

# PARK *watch*

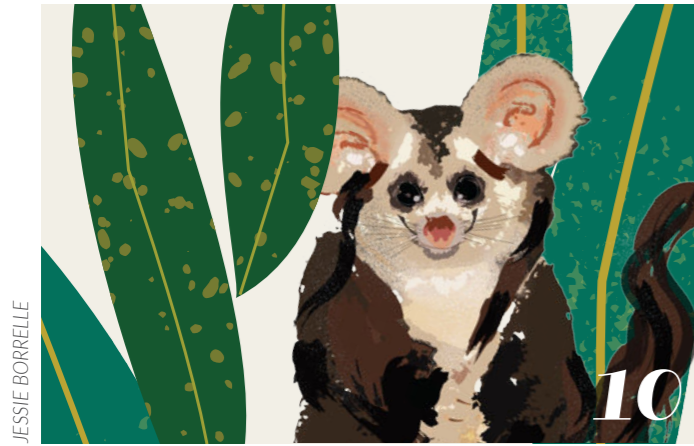
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VICTORIAN  
NATIONAL PARKS  
ASSOCIATION  
*Be part of nature*

DECEMBER 2023 #294

# In this issue...



JESSIE BORRELLE



HARTLEY TOBIN



MYRA KELLY/NATURALIST

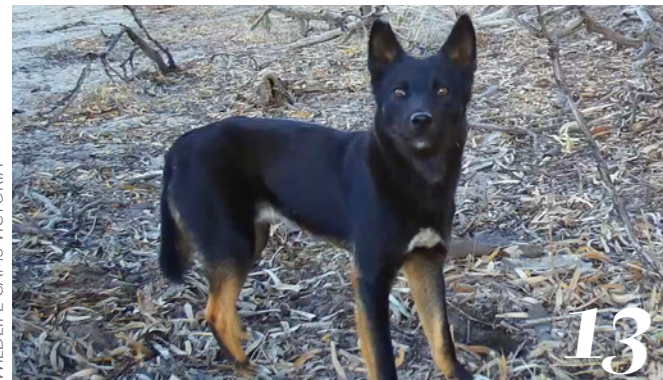
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CAFUEGO/FICKR

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SERA BLAIR

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BLAKE NISBET

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## PARKwatch

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Austral Grass-trees (*Xanthorrhoea australis*) in Grantville Nature Conservation Reserve, Bunurong Country.

HARTLEY TOBIN

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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.

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 Kristian via [support@vnpa.org.au](mailto:support@vnpa.org.au), or on 03 9341 6506 or download a donation form at [vnpa.org.au/gifts-in-memory](http://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 our office.



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



# From the President

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

I recently attended a community forum to discuss nature law reform (including the effectiveness of the current EPBC Act), featuring two federal MPs. The discussion was engaging but also reinforced the trend of conversations about nature to shift quickly to climate change and reducing greenhouse emissions.

While intrinsically linked, it's important to recognise that climate change and nature conservation are two distinct policy fields, addressing different aspects of equally critical issues.

Nature conservation centres on protecting, respecting and caring for the web of life we rely on to eat, breathe, drink, work and play. It contributes to climate change mitigation, for example, by halting

deforestation, land degradation and clearing, while promoting restoration efforts that help sequester carbon.

Being complex and difficult to measure, politicians and the media prefer to avoid or divert to the more definitive and measurable area of emissions reduction. Yes we're in a climate emergency, but we're also experiencing a biodiversity crisis – so wouldn't it be great if we walk and chew gum at the same time. Creating a broader understanding of the difference between nature conservation and climate change is critical. Whilst the recently UN-brokered Global Biodiversity Framework is encouraging, the nature conservation movement remains highly reliant on individuals, community groups, philanthropy and not-for-profit organisations. With

greater awareness, community effort, individual donations and philanthropic money can be invested knowingly and appropriately.

In this edition, we cover how very overdue the establishment of our promised central west national parks are. Likewise, how restoring our unique Golden Kelp forests is a critical undertaking for Victoria's incredible variety of marine life and habitats. We focus on achieving positive outcomes for nature conservation and we thank you for your ongoing generosity and support.

Finally, at this time of year especially in the high-country and across our native grasslands our unique wild-flower display is in full-swing. It's a great time to get out into the bush – but have a read first! 🌿

David Nugent, VNPA President



## Enfield Grevillea victim of a flawed experiment

**BEN GILL, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER, INVESTIGATES DISREGARD FOR NATIONAL NATURE LAWS**

VNPA was shocked to discover the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) and Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMV) have been experimenting on populations of an endangered plant, the Enfield Grevillea (*Grevillea bedgoodiana*) in Enfield State Park, 25km south-west of Ballarat on Wadawurrung Country.

We had earlier learned that FFMV intended to conduct large-scale planned burns across a third of Enfield State Park. Concerned locals, the newly formed Friends of Native Forests Enfield (FONFE), contacted VNPA about recent fire mitigation preparation works that fundamentally affected threatened wildlife within the park. It also seems FFMV planned unorthodox burns, but not any public consultation about them.

Many nature loving Victorians frequent Enfield State Park for wonderful displays of wildflowers, birdlife and bushwalking. Proclaimed in 1995, the 4400 hectare park sits in an area heavily impacted by historical gold mining and timber extraction. The park's management plan details numerous rare and threatened plants, including the endemic EPBC-listed

Enfield Grevillea, major populations of the Yarra Gum (*Eucalyptus yarraensis*) and a diverse understorey that includes more than 60 species of orchid. The plan also references animals listed under Victoria's nature laws (the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*).

When VNPA reached out to DEECA/FFMV for further information, we were baffled to hear that the areas were subject to a departmental experiment – designed to see the impact planned burns and disturbance have on endangered species.

There is a national recovery plan for the Enfield Grevillea. The plan lists two of this native plant's greatest threats – *Phytophthora cinnamomi* and fire. Given that the Enfield Grevillea has been successfully propagated at a local nursery, we'd have to argue that the 'experiment' could be conducted in a controlled environment, instead of only place in the world this grevillea grows naturally!

Under our national nature laws (the EPBC Act), works that could harm a listed species must be referred to the Federal Environment Minister, under National Matters of Environmental Significance guidelines. VNPA have penned a report and sent our concerns to Minister Plibersek, asking for intervention to avoid any more damage to this important forest.

Following pre-burn works this winter, locals were upset to find over 108 trees damaged by mulching and mowing that also deeply scarred several roadside trees. Further distress was caused by machine mulching

FONFE members Les Sprague, Liz Houlder and Helen Lewers sit on debris pushed on top of Enfield Grevillea in Enfield State Park. BEN GILL



Damaged Enfield Grevillea. BEN GILL

and perimeter tree-felling. This has widened walking tracks within the park and exposed the forest to further disturbance from motorbikes, 4WD use, weeds and feral deer and pigs. These works have made these rare populations of Enfield Grevillea vulnerable to pathogens such as *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, a serious disease that requires strict controls and mitigation measures.

Upon investigation, we discovered limited records of the grevillea on the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas (VBA) with the last update records dating back to 2016. The VBA captures historic records from road/track side surveys. Further VNPA and FONFE surveys reveal significant populations deeper in the forested areas that haven't been recorded and are now under threat from FFMV's activities. Some clusters of Enfield Grevillea have already been destroyed in 'planned burn preparation' activities by DEECA. VNPA established new records along the mulched path that forms the edge of the firebreak.

This situation has further highlighted the glaring lack of oversight and regulation of FFMV at a state level. Enfield Park should not be a guinea pig in poorly thought-out experiments by our own government agencies.

The question now is, should FFMV be listed as the third greatest threat facing the Enfield Grevillea? 🌿

## Western Port Woodlands Quiz



- Who am I? I'm a small marsupial, 40–50cm long with round ears, a pointy nose, a big round bum, a short furry tail and big strong claws.
- What is the largest owl in Australia?
  - Sooty Owl
  - Boobook Owl
  - Barking Owl
  - Powerful Owl
- Which type of eucalypt only grows in the Strzelecki Ranges?
- Which lizard lays its eggs in termite mounds?
- Which marsupial lives fast and dies young, only living less than one year?
  - White-footed Dunnart
  - Koala
  - Eastern Grey Kangaroo
  - Platypus
- True or false? Southern Brown Bandicoots move about four tonnes of soil in a year.
- True or false? Tea-tree Fingers is a fungus that grows in a typical mushroom shape, out of the ground.
- The Green-striped Greenhood is a type of:
  - tree
  - frog
  - orchid
  - bird
- True or false? Most Grey Goshawks in Victoria are completely white.
- What is the largest reptile in Victoria?
  - Lace Monitor
  - Eastern Blue-Tongue Lizard
  - Saltwater Crocodile
  - Grassland Earless Dragon

See p.40 for answers



Tee-tree Fingers. DANCG/INATURALIST



# VicForests: The end of an error



**MATT RUCHAL,**  
VNPA EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR, ON  
VICFORESTS' DEATH  
RATTLES

Despite the imminent end to native forest logging in Victoria the state-run zombie institution VicForests still lurks in our landscapes, and in our courts. The fact that one of the most egregious examples of public mismanagement in this state's history is still in operation is scandalous. On 10 August 2023, the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner (OVIC) released a report into potential breaches of the *Privacy Act* by VicForests after allegations of covert surveillance of conservationists Sarah Rees, Steve Meacher and leading scientist Professor David Lindenmayer. The report considered an allegation that VicForests hired a private investigator to conduct covert surveillance – or 'collect dirt' – on members of the public in 2010/11. It concluded that the collection of personal data breached information privacy principles. OVIC commissioner Sven Bluemmel was quoted in *The Age* describing the *Privacy Act* breaches

as 'serious and flagrant.' The report states:

*Collecting this information for the purposes of seeking to discredit the environmentalist was not necessary for any legitimate functions of VicForests. It was also unreasonably intrusive. The contraventions resulted from deliberate conduct on behalf of VicForests, which appears to have been intended to cause harm.*

On the back of this and many other failings, the government has started to move, albeit slowly. On 6 September, VicForests' state business corporation status was changed to a 'reorganising body'. This paves the way for it to be split up and absorbed into different government departments (or reincarnated as another entity).

VicForests has outlived its purpose and needs to be abolished in an orderly manner, conscious of any ongoing and outstanding liabilities. Nature and community groups are calling for our elected representatives to finally put VicForests out of its misery. In October we, along with over 60 environment and conservation groups, published an open letter to the Allan Government.

The letter highlighted systematic breaches of the public's trust, abjectly

failing Victorians on every measure: including:

- Haemorrhaging millions of dollars in public funds.
- Breaking the law repeatedly, without apology or show of remorse.
- Decimating our iconic native forests which are on the verge of ecological collapse.
- Destroying the habitat of threatened and endangered wildlife and plants.
- Logging in a manner that studies show increases bushfire risk and severity.
- Putting the quality and security of Melbourne's water supply at risk.
- Reducing the amount of carbon stored in forests and released millions of tonnes of emissions.
- Not regenerating massive areas of the forest estate, leaving the state and Traditional Owners with an enormous on-going land management burden.
- Spreading disingenuous claims about the sustainability of its operations that have had significant impact on regional workers, families, businesses and the community.
- Extending its degradation of forests to some of Australia's most

fragmented landscapes in western Victoria.

- Conducting covert surveillance on a Victorian citizen who dared hold them to account.

The reputational, ecological and socio-economic damage caused by VicForests has no place in our state. The commercially driven extraction of trees from native forests and bushland

has lost its social licence, including under the guise of public land management.

The restoration and conservation challenge ahead provides a huge opportunity to generate meaningful, ongoing employment. Future land management regimes must be open, transparent, and underpinned by robust science.

The letter concludes that it is time to end this sorry saga, wind up VicForests, and partner with First Nations, nature and wildlife protection organisations, scientists, and the broader community. This is how we secure enduring protections for all of Victoria's globally significant native forests, for the enjoyment of current and future generations. 🌿



Logging in the Wombat Forest. BEN GILL

**IT'S TIME TO WIND UP VICFORESTS!**

Dear Premier Jacinta Allan and Treasurer Tim Pallas, We, the undersigned groups, welcome the announcement that the declaration of VicForests as a state business corporation has been revoked.

With logging in state forests finally coming to an end this year, VicForests has outlived its purpose and needs to be abolished as a priority – in an orderly manner – conscious of VicForests' ongoing and outstanding liabilities.

VicForests has systematically breached the public's trust and abjectly failed Victorians on every measure – economically, socially and environmentally.

In one of the most scandalous examples of gross public mismanagement in this state's history, VicForests has:

- Haemorrhaged millions of dollars in public funds.
- Broken the law repeatedly, without apology or show of remorse.
- Decimated our iconic native forests which are on the verge of ecological collapse.
- Destroyed the habitat of threatened and endangered wildlife and plants.
- Logged in a way that studies have found increases bushfire risk and severity.
- Put the quality and security of Melbourne's water supply at risk.
- Reduced the amount of carbon stored in forests and released millions of tonnes of emissions.

The restoration and conservation challenge ahead provides a huge opportunity to generate meaningful, on-going employment. Future land management regimes must be open, transparent and underpinned by robust science.

We call on your leadership to end this sorry saga, wind up VicForests, and partner with Traditional Owners, environmental and wildlife protection organisations, scientists and the broader community to secure enduring protections for all of Victoria's globally significant native forests for the enjoyment of future generations.

If the government can rise to this occasion and finally act in the best interests of all Victorians – an historic, enduring and celebrated environmental legacy awaits.

**Join over 60 nature and community groups representing hundreds of thousands of people and sign the open letter**

[vnpa.org.au/action/wind-up-vicforests](http://vnpa.org.au/action/wind-up-vicforests)

# Djaara response to 'Equity and nature conservation'

**RODNEY CARTER,**  
DJA DJA WURRUNG  
GROUP CHIEF  
EXECUTIVE OFFICER,  
RESPONDS TO AN ARTICLE IN  
PARK WATCH #292 (JUNE 2023)

In June, VNPA published an article 'Equity and nature conservation' (Park Watch #292) by Phil Ingamells.

We are sorry to hear of the author's passing and note that we do not question his intent.

However, we must correct the assumptions inherent in the published article and address any confusion they have created.

The article is framed around a misplaced fear that Native Title claims have opened Victoria's conservation estate to exploitative pressures from Traditional Owners seeking an income stream.

There is no basis whatsoever to suggest that Traditional Owners will, of economic necessity, 'construct a Western income stream from under-threat conservation estate'. This is a gross misrepresentation of who we are.

This flawed assumption leads the article to conclude 'the recent emergence of forest gardening, a euphemism for selective timber harvesting, is surely a result of unfair pressure'.

Well, no. Such a conclusion completely misrepresents both Djaara's intent, and the practice and philosophy of forest gardening.

Our *Galk-galk Delkunya* (Forest Gardening) Strategy is a proactive assertion of our right to bring Country back to health. We are motivated by our responsibility as custodians to care for Country and Culture.

Forest gardening is an expression of knowledge, obligation to Country, and a gift by us to all Victorians to restore long-term health, biodiversity and resilience across the landscape.

The principles and practices of forest gardening stand in stark contrast to the waves of land-management

values and practices that have swept across Country since colonisation – including mining, clear felling, and land clearing.

In the Wombat Forest – as on much of Dja Dja Wurrung Country – the very ground has been turned upside down.

Dispossession of Aboriginal People meant we were denied access to the forest, denied access to practise culture, and denied the opportunity to actively manage and care for the landscape in the way we have done for millennia.

Through forest gardening, we are now applying traditional knowledge and practices in a contemporary manner to restore wooded areas to the health, structure, and diversity they enjoyed prior to colonisation. This will benefit both Country and the health and well-being of Traditional Owners, and the broader community.

The Wombat Forest, like much of Australia's forest estate, has been deeply damaged. In its current state, and with what others propose without us, it is hurt and experiencing pain just like us. The once tall, open forest – with Messmates of more than three metres in diameter – is now a forest choked and suffocating with young eucalypts.

The remaining mature trees are precious to us, as they are for environmental advocates. Consider them emerging Elders – to be protected and nurtured.

Prior to colonisation, the forest was more abundant – and the most resilient it can be to bushfire. The current connectivity between fuel loads from the forest floor to the canopy at a landscape scale is a deeply dangerous state for the forest, its inhabitants and the communities that border it. We can no longer tolerate the disrespect of our homelands.

Without active restoration, the forest is vulnerable to catastrophic fire – brought about, ironically, by both forestry activities and green pressure.



Galk-galk Delkunya, Forest Gardening Strategy. ARTWORK: DAIKOTA NELSON

We propose to culturally thin the young eucalypts to enhance biodiversity and return cool cultural fire to the forest.

To be clear, these forest thinnings are small trees with very little commercial value: they are mostly under 20cm diameter. We take responsibility for honouring those trees however we might choose to. Use as sawn timber is not possible. We are proactively exploring options like biochar to sequester carbon. At the very least we hope they could be utilised as firewood instead of being lost in fuel-reduction burns or bushfires.

As for commercial initiatives, the Galk-galk (Djaara Timbers) enterprise is deliberately cost-neutral / not-for-profit to avoid the distortions of economic imperatives. Ethical local timber is a way to deal sustainably and efficiently with recovered timber, while limiting the harm to vulnerable forests locally and around the world.

Unfortunately, in a changing climate, events like storm throw and bushfires are becoming more common. A small adaptive timber business places us well to respond. We also assert the right for Djaara to source and harvest cultural timber for making tools, artifacts and being used in ceremony.

We are currently making use of salvaged storm-thrown trees (sourced by our own contractors, not VicForests). We will also use urban

salvage, exotics such as cypress macrocarpa, and trees being removed anyway including by councils and from housing and farm fencing.

Another misconception laid out in the article – regarding Native Title and reparations – must also be addressed. Reparation for dispossession has not been appropriately addressed in Australia. Native Title is simply a recognition of pre-existing legal rights which survive on Crown land. The application of forest gardening principles may be a native title right but it is completely unrelated to any form of reparation.

Aboriginal principles of only taking what Country provides apply today, as they have always applied here on Djandak (Dja Dja Wurrung Country). As the oldest continuous culture in the

world, we intend to uphold our track record of sustainability.

While we are not responsible for the damaged state of our forests, we remain responsible for this Country and will do what we can to clean up the mess left by others.

We recognise the respect and advocacy that the environmental movement has historically shown the Aboriginal community and the deep care they have for Country.

Friends speak to each other before speaking about each other. That such misunderstandings are being circulated shows the need for dialogue.

We extend our hand in friendship – we're here to walk together, and hope others will join Djaara's journey to heal forest country. 🌿

## Editorial response

VNPA made several attempts to discuss forest gardening with the Dja Dja Wurrung community before publishing the article 'Equity and Nature Conservation' in the June 2023 edition of Park Watch and are liaising with Dja Dja Wurrung Traditional Owners Corporation to schedule meetings.

We still have many questions about the proposed strategy and forest gardening practices, and we look forward to any and all opportunities to discuss long-standing issues of public land management with the Dja Dja Wurrung community.



## Spotlight on Nature with Meghan Lindsay



### Southern Brown Bandicoot *Isodon obesulus obesulus*



Southern Brown Bandicoot. IT'S A WILDLIFE

Southern Brown Bandicoots, or should we say Bandi-cutes, are small, endangered marsupials. They live in areas with dense, low-lying plants across southern Victoria, including Western Port Woodlands, Wilsons Promontory National Park, Cranbourne and Grampians/Gariwerd National Park.

They are threatened by habitat destruction, introduced predators like cats and foxes and busy roads which isolate populations and kill individuals. A lack of foxes in Tasmania could be one of the reasons that Southern Brown Bandicoots are prevalent in larger numbers there.

Southern Brown Bandicoots are 40-50cm long with round ears, a pointy nose, a big round bum, a short furry tail and big strong claws. In Victoria they can produce up to three litters a year and live for about four years. These bandicoots use their strong claws to move nearly four metric tonnes of soil per year in their search for delicious insects and fungi. By moving

such a huge amount of soil, they increase nutrient turn over and improve water penetration – they are mini composters!

In some areas, they use dense infestations of Blackberry to hide from predators and nest in. This poses a challenge for land managers wanting to remove this weed of national significance. Land managers must slowly remove it bit by bit and replace it with bandicoot friendly native alternatives. 🌿

# Community calls for central west national parks to finally be put on the map

Over 60 local, state and national groups – including prominent individuals – signed on to an open letter to Premier Jacinta Allan, calling on her to legislate the long overdue Wombat-Lerderderg, Mt Buangor and Pyrenees national parks.

The letter ran in print and online across eight local newspapers in late November, covering Ballarat, Bendigo, Castlemaine, Macedon Ranges, Moorabool, Ararat and the Pyrenees. After decades of dedicated work to safeguard these forests, woodlands, rivers and habitats, the community now waits on the Victorian Government to give the wonders of the west permanent protection.

**Add your name to the letter**  
[vnpa.org.au/centralwest-openletter](http://vnpa.org.au/centralwest-openletter)

## THE STEPS FORWARD

### Next steps to officially protect the park:

- Legislation produced, tabled and passed in both Houses of Parliament.
- Gazetted by the Governor.
- Park Management Plan.

## DECISION MAKING, DELAYS AND DESTRUCTION

- Aug 2019** Final Report tabled in Victorian Parliament. Under law, the government has six months to make a decision.
- Feb 2020** Legal deadline to respond to parliament missed, breach of legal duties.
- June 2021** Government response tabled (18 months late) supporting new parks, with some logging prior to creation.
- Oct 2019** Mt Cole Grevillea (*Grevillea montis-cole*) listed as Critically Endangered under state threatened species laws (*Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*).
- June 2021** Storms hit Wombat Forest, VicForests starts 'storm recovery salvage logging'.
- May 2022** Andrews Government reaffirms commitment to new national parks and commits \$4 million to establish new boundaries for the parks.
- July 2022** Greater Glider (*Petauroides volans*) listed as Endangered under Commonwealth law (*Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*).
- May 2023** Victorian Government announces end to native forest logging in eastern Victoria.

## FORMAL INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT

- Nov 2016** Government consultation on terms of reference for investigation. Final terms of reference tabled in Victorian Parliament.
- Mar 2017** Independent (VEAC) investigation initiated.
- June 2017** Notice of investigation published, 60+ days of formal submission process.
- Aug 2017** Draft proposals paper published, 60+ days formal submission period.
- Oct 2018** Investigation delayed and extended consultation until December 2018.
- Nov 2018** State election (Labor re-elected).

## THE BUILD UP

- 1990s** Intense community debate over clear-fell logging in the Wombat Forest.
- 2002** Ban on clear-fell logging in Wombat Forest, Bracks Labor Government commitment to Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) process.
- 2010-15** Community Assessment Reports with renewed community campaign.

## An open letter to Victorian Premier Jacinta Allan

Congratulations on your recent appointment to Premier.

We celebrated the Victorian Government's 2021 public commitment to create new protected areas. We applauded the decision to end native forest logging in the east of Victoria by 1 January 2024. In doing so your government acknowledged the incredible natural diversity and cultural importance of these areas.

Yet VicForests has plans to log over 60,000 hectares in the fragmented and cleared landscape of the west. If your agencies continue to log this habitat, plants and animals like the Powerful Owl, Brush-tailed Phascogale and Mt Cole Grevillea risk becoming locally extinct.

It's now time to demonstrate leadership by permanently protecting the surviving wildlife, forests and woodlands of western Victoria. **It's time to look after the complex web of natural life in these forests and restore what we have left.** We call on you to immediately:

- Halt the taxpayer-funded destruction of our natural heritage and end native forest logging statewide.
- Legislate the promised Wombat-Lerderderg, Mount Buangor and Pyrenees national parks.
- Cease all firewood harvesting in Wellsford Forest and include it in the Greater Bendigo National Park.
- Enact formal protections promised for the nature-rich Cobaw Conservation Park, and other regional parks and conservation reserves.

**This is a rare opportunity to create a profound legacy for future generations and:**

- Provide vital habitat for over 370 rare and threatened animals and plants.
- Support First Nations joint management of new parks.
- Help reduce the impacts of climate disruption by trapping millions of tonnes of stored carbon.
- Support rural and regional livelihoods through visitation and nature-based tourism.
- Protect river headwaters that flow from these forests to create water security for farms and communities.
- Help forestry workers to transfer their skills to nature-positive jobs.

Creating new national parks and phasing out destructive native forest logging isn't only about protecting wildlife and beautiful places. It's about clean air and water, a liveable climate and people's livelihoods.

**We, the undersigned, representing hundreds of thousands of Victorians, call on you to formally protect these natural areas and act immediately to halt logging our native forests and woodlands.**

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| ACF Community Bendigo District                    | Environment Victoria                      | Moorabool Environment Group                           |
| Australian Conservation Foundation                | Environmental Justice Australia           | Mount Cole and Pyrenees Nature Group                  |
| Australian Plants Society                         | Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat        | The National Trust Australia (Victoria)               |
| Bacchus Marsh Platypus Alliance                   | Field Naturalists Club of Victoria        | Nature Network  |
| Ballarat Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation | Friends of Kooyooora                      | Newham and District Landcare Group                    |
| BEAM Mitchell Environment Group                   | Friends of Native Forests Enfield         | Newlands Friends of the Forest                        |
| Bendigo and District Environment Council          | Friends of Nyah Vinifera Forest           | Rob Gell AM, President, The Royal Society of Victoria |
| Bendigo Climate Alliance                          | Friends of Steele Creek                   | Riddells Creek Landcare                               |
| Bendigo Family Nature Club                        | Friends of the Box-Iron Bark Forests      | Save our Strathbogrie Forest                          |
| Bendigo Field Naturalists Club                    | Friends of the Brisbane Ranges            | Southern Otway Landcare Network                       |
| Bendigo Sustainability Group                      | Friends of the Earth                      | Trentham Sustainability Group                         |
| Biolinks Alliance Inc                             | Friends of the Whipstick                  | Victorian Forest Alliance                             |
| BirdLife Castlemaine District Branch              | Friends of Werribee Gorge and Long Forest | Victorian Mountain Tramping Club                      |
| Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club                | Mallee                                    | Victorian National Parks Association                  |
| Clarkefield and District Farm/Landcare            | Greening of Riddell                       | The Waterways Network                                 |
| Professor David Lindenmayer                       | Hepburn Wind                              | Wellsford Forest Friends and Landcare Group           |
| Doctors for the Environment Australia             | Lighter Footprints                        | Werribee River Association                            |
| Entomological Society                             | Macedon and Mount Macedon Landcare Group  | Western Highway Conservation Group                    |
|   | Macedon Ranges Field Naturalists Club     | White Gums Australia                                  |
|   | Macedon Ranges Sustainability Group       | The Wilderness Society (Victoria)                     |
|   | Malmsbury District Landcare               | Wildlife Carers for Protection of Habitat             |
|   | Melbourne Bushwalkers Club                | Wombat Forecarea                                      |
|   | Monique Ryan MP                           | WWF Australia   |
|   | Moonee Valley Sustainability              |   |

**Add your name**



Wombat Forest  
SANDY SCHELTEMA



Mt Cole Grevillea  
VNPA



Greater Glider  
GAYLE OSBORNE



Logging in Wombat Forest  
VNPA

## Correa change: bell-shaped beauties in the firing line

STRANGE OPERATIONS CONTINUE TO LOOM LARGE IN THE DANDENONG RANGES NATIONAL PARK

We hold major concerns about Forest Fire Management Victoria's (FFMV) largely desktop approach to assessing environmental values in the Dandenong Ranges National Park.

We've continued our ecological surveys across the park in areas proposed for off-track heavy machinery disturbance and tree removal operations. Alongside the Southern Dandenongs Landcare Group and the Victorian Forest Alliance, we've undertaken habitat, aquatic, spotlighting, hollow-bearing tree and plant surveys across two sites. Our plant surveys turned up a significant finding: large populations of the endangered Powelltown Correa (*Correa reflexa* var. *lobata*). Protected under state nature laws (FFG Act), these lemon-lime hued beauties display a bounty of bell-shaped flowers – a real treat for local birdlife. We estimate more than 1000 are present across both sites.



Powelltown Correa. REINER RICHTER

As they'd missed the presence of this endangered plant in their pre-assessments, we reported our findings to FFMV. The populations have now been verified by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action with FFMV working on mitigation measures to protect the plants. Without the efforts of citizen scientists, it's likely this pocket of Powelltown Correas would have remained unseen and unprotected by their machinery operators.

FFMV are yet to make public modelling or assessments that support the claim their operations will reduce fire risk in Dandenong Ranges National Park. Nature group Wombat ForestCare recently challenged similar Wombat Forest storm salvage works in the Supreme Court. Justice Richards granted an interim injunction to logging operations as she was not provided with evidence that the extraction of fallen trees would reduce fire risk. Amongst her reasons, Justice Richards noted that:

*Coarse woody debris is a naturally occurring component of a forest. Associate Professor Wardell-Johnson's evidence is that its presence improves thermal conditions, 'by moderating temperature extremes and raising micro-scale moisture levels'.*

Justice Richards also highlighted concerns about plans to take trunks and branches from Wombat Forest, while leaving behind bark, twigs and leaves of the fallen trees – the fine fuels that contribute most to the rate of spread and flame height of wildfires. We hold similar concerns over the proposal to remove fallen habitat from Dandenong Ranges National Park and continue to push FFMV for greater transparency. The public deserves to know the underlying justifications of their operations, as well as their potential impacts on our natural heritage. 🌿

**Blake Nisbet, Nature Conservation Campaigner**

## 71st VNPA AGM

Thank you to the more than 160 members and supporters who joined us at our AGM in October. It was marvellous to catch up with members of our community in person, as well as have an online audience.

The evening opened with a Welcome to Country from Wurundjeri elder, Bill Nicholson. Uncle Bill explained that through such a Welcome, he wants to change the mindset of people from thinking about what we can get from this land to benefit ourselves, to what we can do for the land – and then in turn the land will benefit us.

Our special guest speaker, Professor Sarah Bekessy delivered an inspiring presentation on the opportunities for embedding nature positive design into Australian cities (*read more on p. 32*). Executive Director, Matt Ruchel, presented an informative summation of the highlights of VNPA's past year, achieved with the help of our generous members and supporters. Caitlin Griffith, Community Learning and Engagement Manager, gave a heartfelt tribute to the late Phil Ingamells. And Maddy Willcock, Nature Stewards Coordinator, updated the audience on the popular Nature Stewards environmental education program.

The new Council elected are: David Nugent (President), Marilyn Crestias (Vice President), Askin Morrison (Treasurer), Chris Harvey (Secretary), Lara Bickford, Michael Feller, Dianne Marshall, Bruce McGregor, Gerard McPhee, Jan Hendric Brueggemeier, Michael Young and Doug Robinson.

We were also very pleased to award Larysa Kucan VNPA Honorary Life Membership in recognition of her long-term and outstanding volunteer service (*see p. 39*). 🌿



MEGHAN LINDSAY

## Plant Blindness\* with Jordan Crook

\*The inability to notice plants in everyday life, to recognise their importance, and a belief they are inferior to animals.

### Green-striped Greenhood *Pterostylis chlorogramma*

In the sandy rich soils of the Western Port Woodlands, stretching from Nyora to Grantville on the Gippsland Plain, wildflowers start to bloom after being awoken by the warming soil and temperatures as summer approaches.

From Blue Pin-cushions (*Brunonia australis*) to the always stunning Milkmaids (*Burchardia umbellata*) the woodlands are a botanical beacon in an incredibly cleared landscape.

So it was hard to pick just one species to highlight, but the Green-striped Greenhood is above the rest quite literally in its growth, but also as the Western Port Woodlands are a hotspot for this orchid.

Like most orchids, it's all about the detail. The Green-striped Greenhood has some remarkable features such as a moveable claw in that is triggered by pollinators like gnats and flies. When they land on it, the modified petal or labellum is propelled against the reproductive part of the plant in the column, helping with the spread of pollen.

You will find these beautiful orchids flowering between July to September. 🌿

Green-striped Greenhood. GEOFF GLARE



## Dingo killing order extended

In late September, the Victorian Government extended the Order of Council that extinguishes protection for Dingo (*Canis lupus dingo*) under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act*. The Dingo is listed as Vulnerable.

This gives the green light to 12 more months of trapping, shooting and baiting of Dingoes within a 3km buffer zone on public land, including protected areas like national parks.

As highlighted in *Park Watch*, September 2023 ('Top dog needs protection') new analysis by geneticist Dr Kylie Cairns at the University of New South Wales found that 87 per cent of 'wild dogs' in Victoria tested as pure dingo, not hybridised with domestic dogs.

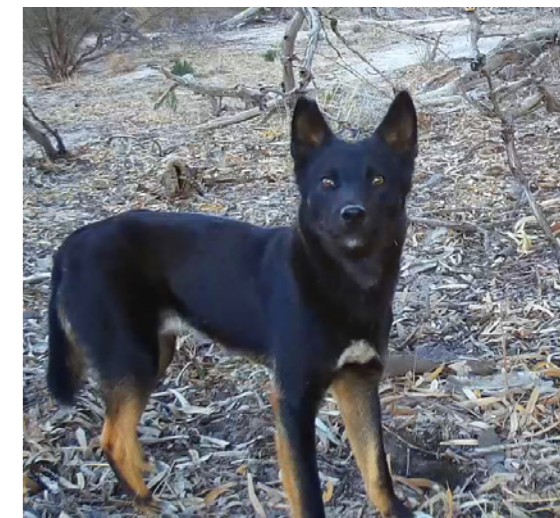
The Victorian Government has indicated that it would undertake 'a robust population count to inform the most appropriate policy settings moving forward'. This comes off the back of a Traditional Owner-led

meeting in Cairns at the First Nations Dingo Forum, which produced a joint statement from 20 groups across the country called the National First Nations' Dingo Declaration.

The Declaration calls for an end to the killing of Dingoes due to the spiritual and cultural connections between Traditional Owners and Dingoes in Australia. It seeks a peaceful co-existence between Dingoes and stakeholders using Aboriginal cultural and Western knowledge to find a way forward.

VNPA recognises the Dingo as an apex predator, critical to the natural balance of native animal populations and beneficial in the control of some pest animal populations. We call for better evidence-based approaches, data collection on interactions between stock and dingoes, and genetic population vulnerability. There needs to be a focus on the Wimmera Dingo population that is at high risk of collapse.

Pure Wilkerr (Big Desert) Dingo. WILDLIFE CAMS VIC



Our elected representatives should investigate and implement alternatives to culling of Dingoes, such as use of guard dogs to protect stock, industry incentives to cooperate with Dingoes, and payments for killed stock if proven killed by Dingoes. 🌿

**Jordan Crook, Parks and Nature Campaigner**

# Energy pressures mount on Western Port Bay

**SHANNON HURLEY**, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER, REPORTS ON COMPETING NEEDS IN WESTERN PORT

Western Port is experiencing a paradox of energy proposals. On one hand, there is the Victorian Renewable Energy Terminal (VRET) to support the state's offshore wind construction. On the other hand, is a Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain (HESC) project, converting brown coal to hydrogen.

Let's delve a little more deeply into what is proposed.

HESC would produce hydrogen gas from brown coal in Victoria's Latrobe Valley, transport the hydrogen by truck to the Port of Hastings to be exported to Japan. A glaring concern is how a new fossil fuel export project ends up in a Ramsar wetland during a climate crisis.

The Port of Hastings VRET is more in line with our framework that supports sustainable marine industries. However, we are concerned about the development's unknown volumes of dredging for deepening of the channel, reclamation of 29 hectares of the wetland for a wharf structure, and the clearing of 25 hectares of vegetation. Any construction needs to be done in a way that avoids and minimises impact, with careful assessment of the proposed works.



HESC Project site in Hastings. SOURCE: HESC

Both proposals need careful assessment to make sure any negative impacts on Western Port's Ramsar wetland and Biosphere Reserve are minimised.

We recently recommended, via the EPBC referrals process, the project go through the full environmental assessment before approval.

### Western Port Bay framework

VNPA has been working alongside organisations, businesses, and groups in the Western Port region to secure a healthy future for Victoria's second largest bay. We have made great progress on gaining support for our proposed Western Port Bay Framework, with nearly 70 groups and businesses, including the four local Councils now onboard. With a new environment minister on deck, it is unclear where our proposal now sits within state government.

The Cranbourne-Pakenham area is experiencing the fastest urban expansion in the state. The poor health of the waterways flowing into the bay, along with climate impacts and energy industry pressures, means a decision for about Western Port's future must be made with all cards on the table, not in isolation of one another.

We continue to work with government and the port towards a vision for a thriving Western Port Bay.

Read our submission to the proposals  
[vnpa.org.au/submissions](https://vnpa.org.au/submissions)



We acknowledge this location is part of the unceded traditional lands and waters of the **BUNURONG** and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country.



Ramsar-listed wetlands at Crib Point. STACEY CHILCOTT

# A fair cop for suburban nature corridor

**JORDAN CROOK**, PARKS AND NATURE CAMPAIGNER, REPORTS ON DANDENONG POLICE PADDOCKS/NERRE NERRE WARRENE MASTER PLANNING

The Dandenong Police Paddocks/ Nerre Nerre Warrene reserve is an important greenspace and bushland in an increasingly urbanised landscape. It forms part of a critical corridor of continuous habitat from the suburbs of Dandenong up into the Dandenong Ranges. Wildlife, like Powerful Owls and Eastern Kangaroos, rely on it to move between the flat lands and mountains.

The park is an important cultural site for the Bunurong people, who called the place Nerre Nerre Warrene. The beautiful stands of Yellow Box trees and open green space of this natural corridor provides much needed respite from the surrounding acres of asphalt and cement.

A funding boost at the last state election promised to deliver a master plan and revitalise the reserve. Parks Victoria has now started re-working the management plan for the first time in 24 years.

Nerre Nerre Warrene is listed on the Victorian Heritage Register due to its Indigenous cultural heritage values, and past use as the base of the Mounted Division of the Victoria Police in the 1900s, from where it gets its English name.

The land was designated as a reserve for public use in 1930 under its own Act of Parliament due to the reverence the public had for the area. Today, the



We acknowledge this location is part of the unceded traditional lands and waters of the **BUNURONG** and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country.



Dandenong Police Paddocks/Nerre Nerre Warrene, Bunurong Country. JORDAN CROOK

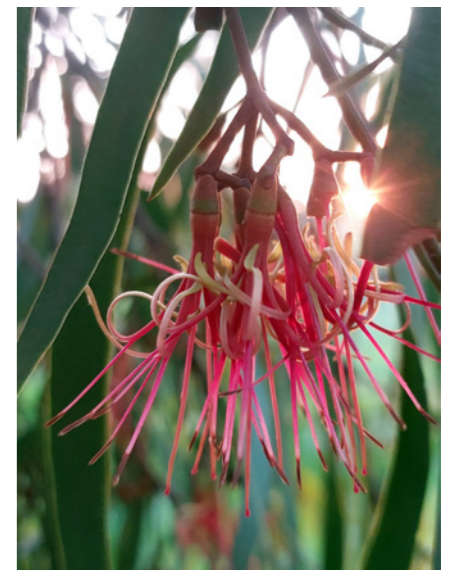
reserve and surrounding parks face increasing pressure from encroaching suburbia, visitor pressure, rubbish dumping, illegal trail bike use and pest plant invasion, to name a few.

How the new management plan finds solutions and ways of dealing with these pressures is going to be vital to its survival. The vision from the existing Dandenong Police Paddocks Reserve Future Directions Plan, which must guide future care and management of the reserve, states:

*Dandenong Police Paddocks Reserve: a spiritual and historic place in which people can experience cultural and natural environments and undertake recreational pursuits in a quality rural setting.*

VNPA will keep you updated on future chances for public input on the management plan.

Read our submission to the management plan  
[vnpa.org.au/submissions](https://vnpa.org.au/submissions)

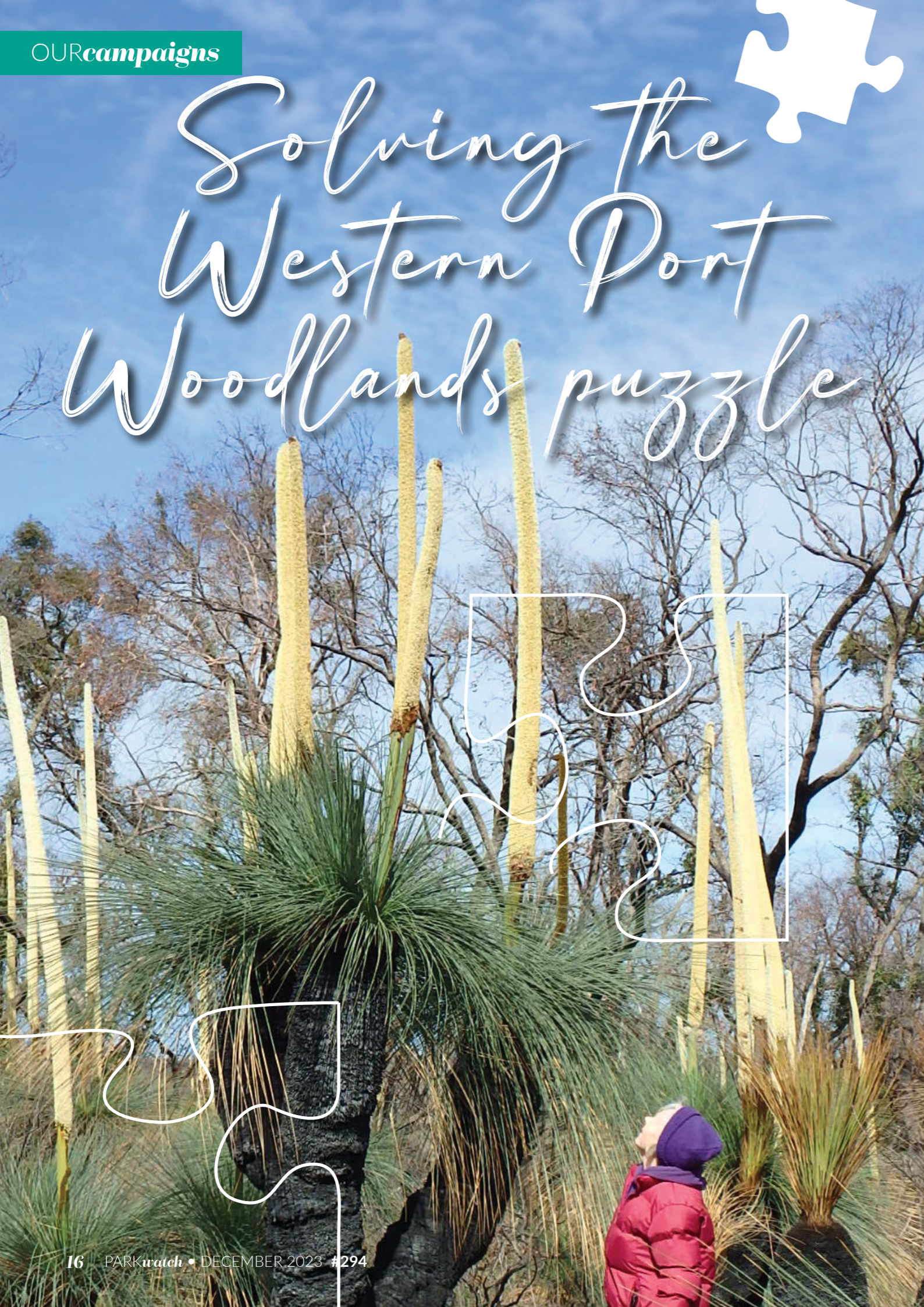


Do you have stories, bird lists or other documents about the Dandenong Police Paddocks/Nerre Nerre Warrene? We'd love to see them!

Please send them through to [vnpa@vnpa.org.au](mailto:vnpa@vnpa.org.au)



# Solving the Western Port Woodlands puzzle



Austral Grass-trees in Grantville Nature Conservation Reserve. HARTLEY TOBIN

 SMALL PIECES OF WILDLIFE-RICH PUBLIC RESERVES AND PRIVATE LAND FORM A PUZZLE THAT, IF CONNECTED, CAN FORM A NEW NATIONAL PARK, WRITES **JESSIE BORRELLE**, DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

It might not look like it, but that slender string of woodlands on the eastern shores of Western Port Bay, from Lang Lang and Nyora and south to Grantville, is home to some of Victoria's most endangered wildlife. The woodlands survived colonisation, becoming stranded as the landscape surrounding it was stripped, burnt and ploughed. Today these last remnants of habitat are being whittled away by sand mining, land clearing, housing developments, climate change and invasive pests.

Sand mines are swelling, consuming the landscape and leaving deep open wounds. Everyday huge sand trucks lumber in and out, robbing the remaining woodlands of its already meagre soil. We know for a fact there are abundant sand supplies available elsewhere; there's no need to destroy critical habitat here.

Rabbits, foxes and other invasive species are mowing down native grasses and critters. The risk of green-

lighting more land clearing for farming, housing and other commercial development puts protection of this wildlife corridor at risk.

Right now the woodlands, particularly on private land, lack even the most basic protection from mining and inappropriate development. Only a very small area is protected.

## Connecting the pieces

It doesn't have to continue like this. We can give Lace Monitors and Grey Goshawks a chance to become common sights among the gums and Austral Grass-trees once again.

Local nature-lovers have worked together for decades to get this area's natural beauty and significance recognised and to protect it from being mined and cleared.



Southern Toadlet

The Bass Coast was declared a 'Distinctive Area and Landscape' in 2019. But this doesn't mean the woodlands are safe, even though the government's own ecological experts' class the Western Port Woodlands as Nationally Significant.

The Victorian Government has designed the Distinctive Areas and Landscapes (DAL) policy draft for the Bass Coast. It proposes a 50-year vision and planning controls to guide land use and development for the region.

Together with South Gippsland Conservation Society and Save Western Port Woodlands we put forward the case for better planning controls for the Woodlands to the DAL hearing panel. Together with ecologists, mycologists, botanists and planning experts, we pushed for science-led future protection of the woodlands.

We're waiting on a decision from our elected representatives any day now. Meanwhile we continue to work with the community to push for a new Bass Coast National Park to keep this fragile wildlife corridor safe, in perpetuity.



Lace Monitor

MARK GILLOW



We acknowledge this location is part of the unceded traditional lands and waters of the **BUNURONG** and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country.

JAMES WHITE



Powerful Owl

## A special glimpse into what once was

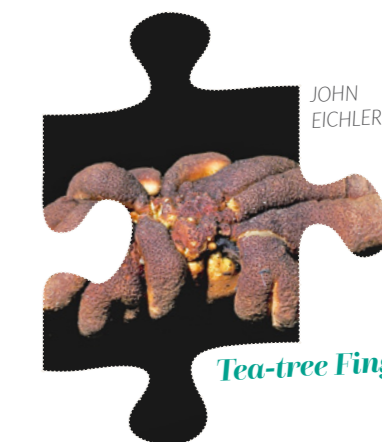
Along with the bushland nestled inside the proving track of the former Holden test site, the corridor has some of the most intact original native vegetation in Gippsland.

The sandy soils are rich with wildflowers, including 54 types of orchids. Threatened plants, critically endangered Strzelecki Gums, Grey Goshawks, White-throated Needletails and Eastern Curlews, amongst others, make their homes in the Grass Tree forests, creeks, woodlands and heathlands. Critically endangered Swift Parrots stop to feed here on their migratory journey – and there are only 300-odd individuals left on our planet.

If you're interested in rare and unusual creatures, the endangered Tea-tree Fingers fungus exists in these woodlands, along with Southern Toadlets, Swamp Antechinus (a little creature similar to a Dunnart) and Giant Gippsland Earthworms.

It's a hotspot for Southern Brown Bandicoots, whose homes are being destroyed by inappropriate development pushing them closer to local extinction. Likewise for lovers of thick, heathy understoreys – Long-

*continued overpage...*



Tea-tree Fingers

JOHN EICHLER



Base ©Google Earth  
Map ©VNPA 2023

nosed Bandicoots, heavily hit by fires in other areas, and White-footed Dunnarts, a tiny carnivorous marsupial with a white belly and angular snout.

**How can we protect this landscape?**

We need to maintain and improve links between areas to preserve the integrity of the wildlife corridor. We need to safeguard the surviving coastal forests with better planning controls and reject any expansion of sand mining. In a world facing a man-made climate and biodiversity crisis, these patches of woodlands are more important than ever.

To honour what was and what can be, we must unite these wonder-filled pieces and keep them safe as a new Bass Coast National Park.

VNPA works with the South Gippsland Conservation Society and the Save Western Port Woodlands as the Western Port Woodlands Alliance.

Donate to protect the Western Port Woodlands in a new national park  
[vnpa.org.au/support-western-port-woodlands](http://vnpa.org.au/support-western-port-woodlands)

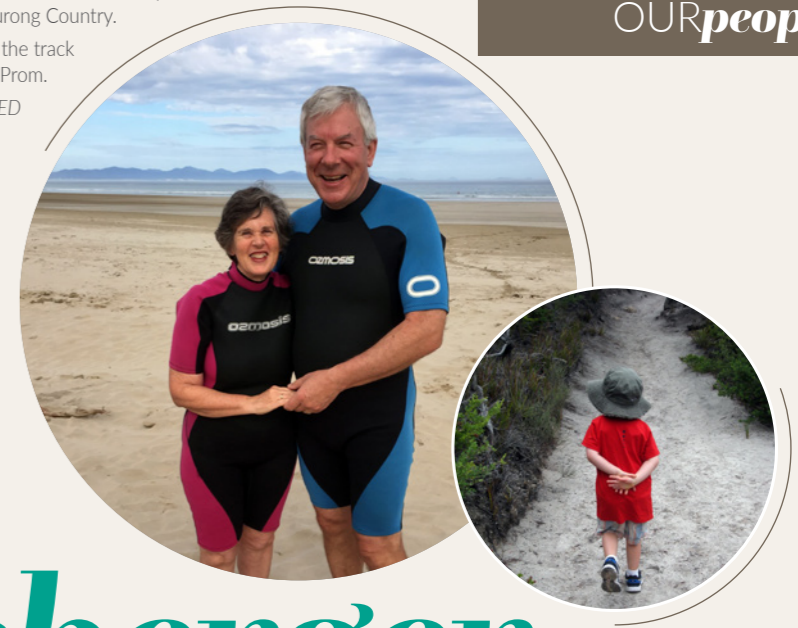
RICARDO SIMAO



Southern Brown Bandicoot



Pam with her husband, David, at Waratah Bay, Gunaikurnai and Bunurong Country. One of Pam's grandchildren on the track to Squeaky Beach, Wilsons Prom. IMAGES SUPPLIED



# Pam Habersberger

PAM HABERSBERGER HAS BEEN A VNPA MEMBER FOR AN INCREDIBLE 54 YEARS, AND IS A LONG-TERM DONOR. PAM RECENTLY SHARED SOME INSIGHTS INTO HER LIFETIME LOVE OF NATURE

**What are some of your first memories in nature?**

As long as I can remember, nature has always played a leading role in my life. When I was very small I would collect all sorts of treasures, from beetles to gumnuts. Bugs of all sorts have been a source of fascination and hold no fear for me. Holidays at the beach would always find me exploring rock pools. This interest led me to study zoology and botany at university, and my appreciation of nature has stayed with me always.

**How did you come across VNPA and what has kept you as a member and supporter over the years?**

The flooding of Lake Pedder in Tasmania in 1972 was the issue which made me realise how important it was to keep wilderness areas intact for their innate value. It would have been around this time that I joined VNPA as I did not want similar destruction of wild places in Victoria. When the damming of the Franklin River was proposed I demonstrated for the first time. In 1997, I participated in the 'Hands Off' campaign at the Prom, and in 2013 I stood on the beach at Tidal River with family and friends objecting to the privatisation of national parks. Both demonstrations were organised by VNPA.

**Is there a particular park or place in Victoria that you feel particularly connected with?**

As you have probably gathered from my answer to the previous question, The Prom has a special place in my heart. My boyfriend (now husband of 55 years) introduced me to The Prom when I was 18. Ever since we have walked there regularly with friends and family. It has been a great delight for me to introduce my grandchildren to this magical park.

**Tell us about memorable experiences of yours in national parks**

My husband and I have had many memorable experiences walking in national parks all around the world. A few come to mind: At the Prom, one hot summer's day we were greeted by four sailing ships at anchor, framed by a black sky and lightning as we got our first view of the sea. This was during the Bicentenary celebrations and the ships were sheltering from the strong easterly wind, unable to round the Prom on their voyage to Sydney.

Another time camping in the Little Desert during a drought it was so dry that bees were landing on us to suck up the moisture of our perspiration! And once camping in the Barmah Forest at Easter we had hoons shooting across the river from the other side. We flattened ourselves on the ground for safety.

**What was the VNPA like 50 years ago?**


Of course, it was a much smaller organisation then, and there were fewer parks. There were not nearly as many associations back then whose main aim was the preservation of natural areas. But it is thanks to the tireless efforts of VNPA and other groups that we now have more parks. Unfortunately, the fight to preserve wild areas never ends.

**What is something you have learned from nature?**

Being out in the natural world is the best place to calm the soul and to be in awe of the beauty and complexity of life on earth.

# Sating the thirst for proper marine planning



 VNPA HAS BEEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF DRIVING MARINE SPATIAL PLANNING SINCE THE 1970S SAYS SHANNON HURLEY, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER

Half a century ago, the Victorian National Parks Association developed a strong appetite for improving the laws that govern Victoria's seas and shores.

Any substantial cook-up involving policy and legislation requires time, patience and the right ingredients. Marine and coastal reforms were no exception. After years of kneading, at long last during the 2014 state election, the then Andrews Government committed to uniting management and protections in one bowl. This resulted in a new *Marine and Coastal Act* in 2018, a *Marine and Coastal Policy* in 2020 and the *Marine and Coastal Strategy* in 2022.

A core theme of the work is finding a tool to plan and coordinate the

many uses of our big blue backyard. Solving this challenge is essential to future-proofing our ocean body of health. With today's pressures of fossil fuel exploration, offshore wind development, climate change impacts on our shores, along with fishing and tourism, we are hungrier than ever for proper planning and coordination!

This much needed, long overdue solution – marine spatial planning – helps industry, government, and community better plan their thirst for activities in the marine environment. It's only recently the marine world has begun to catch up with the more established planning systems used for land.

The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action's recent 'Planning areas and marine spatial planning guidelines', defines eight geographic areas where a plan can be baked along the coast, and the recipe for how to do it. Now the environment minister needs to green light a marine spatial plan at one of the areas, as required under the *Marine and Coastal Strategy*.

At the moment, Western Port Bay has no overarching plan to look after its future. Its health is in serious decline, and it faces multiple conflicts of use. We need a holistic, coordinated approach to minimise impacts on the bay's marine web of life. We've been advocating for area 1 (around Portland) and area 5 (Western Port Bay) to be considered as ideal for testing these guidelines and putting the marine spatial planning process into action.

Consider this a call for swift baking of a marine spatial plan, for our ocean deserves to have their cake and eat it too. 🍌

**More info on marine spatial planning in Victoria**

[marineandcoasts.vic.gov.au/marine/marine-spatial-planning](http://marineandcoasts.vic.gov.au/marine/marine-spatial-planning)

## Where we went in spring



Over spring, volunteers and supporters joined us for citizen science, special activities for young adults, learning opportunities and bushwalks.



Marine fans learned about fish ears, blue carbon and a tasty underwater pest at the Great Victorian Fish Count celebration night.



Marine enthusiasts learned about the geology, extinct megafauna, ecosystems and water quality of Port Phillip Bay at nature of change in Port Phillip Bay webinars.



Concerned supporters joined a picnic for the park in the Dandenong Ranges, to look at areas threatened by rogue logging.



Bushwalkers enjoyed walks at Darebin to East Malvern, Toolangi, Brisbane Ranges, Dandenong Ranges, Jan Juc, Mt Macedon and the You Yangs.



Grassland enthusiasts explored native grassland across western Melbourne.



Grassland lovers learned all about the Merri Creek at a Grassy Plains Network monthly meeting.



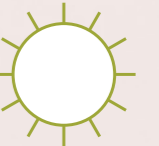
Marine citizen scientists searched for sea slugs at Beaumaris and Torquay.



Picnic in Dandenong Ranges National Park, Wurundjeri Country. MEGHAN LINDSAY




## Join our summer activities!




Our online Activities Calendar brings opportunities to get into nature through bushwalking, citizen science, short courses and events for all ages. Right now, there are plenty of opportunities to join us for an adventure in nature.

Check out the online calendar for the latest opportunities to get into nature. New activities are added regularly.

### A snapshot of our summer activities calendar

 **Spotlight on Wombat Forest and the Dandenong Ranges**


Multiple events from December to March  
Join us for some spotlighting and fauna camera surveys.

 **Bushwalk - Castlemaine**

Saturday 9 December  
Search for wildflowers on this 12km bushwalk through Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park.

 **Great Victorian Fish Count**

18 November - 17 December  
How many fish will you spot on a snorkel or scuba dive?

 **Jolly's Parwan Grassland Tour**

Sunday 10 December  
Explore magnificent native grasslands in Bacchus Marsh.

Discover more at [vnpa.org.au/activities](http://vnpa.org.au/activities)

Subscribe to our mailing list to receive activities updates [vnpa.org.au/activities-sign-up](http://vnpa.org.au/activities-sign-up)

Verco's Nudibranch (*Tambja verconis*)  
MYRA KELLY/INATURALIST

# Don't go chasing butterflies\*



\* Because they're actually sea slugs!

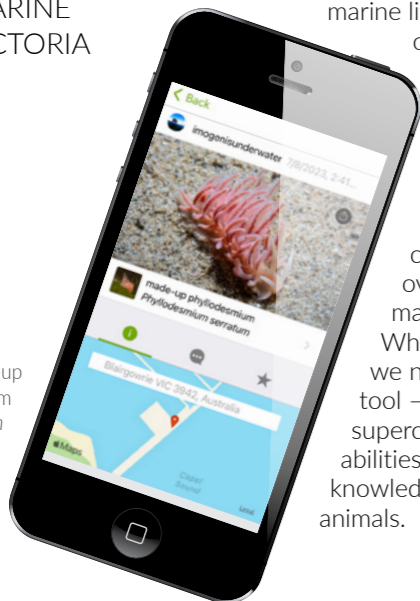
*Aplysia* sp. KADE MILLS/INATURALIST



Left: Evans Seaspider (*Anoplodactylus evansi*)  
KADE MILLS/INATURALIST  
Right: Marine Life of Victoria project page on iNaturalist

**KADE MILLS,**  
REEFWATCH  
COORDINATOR, ON  
THE SUCCESS  
OF THE MARINE  
LIFE OF VICTORIA  
PROJECT

Record for Made-up  
Phylloidesmium  
(*Phylloidesmium  
serratum*)  
IMOGENIS  
UNDERWATER/  
INATURALIST



"Kade, can you identify this?" I often find myself uncertain when someone directs my attention to a plant or creature from their dive or rockpool expedition. It's not a lack of marine life knowledge; it's a reflection of the countless undiscovered species awaiting documentation along the Great Southern Reef.

In the 'good old days', identifying something involved memorising its characteristics and pouring over reference books to find a match once you returned home. While it was fun and rewarding, we now possess a more powerful tool – our smart phones – that supercharge our identification abilities and contribute to the global knowledge database on plants and animals.

iNaturalist, which began as a master's project by two students in 2008, has evolved into an online social network for people to share biodiversity information, helping each other learn about nature. Since its inception, it has documented over 163 million observations of more than 430,000 species by nearly 3 million contributors globally. This data is shared with the Global Biodiversity Information Facility worldwide and the Atlas of Living Australia in Australia, eventually reaching the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas.

iNaturalist employs machine learning and image and pattern recognition to accurately identify common and frequently photographed species. However, I quickly realised it wasn't recognising marine species; many sea slug images were mistakenly suggested to be flowering plants or butterflies!

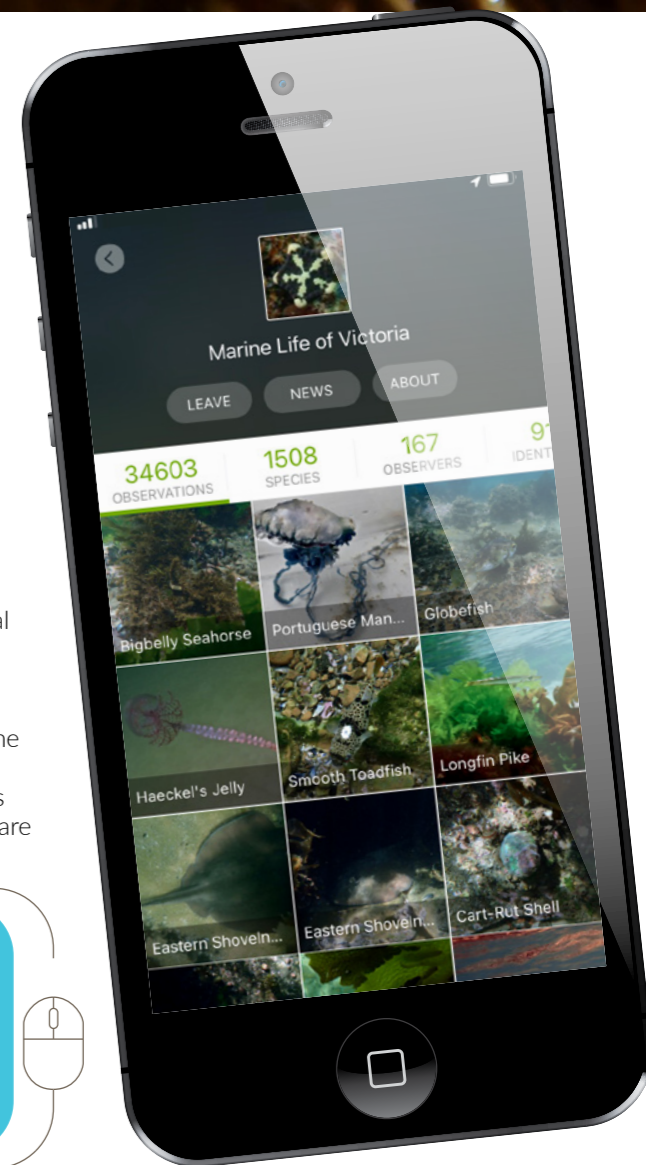
Fortunately, identifications don't rely solely on technology, but also on taxonomists, naturalists and nature enthusiasts who offer their expertise in the identification process.

ReefWatch initiated the Marine Life of Victoria project, providing a platform for local marine enthusiasts to share their images and convert them into valuable data, simultaneously sharing their expertise and enthusiasm for Victoria's marine life.

The project has gathered over 33,000 observations of more than 1,400 species, accurately identifying many frequently sighted and photographed species through the platform. It also serves as a community where people celebrate each other's unique discoveries and organise meet-ups for diving, snorkelling and rock pool exploration.

Though the technology isn't flawless, with some species being difficult to photograph or unidentifiable from images, the project still provides a visual record of Victoria's marine life on an open-source platform accessible to all learners. And we have successfully trained 'the machine' to recognise that sea slugs, while often referred to as the butterflies of the sea, they are not butterflies. 🐌

Find out more and get involved at  
[vnpa.org.au/programs/marine-life-of-victoria](http://vnpa.org.au/programs/marine-life-of-victoria)



# Life after fire



Opposite: Fieldwork volunteers at the Colquhoun site. SERA BLAIR

**DR SERA BLAIR,**  
NATUREWATCH  
COORDINATOR,  
REPORTS ON THREE  
YEARS OF POST-FIRE WILDLIFE  
MONITORING IN EAST  
GIPPSLAND

NatureWatch volunteers, Nunniong Plains site



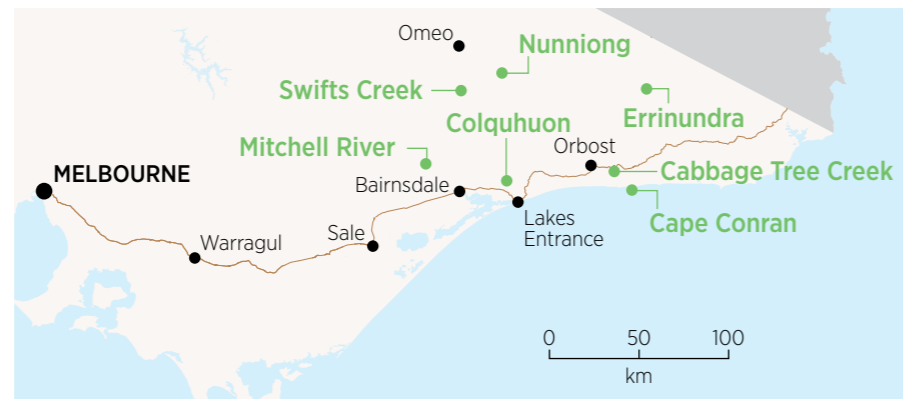
Since the devastating bushfires in 2019-2020, vast areas of East Gippsland's forests have been in recovery. In 2021, our NatureWatch program responded with the Life After Fire project where 85 volunteers took part in multi-day citizen science expeditions. Initially, it focused on supporting private landowners in fire-affected areas to monitor wildlife survival and habitat recovery. Volunteer crews then went on three-day expeditions into parks and state forests in remote areas. Over each expedition, they were trained to use motion-detection cameras, audio recorders, spotlighting surveys, scat, track and digging surveys and photo points.

Research sites were 1km long transects with motion-detection cameras installed every 250m along the transect, five per site, and a photo point

at each spot. At either end an audio recorder was installed, one acoustic and one ultrasonic (for bats). Scat, track and digging surveys were conducted by walking the transect, while spotlighting surveys were completed by walking the transect at night.

Research areas were chosen for two reasons. Firstly, where wildlife survival needed to be evaluated in burnt high conservation value areas. Secondly, in unburnt places threatened by preventable destruction from timber harvesting.

Research areas included: Errinundra National Park, Cape Conran Coastal Park, Cabbage Tree Creek Flora Reserve, Mitchell River National Park, Swifts Creek, Nunniong Plains, Colquhoun Regional Park. All are on Gunaikurnai Country with Errinundra National Park also extending to Bidwell and Monero Country.



## Success against the odds

This project has been a great success, but it certainly came with challenges. Field expeditions were cancelled or cut short due to Covid-19 lockdowns, some were run without volunteers, and storm events cut off access to research sites. Despite these added burdens on fieldwork, and thanks to our intrepid volunteers, we managed some fantastic outcomes:

- 13 out of 15 planned field expeditions accomplished
- 26 out of 30 planned research sites surveyed
- 130 wildlife camera deployments
- 52 audio recorder deployments
- 23 kilometres of scat, track and digging surveys completed
- 22 kilometres of nighttime spotlighting surveys completed.

Results include the analysis of 26,754 wildlife photos (see Table 1, p. 28) containing:

- 22 native mammals
- 29 native birds
- 3 native reptiles
- 9 introduced mammals
- 3,896 hours of audio data – currently being analysed by Museums Victoria.

## Cape Conran Coastal Park

This amazing coastal area is well-loved for its beauty and the ability for visitors to explore many natural environments.

Wildlife recorded at our sites two years after high intensity burns included bush rats and wallabies, with some Long-nosed Bandicoots, snakes, Agile Antechinus, White-footed Dunnarts, Sambar Deer and Black Rats. Ringtail Possums were seen in small pockets of unburnt tea tree. In areas recovering from low intensity/patchy burns we recorded Common and Mountain Brushtail Possums, Echidnas, Peregrine Falcons and endangered Southern Brown Bandicoots. In unburnt refuge areas



Bare-nosed Wombats caught on camera at Cabbage Tree Creek

## Averages across the sites

The amount of wildlife photos taken, and the number of wildlife species recorded, varied across our seven research areas. While it is difficult to compare the number of photos taken between sites, due to the proclivities of some species that like to hang around in front of the cameras (wallabies and bush rats!), the areas of Cape Conran, Errinundra and Swifts Creek showed the highest numbers of species recorded and the largest average number of wildlife photos taken per site.

Site	Average photos	Species recorded
Cape Conran	1484	40
Cabbage Tree Creek	1323	26
Colquhoun	536	29
Errinundra	2077	34
Mitchell River	193	26
Swifts Creek	1455	38
Nunniong	660	26

we also recorded Eastern Pygmy Possums (below, left) on cameras and spotlighting surveys.

## Cabbage Tree Creek

Cabbage Tree Creek Flora Reserve is small, but it has a lot to offer! Low-lying pockets of rainforest are mixed through wet forests and Riparian scrub dotted with the southernmost stand of Cabbage-tree Palms (*Livistona australis*). The low-lying area of the reserve is unburnt and relatively unmodified, but the Lowland Forest surrounding the reserve has been impacted by timber harvesting and regular planned burns.

Thankfully, recent planned burns were patchy, and we recorded Long-nosed Bandicoots and Long-footed Potoroos (below, right) in between burnt areas. Mainland Dusky Antechinus were recorded inside the reserve, Agile Antechinus and Bush Rats were both in and out of the reserve area. Mountain Brushtail Possums were recorded in the reserve and Common Brushtail Possums were recorded in both areas. Sambar Deer and cats



were recorded both in and out of the reserve area, and foxes in the open Lowland Forest areas.

## Colquhoun Regional Park

Rather overlooked as wildlife habitat, this park is primarily used for camping, four-wheel driving and mountain biking pursuits. The state forests on its edge are depleted from timber

*continued overpage...*

Below: NatureWatch Project Officer, Rachel Nalliah (right) and volunteers installing cameras at the Cape Conran site. LIZ MORRISON



Volunteers in the field at Swifts Creek  
SERA BLAIR

## Life after fire continued...

harvesting and areas of the park are burnt for fire risk reduction.

Our sites inside the park recorded common animals like antechinus, wallabies, bush rats and Brushtail Possums, but also Eastern Yellow Robin (left), Yellow-bellied Gliders and Sugar Gliders.



We recorded Yellow-bellied

Gliders only once outside of the park. Stands of Black She-oak (*Allocasuarina littoralis*) are present in and around the park, which are a critical food source for Glossy Black Cockatoos. These trees were wiped out across the burnt areas of East Gippsland rendering all surviving mature stands of high conservation value.

### Errinundra National Park

Ancient rainforests and wet gullies wind through these old growth eucalypt forests. Much of the southern part of the park, the Errinundra Plateau, was burnt, in many cases with high severity. Following decades of timber harvesting around the park, pressure increased around the edges of the park as planned logging coupes lost in the fires were reassigned.

One of our sites was in long-unburnt forest and recorded many Agile Antechinus, Bush Rats, Mountain Brushtail Possums, Swamp Wallabies, Satin Bowerbirds, Yellow-bellied Gliders, Sugar Gliders and Greater Gliders. The spotlighting survey was thrilling – packed with possums and gliders in this incredible forest rich in tree hollows.

Our second site was on the edge of the park, across the road from a planned logging coupe. Again, small mammals were abundant, joined by records of Long-nosed Bandicoots, Long-footed Potoroos, and Mainland Dusky Antechinus (left) and we



saw three snakes (Tiger and Lowland Copperheads) on our scat survey. Also, present were deer, cats, mice, rabbits and several unwelcome leeches.

### Mitchell River National Park

The furthest west of our sites, Mitchell River National Park was identified as an import area of unburnt Lowland and Wet or Damp Forest after the fires. While the state forests that border the park have been logged over time, and large areas of the park burnt for risk reduction, it still provides older, more complete habitat areas than recently burnt areas that will take decades to recover. Our sites inside the park were open, dry forest, one that recently had a planned burn. No bandicoots or rodents were recorded on these sites, but wallabies, Eastern Grey Kangaroos (below), wombats,



Volunteers on the ground at Mitchell River. SERA BLAIR

echidnas, Brown Hares and foxes were. Spotlighting and scat surveys recorded Brushtail Possums, and evidence of deer.

Outside of the park, our sites were not recently burned but located along planned logging coupes. Both recorded Agile Antechinus, Bush Rats, Long-nosed Bandicoots, White-footed Dunnarts and Eastern Pygmy Possums. Southern Boobooks and Tawny Frogmouths were also recorded while spotlighting.



### Swifts Creek

Moving up towards the high country, Swifts Creek is a stunning area of dry forests changing as elevation increases to Wet Forests and Montane Woodlands dotted with Montane Riparian Thickets and wet gullies. The area has a long history of logging, most recently this has concentrated on the lower elevation areas.



Volunteers in the forest at Errinundra  
SERA BLAIR

One of our sites intentionally ran through two planned logging coupes in long unburnt forest, that were squeezed between the Cassilis Heritage Area and large areas of Special Protection Zone in the Mount Delusion State Forest. The site was simply magnificent – stunning forest with incredible views.

The cameras recorded the commonly seen animals plus Long-nosed bandicoots, Eastern Pygmy Possum, many bird species and even baby Emus (left). The Emus were also recorded on the scat survey along with fox, cow, deer, rabbit, and wombats.



Spotlighting was amazing with multiple Greater Gliders, Ringtail Possums, Brushtail Possums, Yellow-bellied Gliders and Southern Boobooks. We referred the Greater Glider sightings to Parks Victoria and DELWP (now DEECA) for review of the planned logging coupes. Thankfully, the coupes will be removed at the end of this year.

Two other sites along planned logging coupes recorded common species



Rare photo of a juvenile Greater Glider, Nunniong

as well as Long-nosed Bandicoots, Yellow-bellied Gliders, Greater Gliders, Sugar Gliders, Southern Boobooks, Ringtail Possums and Mountain Brushtail Possums. These coupes were also referred to Parks Victoria and DELWP for review.

### Nunniong

A short drive off the Great Alpine Road heading to Omeo, just north of the fire line, is an amazing pocket of endangered Sub-alpine Wet Heathland and rare Alpine Damp Grassland surrounded by Montane Woodland and Wet Forests at Bentley Plain Natural Features and Scenic Reserve.

This little oasis recorded Broad-toothed Rat in the past, but sadly we did not pick them up on our sites. We did record both Swamp Wallabies and Red-necked Wallabies on our sites along with Swamp Rats.

Scat surveys showed evidence of cows in the delicate grasslands and the spotlighting surveys had Greater Gliders (below left), Sugar Gliders, Mountain Brushtail Possums and Boobook owls.

Bentley Plains is a remarkable area to visit. Wildlife abounds and misty mornings across the wetlands are stunning. However, intense logging has happened, and more was planned, all around the reserve.

### It's a wrap

The incredible teams of volunteers trekking across East Gippsland to record the recovery of wildlife shows how passionate we are about the recovery of forests, plants and animals. Getting to visit so many amazing areas in East Gippsland with

so many passionate people was a great adventure. The fieldwork was enormously fun and the contribution by the volunteers to knowledge is significant: our wildlife records have been added to the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas.

Thank you to all the volunteers who joined our expeditions for their hard work, sharing of knowledge and sheer willingness to get stuck in and get things done. Each expedition became a tight team working together – not just on the fieldwork but on enjoying the whole experience including camping and cooking together and leaving with a great sense of achievement.

While this project has concluded, the need to monitor wildlife recovery, particularly of threatened species, and to reduce preventable impacts continues. We will retain the connections we have made across East Gippsland and look forward to returning in future.

Now we are turning our focus out west, where three-day expeditions will survey wildlife in the central west/Pyrenees area in 2024. 🌿

This project was supported by an Impact grant from the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust.



Life After Fire field team, Bentley Plains, Nunniong

Female Satin Bowerbird, Cabbage Tree Creek



# Life after fire continued...

Table 1: Wildlife presence by site as determined by photo data, spotlighting surveys or verifiable scat, track or digging evidence. This does not include records from acoustic and ultrasonic data still under analysis.

Common name	Scientific name	Cape Conran	Cabbage Tree Ck	Col-quhoun	Erri-nundra	Mitchell River	Swift's Creek	Nun-niong
<b>Native mammals</b>								
Agile Antechinus	<i>Antechinus agilis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bush Rat	<i>Rattus fuscipes</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Black-tailed/Swamp Wallaby	<i>Wallabia bicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Brushtail Possum	<i>Trichosurus vulpecula</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Common Wombat	<i>Wombatus ursinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eastern Grey Kangaroo	<i>Macropus giganteus</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Eastern Pygmy Possum	<i>Cercartetus nanus</i>	✓				✓	✓	
Eastern Ringtail Possum	<i>Pseudocheirus peregrinus</i>	✓			✓		✓	
Greater Glider	<i>Petauroides volans</i>				✓		✓	✓
Long-footed Potoroo	<i>Potorous longipes</i>	✓	✓		✓			
Long-nosed Bandicoot	<i>Perameles nasuta</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mainland Dusky Antechinus	<i>Antechinus swainsonii</i>		✓		✓			
Microbats	<i>unidentified</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mountain Brushtail Possum	<i>Trichosurus cunninghami</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rakali (Water Rat)	<i>Hydromys chrysogaster</i>	✓						
Red-necked Wallaby	<i>Macropus rufogriseus</i>	✓					✓	✓
Short-beaked Echidna	<i>Tachyglossus aculeatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Southern Brown Bandicoot	<i>Isodon obesulus</i>	✓						
Sugar Glider	<i>Petaurus breviceps</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓
Swamp Rat	<i>Rattus lutreolus</i>	✓						✓
White-footed Dunnart	<i>Sminthopsis leucopus</i>	✓				✓	✓	
Yellow-bellied Glider	<i>Petaurus australis australis</i>			✓	✓		✓	
<b>Native birds</b>								
Australian Magpie	<i>Gymnorhina tibicen</i>			✓		✓	✓	
Australian Owlet-nightjar	<i>Aegotheles cristatus</i>	✓		✓				
Australasian/Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	✓						
Bassian Thrush	<i>Zosterops lateralis</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Brown Thornbill	<i>Acanthiza pusilla</i>	✓			✓			
Brown Treecreeper	<i>Climacteris picumnus</i>						✓	
Crimson Rosella	<i>Platycercus elegans</i>				✓			
Eastern Whipbird	<i>Psophodes olivaceus</i>	✓			✓			✓
Eastern Yellow Robin	<i>Eopsaltria australis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Emu	<i>Dromaius novaehollandiae</i>						✓	
Grey Currawong	<i>Strepera versicolor</i>			✓			✓	✓



Installing a camera at Colquhoun, SERA BLAIR

Common name	Scientific name	Cape Conran	Cabbage Tree Ck	Col-quhoun	Erri-nundra	Mitchell River	Swift's Creek	Nun-niong
Grey Shrike-thrush	<i>Colluricincla harmonica</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Laughing Kookaburra	<i>Dacelo novageguineae</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Olive Whistler	<i>Pachycephala olivacea</i>				✓			
Painted Button-quail	<i>Turnix varius</i>	✓						
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	✓						
Pied Currawong	<i>Strepera graculina</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Pilotbird	<i>Pycnoptilus floccosus</i>				✓			
Red-browed Finch	<i>Neochmia temporalis</i>		✓					
Satin Bowerbird	<i>Ptilonorhynchus violaceus</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	
Southern Boobook	<i>Ninox novaeseelandiae</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spotted Quail-thrush	<i>Cinlosoma punctatum</i>			✓		✓	✓	
Superb Fairy-wren	<i>Malurus cyaneus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓		
Superb Lyrebird	<i>Menura novaehollandiae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Tawny Frogmouth	<i>Podargus strigoides</i>					✓		
White-browed Scrubwren	<i>Sericornis frontalis</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
White-throated Treecreeper	<i>Cormobates leucophaea</i>					✓		
White-winged Chough	<i>Corcorax melanorhamphos</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	
Wonga Pigeon	<i>Leucosarcia melanoleuca</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
<b>Native reptiles</b>								
Lace Monitor	<i>Varanus varius</i>	✓						
Lowland Copperhead	<i>Austrelaps superbus</i>	✓			✓			
Tiger Snake	<i>Notechis scutatus</i>	✓			✓		✓	
<b>Introduced species</b>								
Black Rat	<i>Rattus rattus</i>	✓						
Brown Rat	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	✓						
Dog	<i>Canis lupus familiaris</i>	✓		✓				
Domestic cat (feral)	<i>Felis catus</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Domestic cow	<i>Bos taurus</i>						✓	✓
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>				✓	✓	✓	
House Mouse	<i>Mus musculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Sambar Deer	<i>Rusa unicolor</i>		✓					
unidentified deer	<i>Rusa sp.</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
<b>Total number of species by site</b>		40	26	29	34	26	38	26

# Restoring Golden Kelp forests



We acknowledge this location is part of the unceded traditional lands and waters of the BUNURONG and WADAWURRUNG and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country.



**SHANNON HURLEY**, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER, ON THE EFFORTS TO REJUVENATE OUR GOLDEN KELP FORESTS

Golden Kelp is the backbone of our Great Southern Reef, but it is in serious decline across Port Phillip Bay's marine sanctuaries.

The Port Phillip Bay Golden Kelp Restoration Project is being trialled to restore underwater kelp forests. This exciting project aims to test and develop techniques to halt and reverse the loss of Golden Kelp (*Ecklonia radiata*) and other macroalgae that form the bay's kelp forest habitats.

The pilot at Jawbone and Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuaries will focus on reducing urchin abundance through culling in at least four hectares, and actively restoring up to one hectare of Golden Kelp, and protecting existing Golden Kelp and macroalgae habitats. Monitoring to track success of activities will also be carried out throughout the two-year project period (until December 2024).

Kelp forests are formed when species such as Golden Kelp, Giant Kelp (*Macrocystis pyrifera*) and Crayweed (*Phyllospora comosa*) form a canopy alongside other macroalgae. Golden Kelp forests can be found along the entire Great Southern Reef, which covers 8,000km of Australia's coastline, while Giant Kelp is predominantly limited to south-east Australia. Kelp forests provide food and shelter for fish and other marine life like abalone, lobsters and cuttlefish.

## How many urchins are too many?

Up until the 1980s, kelp and macroalgae habitat were widespread on the rocky reefs of the bay. Over the past few decades, changes in water quality and an abundance of overgrazing native Purple Sea Urchins (*Heliocidaris erythrogramma*) have pushed these habitats into decline.

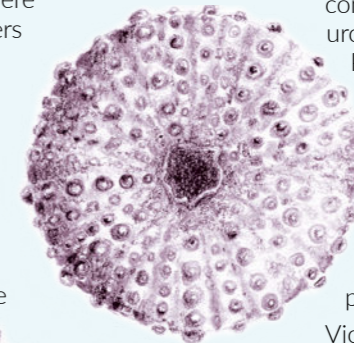
The Purple Sea Urchin is native to Port Phillip Bay and is a natural part of a healthy kelp forest and macroalgae habitat. Urchins preferentially feed on drift algae, but will eat attached algae

like kelp when drift is unavailable. When there are too many, they overfeed on algae and prevent it from regenerating. This leads to the formation of 'urchin barrens' which are devoid of macroalgae and other sea creatures usually found in kelp forests and macroalgae habitat.

Urchin densities of around two per square metre are considered desirable for a healthy macroalgal system, but in some parts of Port Phillip Bay densities are as high as 60 urchins per square metre. More than 100 million urchins are estimated to be in the bay and at least 60 per cent of the bay's reefs are impacted by urchin overgrazing.

## Restoration program

In smaller scale trials and experiments in Port Phillip Bay, macroalgae has recovered where urchin numbers have been reduced, at Jawbone Marine Sanctuary for example. These restoration methods have



been successful in other comparable locations (e.g. Tasmania).

The project will use novel techniques to research and develop the best methods to continue restoration works at a larger scale. Without this kind of innovative intervention, further loss of Golden Kelp forests and macroalgae habitat will continue in the bay.

Culling urchins is the first key step towards restoration and macroalgal regrowth in sea urchin barrens. Returning numbers to healthy levels of two per square metre, in at least four hectares of barrens across Jawbone and Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuaries, is critical.

Juvenile kelp will be grown on twine and gravel in Deakin University's Queenscliff laboratory using reproductive tissue from healthy

populations in Port Phillip Bay. This kelp will be planted by divers into barrens in marine sanctuaries after urchin numbers have been reduced. As they grow, it is hoped that they will naturally attach themselves to the reef substrate and hopefully reproduce to form a new canopy.

The areas will be monitored before, during and after culling and restoration. A robust monitoring plan has been developed to inform future restoration efforts and allow comparison to areas where no culling or restoration occurs.

## Why are we intervening in marine sanctuaries?

To select restoration sites, the current and historic extent of both kelp forest and macroalgal habitats was considered, as well as the existence of urchin barrens at Jawbone and Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuaries. Video surveys were conducted to map the extent of existing habitats and considered in conjunction with historic data. Sites are in barren areas near remnant kelp and macroalgae habitat as restoration is more likely to succeed in proximity to remnant kelp patches.

Victoria's network of marine parks was established in 2002 to protect representative and important marine habitats. We need to prevent the loss of important habitats such as kelp forests and macroalgae for these parks to achieve their important purpose: to support biodiversity. Intervention is required to help restore the values of these sanctuaries.

The Golden Kelp restoration project brings together Victoria's leading organisations working with kelp and urchin research, management and restoration. It is a partnership between the University of Melbourne, The Nature Conservancy, Deakin University and Parks Victoria. It is funded by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.

Read more at

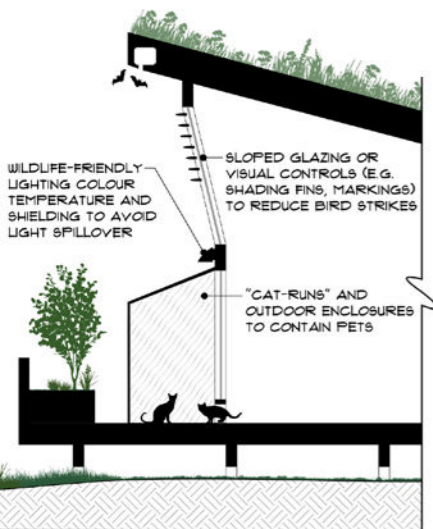
[natureaustralia.org.au/what-we-do/our-priorities/oceans/ocean-stories/kelp-forest-in-port-philip-bay](https://natureaustralia.org.au/what-we-do/our-priorities/oceans/ocean-stories/kelp-forest-in-port-philip-bay)

Illustration: Purple Sea Urchins. NICOLE MERTENS



# Designing 'nature-positive' cities

**PROFESSOR SARAH BEKESSY LEADS THE ICON SCIENCE RESEARCH GROUP AT RMIT UNIVERSITY WHICH USES INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO SOLVE COMPLEX BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION PROBLEMS. THE FOLLOWING IS AN EXTRACT FROM HER MARVELLOUS PRESENTATION AT VNPA'S 71ST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ON 24 OCTOBER 2023**



At my son's school, Carlton North Primary School, we were very lucky to have the expertise and knowledge of Uncle Dave Wandin, an extraordinary and remarkable Wurundjeri elder, who worked with our school to bestow a totem species on the school. The kids learnt about the significance of totems. They learnt how to care for and create habitat for the species – a plant, Matted Flax-lily (*Dianella amoena*), a native grassland species considered endemic to Victoria. We planted a large population of Matted Flax-lily on the school grounds, one of the biggest populations in existence.

The kids learnt about the science of conservation, about the remarkable depth and value of Indigenous science and how it can go hand-in-hand with western science to solve some of our major societal challenges. They learnt about how to see how the school is part of the landscape, where the Matted Flax-lily can be a place where the Blue-banded Bees can come from the creek to the school.

The school is now cooler with more vegetation; more resilient to extreme weather events and has better learning places. We know that kids playing in more biodiverse places in schools have improved cognitive development and lower incidence of behavioural issues like ADHD. The most important thing they learnt, is if

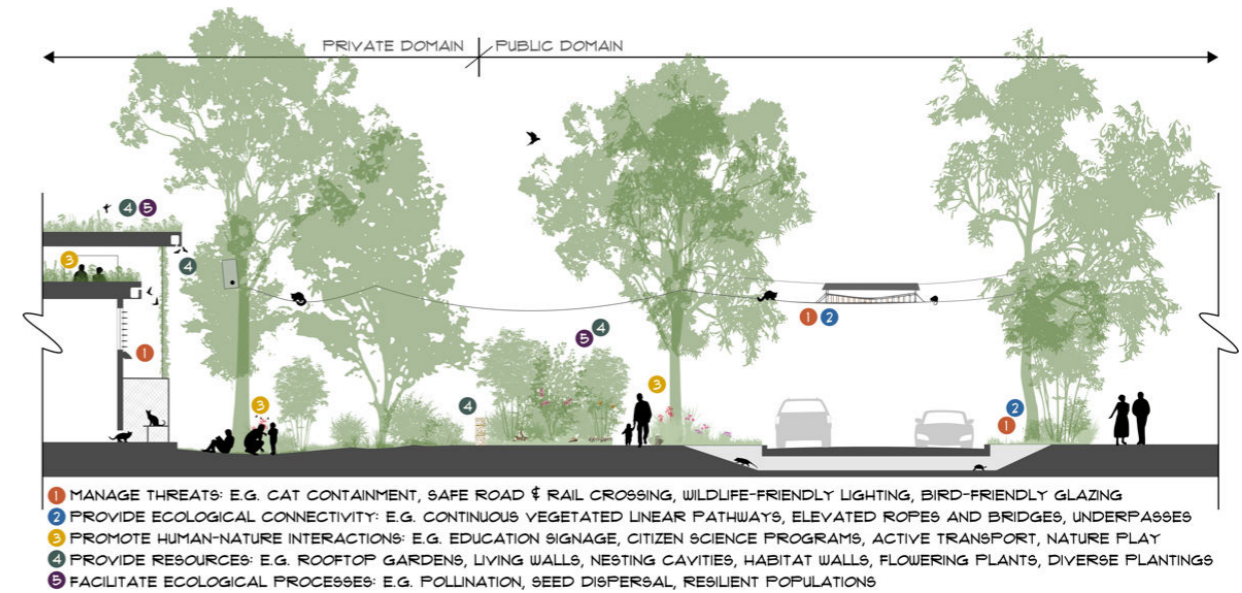
they care for that totem, and nature in general, it will care for them.

## Nature is cool!

Nature in the city allows every person the opportunity to see, in their everyday lives, how they thrive when nature thrives. We're facing the exponential growth of our cities, and extreme events like the 47 degree day we saw on Black Saturday. It has us thinking how we can create cities that are resilient and can help keep people healthy and happy and connected in these places. People around the world are looking more to nature to be a key part of the solution to some of these problems.

We know the benefits of nature cities are extraordinary, such as improving health, promoting sense of community and social interaction, improved cognitive functioning in children, enhancing self-discipline and reducing aggressive behaviour and crime.

The fact is that we can lower the temperature of the city by 8°C during a heat wave. We can clean our water and make sure the beautiful Yarra River/Birrarung has a chance to thrive even when having an unprecedented dump of rain. Our physical and mental wellbeing is so much enhanced by having regular contact with nature. If you live in a street with more nature, you will have a lower incidence of



Above: The key principles of Biodiversity Sensitive Urban Design. GRAPHIC BY CASEY VISINTIN

diabetes, cancer and heart disease. You'll sleep better and you'll probably have better social connections.

Cities with more biodiversity are also able to be part of the solution. Our gardens, streetscapes and parks can be places where threatened species can be given a haven. They're a critical opportunity for engaging with Aboriginal culture.

## City critters

Some creatures completely rely on cities. And sometimes we change cities to make them more suited to creatures, for example, the Flying Foxes in Melbourne.

A new study from Adelaide University has found that reintroducing a diverse array of native plants to public spaces can help strengthen people's immune systems by exposing them to beneficial microbes. Biodiverse natural environments help prevent illnesses like allergies and asthma, improve mental and physical health, as well as generate employment.

## Planning for nature

We need to think less concrete, more vegetation. There are so many opportunities, and not just boring Plane Trees. You can fill a city with trees but have little net benefit to biodiversity if you fail to think about the stuff that belongs there that can really deliver structural diversity – the understorey, midstorey and the overstorey.

In Adelaide, they have legislated for our protocol of Biodiversity Sensitive Urban Design and they're doing really well at implementing this in streetscapes.

It's about diversity. There's a common brown butterfly that once used to emerge in big numbers at the start of one of the seven Wurundjeri seasons. We're trying to encourage the planting of habitat that will attract a return of these butterflies – and connect us to Wurundjeri culture and seasons.

Unfortunately, a lot of our development in Melbourne has not been compatible with the vision I'm painting of people having access to everyday to nature. We have urban fringe monstrosities, inner city high rise and middle ring knock down-rebuilds, where we lose a lot of vegetation for not much gain of how many people we fit in to the suburb. It's about money-making. We need to rethink the way we are developing our cities in Australia – in a way that allows people and nature to thrive.

Our planning system is stuck in a way of thinking that nature is a problem to be dealt. The planning system has biodiversity constraint layers. We should be trying to maximise nature at every point of the planning process. And not 'off-setting' I hate this idea that we can clear some nature, and plant somewhere else to 'offset' it.

We don't have a planning system that adequately respects biodiversity in cities. Recently in Campbellfield, a developer cleared the last remnant of Red Gum grassy woodland and was fined \$200,000. They subsequently went to VCAT and got the green light to proceed with a \$7 million development!

## Fixing the future

The 2022 UN Biodiversity Conference, COP15 in Montreal, created Target 12 to put nature back into cities.

At RMIT, our Biodiversity Sensitive Urban Design protocol is a systematic and scientifically driven approach to bringing back nature into cities.

We are working with designers, developers and government agencies across Australia to implement Biodiversity Sensitive Urban Design. It starts with setting clear objectives for species and ecosystems then requires innovative designs to deliver resources, minimise threats and generate ecological connectivity for those species. Ideas include planting native ground covers, improving midstorey verge vegetation, passive irrigation beds and nature-friendly retaining walls – where lizards can thrive. There's a type of brick where birds can nest on one side, and we can watch them from the other! We can make cities less inhospitable to nature, for example: building catios (containing domestic cats); having windows tilting downwards to stop birds flying into them; and lighting that is the right spectrum, so it doesn't bother wildlife. We can increase connectivity by creating streetscapes and paths that connect you to parks and rivers; and wildlife gardening programs – planting in a way that helps native animals thrive and ways that encourage people to want to be nature-positive stewards.

My vision is that all this is possible, do-able and really desirable. We can bring nature back, allow it to thrive in our cities and at the same time create places where people are going to be healthier, happier and more connected with nature and more connected with each other – it's an altogether enchanting vision. 🌿

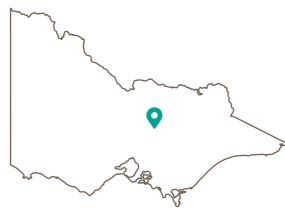
Southern Greater Glider  
HELEN REPACHOLI



# Wrong fire, wrong place



**BERTRAM LOBERT,**  
SAVE OUR  
STRATHBOGIE  
FOREST PRESIDENT,  
ON THE BALANCING ACT  
BETWEEN FIRE AND GREATER  
GLIDERS



We acknowledge this location is part of the unceded traditional lands and waters of the **TAUNGURUNG** and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country.

Taking legal action is no small thing for a regional community group. The passionate and dedicated group of volunteers at Save Our Strathbogie Forest (SOSF) are taking the Victorian Government to court as part of our long-term goal to protect an important population of Australia's largest gliding marsupial, the nationally endangered Southern Greater Glider (*Petauroides volans*).

SOSF has just celebrated its 10-year anniversary and we're proud of our achievements. After years of our advocacy, research and lobbying, the Victorian Government removed all native forest logging coupes from the Strathbogie Forest, in Taungurung Country, in May 2019. In November 2019 the entire forest was declared an Immediate Protection Area as part of the Victorian Government's Greater Glider conservation plan.

In 2022, when SOSF became aware of the proposal to burn up to 2000 ha of Southern Greater Glider habitat in the Strathbogie Forest, we sought to learn more about how such a burn might impact this endangered species. At that time we believe its occupancy in several of the proposed burn areas was poorly known.

Greater Gliders have been known to occur in the Strathbogie Forest for many decades, and in recent years the forest has been regarded as a stronghold for them in Victoria. Extensive government surveys in central, north-east and eastern Victoria in 2018-19 reported average densities of fewer than two animals per spotlight kilometre. Government surveys in the Strathbogie Forest in 2017 recorded an average of nearly ten animals per spotlight kilometre. SOSF's own surveys have

Blue Gum destroyed by planned burns, Strathbogie Forest, Taungurung Country. **BERTRAM LOBERT**



demonstrated that the proposed burn areas contain critical habitat and are home to large numbers of Southern Greater Gliders at an average of between nine and 17 gliders per kilometre transect.

## Burning glider habitat

Fuel reduction is a cornerstone of the broader planned burning program to manage Victoria's forests. The practice is conducted across hundreds of thousands of hectares annually. However, there is no systematic process that assesses the ecological impact on animals such as Greater Gliders of this landscape-scale action.

The Australian Government's Greater Glider Conservation Advice lists fire, particularly too-intense, or too-frequent fuel reduction burning as having 'severe' consequences that contribute to the losses and declines of populations in the glider's range. Victorian fire and conservation policy acknowledges the threat that fuel reduction burning poses to the Greater Glider, yet habitat in the Strathbogie Forest and beyond is regularly subject to such burns. Challenging this contradiction – that the use of fuel reduction burning in habitat supporting healthy greater Glider populations – is at the centre of SOSF's court case.

In Victoria, the ultimate decisions around when, where and how to burn sit with Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMV). There is no independent oversight, or process by which the broader planned burning program, or individual planned burns, might be challenged. Victorian fire agencies do not refer planned burns to the Commonwealth department, arguing that they are not required to do so.

Surveys confirmed there are healthy populations of Greater Glider living in this season's proposed burn areas. SOSF formally asked FFMV and DEECA to cancel the proposed burns, and be referred to the impact assessment unit for the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* (EPBC Act). These agencies then need to develop a transparent regulatory framework, or an independent arbiter/process, to assess the impact of planned burns on biodiversity assets such as threatened species and their habitat.

Despite much lobbying and meeting with diverse government representatives, none of our requests were agreed to, or our stated concerns meaningfully addressed. The government asserts it has a constitutional right to conduct the burns and that the planned burns will not have a significant impact on the Greater Glider population in the forest.

The government also denies that the proposed burns are in contravention of the EPBC Act. However, section 18(3) states that 'a person must not take an action that has or will have or is likely to have a significant impact on a listed threatened species included in the endangered category.'

SOSF have launched this legal challenge to have the burns in the Strathbogie Forest referred to the federal environment department, under the EPBC Act. If the case is successful, it may also reduce or stop similar burns in areas critical to the survival of Greater Gliders in other parts of Victoria and Australia.

In the legal battle it's easy to forget the bigger perspective. A healthy population of Southern Greater Gliders is our goal, but we're also acting on principle. A clever person



Strathbogie Forest supporters at a picnic at The Messmates. **TILMAN RUFF**

once said – we don't know what we're doing, because we don't know what we're undoing! Too-frequent fires are a direct threat to Southern Greater Gliders because they are undoing the very resilience the forest will need as we plow headlong into the Anthropocene.

The court hearing has been set for late January 2024. Details can be found on the SOSF website. 🌿

Save Our Strathbogie Forest  
[strathbogie-sustainable-forests.wordpress.com](https://strathbogie-sustainable-forests.wordpress.com)

Legal fundraising campaign  
[chuffed.org/project/strathbogie-forest-legal-action](https://chuffed.org/project/strathbogie-forest-legal-action)

# Beeripmo: a beloved walk put at risk



**BLAKE NISBET,**  
NATURE  
CONSERVATION  
CAMPAIGNER, TOOK  
TO THE BEERIPMO WALK  
WITH VMTC MEMBERS  
TO RAISE AWARENESS OF  
PLANNED LOGGING

Spring had sprung on Mount Cole/ Bereep-Bereep and numerous keen hikers took to the trails of the Beeripmo Walk. VNPA had the pleasure of joining the Victorian Mountain Tramping Club (VMTC), a very active multiday bushwalking club, on the hiking circuit, a deeply cherished walking experience, to raise awareness of planned logging.

Some members were experiencing the trail for the first time, whilst others were return visitors – a real case of ‘so nice you must do it twice (at least)’.

The walking trail peacefully meanders its way through lush fern gullies and waterfalls up into the exposed rocky

outcrops atop the mountain peaks, providing sensational views of the surrounding landscape.

Along the trail are some localised hotspots of the critically endangered Mount Cole Grevillea (*Grevillea montis-cole* subsp *montis-cole*), a spectacular flowering plant which when we visited was lighting up the forest floor with its blood red flowers. The Beeripmo really is one of Victoria’s premium bushwalks – we are so lucky to have it so close and accessible at just a few hours’ drive heading west of Melbourne.

VMTC is concerned about VicForests’ extensive plans to clearfell log along the trail. This threatens the peace and

serenity for which draws bushwalkers to the trail in the first place.

A short drive around the forests of Mount Cole clearly exposes the destruction and damage caused by years of intensive logging. Big hollow-bearing trees are now rare throughout the landscape, placing environmental pressures on local wildlife such as the Blue-winged Parrot (*Neophema chrysostoma*) and Mountain Brushtail Possum (*Trichosurus cunninghami*). Many logged areas have not been restored to their former ecological glory, turning once long-thriving forests into grassy paddocks.

I use hiking as an opportunity to detox from the long list of issues we bare upon ourselves as a society, and I certainly don’t want to be slapped in the face with clearfell logging during my bushwalking experiences.

## Raising awareness

We showed every passing bushwalker a map of the planned logging and found there to be overwhelming levels of shock and disapproval amongst the bushwalking community.

There was understandably a level of confusion amongst the Beeripmo bushwalkers about the threat of logging, as most were under the impression that native forest logging



had ended in Victoria and that Mount Cole was a national park. We wish this were the case, but the Victorian Government is yet to make a call on the future of logging in western Victoria, and has not yet formalised the establishment of the promised Mount Buangor National Park, leaving

the Beeripmo Walk on the chopping block.

A few things clearly stood out from the weekend on the Beeripmo: that the walk is clearly loved by many Victorians, and that the bushwalking community will not sit silently in the fight to protect the Beeripmo Walk. 🌿

Mount Cole Grevillea  
BLAKE NISBET



We acknowledge this location is part of the unceded traditional lands and waters of the DJAB WURRUNG and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country.

## Keeping your Friends group alive



**ROBERT IRVINE,**  
FRIENDS OF ORGAN  
PIPES NATIONAL  
PARK, ON THE ISSUE  
OF SUCCESSION PLANNING  
IN FRIENDS GROUPS

Is your group full of grey hairs and thin on younger members?

It’s a widespread problem not just with Friends groups but with clubs in general, the new generation thinks differently about commitment.

### So how do you adapt?

The most important thing is to change the way your group operates. To start with, you need to ask new younger members what they actually

want from the group. And what they don’t want. Stop boring, old fashioned committee meetings, they should be short and maybe held at a pub or a social place where younger people feel more comfortable.

Make work days sociable events, perhaps with a conclusion involving food and drink.

In your newsletters or reports make a point of celebrating new members and their ideas with articles and photos.

Don’t expect long-term commitment, be content with one or two visits.

Importantly, long standing members should ‘let go’ and step down from your committee, passing on their passion to the next generation. It’s difficult to do after years of commitment, but it needs to happen.

### Attracting new members

Attracting new members is never going to be easy, but it can be done. Contact all your local schools about projects or work experience opportunities for their students.

Contact universities and students in relevant fields, such as zoology or environmental science, who might be looking for a location or subject to undertake a project or a thesis.

Go to where younger people are: use social media such as Instagram and TikTok, as well as Facebook, Meetup, Trip Advisor and ParkConnect to reach out to interested young people.

Good luck! Remember you want your group to thrive into the future, so the nature you’re looking after continues to thrive. 🌿

# FLYING FOXES

## YARRA BEND PARK



**GEOFF DURHAM**  
VISITS THE NOISY  
TENANTS OF  
MELBOURNE'S  
LARGEST NATURAL BUSHLAND  
PARK

Melbourne/Naarm is located where it is because of the Yarra River/Birrarung. In a diary note on 8 June 1835, John Batman wrote:

*The Boat went up the large River (the Yarra) ... and about six miles up ... found the river all good water, and very deep - this will be the place for a Village. The Natives on shore.*



We acknowledge this location is part of the unceded traditional lands and waters of the **WURUNDJERI** and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country.

The Wurundjeri people were displaced, and a village eventually became the present sprawling metropolis. While the Yarra River is an important wildlife corridor, only small remnants of the original vegetation remain.

Along the river are a variety of parks and reserves which provide open space for recreation. Some are also significant as wildlife habitat, particularly for birds. But not only birds – on a balmy evening in October, I visited the Bellbird Picnic Ground on the Yarra River in Yarra Bend Park to observe the Grey-headed Flying Fox (*Pteropus poliocephalus*) colony and their evening fly-out. To my surprise, there were no Bellbirds there, but we located some bats about a fifteen minute walk up-stream.

Grey-headed Flying Foxes were first recorded by Europeans in Melbourne in 1884 and were only occasional visitors until the early 1980s. In 1986, ten to 15 individuals stayed in the Royal Botanic Gardens over winter, and by 2003 a colony of about 20,000–30,000 bats had formed. They had migrated from the north due to a loss of habitat in New South Wales and Queensland and the creation of a reliable food supply here.

Their migration is possibly due to changes in climate. They do not like periods of high summer temperature, as evidenced by their multiple deaths from heat-stress during heat waves.

In March 2003, a large-scale dispersal program was successful in relocating the colony to a more suitable location at Yarra Bend Park.

Grey-headed Flying Foxes are one of two types of fruit bats are found in the urban areas of Melbourne; the other being the Little Red Flying Fox (*Pteropus scapulatus*). The Grey-headed Flying Fox is listed as Vulnerable under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act*, and Threatened in Victoria under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*. Their survival is vital for cross pollination and seed dispersal of some native plant species.

Fruit bats congregate in a 'camp' from which they disperse widely at night to feed on fruit, nectar, pollen, leaves and bark. Fruit bats navigate primarily by sight and locate food by a combination of sight and smell. They are extremely noisy when feeding. A fruit bat camp can generate a strong, unpleasant odour, cause defoliation of trees and stains on some surfaces from their droppings. Grey-headed Flying Foxes can venture into orchards and cause a significant amount of damage to crops. This is a main reason orchards are netted.

Colonies also exist at Eastern Park in Geelong, Rosalind Park in Bendigo, and seasonally in Bairnsdale and Mallacoota. 🌿

## Excursions Coordinator Larysa Kucan thanked with honorary life membership

Excursions Coordinator, Larysa Kucan was awarded VNPA Honorary Life Membership for her work in leading and coordinating our Excursions program and introducing hundreds of people to national parks over many years.

The endorsement by VNPA of Honorary Life Membership is the highest honour the Association can bestow, and it is awarded at the VNPA's Annual General Meeting.

The first VNPA excursion departed from Melbourne to Wilsons Promontory National Park in 1954 and a program of coach excursions across Victoria grew from there.

Larysa went on her first excursion with VNPA in 1998 and as a non-driver loved the opportunity to experience so many of Victoria's national parks. Through the Excursions Program, Larysa visited beautiful places across Victoria, many for the first time in her life. It was her first visit to Wilsons Prom and the Grampians-Gariwerd national parks and many others. Larysa was first given the task of coordinating an excursion in 2003 after suggesting a location. From there she led many more excursions: over 20 years, Larysa coordinated around 70 excursions, sometimes taking up to 60 people to experience national parks.

Convening the Excursions Group is a step up from leading excursions and Larysa took on the role of

Convenor when her predecessor William Keatley passed away in 2010.

From 2010 to 2023, Larysa convened the whole Excursions Group. This involved everything from coordinating other leaders, planning trips, reconnaissance, promoting the program of excursions, coordinating mail outs, taking registrations and payments, booking coaches, managing the trip and participants on the day and following up the trip with banking, finalising records for the trips and much more.

For many excursion attendees, these trips were their first experiences of national parks and other special places, and gave them an opportunity to understand the value of these places.

Larysa and other leaders – including Ruth Stirling, Sue Parkhill, Geoff Durham and Glenn King – showcased dozens of national parks and special areas to hundreds of people.

The Excursions Group developed a strong following and a strong sense



Larysa receiving her VNPA life membership from Caitlin Griffith. MEGHAN LINDSAY

of community around the excursions and VNPA. Many of the people who attended excursions went on to become long-term participants as well as long-term members of VNPA.

Larysa is retiring as Excursions Group Convenor, and wishes to thank all the VNPA excursions leaders, members, visitors, regular excursions attendees and McKenzie's bus lines for their involvement in bringing the excursions to life.

VNPA thanks Larysa for her many years of service to VNPA and congratulates her on her Honorary Life Membership. 🌿

## Farewell to Heath Rickard

After 10 years of service to VNPA as Finance and Operations Manager, we bid farewell to Heath Rickard in October. Heath has moved on to a new role with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation.

During his time at VNPA, Heath was instrumental in keeping the organisation functioning behind the

scenes. This included everything from IT support, OH&S, introducing and inducting new staff, managing volunteers, juggling all things finance and keeping us all in line.

While constantly busy, Heath always made time to provide generous support to staff and others from VNPA's community.

Staff, Council and members thank Heath for his many years of service in keeping us operational. Staff will miss his wise counsel, his dry wit, and his almost indecipherable back of the envelope diagrams. 🌿



Heath Rickard at a VNPA Staff Day. MEGHAN LINDSAY

## Vale Graham Wills-Johnson

VNPA was saddened to learn in September of the death of Dr Graham Wills-Johnson, who was VNPA President for three years from 1984-1987.

Graham was a chemistry academic all his working life, and during his time as VNPA President was a lecturer in Physical Chemistry at RMIT.

Graham is remembered as a very keen bushwalker who particularly loved the high plains around Mt Bogong. He was active with the VNPA bushwalking group, Melbourne Bushwalkers and the Friends of Bogong. When it began snowing, during the 3rd Friends of National Parks Conference held at Howmans Gap, next door to Bogong National Park, Graham was so delighted that he almost had to be restrained from heading out and camping in the snow, whilst his fellow delegates were 'content to view the alpine scenery through the windows of a car, while making unkind remarks about the number of cattle on the high plains.'

During his time as VNPA President, Graham is remembered as being a highly effective leader. There were many challenges on the table for conservation of nature in Victoria at the time. The battle for the Franklin River in Tasmania had been won in 1983 and the Grampians National Park had been created, and these wins brought additional energy to the community efforts to protect Victoria's endangered places. Graham spoke of using the success of the Grampians to

inspire community in East Gippsland – that protecting forests from the ravages of the timber industry would be of much greater long term economic benefit. He wrote 'winning battles is hard work, but holding the ground won is often very much harder.'

An articulate and erudite writer, in *Park Watch* columns entitled 'Action ... and reaction', Graham discussed many of the challenges of the day: the clearing of native forests, research on long-term impacts of controlled burning and various other fire regimes, the concept of marine reserves, issues in urban development, the designation of wilderness areas and the importance of education for achieving conservation strategy objectives – all areas that VNPA continues to work on today.

Graham and fellow councillors met with the Minister for Conservation, Forests and Lands, Joan Kirner on more than one occasion. He spoke of her positive support for the *National Parks Act* and for bringing all conservation reserves under the schedule of the Act. Graham referred to the state government department as the 'Megadepartment' with tongue in cheek. He certainly had a way with words, referring to the 'Dinosaur Death-spasm Destruction Factor' in reference to unsustainable extractive industries such as the hardwood timber industry, 'causing the most grievous despoliations of our natural



Graham Wills-Johnson in 1986

heritage' and musing on how we can get smarter and avert the worst of it. Graham clearly kept very fit. After completing a full south to north traverse of the Western Arthurs in Tasmania with friends, after one night in Hobart he then walked the same route north to south with the VNPA bushwalking group. He wrote very sensitively and eloquently of his observations of the wonders of nature on that walk.

We send our deepest sympathies to his brother Brian, sisters Helen and Jenny and extended family. Graham died at home in Moonee Ponds.

A memorial gathering was held in Melbourne on what would have been Graham's 85th birthday, 17 November. 🌿

**Jane Crouch, Fundraising Manager**

### Western Port Woodlands Quiz answers from p. 4

1. Southern Brown Bandicoot
2. d. Powerful Owl
3. Strzelecki Gum
4. Lace Monitor
5. a. White-footed Dunnart
6. True. They help nutrient turn over and water penetration in the soil, like mini composters.

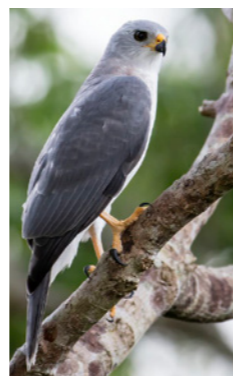
7. False. They are a parasite that grow on top of other fungi, which in turn grow on top of skinny dead branches.
8. c. Orchid
9. True. The grey morph of the Grey Goshawk is rare in Victoria and seen only occasionally.
10. a. Lace Monitor



Lace Monitor. MEGHAN LINDSAY



White-footed Dunnart. ANDREW MCCUTCHEON



Grey Goshawk. JOHN BARKLEY/BIRDLIFE AUSTRALIA

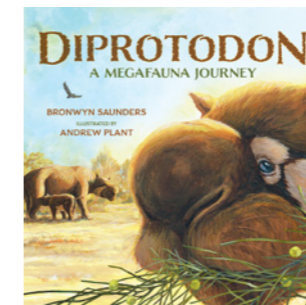
## Megafauna slapdown!

*Diprotodon: A Megafauna Journey*, Bronwyn Saunders

CSIRO Publishing, 2023, 32pp, ISBN 9781486316762

Reading a book with a kid is a joy. Any kid, it doesn't even have to be a kid you know: I have often found myself on trains, planes and buses reading a book to one of my kids and within minutes have a crowd of kids changing seats, leaning over seats or pulling up a bit of floor to listen and join in the conversations reading a book can spark.

One such conversation is the age-old debate of who would win if a Megalodon was pitted against a T-Rex being one of the more recent lively discussions. If you were wondering, it was decided that the Megalodon would just bite the head off the



T-Rex as T-Rex arms are too small to stop a Megalodon.

Kids tend to be well versed in dinosaurs and ancient sharks, yet megafauna is often overlooked and underrepresented in children's literature and minds. *Diprotodon: A Megafauna Journey* brings to life some of the megafauna that roamed throughout Australia by introducing us to the life of a Diprotodon, the largest-known marsupial to have ever lived.

Once the excitement of getting a new book and being a book reviewer subsided, my son Zeke was led

through the story by a six-year-old Diprotodon who encountered megafauna that roamed Australia at the same time. Zeke 'loves the giant crocodile and the marsupial lion', though the 'giant lizard is awesome' and that the 'book was great'. Zeke



then went on to talk about Megalodon and superheroes.

For grown-ups, I suggest taking the time to read the notes at the back of the book. You will learn a thing or two and appear knowledgeable when kids ask questions while reading. Personally, I learnt a lot about some of Australia's megafauna but would have been aided by more extensive notes on the other megafauna that make an appearance throughout the book.

It was later decided that the Diprotodon would lose to both a Megalodon and a T-Rex. 🌿

**Kade Mills, ReefWatch Coordinator, with his son Zeke.**

## Living baubles on our Christmas tree

*Where are all the Christmas Beetles?*, Suzanne Houghton

CSIRO Publishing, 2023, 32pp, ISBN 9781486317905

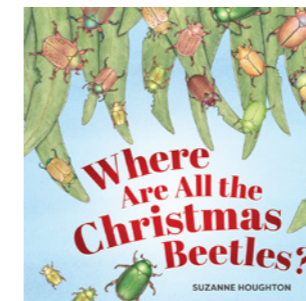
So Billie, this is a kid's book and you're a kid – did you like this book? *The best!*

Why did you like it? *The beetles!*

What about the beetles? *Rhyming beetles! Different golden shines! Lots of shaded colours! And the magpie is one of my favourite birds.*

So out of ten – what do you give the book? *Ten! So mummy, the Christmas Beetles come around to tell us that it's Christmas! Are they a sign that it's Christmas soon?*

Suzanne Houghton's exploration of the lifecycle, behaviour and gradual decline of Australia's Christmas Beetles deftly merged



two of Billie's great passions: Christmas and critters.

From the way their bodies mimic 'baubles on a tree', to how 'our garden jewels' help the bush thrive, Houghton artfully folds observation, intimacy and scientific information into an easy to read and engaging rhythmic text.

The simple pencil illustrations amplify the storyline, helping to keep it focussed. Billie did have some qualms that a particular drawing didn't accurately represent the Christmas Beetle's anatomy, sparking one of many interesting conversations.

The reverent but curious lyricism is a great container for what is at its heart a difficult issue. Whilst I'm far from ready to discuss the idea of shifting baseline syndrome with my almost-six-year-old, books like *Where*

*are all the Christmas Beetles?* are a gentle way to encounter the profound ways humanity has diminished nature.

Nearly six, Billie is within the recommended age group for the book (5-9), which also includes a glossary, further information and additional teacher notes for use in schools.

We usually find a handful of these living gems in our creek-side neighbourhood, but after discovering how common Christmas Beetles once were, I felt deeply nostalgic for a memory that isn't mine – clouds of radiant green-gold beetles heralding the start of the silly season in Victoria. 🌿

**Jessie Borrelle, Digital Engagement and Communications Manager, with her daughter Billie.**



# Wild Families



## Colour your grassland world

1. Kangaroo Grass
2. Plains Yam Daisy
3. Matted Flax-lily
4. Blue-banded Bee
5. Fat-tailed Dunnart
6. Golden Sun Moth
7. Short Wallaby Grass
8. Rough Spear Grass
9. Blue Pincushion
10. Purple Diuris
11. Button Quail
12. Swamp Everlasting
13. Creeping Bossiaea
14. Eltham Copper Butterfly
15. Grassland Earless Dragon
16. Cryptogamic crust
17. Yam Daisy bulbs
18. Striped Legless Lizard
19. Golden Sun Moth larvae (feeding on Wallaby Grass)
20. Wolf Spider
21. Fat-tailed Dunnart (hiding in a burrow)



ILLUSTRATION: GEORGIA ANGUS

**A grassy poem**

Billy-buttons are yellow  
Blue-devils are blue  
If you look closely at grasslands  
You'll find their colours, too.

Bindweeds are pink  
Saltbush berries are red  
Grasslands bloom in spring  
Including fluffy Feather-heads.

Chocolate-lillies are purple  
Greenhoods are green  
When you explore a grassland  
You'll see what we mean!

IMAGES: FLYNN'S BIOME, WINKY WOMBAT, THYLACOLEO, ALAN KING, RETO ZOLLINGER

Download the full Grasslands activity sheet, and the whole set of activity sheets at [vnpa.org.au/wild-families](http://vnpa.org.au/wild-families)

# Explorer's Corner

TIPS & TRICKS FOR GETTING INTO NATURE FOR EXPLORERS OF ALL AGES



## CAITLIN GRIFFITH REFLECTS ON THE MINDFUL ACTIVITY OF SIMPLY SITTING IN NATURE

I have a confession. Often, I find getting into nature a bit overwhelming. I find myself trying to birdwatch, identify trees, complete my nature journal, find fungi, chat to people, name the wildflowers, bushwalk, notice the insects, exercise, observe the ferns and mosses, check out all the scats and tracks, be mindful, take photos and submit my observations to a citizen science project and check out the geology. I attempt to do all of that at the same time! I'm a nature nerd, but not a specialist in a particular area. I try to do everything all at once more often than I care to admit.

Something that has helped me challenge this need to do everything is the idea of a 'sit spot'. A sit spot is simply finding a nice spot in nature, sitting there and observing the surroundings. Ideally you choose one sit spot that you re-visit regularly. I actually have a couple of spots I like to visit.

When I visit one of these spots, I usually spend at least 15 minutes sitting there. I don't do anything in particular. I just sit quietly. I am usually restless when I start and often don't notice so much at the beginning. However, after a few minutes of settling in, I start to notice how much is really happening around me.

On a recent 'sit' (for around 30 minutes) I must have seen at least 15 species of birds, heard at least 10 different bird calls, saw the light change as the sun went down, observed microbats emerging, watched a Swamp Wallaby watching me, heard the wind in the treetops and the sound of the nearby creek, watched a trail of ants, noticed the moss and grass by my feet. I left feeling both calm and thoroughly entertained by the experience. Most importantly for me, I did not feel overwhelmed (or underwhelmed), I just felt 'whelmed'.

This is not a new or ingenious invention. People have been sitting quietly in nature forever, but it was nice to be reminded that it was a thing I could do.

### How to sit in nature

1. Find a spot in nature that inspires you and is comfortable.
2. Sit there.
3. Keep sitting.
4. Take your time.
5. Finish when you are ready.



MARTIN GRIFFITH

### Optional extras

1. Take some deep, calming breaths.
2. Observe what is around you. This could be things really close or in the distance. It could be tiny insects, birds, trees, waves in the ocean, sunrise, stars.
3. Focus on just one thing and observe it very closely, e.g. a wildflower.
4. Think about what you observe.
5. Think about the universe, the forest, the ocean, the ant, the fungi, the meaning of life.
6. Take pencils and paper and draw or write (but keep it low pressure).
7. If you are restless, set yourself a minimum time to sit, that may give you enough time to settle.
8. Revisit the spot regularly, notice any changes over time and seasons.

