

PARK *watch*

A victory for nature:

The end of native

forest logging

37° 15' 10" S, 143° 12' 59" E



VICTORIAN
NATIONAL PARKS
ASSOCIATION
70 years protecting nature

JUNE 2023 #292

In this issue...



JUSTIN CALLY

5



SANDY SCHEITEMA, BEN GILL

9



CHRIS TZAROS

34

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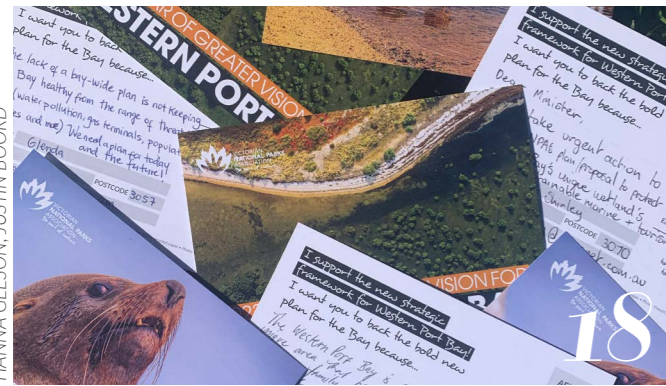
JESS RACKLIEFT

42

Campaigns and updates

- 5 End of native forest logging a victory for nature
- 6 Time to use of all our nature protection tools
- 7 Fat-tailed Dunnart: Vulnerable status an unenviable milestone
- 8 Ending the reign of hard hooves
Nature walk at Mt Cole/Bereep-bereep

- 9 Stop rogue logging in our national parks!
- 10 Salvage logging is forest destruction
- 12 Pressure mounts against rogue logging in Dandenong Ranges National Park
- 14 Cobaws rogue loggers exploiting loopholes
- 16 Mt Cole: Where have all the flowers gone?
- 18 Postcards from the Bay
- 24 Winds of change: Sustainable energy needs sustainable planning
- 26 Equity and nature conservation
- 29 Saving the last one per cent
- 30 Grasslands grapple with growth
- 31 Alliance for woodlands bears fruit
- 36 Going the full ten rounds for Box-Ironbark forests



HANNA GEESON, JUSTIN BOARD

18

Our community

- 21 Profile: Greg Noonan
- 28 Profile: Ian McKellar
- 32 Put space in the right place
- 34 Malleefowl monitoring
- 35 Project Hindmarsh 2023: Butterflies, worms and wildflowers
- 38 In Parks: Maits Rest and Melba Gully



GEOFF DURHAM

38

Regular features

- 4 From the President
- 8 Spotlight on Nature: Mountain Katydid
- 17 Plant Blindness: Mt Cole Grevillea
- 20 Park Watch Victorian Eucalypts Quiz
Taking teals to the bush
- 22 NextGen Nature: Connecting with like-minded people while skilling up for nature
- 23 Winter activities calendar
- 40 Book reviews: *Coastal Guide to Nature and History 3*, *Western Victoria* and *Alight: A Story of Fire and Nature*
- 41 That's a wrap for Rachel
Vale Nancye Blades
- 42 Wild Families: Fungi feature
- 43 Explorer's Corner: Fun fungus facts

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Front cover:
A grand old tree in the
Mt Cole Forest
DAVID TATNALL

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VNPA acknowledges the many First Peoples of the area now known as Victoria, honours their continuing connection to, and caring for, Country, and supports Traditional Owner joint-management of parks and public land for conservation of natural and cultural heritage. Our office is located on traditional land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. We offer our respect to Elders past, present and future.



Snow Myrtle in Grampians/Gariwerd National Park (Phil Ingamells)

Celebrate the life of someone special

Commemorate and celebrate the life of a loved one by making a donation to the Victorian National Parks Association.

By making a donation in memory of someone special, you are ensuring that Victoria's national parks, natural places and wildlife flourish – in memory of your loved one.

If you wish, a card acknowledging your gift can be posted to the next of kin.

To make a gift in memory, please contact Amelia Easdale on 03 9341 6500 or via amelia@vnpa.org.au, or download a donation form at vnpa.org.au/gifts-in-memory

If you would like to request donations to VNPA instead of flowers at a funeral or memorial service, please get in touch with Amelia.



From the President

Welcome to the June 2023 edition of *Park Watch*.

Autumn in Victoria delivers some beautiful clear, crisp and still days. Refreshed by the seasonal rains, our national parks are in delightful condition. Travelling up to Bright and Harrietville then across the Great Dividing Range to Omeo is a magnificent trip, or on a calm day exploring the shores of Western Port Bay or walking along the beach at Blanket Bay in the Otways, our national parks and reserves offer so much to appreciate and enjoy.

A particularly crisp day in May brought special joy to VNPA supporters and environmentalists across the state, with the budget announcement native forest logging will end in Victoria on New Year's Day 2024.

The big wins for nature conservation are often achieved through an informed community supporting evidence-based strategies for long-lasting improvements to nature conservation. But community-based efforts for nature conservation are often side-tracked. Ill-advised government policies and initiatives, and/or private projects emerge that threaten to damage the very places community are determined to protect.

Too often public and private agendas sidestep, or outright ignore, sufficient upfront environmental governance. Government or industry develops an idea from pitch to project. It's then approved without sufficient environmental governance and progresses despite the threats posed. Then a nature conservation community group learns of the project and exposes the environmental threats and/or legal or regulatory non-compliance. Public-debate, citizen science and legal proceedings lead to project delays and cost overruns. It is a counter-productive cycle set to repeat mode.

There are few winners in a process this broken. Potentially valuable programs

are delayed, public funds are wasted and volunteers, not-for-profits and local groups devote precious time and resources to make sure any negative impacts on nature and community are considered and managed appropriately. Many of our campaigns address this fundamental issue.

VicForests is a prime example of inadequate governance leading to poor outcomes. Time and time again they have been found to operate outside of their regulatory obligations. Holding VicForests to account fell onto the shoulders of community-groups, nature conservation associations and individuals using methods such as citizen science, public debate and legal proceedings.

A particularly crisp day in May brought special joy to VNPA supporters and environmentalists across the state, with the budget announcement native forest logging will end in Victoria on New Year's Day 2024.

Now Forest Fire Management Victoria is operating and damaging forests within our existing and promised national parks – under the guise of 'salvage logging' and fire management. It is doing so without appropriate regulation and independent evidence-based governance. Their unregulated operations are impacting our natural world. This includes implementing ineffective fire management techniques, and unnecessary clearing within national parks and conservation areas.

The 2023 VNPA Annual General Meeting will be held on Tuesday 24 October at the Melbourne City Conference Centre (MCCC), 194 Little Lonsdale Street.



We welcome the transition to green-energy, and the proposed Bass Strait wind farms will play a key role in this. But the project is progressing without adequate upfront consideration of the impacts on marine areas. This will in turn lead to failures to identify and manage environmental issues during the early development stages. These issues will carry over into later phases when resolutions will be more complex, time consuming and costly.

Western Port Bay, rich with bird and aquatic life, offers remarkable beauty and diversity. During this time of year, Western Port is a popular nature tourism destination. For such an important natural wonder, improved management through an independent, evidence-based and empowered committee would benefit the Bay's wetlands and wildlife while supporting sustainable marine and tourism industries.

The list goes on; the Falls to Hotham Alpine Walking Track, Warburton Mountain Bike Track, management of our Grassy Plains, legislating the promised central west national parks. With appropriate oversight, stronger and more robust nature laws and improved governance these special places could all thrive into the future. What a great opportunity for the new Environment Minister, Hon. Ingrid Stitt, to bring about significant and valuable change for the people of Victoria.

I invite you to join me in making a generous tax-deductible donation this June. Thank you in advance for your support. Without it our team wouldn't be able to continue this important work to protect Victoria's precious national parks and nature. Enjoy the read! 🌿

David Nugent, VNPA President

Greater Glider. JUSTIN CALLY

End of native forest logging a victory for nature

We are elated! On 23 May the state government announced their plan to speed up the transition out of native forest logging.

Native forest logging will end in Victoria on 1 January next year.

In about seven months you're going to be living in a state that protects native wildlife habitat instead of smashing it up for pulp, paper, pallets and firewood.

This is a game-changer for nature. This is also a testament to the hard work, resilience and determination of the Victorian nature-loving community.

A massive thank you to everyone who emailed or called their elected representatives. To those who donated to our important work. To those who spread the word, joined citizen science expeditions, who again and again took action for our special places, creatures and habitats.

We've talked a lot about the trouble with VicForests. From breaking the laws that govern them, to taxpayer funded financial losses, to repeated

Wow!! Just shed a tear and have taken my 'Protect Nature Now End Native Forest Logging' off my front fence. Congratulations to us all for so many years of activism and a bottom of the heart thank you to all legends at VNPA.
- Russell

A while ago I cancelled my membership – what was I thinking? Please reinstate my membership and monthly donation of \$20. Great news regarding the end of native forest logging in Victoria.
- Darren

failures to protect endangered wildlife like the iconic Greater Glider.

Now it's time to talk about restoring and recovering what we've lost.

As part of the transition, the government will deliver a program to manage the 1.8 million hectares of public land currently available to log. Importantly, forestry workers will be supported through the transition. Forests will be assessed for protection in new national parks and for activities like camping, hiking and four-wheel

Matt, you are an inspiration and seriously one of my top 5 heroes in business and in life. It is natural to be anxious about how the parks will be managed from here. But take the time to soak in this today. You did this. VNPA, Bob Brown and the EDO are my go-to agencies for environmental issues and thought leadership in this field.
- Blair

At last we get the result that is needed for our forests in Victoria. I have been waiting 30 years for this to happen since the Land Conservation Council's final recommendations that created the Yarra Ranges National Park. VNPA led the way then and continues to do so. Congratulations to all those who have worked so hard for so long – both in the VNPA and all the other organisations that have worked together.
- Anne Casey, VNPA President 1996-98

driving. This will include opportunities for Traditional Owner management. We'll be keeping a close eye on what is planned for forest works. Our key concern is the work forest fire agencies are doing is often indistinguishable from intensive logging practices. This announcement is a powerful reminder that the state-sanctioned destruction of nature isn't inevitable. It's the consequence of poor decisions by the people we've elected and entrusted to look after nature. Better decisions can be made, if we demand them. And that's exactly what our community did, for years on end. It has finally paid off. 🌿

We were lucky to squeeze this significant victory into this edition of *Park Watch* at the last minute. Stay tuned, as we'll have a lot more to report in later editions and online.

I know the devil will always be in the detail but an accelerated end to native forest logging in Victoria is great news. And would not have happened without people's courage and work. Thanks so much for your efforts over time to protect the bark cathedrals, the critters, the water and more. I hope you can take a moment and a breath and know you've made a difference.
- Dave Sweeney, ACF

Time to use all of our nature protection tools

Nature protection laws in Victoria are complex and confusing, even to those who use them.

Our existing laws have a limited view of the environment. They're crafted in a way that can prioritise industry and development over the integrity of the living web of nature we all depend on. Hopefully that will soon change.

As we've mentioned in previous *Park Watch* articles, the Mount Donna Buang Wingless Stonefly (*Riekoperla darlingtoni*) is listed as Critically Endangered in Victoria. The Stonefly is only found in seasonal streams and weak trickles of melted snow high on Mount Donna Buang. With such a tiny range, any change to its habitat spells doom.

That's why we applied for this critter to be safeguarded by a little-known and never-used legal tool.

On 6 March 2023, we presented our evidence to the Secretary of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA). Our submission also went to the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC), the independent body with the power to recommend the Critical Habitat Determination (CHD) to the Secretary, who must consider that recommendation in their decision-making.

Legally, the SAC and Secretary are under no obligation to consider this nomination because it comes from the public – VNPA in this case. But at the same time there is nothing in the

legislation that says they can't. We understand that the SAC has been discussing our nomination, but we are yet to receive any formal response regarding the outcome.

We are in no doubt the Stonefly nomination meets the eligibility criteria required. Our submission includes the scientific literature and government documents relating to this species that underpin its case, a supporting letter from the Entomological Society of Victoria, and Environment Justice Australia legal advice supporting VNPA's interpretation of the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*.

If approved, this would be a game-changer for the future of the Mount Donna Buang Wingless Stonefly and could set a major precedent for the protection of threatened wildlife.

Protecting the Stonefly is just a drop in the ocean of the work required from the Victorian Government to protect our threatened wildlife and habitats.

The uncomfortable truth is that listing a plant, animal, insect, fungi or community as threatened doesn't by itself do much to reverse its decline towards extinction. Victoria's threatened wildlife cannot wait for long-promised CHD guidelines.

It's past time our political leaders started using the legal conservation tools available to them. 🌿

Blake Nisbet, Nature Conservation Campaigner with Jessie Borrelle, Digital Engagement and Communications Manager

VNPA and the greater community have grown tired of waiting for our elected leaders to use their own legislation. At least three independent reports in as many years have emphasised the need to act. The Victorian Government's own Stonefly Action Statement includes a direct reference to a key part of the insect's habitat that should be protected through a CHD.

Victorian Regional Forest Agreements: Major Event Review of the 2019–20 bushfires.

'That the Victorian Government... activate existing legislative tools (e.g. Critical Habitat Determinations) under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* (Vic), and that the Victorian Government make public the rationale for choosing specific legislative tools to protect listed species and communities.'

Review of Legislative Protections for the Threatened Species and Communities of Victoria's Forests

'Continue the development of guidelines for Critical Habitat Determinations and identify potential examples where it can be tested (e.g. via a 'regulatory sandbox' process) so that the practical implications of its use can be assessed in detail (before actually implementing).

Use this 'regulatory sandbox' approach to develop guidance to assist policy officers and others to identify potential use of relevant legislative instruments. In particular, this approach could develop specific guidance on the use of the provisions that have not been used to date (e.g. Critical Habitat Determinations, Flora and Fauna Management Plans and Habitat Conservation Orders).

Parliament of Victoria: Inquiry into ecosystem decline in Victoria

'That the Victorian Government amend the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* (Vic) to specify circumstances where the Secretary of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning must make a declaration of critical habitat.'

Mount Donna Buang Wingless Stonefly: Action Statement

'Based upon current knowledge, it seems likely that the resort area and surrounds at Mount Donna Buang will constitute a key part of the 'critical habitat' of the taxon, as defined under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*.'



Mount Donna Buang Wingless Stonefly. JACOB L'HUILLIER LUNT



Fat-tailed Dunnart

Vulnerable status
an unenviable milestone

Fat-tailed Dunnarts. ABOVE: EMILY SCICLUNA. BELOW: CALEB MCELREA

THE FAT-TAILED DUNNART HAS BEEN OFFICIALLY LISTED AS VICTORIA'S 1,999TH VULNERABLE ANIMAL

The Fat-tailed Dunnart (*Sminthopsis crassicaudata*), a grassland-dwelling, tiny and ferocious predator, will be joining 1,998 other species officially on the road to extinction, achieving Vulnerable listing status under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act*.

Fat-tailed Dunnart populations have crashed in recent decades and their habitat – critically endangered grassland – continues to be cleared. We've destroyed over 98 per cent of Victoria's ancient volcanic grassy plains since colonisation.

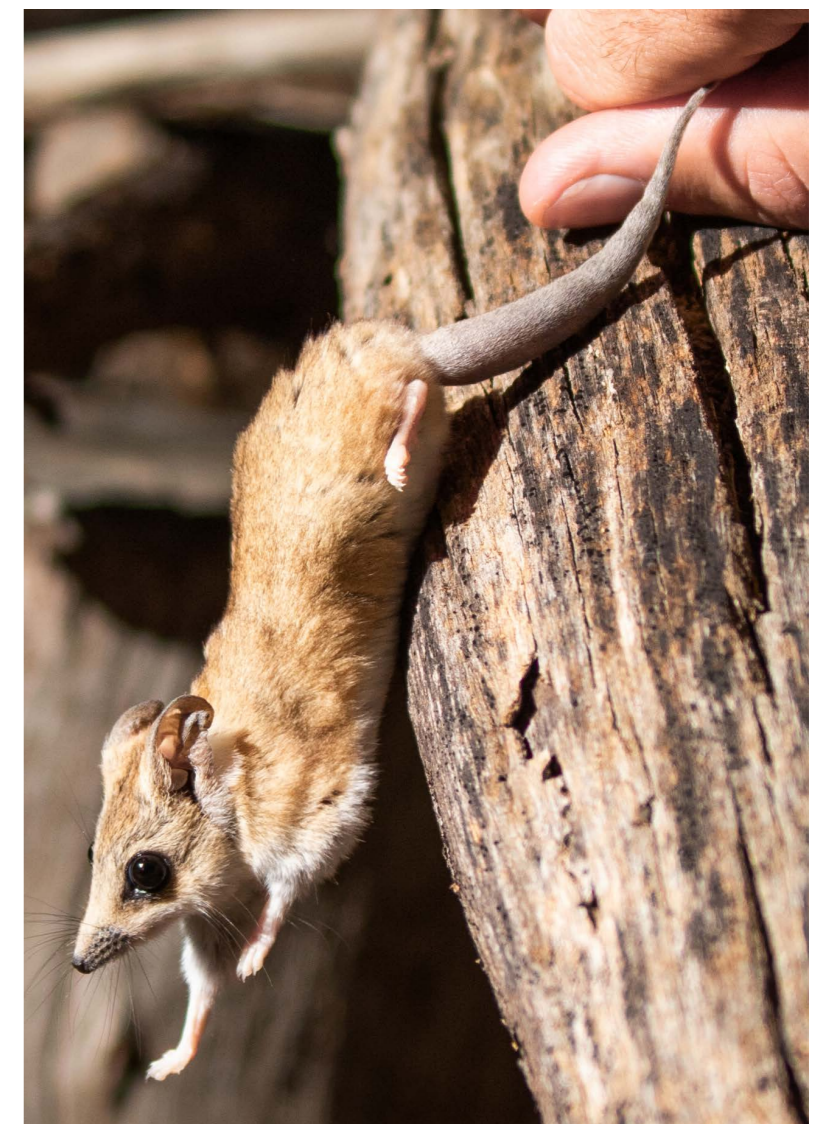
One major driver of decline is that farmers, under economic pressure, are switching from grazing native pasture to ploughing it up for cropping. It's grim, but the listing is good news, bringing an Action Plan and steps to recovery. We need research on population strongholds, biodiversity programs for farms, and money to kick it all off.

And now proposals to clear native vegetation will have to consider Fat-tailed Dunnarts. That will help save native grassland habitat as well.

Credit goes to Emily Scicluna, PhD researcher, who has worked tirelessly to shepherd the Fat-tailed Dunnart through the Scientific Advisory Committee and two ministerial approvals.

With continued campaigning to keep the focus on the last remaining small marsupial of the grasslands, 'Dunnies' may once again thrive in our grassy meadows. 🌿

Adrian Marshall, Facilitator, Grassy Plains Network



Ending the reign of hard hooves

SUBMISSIONS TO THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO IMPACTS AND MANAGEMENT OF FERAL HORSES IN THE AUSTRALIAN ALPS WILL ASSIST IN REMOVING THIS DESTRUCTIVE INVASIVE SPECIES

A retired Alpine National Park ranger once told VNPA that if you wanted to design an animal that would do the most damage to alpine ecosystems, a horse would be it.

Feral horses trample, wallow, erode streambanks, compact soil, overgraze and destroy sphagnum bogs and wetlands. They're negatively impacting at least 25 threatened alpine plants and 14 threatened alpine animals, including the fuzzy Toarrana (Broad-toothed Rat) (*Mastacomys fuscus*)

and rare alpine orchids.

Our governments have a responsibility to look after the native wildlife that has evolved in these distinctive ecosystems over millennia.

Thank you to everyone who made a submission to inquiry on feral horses in the Australian Alps. As *Park Watch* readers know, the pro-feral horse lobby swamped the federal government with submissions, and it is only with the help of passionate supporters like you that we can

hope to make a difference. Your submission, along with our formal VNPA submission, will go along way in influencing the removal of invasive species and the restoration of native habitats and wildlife.

The scientific evidence is clear: we need to act now to prevent further damage to these ancient habitats. 🌿

VNPA's submission available online at vnpa.org.au/publications/submission-impacts-and-management-of-feral-horses-in-the-australian-alps

Spotlight on Nature with Meghan Lindsay



Mountain Katydid *Acripeza reticulata*

The high country is home to many incredible and unique plants and animals, like the Mountain Katydid (*Acripeza reticulata*). The females are round and stumpy, but the males have long wings, making them look almost like a dead leaf.

These peculiar insects are brown and tend to blend in with their surroundings, hiding from unwanted attention. If that doesn't work, they lift their wings and flash a dazzling display of red, black and blue stripes to scare away predators. If a flash of bright colours doesn't work, they can ooze foul tasting goop as a last resort. These special katydids usually live in high-altitude grasslands, heathlands and woodlands. 🌿



Nature walk at Mt Cole/ Bereep-bereep

Mt Cole Pyrenees Nature Group on a nature walk with renowned ornithologist and ecologist, Gary Cheers in April. 🌿



PETER KERVAREC

Stop rogue logging in our national parks!



Main image: Nolans Crossing in Wombat Forest. SANDY SCHELTEMA. Inset: Rogue logging in Cobaw Forest, February 2023. BEN GILL

LOGGING OF OUR NATIVE FORESTS MAY SOON CEASE, BUT ROGUE LOGGING IS EMERGING AS A THREAT TO OUR PARKS AND RESERVES

Under the guise of 'storm clean up' and 'fire management', invaluable forests are being trashed and sold for commercial gain. Vital habitat for endangered animals like Phascogales, Powerful Owls and Greater Gliders is being dramatically damaged.

Central west hotspots

As can be seen over the following pages, and in previous editions of *Park Watch*, rogue logging is rampant in the Wombat and Cobaw forests.

In June 2021, the state government promised that Cobaw Forest (near Macedon) would become a conservation park. The Cobaw is a water catchment area and an island haven for biodiversity in a sea of cleared farmland.

Not far from Cobaw, VicForests has expanded logging in the promised Wombat-Lerderderg National Park, under the guise of 'salvage logging'. State-owned logging is cutting up the national park that Premier Andrews promised to create. And they have further plans to truck out hundreds of

hectares of precious habitat for paper pulp, pallets and firewood.

Parts of Wombat Forest were devastated by storms, but these areas should be cleaned up with a careful, highly targeted operation. It's vital a proper, detailed environmental assessment is carried out before any 'clean up' is done, and this is publicly available and independently assessed. But this is not a clean-up – it's a smash-up! Every day our state agencies, both VicForests and Forest Fire Management Victoria, log and damage more public land, plundering forest and wildlife habitat.

So-called 'salvage logging' is the worst kind of logging. It adds pressure to the recovering forest after the initial storm or fire, hitting the forest at its most vulnerable stage of recovery.

Just as new green shoots emerge, they are crushed by the heavy machinery brought in to clear the forest. And we know from experience, 'salvage' logging becomes a license to extend the logging operations into other areas of the forest.

Now that the state government has dramatically sped up the transition away from native forest logging, we must apply pressure to stop rogue logging by other agencies or other guises.

Help us stop rogue logging

As we've seen in the recent announcement to end native forest logging, change happens as a result of the work and dedication of people like us. With your support we can:

- Work with local groups to monitor the destruction in protected areas.
- Work with the media to draw attention to the issue.
- Support citizen scientists to conduct population surveys of native plants and animals.
- Pressure environment ministers to take action to stop rogue logging.

Your tax-deductible donation will help protect our beloved native wildlife and forests. 🌿



Help us stop rogue logging! Give a gift today to protect wildlife and forests

vnpa.org.au/rogue-logging

Credit: BEN GILL

Credit: SANDY SCHELTEMA

Salvage logging is forest destruction



VNPA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR **MATT RUCHEL** ASKS IF ROGUE LOGGING WILL BECOME THE NEXT FOREST-EATING MONSTER NOW WE'VE (ALMOST) BANISHED VICFORESTS

Due to the impact of a series of community court cases, large-scale commercial logging will cease across the state at the end of this year. State agency VicForests lost its social licence to operate after years of haemorrhaging taxpayer money and running roughshod over community concerns.

But now a new form of logging is on the rise. In many ways it's as equally rogue and could be as equally damaging if not managed and regulated. It appears our state leaders haven't learnt the lessons of decades of battles to end industrial native forest logging. We need the opposite, not the same again under a different name.

VNPA has been tracking 'salvage logging' as well as fire prevention and 'clean up' works across the state. We're seeing operations in established national parks (Dandenong Ranges National Park), in promised national parks (Wombat Forest) and conservation areas, the Cobaws and even the closed Silvan water catchment (see pp. 12 and 14).

These so-called 'clean ups' are being done in response to windstorm damage that occurred almost two years ago. Windthrown trees are being taken for commercial purposes, even out of national parks, where the natural decay of trunks and branches have long been considered a normal, healthy ecological process. In some instances, the sites are already in recovery, and it is hard to see any need for salvage. In reality, it appears that useable timber logs are the real target.

Climate science tells us that weather and fire are becoming more frequent and intense. While we will always need to protect human life and respond to emergencies, we need a truly thoughtful approach to how that

happens. Nature is part of the climate solution, not the enemy; it would be a failure of governance to end up in a world of human-made climate disaster logging, just because the opportunity is there.

How do we avoid a world like that? The first step is to make sure our nature protection laws and legal structures are fit for purpose. The current policy and approval architecture of how fire preparation works get the green light is very opaque.

In Victoria, the *Forests Act 1958* requires the Secretary of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) to carry out proper and sufficient work in state forests, national parks and other protected public land to prevent and suppress bushfires. This is a significant head of power, but it can be abused. It makes sense when fighting a wildfire in the depths of summer but what about in the depths of winter, in the name of fire prevention, especially when logs are being sold and money being made? A lack of scrutiny is what makes dubious actions not only possible but enticing to some.

It seems Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMV), through the Secretary, has almost unlimited

powers. A recent decision to 'shift and lift' over 100 specialist fire staff from Parks Victoria into FFMV has further consolidated that fire power.

The *Forests Act* provisions give FFMV the power to do what they choose, largely without scrutiny. FFMV states on various websites and public documents that they do assess for impacts on threatened plants and animals and other ecological features, but these assessments are not made public.

Works conducted under the guise of fire mitigation are not subject to the normal guidelines for forestry practice set out in the Western Regional Forests Agreement (RFA). Nor are they present in the *Sustainable Forestry Timber Act* or even the minimum standards set out in Code of Practice for Timber Production. At a state level there is no independent oversight of the ecological implications of fire-related management from other agencies such as the Office of the Conservation Regulator, which oversees VicForests.

There is a Code of Practice for Bushfire Management on Public Land (last updated in 2022), but it doesn't explicitly mention these types of works. It talks vaguely and

A pile of potential habitat logs sits by the roadside in Cobaw. BEN GILL



Heavy erosion in Cobaw in January 2023, with a safety zone sign from the future. BEN GILL

bureaucratically about 'continuing public land stabilisation activities', 'identifying, assessing and treating any further risks ...including risks to natural and cultural values' and 'undertaking works that facilitate access to public land and the recovery of natural, cultural and built assets'.

While most people would recognise that strong powers are needed during an emergency, these powers should surely be proportional once the emergency is past and subject to a thorough and transparent process to assess ecological impact. Most other industries are assessed, especially for large projects.

Unlike forestry, these types of works are in theory subject to the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* even though it looks a lot like forestry, uses the same contractors, machinery and methods and the wood for commercial use. National environmental law do not apply to forestry under RFAs, but they are supposed to apply to every thing else including fire preparation works.

When we raise these issues with the federal environment minister, she responded thus:

I understand that DEECA has undertaken a self-assessment to identify relevant protected environmental values and implement appropriate management controls and will refer

proposals if a significant impact on a protected matter is likely to occur.

This approach is vastly different to the federal department's on similar fire related projects in the past. In 2007/8, strategic fuel breaks in the Yarra Ranges were referred to the Commonwealth department. While the Commonwealth decided they didn't require further public assessment, they did put more than a dozen conditions on the works to protect key nationally listed species. This was a bare minimum of protection.

The public surely would require more caution for large-scale works in Dandenong Ranges National Park, which has records of at least eight nationally-listed threatened plants and animals.

'Salvage logging' appears to be treated using the same process as a strategic fuel break program. These have a distinct 'Planning and Approval Framework', that empowers DEECA/FFMV to make assessments for threatened wildlife and other environmental values, which are signed off by the chief fire officer and a regional DEECA director. These are not public documents; there is no transparent process of approval nor any opportunity for public scrutiny. When we asked for copies of documents, the response was that they are available under Freedom of

What is a Strategic Fuel Break?

Prescribed burning has always been a focus of FFMV. Controversial for environmental impacts, it is also increasingly difficult to manage in the wet and dry years of a rapidly changing climate.

In 2019/20 the Victorian Government made a \$35 million investment for FFMV to put in place 1,447 km of strategic fuel breaks and 108 hectares of mechanical treatment. These are being rolled out in various parts of the state, some well thought through, others not. By their own admission, this is permanent clearing with some tree canopy cover left.

According to FFMV, strategic fuel breaks are:

...fuel reduced areas up to 40 m wide, that once established, will resemble open grassy wood or heath lands. They involve the permanent reduction of bushy vegetation through mulching and slashing, and the removal of hazardous trees and impediments to maintenance such as stumps, logs and branches.

Information, a lengthy, subjective, and uncertain process.

The scale of salvage works proposed in the Wombat, Cobaws and Dandenong Ranges is huge. While complaints from VNPA and the local community have slowed some of this, any other project or program of this size would have had a full Environmental Effects Statement – or at least some comprehensive public process. But as far as we can tell, except for some rushed local consultation, little publicly available assessment of ecological impacts has been undertaken.

In a web search for the opposite of 'rogue', words like aboveboard, honest, credible and exemplary pop up. We need a system that abides by these hallmarks, not a return to rogue logging. 🌿



Credit: BEN GILL



Credit: SANDY SCHELTEMA

**Stop rogue logging
in our national parks!**

Pressure mounts against rogue logging in Dandenong Ranges National Park



NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER **BLAKE NISBET** ON THE FIGHT AGAINST ROGUE LOGGING IN DANDENONG RANGES NATIONAL PARK AND SILVAN RESERVOIR

Immense local pushback has thwarted another proposal to 'salvage log' the beloved Dandenong Ranges National Park. But it is unclear how long the pro-nature community can keep the logging machinery at bay.

Scope of work revealed

The scale of proposed logging continues to evolve. Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMV) initially scheduled broadacre salvage logging but has scaled back their plan to roadside 'edge treatment', removing windthrown trees within one tree length of the roads. One proposal involves clearing a 60 metre wide firebreak within the national park (in addition to other completed firebreak operations).

VNPA started on-ground habitat surveys at one of the sites, documenting over 50 hollow-bearing trees in the area earmarked for logging. These trees survived the devastating 2021 storm event and serve an important role as habitat for hollow-dependent native wildlife. This includes endangered Greater Gliders and Gang-Gang Cockatoos, who both rely on these trees for denning and nesting.



We acknowledge these places are part of the unceded traditional lands and waters of the **WURUNDJERI WOI WURRUNG** and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country.

We are incredibly concerned that these hollow-bearing trees may be removed if salvage logging commences. These trees are often identified as hazardous to machinery workers and removed for occupational health and safety reasons. FFMV say they'll be doing on-site assessments to locate feeding and nesting trees, but we are yet to see any survey results from the department.

We hold deep concerns about the potential impacts of fallen tree removal and the destruction of understorey habitat on the Tooarrana (Broad-toothed Rat), an endangered rodent that needs understorey vegetation and fallen logs to nest under. Many of the fallen trees targeted for removal are absorbing lots of water, creating a wet and cool microclimate that supports an array of fungi and moss. If respected and left as habitat, these water-soaked trunks and branches would serve as a natural fire retardant.

A concerned member of the public shared recent drone imagery with VNPA that shows intensive 'salvage logging' in the Silvan Reservoir catchment, directly adjacent the national park. VicForests was contracted by Melbourne Water to undertake the operations with the justification of reducing the hazardous fuel load in post-storm areas.

An example of the logs planned for removal from the forest. **HAYLEY FORSTER**

What happens after rogue logging?

In the aftermath of rogue logging the understorey vegetation is decimated. Formally sheltered topsoil is exposed to sunlight, reducing soil moisture levels that would naturally help decrease bushfire intensity.

After larger trunks are taken and sold as firewood, sawlogs and pulp, the finer fuels remain on site. These comprise mostly of small branches, sticks and leaves, often referred to in the industry as 'logging slash'. Melbourne Water plans to burn the 'slash', further drying out the soil and threatening any surviving hollow-bearing trees. A burn like this will remove fine fuels temporarily but ultimately regenerate as a dense forest understorey of high fire risk in 5-10 years.



Drone footage of salvage logging in the Silvan Reservoir catchment area. ANONYMOUSLY SUPPLIED



Faulty self-assessment

Melbourne Water assessed themselves to see if their operations are likely to affect federally listed threatened plants and animals, and make sure they meet the obligations of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. This publicly-released assessment concluded that it was unlikely their logging operations would significantly impact any nationally endangered species, dusting off any legal responsibility.

Using the Greater Glider and Tooarrana (Broad-toothed Rat) as examples, the assessment states that their pre-logging populations were largely unknown, as both animals are 'rarely observed or surveyed'.

It is worth noting here that the Silvan Reservoir is a closed catchment and not accessible to citizen scientists or the public. The assessment did not involve targeted fauna surveys which occurred for these endangered animals before they started logging. This highlights a significant issue with

our federal environmental department, who chose to abdicate responsibility and leave state agencies to self-assess.

The self-assessment report states that VicForests voluntarily applies the rules that govern logging, the Code of Practice for Timber Production, throughout these salvage logging operations, despite no legal obligation or oversight in them doing so. This would require the application of a provision known as 'the precautionary principle', which VicForests has been found to breach time and time again by the Supreme Court, including for Greater Gliders in forests across Victoria. The Supreme Court found that to satisfy the precautionary principle in relation to Greater Gliders, comprehensive surveys are required prior to logging. None were undertaken in the Silvan Reservoir catchment.

Our work protecting the Dandenong Ranges National Park from rogue salvage logging continues, and the aftermath of the Silvan Reservoir operations serves as a clear reminder as to why it is so important that we succeed in keeping this incredible web of life safe. 🌿

FFMV announces raft of changes

Just as *Park Watch* was going to print, we caught wind of changes to FFMV's plans for the national park.

Storm debris removal will be reduced to 40 metres off tracks at the two sites (a total of 50 hectares), compared to the original plan for broadacre works with areas cleared for log landings.

Debris clearing will be limited in sensitive areas or where the storm impact has been minor to targeted roadside verges.

Preparatory road works to commence in late May, and operations to start shortly after when weather is suitable (targeting some areas prior to winter

and returning in summer to finish it off).

The Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research are studying this as part of a long-term research project. Data was collected on recovery of forest prior to operations commencing. They will monitor the recovery after further disturbance events of debris removal, and after planned burning.

FFMV has also committed to:

- Retain refuges in the under- and midstorey for connectivity.
- Protect canopy trees.
- Exclude Riparian areas and areas around water bodies from logging.
- Protect all hollow bearing, den, sap feed trees and tree ferns, and create exclusion zones around nesting trees during breeding season.

- No machinery disturbance in areas of dense, swampy vegetation in gullies and other damp areas where threatened and protected species have been recorded.

- The identification, marking and protection of nest and roost sites.

While these are steps in the right direction, when comparing the Department's maps we're still seeing planned operations in areas that didn't experience storm impact.

FFMV acknowledge that the works will only partially reduce the intensity of future bushfires. VNPA's work is far from done but with community pressure and continued field work, we can hold these agencies to account and gain even greater oversight and protection of the national park. 🌿

Credit: BEN GILL

Credit: SANDY SCHELTEMA

Cobaws rogue loggers exploiting loopholes



NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER **BEN GILL** REPORTS THAT WHILE ALL IS QUIET ON THE WOMBAT FOREST FRONT, ROGUE LOGGING HAS SHIFTED TO THE COBAWS

The sounds of industrial logging have fallen quiet in the Wombat Forest in the last few months. Just one solitary machine is holding court on the log landing on Wombat Creek Road in Bullarto. Focus appears to have shifted to the nearby Cobaws in a sign that rogue logging using fire rules and exploiting loopholes to log Special Protection Zones (SPZs) and other protected areas is gaining traction.

The level of fine fuel strewn across the 80 hectare site in the Wombat exposes the fallacy of storm recovery works being conducted to minimise future fire risk. Areas of forest across the Victorian public estate that were once thought to have certain levels of protection are now finding themselves under attack from rogue logging conducted under the guise of fire mitigation. A recent update on VicForests website states:

Works in the Wombat State Forest commenced in May 2022, but were put on hold initially due to wet conditions and following that, species detections. We are currently awaiting advice from the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) before works can recommence.

The lack of adequate planning and proper management plans by VicForests played a part in its upcoming demise. Meanwhile another threat looms on the horizon, with a large scale operation undertaken by DEECA and Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMV) that involves both roadside clearing and broadacre (large scale in deep forest) works.

Under the fire management rules, FFMV are only required to conduct a self-assessment and are not required to publicly release these documents. Ongoing court cases against VicForests in the east are pushing bulldozers into the west to fulfil contractual obligations and timber shortfalls.

A recent *Weekly Times* article stated:

Harvest and haulage contractors said the thousands of fallen trees that litter the forest floor could have helped some of the state's saw mills that faced shortages, and delivered royalty revenue to the Victorian Government.

VNPA have repeatedly requested meetings with FFMV in attempt



Habitat log piles sit ready for collection in Cobaw Ranges. BEN GILL

Approximately 80 hectares of fine fuels are left behind on the Wombat Creek Road. BEN GILL

to better understand and make a contribution to how these works are conducted. These requests have fallen on deaf ears. To date approx. 301 hectares has been harvested over 13 coupes across the Wombat (see map), a promised national and regional park.

Works continue in the Cobaw Ranges near Mount Macedon. This area is almost wholly covered by a Special Protection Zone (SPZ). The SPZ exists to safeguard this incredibly biodiversity haven that has become stranded in a sea of cleared farmland.

The Andrews Government committed to converting the forest to a conservation reserve based on the advice the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council.

Late last year, VNPA staff conducted extensive surveying after being alerted to potential broadacre operations. Our questions helped result in a down scaling to roadside works on five tracks. However, several weeks later a machine was found deep in the forest on a very inaccessible track in an area with almost non-existent storm damage. Two days after our concerns were raised, FFMV released a new map with this remote location



on it. Our questions and concerns over these events are still with the Victorian Ombudsman.

Meanwhile, approximately 1,000 tree trunks await their fate in piles by the tracksides. Much of the work seem to focus on cherry-picking commercially viable windblown trees, rather than any attempt at clean-up of fine fuels.

Credible science consistently refutes these regimes of disturbance and forest fragmentation. Yet the desperate appetite of a dying industry is still devouring our natural world.

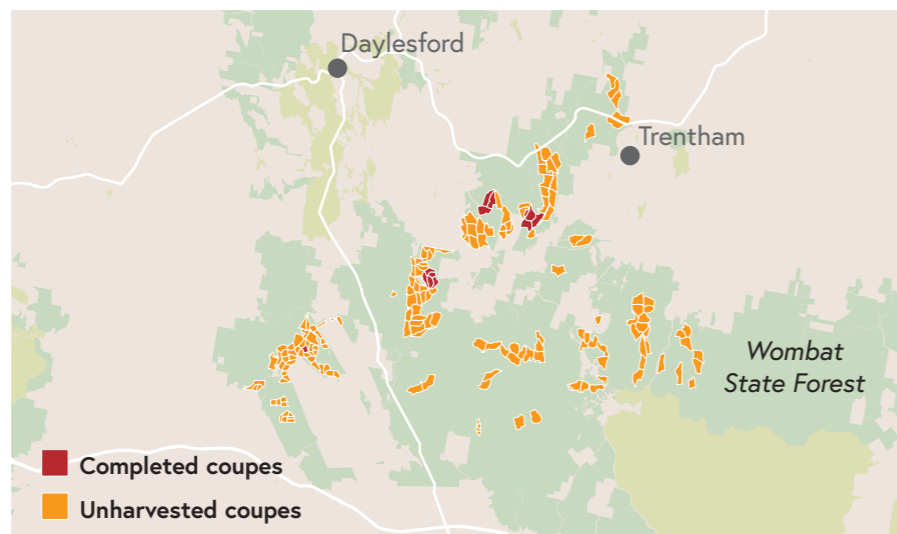
Current FFMV approaches appear to be deeply ingrained in departmental culture further fanning the flames of a divide between community.

Instead of scratching around in the forests for fallen trees to prop up a dying industry, we should be working towards a common goal.

Together we could both protect our living web of nature and mitigate fire threats by keeping moisture and structure in the forest, where it belongs. 🌿



We acknowledge these places are part of the unceded traditional lands and waters of the **DJA DJA WURRUNG, TAUNGURUNG and WURUNDJERI WOI WURRUNG** and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country.



Phantom logging machine sits idle by log pile awaiting collection. BEN GILL

Mt Cole: Where have all the flowers gone?



THE GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO LIVE UP TO ITS PROMISE OF CREATING NEW CENTRAL WEST NATIONAL PARKS SAYS NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER **BLAKE NISBET**

Anniversaries are cherished by most, but when it comes to creating new national parks, the Andrews Government seem to have forgotten the flowers.

This June marks the two-year anniversary of the government making an important promise to Victorians to establish 65,106 hectares of new national parks in the central west. This includes the Mt Buangor National Park, east of Ararat, that will protect the lush forests of Mt Cole/Bereep-bereep (the Djab Wurrung name for the area), a forest oasis that towers over the cleared agricultural land surrounding it.

Unfortunately for Victorians, this anniversary brings few celebrations, as the government is yet to follow through with its promise and legislate the Mt Buangor National Park.

Buried in the announcement's fine print was a disturbing clause: intensive logging could occur in certain sections of the park prior to legislative change. At the time there were about 23 logging coupes scheduled, and the government has just approved six new coupes this past May. The addition of the new coupes is a bit of a head-scratcher with the government announcing in the state budget that native forest logging in Victoria will cease at the end of 2023. VicForests has said that they remain focused on delivering timber for the rest of the year, so the threat of logging looms over the promised park for the next six months.



We acknowledge these places are part of the unceded traditional lands and waters of the **DJAB WURRUNG** and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country.



Beeripmo Walk, Mt Buangor State Park. BILL BLACKBURN

Together with the community, VNPA has been keeping a close eye on the overhanging threat of logging in the park, and whilst no logging has occurred in there since the park's announcement, the impacts of any last minute logging would be devastating for Victorians and the local flora and fauna that relies on these forests.

As we cast our eyes over previously logged forests at Mt Cole, we see what the future looks like if government run agencies do log it. Once thriving forests turned to grassy paddocks of bracken and weedy thistles. A fragmented 'national park' with patches eerily like the monotonous agricultural paddocks that surround it.

VicForests has shown no willingness or competence in their legal obligation to restore these forests after logging. The failed regeneration at Mt Cole is consistent with a report co-published by 19 Victorian environment groups in 2021, including VNPA. The report revealed VicForests' systemic failure to regrow logged native forests, with a whopping third of their coupes failing to regenerate after logging finished.

With the phase out of native forest logging brought forward to 1 January 2024, VicForests' motivations for successfully regenerating these forests have clearly diminished.

The promised Mt Buangor National Park is critical to the survival of native wildlife. The Blue-winged Parrot (*Neophema chrysostoma*), for example, is one of Australia's newly listed threatened species which VNPA recently observed in the canopies of these forests. Once common and widespread, the Blue-winged Parrot is now on the flight path to extinction, largely due to the current and past habitat clearing.

Threatened plants, such as the Mt Cole Grevillea (*Grevillea montis-cole* subsp. *montis-cole*) (see *Plant Blindness*, p. 17) and the Grampians Bitter-Pea (*Daviesia laevis*), are also hanging out for the protection of a new national park. The government, on the advice of relevant experts, acknowledges that these critically endangered plants need additional protection from logging in the form of 200 metre Special Management Zones, but hasn't completed the survey work required

Right, top: Coupe adjacent the promised park right after being clearfell logged in 2018.

Right, below: What the coupe looks like in 2023, five years later. All that has been regenerated is bracken and weedy thistles. MARK LAMBLE/EVOLVE FILMS



to put those protections in place. The government is also yet to release any details as to what restrictions will be placed on logging within these management zones.

Until the Mt Buangor National Park is legislated, the government's promise simply remains an unmet commitment, and the integrity of this natural refuge remains under threat from logging. And that is nothing to celebrate.

We'd like the park to be filled with birdsong and large old trees. We'd like to seek refuge in the cool, shady forests of Mt Cole on those hot summer days in rural Victoria. That's why we'll continue to resist the proposed logging of Mt Cole Forest, and make sure Victorians get the park they are promised and deserve. 🌿



Plant Blindness with Blake Nisbet



Mt Cole Grevillea *Grevillea montis-cole* subsp. *montis-cole*

The contraction of blood-red understoreys in the forests of Mt Cole/Bereep-bereep has its roots in plant blindness. When undisturbed, the Mt Cole Grevillea is a relatively long-lived shrub in the granitic loam soils of the Mt Cole range, with striking red flowers that light up the forest floor in October and November and pointed, holly-shaped leaves which are sharp to touch.

Once widespread, the Mt Cole Grevillea has diminished by 75 per cent. It is now listed as Critically Endangered under Victoria's *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act*.

Plant blindness has impacted the Mt Cole Grevillea on different levels; direct destruction from recreational activities, such as off-track bushwalking, has likely had an impact. On a much larger scale, industrial-scale logging operations across its range are strongly implicated in the decline of this rare plant.

Pre-harvest surveys are largely non-existent across western Victoria, even within the tiny geographic range the Mt Cole Grevillea can occupy. You can't protect



Mt Cole Grevillea. BILL BLACKBURN

something if you don't look for it, and for the Mt Cole Grevillea, high intensity clearfell logging has led to the widespread destruction of its habitat and populations. To make matters worse, VicForests neglected its duty to regenerate logged forests, leaving the area in an unsuitable state of habitat for the Grevillea.

There is hope that the Mt Cole Grevillea can once again thrive. Much of its habitat falls within the new national park promised two years ago but yet to be delivered. 🌿

POSTCARDS FROM THE BAY



NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER SHANNON HURLEY

ON THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN THE BOLD PLAN TO PROTECT WESTERN PORT BAY



We acknowledge these places are part of the unceded traditional lands and waters of the **BUNURONG** and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country.

A recent good news story from Western Port shows the way groups can come together for a shared outcome, in this case to protect wildlife they love.

It involves the protection of Short-tailed Shearwaters (*Puffinus tenuirostris*) and their epic migratory journey between Phillip Island/Millowl and the northern hemisphere. As the chicks emerge from their nests on Millowl, the adults embark on their long flight back across the seas. The chicks follow once they have grown enough feathers and strength.

But light pollution often disrupts the birds' flyways, scattering them across roads, resulting in many deaths. To help the Shearwaters avoid these

fatal distractions, local residents and businesses have agreed to switch off their lights for a few nights during the Shearwaters' peak fly time.

This story embodies what we are working to achieve: for businesses, government agencies, water user groups, industry, Traditional Owners and community groups to come together with the shared goal of protecting the bay.

After teaming up with the Western Port Biosphere Reserve Foundation, Phillip Island Conservation Society, Save Westernport, and many other local and statewide groups, VNPA efforts have created a ground swell of support, with over 60 businesses, groups and clubs signed on. We've also been speaking with local councils, tourism bodies, community groups, committees of management and government agencies.

So far there hasn't been anyone that's said it's a bad idea! Even local MPs Paul Mercurio (Hastings) and Jordan Crugnale (Bass) are supportive. What's missing is the broader state government commitment.



Australian Fur Seal. HANNA GEESON

French Island coastline. JUSTIN BOORD



Government support

With no commitment in the 2022 state election, we tweaked our approach.

We're now hoping to secure state government support to start the process. This could initially be a small investment to start the scoping process. It might include a staff member or two within the Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action (DEECA) to develop the Framework VNPA and our partners have begun, prepare a bid for the next state budget and start consulting with relevant agencies.

The threats are too big not to have any over-arching plan and partnership to care for the bay and the businesses and industry that rely on it. This is why our Framework proposes three pillars:

- A new strategic plan for Western Port Bay.
- A new collaborative management partnership.
- A dedicated Western Port fund with annual funding for its objectives.

Western Port Bay has an astonishingly high number of deteriorating environmental health indicators, as shown in the *State of the Marine and Coastal Environment Report*.

Yet it remains the birthplace of many risky industrialisation projects. A recent example is the trial of the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain, where liquid hydrogen is produced from coal in the La Trobe Valley exported to Japan through the port of Hastings. The rationale for this project is beyond us.

Another is Esso's plan for an ethane gas-fired power station at Long Island Point, to burn gas for power generation. Despite significant community and local council concerns, the government has conferred 'priority' status on the project, a streamlined process for approvals set up during COVID.

Renewable energy plans

On a more optimistic note, the Port of Hastings also facilitates the Victorian Renewable Energy Terminal, which promotes sustainable industry. There is a lot of positive community sentiment for more renewable energy projects. While there are many studies still to be done to assess and mitigate impacts on Western Port's UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and a Ramsar-listed wetland, the direction towards sustainable and renewable industries and economy is a good thing

The Western Port Bay Framework, once set in motion, will help establish the offshore wind sector and the Bay's role in it. It's a powerful tool to guide marine planning inclusive of offshore wind development and its interaction with other uses and interests like tourism, conservation and industry.

If done right, the Framework will provide a thorough process to assess, monitor and minimise harm on the marine environment. It will be a catalyst that brings together different interest groups around the Bay to organise.

We've been meeting with the Offshore Energy arm of DEECA to emphasise the need for leadership and collaboration between the energy and environment portfolios. (*More on the intersection between offshore wind and Western Port Bay on p. 24.*)

Take action for Western Port

In March we launched a Western Port postcard action to grow the groundswell of support for the Framework. Please send your message of support! We'll transcribe your words onto a postcard featuring mangroves, a seal or the French Island shoreline, and deliver it to the environment minister, or your local MP if you live in the Western Port area.

Thank you!

Many *Park Watch* readers have made generous donations to power this work.

We are so very grateful to our community for helping us in our goal to create a holistic approach to how we look after the Bay: a sustainable economy that respects – not exploits – the area's living wonders.

The amazing business and groups that have joined our Western Port campaign:

- ACF Community Mornington Group
- Adam Schutz
- Balin Surfers Hardware
- Balnarring Boomerang Bags
- Bass Coast Shire Council
- Bass Coast Small Coastal Township Alliance
- Blue Wedges
- Cardinia Catchment Landcare Group
- Clean Ocean Foundation
- Coolart Homestead
- Corinella Foreshore Reserve
- Corinella General Store
- Corinella Residents and Ratepayers Assoc.
- Coronet Bay Ratepayers' and Residents' Assoc.
- Crib Point Action Group
- Crib Point Stony Point Foreshore Committee of Management
- DarkLight Digital
- Devilbend Foundation Inc
- Dolphin Research Institute
- Environment Victoria
- ETCH Sparkling
- Family Rings
- FARSTE EVs
- Flinders Community Assoc.
- French Island Barge
- French Island General Store
- Friends of Coolart
- Friends of Corinella Foreshore Reserve
- Friends of French Island National Park
- Heritage Collective
- Krystal Deans
- Lloyd Environmental
- Moonlit Sanctuary Wildlife Conservation Park
- Pat The Mac Bravard
- Phillip Island Nature Parks
- Port Phillip Conservation Council
- PSYKLZ ClubSport
- Rebalance Wellness
- Save Warneet Jetties
- Save Western Port Woodlands
- Shoreham Community Assoc.
- Silver Leaf Art Box
- Small Giants
- South Gippsland Conservation Society
- Southern Peninsula Indigenous Flora and Fauna Assoc.
- Southern Ranges Environment Alliance
- SunButter Skincare
- SUP-FIT
- Surfrider Mornington Peninsula Chapter
- Swell Blades
- Tall Trees Nursery
- Tenby Point Residents Assoc.
- The Somers General
- The Waterline Area
- Westernport & Peninsula Protection Council
- Westernport Swamp Landcare Group
- Wildlife Coast Cruises

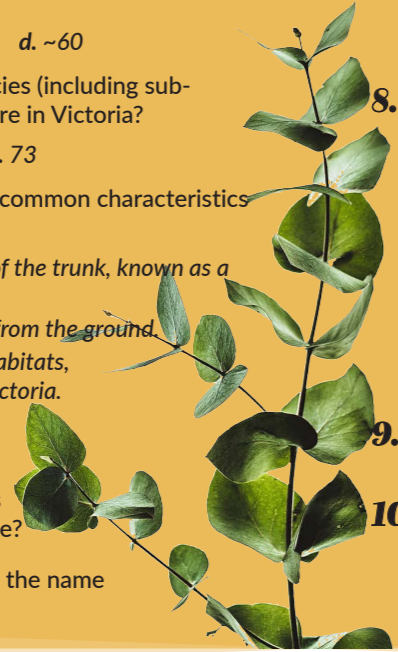
Send your own Western Port Bay support message:

vnpa.org.au/personalise-westernport-postcard

Park Watch Victorian Eucalypts Quiz



1. True or False? Eucalypts dominate many of our treed habitats in Victoria.
2. Approximately how many species of eucalypt can be found in Victoria?
a. ~20 b. ~100 c. ~200 d. ~60
3. How many threatened species (including sub-species) of eucalypt are there in Victoria?
a. 39 b. 0 c. 12 d. 73
4. Which of the following are common characteristics of mallee eucalypts?
a. Swollen root at the base of the trunk, known as a lignotuber.
b. Multiple stems emerging from the ground.
c. Generally found in drier habitats, particularly north-west Victoria.
d. Very tall.
e. Thick leathery leaves.
5. Which Victorian eucalypt is found at the highest altitude?
6. Which eucalypt species did the name Eucalyptus originate from?
7. Which of the following is not a name for the form of a eucalypt?
a. Gum b. Peppermint
c. Ribbonbark d. Stringybark
e. Mallee f. Ironbark
g. Ash h. Box
8. What eucalypt am I?
a. I am the most widespread eucalypt across Australia.
b. I am often the main eucalypt found along lowland rivers.
c. My buds are very pointy and usually in clusters of seven.
d. I can grow to have a very thick trunk and twisting, heavy branches.
e. I am known for dropping limbs unexpectedly.
f. I am known for my strong wood.
9. True or false? Eucalypts can only be found in Australia.
10. What is the world's tallest species of flowering plant and which states of Australia can this species be found?



See p.41 for answers

Nominations now open for VNPA Council


Council plays an important role in the life of VNPA – establishing policy guidelines, approving annual budgets and undertaking strategic planning for the association. Councillors are unpaid volunteers and are asked to participate in six Council meetings and relevant committees (usually around two hours each) over the course of the year. Council, elected at the Annual General Meeting, includes a president, vice-president, honorary secretary, honorary treasurer and up to nine councillors. We are particularly keen to recruit members with legal, fundraising and outdoor activity experience. To nominate, you must be a current financial member and indicate your intentions by writing to Matt Ruchel, Executive Director, mattruchel@vnpa.org.au by 5pm, 12 September. For more information, please visit vnpa.org.au/about

Taking teals to the bush

On a stunning cloudless autumn day in April, VNPA and Wombat Forestcare hosted a visit from 'teals' Dr Monique Ryan (MP for Kooyong) and Sophie Torney (candidate for the Victorian state seat of Kew). In effort to present the facts in a careful, considered and accurate manner we designed the tour to chronologically follow the salvage log grab conducted under the guise of fire mitigation. We discussed the increased pressures on Wombat in the light of logging restrictions in other areas of the state. We talked about the potentially enormous cost of rehabilitating habitat logged by VicForests. We emphasised the need to return to federal oversight of national nature laws, and the opportunity for state government to abolish Regional Forest Agreements and end native forest logging. It was wonderful to be able to show our guests the forest's amazing and



Trevor Spiers and Gayle Osborne (Wombat Forestcare), Dr Monique Ryan, Matt Ruchel (VNPA Executive Director) and Sophie Torney in the Wombat Forest. BRENDAN SNYDE

complex web of nature, and discuss in detail the importance of protecting the habitat. The day highlighted the power and value in experiencing and understanding the complex nature of our forest systems and the battered Wombat Forest. We extend deep thanks to Dr Monique Ryan and Sophie Torney for their time, voice and curiosity. We look forward to working with them in the future. 
Ben Gill, Nature Conservation Campaigner

Greg Noonan



Left: Greg at Yarra Ranges National Park.
Below: View of a storm approaching The Horn, Mt Buffalo. GREG NOONAN

GREG NOONAN HAS BEEN A VNPA MEMBER SINCE 1995 AND A REGULAR MONTHLY DONOR FOR 10 YEARS. GREG JOINED OUR GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE LAST NOVEMBER. WE RECENTLY CAUGHT UP WITH HIM FOR A CHAT.

What drew you to support VNPA?

I had noticed references to VNPA a number of times in the media – at that time, of course, that meant newspapers, free-to-air TV and radio. I gained the impression that in a field of several substantial environment campaign organisations, VNPA stood out for its insistence on solid research and reasoned persuasion, and for the respect it seemed to command. That appealed to me, as did the bushwalking program. So, I signed up. I quickly concluded that my impression was correct. What's more, I soon learnt what an impressive bunch VNPA's people were.

Tell us about one of your favourite Victorian parks and what aspects of them you especially enjoy.

A few favourites, but it's hard to go past one of the oldest for sheer grandeur and spectacle: Mt Buffalo. It is a world distinct from its surrounds, and even by car you have to earn your entry (two of my grandsons have ridden up in recent times, making a somewhat more impressive arrival!). The view of what seems to be most of Victoria from The Horn is quite something, as was the approach from the south-east of a big storm last time I visited. The jumbles of rocks are like living things. There is much variety in the walks, and so often a distant view of normal life far, far away. I may of course be slightly biased as my wife and I honeymooned at Mt Buffalo Chalet a year or two ago.

If you were 'the Government' and could create a new Victorian national park, where would it be and why?

Mt Napier, near Hamilton, perhaps as part of an enlarged volcanic province national park, based on the existing park at Budj Bim. Mt Napier was Victoria's last volcanic eruption and is classified as dormant. It is not much promoted as a visitor spot but has a wonderful atmosphere about it. The walk to the top is very rewarding.


Do you have a particular favourite creature or plant, that you go out of your way to observe or photograph?

You have to love echidnas! They live just about everywhere, and live a long life not much bothered by anything or anyone. Their food is never short, they do a very neat trick of vertical tunnelling when they need to be 'invisible', and the females keep their young cleverly safe as they grow, but leave home for good when the time is right.

Tell us about a 'surprising' experience you have had in the Victorian outdoors.

Late last year I was at Beech Forest in the Otways with a plan to walk to Little Aire Falls and Triplet Falls in the Great Otway National Park. However, steady rain set in, and the prospect looked uninviting from the local café where a friend and I were enjoying a warm lunch. Nevertheless, we donned wet weather gear and set out through the very drizzly rainforest. The 'surprise' was that I found the walk entrancing and exhilarating. And the waterfalls were in full flight. A rainforest in its pristine state.

If you could invite a famous person on a bushwalk with you, who might it be?

Stan Grant. His writing and worldview straddles the gulf between his Wiradjuri roots and the wholly modern experience. I have just been reading his illuminating take on the coronation and I would like to learn more about how he manages that straddling. He would, I am sure, also better inform my appreciation of the country through which we were walking. Better still, it might be a bushwalk on his Country. 

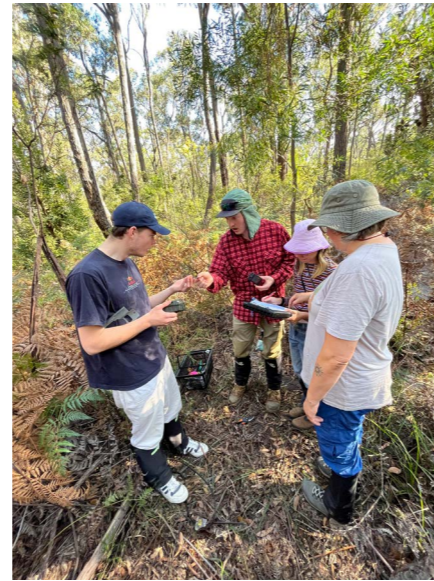
Connecting with like-minded people while skilling up for nature



In April, a group of seven nature lovers led by myself and Sera Blair, VNPA NatureWatch Coordinator, went to the forests of East Gippsland to learn how to monitor native species within the framework of the Life After Fire (LAF) project. Since 2020, LAF volunteers have been monitoring wildlife in East Gippsland to improve our understanding of threatened animals in fire-affected areas. But, this three-day expedition was looking for more than just collecting data. In line with one of the main objectives of the NextGen Nature program, this experience sought to provide new practical field skills to the participants and inspire them to take an active role in nature protection.

We began our first day by getting to know each other with fun activities before our first night of spotlighting. In smaller groups, we had the chance to learn the basics of the equipment and encounter some of the most iconic wildlife in the area, like Sugar Gliders, Greater Gliders and Mountain Brushtail Possums. Day two involved preparing and installing camera traps and audio recording devices, in addition to on-field training on identifying tracks and scats. In the evening we had a discussion panel about professional pathways in the conservation field. This activity provided valuable insights into the importance of gaining experience through volunteering, the role of social media in engaging communities in local conservation issues, relevant lessons on perseverance and how to overcome some common challenges in the field of conservation as young professionals. On our final day, we shared valuable reflections on the new perspectives and expertise gained during the trip and how young people can bring new values and expertise to the nature conservation movement.

Consuelo Quevedo, NextGen Nature Coordinator



If you're interested in hearing more about NextGen Nature, join our Facebook group and stay tuned to our upcoming activities!
www.facebook.com/groups/nextgennature



'An invaluable trip'

Oliver Stapler-Hunt, a member of the NextGen Nature Collective, shares his experience as a participant in the NextGen East Gippsland expedition.

The expedition was an invaluable trip that gave me helpful insights into the conservation field, as well as practical knowledge and skills around the study of wildlife. A group of seven volunteers and three leaders headed up to Swan Reach for three days to undertake animal monitoring studies as a part of a bigger project, studying habitat all over Victoria. We went spotlighting at night, and observed Greater Gliders and Mountain Brushtail Possums, as well as the stars on a beautiful clear night! The next day we set up cameras, bait stations and audio recorders in 10 different locations along our two study sites. We learned how to operate

and set up the equipment, and how it contributes to the study. We also learned how to identify different animal scats by their shape and structure. We even had a Q+A session with our leaders, learning how they got into the conservation field, and the ins and outs of the industry. The trip instilled more of a drive in me to get out and volunteer, because it's such a great way to learn and experience different things, and find out what you are really passionate about. I would definitely recommend something like this to anyone who loves the outdoors and is willing to try something new, and learn whilst doing it!

Winter activities calendar

Here's a selection of the activities and events VNPA has coming up for you in winter 2023.



A snapshot of our winter activities calendar

NextGen Nature - Lyrebird walk
Sunday 25 June

Designed for young adults, this walk will explore Cool Temperate Rainforest and Mountain Ash Forest in the Dandenong Ranges National Park where we will learn all about lyrebirds and loads more.

Birdwatching for beginners
Online workshops. Sun 25 June, Sun 2 July 10am-12pm

New to birdwatching? Come and learn twitching tips and tricks in this interactive online workshop.

Nature Stewards course in Horsham
22 July-26 August

A six-week program where you will learn all about natural places and meet like-minded people.

Sea Slug Census
San Remo
6 August

This event takes rockpooling to the next level. You will see amazing stuff, like hermit crabs, brittle stars, sea spiders and hopefully sea slugs!

Bushwalk: Crusoe Reservoir and Big Hill
Saturday 26 August

Kick off the start of the wildflower season with this 12 km walk through Greater Bendigo National Park.

Bushwalk: Long Forest Reserve
Sunday 27 August

How many birds will you spot along this 10.5 km woodland walk?

Discover more at vnpa.org.au/activities

Where we went in summer and autumn

Since the beginning of the year volunteers and bushwalkers have taken part in many adventures with VNPA.

- Budding photographers learnt tips and tricks at an **environmental photography workshop** with Alison Pouliot.
- Citizen scientists went **spotlighting and camera trapping** in Bunyip and on multi-day trips to East Gippsland with NatureWatch.
- Marine citizen scientists rambled in rockpools at San Remo to **record sea slugs** with ReefWatch.
- **Nature Stewards** in Melbourne, Merri-bek, Moonee Valley, Mornington Peninsula and the Strathbogie Ranges began their 10 week journeys, learning about local and Victorian nature.
- **Bushwalkers** traversed Kinglake, Brisbane Ranges and You Yangs National Parks, while **coach trippers** visited Mt Macedon and the Great Ocean Road.

Photography workshop with Alison Pouliot



ReefWatch Sea Slug Census

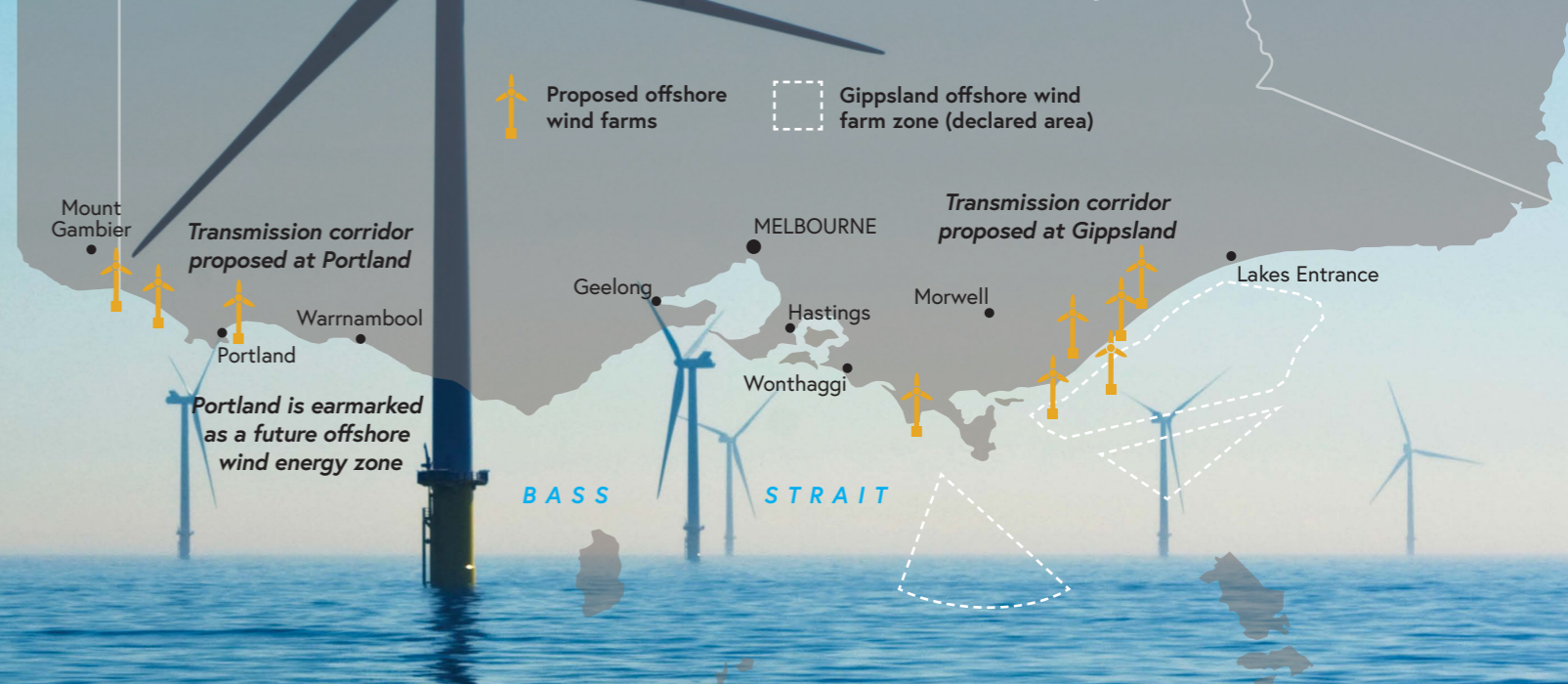


Fungi adventures with Dr Sapphire McMullan-Fisher and Gidja Walker, Mornington Peninsula Nature Stewards Autumn program. JULIE VAN SCHIE

Winds of change

Sustainable energy needs sustainable planning

Rampion Offshore Wind Farm, UK. NICHOLAS DOHERTY/UNSPLASH



IF OFFSHORE WIND ENERGY IS TO PROTECT OUR PLANET, NATURE NEEDS TO BE UP FRONT AND CENTRE. MARINE SPATIAL PLANNING IS A TOOL THAT CAN ACHIEVE THIS SAYS SHANNON HURLEY

As plans to power Victoria with offshore wind energy develop, government leadership to properly protect our marine environment is not as breezily found. Victoria has ambitious plans to be a leader, but this shouldn't come at the expense of nature and people's livelihoods. What are the current planning arrangements governing the industry, and where should they be if we're to protect Victoria's marine gems?



We acknowledge these places are part of the unceded traditional lands and waters of the GUNDITJMARA, BUNURONG and GUNAIKURNAI and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country.

Building the offshore wind world

Offshore wind generation is where the wind turbines are mounted on the seabed. Other offshore assets like sea cables and substations to transform the power are included. The infrastructure is in Commonwealth waters (more than 5 km offshore), but the cables traverse into state waters to connect with the land.

The transmission network is required to transfer energy generated by the wind farm to the existing electricity transmission network. Two locations have been proposed to extend the network at Portland and Gippsland. VicGrid, within the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), has been tasked with its development.

The Port of Hastings, known as the Victorian Renewable Energy Terminal, has been identified as the assembly port, providing support for wind farm construction and operation.

Potential impacts

There will be impacts from the construction and ongoing operation, some of which may include:

- Direct damage to habitats such as reefs.
- Direct collision, injury, or death of wildlife with infrastructure like albatross and other seabirds.
- Impacts from underwater noise on navigation of fish and marine mammals.
- Disruption to migration pathways, breeding, feeding and calving areas

of wildlife like Southern Right Whales.

- Vegetation removal on land.
- Dredging impacts in Western Port Bay, should that be undertaken.

Capturing data and analysing the impacts on marine environments is challenging. As a result, there are still many unknowns.

The regulatory framework

The federal government is responsible for the over-arching framework and deciding how and where projects can operate. In December 2022, the Albanese Government declared the first offshore wind energy zone at Gippsland, which opened the door for companies to apply for a feasibility license and undertake studies. This year should reveal which ones get a license.

The Victorian Government's job is more in the roll out, construction and support for projects. They have responsibility for the transmission network and port development.

All elements of the power supply chain will need to assess the environmental impacts before any construction begins. The Commonwealth will assess their jurisdiction across land and sea under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, and the Victorian Environmental Effects Statement (EES) process covers the relevant areas within state waters and land.

While the transmission network and the ports development are government-led (by VicGrid and the Port Authority, respectively), it is disappointing to see the marine space

is left to each offshore wind developer to do their own planning.

Once again, our marine environment is conspicuously absent. The danger is that energy companies may think they have a suitable site, when in fact they have not, which could result in a waste of time, enormous funds and effort if the area is later deemed unsuitable.

On land there are detailed planning schemes and laws that developers are required to work with in order to avoid infrastructure in certain places. This includes tenure arrangements such as national parks. These do not exist in the marine environment.

Just because wind turbines are located offshore does not mean their impact is nullified. The same level of care and the criteria we show for our land should also be applied to the marine world.

Lack of marine planning

Our unique marine world, above and below the surface, is exquisite. From critically endangered Southern Right Whales calving and splashing, to the sheer size of the wings of an albatross soaring the sky, to Kingfish schooling and darting as they catch a feed.

The energy and environment portfolios of government must come together effectively to plan for the protection of our marine world. Without coordinated upfront planning, clean technology designed to address the climate crisis could cause significant and unnecessary harm to reefs, wildlife, and habitat.

In a nutshell, the current system is not fit for purpose – especially when we're talking about the establishment of a state-wide industry. It's being squashed into existing assessment processes on a project-by-project basis. There's no upfront planning, which is essential for the proper identification of suitable areas for new projects.

The Victorian Marine and Coastal Policy (and international guidelines) say marine spatial planning should be used to coordinate and guide planning, management, and decision-making across marine sectors in Victoria (like renewable energy).

VNPA is advocating for proper upfront marine planning. It is the only way for impacts across land and sea to be understood (and thus avoided) early on. The Victorian Government even developed a framework for exactly this – but has yet to get the ministerial tick of approval to implement it.

Marine spatial planning is a process that could be used to identify marine users and organise marine space in state and Commonwealth waters.

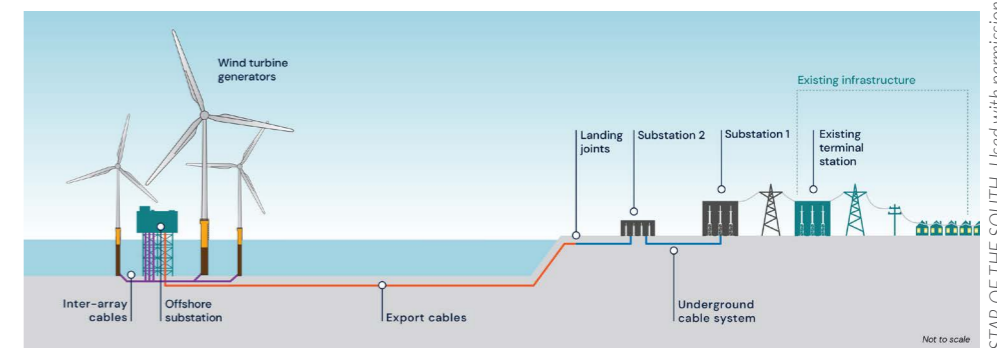
We've been advocating for clear criteria to oversee:

- Infrastructure through national and state parks, marine national parks, Ramsar areas, high conservation value areas.
- Areas marked to be new marine national parks.
- Culturally significant areas.
- Important feeding, breeding, calving and migratory areas.
- Visually sensitive areas or national parks like Wilsons Promontory.

Sustainable energy needs sustainable planning. Industry needs the help of marine spatial planning early on to guide initial site identification and safeguard our marine environment from harm.

Marine planning would help to develop a responsible industry. It just needs the seal of approval from both the environment and energy ministers to make it happen.

It's our hunch that Portland could be the next area declared. It's time to get our skates on. It doesn't have to be perfect, but it has to get started. 🐟



What's involved? Offshore turbines catch the strong offshore winds to generate electricity, which is transmitted through a network of cables and substations to connect to the grid.

Equity and nature conservation



THERE HAVE BEEN BIG ADVANCES IN REPARATIONS FOR ABORIGINAL DISPOSSESSION, BUT THERE MIGHT BE TROUBLE ON THE HORIZON. WE CAN AVOID IT, SUGGESTS PHIL INGAMELLS

Once had the privilege of spending time with an elder of the Gunaikurnai community, a man whose quiet wisdom and wily determination brought respect from all who knew him. He told me how, taking refuge from his tough job in East Gippsland's Club Terrace timber mill, he would camp on a beach near Shipwreck Creek.

But in 1979, when the beach was included in the new Croajingolong National Park and others discovered its beauty, it was made clear he should move along.

Then there was the family I knew in Central Victoria, who grew up having to hide their Aboriginality. In their early days they claimed to be Indian, which allowed them a degree of social acceptance – something pretty important to any child through their school years.

Not so many years later, when being Aboriginal was formally celebrated, they found themselves obliged to welcome everyone to Country, a series of requests that didn't necessarily come with the critical (for them) petrol money.

Things like that hurt, though they are comparatively small events in the long saga of First Peoples mistreatment.

The extent of disadvantage meted out to Victoria's Aboriginal community over a couple of hundred years, and its multiple manifestations, can be difficult to grasp for anyone outside that community. It's a story yet to be fully told. But there are pretty clearly two areas of long-term disadvantage that reparation should be aiming at: damage to Aboriginal culture and a loss of economic opportunity.

There isn't, nor should there be, a cheap way out of this. Current reparations in Victoria, focussed as they are on Native Title over prime crown land, might fit the cultural objective (and even help a parallel biodiversity objective) but as a remedy for economic injustice the scenario is fraught.

Expecting Aboriginal communities to construct a Western income stream from under-threat conservation estate puts them in an invidious position. It's ripe with expectations but full of conflict, and fundamentally unfair to good people.

National parks do bring substantial economic benefits to rural communities, but their actual management comes at a cost. Government funding for joint

management, including ranger positions, can benefit some in each community, but that's scarcely sufficient recompense for long-term exclusion from property ownership and economic opportunity. And Aboriginal cultural tourism, as fulfilling as that can be, is not the money-spinner some imagine.

Native Title rulings (under either Victoria's *Traditional Owner Settlement Act* or a Federal High Court Native Title finding) have now been established over more than 26 national parks and reserves in Victoria. The list includes Mt Buffalo National Park (Taungurung People), Kooyoora State Park (Dja Dja Wurrung People), Mitchell River National Park (Gunaikurnai People) and Barmah National Park (Yorta Yorta People). The Eastern Maar People have recently had a similar win, with Native Title restored over much of their Great Ocean Road region. The list will continue to grow.

The granting of Native Title over Victoria's conservation estate should, from the outset, have been accompanied by guaranteeing part ownership of a range of government or public/private enterprises, or even by buying profitable private ventures, bringing employment opportunities as well as economic recompense to people and communities that need it.

There are many options to consider. Joint ownership of Melbourne's Yarra Park, for example, could bring an income stream from the operation of the MCG. There are ports and other possibilities.

But in the absence of appropriate access to substantial economic opportunity, management of areas critical to the protection of native species can become skewed by an understandable need for communities to capitalise on the joint-managed park or reserve. The recent emergence of 'native forest gardening', a euphemism for selective timber harvesting, is surely a product of that unfair pressure (see box opposite page).

Granting Native Title over our finest areas of native bush is a gesture of appropriate scale, but it's also an unworkable way out of the full recompense 'problem'. It's incomplete.

If the remnants of bushland, marshland and coast that the Victorian community freed from exploitation pressures over the last 100 years or so are to be unnecessarily reopened to new exploitative pressures, putting our 500-million-year-old natural heritage at further risk, we all lose.

With a bit of thought, and a bit of overdue, clear-eyed generosity, it doesn't have to be like that. 🌿

Native forest gardening

Central Victoria's Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation has recently developed Galk-galk Dhelkunya, a 'Forest Gardening Strategy'. It's a cross-tenure plan to guide management of all forested lands held by the Dja Dja Wurrung (Djaara) people, either as freehold or public land under native title.

Its aims appear largely consistent with their earlier Joint Management Plan for the Dja Dja Wurrung Parks, but there is a significant change of emphasis.

Galk-galk Dhelkunya puts forward two prime techniques to heal the mining-era damaged Box-Ironbark Woodlands: cultural thinning, followed by cultural burning.

There is growing concern among people familiar with the strategy that the scale and methods of thinning box and ironbark trees, as well as the Wombat Forest's Stringybark and Small-leaf Peppermints, could be overly driven by understandable commercial incentives.

The Corporation has recently been granted \$1.4 million by the Federal Government (to be matched by some

\$3 million of Djaara funds) to 'enable Djaara to establish a business known as Djaara Timbers, which would see the organisation access, treat and mill timber for a variety of environmental and commercial purposes'.

The Victorian Forest Products Association has welcomed the investment in the project. The strategy appears to have evolved with support from the University of Melbourne's School of Ecosystem and Forest Sciences and Forestry Australia. 🌿

Read more at dhelkunydja.org.au

Ian McKellar

IAN MCKELLAR HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF VNPA SINCE 1953 – THAT'S JUST ONE YEAR AFTER WE WERE FORMED! NOW IN HIS 90S, IAN HAS A LONG CAREER AS AN ENGINEER, AN AVID BUSHWALKER, AND AUTHOR. WE VISITED IAN TO TALK ABOUT HIS MANY INTERESTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS.



When did you first get interested in the bush?

As a boy I joined the Scouts, and through them I was introduced to camping and the bush. We used to travel in the dog box carriages in suburban trains to go walking and camping in the 1940s. Later, I joined the Rovers, where the legendary Bill Waters introduced me to the greater fascinations of walking in the Australian bush. I think I originally joined VNPA in 1953 simply because my mother was a member!

What brings you the most enjoyment in the Australian bush?

For me, the joy of walking in the bush is equalled by that of undertaking the navigation. This is what makes multi-day walks most interesting. On numerous walks throughout the 1990s I undertook consecutive sections of the Alpine Walking Track, trekked to the headwaters of the Murray, as well as the Grampians, Hume and Hovell Walking Track, Warby Ranges, the Great Ocean Walk and many walks in both the Victorian Alps and Wilsons Promontory.

Tell us about your interest in coastal radar stations.

My father was a pioneer amateur radio enthusiast, and as a student I qualified for my own licence [Ian's callsign was VK3ZAM]. This lifelong interest led me to write a number of books on the histories of radar stations along Australia's coast.

It's a fascinating and not very well known aspect of our history. For our book on the Cape Otway radar station, we were able to access German navy records, including a map showing where German ships were in Bass Strait in 1940, and the captain's log book showing where they planned to lay mines.

Which is your favourite Victorian national park?

My favourite Victorian national park would have to be Wilsons Promontory, because it's where my parents first met, at the Derby Chalet in 1924. So I grew up hearing their stories of the Prom. I have done countless walks in the Prom, and my wife Margaret and I introduced our children and grandchildren to the joys of bushwalking, taking family walks around Oberon Bay. I was also on the Wilsons Promontory National Park Advisory Group for a number of years.

If you were 'the Government' what would you do for Victorian national parks?

I have recently been lobbying Parks Victoria to put in an extra walk at Wilsons Promontory. I refer to it as 'the missing link': from Tidal River to the shuttle bus turnaround, so people don't have to walk on the road.

I believe one area of Victoria we need to strongly protect is the high country. I am concerned at the proposals to build new huts in the Alpine National Park. It is not the sort of thing we should be encouraging.

Another area of concern is the degradation of walking tracks caused by motorbikes. It causes destruction and so much noise in the bush.

Ian McKellar is the author of *History and Memories of 14 Radar Station Wilsons Promontory* (2004), *Defending the Eye of the Needle: A History of Cape Otway 1939-1945* (2010) and *Flinders Island Secret: The untold story of 1RS WW11 Radar Station* (2019), amongst numerous other publications.

Saving the last one per cent



Small Golden Moths Orchid
DAVIDFRANCIS34/WIKIMEDIA

Victoria's grasslands have suffered huge losses since colonial settlement, with 99 per cent destroyed by grazing, cropping and urban development. Once covering almost a third of the state, our native grassy ecosystems are on the brink of extinction.

In good news, the audit found the handful of high-quality patches of grassland acquired by the MSA are stable. But the bulk of the protected grasslands are in decline. Across most of the MSA, weeds and mismanagement are combining to destroy the very biodiversity values supposedly protected by this deal. Instead, we've seen developers thrive while nature and native wildlife continue to suffer irreversible damage from every risk the government was warned about.

The audit doesn't specifically cover the most important biodiversity hotspots within the new urban growth corridors. It also fails to mention the recent complete destruction – through dumping of asbestos-contaminated fill – of Conservation Area 9.

It's like a doctor giving you a check-up but failing to report that you have a missing hand.

Other audit recommendations cover the way the health of grasslands and native wildlife are assessed and include:

- Giving Traditional Custodians a seat at the table.
- An improved land acquisition strategy.
- Weed management.
- Better fire regimes for biomass management.
- A new research program.
- The need for urgent action to protect the very last patch of Small Golden Moths Orchid (*Diuris basaltica*) on earth.

If these recommendations are acted on, we might finally get some positive change for our grassy plains.

The Strategic Audit of the Implementation of Melbourne Strategic Assessment Conservation Outcomes 2022 Report comes from the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability and is one of the key recommendations of the damning 2020 Victorian Auditor-General's Office report *Protecting Critically Endangered Grasslands*.



GRASSY PLAINS NETWORK FACILITATOR ADRIAN MARSHALL SAYS

RADICAL CHANGES ARE NEEDED IF THE GOVERNMENT IS TO SUCCEED IN RETAINING THE LAST ONE PER CENT OF VICTORIA'S GRASSLANDS

A quietly critical audit of the Victorian Government's flagship grassland conservation program is calling for major changes to protect some of the state's most precious landscapes.

The audit makes 16 recommendations to redesign the Melbourne Strategic Assessment (MSA), including a new governance framework to support 'better decision-making and risk management practices at all levels'.

The MSA (an agreement between the Victorian and federal governments) is designed to protect 'matters of national environmental significance'. This includes the critically endangered grassland communities and the bandicoots, frogs, lizards, and threatened plants that depend on them for their survival.

It's also supposed to streamline development of the 60,000 hectares of land released for urban growth back in 2010. But the audit describes the MSA as 'limited in scope', stating it lacks 'the comprehensive analysis of biodiversity values at an ecosystem scale...required to achieve whole-of-landscape outcomes'.

Critical gaps in vital data and knowledge 'hamper the MSA program's ability to adequately assess whether it is meeting its conservation commitments.'



We acknowledge these places are part of the unceded traditional lands and waters of the WADAWURRUNG, WURUNDJERI WOI WURRUNG and BUNURONG and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country.

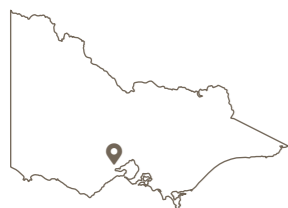


Golden Sun Moth. SIMON BENNETT/FLICKR

Grasslands grapple with growth



ADRIAN MARSHALL
ASKS: DOES THE
GEELONG STRATEGIC
ASSESSMENT
THREATEN NATURE?



We acknowledge these places are part of the unceded traditional lands and waters of the **WADAWURUNG** and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country.

Geelong's Northern and Western Growth Areas are 6,000 hectares earmarked for development. They include endangered grassland, and habitat for Striped Legless Lizard and Golden Sun Moth, federally protected species which are the subject of the Geelong Strategic Assessment (GSA).

Strategic assessments, carried out under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act), sound good on paper. They aim to balance protection of listed species with development needs: one big overview rather than many individual assessments.

Integrating natural values early into planning is good. It can allow biolinks, sensible trade-offs, early protection of strategically important assets, and greater certainty for everyone.

What can go wrong?

The disastrous Melbourne Strategic Assessment shows how bad it can be. Developers saved \$500 billion, got certainty, while biodiversity continues to crash. It was naïve, failed to protect small high-biodiversity areas, and allowed weeds to destroy thousands of hectares of grassland.

Read our detailed concerns here
www.northwestalliance.au

The City of Geelong has just gutted its environment department to save costs. Ministers are calling for state intervention. The risk of failed governance is mounting.

The GSA agreement with the federal government cuts out state government, sidelining DEECA as well as the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority, responsible for integrated planning and biodiversity management in the area.

The biggest red flag was in the briefing VNPA and Grassy Plains Network attended. It showed only one area protected for conservation in the Northern Geelong Growth Area. Three out of four populations of Striped Legless Lizard could be bulldozed, along with Natural Temperate Grassland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain and hundreds of hectares of Golden Sun Moth habitat – a ratio of one part protection to six parts destruction. That's simply lip-service to the principles of avoid and mitigate on which the EPBC Act is built.

The Moorabool River and Cowies Creek get a scant 100 metre buffer, and we fear development on their flood plains. We were told biolinks would be considered later, when land use has been mostly determined, the exact opposite of what a strategic assessment should be.

Once the detail gets released in late June we have just eight weeks to respond. They're rushing this through. Whatever the outcome, we need a broader discussion on how we plan for nature at a larger scale. Are strategic assessments the best way? Why does the environment always wear the risk?

North West Alliance

VNPA and Grassy Plains Network have joined the North West Alliance, a coalition of environmental organisations and community as shocked as we are. Together, we've written to state and federal environment ministers, Geelong's planners and EPBC authorities.



Southern Brown Bandicoot. MARK GILLOW/FLICKR

Alliance for woodlands bears fruit



CATHERINE WATSON FROM
SAVE WESTERN
PORT WOODLANDS

REPORTS ON THE EPIC
JOURNEY TO PROTECT
THIS IMPORTANT WILDLIFE
CORRIDOR FROM SAND
MINING

After 747 submissions, 27 hearing days, 72 presentations, 32 expert witnesses and 570 documents, the community's work on the Bass Coast Distinctive Areas and Landscapes (DAL) hearing is done.

For Save Western Port Woodlands (SWPW) members and our allies, it's been arduous, time-consuming and costly, but also unexpectedly useful.



We acknowledge these places are part of the unceded traditional lands and waters of the **BUNURONG** and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country.

The Woodlands proved to be the major issue of the eight-week hearing, which started in the Wonthaggi Town Hall in early March and closed in Spring Street in late April.

The *Planning and Environment Act* defines a distinctive area as one containing 'a concentration of unique attributes of state and/or national significance that are under threat from significant or irreversible land use change'. It seemed tailor-made for the Western Port Woodlands, the last significant remnant forest in the Gippsland Plains bioregion and a biodiversity hotspot, according to a 2021 report by VNPA. It's also under threat from a surge in sand mining, with 10 working mines, another nine approved and seven under application.

So we were dismayed when the draft Bass Coast Statement of Planning Policy (SPP), released in April 2022, contained nothing about protecting the Woodlands but plenty about protecting the sand from 'encroachment by incompatible land uses'.

Two-thirds of the submissions called for an end to sand mining in the Woodlands. They came from our members, Bass Coast Shire Council and organisations including VNPA, the Western Port Biosphere and the two local conservation societies.

SWPW, VNPA and the South Gippsland Conservation Society formed the Western Port Woodlands Alliance for the hearing, employing an advocate and calling expert witnesses.

Even before we presented our case, the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) accepted that the SPP 'should explicitly recognise the unique, significant and intrinsic biodiversity

value of the Western Port Woodlands corridor as a whole, irrespective of land tenure, and the potential for cumulative, permanent impacts associated with extractive industries in the region.' Further, the Woodlands are 'a concentration of unique attributes of state and/or national significance that are under threat from significant or irreversible land use change'.

This was a real breakthrough. It meant that for the first time the Woodlands were acknowledged and valued in official government documents. Now came the hard bit: persuading the panel to do something about the threats.

DTP agreed with the Alliance and Council on most points, supporting further work to identify biodiversity values and habitat connectivity and to use planning provisions to strengthen protections. However, they argued that most of the work must be done after the SPP is completed.

The dangers are obvious. Council argued for interim environmental and landscape overlays – a virtual moratorium – to protect the forest while the planning work continues.

Our closing submission noted that it had been left to the community to do the work to identify environmental values so the SPP could protect them. Sound familiar? Now it's up to the planning panel to adjudicate and report to Planning Minister, Sonya Kilkenny, who will make the final decision.

Ultimately, the decision to end sand mining in the Western Port Woodlands will be political. Our work is not done but we are buoyed by the progress we have made. Unexpected to us and probably unexpected to the state government, which can no longer pretend that the regulatory system will take care of our legitimate concerns about mining in woodlands.

VNPA is pleased to be part of the Western Port Woodlands Alliance. These planning panels cost thousands of dollars (for expert witness, legal advice). If you would like to support this work, please visit our campaign site

vnpa.org.au/campaigns/western-port-woodlands

put space in the right place



JULIA PEACOCK,
NATURE ADVOCATE
AT THE NATURE
CONSERVATION
SOCIETY OF SOUTH
AUSTRALIA, REPORTS THAT
AN EMERGING INDUSTRY
THREATENS PROTECTED
AREAS IN THE STATE



We acknowledge these places are part of the unceded traditional lands and waters of the NAUO and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country.

Currently in South Australia there is an appetite to capitalise on the space industry. With the global 'space economy' worth around US\$350 billion in 2018 and expanding rapidly, a growing market for rockets carrying small satellites is leading to a race to establish commercial launching complexes across Australia.

Unfortunately, our natural areas, including those formally protected, are set to lose out.

An example of this is the proposal for a rocket launching facility at Whalers Way, a conservation area on the southern tip of the Eyre Peninsula, which the Nature Conservation Society of SA (NCSSA) has been fighting for over two-and-a-half years. NCSSA's fight has highlighted weaknesses in both state and federal environmental law and is a cautionary tale about what happens when our regulatory systems lag behind new industries.

What is at stake?

The specific proposal is to build a private, industrial-scale rocket launching complex capable of sending 'small' rockets (up to 29 metres) into space for putting satellites into sun-synchronous and polar orbits.

There's no doubt this emerging market presents an economic opportunity but Whalers Way is simply the wrong place for this development. It is a sensitive

environmental area, formally protected as a Heritage Agreement under South Australia's system for private land conservation (equivalent to Trust for Nature Covenants in Victoria), meaning it should be managed for native vegetation protection in perpetuity.

It is also home to a range of threatened wildlife, notably the Southern Emu-wren (Eyre Peninsula) (*Stipiturus malachurus parimeda*), Mallee Whipbird (*Psophodes leucogaster leucogaster*), White-bellied Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) and Eastern Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus cristatus*), and is adjacent to the Thorny Passage Marine Park, habitat for the endangered Australian Sea Lion (*Neophoca cinerea*) and a breeding area for the Southern Right Whale (*Eubalaena australis*).

All this wilderness and fragile beauty is now threatened with clearance for launch pads, block houses, blast walls and firing bunkers, as well as other infrastructure including new tracks and a dam. Once established, the facility would increase disturbance from visitation as well as rocket launch noise which would pierce this wild coastline, travelling over several kilometres and leading to further decline in the populations of timid, endangered birds.

Site selection the critical step

In looking for a suitable site for this rocket launching complex, the start-

Opposite: Whalers Way.
FRAN SOLL/ TAKE 2 PHOTOGRAPHY

Right: Southern Emu-wren (Eyre Peninsula).
FRAN SOLL/ TAKE 2 PHOTOGRAPHY

up company Southern Launch says it undertook an 'extensive review' of the entire southern Australian coastline – from Albany in Western Australia to Sale in Victoria – and selected three preferred areas. These were Whalers Way, nearby Lincoln National Park and West Cape Howe National Park in WA. In other words, the company selected three formally protected conservation areas as their preferred sites. It is deeply concerning that the emerging space industry has the impression that our conservation areas are greenfield zones ripe for development.

In part, Southern Launch justified their choice by saying the South Australian land-use planning system has no zones which envisage space industry developments, a yawning omission in the recently revamped system.

Failure of threatened wildlife management

Two of the bird species placed at greatest risk from this proposal – the Southern Emu-wren (Eyre Peninsula) and the Mallee Whipbird – are 'protected' under the national *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

However, the impacts of years of failure to act on this national 'protection' through a lack of resourcing and weak political will are clearly evident. The Southern Emu-wren (Eyre Peninsula) has been recognised as threatened for over 20 years, yet a Recovery Plan has never been adopted, despite drafts being prepared.

No systematic actions to recover this tiny bird have ever been funded. Rather, in one of her last acts as Environment Minister, Sussan Ley decided this bird did not even need a Recovery Plan, at the same time as the proposal to destroy its habitat for this development came before her as a referral.



Both the Southern Emu-wren (Eyre Peninsula) and the Mallee Whipbird are now being considered for 'uplisting' from Vulnerable to Endangered under the EPBC Act, with independent Threatened Species Scientific Committee advising that both are closer to extinction, even before prime habitat is destroyed for this proposed facility. A recent survey of the Southern Emu-wren (Eyre Peninsula), funded by the company in an attempt to seemingly 'greenwash' their proposal, shows that there are even fewer of these birds left than previously thought – less than 500 are likely to remain.

It makes absolutely no sense to be pushing any threatened species closer to extinction for novel developments that could be sited elsewhere, and our state and national laws need to reflect this, both in their drafting and their implementation.

Acute fire risk

Whalers Way is a high bushfire risk area. There have already been catastrophic fires on the Eyre Peninsula that have led to the loss of populations of the Southern Emu-wren (Eyre Peninsula).

Rocket launching is inherently dangerous and experimental, as was recently demonstrated by SpaceX's

'unscheduled disassembly', and it is therefore incompatible with the flammable vegetation that blankets Whalers Way.

This risk is real and was clearly demonstrated when a 'test' launch, attempted in September 2021, ended in a fire on the 'temporary' launch pad. Luckily this mishap was contained but the risk of uncontrolled fire at Whalers Way – to people, property and wildlife – is clearly unacceptable.

What's next?

Decisions on whether to let the reckless and damaging proposal proceed at Whalers Way are still pending – from the SA Planning Minister, the SA Environment Minister (who specifically needs to give permission to cut the Heritage Agreement up) and the Federal Environment Minister, Tanya Plibersek.

NCSSA is calling for a refusal, followed by an independent review of suitable sites for such a development, involving a range of expertise including in rocket launching and conservation.

But we also need to update our state land-use planning system and improve our national environmental laws. If we did, proposed developments in sensitive natural areas, or in habitat for threatened wildlife, would get a short, sharp 'no' rather than costing community years of time and effort in concerted campaigning. 🌱

Send a message in support for Whalers Way to SA Planning Minister, Nick Champion via the campaign website: www.ncssa.asn.au/save-whalers-way



Southern Right Whales and dolphins. FRAN SOLL/TAKE 2 PHOTOGRAPHY



Malleefowl monitoring



MICK WEBSTER SAYS VOLUNTEERING FOR THE VICTORIAN MALLEEFOWL RECOVERY GROUP IS GOOD FUN AND GREAT EXERCISE

As a confirmed non-birder, I must admit to having been captured by the amazing bird that is the Malleefowl (*Leipoa ocellata*). Since retiring I've participated in many 'citizen science' programs all over the world, the best-organised and most satisfying to me has been the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group (VMRG).

Malleefowl is a turkey-sized bird that inhabits semi-arid scrublands from north-west Victoria and western New South Wales, to the Indian Ocean in Western Australia. A male bird spends winter constructing a mound of leaf-litter and soil up to five metres across and a metre high, in which his mate will lay up to 30 eggs over the following summer. As the eggs incubate deep below the surface the male adjusts the temperature by opening or closing the mound, even



We acknowledge these places are part of the unceded traditional lands and waters of the WOTJOBALUK, JAADWA, JADAWADJALI, WERGAIA AND JUPAGALK NATIONS and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country.

covering it in sticks to drain off any rain. The chicks hatch one by one, and take many hours to fight their way to the surface – once there they roll down the slope and scurry off into the bush – no parental after-care!

Unfortunately, Malleefowl numbers are slowly declining. VMRG was set up over 30 years ago to monitor numbers of active nests from year to year, and also to study possible causes of the decline. Every October up to 150 eager volunteers meet at Wyperfeld



Volunteer with the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group!

Our 2023 training weekend will be held on 14–15 October at Wonga Campground, Wyperfeld National Park.

New attendees treated to a free dinner on Saturday night and a welcome pack!

Training takes place on Saturday afternoon and includes a visit to a Malleefowl nest plus training on: collecting monitoring data; bush navigation and safety; and using technology (CyberTracker app, GPS navigator and safety equipment).

Data collection takes place at a time to suit the volunteer between Oct and Feb.

For more information visit www.malleefowlvictoria.org.au

To register your interest email Secretary Liz Leigh lizleigh1@bigpond.com

Malleefowl. CHRIS TZAROS

National Park for a training weekend, to learn or refresh our memories about our tasks over the next six months. Groups are assigned to visit sites on public land (national parks and reserves) all over the Mallee and Wimmera, each one having up to 130 nests. Each group visits their site and nests with a set protocol at each one: active/not active?, shape, dimensions, tracks and scats (we collect all fox poo!), feathers (collected), photo for comparison to last year... it's a random bushwalk with the occasional excitement of finding an active nest, maybe with a bird actually working away in it.

We also maintain and check about 70 camera traps in the Victorian Mallee, taking photos of every animal that comes past over a year. This gives us a good indication of what's out there in the bush.

We all meet again at the Reporting Weekend the following autumn, when we learn the results for the year. Sadly numbers of active nests have declined from over 200 in 2012 to only 136 in 2021-22 out of over 1300 visited. But the good news from 2022-23 is we counted 209 active nests – the best year since 2012. More research is needed on breeding, predation and competition for food from kangaroos and feral herbivores.

So, we need more volunteers! It's an amazingly well-run program and lots of fun and good exercise! 🌿

Golden-Rayed Blue Butterfly. ZOOS VICTORIA



Butterflies, worms and wildflowers



JONATHAN STARKS REPORTS THAT IN 2023 PROJECT HINDMARSH IS HEADING TO RAINBOW

Project Hindmarsh, which VNPA members and supporters have been attending for decades, will this year be restoring a section of the Rainbow Rise, a lunette west of the township of Rainbow. The Rise was once covered in a myriad of different wildflowers of all colours of the rainbow, and is said to be the reason the town got its name.

Project Hindmarsh, the Big Desert to Little Desert Biolink, is a long-term initiative of the Hindmarsh Landcare Network and aims to re-connect the Big Desert and Little Desert regions



We acknowledge these places are part of the unceded traditional lands and waters of the WOTJOBALUK, JAADWA, JADAWADJALI, WERGAIA AND JUPAGALK NATIONS and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country.

in Victoria's wild west with a series of corridors, stepping stones and revegetated remnants.

Among the list to be planted is Creeping Boobialla (*Myoporum parvifolium purpurea*), the food plant of the endangered Golden-rayed Blue Butterfly (*Candalides noelkeri* sp. nov.). In partnership with Zoos Victoria, we will be planting 200 Creeping Boobialla in the hopes of establishing another population of Golden-rayed Blue Butterflies in the area.

Another plant on the list is Austral Scurf-Pea (*Cullen australasicum*), listed as Threatened in Victoria, and the favoured food plant for the migratory Chequered Swallowtail (*Papilio demolius*). Two amazing butterflies we hope to attract back to Rainbow.

One of the other wildflowers we will be planting is the Poached-egg Daisy (*Polycalymma stuartii*), long gone from the area but such an iconic desert bloom and a great species to bring back. To encourage the wildflowers to grow, and to restore soil microbial activity, we will be adding worm castings to the soil around the plants.

Volunteers needed!

The Project Hindmarsh planting extravaganza will be held over the weekend of 7–9 July 2023, based at Rainbow Recreational Reserve. We are looking for volunteers to join us for the

weekend and plant 7,000 trees, shrubs, herbs and grasses at two sites on the southern edge of the Rainbow Rise.

If you like getting away for the weekend, helping the environment, getting your hands dirty and making a difference, visiting historic rural towns and enjoying that famous country hospitality, come along, we would love you to join us. 🌿

This project is supported by funding through the Victorian Government's Victorian Landcare Program.

Zoos Victoria program to save the Golden-rayed Blue Butterfly: zoo.org.au/totes-for-wildlife

For more information, contact Jonathan Starks, Hindmarsh Landcare Facilitator 0429 006 936 jstarks@hindmarshlandcare.org.au

Registrations for Project Hindmarsh are now open via Eventbrite. www.eventbrite.com.au/e/project-hindmarsh-2023-tickets-633005074217

Further details about the planting weekend at hindmarshlandcare.org.au

Going the full ten rounds for Box-Ironbark forests



TWENTY YEARS ON, CHARLIE SHERWIN REFLECTS ON THE LONG CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT VICTORIA'S BOX-IRONBARK FORESTS

AUTHOR IMAGE: KAREN BROWN



We acknowledge these places are part of the unceded traditional lands and waters of the YORTA YORTA, TAUNGURUNG and DJA DJA WARRUNG and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country.

Sitting quietly in the twilight dew with a small group of good people, I recalled my mentor's words: 'Don't over-promise when you take punters in the bush: the wildlife won't cooperate'. So, hoping for a miracle, we fixed our eyes on an old, haggard tree our guides had led us to.

There! With the nifty excitement of one who may be predator or prey, a Phascogale emerged from a hollow in the trunk, fluffy tail quivering, and spiralled up towards the canopy. One at a time, another Phascogale and two Squirrel Gliders followed, bringing the woodland to life. We had under-promised, but the old Grey Box had delivered an inspirational night for us.

In for the long haul

We often had to manage each other's expectations over the decade that it took to get better protection for the few big old trees and wildflower-strewn woodlands that remained in the Box-Ironbark country.

We'd begun to craft a plan to lift the fortunes of this fragmented ecosystem (83 per cent of it was destroyed, and the rest was still getting hammered) when the Kennett Liberal/National

Government came to power in October 1992. Their policy platform wasn't environment-friendly, so we found ourselves sitting on the balcony of the VNPA office in Parliament Place wondering whether to just give up.

Instead, we resolved that even if it took a decade of campaigning, and only achieved protection of 1000 hectares of this tragic, beautiful place, it would be worth it.

We persevered: working with farmers to create corridors linking together remnants of Box-Ironbark Woodlands; fighting alongside local residents to stop open-cut mines among the Ironbarks; highlighting systematic breaches of timber cutting guidelines; and teaming up with field naturalists to showcase this wonderful mix of forests and woodlands dominated by Ironbarks and Box Eucalypts (including through our 1994 publication *The Forgotten Forests*).

More and more brave, gentle, passionate and persistent people from across north-central and north-eastern Victoria, as well as VNPA staff, volunteers and members in Melbourne, came together to champion this busted bit of bush.

Opposite: Box-Ironbark woodlands in the Warby Ranges. CHRIS TZAROS

Right, top: Benalla Box-Ironbark Conference, Lurg Field Day, 1995. VNPA

Right, below: VNPA camp in Big Tottington State Forest (now a Nature Conservation Reserve), near Kara Kara National Park. VNPA

Rallying the community

A joint VNPA/Field Naturalists Club of Victoria conference held in Benalla in 1995 gave a strong boost to public awareness and scientific interest in the ecosystem. With the advent of 'brick' mobile phones we were able to keep the local media up to date with campaign activities as they happened. The people were as wonderful as the plants and animals: field naturalists who knew every orchid in their patch; farmers who gave their hearts, their sweat and more to help these woodlands; botanists, zoologists, journalists, amazing public servants, some good-hearted politicians, and VNPA members, donors and supporters all gave great support to the campaign.

It's not surprising that people were so passionate about this bush. In one small remnant near Stawell there are more species of terrestrial orchids than in all of Europe and North America combined. The Chiltern forest alone has over 220 bird species. And no spectacle is livelier than a Phascogale in terminal breeding frenzy!

The head of the Land Conservation Council (LCC) met with us in 1995 at our behest to discuss the merits of a Box-Ironbark investigation. A year or so later the Kennett Government commissioned the LCC to review public land use in the Box-Ironbark country, and a major milestone of our campaign was reached.

That same year, the government tried to push through national park status for Chiltern forest while deleting its

very name. They proposed calling it the 'Box-Ironbark National Park' but this went down like a lead balloon in the region. It pre-empted the LCC's review and the community consultation, took away the Chiltern community's sense of identity and heritage and, worst of all, it tacitly suggested that there would be only one new reserve in the ecosystem, hinting that nature-lovers from Wangaratta to St Arnaud may miss out. A vehement local backlash killed the proposal.

Another apparent setback came a year later in 1997, with the LCC's abolition. Under the gaze of VNPA's campaign, however, the government allowed the new Environment Conservation Council (ECC) to carry on the Box-Ironbark work in good faith.

Public submissions throughout the five-year ECC investigation came predominantly from the Box-Ironbark region and overwhelmingly favoured greater protection in parks. This was a strong indication to wavering politicians that the region's community loved their bush: that looking after 'fluffy animals and trees' in the Box-Ironbark country was in keeping with looking after their constituents.

Some of those submissions were pretty powerful. I recall one that contained the childhood memory of a boy looking up as his father swung an axe at a big 'chimneyed' red Ironbark whose hollowed trunk had filled with resin-stained rainwater. The child never forgot the gush of red as the axe cut into that great old tree.

Eventual success

Through VNPA's campaign, all the trees, wildflowers, birds, animals and the people who cherished them became visible to people well beyond the region itself.

Although we were right in thinking the campaign may take ten years, we were wrong about achieving only 1000



hectares of reserves. In October 2002, ten years after we sat on that balcony in Parliament Place, the Bracks Labor Government created over 100 times that area of new Box-Ironbark parks and reserves. Fittingly, Jason Doyle who had come from the Goulburn Valley Environment Group in 1999 to lead VNPA's campaign, was sitting in the Parliamentary Gallery to see the new parks enshrined in law.

VNPA staff and supporters provided the initial vision for this achievement, but it was Box-Ironbark people with grass seeds in their socks and their eyes swinging between the tree canopy and the dappled woodland floor, who bought it home for all of us.

The success of the Box-Ironbark campaign heralded an increase in woodland conservation over the ensuing 20 years, beyond Victoria to other woodlands across Australia's inland slopes and plains, and up into the great tropical savannahs of northern Australia. All inspired by four fluffy animals and an old Grey Box. 🐣

Victoria's Box-Ironbark national parks are Chiltern-Mt Pilot, Warby-Ovens, Heathcote-Graytown, Greater Bendigo, Kara Kara and Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park, along with many important smaller reserves.



Box-Ironbark forests provide important feeding habitat for the Swift Parrot (*Lathamus discolor*).

MAITS REST & MELBA GULLY

GREAT OTWAY NATIONAL PARK

Melba Gully. D NEILSON



GEOFF DURHAM VISITS TWO LOCATIONS ON THE GREAT OCEAN ROAD EASILY ACCESSIBLE BY CAR

A confession – because of advancing years and all that goes with it, I don't get around much anymore, and in particular I am restricted when visiting parks. (Wikipedia tells me that 'Don't Get Around Much Anymore' is a jazz standard written by composer Duke Ellington.)

I am reminded of a conversation I had many years ago with the late Valda Trenberth, a long-time VNPA member who was confined to a wheel chair. I asked Valda why she supported parks when she was so restricted in visiting them and she replied 'I just want to know they are there for the birds and the animals and that someone is looking after them'.

Victoria is a comparatively small state of extraordinary natural diversity whose parks are accessible by road. There are plenty of pull-in off-road sites, many with picnic facilities, where you can sample a park. In January this year I visited two of these on the Great Ocean Road in Great Otway National Park: Maits Rest, 17 km west of Apollo Bay, and Melba Gully, 2 km west of Lavers Hill.

Great Otway National Park and Otway Forest Park were created in accordance with recommendations of the Victorian

Environment Assessment Council. Proclaimed in 2005, and now 110,555 hectares, Great Otway National Park includes the former Otway National Park and Melba Gully State Park, most of the former Angahook-Lorne and Carlisle state parks, areas of state forest and other smaller reserves. Otway Forest Park (approximately 40,000 hectares) was proclaimed in October 2006. Both parks are fragmented and extend from near Torquay in the east to Princetown in the west.

Great Otway National Park is managed under the *National Parks Act* and Otway Forest Park is managed under the *Forests Act*. VicRoads manages the road itself. A new body, the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority takes control and management of the parks mostly seaward of the Great Ocean Road, including Maits Rest and Melba Gully, by no later than 1 November 2025.

Parks Victoria will continue to have an on-ground management role. It remains to be seen how this will work and particularly how it will affect Parks Victoria's management. It seems to me something of a bureaucratic tangle which may not be in the best interests of the park.



Otway Black Snail. MEGHAN LINDSAY



We acknowledge these places are part of the unceded traditional lands and waters of the GADABANUD and EASTERN MAAR and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country.



Clockwise from top left: Melba Gully picnic area; Madsens Track, Melba Gully; Parks Victoria information board at Maits Rest. GEOFF DURHAM

Maits Rest

Maits Rest is named after Maitland Bryant one of the region's first foresters. Immediate access is from the Great Ocean Road to surfaced car and bus parks. There are no picnic or toilet facilities.

From the car park an 800 metre (30 minute) well-surfaced loop walk takes you through rainforest ferns and trees. In January we went there at dusk and waited until dark: we were disappointed not to see any glow worms, but we heard a bellowing Koala.

Melba Gully

I first visited Melba Gully in the late 1940s when hitch hiking to Adelaide. I had lunch at the house of the then owner Mrs Jessie Fry who supplied refreshments to travellers in her kitchen. Mrs Fry named the gully after Dame Nellie Melba. Later owners, the Madsens, donated the land and Melba Gully State Park was established under the *National Parks Act* in 1978.

The narrow Melba Gully Road off the Great Ocean Road takes you half a kilometre to a well-appointed and most attractive picnic area, on the revegetated site of Mrs Fry's house. There is parking for cars and buses, toilets, a picnic shelter and a free barbecue.

Madsens Track Nature Walk is a 1.2 km (35 minute) loop walk, on a gentle grade to Anne's Cascades on the Johanna River and then a steeper return section with steps past the stump of 'The Big Tree', a 300 year-old Messmate that was a feature of this walk until blown down in 2009.

Things to look out for

Myrtle Orange fungus

The fruit of Myrtle Orange fungus (*Cyttaria gunnii*) is a parasite of Myrtle Beech trees (*Nothofagus cunninghamii*). Fruit clusters in late spring and summer resemble bunches of orange-coloured grapes. Individual fruit are globular or pear-shaped and can reach 2.5 cm in diameter.

Glow Worms

Glow Worms (*Arachnocampa otwayensis*) are not worms. They are maggots of a mosquito-like fly that spend their nine-month larval stage in damp places such as the soil banks and overhanging ledges along the walking tracks in Maits Rest and Melba Gully, particularly Madsens Track. The best time to see them is between December and March.

They are carnivorous. The end of the abdomen is luminous and glows at night attracting small insects that are

caught on dangling sticky threads. They turn off their glow when disturbed, as with torch light or noise.

Black Snails

Otway Black Snail (*Victaphanta compacta*) is a carnivorous snail endemic to the Otways. Its shell is a distinctive glossy black-brown with a maximum diameter of 28 mm.

Immerse yourself

Don't miss the turn-offs to Maits Rest and Melba Gully when driving along this inland section of the Great Ocean Road. They are just two of the many easy-access off-road places in Victoria where you can immerse yourself in a park. If bush walking and camping are no longer options, take advantage of any opportunity to do so.

Find out more at:
parks.vic.gov.au/places-to-see/sites/melba-gully-day-visitor-area
parks.vic.gov.au/places-to-see/sites/maits-rest-rainforest-walk

Get sand under your feet on western Victoria's coastline

Coastal guide to nature and history 3 western Victoria. Point Lonsdale to the South Australian border, Graham Patterson.

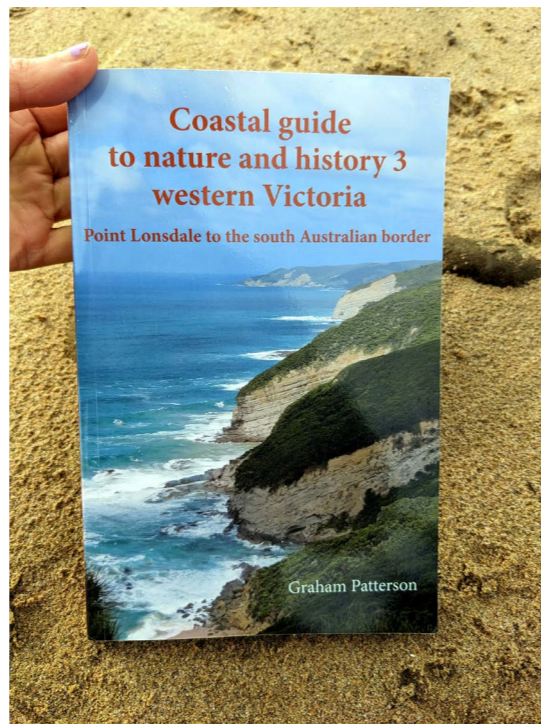
Coastal Guide Books, 2022, 186pp, ISBN 0992321735, 9780992321734

It brings a smile to my face when I watch people's fascination of the coast grow. The wonder at finding a new shell on a beach walk, or the curiosity sparked at finding an unknown creature, to the learning and sharing of knowledge of nature's cycles, culture and history. It is fascinating to be sitting on a cliff top, appreciating the waves rumble in to hug the sandy beach below and wonder how what has happened on this coastline has shaped how I experience the coast now. The more I learn, the deeper I understand, the more I can appreciate.

This wonder, awe and curiosity is what has filled me as I read Graham Patterson's new book. I appreciated how you could stand or walk along any stretch of coast between Point Lonsdale to the South Australian border and immediately get a snapshot

of the natural and human history that has taken place here. Graham has interwoven information on geology and landforms, coastal plant and animal life identification, inspiration for exploring the coast by foot, and tells some of the stories of the culture and history of First Nation peoples and later European arrivals. This gives readers an enhanced experience of the land and seascape around them.

The ability to learn more about tides and the moon, and sea level changes over history was a strength of this guidebook, helping to connect the coast with the larger cycles of nature. Graham talks about how the moon's gravity is the main influence on the tides of the ocean, giving us two low and high tides each day as the earth rotates. He also includes an explanation as to why the tide times are slightly later each day (if you do not know the



answer to that one, I will leave to you to read his book to find out!).

What a thorough and fascinating account of western Victoria's coast. It sparks curiosity, fulfils a satiating thirst for knowledge and inspires one to get and explore the many spectacular areas of Victoria's coastline. 🌿

Shannon Hurley, Nature Conservation Campaigner

Setting imaginations alight

Alight: A story of fire and nature, Sam Lloyd. Illustrated by Samantha Metcalfe.

CSIRO Publishing, 2023, 32pp, ISBN 9781486315444

Alight: A story of fire and nature is a beautiful book to introduce young children to the complicated topic of fire in our natural places.

We follow the journeys of Old Eucalypt, Wallum Banksia, Christmas Bells, Wallum Sedge Frog and Antechinus through a planned burn in a woodland. How will the Wallum Sedge Frog and Antechinus hide from the fire? What will happen to Wallum Banksia's seeds after the flames die down? This book tells the story of how a planned burn, if done in the

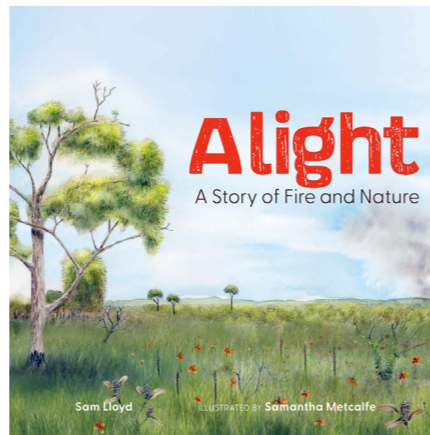
right place and the right way, can be beneficial. The gorgeous illustrations not only immerse you in the story but also teach us about some amazing Australian plants and animals.

Our natural areas are complex and behave differently to different types of fire. Both planned burns and bushfire can be good and bad for many animals, fungi and plants. As Phil Ingamells explored in the March 2023 *Park Watch* article 'Getting fire right', the topic of planned burns is complex.

This book provides an example of how some environments



Wallum banksia. SAMANTHA METCALFE



can respond to planned burns in a positive way. But this is not always the case. Exploring the issue that fire is complicated and not always good for natural places, even when it is planned, would be a great follow up conversation to have with your family after reading this book. 🌿

Meghan Lindsay, Community Learning and Communications Officer

That's a wrap for Rachel

In May we bid farewell to Rachel Nalliah, NatureWatch Project Officer, wrapping up two years with VNPA.

Rachel joined Sera Blair on the NatureWatch team to assist fieldwork and data analysis primarily for our Life After Fire project in East Gippsland. With Rachel's help we conducted field work in the areas of Cape Conran, Cabbage Tree Creek, Errinundra National Park, Nunniong, Swift's Creek, Mitchell River National Park, and Colquhoun Regional Park.

She joined ten three-day field trips to Gippsland, visiting twenty research sites. Rachel helped with recruiting and organising our intrepid expedition volunteers and liaised with land managers to ensure reliable access to

our sites and to check cultural heritage overlays in the area.

Rachel installed most of the 100 motion-detection cameras deployed in 2021 and 2022, which resulted in 23,913 images for her to examine. She became very good at identifying all the gorgeous critters in East Gippsland, from Eastern Pygmy Possums and Long-footed Potoroos to Bush Rats and Long-nosed Bandicoots.

Rachel assisted on 18 night-time spotlighting surveys, enjoying the thrill of seeing Greater Gliders in the wild, hearing Powerful Owls in the distance and chuckling at the ludicrous sound Yellow-bellied Gliders make.

There was rain, leeches, snakes and COVID lockdowns to contend with along the way but Rachel's positive attitude kept her going. In the process she found a new interest in teaching others to use the monitoring equipment and guiding our student placements to identify animals on camera.

Rachel's help with this project and other collaborations within our VNPA team are greatly appreciated and we wish her well in her future adventures. 🌿

Sera Blair, NatureWatch Coordinator

Left: Rachel in the field setting up a wildlife camera.



Vale Nancye Blades

Long time participants in our Excursions program were saddened to hear of the death in February of Nancye Blades, aged 90. A service was held to celebrate Nancye's life in Mt Martha in March.

Nancye was a member of our Excursions Committee and contributed tirelessly and with great dedication for 14 years, through to her retirement from the Committee in November 2010.

Amongst the many necessary tasks, Nancye did much administration of bus bookings, along with fellow member, William Keatley. At that time, excursions were so popular, that a 57 seater bus was nearly always booked out, and it was often necessary to use two buses.

Former *Park Watch* editor, Michael Howes, presented Nancye with an Honorary Life Membership in February 2011.

We offer our condolences to Nancye's family and friends. 🌿



Nancye Blades in 2011. EMILY CLOUGH

Quiz answers from p.20

- 1. True.** Eucalypts now dominate Australia, but they haven't always. Up until about 20 million years ago, Australia was covered in rainforest. Climate change began drying out the continent, which caused the rainforests to recede and the eucalypts to explode. They have only begun to dominate our landscape over the last 2 million years.
- 2. B.** There are just over 100 species of eucalypt that occur naturally in Victoria and over 800 across Australia.
- 3. D.** Even though we tend to think of eucalypts as common and widespread, some species are threatened with extinction. There are 73 eucalypts threatened with extinction in Victoria.
- 4. ABCE.** Some mallee species can grow up to 10 metres high in areas with more
- 5. Snow Gum (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*).** These grow between 1–20 metres high depending on location. They are threatened by climate change, fire and beetle infestation.
- 6. Messmate Stringybark.** A specimen was collected by botanist Charles Louis L'Héritier de Brutelle who officially named the species *Eucalyptus obliqua* in 1788. L'Héritier created the name Eucalyptus from the Greek *eu* meaning 'well' and *calyptos* meaning 'covered', referring to the little caps covering the flower buds.
- 7. Ribbonbark** is not a term used to describe the form of a eucalypt. The word gum is often used to describe eucalypts with smooth bark. We also tend to use the word gumtree and eucalypt interchangeably to describe all eucalypt species, but they are

productive soil and less frequent fire, but most are much shorter.

in fact different. Eucalypt describes plants belonging to the genus *Eucalyptus*, whereas gumtree refers to plants belonging to either *Eucalyptus*, *Angophora* or *Corymbia*.

8. River Red Gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*). These are the most widespread of the eucalypts. They grow from 12–45 metres tall and their trunks can grow to be over 5 metres around.

9. False. There are 15 species of eucalypts that can be found outside of Australia, nine of which do not occur in Australia.

10. Mountain Ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*) is the tallest flowering plant in the world, with the tallest in Victoria standing at over 93 metres tall. Mountain Ash can be found in Victoria and Tasmania. In Victoria they can be found in Dandenong Ranges National Park, Great Otway National Park and Yarra Ranges National Park among others.

Wild Families



Fungi can come in all shapes and sizes...

CAN YOU SPOT 10 DIFFERENT FUNGI IN THIS PICTURE?

- ❑ **EMPEROR CORTINAR.** A purple fungus with a stalk and a cap.
- ❑ **SPLENDID RED SKINHEAD.** A red fungus with a stalk and a cap.
- ❑ **PIXIE'S PARASOL.** Tiny blue fungus with a stalk and a cap.
- ❑ **CROWNED CORAL FUNGUS.** A cream coloured fungus that looks like coral growing from a log.
- ❑ **COLLARED EARTHSTAR.** A cream coloured fungus that looks almost like a flower, with a ball at the centre surrounded by star-shaped rays.
- ❑ **SNOW FUNGUS.** A white fungus that looks like jelly growing on a log.
- ❑ **WHITE PUNK.** A cream coloured fungus that looks like a shelf growing out of a tree.
- ❑ **ANEMONE STINKHORN.** A red fungus that looks a bit like an alien with a round centre and tentacles sticking out.
- ❑ **FOREST BROWN CUP.** Fungi shaped like little brown cups growing from a log.
- ❑ **TEA-TREE FINGERS.** A brown fungus that looks like fingers growing from a branch.



ILLUSTRATION: JESS RACKLYEFT

Jess Racklyeft

Q. What do you call a fungus that makes music?

A. A decomposer!

Staying safe with fungi

Some fungi are extremely poisonous. Don't eat fungi you find in the forest. Don't ever put fungi you find in your mouth or nose. Wash your hands after touching fungi. Always supervise young children and babies when checking out fungi.



Explorer's Corner

TIPS & TRICKS FOR GETTING INTO NATURE



Fun fungus facts

LET'S DIVE INTO THE FASCINATING WORLD OF FUNGI WITH SOME FUN FUNGUS FACTS!



1 Fungi are unique. They are neither plants nor animals, instead they have their own kingdom. 👑



2 Fungi are an important part of life on our planet 🌍. They are nature's recyclers, decomposing organic matter like sticks, leaves and dead animals into soil. Some types of fungi can be an important source of food for some animals.



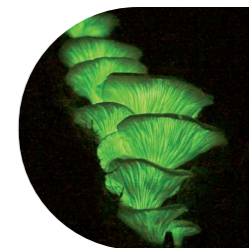
4 Some fungi live on and eat other living things like plants and animals. Dark Vegetable Caterpillar fungi infect the caterpillars of Ghost Moths and eat them from the inside out - 😱 whoah! These are called parasitic fungi.



3 Some fungi 'eat' poo 🐾. Small Dung Buttons only grow on the poo of herbivores, like wallabies.



5 Some fungi, like the Emperor Cortinar, work together with plants. The underground part of the fungus (the mycelium) can attach to the roots of trees. The tree provides energy to the fungus and the fungus helps the tree absorb water and nutrients 🌱. It's a win-win!



6 Some fungi are bioluminescent 💡 - that means they glow in the dark!

ALL IMAGES: REINER RICHTER

Figuring out your fungi

When you find fungi, take some time to admire and get to know them. If you take a little hand mirror you can see underneath fungus without pulling it out.

- 👁️ What shape is it?
- 🎨 What colour is it?
- ✋ What texture is it?
- 📍 What is it growing on?
- 👁️ Look at your fungus from all different angles, including looking at the underside. What do you see?
- 💡 Is it growing in the light or dark?
- ✍️ Draw your fungus.
- ☰ Use four words to describe your fungus.

RIDDLE

I am the type of room from which you cannot enter or leave. Raised from the ground below, I could be either poisonous or a delicious treat.

What am I?

RIDDLE ANSWER: A MUSHROOM

Will you help stop rogue logging in Victoria's national parks by giving a wildlife and forest-saving gift today?

Rogue logging is destroying vulnerable areas of our protected parks and reserves. Under the guise of 'storm clean up' and 'fire management', invaluable forests are being trashed and sold for commercial gain.

Yes, I'll give to stop rogue logging and protect our native forests.

Here's my gift of: \$30 \$50 \$100 \$500 \$1,500 \$_____ My choice
 Please make this a regular monthly donation

My contact details

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

Address _____

Suburb/Town _____ State _____ Postcode _____

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

Payment method

Visa MasterCard Cheque/money order payable to 'Victorian National Parks Association' is enclosed.

Card no _____ / _____ / _____ / _____ Expiry date ____ / ____

Cardholder name _____ Signature _____

How to donate:

✉ **Post:** return this form in the reply-paid envelope provided

💻 **Online:** vnpa.org.au/rogue-logging

📞 **Call the VNPA team:** (03) 9341 6500

Or scan here to donate online

