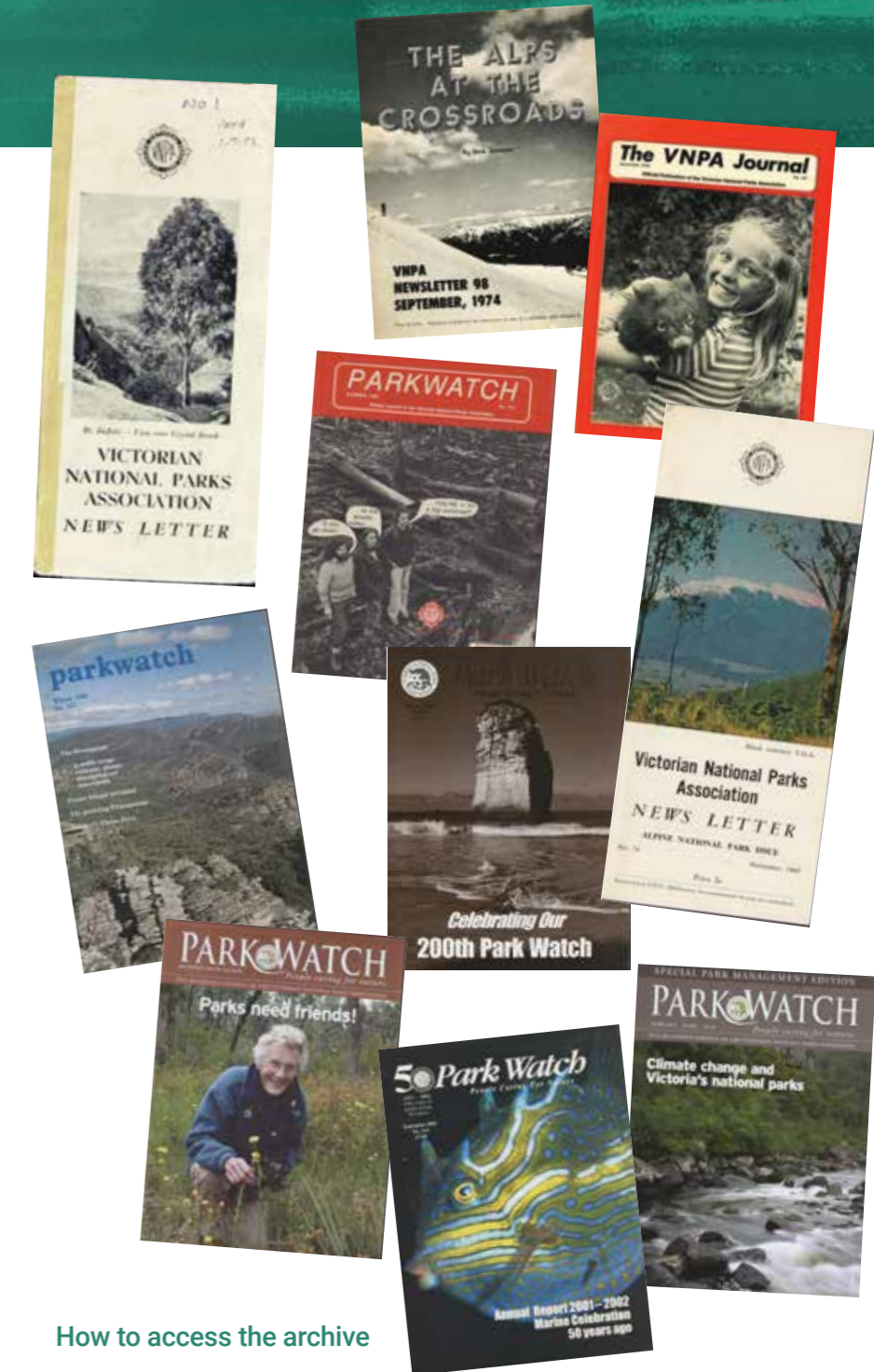
FINANCE & OPERATIONS MANAGER
HEATH RICKARD REPORTS
WE ARE WORKING TOWARDS
UPLOADING EVERY EDITION OF
PARK WATCH – ALL 70 YEARS
AND NEARLY 300 EDITIONS OF IT!
– TO THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF
AUSTRALIA'S TROVE ARCHIVE.

We all love reading *Park Watch*. However, finding copies of those early editions outside of the VNPA office has always been a challenge – until now! As part of VNPA's 70th anniversary celebrations, and funded through the Public Record Office of Victoria's Local History Grants Program, *Park Watch* is now available and searchable in digital form online through the National Library of Australia's Trove website.

Trove is an online catalogue hosted by the National Library of Australia (NLA) which includes digital copies of newspapers, maps, magazines and newsletters, books, pictures, photographs, government gazettes, archived websites, interviews and music. Trove contains more than 6 billion digital items collated from hundreds of Trove partners across Australia, including libraries, museums, galleries, the media, government and community organisations.

Over the last 12 months, VNPA in partnership with the State Library of Victoria and the NLA have professionally digitised 6,458 pages of *Park Watch* which are now published across three catalogues, one for each title – the *VNPA News Letter*, *The VNPA Journal* and *Park Watch*.

The VNPA's first quarterly publication, the *VNPA News Letter* started in 1953, just one year after incorporation. The *News Letter* was offset printed and published as a folded DL size format for than 20 years. In 1973, the publication was refreshed in a magazine format, and in 1975 renamed the *VNPA Journal*. This only lasted a few years until 1978 when the first edition of *Park Watch* was printed, initially with just a coloured cover. It finally went full colour in 2007. • PW



How to access the archive

There are two ways:

- 1 Search text:** Go to www.trove.nla.gov.au, enter your text and click search. To narrow your results, select 'Magazines and Newsletters' from the *Categories*. Note this will search across all of Trove, not just in the *Park Watch* catalogue. Give it a try...
 - Search 'Crosbie Morrison' – 1,335 results
 - Search 'BWAG' – 136 results
 - Search 'Nature Conservation Review' – 36 results
 - Search 'Organ Pipes National Park' – 88 results
- 2 Browse:** If you would like to browse through publications, you can view each catalogue separately:
 - *VNPA News Letter* – go to www.nla.gov.au/nla.obj-3009073188
 - *The VNPA Journal* – go to www.nla.gov.au/nla.obj-3009230349
 - *Park Watch* – go to www.nla.gov.au/nla.obj-3009287070

Note: This catalogue only goes to March 2012. The most recent editions will be added shortly to provide a full searchable catalogue of *Park Watch* from 1953 to now.

Epic achievements for people & nature

THE STORY OF THE CONSERVATION MOVEMENT IN VICTORIA IS RICH IN MORAL COURAGE, PASSION & DOGGED PERSISTENCE. TOGETHER WITH OUR COMMUNITY, WE'VE BEEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF NATURE PROTECTION FOR 70 YEARS, WITH OUTSTANDING RESULTS

PEOPLE FOR NATURE
Vision and a deep passion for parks protection leads to our creation

1952



50s

1954

DAY AT THE PROM
A trip to Wilsons Promontory marks our first adventure into community-led nature activities which continue to this day



1956

CLASS ACT
Our tireless advocacy inspires the first Victorian National Parks Act & the founding of the National Parks Authority

GROW WEST PROJECT
We partner with local communities to rejuvenate 10,000 ha in the Werribee River catchment

2003



2002

WORLD FIRST
Victoria creates world's first marine national parks & sanctuaries after years of relentless advocacy

ICONIC FORESTS
Box-Ironbark forests protected in new national parks



1996

HANDS OFF THE PROM!
We lead a successful campaign to protect Wilsons Prom from a large-scale hotel development



1989

SECOND ACT
New & improved National Parks Act passed

1975

TRAIL BLAZERS
We publish Victoria's first ever nature conservation review

1971

LITTLE DESERT
The campaign to protect the Little Desert gains it national park status & sparks the Land Conservation Council (today's Victorian Environmental Assessment Council)

1970

60s

EYES ON NATURE
Community nature monitoring starts – today NatureWatch & ReefWatch offer invaluable ecology & science activities & resources

1962



Alan Jordan/STV

70s

HIGH HOPES
A campaign run with local partners bears fruit with the creation of the Grampians National Park

1984

80s

TOP NOTCH
• The Alpine National Park declared after decades of advocacy by VNPA & other dedicated groups
• Point Nepean National Park established

PARKS GALORE
New & bigger parks in the Mallee: Murray-Sunset National Park & Big Desert Wilderness Park

1990

A GREAT CITY DESERVES A GREAT NATIONAL PARK
We lobby for the Ash Ranges National Park to be expanded – state leaders rename it Yarra Ranges National Park (protecting a quarter of what we propose)

1995

YAY FOR THE BAY!
We unite with conservation groups & local community to stop AGL's proposed gas import terminal in Western Port Bay

2021

PROMISE OF NEW PARKS
Commitment for 50,000 ha of new central west national parks, protecting 370 rare & threatened animals, plants & insects



Patrick Kavanagh

2020

HOODIES NOT HOOVES!
A fierce community campaign yields protection for Hooded Plovers from commercial horse racing on beaches at Belfast Coastal Reserve



Sandy Schalteema

2020s

2022 & BEYOND

- Central west national parks come into being
- Defend the integrity of parks from inappropriate development & uses
- Fund parks for a changing climate
- Fill the gaps to complete the conservation estate
- Stronger protection for rare & special places & wildlife
- Grow community love for nature through citizen science, experiences & education
- Hold elected representatives to account so laws & agencies actually protect nature
- Find new ways to be more inclusive & diversify our community

2019

HUGE PROGRESS

- Inaugural Melbourne Sea Slug Census launched
- Our proposal for a new Marine & Coastal Act is realised
- After years of campaigning a plan to control feral horses Victoria's Alpine National Park is enacted
- Groups gather audio records of wildlife for Communities Listening for Nature

2018

VISIONS FOR NATURE
Our advocacy for a long-term vision for Victoria's biodiversity results in the Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037 strategy

2017

FAMILIES GO WILD
Launch of Wild Families program

2010

RIVER RED GUM PARKS
Twenty years of work rewarded with the protection of almost 100,000 ha in new River Red Gum national parks



2009

GETTING INTO NATURE
We run 400+ bushwalking & outdoor activities annually!

2005

FISH DO COUNT
'Friendliest fish in the sea,' the Blue Gopro, is provided protection after being recorded during our annual Great Victorian Fish Count



Paul Simclair

2010s

NATURE RETURNS
NatureWatch volunteers record first Southern Brown Bandicoots in Bunyip State Park since 1981

2012

HOOVES OFF
Forty years of effort pays off with cattle grazing ban in the Alpine National Park legislated

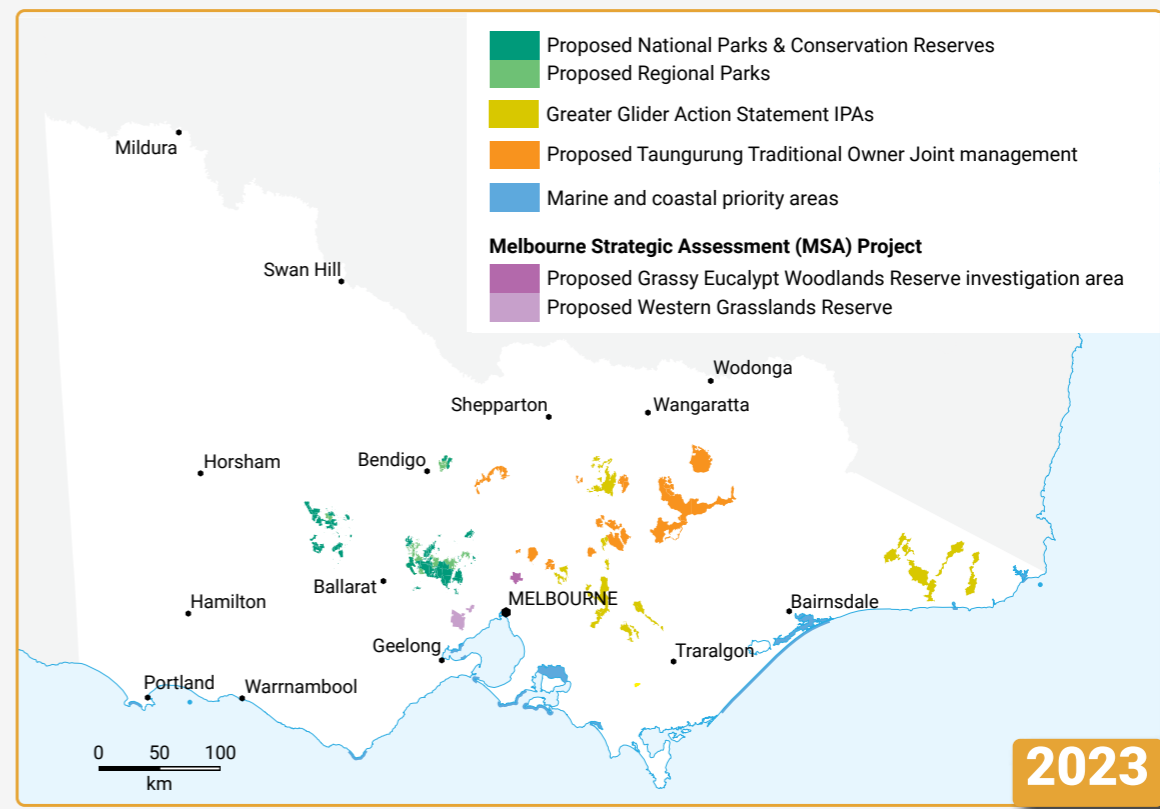
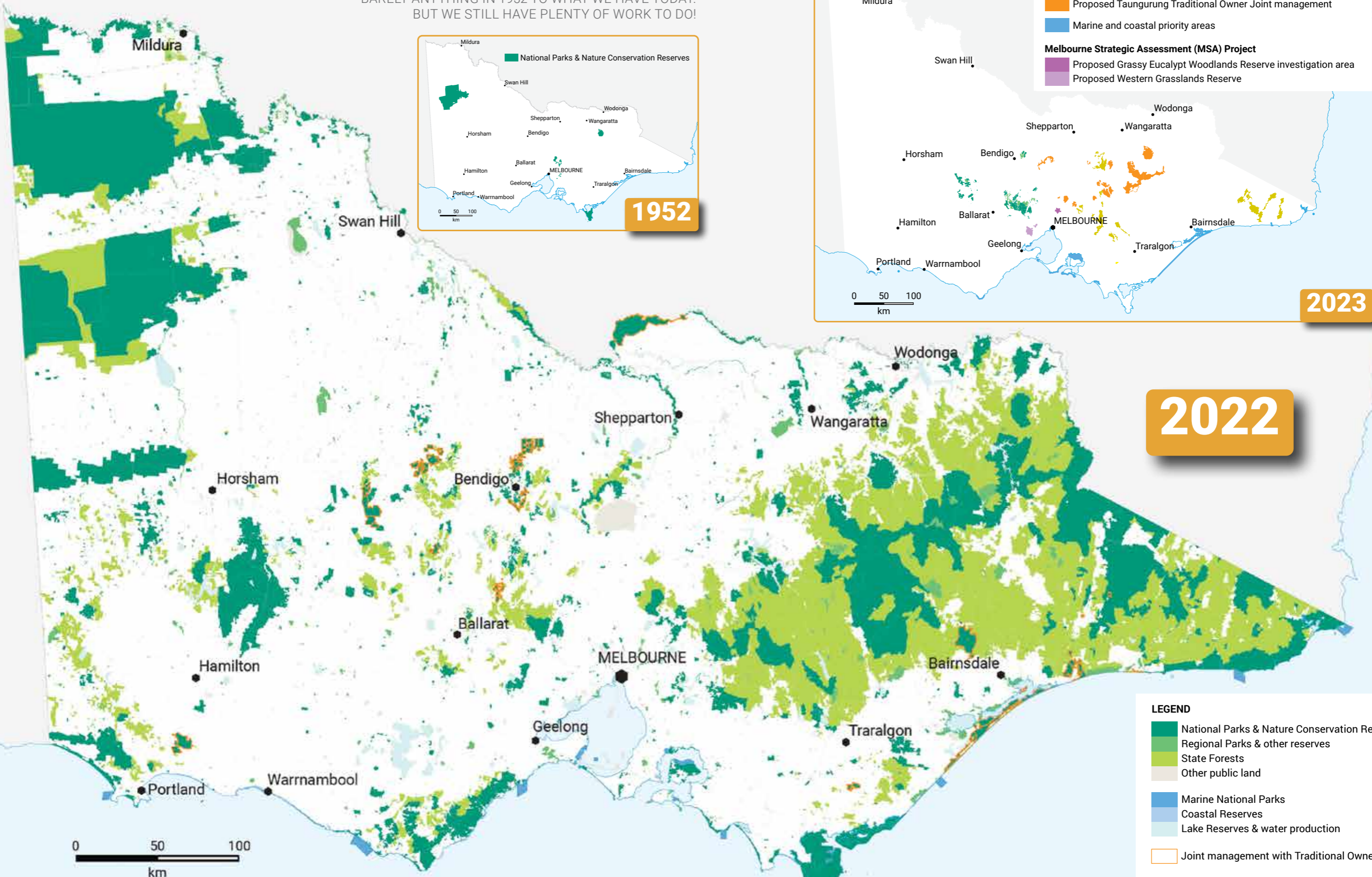
2014

2015

DEFENDING NATURE
99-year lease clause that incentivises commercial developments in parks is removed from National Parks Act

Our parks: yesterday, today & tomorrow

IN OUR 70 YEARS, WE HAVE OVERSEEN VICTORIA'S PARKS INCREASE FROM BARELY ANYTHING IN 1952 TO WHAT WE HAVE TODAY. BUT WE STILL HAVE PLENTY OF WORK TO DO!



2022

LEGEND

- National Parks & Nature Conservation Reserves
- Regional Parks & other reserves
- State Forests
- Other public land
- Marine National Parks
- Coastal Reserves
- Lake Reserves & water production
- Joint management with Traditional Owners

People in parks

VICTORIANS HAVE ALWAYS ENJOYED ACTIVITIES IN OUR NATIONAL PARKS. HERE IS A SMALL SELECTION OF SNAPSHOTS THROUGHOUT THE LAST 70 YEARS.



1954: Walking to Mt Oberon
Kevin Patterson/SLV



1963: Ann Crawford at Wilsons Prom



1987: Friends of Grampians Gariwerd campout
Margo Sistsma



1989: Major Mitchell Plateau, Grampians/Gariwerd
Martin Lenard



1970: Jordan family camping in the Victorian Alps
Alan Jordan/SLV



1981: Walking along the Thompson River, Mt Baw Baw National Park
Don Murray



1993: Brisbane Ranges National Park
Hilary Howes



Mitchell River
Carl Gardiner



2001: Barbara Archer at Loch Ard Gorge
David Archer



2007: Hiking near Bendigo
Darren McClelland



2010: Mt Buffalo Big Walk
Darren McClelland



1985: Lake Tali Karng Walk in the Alps
Glenn Hilling



1986: Lining up for the thunder box in the Otways
Glenn Hilling



2017: Jack's first swim, Barmah NP
Sarah Johnson



2019: Wild Families snorkel at Rye
Nicole Mertens



2021: Goongerah Easter weekend camp
Paul Clifton



Turning a moment into a movement: the collective future of biosecurity

BIOSECURITY HAS TRADITIONALLY BEEN A DOMAIN OF GOVERNMENT. THE DECADE OF BIOSECURITY AIMS TO SEE ALL AUSTRALIANS TAKE RESPONSIBILITY, REPORTS NATURE CAMPAIGNER **JORDAN CROOK**.

Earlier this year government, industry, conservation and Traditional Owner groups gathered on the Gold Coast at the second Australian Biosecurity Symposium to share research and exchange knowledge and ideas about biosecurity in Australia.

The crescendo to this inspiring and informative symposium was the declaration of the 'Decade of Biosecurity'. This idea, was inspired by the 1980s declaration of the Decade of Landcare that led to today's national movement that works with regional landholders to improve ecological outcomes on private land.

The catch cry for the Decade of Biosecurity is 'Turning a moment into a movement' – an ambitious long-term vision that includes all Australians in its scope.



Quaking Grass

PHOTO: BEN GILL

Across our parks and wild places we see and feel the impact of poor biosecurity choices made by past and existing authorities. From weed invasions and grazed plants to feral rabbits and deer. But most notable is what we don't see and hear in our landscapes anymore.

Pest plants, animals and pathogens don't care about land tenures or borders, conservation areas, production areas or urban areas but their presence is felt across all these. These impacts need to be tackled across all these areas to make solid long-lasting inroads in reducing their effect.

For a long time legislation, enforcement and research have been predominately focused on reducing the threat of new, emerging and existing biosecurity threats on agricultural production. Pests that impact only environmentally significant areas are often not dealt with in an effective or strategic manner to stop their spread and start their eradication in many cases.

The Decade of Biosecurity is a chance to 'reimagine our biosecurity system, engage all Australians and enact

more inclusive, ambitious and effective measures'. This gives great hope for a future where new and emerging pest and diseases are stopped before they entrench themselves in our parks and farm lands, and existing threats are managed by communities to the benefit of everyone: our unique native plants, animals and ecosystems.

On 20 September, Minister for Agriculture Gayle Tierney launched Victoria's Biosecurity Statement, which sets out ways industry and government can work together to protect our environment and economy. VNPA welcomes this statement. We've long needed a more cohesive approach to how we can look after both our natural and cultural heritage, and the state's agricultural sector.

There's now a clear future where the biosecurity challenges of the food and fibre industries are tackled *without* compromising the health and well-being of the natural world.

For more information on the Decade of Biosecurity and to join the movement head to biosecurity2030.org.au

VNPA attended the 2nd Australian Biosecurity Symposium on the Gold Coast with support of the Invasive Species Council.

Tribute

Raimonne and John McCutchan

(1931 – 2022)

WE CELEBRATE AND REMEMBER RAIMONNE AND JOHN MCCUTCHAN – DEDICATED MEMBERS, ACTIVE VOLUNTEERS AND GENEROUS SUPPORTERS OF THE VICTORIAN NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION.

John and Raimonne were a great team, married for 64 years with a loving family of four children and 10 grandchildren. They loved nature, bushwalking and cross-country skiing, particularly in Victoria's alpine regions. They joined as members of VNPA in 1986.

Raimonne was a teacher, and after she started taking students on walks, she embarked on a bushwalking leadership course which included a practical element of leading group walks. Fortunately, Raimonne chose to join VNPA to fulfil that requirement and she led many walks and also became a mentor for other leaders. In 1994 Raimonne started up regular 'mid-week walks' for VNPA as a 'celebration of the freedom of retirement' and there was a regular following for these walks including the special Christmas walk where John would meet Raimonne and her loyal followers at the end of the walk with champagne!

Raimonne and John were passionate about campaigns to protect Victoria's forests and alpine areas and wrote many letters to their local MPs. They also helped protect nature with their family, such as participating in Grow West tree planting days, and by setting up and monitoring nest boxes in their garden which provided homes for birds and gliders. In 2018



Three generations planting trees together – John and Raimonne with their family at the Grow West community planting day in 2017. Left to Right (granddaughter April, John, Raimonne, son-in-law Mark, daughter Jennifer).

PHOTO COURTESY OF GROW WEST



John and Raimonne hiking at the Forests Forever Easter Ecology Camp in East Gippsland delivered by East Gippsland Environment in partnership with the VNPA in 2018.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MCCUTCHAN FAMILY

they loved attending the remote 'Forests Forever Easter Ecology Camp' in East Gippsland – three days of camping with other keen nature conservationists exploring the incredible forests and learning from experts.

Raimonne was also a wonderful office volunteer – helping to mailout *Park Watch* and scour the newspapers to track VNPA mentions in the media and relevant nature conservation issues. Raimonne also made a special effort to have a friendly chat with each of the staff and volunteers in the office whenever she was there. Raimonne, supported by John, was always willing to go the extra mile for VNPA with her volunteering such as bus monitor for the 'We love parks' picnic and human sign

at Mount Donna Buang 2017. The McCutchans were also always familiar faces at our AGMs, picnics and events.

John and Raimonne made the wonderful commitment to give regularly for many years to support our work. And more recently they also made two generous gifts to support the protection of forests and woodlands, and were proud to see the progress made due to this support.

Raimonne and John certainly lived their lives to the full – enjoying nature, inspiring and supporting their family and others to love nature, as well as doing all they could to protect the natural places they loved. • PW

A memorial celebration was held for Raimonne and John on 22 September 2022.



Safeguarding our seas – now and for the next 20 years

VICTORIA'S MARINE PROTECTION LEGACY IS OUT OF DATE AND NOW LAGS BEHIND OTHER STATES. THIS YEAR'S 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF MARINE NATIONAL PARKS AND SANCTUARIES IS A TIMELY REMINDER TO UP OUR GAME ON MARINE PROTECTION.

On 16 November 2022, we celebrate 20 years since Victoria created of the world's first network of marine national parks and sanctuaries.

In March's *Park Watch* we celebrated our protected underwater worlds, and in June we revisited the community campaign that resulted in their creation. In this edition we explain how, 20 years on, successive governments have dropped the ball – not only have they failed to invest more in our current marine parks, but they've also abandoned plans for any new ones. We explain how the next Victorian Government can step up for our marine environment. But first let's take a second to recap how it is we got to this point.

VNPA's vision: 'A diverse and resilient Victorian marine environment safeguarded for future generations through an extensive network of highly protected areas forming the core of a comprehensive marine conservation and management system.'

How far we've come

Topping the list of achievements over our 70 long years of nature conservation is the creation of Victoria's marine network, created in 2002 by the Bracks Government. Since then, we've seen marine friends' groups and local champions stepping up as guardians for these special places, undertaking citizen science activities and leading the public on journeys of discovery. We've also seen more and more Victorians enjoy snorkelling, diving, rock pooling, kayaking, and walking in these precious salty playgrounds.

From a scientific perspective, Parks Victoria's Research Partner Program has helped us discover what lies beneath the surface using technology and people power. Some of these learnings include:

- The discovery of rare and important rhodolith beds in some of the parks comprising colourful, unattached calcareous nodules of significant age made by a coralline red alga.

- Higher fish and invertebrate richness inside parks than out, particularly in larger remote parks (including for the economically and ecologically important lobster and abalone).
- After the overexpansion of urchin populations, urchin control programs have been successful in the recovery of kelp forests.
- Smaller parks, and ones closer to human populations and ports, had lower richness of fish, suggesting that compliance and enforcement efforts will need to be greater for parks here (i.e. parks in Port Phillip Bay).
- In the Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park fish species such as the Bluethroat Wrasse and Horseshoe Leatherjacket showed increases in number present since its declaration, indicating the benefits of no-take protection for fish populations.
- Particular habitats are over-represented inside parks across the state while sediment habitats tended to be under-represented. This confirms there are gaps within our current network.

Wilson's Promontory Marine National Park has even been recognised as a global ocean refuge to honour its strong protection of marine ecosystems and biodiversity.

So, what's the problem with the current network?

At the time of the declaration the network was said to be comprehensive, adequate and a representative sample of the state's marine habitats, based on the best available knowledge. But as we all know politics often gets in the way of good science and there were last minute deals done to 'water down' the parks. Some parks were reduced in size, and many critical areas worthy of protection (fishing was a big driver).

Over the last 20 years several independent government assessments have reflected on the shortcomings of Victoria's marine network. This includes:

The State-wide Assessment of public Land (2017): 'the existing system of no-take marine protected areas has some gaps in representation, and individual marine protected areas may not meet the adequacy criterion'

Disappointingly, the Andrews Government response explicitly ruled out consideration of new marine national parks: 'The review will not include recommendations to expand Victoria's marine protected area system. It is current government policy that no new marine national parks will be created'.

A 2010 review of Victoria's marine protected areas (MPAs) found they did not meet national criteria of comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness. Both the 2013 and 2018 *Victorian State of the Environment* reports highlighted the limited protection afforded by current MPAs.

To address the problem, these reports continued to recommend the government 'undertake a review for the comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness of Victoria's marine protected areas.'

Despite the science and recommendations, we've seen a continued rejection and refusal to address this issue from our elected representatives. This has resulted in the legacy for Victoria as the second lowest state or territory with their waters as no-take marine protected areas – a mere 5.3 per cent of our coastline. Compare this to almost 18 per cent protection of our terrestrial environment.

Continued overleaf

- 1 Discovery Bay Marine National Park
Whale nursery ground
- 2 Merri Marine Sanctuary
Little Penguins roost and breed on the islands within
- 3 The Arches Marine Sanctuary
Spectacular underwater limestone formations
- 4 Twelve Apostles Marine National Park
Rugged cliffs and spectacular rock stacks
- 5 Marengo Reefs Marine Sanctuary
Two small reefs featuring seaweed gardens and sponge gardens
- 6 Eagle Rock Marine Sanctuary
Kelp forests with a variety of seastars, crabs and sea anemones
- 7 Point Addis Marine National Park
Haunt of the mysterious Weedy Sea Dragon
- 8 Point Danger Marine Sanctuary
Limestone reef filled high diversity of weird and wonderful critters
- 9 Barwon Bluff Marine Sanctuary
Lava flow formed basalt reefs with bull kelp and schooling fish
- 10 Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park
Internationally recognised dive and snorkel sites, made up of six separate marine areas
- 11 Point Cooke Marine Sanctuary
Diversity of sponges, sea-urchins, crustaceans, sharks and skates
- 12 Jawbone Marine Sanctuary
The largest occurrence of mangroves in Port Phillip Bay
- 13 Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuary
Rockpool and snorkelers wonderland
- 14 Mushroom Reef Marine Sanctuary
Diverse intertidal rocky reef communities
- 15 Churchill Island Marine National Park
Significant roosting and breeding sites for migratory birds
- 16 Yaringa National Park
Mangroves and mudflats important for migratory birds and juvenile fish
- 17 French Island Marine National Park
Part of Western Ports significant Ramsar-listed wetlands
- 18 Bunurong Marine National Park
Exploration of intertidal platforms and rock pools
- 19 Wilson's Promontory Marine National Park
Underwater caves and sponge gardens
- 20 Corner Inlet Marine National Park
The only extensive beds of Posidonia seagrass in Victoria
- 21 Ninety Mile Beach Marine National Park
Vast underwater plains rich in sea life
- 22 Beware Reef Marine Sanctuary
Tremendous biodiversity of fish, corals species
- 23 Point Hicks Marine National Park
Spectacular sub-tidal reef
- 24 Cape Howe Marine National Park
Where many species from warmer northern waters reach their southern limits



Continued from previous page

This is highly alarming given the Federal Labor Government has signed Australia up to achieve 30 per cent protection of land and sea by 2030, with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals having set the bare minimum at 10 per cent protection.

This is a critical oversight given increased energy developments including oil, gas, offshore wind and electricity, as well as serious climate change risks. Our seas are often the first to feel the impacts of these changes, with our southern seas experiencing some of the fastest warming on the planet.

Investing in marine protected areas leaves climate refuge areas for marine life to adapt, where they are given a helping hand to ward off invasive species, and given a break from extraction and development.

It is clear Victoria falls well short of our responsibilities as guardians for our marine world. We were once a world leader but are now woefully behind almost every other jurisdiction in Australia.

A case for additional protection

The Victorian marine environment is unique, with 80 per cent of its plants and animals found nowhere else on

earth. Our current marine protected areas are a good start, but if we're going to meet Australian and global standards, Victoria needs to step up and expand our marine park network.

We've already undertaken work to identify new areas worthy of protection to fill Victoria's shortfalls. After working with leading scientists, collating and interpreting information from VNPA's scientific *Nature Conservation Review 2014*, 20 priority areas needing protection were identified. These include some new areas, and the expansion of existing protected areas.

We first determined the degree of existing threats these areas face, established their conservation values (based on ecosystem resilience), ecosystem processes and their vulnerability to threats. The final step was to rate the conservation value of each area based on the distribution of important habitats they contain, their degree of ecosystem integrity, rarity and diversity.

These twenty priority areas include:

1. Bridgewater Bay (aka Cape Bridgewater) – contains sediment beds and seagrass that are important habitats for many species of fish, crustaceans (including the threatened Ghost Shrimp) and other marine animals.

2. Deen Maar (Lady Julia Percy Island) – home to an Australian fur seal breeding colony, is a rookery for the common diving petrel, and provides breeding habitat for the White-bellied Sea-eagle and Fairy Prion.

3. Cape Otway – an extensive and highly complex reef system extending into the ocean and offering highly varied and unique physical habitat for a diverse range of species.

4. The coast from Point Lillias to Point Wilson – contains seagrass and saltmarsh habitat of high conservation value. Saltmarshes support plants that can tolerate high soil salinity, high temperatures and occasional inundation by salt water, and are very important as food for aquatic species and for recycling nutrients. The area is also home to the critically endangered Orange-bellied Parrot.

5. The area from Point Wilson to Kirk Point – contains seagrass habitat. Seagrass strengthens the resilience of our bays. The area is currently unprotected and is at risk of degradation or destruction.

6. Wedge Point – is an ideal sheltered environment for a unique drift algae community.

7. The sheltered marine environment off Clifton Springs – contains flowering seagrass beds that support very high marine productivity.

8. Point Nepean – contains significant *Amphibolis* seagrass habitat and is a dolphin refuge. The current boundary of Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park must be extended to encompass the full extent of seagrass habitat, and protect the dolphin refuge at Ticonderoga Bay. Point Nepean also has deep reef and canyon habitats that support highly diverse sponge gardens.

9. The Flinders-Honeysuckle-Merricks coast – has significant reef areas that support colonies of iconic sea-dragons and species-rich *Amphibolis* seagrass meadows. This area has rare sea cucumbers present.

10. Cape Schanck or Phillip Island – deep reefs, pinnacles canyons support incredibly diverse communities of sedentary invertebrates such as sponges, sea tulips and lace corals.

11. Summerland Peninsula and Seal Rocks – are home to a seal breeding colony and include an important Great White Shark feeding area. They also have a penguin colony and mutton-bird rookery. Reef areas here are highly productive and support

important kelp habitat. Kelp forests offer shelter, habitat and food to fish, sea snails, lace corals, sponges, crabs and many other species.

12. Crawfish Rock – is a pinnacle reef with unique seaweed and invertebrate communities. There is a high diversity of sponges and hydroids. A listed hydroid species is only found on this rock. Covering a small area, this community is vulnerable to environmental changes in Western Port.

13. The North Arm of Western Port Bay – contains significant and unique channel habitats, and supports extensive seagrass beds, mangrove and saltmarsh habitats. It also contains the Barrellier Island bird roost. The boundaries of the existing French Island, Yaringa and Churchill Island marine national parks must be extended to protect these critically important habitats.

14. Bunurong Marine and Coastal Park – contains significant *Amphibolis* seagrass habitat and is home to the threatened sea cucumber *Pentocnus bursatus*. The crevice habitats here are unique in Victoria.

15. Anderson Inlet – contains important sandflat and saltmarsh habitat. It is also important as a

- 1 Bridgewater Bay (aka Cape Bridgewater)
- 2 Deen Maar (Lady Julia Percy Island)
- 3 Cape Otway
- 4 The coast from Point Lillias to Point Wilson
- 5 The area from Point Wilson to Kirk Point
- 6 Wedge Point
- 7 The sheltered marine environment off Clifton Springs
- 8 Point Nepean
- 9 The Flinders-Honeysuckle-Merricks coast
- 10 Cape Schanck and Phillip Island
- 11 Summerland Peninsula and Seal Rocks
- 12 Crawfish Rock
- 13 The North Arm of Western Port Bay
- 14 Bunurong Marine and Coastal Park
- 15 Anderson Inlet
- 16 Ninety Mile Beach
- 17 The Gippsland Lakes
- 18 Bemm Reef
- 19 Mallacoota Inlet
- 20 Gabo Island

feeding, breeding and resting place for birds. Enclosed lagoon habitats and estuary grass (*Ruppia*) here are also of high conservation value.

16. Ninety Mile Beach – has the most biologically diverse sediment beds in the world, and important reef areas. It is also a shorebird breeding habitat. The boundaries of the existing marine national park must be expanded to encompass these areas.

17. The Gippsland Lakes – an area of high wetland bird diversity, has Ramsar listed wetlands of international significance and contains highly significant coastal and dune habitats. Seagrasses and *Ruppia*/estuarine grass, in addition to important

Continued overleaf

Continued from previous page

coastal grasses and heath, are all found here. The lakes are also an important feeding, breeding and resting area for birds.

18. The Bemm Reef – area experiences upwelling of sea water, and as a result is an area of extremely high marine diversity and productivity. It is home to significant filter-feeding communities and supports a great diversity of seaweeds.

19. Mallacoota Inlet – is important as a feeding and roosting area for birds. The area has important sandflat and saltmarsh habitat, as well as *Ruppia* and lagoon habitats, and is of high conservation value.

20. Gabo Island – is home to a penguin colony and seabird rookery. It supports a highly diverse invertebrate community and a high diversity of fish species, and is important for threatened species such as the White-bellied Sea-eagle, Humpback Whale and the Southern Right Whale

Most of these priority areas identified by VNPA and expert marine scientists were also earmarked for protection in the original investigation that recommended the marine national parks and sanctuaries back in 2002.

Support is strong

The last polling opinion poll commissioned by VNPA on marine national parks shows that the majority of Victorians support having marine national parks, with **'81.5 per cent of people support having marine national parks and sanctuaries aimed to protect marine habitats (43.9 per cent strongly support, 37.6 per cent support)'**.

How can the next Victorian Government step up for marine?

The Andrews Government has made some solid moves toward better management and planning for our coastline. The *Marine and Coastal Policy 2020*, the *Marine and Coastal Strategy 2022*, both include important steps to develop marine

spatial planning – a tool that brings stakeholders together to work out how to use our shared marine space. But we cannot rely on policy alone to protect our waters. Spatially protecting marine areas is one of the best-known tools for conserving biodiversity and mitigating threats.

We're calling on the next Victorian Government to address the shortfalls in the management and resourcing of our current network of marine national parks and sanctuaries and consider new areas for protection. We are asking for:

- Adequate funding provided and maintained for Parks Victoria's marine program** for the effective management of Victoria's marine estate. This includes ensuring Parks Victoria has enough resourcing for reducing the threats to marine biodiversity and includes:
 - A significant investment in Parks Victoria's in-water capacity to monitor and protect reefs from marine pests in marine national parks and sanctuaries across the state.
 - Effective compliance activities and education programs
- Review the current marine network:** Implement the recommendations for a scientific review of Victoria's marine protected areas for a network that is a comprehensive, adequate and representative of Victoria's vast marine biodiversity and ecological values. VNPA has done significant work on this already that could be incorporated.

To read more about the 20th anniversary of marine national parks and sanctuaries visit: www.vnpa.org.au/marine-national-parks-and-sanctuaries/

The Victorian National Parks Association acknowledges the many First Peoples of the area now known as Victoria and honours their continuing connection to, and caring for, Sea Country.



Spotlight on the west – a dive into the parks between Torquay and Portland

The west of our state has eight special areas formally protected in Victoria's marine reserve system. These parks generally have lower levels of threats from invasive species and extraction and are more intact than the east and Melbourne region where there is higher population pressure and more illegal activity. They will be important climate change refuge areas.

As they are often harder to access due to weather conditions, let's take a metaphorical dip into what you might find below (see map on p. 44-45 for locations).

Point Danger Marine Sanctuary

At the coastal town of Torquay, this sanctuary features an intertidal limestone platform home to 26 species of marine plants, and more than 44 species of intertidal invertebrates, mostly found underneath rocks on the intertidal reef. The sanctuary is particularly recognised for its diverse sea slugs

(nudibranchs), with 96 species having been recorded on both the rock platform and reefs beneath the waves.

Point Addis Marine National Park

The third largest of all the marine national parks it includes the internationally renowned Bells Beach. It is backed by crumbling limestone cliffs with extensive intertidal rocky platforms along the headlands – a nudibranchs delight! Under the waves you will find eroded calcarenite reefs that support extensive kelp forest in shallow water, and spectacular sponge gardens full of life in deeper water. Weedy Seadragons, dolphins and whales on their migration path can all be found here. An unusual offshore habitat in the park are rhodolith beds – colourful, unattached calcareous nodules of significant age made by coralline red alga.

Eagle Rock Marine Sanctuary

Below the lighthouse at Aireys Inlet is this gem of a sanctuary, where it is not uncommon to see the Southern Eagle Ray up close and personal. The shore rock platforms are covered in swathes of Neptune's Necklace, a brown seaweed that looks like strings of beads. Marine life abounds in the deeper rock pools, with animals including octopuses, decorator crabs, chiton, and schools of tiny silver fish.

Marengo Reefs Marine Sanctuary

These two small reefs near Apollo Bay provide a wide variety of habitats, a dense growth of seaweeds and an abundance of soft corals and sponges. The two islands in the park, Henty and Little Henty, are surrounded by colourful underwater gardens, and the larger island is home to a haul out area for Australian Fur Seals. On a quiet night, you might even hear them calling from the shore!

Twelve Apostles Marine National Park

Includes some of Victoria's most spectacular underwater scenery, with rich intertidal and subtidal invertebrate communities and dramatic underwater arches, canyons, fissures, gutters and deep sloping reefs.

The Arches Marine Sanctuary

Included in this sanctuary are some of Victoria's most spectacular underwater limestone formations near the Twelve Apostles. Reefs here are carpeted by sponges, bryozoans, gorgonians and sea stars.

Merri Marine Sanctuary

At the mouth of the Merri River, Warrnambool, this sanctuary contains a range of marine habitats in reef and sand, with rocky overhangs, deep canyons and the elusive giant kelp forests supporting many fish. Penguin colonies are found here and the area is frequently visited by dolphins.

Discovery Bay Marine National Park

This is Victoria's marine gateway to the Great Australian Bight! The Marine National Park is part of the largest coastal basalt formation in western Victoria and experiences one of the highest wave energy environments in the state. The cold nutrient-rich water associated with the Bonney Upwelling encourages the growth of microscopic plants and animals, providing a feast for fish, whales, penguins, and seafloor life such as sea-fans, sea-mosses and hydroids, sponges, and sea-squirts. The connection to the Great Australian Bight and the Southern Ocean is highlighted by the regular visits of Southern Right and Humpback Whales that migrate north from Antarctic waters in winter to breed. There are deep habitat and unique reefs with bryozoan reefs and soft corals.

Discover more of what lies beneath the surface at our revamped explore underwater Victoria site: www.vnpa.org.au/programs/explore-underwater-victoria/

PHOTO: VNPA



ACT FOR WESTERN PORT BAY

SHANNON HURLEY SHARES EXCITING PLANS FOR THE FUTURE HEALTH OF WESTERN PORT BAY'S COMMUNITY AND NATURE.

White mangroves (*Avicennia marina*) in Western Port Bay.

PHOTO: STACY CHILLCOTT

We acknowledge that Western Port is on the traditional land and water of the Bunurong people from the BoonWurrung language group.

Tuesday 30 March 2021 was a truly historic day for Western Port Bay. It was the day the Victorian Government ruled out AGL's plans to build a giant polluting gas import terminal because of the unacceptable risk it would pose to nature. It was a milestone moment – not many projects under the scrutiny of the state's Environmental Effects Statement process had previously been denied. Glasses were raised and celebrations had by the community who fought so hard in the months and years leading up to the decision. The decision was not only a great relief, but a chance to think deeply about the future of this important wetland bay.

Since then, we've joined with local community groups and Environment Victoria to reignite discussions for what Western Port Bay and community livelihoods could look like. It was agreed that it was time for a new long-term vision for the future health of the bay and all who depend on it. We wanted to imagine what it could look like with better planning and management and without relentless and inappropriate industrialisation and development.

VNPA put together a list of tools under existing legislation that could be used to deliver a new vision. Some of these included national and marine national parks, marine spatial planning, an environmental management plan, threatened species protections, and various tools under local planning laws.

After many discussions, meetings and workshops, it became clear that no one mechanism that could deliver our vision, but a variety of integrated could work. To explore this further, a smaller steering group was established to move things forward, with representatives from VNPA, Save Westernport, Phillip Island Conservation Society (PICS) and The Western Port Biosphere Reserve Foundation leading the charge.

After hundreds of hours of groundwork, which included input from local councils, government agencies, tourism and recreational groups, and local and conservation groups, the steering group developed a proposal called 'A Strategic Framework For the future of Western Port Bay: protecting Victoria's wetland biodiversity and sustainable marine and tourism industries'. It captures our vision, the problem, the solutions, and three key asks for the State Government.

With 2022 being an election year we saw this as another big moment for Western Port Bay – and an opportunity to give Port Phillip Bay's poor cousin, who often misses out on the action, some love and attention. The highlights from the framework are:

Our vision: *to effectively manage, restore, and legally protect the marine and coastal environment of Western Port Bay and establish an ecologically sustainable economy for the future.*

The problem

As population growth and inappropriate development continues, the health of Western Port Bay declines.

Western Port Bay has the highest number of deteriorating environmental health indicators in Victoria (out of the areas that have data for), according to the State of Marine and Coastal Environments Report. This includes declining populations of snapper and waterbirds.

Exacerbating this is the substantial land use changes that are altering the quantity and quality of river discharges into the bay. So much so that Western Port is identified as having a serious

water quality problem, with five of the nine estuaries flowing into the bay rated as 'very poor'. The Cranbourne-Pakenham area is experiencing the fastest urban expansion in the state, with the population of the Western Port catchment expected to double over the next 20 years.

These biodiversity and environmental health indicators and projections are urgent signals that action and collaborative management are needed. Yet current planning, protection and management arrangements for Western Port are inadequate, with decisions often siloed and fragmented, and no cohesive or overarching guiding framework over the whole bay.

Western Port has long been under pressure from heavy industrial development – the community are fed up and want more collaborative action!

The solution – A new 'whole bay' approach

After seeking guidance from community, Traditional Custodians, land managers, tourism, fishing and other recreational bodies, we are proposing a 'whole of bay' integrated management framework that promotes environmental protection and economic sustainability for Western Port Bay, its coastlines and hinterland.

This management framework has three core elements:

- 1 **A new strategic plan for Western Port Bay** – bringing together objectives, actions and programs into a coordinated planning and management tool that recognises the natural values of Western Port and the future economic prosperity of the region.
- 2 **A new collaborative management partnership** – bringing together Traditional Custodians, community representatives, government agencies, councils, local business and industries, fishing and recreational groups, to develop the plan and oversee implementation.
- 3 **A dedicated Western Port fund to deliver the plan** – with annual funding to deliver its objectives (at least equivalent to the Port Phillip Bay Fund).

We like to think of as this as the 'what'. As for the 'how' to implement it, the management framework and its three core pillars can be delivered under existing marine and coastal legislation. For example, an Environmental Management Plan with marine spatial planning integrated would go a long way to achieving our objectives.

In the earlier iterations of our proposal, we suggested an alternative option to create a new Western Port Bay Act, allowing for more flexibility and geographic scope for what and how this planning and management would look like. However, it was felt by some in the community that having this additional option would be too hard to achieve and get a commitment for, and confused the proposal, so was removed at the last minute.

An important distinction to make is this is not at about excluding the marine industries that already exist, but rather working together across sectors to ensure that Western Port Bay health is cared for now and into the future. We also recognise the role of the current management agencies who have undertaken some fabulous work, and various plans and strategies (including catchment management plans and programs, marine national park management plans, industry and port strategies, and fishery and Ramsar management plans) that exist to govern so far.

Our proposal speaks to the need to bring together all of these interests in a more coordinated way with ecology at the forefront.

How can we make this happen?

We're calling on the next Victorian Government to publicly commit to the new Framework for Western Port Bay, as an election policy, and its implementation in the next term of government.

The framework consists of three pillars:

- A new strategic plan for Western Port Bay.
- A new collaborative management partnership.
- A dedicated Western Port fund to the deliver the plan.

How can you help?

If you support the vision, we need your help to spread the word so our proposal for the new framework is adopted by the next Victorian Government. You can show your support whether you are an individual, a business or group, a tourism operator, or recreational or industry representative, by signing up to support the proposal.

Find out more and act now for Western Port Bay by visiting www.actforwesternportbay.au



Colourful invertebrate life in Western Port Bay.

PHOTO: SHANNON HURLEY

LOCAL MARINE CHAMPION

Marg O'Toole

SO MUCH HAS BEEN LEARNT ABOUT OUR MARINE ENVIRONMENT OVER THE LAST 20 YEARS. MUCH OF THIS IS THANKS TO THE DEDICATION OF VOLUNTEERS WHO SPEND COUNTLESS HOURS ABOVE OR BELOW THE WATER, EXPLORING, OBSERVING, MONITORING AND SHARING THEIR FINDINGS FAR AND WIDE. MEET LOCAL MARINE CHAMPION **MARG O'TOOLE** FROM PORT CAMPBELL WHO HAS DEDICATED SO MUCH OF HER LIFE TO PRESERVING OUR SEAS AND SHORES.



Q1. How did you first get acquainted with Victoria's marine national parks and sanctuaries?

I was working as a nurse in Papua New Guinea in the 70s, and went for a snorkel. I was so amazed at the marine life that lived below the surface, that when I came back home to Australia I decided to undertake a marine biology course and learn to scuba dive. One of my first dives was in Port Phillip Bay at a site called Popes Eye. This experience blew my mind and was my first taste for how special and unique Victoria's marine life is. From then on, I had the bug to get out and explore our coastline and share it with others.

Wilson's Promontory was one of these places I am grateful to have explored. Like much of this early exploration it was at a time when the dive industry was small, and well before Victoria's network of marine national parks and sanctuaries had been born.

When the campaign started in the 90s to see Victoria's coastline and marine environment protected in no-take marine national parks, I took great joy being involved as it was something I truly believed in. Protecting pockets of our coastline was one of the most important things that could be done for marine life, and for people to enjoy

them. I worked with others like Tim Allen, Chris Smyth, Mark Norman, to name just a few, to raise awareness in the public realm for what lived below and why it was worth protecting. Living in regional Victoria in a small coastal community added an extra layer of difficulty, as not everyone supported them. One of my proudest moments was speaking with the shadow environment minister at the time and giving a presentation to the local shire council who ended up supporting the parks.

Twenty years later it has been great to see the change in attitude now the parks are well established.

Q2. Tell us about your local marine sanctuary and why it's special to your heart?

The Arches Marine Sanctuary off Port Campbell is unbelievably special. This underwater landscape features limestone reefs, swim throughs and arches covered in invertebrates and bryozoan colonies that will take your breath away. Not many get the opportunity to dive on it due to weather conditions, and a boat is needed for access. The cold, nutrient rich waters coming from the Bonney upwelling is an important reason for the diversity, with many fish species seen here as well. It's so special because we fought so hard to see it protected.

The Twelve Apostles Marine National Park, which is close by, also has astounding values such as the Loch Ard shipwreck from 1878. Its rich history, along with the high energy movement along the coastline, always leaves something new to be discovered.

There's something quite magical about standing on protected land of the Port Campbell National Park, looking out to the ocean and knowing that this protection extends to beneath the surface at the Twelve Apostles Marine National Park.

Q3. How has your connection with these marine parks shaped your desire to care for them?

My passion for the oceans started with one snorkel, but led me to a much deeper journey of learning and exploring them. My own enjoyment of Victoria's marine life led to my efforts to advocate for marine national parks and to guide the public on special experiences to help them understand, appreciate and value of them. One of the best ways I have learnt to do this is through guiding people on education experiences in these special places that spark curiosity and wonder. Over the years, I have delivered many activities for Coastcare such as rock pool walks, beachcombing, talks to community groups to share how at the very core, the oceans are the basis for life on earth.

Q4. Is there a particular marine life encounter you have had that takes the cake?

Malcolm Turner and myself teamed up to compile the book *'Down Under at the Prom' – A guide to marine life and dive sites at Wilson's Promontory*. When putting it together I was diving on Dannevig Island, in the Glennie Group of islands, off Tidal River. There were these giant granite boulders that formed a cave and they were absolutely covered in colourful invertebrates. Rising up from the bottom were sea whips and soft corals unlike anything I've seen before. It's hard to imagine a scene as stunning as that, being anywhere else on earth. I remember feeling too scared to swim through, from the fear of causing damage, that I just stopped and admired them.

Closer to home in the Arches Marine Sanctuary, a definite stand out was when a seal joined us on a scuba dive, dancing and diving as playful as could be around us. Moments such as these can be rare and so special in the memory bank.

Q5. For others aspiring to experience and care for Victoria's marine national parks and sanctuaries how would you recommend they get involved?

Put on a mask and snorkel and get under the water! If this is new to you, joining a program can make it much easier. Join a Reef Watch activity run by VNPA, or other coastal activities run by Coastcare or Parks Victoria is a great way to get involved. Finding a group in a coastal area of your choice and approaching them is another great way to get involved. The coastline is full of groups, whether around Melbourne like the Ricketts Point Marine Care Group, or further afield. Taking a snorkel trip out to Popes Eye in Port Phillip Bay with a local tour operator is another great way to experience a taste of what Victoria's marine life has to offer.

Q6. What would you like to see looking ahead for the next 20 years of protection?

When I started out, the marine sector was very small and it has been great to see this support and interest grow exponentially. I'd like to see this appreciation grow further.

I have also realised how lucky we are in Victoria for our network of marine national parks and sanctuaries to be no-take. Having recently been involved in a meeting in NSW for their marine parks, and seeing how the marine parks there, only have small no-take areas within them, makes it very confusing and not as effective in conserving and protecting the marine environment. With the latest Parks Victoria science data showing proof of their value for what they have achieved, it is important to see them extended further to keep up with national and international targets which have greater ambitions for the area protected in no-take areas. • PVV

Terrick Terrick National Park is one of the most important sites for the conservation of grassland fauna in south-eastern Australia, home to at least 18 State or federally listed species, including the Plains Wanderer.



Grasslands deserve our TLC

PHOTO: MARK ANTOS

DESPITE THEIR IMPORTANCE AND DIVERSITY – AND THE SCIENCE – VICTORIA'S GRASSLANDS ARE EXPERIENCING AN ONGOING DECLINE. **ADRIAN MARSHALL**, FACILITATOR OF THE GRASSY PLAINS NETWORK, DESCRIBES THE BEAUTY OF THESE GRASSLANDS AND HOW OUR CAMPAIGNS ARE AIMED AT STEMMING THE TIDE.

I often hear that Victoria's ancient grasslands are disappearing. But the fact is they're not 'disappearing', they're being destroyed, neglected – or worst, completely ignored. What gives me hope is the potential for our elected representatives to reverse the history of decline and start protecting our surviving native prairies.

VNPA's grasslands campaign began back in 1984. We began by undertaking a thorough review of existing research on what remained of Victoria's remnant vegetation. Our aim was to identify the deficiencies in the protection of the native plant and animal communities in the State.

The Review, undertaken by Doug Frod from the Botany Department of the University of Melbourne, highlighted the perilous state of our grasslands, and their complete absence from the parks estate. It built on pioneering work by Richard Groves (1979) and Neville Scarlett and Bob Parsons (1981), who first brought the wholesale loss of the temperate

grasslands of south-eastern Australia to the attention of the scientific community.

Victoria's grasslands had been grazed, ploughed and disconnected from First Nations management practices. They'd been built on to such an extent that the only remaining species-rich patches were almost entirely confined to rural roadsides, fenced pioneer cemeteries and railway lines. Only a tiny fraction remained.

It was big news, shocking in the scale of loss, but welcome in that it spurred conservationists to action. Grasslands, along with the remnant Box-Ironbark woodlands of central Victoria, the heavily forested Central Highlands to the east of Melbourne, and Victoria's large marine and coastal regions, became a key focus for VNPA.

An early success

Terrick Terrick State Park, east of Echuca, was an early campaign success. Now a national park, it is a

glorious example of what is known as the Natural Grasslands of the Murray Valley Plains, known for its beautiful *Swainsona* – a flowering plant of 84 species, all but one endemic to Australia. Terrick Terrick is the last bastion of the remarkable and critically endangered Plains-wanderer.

A hard sell

Despite the urgency for conservation, grasslands have proved to be difficult to protect for several reasons.

Conservation is often hampered by the value of the land either for grazing or cropping or, in more urban situations, for development. Some of the largest areas of grassland on the Victorian Volcanic Plain are in or around Melbourne and are under immense pressure from developers.

Socially, grasslands are stigmatised as weedy, snake-infested fire hazards. Their biodiversity values are often hard to see, requiring a person to get down and look closely between the tussocks. Flowering times can be

brief, flowers themselves are quite small, and big shows of flowers are uncommon.

Most grasslands are quite degraded, so when we visit a grassland, or drive past it at 100kmh, we're not seeing its full potential. The historic record, and Aboriginal knowledge, tells us there used to be vast fields bursting with colour, sight and scent. The amazing *Diuris fragrantissima*, an orchid with a heady perfume, is listed as endangered both federally and within Victoria, but was once so common it was used for wedding bouquets.

Culturally, Australians are generally not proud of their grasslands the way, say, Americans are of their prairies. Many remain unaware of their existence at all.

Because of these reasons, progress on protecting grasslands has been slow. Nevertheless, we persist with our grasslands campaigning, with much work up to 1997 being led by James Ross, who represented VNPA on the Roadsides Conservation Advisory Committee, Greening Australia's Urban Advisory Committee and the Recovery Teams for the Striped Legless Lizard and Southern Lined Earless Dragon. The Grassy Ecosystems Network, a cooperative across the four south-eastern states that was hosted at our main office, also led the charge.

In 1998 we published *Plains Wandering: Exploring the grassy plains of south-eastern Australia*. More than just one of the first field guides to Victoria's grasslands, its introductory essays educated many readers on the complexities of grassland conservation.

The fruits of this labour have seen a shift in public appreciation of grasslands. Groups such as Friends of Merri Creek took on valuable work. A number of remnant areas were acquired for reserves, such as Craigieburn (1996), Cressy, Derrimut, Blacks Creek near Skipton (2002), and the former RAAF base at Laverton. The airbase supported one of the best remnants of native grassland in the region, including important

populations of endangered and vulnerable plants such as Spiny Rice-flower, Large-fruit Groundsel and rare orchids.

VNPA also focused on educational outreach, with the publication of *Looking After Native Grasslands and Grassy Woodlands: A guide for landowners, government agencies, extension staff, conservation groups, teachers, students* (1998).

In 2008, the Commonwealth's EPBC Act declared the Natural Temperate Grasslands of the Victorian Volcanic Plain as critically endangered.

The Western Grassland Reserves

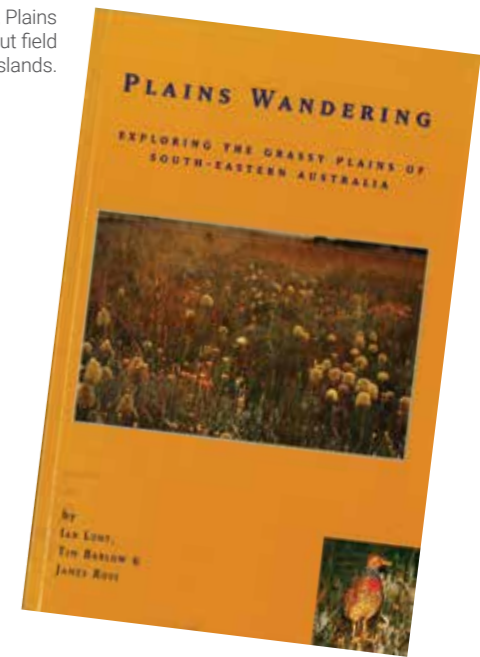
Grassland conservation changed dramatically in 2009 with the expansion of Melbourne's Urban Growth Boundary. The Melbourne Strategic Assessment (MSA) was a deal between Victoria and the Commonwealth that turned-off federal EPBC protections for the environment across the 60,000 hectares of to-be-released land of the new growth corridors. In return, developers would fund, through an offset program, the purchase and management of the Western Grassland Reserves – 15,000 hectares of grassland just outside the new Urban Growth Boundary. In addition, 36 conservation reserves

were declared within the new growth corridors. Also promised were 5000 hectares of Grassy Eucalypt Woodland reserve.

But the devil is in the detail. Much of the 15,000 hectares of the land that will become, over 50 years, the Western Grassland Reserves, is degraded, species-poor grassland thick with highly invasive weeds. The surveys that were done were rushed and failed to identify significant areas of grassland (and other ecosystems) within the growth corridors. The 36 conservation reserves now languish without suitable management, their biodiversity rapidly being lost to lack of appropriate management. The 5000 hectares of Grassy Eucalypt Woodland reserve have yet to materialise.

Continued overleaf

The 1998 VNPA publication, *Plains Wandering*, became a stand-out field guide to Victoria's grasslands.



Rural roadsides, often "3 chains" in width, are one of the last unspoilt locations of high-quality remnant grasslands.

PHOTO: PAUL GIBSON-ROY

The tragedy of Conservation Area 9

The loss of this grassland provides apt illustration of the systemic problems facing grassland conservation. This 40 hectare privately owned grassland was supposed to be protected as one of the 36 MSA Conservation Areas but was recently (December 2021 to January 2022) destroyed by being covered with asbestos-contaminated fill. The grassland lacked basic planning protections such as an Environmental Significance Overlay and was inappropriately zoned Urban Growth. These were known problems that DELWP failed to address, leading directly to the grassland's destruction. The grassland never even had a proper survey, so we don't know what was lost. Until the ongoing investigation is completed, we are left to ask: Did local council officers, or DELWP, ever advise the owner of their obligations, that the site was designated to be a future reserve, and if not why not? Why did DELWP fail to put appropriate planning provisions in place? Was the land being appropriately managed for its biodiversity values prior to its destruction? Are federal authorities aware of the declining quality of the 36 conservation areas and why are they doing nothing about it? Why did the landowner, trucking contractor and truck drivers not recognise the value of the native vegetation on site? Who knew about the asbestos? The destruction made it to ABC News. VNPA and the Grassy Plains Network are demanding a thorough federal audit of the MSA program, and the purchase of an equivalent site within the Melbourne area.

VNPA's chief grassland campaigner, Yasmin Kelsall, and a broad coalition of around 20 mostly local environmental groups, worked hard to improve much of the detail of this poorly thought-through, developer-friendly model of grassland conservation. While some important improvements were made, the foundation process was rushed and the final form of the MSA is fraught with problems.

The Grassy Plains Network

In 2018, grassland experts, land managers, conservationists and community members came together in Melbourne at the public conference *Respect, Protect and Re-connect Melbourne's Grassy Plains*, at which the Grassy Plains Network was formed. This broad coalition, now philanthropically funded, is hosted by VNPA and provides ongoing advocacy for the grasslands in and around Melbourne.

Loss of appetite

Today it appears the state government has lost its appetite for further grassland conservation.

Large high-quality patches of grassland exist within the middle suburbs of Melbourne that desperately need to be brought into the state reserve system. Some efforts have been made to increase funding for the Western Grassland Reserves, but the fundamental problems remain.

Outside of Melbourne, good work is being done. Catchment Management Authorities, local councils, Landcare and community groups are using broad-scale restoration to expand and reconnect diverse native grassland communities and protect remnant roadsides. But dependence on local volunteer fire brigades for the requisite annual burning is a huge stumbling block for these projects.

Private land

Putting aside the as-yet unfulfilled promise of purchasing the Western Grassland Reserves, the biggest gains that can be made now are on private land, where almost 90 per cent of the remaining extent of native grasslands occur. Over the years, Trust for Nature, in partnership with other organisations, has supported

many landowners to place long-term protective conservation covenants on grassland. More than 70 landholders now help protect (in perpetuity) about 1500 hectares of native grassland in the Victorian Riverina and on the Victorian Volcanic Plain. The Trust has also helped protect (or has facilitated protection of) an additional 5000 hectares of native grassland on the Northern Plains through direct acquisition or assisted purchase by the Victorian Government.

It is important to note that grassland on private land exists at the whim of the landholders. While it is illegal to clear endangered grassy ecosystems, if they are left unmanaged, in the absence of burning, grazing or slashing, the tussocks thicken and suffocate the biodiversity in the vital inter-tussock spaces. The grassland ecosystem can collapse and prolific weeds can spread. There is an urgent need to create legislation that can prevent this sort of 'native vegetation clearing by stealth'.

What do we need now?

Restoration rather than reservation looks like the best path forward. The huge swathes of weeds currently being removed from the Western Grassland Reserves create a botanic vacuum that needs to be filled through a direct seeding program of sufficient and substantial scale. With such a program, we can fire-up the native seed industry and roll out the direct seeding techniques we know will work, across the whole of Victoria.

The Western Grassland Reserve program needs urgent attention to create a grasslands vision and to drive community engagement. It must become a go-to destination for schools, scouts, locals and tourists. It must showcase the scale and beauty of what our once magnificent grasslands still can be.

The Western Grassland Reserves are one of the best hopes for transforming public opinion about grasslands, to make us, as a nation proud, of our land of sweeping plains.



A large population of endangered Hoary Sunray, *Leucochrysum albicans* subsp. *tricolor*, here in a restored patch of rural roadside, highlights the capacity we now have for effective restoration by direct sowing.

PHOTO: PAUL GIBSON-ROY

We need better funding for Parks Victoria to manage large areas of grassland at a best-practice level. Our grasslands need more love than they are currently getting, with most in decline due to the spread of weeds.

Another crucial means of transforming the state of our grasslands is by welcoming back the First Nations people disenfranchised from Country and reintroducing their management practices and their understanding of these systems.

We urgently need the acquisition of remaining high-quality grasslands in urban Melbourne, places like Ajax Road, Burns Road, Solomon Heights and the Broadcast Australia site.

We also need a new grassy design ethos: the visual and experiential qualities of our diverse grasses have yet to be fully explored through design.

Has anything changed?

The words of the The Review, undertaken by Doug Frood from the Botany Department of the University of Melbourne, are as relevant today as they were in 1987:

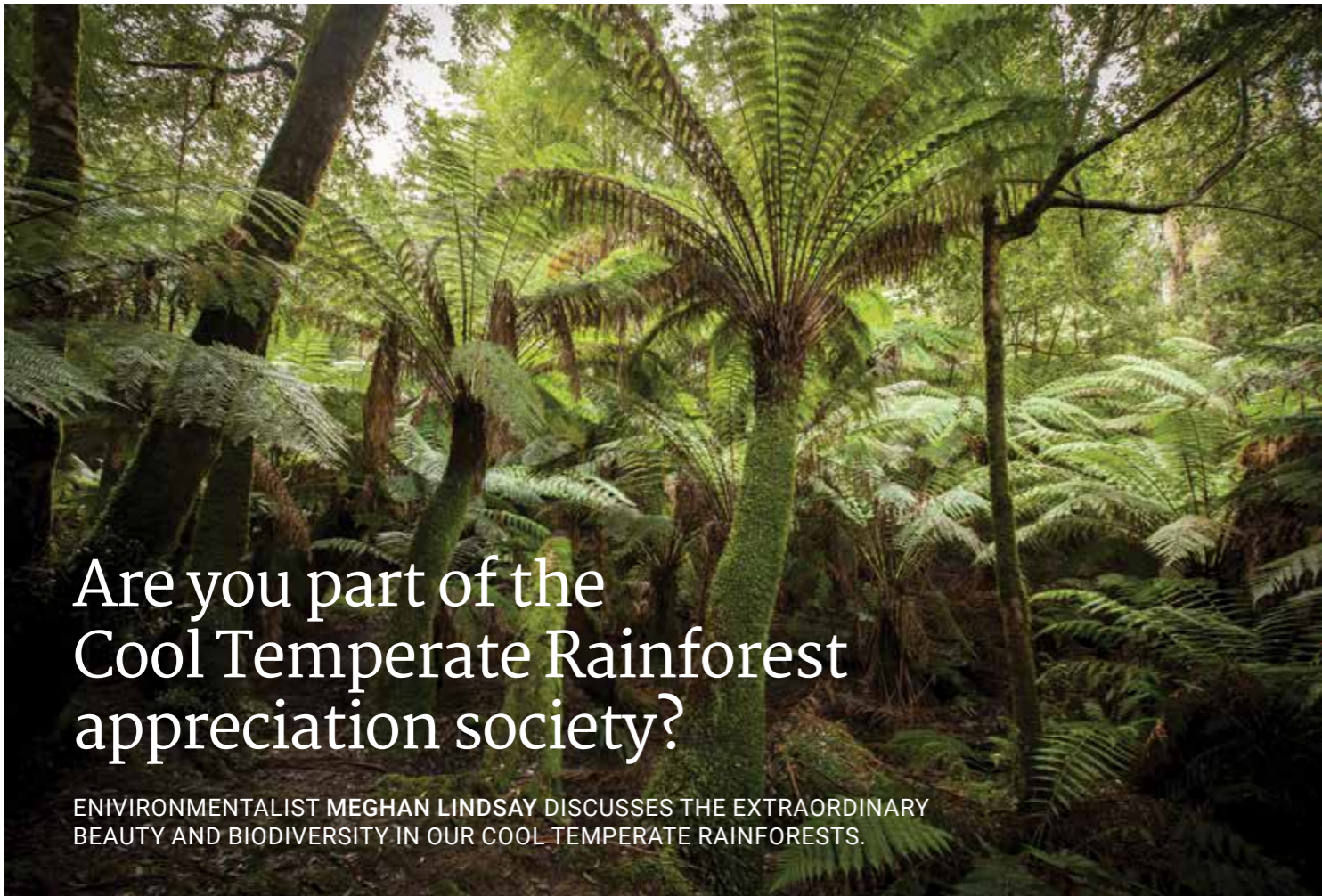
Very little remains of these formerly widespread vegetation types, at least in relatively intact condition, and relics are frequently deteriorating at an alarming rate. Little land remains in public ownership on the lowland plains, and demand for various types of public uses can be high. Grasslands in particular are extremely poorly represented in biological reserves. • PW

Mammal extinctions

Almost half of all global mammal extinctions since 1500 CE have been Australian (39 out of 85). Most of those 39 species were either wholly or partly dependent on grassland. They include bettongs, bandicoots, bilbies, bats, potaroos, wallabies, and native rats and mice.

The immediate cause of extinction was often hunting, predation by introduced dogs, cats and foxes, or loss of habitat. But equally important, depopulation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from Country, through disease, massacre and displacement, led directly to a decline in habitat quality, causing mammal populations to crash, drastically increasing the likelihood of extinction.

Take action at our grasslands site: www.vnpa.org.au/grasslands



Are you part of the Cool Temperate Rainforest appreciation society?

ENVIRONMENTALIST MEGHAN LINDSAY DISCUSSES THE EXTRAORDINARY BEAUTY AND BIODIVERSITY IN OUR COOL TEMPERATE RAINFORESTS.

PHOTO: MEGHAN LINDSAY

You've heard a lot this year about Cool Temperate Rainforest because of the proposed mountain bike track network in Yarra Ranges National Park – but what exactly is Cool Temperate Rainforest?

Cool Temperate Rainforests are a unique plant community that, along with other types of rainforests, dominated our continent 65 million years ago. They can be visited any season, with special fungi to spot in autumn and a cool microclimate underneath the dense canopy to retreat to on a hot summer's day.

These incredible rainforests are habitat for magnificent plants such as ancient Myrtle Beech, Southern Sassafras and gorgeous ferns including the Hard Water Fern (*Blechnum wattsi*), Slender Tree Fern (*Cyathea cunninghamii*) and Soft Tree Fern (*Dicksonia antarctica*). This unique forest type is also home to incredible animal species, such as the Mount Donna Buang Wingless Stonefly (*Riekoperla darlingtoni*), the carnivorous Gippsland Black Snail (*Victaphanta atramentaria*) and the Sooty Owl (*Tyto tenebricosa*). They

provide important refuges after bushfire for many animals including the globally revered Superb Lyrebird.

I always feel a sense of awe walking through rainforest of the Yarra Ranges, it's a place I visit when I need a quiet, peaceful walk to reflect and recharge. I love to spend time admiring the ancient Myrtle Beech (*Nothofagus cunninghamii*), carpets of moss and calls of a nearby Superb Lyrebird (*Menura novaehollandiae*).

Mature cool temperate rainforests are dominated by a canopy of Myrtle Beech, Southern Sassafras (*Atherosperma moschatum*) and Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*), with no 'emergent' Eucalypt trees. The understorey is dominated by tree ferns and ground ferns.

They can be found across Victoria in parks such as the Dandenong Ranges National Park, Great Otway National Park, Tarra-Bulga National Park and Yarra Ranges National Park. Even though it can still be found in a range of parks across the state, historic land clearing, fire and logging have reduced the amount of these forests

in Victoria (a mere 0.08% of the state's total area). They're listed as a threatened community under the *Victorian Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act* (1988), as they continue to face the threat of extinction.

Cool Temperate Rainforests take a very long time to recover from fire and what remains of it in Victoria is in areas that have escaped frequent fires in the past, such as protected gullies. Increased occurrence of bushfires due to climate change is putting their future in Victoria at risk. Disturbance and development, such as the proposed mountain bike track network in the Yarra Ranges National Park and current logging practices are also major threats. Other threats include by introduced pests like feral Deer, Myrtle Wilt (*Chalara australis*) and weeds such as Wandering Trad (*Tradescantia fluminensis*).

Next time you visit a Cool Temperate Rainforest, take a few minutes to stop and appreciate this incredible plant community. **Breathe** in the damp, earthy smells. **Admire** the thousand shades of green displayed across the trees, ferns, mosses and lichens. **Listen** for the call of a Superb Lyrebird in the distance. • PW

PROFILE

Gayle Osborne

FORESTS DON'T JUST UP AND PROTECT THEMSELVES, AS **GAYLE OSBORNE** KNOWS ALL TOO WELL. SHE SHARES HER EXPERIENCES OF NATURE AND WHY SHE'S BATTLED FOR 20 YEARS TO SEE WOMBAT FOREST SAFEGUARDED AS A NATIONAL PARK.

1 Can you tell us about a memorable experience of nature from your childhood or younger years.

When I was 13 I flew to Perth to stay with a great aunt in Busselton. My family travelled to collect me and we drove home across the Nullarbor in mid-summer on dirt roads in our Zephyr station wagon. It was 1959 and considered quite an adventure as you could easily break down and not see another car for days. Although it was very hot (45C/113F in the shade at Cocklebidy) I just loved it. Tall clumps of Kangaroo Paws and wonderful wildflowers amongst the scrub.

2 Do you recall anyone from your childhood or younger years who influenced your love of nature? Who were they? What was their influence?

There was not anyone who particularly influenced me, but I was lucky to spend holidays in the country, including the Blue Mountains, Barooga on the Murray and the Victorian Alps.

3 What was one of your earliest experiences of Wombat State Forest?

Driving into the forested block I now live on and thinking it was pretty uninteresting forest. It was neither tall lush forest like the Otways nor dry forest with wonderful wildflowers.

4 What drew you to start standing up for Wombat State Forest?

The forest around us was being logged, and we did express our concerns, but it wasn't until the logging really increased that my partner and I got involved. We very quickly joined with other protesters, entering the logging coupes to stop the harvesting. It was very much 'not in my backyard'.

5 How long have you been involved in caring for Wombat State Forest?

It has now been 20 years and in that time I have learnt so much and made many wonderful friends.



PHOTO: SANDY SCHELTEMA

6 Of all the actions you have taken to stand up for nature, what do you feel has had the biggest impact and why?

Being part of the group that formed Wombat Forestcare. We are a team of conservationists and activists with a wide range of skills, who have achieved so much, including stopping a gold mine in the headwaters of the Lerderderg River and working in partnership with VNPA to get a VEAC investigation for the Wombat Forest that has led to the promise of a national park.

7 Can you tell us about a time when standing up for nature felt too hard? Why did it feel like this and how did you overcome it?

Up until now it has never felt too hard, but this latest salvage operation by VicForests is devastating, not only to me but to our community as well, particularly as it is mainly in the promised Wombat-Lerderderg National Park. So many of us have been working for years for the protection of the Wombat Forest and we are experienced campaigners. I do not doubt that we will achieve our goals.

8 If we could all do one thing to care for Wombat Forest today, what would you recommend we do?

Please contact your local politicians and ask them to lobby to halt the VicForests salvage logging and legislate the promised Wombat-Lerderderg National Park.

9 What would a healthy, protected and respected Wombat State Forest be like to you in 5-10 years?

It will take longer than 5-10 years for there to be a substantial change. I like to think about how it will look in 100 or 200 years. It will take nature that long to undo the dreadful damage that we have caused. • PW

Eva Klusacek

EVA KLUSACEK HAS BEEN A BUSHWALKING LEADER WITH VNPA SINCE THE MID-00'S AND SINCE THEN HAS LED A RANGE OF TRIPS FOR THE UNDER 35S GROUP INCLUDING BUSHWALKS, BIKE RIDES AND ART AND NATURE ACTIVITIES.



On my first walk there the wattles were in full bloom. The colour and fragrance left a real impression on me.

Another great thing about this walk is that it involves a climb along the steep rock face where you need to hold steel cables so you don't fall into the Werribee River. This turns the walk in to a real adventure.

I also manage to spot wedge-tailed eagles every time I go there, which has turned me in to an amateur birdwatcher.

One other thing that is special to me about the place is Fred Williams' paintings and prints of the Werribee Gorge landscapes – I feel like he's really captured the sense of the place, and I really connect with that.

Eva Klusacek has been leading bushwalks and activities with the Under 35s group as a VNPA volunteer for 12 years now. Here she shares her experience as a bushwalker and a leader. When not running bushwalking activities Eva likes gardening, ice skating, and working on creative projects.

1 How long has bushwalking been a part of your life?

I guess I've been bushwalking since childhood. When I was a kid we always spent time in nature with my family.

I got in to bushwalking with my Dad when I was in my teens through the Albury-Wodonga Bushwalking Club where we did a lot of walks around Falls Creek.

2 Can you tell us about one of your earliest bushwalking memories?

I did a lot of walks with the Bushwalking Club. We did a walk from Bogong Village with climbs that felt very steep to me and I wasn't sure I was going to make it. I pushed through though and it was a real sense of achievement for me as a teenager, making it up those steep inclines.

3 Can you tell us about one of your favourite bushwalks in Victoria? What is special about this walk to you?

I love the Werribee Gorge Circuit Walk. It is actually quite special to me for a number of reasons.

4 Do you recall your first ever bushwalk with VNPA? Who led it and where did you go?

Yes! I went on a two-day camp in the Otways near Lorne with the Under 35s group and we did a number of walks around some of the beautiful waterfalls down there. I remember it being a particularly fun bunch of people.

5 Tell us about your first experience as a VNPA bushwalking leader.

The first activity I led was a number of years ago. It was a cycle and snorkel trip. We rode our bikes from the Port Phillip Eco Centre to Ricketts Point, we snorkelled Ricketts Point and then caught the train back.

As it was the first activity I was running I had a mentor with me. I really appreciated having a mentor there as I knew I wasn't alone to deal with any issues that might arise.

One of the things that worked really well on this activity was the combination of cycling and snorkelling. People who were in to cycling came and ended up enjoying snorkelling and people who were in to snorkelling came and really enjoyed riding. This combination really seemed to broaden people's enjoyment of the activity.

6 Can you tell us about an activity you led that didn't go to plan? What happened? How did everything get sorted out?

I haven't had too many things go wrong. The main thing that sometimes happens is getting slightly lost. However, I can't say I've led a group 5km up the wrong path! This is because even when we do end up going the wrong way for a bit, I always stop and double check where we are going and have a pretty good sense of direction so manage to get us back on track.

7 Why do you lead activities specifically with VNPA?

I've been involved with VNPA bushwalking and activities for a long time now. I really like the conservation aspect of the organisation. I get to meet like-minded people and it's a good opportunity to get out into the bush.

8 As an Under 35s bushwalking leader, why do you think there should be a group targeted at younger adults?

For many there is a perception that bushwalking is not for young people, which isn't really true. It's great that there is a bushwalking group which is dedicated to young adults to pursue this interest as well and of course it is a change to get outdoors and spend time in nature, and meet like-minded people.

9 What would be your top tips for any younger folk today who are wanted to start bushwalking with a club?

Sign up and get involved.

Wear comfortable hiking boots.

Keep your eyes open, be curious, learn from nature. • PW

Andrew Booth

ANDREW BOOTH IS A LONG-TIME NATURE ADVOCATE. RECENTLY, HIS DILIGENCE CHECKING THE HEALTH OF SUPPOSEDLY PROTECTED GRASSLANDS ON MELBOURNE'S WESTERN URBAN FRINGE ALERTED THE GRASSY PLAINS NETWORK TO THE LOSS OF CONSERVATION AREA 9 AND LED TO AN ABC INVESTIGATION.



Andrew Booth

PHOTO: ABC NEWS; NICO WHITE

1 Why did you begin to seriously advocate for nature protection?

At university in the 1980s I saw the posters of native forests being decimated by wood-chipping operations, with the caption 'Write for the Forests, Write Now'. That led to me helping out with native forest campaigns back in my uni days, with things like street stalls and petitions, and Forest Watch.

Then in 1995 the magnificent woodland gully behind our family house near Bendigo was wrecked. They cut down these great big old trees just to clear either side for a small power line. I was so angry, and then I realised they were doing this on roadsides across the state. I thought someone's got to do something about this, so I got involved working on remnant vegetation issues with Environment Victoria and a range of other groups including VNPA. I received a great introduction to Government policy from the late Jenny Barnett. Being more of a background technical person than a public campaigner, I got involved in case studies and planning appeals about the implementation of native vegetation regulations. Examples include Buloke and Red-gum clearing in West Wimmera, old-growth roadside forest in South Gippsland, and later on remnant grasslands in Melbourne's west. Throughout I've been lucky to have good part-time paid work in a hospital.

3 Where do you think your connection to nature came from?

Growing up next to the box iron bark forest just out of Bendigo, including what's now called One Tree Hill Regional Park, just behind our family home. I would just go on my bike many hours along the trails. It had a very strong emotional draw on me. I just felt something being out in those woodlands – the raw energy of nature just gets inside you. That stayed with me all my life. It connects us to our journey and the truth of life. It's important to not to lose that, because it can guide us through.

Wilderness hikes with venture scouts, and East Gippsland Forest camps, were also a great introduction to nature.

3 Of all the actions you have taken to stand up for nature, what do you feel has had the biggest impact and why?

A lot of it is incremental, getting good planning appeal outcomes, for instance, that push things in a better direction. A lot can be said for plugging away at things.

Can you tell us about a time when standing up for nature felt too hard?

When we have had a State or Federal Government who prioritise quick resource and development profits over the environment it can be a bit demoralising. In these times we rely on inspiration from gutsy environmental campaigners who can turn things around.

Over the last decade I've had chronic fatigue (long-Covid equivalent), which still allows me to do things and be active, but I have to sleep heaps so I don't have the time like I used to. I've been assisting environment groups advocate for grassland conservation in Melbourne's west, providing input to precinct plans and the Melbourne Strategic Assessment. At one level problems with the Melbourne Strategic Assessment process and its narrow focus have been frustrating, however, I'm optimistic that a good urban conservation outcome can still be achieved with improved implementation.

4 If you could change one thing, what would it be?

Improving native vegetation policy. The strength of it and the effectiveness of its implementation has huge ramifications for biodiversity across the state. I would go with that as a priority, coupled with incentives and support to landholders for conservation.

5 What could a healthy, protected urban edge to Melbourne look like in 10 years?

We could have a really great network of urban grassland and waterway parks through the new growth corridors and the existing urban areas which connect to the Western Grassland Reserves. We could have the natural volcanic plains grassland landscape, the different habitats of it, right close to the new migrant communities, giving people from many different national backgrounds a connection to Country. • PW

Explorer's corner

TIPS AND TRICKS FOR GETTING IN TO NATURE



What do I put in my pack?

LONG-TIME BUSHWALKING LEADER **ROB ARGENT** SHARES WHAT GOES IN HIS BAG FOR OVERNIGHT HIKING TRIPS.

Equipment choice can be overwhelming for people new to hiking, although the basics come down to safety, shelter, warmth, food and comfort. Opinions vary ENORMOUSLY on what is 'essential', but always aim to pack and travel lightly but safely. The following list is one that I use for all my hiking planning, reorganised to make it easier (hopefully!) for beginners to follow.



Basics

- Pack (at least 65 litres)
- Pack liner
- Sleeping bag
- Sleeping mat (foam, Thermarest)
- Water bottle / bladder (3 litres)
- Tent
- Rubbish bags
- Map
- Compass

Survival bag

- Toilet paper
- Hand sanitiser
- Spade/trowel

Cooking and eating

- Billie/s (or an old, light saucepan or pot)
- Lightweight hiking stove
- Knife, fork & spoon (from the kitchen drawer)
- Cup, bowl/plate
- Pocket knife

Clothes

- Shirt/s
- Shorts
- Socks
- Trousers (warm for winter)
- Jumper / bush shirt / fleece raincoat / Goretex jacket
- Hat (warm for winter; shady for summer)
- Boots or solid shoes (MUST BE comfortable)
- Underwear
- Thermals

Bag of Stuff

- Money / credit card
- Laces (spare)
- Lighter (good for leeches!)
- Matches
- Time piece / watch
- Head torch / torch

Personal First Aid

- Antiseptic
- Paracetamol (or other pain relief tablets)
- Elastoplast or similar for blisters
- Personal medications
- Salt (for leeches - yuk!)
- Snake bandages
- Insect repellent
- Sun block
- Safety pins
- Scissors
- Thread
- Needles
- Throat lozenges
- Tissues/handkerchief
- Triangular bandage with fasteners
- Wound dressing (medium)

Rob's tips on planning meals and food to pack for your overnight hike will be published in part two of this article in the next edition of Park Watch. They will also be available with a range of other tips and tricks for getting out into nature at www.vnpa.org.au/programs/explorers-corner

Personal (separate bag)

- Face cloth
- Lip balm
- Towel
- Toothbrush
- Toothpaste

Optional Basics

- Sleeping bag liner
- Pot scourer
- Light entertainment (Frisbee / cards / book / songbook / hacky sack)
- Camera
- Candle

Optional Personal

- Comb
- Deodorant
- Pillow case
- Shampoo
- Soap
- Razor

Optional Clothes (depends on weather, comfort)

- Ankle bandage
- Balaclava
- Beanie
- Bread bags (boot liners)
- Campsite shoes / thongs
- Mitts / gloves / over-mitts
- Waterproof over-trousers
- Sunglasses / snow goggles (essential in sun or snow)
- Tea towel
- Gaiters
- Bathers
- Scarf

Optional First Aid

- Cotton wool buds
- Tiger balm / Deep heat

Optional Extras

- Lantern
- Pegs
- Seat
- Spare batteries
- Axe cord / string elastic
- Pocket stone (a small sharpening stone that goes in your pocket)
- Paper
- Pen
- Wire

Food

Food and water are of course essential!

WILD FAMILIES

The age-old scavenger hunt

On your next family adventure take some time to discuss how old the living, dead and non-living things around you might be with this 'Age Old Scavenger Hunt'.

How old are you?

How old are the people in your family?

How old are the things that you see in nature?

The Victorian National Parks Association is 70 years old!

Just like our family, things in nature are all different ages, e.g. a butterfly flying past might be a few weeks old and the surrounding rocks a few million years old!

What to do

Write your name or draw yourself in the right age group in the table below.

Look around you and find some living, dead and non-living things that might belong in each age group. Use what you know to guess their age. Tell your friends and family why you choose to put something in a particular age group.

See if you can find something from nature for every age group. You could write what you find, draw a picture or take a photo. You could have a chat about why you think it belongs in that age group. The important thing is to explore, discuss and remember. • PW

AGE GROUPS		
Less than 1 month old	31-60 years old	Hundreds of years old
2-12 months old	70 years old (like the VNPA)	Thousands of years old
2-10 years old	71-100 years old	Millions of years old
11-30 years old		



This limpet?



This bird?



This flower?



These ferns? The rocks? The creek?



The algae?



The rock columns?

Tips

- You don't need to **know** how old things are. You can use what you know about it to **have a guess** (e.g. it has a thick trunk, it is type of insect, it is a brown rock, it is soft) or do some research together to inform your guess.
- Examples of living things are humans, plants, insects, mammals, birds, flowers, moss, fungi.
- Examples of dead things are leaf litter, bones, sea shells.
- Examples of non-living things are mountains, cliffs, a creek, the ocean, sand and rocks.

Ann Birrell

OUR PARKS, NATURE AND COMMUNITY HAVE BENEFITED GREATLY FROM ANN BIRRELL'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE VICTORIAN NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION.

Ann is a lawyer, and for almost 11 years she has been our primary legal expert amongst the dedicated volunteers that govern our organisation.

Ann grew up in a bushwalking family, as the youngest of four, spending many weeks hiking and camping in Alpine parks, riding in her father's pack: trying to draw all the different wildflowers; crawling through the grass, stalking wildlife; enjoying spectacular views and night skies, and happy times with loved ones. Just the activities that VNPA works so hard to encourage.

Like many of our members, Ann has been involved in environment organisations since school. In between legal jobs and family life, she worked for Australian Conservation Foundation on pollution issues, was a Greens candidate several times, and a volunteer for integrity and planning NGOs.

Ann joined as a VNPA Member in 2011 and shortly after, Council and the Governance, Legal and Policy Committee. In 2014 she became the Convenor of the Committee and helped the group address a range of issues including development of risk register, review of council by-laws and policies, and a range of compliance and reporting processes. Most recently the Committee looked at the impact of the Electoral Act political donations reforms on the political activity of NGOs.



PHOTO: PAUL CLIFTON



Ann's work behind the scenes was incredibly important and could be challenging and complex, but she took it all in her stride and her input has been of great benefit and has strengthened our governance.

Volunteers are such an important part of our community, and Ann was one of those volunteers who would always cheerfully pitch in with any task or event. For example, she still represented the VNPA at the 'Celebrating women in conservation breakfast' in 2019 despite having a leg in plaster! In 2013, she also happily counted the 1200 people heading down to the beach at the Prom to form a human sign 'Hands off our parks!' to protest against privatisation.

Ann's effective work has built a stronger organisation, and after more than a decade of service, she decided to step down from the Council and committees earlier this year. We are delighted to endorse Ann's contribution by awarding her an Honorary Life Membership.

Thank-you Ann for standing with us to protect nature and parks in Victoria. • PW

The VNPA Council award honorary life membership to people who have performed meritorious service to VNPA. Ann Birrell received this award at our 2022 AGM.

Chris Smyth

CHRIS SMYTH HAS MADE AN INCREDIBLE CONTRIBUTION TO THE VICTORIAN NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION, AND HAS PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN PROTECTING VICTORIA'S MARINE AND COASTAL ENVIRONMENT.

Chris has always had an interest and passion for the Victorian coast – usually living near it and always involved in protecting it through his work or volunteering. Before Chris began his teaching career and while at Monash University, he directed a research project that culminated in the publication of *A Coastal Retreat*, a 270-page report on coastal management in Victoria that received a Citation in the Royal Australian Institute of Architects Robin Boyd Award. This work paved the way for a distinguished career in coastal planning, protection and management.

While teaching in Portland and Mallacoota, he became actively involved in campaigns to prevent the establishment of the Alcoa aluminium smelter and the Bastion Point Boat Harbour. Although eventually unsuccessful, it reaffirmed his commitment to the protection of coastal and marine environments.

Chris developed strong communication skills and knowledge about the environment through his many years as a geography teacher, as Education Officer at the Soil Conservation Authority and also publications coordinator and environmental education consultant with the Gould League of Victoria.

In 2000, Chris became a VNPA member and also became our Marine Campaigner for three years. His dedication and collaboration with others led to the creation of the world's first network of marine national parks and sanctuaries in 2002. Subsequently, Chris was awarded a Parks Victoria Kookaburra Award for his outstanding contribution to the extension of the Victorian parks system.

Chris' experience and success at VNPA lead him to become the Healthy



PHOTO: PAUL CLIFTON



Oceans Campaigner at the Australian Conservation Foundation. In 2012 he established a consultancy specialising in marine and coastal planning, protection and management which still keeps him busy today.

Fortunately for us, Chris once again joined the team at VNPA from 2015–2017. During this period the extremely capable and reliable Chris successfully took on several roles – marine campaigner, acting executive director, project manager for delivering a new website, and editor of *Park Watch*.

Chris' work for VNPA involved countless submissions, meetings, conferences and community liaison. His long-term commitment and dedication led to many wins, such as the integration of the historic Quarantine Station within the Point Nepean National Park in 2009, and stopping commercial racehorse training at Belfast Coastal Reserve

which threatened the endangered Hooded Plover.

Chris served on marine and conservation committees at VNPA as a staff representative and also as a volunteer. During 2007 Chris served on Council and facilitated strategic planning. He also wrote *The Coast is Unclear* report as part of VNPA's 2014 Nature Conservation Review.

Chris is a highly respected marine and coastal expert within government, scientific community and community organisations. In 2019 he was made an Honorary Fellow at the University of Wollongong Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources and Security.

The VNPA community has benefited from Chris' skills as a writer and editor, and his calm but assertive approach to collaboration and advocacy. A fantastic colleague, volunteer and leader, we commend him for the progress he has made for its protection. We also appreciate Chris' ongoing loyalty to VNPA as a generous member and supporter, and we are so pleased to recognise his achievements by awarding him an Honorary Life Membership.

Thank you, Chris, for your outstanding contribution and your continuing guardianship of Victoria's seas and shores. • PW

The VNPA Council award honorary life membership to people who have performed meritorious service to VNPA. Chris Smyth received this award at our 2022 AGM.

First ever Feathertail Gliders found in proposed Pyrenees National Park



PHOTO: DAN PENDAVINGH

NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER **JORDAN CROOK** ZOOMS IN ON ONE OF OUR MOST MYSTERIOUS AND MINIATURE MARSUPIALS.

If you've been part of our community for a while, you may have once sported a Feathertail Glider on your pack while walking the Alps, or carried one on a banner at a rally at Victorian Parliament, or perhaps you might recall them adorning the pages of one of our many publications. The Feathertail Glider was featured in VNPA's logo for many years until 2012.

Our shared history with the Feathertail Glider continues with recent survey work done in the proposed Pyrenees National Park. The survey revealed the first ever records of the glider in this area – which is still open to logging even though it has been agreed to be a national park.



PHOTO: BLAKE NISBET

Feathertail Glider in Toolangi State Forest

Little is known about this pint-sized creature – whose gliding is better described as a controlled fall from canopy to canopy – but what we do know is remarkable. Feathertail Gliders are the smallest gliding mammal in the world, growing to around 12 grams in weight and 16cm in length (including their tail). They're found along the east coast of Australia from the tip of Cape York around to South Australia, but not Tasmania. They get around using their gliding membrane that stretches between their fore and hind limbs, carrying them for around 20 metres from tree to tree.

In recent times the Feathertail Glider *Acrobates pygmaeus* has been recognised as two distinct species: Narrow-toed Feathertail Glider *Acrobates pygmaeus* and the newly described Broad-toed Feathertail Glider *Acrobates frontalis*. Spoiler alert – the width of their toes is the main distinguishing factor between the two species.

The two species are part of the family *Acrobatidae*, which includes the Feather-tailed Possum *Distoechurus pennatus* endemic to New Guinea and shares the feather-like tail of stiff bristles that inspired its common name. Both species are listed as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List, but not in Victoria (though it has likely experienced localised extinctions due to habitat loss and fragmentation). It seems to be secure across much of Victoria and is historically absent from the Mallee region. The Narrow-toed Feathertail Glider is considered Endangered in South Australia.

Like many of our gliding marsupials, the Feathertail Glider relies on tree hollows for denning. Incredibly they prefer to nest in large groups, with between 20-30 individuals often squeezed into one hollow!

Luckily, due to their small size, they can access hollows sooner than larger critters who need to wait over a century for hollows large enough to nest in. They usually den or nest with large groups of gliders, sometimes up to 20 or 30 individuals in one hollow! But the ability to occupy small and inconspicuous hollows can come at a cost. It's quite likely these are the types of modest hollow-bearing trees that are missed by contractors assessing trees for their logging. Left unidentified these habitat trees are more likely to be felled and logged – with Feathertails suffering the consequences.

So, keep an eye on the canopy because what looks like a falling piece of bark or leaf could be this tiny gliding marsupial feeding on flower blossoms, or maybe a dose of sap slurped from incisions made by Yellow-Bellied and Sugar Gliders.

Read more about this split in the two species in the article 'Feathery-tale of a new species' by Bertham Lobert in the *Strathbogrie Ranges-Nature View*. • PW

Ref: Harris, J. M. *Acrobates pygmaeus* (Diprotodontia: Acrobatidae). *Mammalian Species*. 47, 32-44 (2015).

Lobert, B. Feathery-tale of a new species. *Strathbogrie Ranges-Nature View* (2020).



Jells Park

Jells Park

PHOTO: GEOFF DURHAM

GEOFF DURHAM EXPLAINS HOW THIS SUBURBAN SANCTUARY WENT FROM PIG FARM TO ONE OF MELBOURNE'S MOST PRIZED PUBLIC PARKS.

Jells Park was a pig farm when purchased by the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) to be developed as the first public Metropolitan Park in the chain of parks and open space that arose out of the December 1971 Interim Development Order. The Metropolitan Parks were an initiative of the Chairmen of the Board, Alan Croxford, who was prompted to create them by Premier Dick Rupert Hamer. They were funded by the Metropolitan Improvement Levy upon annual rates.

In opening the park in April 1976 Premier Hamer said: 'We are doing for the future what our forebears did for us. If you look at the map of Melbourne, you can read its history outward from the centre like the rings of a tree. When the city began, the grand design included major open spaces which are now parks in the inner city. They are priceless. Outside

the inner area are the intermediate suburbs, built when few were concerned with planning and few parks. Then in the outer ring, beginning here in the Dandenong Valley, you see again the return of conscience, the return of overall design, the return to a belief that a city must breathe – it must have lungs. ... It was obvious (in 1967 when I was Minister for Local Government) that individual local councils could not be expected to pay off, or to manage and maintain, really large areas of parkland for the use and delight of residents of the metropolis generally. Obviously the Board, as metropolitan planning authority, would have to do it'.

Do it the Board did, establishing five parks – Jells (127 ha), Brimbank (328 ha), Point Cook (443 ha), Westerfolds (120 ha) and Braeside (310 ha). But the Board is no more and the parks are now managed by Parks Victoria

which has no mandate to establish new parks. The metropolitan urban area has now sprawled way beyond Premier Hamer's 'outer ring' of parks.

Jells Park is within the territory of the Wurundjeri and Bunurong. Thomas Napier was the first licensee in 1839. After a year the licence was transferred to Alexander and Madeline Scott. Joseph Jell, after whom the park is named, was the owner for 37 years from 1849.

On acquisition by the Board, 60 to 70 per cent of the land was covered by blackberries, which were cleared, and 12,000 10-ton truckloads of rubbish were removed. The 11.5 ha lake was developed out of an old billabong of the Dandenong Creek. There was much tree-planting.

Access to the park is off Waverley Road extension to Jells Park East or Ferntree Gully Road to Jells Park



PHOTO: NORM HANSON (FLICKR)

South. The Dandenong Creek Trail runs through the park and up-stream to Nortons Park and Shepherds Bush. The creek is a significant wildlife corridor, indicating that metropolitan parks have many conservation values which should be maximised.

The park today

The park is open to vehicles from 8.00 am to dusk with 24-hour vehicle exit. The centre-piece is the Visitor Centre which has some interpretation panels and the popular Madeline Café (named after Madeline Scott), with take-away kiosk, closed Monday & Tuesday, other days open to 3.00 or 4.00 pm, phone 9561 4522 for bookings. From here there are views over the lake.

The lake has many water birds with thousands of noisy white ibis on islands. There is a bird hide. Years ago, when walking around the lake, I was attacked by a grazing purple swamp-hen which flew into my face. In the lake are red-fin, European carp and eel. Fishing is permitted, except in the Conservation Area. Two of the three jetties (No 1 and 2) have been long-closed for repair, whilst boating and canoeing are no longer allowed.

The park is very popular with picnickers. It has extensive mowed grass, shaded picnic areas with many tables, some shelters and free BBQs. There are three formal playgrounds including a large refurbished one near the Visitor Centre which has many imaginative attractions and is designated a 'Playscape'. The Jells East playground features a carved timber lizard with a very blue tongue.

Walkers, joggers and cyclists share a 9 km network of wide pathways, with a few seats. 'Oaks' and 'Ashes' ovals in Jells South can be booked for sporting events. Dogs on-lead are permitted



PHOTO: ALFRED SIN



Jells Park

PHOTO: GEOFF DURHAM

except in the large Conservation Area which has manna, swamp and Yarra gums with an overwhelmingly weedy ground cover.

In April this year the State Government released its Open Space Strategy including a proposed \$154 million investment in 'new regional parks and trails in outer growth areas, and local dog parks and revitalised parks in established suburbs'. Three parks together represent more than 720 ha of green open space. The Strategy is a collection of worthy projects but no grand plan as in the 1971 Interim Development Order.

The parks levy remains as the annual parks charge but the money is now split-up between Parks Victoria, the Zoos, the Botanic Gardens and the Shrine of Remembrance and no longer funds the purchase of private land to create new parks. In the new outer suburbs, with their dense housing lacking backyards, open space is particularly important and there is a great need for passive recreation parks like Jells. • PW

The Friends of Dandenong Valley Parklands carry out volunteer work in the park. A current project is creation of a show garden at the Visitor Centre. Contact Brian Loft – 9561 2381.

Tributes

Anne Kantor AO

(1935 – 2022)

Anne was dedicated to serving the community as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist and social worker, advocate and philanthropist. She supported many charities across many sectors and her commitment to nature conservation was admirable.

Anne's family describe her as having a 'huge heart'. She was a wonderful wife to her husband Milan, mother to six children and grandmother to eleven.

Anne became an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) in 2016 for 'distinguished service to the community through philanthropic support for a range of environmental, social welfare, arts and educational organisations and to psychotherapy'.

Anne became a member of VNPA in 1986 and soon became a very loyal and generous supporter. In 2016 Anne was awarded an Honorary Life Membership for her meritorious service and dedication to protecting nature and national parks in Victoria.



Anne's long-term support meant that we were able to commit to, and win, many lengthy campaigns – such as ensuring cattle grazing was stopped in the Alpine National Park in 2005 and again in 2014, and the establishment of almost 100,000 hectares of River Red Gum national parks along the Murray River in 2009.

Anne also funded our comprehensive Nature Conservation Review, released in 2014. This important piece of

work is critical to identifying priority areas for nature conservation in Victoria.

Anne has ensured that her legacy will continue by inspiring and supporting the next generation of social and environmental advocates through the Australia Institute's Anne Kantor Young Woman Environmentalist Fellowship. Recently we were pleased to host Elizabeth Morison for 12 months as part of this fantastic program.

Anne will be fondly remembered for her incredible dedication and generosity, which has been so important to protecting nature in Victoria. • PW

Beth Gott

(1922 – 2022)

Ethnobotanist, Beth Gott, helped grow our understanding of the way Indigenous people lived with the land. She was a family friend and I recall camping holidays trailing her through the bush, looking at plants and listening to her vast store of knowledge about them.

Beth studied botany at Melbourne University through the Second World War – gaining a BSc and MSc. – and finally a PhD from Imperial College London. But it wasn't until she returned to Melbourne in the 1980s and joined Monash University as a botanist that she developed her life-long interest in Australian indigenous plants. She planted her first native garden on the Monash campus in 1985 and it is still going strong despite a move within the campus in 2007. In 1995, after being awarded a grant by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIC), Beth became a research fellow at Monash University, cementing a long relationship with Indigenous people and organisations. In 2017 Beth was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for significant service to the biological sciences as an ethnobotanist, but she was equally proud of being given the title 'Auntie' by members of the Victorian Aboriginal community.



My memories of Beth are as a family friend, always ready to take part in detailed discussions of indigenous flora, always interested in what was growing in our garden, and always off to a botanical conference somewhere in Australia. Her gift to me was stories of what Melbourne would have looked like before invasion; a rich ecology of billabongs full of ducks, quail, swans and other wildlife with

vast fields of edible plants including chocolate and vanilla lilies, murrnong or yam daisies, beautiful seed heavy grasses and many, many varieties of orchids to name just a few.

Beth wrote widely and has six papers available through the AIATSIC Library that range from Indigenous use of plants to Aboriginal fire management in SE Australia.

In the foreword to her book *Victorian Koorie Plants* (1991) Jim Berg, Gunditjmarra Clan, wrote, 'So much knowledge of our culture has been lost, and people like Beth Gott, who gained their knowledge from my people over the years, are now working with the Koories ... to give this knowledge back. Because of this mutual respect and co-operation this knowledge is now available to all'.

What better way to acknowledge and celebrate Beth's life and contribution. I miss her heaps. • PW

Jane Mullett

Monash University and the AIATSIC Library have contributed information to this article.

FAREWELL AND THANK YOU TO MEG

AFTER MORE THAN FIVE YEARS AS
VNPA'S PRINT AND ONLINE COORDINATOR,
MEG SOBEY IS MOVING ON.

Most of you will have known Meg as the editor of *Park Watch*. She edited an impressive 21 editions and worked closely with contributors and South Star Design to produce the journal we all know and love. Meg is grateful to those who generously contributed their words and images for *Park Watch*.

Between editions Meg also delivered a wide range of communications online for our campaigns to protect nature and engage the community, with the volume and impact of our messages growing each year.

Meg's genuine passion for nature and the stories she has shaped and shared have played a key role in supporting our community to learn about, enjoy, and care for Victoria's



parks, natural places and wildlife. Meg loved showcasing the splendour of our state's nature through her work, and while she sincerely wished it was not necessary, she had exemplary skills in communicating the often complex threats, the solutions needed, and a knack for sourcing the perfect visual elements to bring the message home.

We will all miss collaborating with Meg, and her colleagues will miss coffee breaks, chats and staff gatherings with their smiling, caring workmate.

We are very pleased for Meg, and her partner Ryan, who will be welcoming a new baby into their lives later this year. Thank you Meg for your fantastic contribution, we wish you well on your next adventure. • PW

QUIZ ANSWERS

(From p. 9)

- 1 **Over 2 million hectares in 32 national parks** (also 26 state parks and 13 marine parks).
- 2 **Wilson's Promontory National Park.** This excursion was the beginnings of a series of excursions which evolved into our bushwalking and activities program. This program peaked in the early 2000s with up to 10 activities on offer in any given week. VNPA still has thousands of participants every year getting out into nature through bushwalking, citizen science, community education, excursions and family activities.
- 3 **E) All of the above.** While creation of national parks is a critical first step, persistence is required to maintain the integrity of the purpose of national park status.
- 4 **False.** VNPA pre-dates the National Parks Act. VNPA was the organisation that advocated for the Act and for an authority to manage Victoria's national parks. The first objective of our 'National Parks Policy' was to 'have passed a Victorian National Parks Act, under which will be set up an Authority to administer the national parks of Victoria'. This Act was passed in 1956 which included establishing an authority to manage the national parks system (later called Parks Victoria).
- 5 In 2002.
- 6 People started counting fish on their local reefs on the ReefWatch program in 2002. This annual event evolved and was officially named the Great Victorian Fish Count in 2005. It is now Victoria's largest annual marine citizen science event.
- 7 Feathertail Glider. See page 66.
- 8 **Park Mates.** It was also called Park Guardians in its early stages.
- 9 **Little Desert National Park campaign.** VNPA was a heavily involved in this campaign.

