

PARK *watch*

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Parks for life!



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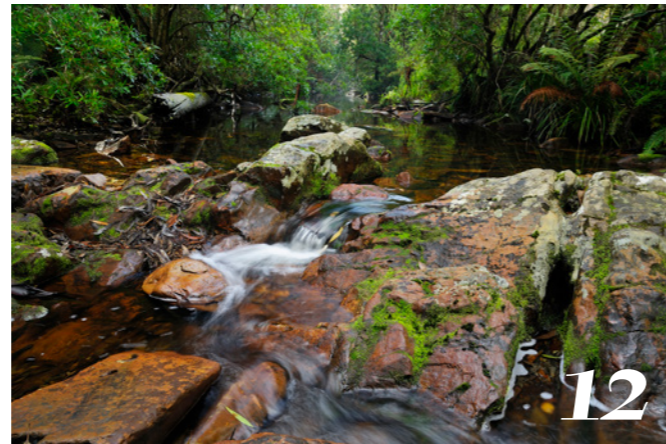
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PARKwatch

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Front cover: Boy paddling a homemade raft on a dam near Trentham, on the edge of the Wombat Forest, Dja Dja Wurrung Country.

SANDY SCHELTEMA

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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, or on 03 9341 6506 or download a donation form at vnpa.org.au/gifts-in-memory

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



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



From the President

Welcome to the June 2024 edition of *Park Watch*.

The future of nature conservation in Victoria is at a critical point. The recently announced Great Outdoors Taskforce carries the responsibility of shaping the future of our public land estate, including more than 1.8 million hectares of forest previously used for logging.

This is a unique opportunity to make the case for new and expanded national parks and protected areas. We encourage the taskforce members to read Professor David Lindenmayer's latest book *The Forest Wars* (see review, p. 40). It provides a candid examination of the Australian forest industry, highlighting the clash of entrenched myths and evidence-based realities. In the book, Lindenmayer sets out a 'new vision for Australia's native

forests' which is particularly relevant to the Great Outdoors Taskforce.

The rapid expansion of renewable energy generation is a promising development. The global transition away from fossil fuels is gaining momentum, with investments, research, corporate policies, and public strategies increasingly focusing on carbon-negative approaches.

The challenge for governments is to enable the fast-tracking of these important projects without creating other environmental or social problems. Up-front planning is required to establish policy and regulations that provides approval certainty for proposed projects, and protects our natural environment.

The Victorian Government's welcome plans for large-scale offshore

wind are a case in point. Shannon Hurley's *Winds of change* report, and subsequent update in this issue, provide an excellent commentary of the situation and how the Government can establish a policy framework for renewable energy infrastructure while also protecting ecosystems and biodiversity.

In this issue of *Park Watch* we're introducing three new regular features: 'PhD Progress', presenting current university research into Victoria's natural world; 'Salty Science', a squizz at a marine animal or plant of interest; and 'Grouse Parks', chronicling Jordan Crook's park visits across the state.

Thank you for your ongoing support, and enjoy the read! 🌿

David Nugent, VNPA President



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.

Tall Astelia *Astelia australiana*

Endemic to Victoria, the Tall Astelia is only found in two regions of our state, in the Otways near Lavers Hill and the Powelltown-Beenak areas of the Central Highlands.

Tall by name and nature, this plant is grouped with lilies and irises but sits in its own family of Asteliaceae. It can grow to a height of 1.8 metres but is believed to take at least 10 years to reach reproductive maturity.

Calling the wet and damp gully heads and streams its home, this remarkable plant relies on moist soils with year-round shade. It lives on the edge of the Rainforest ecosystems as well as in dense stands of Woolly Tea Tree and Scented Paperbark where shade is plentiful. This is also believed to protect the plant from bushfires.

I'll never forget the first time I met a Tall Astelia; off a track in a rainforest gully stood these tall and imposing plants that looked more likely to live in a northern hemisphere rainforest. But here they were, in flower, and looking stunning. It was like meeting a celebrity after reading and advocating for them for many years!

Tall Astelia is listed under state law as Endangered, and federally as Vulnerable to Extinction. A Recovery Plan for it was published in 2010. Very little of the



Jordan with a Tall Astelia. MEGHAN LINDSAY

Tall Astelia's habitat is within national parks, so I was delighted to find VNPA campaign materials from the 1990s advocating for its habitat to be included in new national parks. Unfortunately, that didn't occur, but now we have another chance to secure this wonderful plant's habitat in new national parks and conservation reserves. Check out and support our Parks for Life campaign now at vnpa.org.au/parks-for-life. 🌿

Park Watch Quiz: Parks for life!



1. When was the Alpine National Park created?
a) 1967 b) 2001
c) 1989 d) 1904
2. How many marine national parks do we have in Victoria?
a) 13 b) 11
c) 24 d) 106
3. Some of the best patches of grassland in Victoria are found where:
a) In museums
b) Trick question: they're all extinct!
c) On rural roadsides, railway lines and colonial cemeteries
d) In East Gippsland
4. When was the Victorian National Parks Act created?
a) 1975 b) 1902
c) 2006 d) 1991
5. Where is Victoria's tallest tree?
a) Alpine National Park
b) Western Port Woodlands
c) Central west
d) Central Highlands
6. Grasslands are also called:
a) Savannah b) Tundra
c) Rangelands d) All of the above
7. When did the Government commit to create new national parks in the central west?
a) 2004 b) 2021
c) 2024 d) 1999
8. Where are the Western Port Woodlands?
a) From Nyora to Glen Forbes
b) On Phillip Island
c) From Hastings to Tooradin
d) On French Island
9. When was cattle grazing banned in the Alpine National Park?
a) 2021 b) 2014
c) 2000 d) 1950
10. Which of the following is not a marine national park in Victoria?
a) Yaringa
b) Point Addis
c) Lakes Entrance
d) Wilsons Promontory

See p.40 for answers

Nature laws cliff-hanger



DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT MANAGER, **JESSIE BORRELLE**

HUNTS FOR THE RIGHT METAPHOR TO EXPLAIN THE FLAILING NATURE LAWS REVIEW

You're teetering on the edge of a cliff. Emergency services has arrived. Instead of helping you back to safety, they say 'Actually can you hold on, we'll come back later on'.

A crude analogy maybe, but a relevant one for the Albanese Government's backtrack of their election promise to strengthen our national nature

laws, the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

The reformed laws were expected by the end of 2023. Placing the process in an indefinite limbo puts nature across the country in an even more precarious position. The already (shamefully) long list of endangered wildlife and landscapes may grow as Federal Labor's 'Nature positive plan' is dragged out and undermined.

Graeme Samuel's EPBC Act review that triggered the commitment can be justifiably applied to the government's approach, being 'outdated, ineffective, and requires fundamental reform'.

There has been a glimmer or two of hope. The Federal Environment Minister announced a plan to create a national environment protection agency, along with 'Environment Information Australia', an entity to 'provide public data on ecosystems, plants and animals'. No date has

been set for the final, overhauled legislation. Our web of life is now even more vulnerable and unprotected. Nature and climate organisations are frustrated by the lack of transparency and consultation, and vocal pressure from noisy (and perversely influential) agricultural and extractive industries.

While we're stuck with the current laws, at least 30 new fossil fuel projects are likely to be approved, further supercharging the destruction of our irreplaceable wonders. Meanwhile in the Yarra Ranges, Forest Fire Management Victoria are destroying habitat for nationally-listed critters while federal regulators sit on their hands. Surely, if our State Government refuses to act, their national counterparts must step up (see p. 16). Toothless and in limbo, it seems our elected leaders still haven't developed the courage, or independence, to admit that there is no real business without a healthy natural world, especially one already on the brink. 🌿

End of native forest logging a year on: milestones, duck ponds and legislative bunyips



MATT RUCHEL,
EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR, PONDER
THE STATE OF

VICTORIA'S FORESTS A YEAR
ON FROM THE SURPRISE
ANNOUNCEMENT ENDING
NATIVE FOREST LOGGING

It's only been a year since the State Government prematurely ended native forest logging. While many continue to (deservedly) celebrate this key milestone, logging loopholes are still being exploited and significant challenges remain. We have much work to do to make sure this destructive industry is truly at its end.

Key phase out milestones to date:

- 1 January 2024: native forest logging ended in the state's east ✓
- February 2024: native forest logging ended in the state's west ✓
- 30 June 2024: VicForests will cease to exist ✓
- May 2024: The Sustainable Forests (Timber) Repeal Bill 2024 introduced to Victorian Parliament ✓
- End of 2024: Regional Forest Agreements will finish ✓

Millions for transition

To date, nearly a billion dollars (\$875 million) has been committed to forest industry transition. The 2024 State Budget committed \$290 million to employ forest contractors for the next four years.

The Future Forest Program received \$44.8 million in 2024-2025, \$115.6 million over four years. While some of that includes biodiversity and restoration activities, it also includes re-employing VicForests staff in the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA). There's also a grab bag of existing regulatory and policy functions, including a range of threatened species programs, something called a Timber By-products Framework, and developing a Code of Practice for forest management.

While several processes have been announced, we're yet to see any significant permanent protection measures put in place, such as new national parks or reserves.

Great Outdoors Taskforce: bonus or boondoggle?

The Budget included \$11 million for the Great Outdoors Taskforce. Announced by the Allan Government on April Fool's Day (perhaps portentously), the Great Outdoors Taskforce will '...explore which areas need to be protected to safeguard threatened species, areas that qualify for protection as national parks and opportunities for Traditional Owner management'.

While a step forward in some ways, there are glaring deficiencies in the Taskforce's composition. Of concern is a complete lack of specific ecological or zoological expertise, and limited land management experience.

All of which begs the question: are we merely treading water in a sea of endless panels, taskforces, and processes, with little progress towards meaningful nature protection? Are we stuck swimming around a duck pond. To date, the new process lacks the certainty and thoroughness of Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) investigations, a world-leading public land assessment process for over 50 years.

Central Highlands 'consultation'

An Eminent Person Panel for Community Engagement has been flagged for the Central Highlands and East Gippsland since 2019. A VEAC Interim Report on values of the Central Highlands was released in December 2023 (see *Park Watch* 295, March 2024).

Many local conservation groups have met with the panel, which is a good thing. However, despite there being no formal request for substantive submissions, local groups are providing them nonetheless.

The Eminent Persons Panel, assisted by consultants, ran local drop-in sessions in the Central Highlands in April and May. A profoundly superficial Engage Victoria online survey was also launched, inviting people to share what they like about the Central Highlands and drop pins on a map. Locals said the drop-in sessions ranged from disorganised to unsafe shouting matches dominated by hunting and other recreation lobbies (who appeared well-informed in advance).

The Eminent Person Panel also commissioned biocultural assessments for some Traditional Owner corporations that call for the establishment of a new type of park called a Cultural Reserve. It's unclear if VEAC has begun assessing the values of East Gippsland.

Great emphasis was placed on what locals and specific user groups thought, with little context or information. This worn out tactic breeds misinformation and misunderstanding and leads to pointless debates, such as about whether you can drive a 4WD vehicle on road in national park (yes you can, the rules are the same as in state forests). Without context and substance, these types of consultations become echo chambers of half-baked myths.

The question now is how the panel will weigh the angry loud voices of user groups against evidence-based research and strong support for better protection in parks amongst the broader community, especially nature-hungry Melburnians.

No movement despite broad public support

Despite important recommendations – such as the creation of new protected areas (like the Strathbogies and Mirboo North) – vital habitats and landscapes remain unprotected and vulnerable.

Of particular concern are the future central west parks and reserves, which have idled on the Allan Government's to-do list since 2021. Instead of being

Cool Temperate Rainforest
Yarra Ranges National Park
in the Central Highlands,
Wurundjeri Country
MEGHAN LINDSAY



legislated, dodgy salvage logging practices and poor management continue to damage these landscapes and wildlife habitats. The process of establishing the promised parks has been obfuscated, with timelines far beyond those seen in the creation and legislation of the Box-Ironbark, Red Gum and Great Otway national parks.

Global leaders, including Australia's, have committed to expanding protection on land and sea by 30 per cent by 2030. We know the public support better protection, including new national parks. Independent polling consistently puts the level of support in 70–80 per cent range, whether polled nationally, state-wide or at a metro level.

Planning for the future: leading not dawdling

Yes, new protections are critical to avoid the return of native forest logging once political cycles spin on. But we still need to defend against mining, inappropriate development

and to properly plan and manage visitation as Victoria's population continues to boom.

There is a legitimate and important role for First Nations management of our natural areas. The role and aspirations of Traditional Owners need to be considered and reconciled so the resources and capacity is there to successfully look after forest and biodiversity into the future, whoever manages it and whatever tenure it is.

Behind the scenes, the Allan Government is still working on a new *Public Land Act*, further confusing the narrative around protection. First flagged as part of the *Land and Biodiversity White Paper* back in 2009, it was formally recommended as part of the VEAC state-wide review in 2017 and adopted by the then Andrews' Government.

The environment department commenced a brief three-week consultation in 2021 which committed to 'renewing and modernising' Victoria's public land legislation, including new categories of parks and reserves and tweaks to the *National Park Act*. The consultation paper clearly states that 'there will be no changes to the permitted uses and levels of protection currently afforded to land managed under the *National Parks Act*'.

This complex piece of legislation was expected to be complete before the

2022 election. Eighteen months later, there's still no sign of the proposed reform, with mixed messages coming out of the department about when it will be done. Yet another can be kicked down the road.

The problem that arises is that various recommendations from previous Eminent Person Panels and VEAC reports, such as for Strathbogies and Mirboo North, recommend types of parks that currently don't exist in legislation, such as 'cultural reserve' and 'conservation park'. This was also true of recommendations as part of the central west.

How can our elected representatives protect nature under a category that simply doesn't exist? Technically speaking, it just requires legislation – something the State Labor Government has been dragging its heels on for years. But it would be an exercise in futility – and only further confuse about the definition of what park protection means for the community. The existing categories in the *National Parks Act* exist, and can and should be embraced.

So, are these new types of parks a mirage? Are there more fundamental changes being proposed behind closed doors? Is there some sort of legislative Bunyip hiding in the shadows of DEECA? Or is there simply a dogged unwillingness to get things done. 🐾



Rogue logging in the Cobaws
BEN GILL

Reprieve for Victoria's apex predator

JORDAN CROOK,
PARKS AND NATURE
CAMPAIGNER,
REJOICES AT THE
RE-PROTECTION FOR THE
DINGO/WILKERR IN NORTH-
WEST VICTORIA

From 14 March 2024, the un-protection order for Dingo/Wilkerr (in Wotjobaluk language) in the north-west of Victoria ceased due to a steep decline in their populations.

Dingo/Wilkerr are listed under Victoria's threatened species legislation, the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*, as Vulnerable, but have been subject to an Order in Council by successive governments to revoke the protections afforded to them under the Act.

The Allan Government's decision to remove the un-protection order is based on data from the Arthur Rylah Institute that shows as few as 40 Dingoes/Wilkerr left in the north-west region, putting them at high risk of regional extinction.

Impacted farmers will be able to apply for an Authority to Control Wildlife permit to use lethal control methods where livestock is significantly impacted and no other control methods are available. A \$550,000 investment will be made to adopt alternate non-lethal control methods via a pilot of measures, such as exclusion fencing and guardian animals.

Pumbah the Dingo/Wilkerr on a visit to Parliament House, Canberra. PUMBAHTHEHINGO/INSTAGRAM



The un-protection order for Dingo/Wilkerr across the rest of the state remains until 1 October 2024 but is under review. This is an excellent first step by the Allan Government and a great move for our threatened wildlife.

The re-protection of Dingo/Wilkerr in north-west Victoria is a testament to advocacy by the Australian Dingo Foundation and the Barengi Gadjin Land Council to protect this species of cultural and ecological significance for the north-west.

It's time for Victoria to protect our apex predator and encourage non-lethal techniques in protecting livestock. Across the world,



Pumbah the Dingo/Wilkerr. PUMBAHTHEHINGO/INSTAGRAM

communities live alongside apex predators such as bears, big cats and wolves, utilising different techniques to protect livestock.

In many locations, apex predators such as wolves and lynx are being re-introduced into the landscape with great success to control declining ecological health. 🐾

A Dingo/Wilkerr in Spring St

In March 2024, VNPA was excited to work with Australian Dingo Foundation and the Wotjobaluk Nation to bring a Dingo/Wilkerr into Parliament House in Spring St.

The event was a great success with many parliamentarians and advisors meeting Pumbah the Dingo/Wilkerr on the lawns of Parliament House.

It was a special moment knowing that Pumbah was the first Dingo/Wilkerr in over 200 years to step foot into the heart of a place that has tried to eradicate his kind from across Victoria, instead of learning to live with this apex predator. 🐾



Pumbah the Dingo/Wilkerr at Victorian Parliament House. PUMBAHTHEHINGO/INSTAGRAM

Time for a People's Audit of our grasslands



IT'S TIME FOR A PUBLIC ACCOUNTING OF THE MSA CONSERVATION AREAS, SAYS **ADRIAN MARSHALL,** GRASSY PLAINS NETWORK FACILITATOR

Two years ago, I got a phone call. Not just any old phone call. Grassy Plains Network (GPN) member Andrew Booth has been on his bike checking Conservation Areas in Melbourne's western fringe. He describes what he's seen: spoil, smashed rocks, heavy machinery, a ruined landscape. As we speak, I get aerial imagery up on screen.

Something very bad has happened at Conservation Area 9.

This once-glorious remnant grassland was now buried under asbestos-contaminated fill. It was one of 36 biodiversity hotspots supposedly protected as part of the Melbourne Strategic Assessment (MSA). In a deal between Victoria and the Commonwealth, they were part of the compensation that let developers clear otherwise legally protected plants, animals and ecological communities.

The destruction of Conservation Area 9 shone a glaring light on how bad this deal is for our surviving grassland meadows. These areas are to become public land, jewels in Victoria's conservation program. What condition are they in? Are they being purchased by government or kept by developers? Who's managing them?

These are basic questions we've been asking the MSA, and state and federal environment ministers. Over two years, we have received little response. These aren't state secrets.

So it's time for a public reckoning. Soon we'll release our People's Audit of the Conservation Areas. This is what we already know:

- Almost all areas are in worse condition now than when they were first defined in 2013.
- At least 14 compliance breaches exist across all 36 areas.

- Half (18) are yet to receive protection, eight are partially protected, in fact only eight are fully protected. Without protection, these biodiversity hotspots can be left to choke from weeds or be grazed to hell and back.

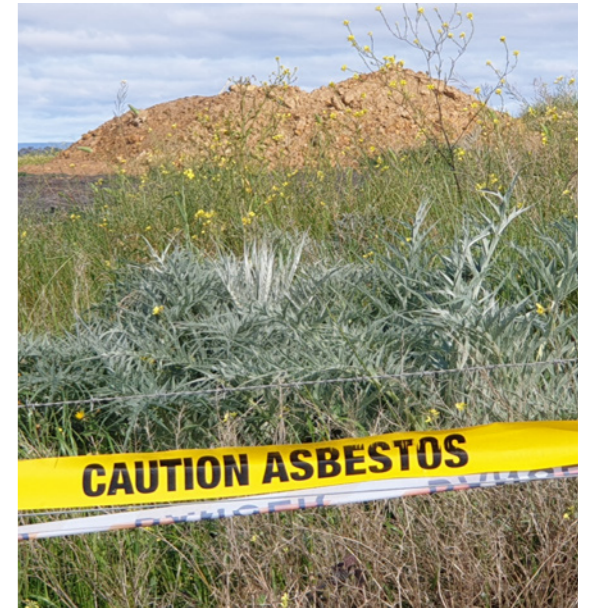
- 21 have had their 2013 boundaries reduced, mostly by developer legal action (the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) has been reluctant to oppose, and which the Federal Government has approved). Over 425 hectares has been handed to developers for their profit.

Many of these problems stem from the way the original MSA was set-up. But many come from years of mismanagement and little oversight. The Commonwealth Government has failed to make sure Victoria keeps its side of the bargain. DEECA has done little to help under-resourced councils on the front lines of compliance.

MSA management is getting its house in order, but there is a long way to go. Here are some good steps forward:

- **Compensation:** For reductions in size, for irreversible losses of conservation value, and for the destruction of Conservation Area 9. There are several high-quality grasslands in private hands that would work as compensation.
- **Transparency:** We need to see the management plans, the surveys, the monitoring.
- **Acquisition:** Roadblocks need to be removed. The Allan Government must get on with the job.
- **Community engagement:** Get significant programs going in the communities around these biodiversity hotspots.

Stay tuned for the full report. 🐾



Asbestos-contaminated fill at Conservation Area 9. ADRIAN MARSHALL

Previous concerns ignored

Just a month before the destruction of Conservation area 9, GPN had written to DEECA's head of Biodiversity. We could see weeds choking the life out of unmanaged grasslands.

Our listed concerns included ongoing decline, lack of biomass removal, heavy grazing, cropping, deliberate vegetation removal, and failure to manage weeds.

We noted the lack of Environment Significance Overlays, no mechanisms to encourage landholders to manage their land, failures to take action against obvious breaches, absence of survey data, and little publicly accessible information.

Two years later, and even after the destruction of Conservation Area 9, all of these remain outstanding issues. 🐾

The grasslands need you!
Sign up to the GPN mailing list to get involved
grassyplains.net.au/#join





Small old Grass Trees and woodlands in the Holden Proving Ground. MEGHAN LINDSAY



Racing towards better biodiversity outcomes



THERE IS A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR THE WESTERN PORT WOODLANDS SAYS **JORDAN CROOK**, PARKS AND NATURE CAMPAIGNER, IF THE OPPORTUNITY OF PURCHASING THE HOLDEN PROVING GROUND IS GRASPED

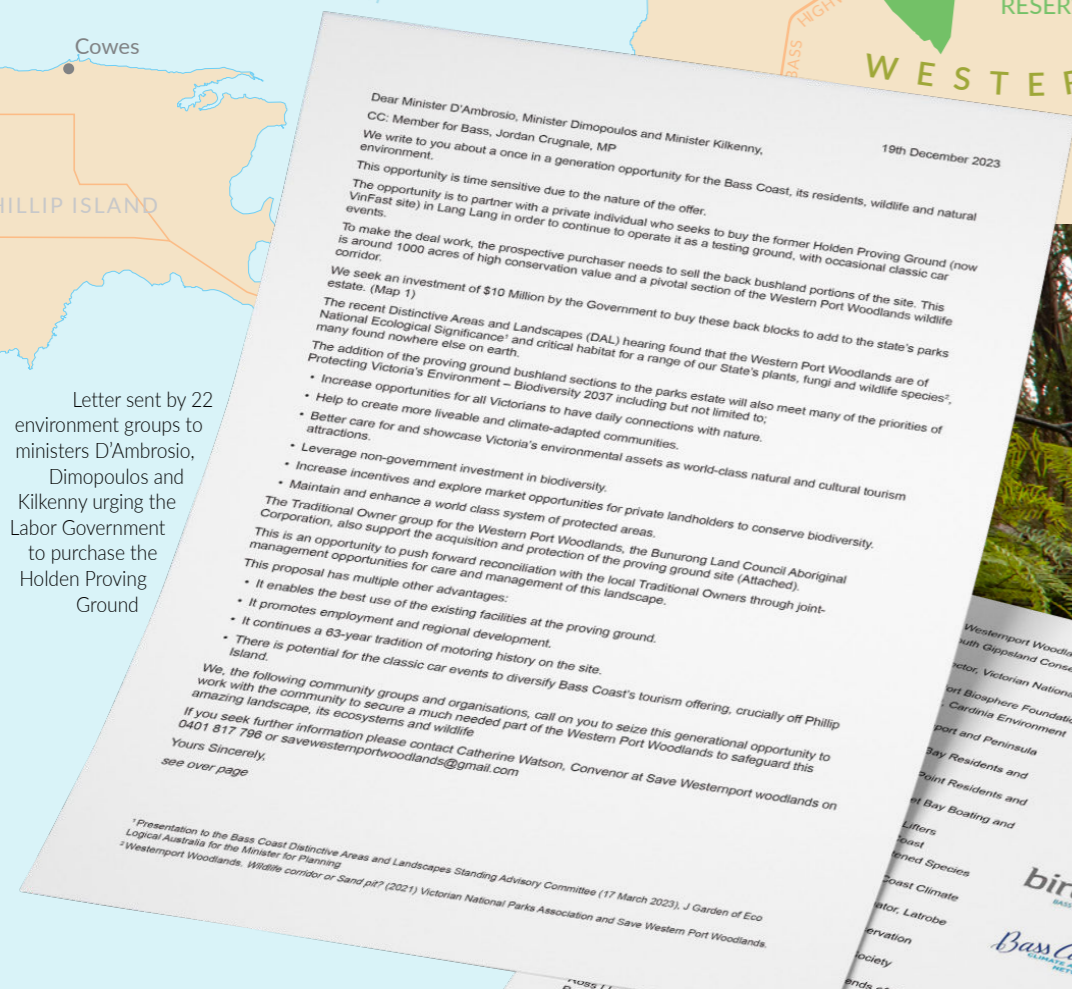
The largest patch of native vegetation in the Western Port Woodlands, the former Holden Proving Ground in Lang Lang, has again come on the market for sale. An anonymous entrepreneur approached conservation groups hoping to buy the front half of the property, with the existing track and infrastructure, for a tourism venture. With the chance to acquire the back half of the property (approximately 800 hectares) as the largest patch of

remnant native vegetation within the Western Port Woodland corridor. The Western Port Woodlands – stretching from Nyora to Grantville – are a special place. Spread across public and private land, the corridor of native vegetation straddles an ancient sand deposit that gives life to an amazing diversity in wildflowers and orchids, but also threatens its existence. The whole area is covered by an Extractive Interest Area putting the corridor at risk of fragmentation, and in some areas complete destruction. A few months ago, VNPA worked with Save Western Port Woodlands to facilitate a group letter of 22 regional and state-based groups to Lily D'Ambrosio, Minister for Energy and Resources, Steve Dimopoulos, Minister for the Environment, and Sonia Kilkenny, Minister for Planning, calling on the Allan Government to help acquire the site. The proposal is supported by the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal

Corporation who stated that they 'would openly welcome the opportunity to have this handed back to us for management and to strengthen our connection to Country'. This opportunity has slipped by once, will Minister for the Environment, Steve Dimopoulos let it go again? Let's hope not! 🌿

Add your name to the letter to the ministers

vnpa.org.au/action/protect-a-piece-of-the-western-port-woodlands-puzzle



Letter sent by 22 environment groups to ministers D'Ambrosio, Dimopoulos and Kilkenny urging the Labor Government to purchase the Holden Proving Ground

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.



VNPA NatureWatch Coordinator, Sera Blair, walking through the untouched landscape of the Holden Proving Ground. MEGHAN LINDSAY

Parks for life!



NOW IS THE PERFECT TIME TO EXPAND AND IMPROVE OUR NATIONAL PARK NETWORK, EXPLAINS **MATT RUCHEL**, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

National parks are the cornerstone of efforts to protect nature. They support the web of life and they benefit our mental and physical health. Due to decades of tireless advocacy and action, Victoria has a fantastic network of national parks and reserves covering about 18 percent of the state. When a passionate community defends parks, they protect whole habitats forever. This is true protection – for life!

But there are still important gaps to fill. It's 14 years since Victoria last established large new national parks, the River Red Gum national parks in northern Victoria in 2010. It's vitally important we improve this record.

The Victorian Government has acknowledged the need to repair decades of damage caused by extractive industries and short-

sighted policies. They recently announced the establishment of the Great Outdoors Taskforce to help decide the future of the state's public land estate, including more than 1.8 million hectares of forest previously used for logging.

The taskforce committee will explore which areas qualify for genuine protection as national parks, and which areas are suitable for activities such as hunting. While committees on their own can't deliver the outcomes nature needs, it is a unique opportunity to reinforce the case for new and expanded national parks and protected areas. Now is the time to increase the pressure on our elected representatives to live up to their responsibilities to protect nature and wildlife by completing the national park network.

Opportunities for new and better parks

Central west

The forests of Victoria's central west are extraordinary refuges for wildlife and people. They're not only scenic wonders, they're also critical for climate resilience.

These forests and woodlands are fragmented remnants of bush, surrounded by a sea of cleared farmland. An incredible variety of life exists here – including over 370 rare and threatened plants and animals, such as Brush-tailed Phascogales, Barking Owls, Swift Parrots and Mt Cole Grevilleas.

In June 2021, after decades of community pressure, the Victorian Government committed to three

new national parks in the central west. They agreed to protect 60,000 hectares of forest in the Wombat and Wellsford forests, the Pyrenees and Mt Cole.

Three years on, the parks have still not been legislated. This has taken two to three times longer than any previous new park in the last 25 years. There's no reason to delay. These parks need to be established now!



Domino Trail, Wombat Forest. SANDY SCHELTEMA

East Gippsland's forests

Walking through the lush Cool and Warm Temperate Rainforests of East Gippsland, with ancient Shining Gums and Mountain Ash, is awe-inspiring.

Numerous assessments have confirmed the extraordinary natural values of East Gippsland's forests. They are critical habitat for unique plants and animals including large forest owls, Greater Gliders, Spotted-tailed Quolls and Long-footed Potoroos.

British botanist David Bellamy described these forests as 'the most diverse range of temperate forest ecosystems on Earth'. Along with local allies, we are continuing to survey key areas and advocate for the greatest level of protection possible to protect these unique forests.

continued overpage...

Parks for life! continued...

Central Highlands forests

The Great Forest National Park will be the largest national park close to Melbourne. With towering trees above and lush ferns below, it's a spectacular place to visit.

It will protect some of the largest trees in Victoria and safeguard unique animals and plants like Leadbeater's Possums, Greater Gliders, Tree Geebungs, Gully Grevilleas and Tall Astelias.

For decades community has pushed for the area to become the Great Forest National Park. With the end of native forest logging, it's time to get on with it!

Leadbeater's Possum. PHIL INGAMELLS



Snow Gum in the Victorian Alps. PAUL SINCLAIR

Victorian Alps

Our alpine landscapes are iconic. Twisted Snow Gums and wet sphagnum bogs hold a special place in our hearts.

The Victorian Alps are home to many endangered wildlife like Greater Gliders, Sooty Owls, Royal Grevilleas and Hairy Eyebrights.

Expanding the Alpine National Park to include areas previously set aside for logging, will protect important habitat for rare alpine wildlife.

The proposed Stirling-Alpine Link will increase connectivity, improve tourism values, and build climate resilience. This area must be included in the Alpine National Park to improve outcomes for nature, recreational experiences, and the overall integrity of Victoria's Alpine regions.

Lace Monitor. MEGHAN LINDSAY



Western Port Woodlands

The Western Port Woodlands are a remarkable oasis of important habitat in one of the most cleared regions of Victoria. There are grass-tree forests, creeks, woodlands and heathlands, all providing precious homes for a wealth of wildlife. They're a refuge for wildlife at the fringes of Melbourne, like Southern Brown Bandicoots, Powerful Owls, Tea-tree Fingers, Mountain Brushtail Possums, Lace Monitors and Koalas.

These amazing woodlands continue to be threatened by sand mining and urban sprawl. We must unite the surviving patches of woodland and protect them into the future.

A Bass Coast National Park would protect the irreplaceable natural values of the woodlands, stimulating tourism and providing areas for recreation.

Marine parks

Victoria's marine habitats are amazingly diverse. They include seagrass, kelp forests, mangroves and bays. About 70 per cent of all marine wildlife in southern Australian waters are found nowhere else on Earth, including Australian Sea Lions, Golden Decorator Crabs, Giant Australian Cuttlefish and Southern Bull Kelp. But inappropriate developments, climate change and overfishing are threatening the balance.

Victoria has gone from being world leaders in marine protection to laggards. We created the world's first network of marine parks in 2002, but since then we've fallen behind other states, with no new marine protected areas in decades. Marine parks are proven to be the most effective way of making sure our marine life thrives, but Victoria has the lowest percentage of any Australian state, with a mere 5.3 per cent of our waters in protected 'no take' areas.

A team of marine experts identified 20 marine conservation priority areas that should be protected as part of our marine national parks network. They include extraordinary places like Bridgewater Bay, Cape Otway, Anderson Inlet, the Gippsland Lakes and Gabo Island.

Weedy Sea Dragon. MATT TESTONI



Grassland wildflowers. CHRIS CLARK

Grasslands

There was once a million hectares of grassy meadow stretching across Victoria. In the rush for agricultural land and development, we cleared 99 per cent of native grasslands in Victoria.

Our remaining grasslands are home to amazing, rare and threatened wildlife, like Earless Dragons, Fat-tailed Dunnarts, Golden Sun Moths and Small Golden Moth orchids.

Grasslands continue to decline, despite being listed as endangered under our national and state nature laws.

We urgently need to protect and restore these iconic grassy meadows so they can continue to shelter our unique wildlife and thrive into the future.



Support the push for parks for life

National parks are not created until they are signed into law. For all the Victorian Government's promises, so far, they have under-delivered. We must seize the current opportunity to make our reserve system bigger and better.

Now is the time to redouble our efforts in each of these areas. Thanks to generous supporters, we will continue to play a leading role in making the case for new and better national parks and protected areas.

We'll work with local groups on the ground to mobilise community support. We'll campaign for adequate funding to keep our parks thriving. We'll survey priority areas to discover natural values that help make the case for protection. And we will endeavour to engage and inspire more people to join the push for new and better parks. Now is the time.

ILLUSTRATION: NICOLE MERTENS

Help seize this chance to expand our precious national park network by making a tax-deductible donation at:

vnpa.org.au/parks-for-life



Mowing the trees instead of the grass

Hollow-bearing tree earmarked for imminent removal along the Forty Mile Break, Yarra Ranges National Park
MEGHAN LINDSAY



BLAKE NISBET,
NATURE
CONSERVATION
CAMPAIGNER,

ON HOW FOREST FIRE
MANAGEMENT VICTORIA IS
EXACERBATING A HOUSING
CRISIS FOR ENDANGERED
WILDLIFE

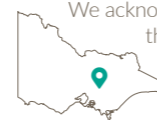
Back in 1995, Victoria had the foresight to protect Melbourne's forested water catchments from logging via the establishment of the Yarra Ranges National Park. Now, in 2024 – following the State Government's alleged ban on native forest logging – the logging machines have returned to the park. This time, they've shapeshifted into fire management.

Numerous hollow-bearing trees have recently been removed as part of 'fire management' operations. Many more are planned for removal within habitat critical for the survival of iconic threatened wildlife like the Critically Endangered Leadbeater's Possum and Endangered Greater Glider.

Why is our national park being logged, you might ask? Well, these operations are being coined as the 'maintenance' and 'renewal' of existing strategic fuel breaks (SFBs – see 'What is a strategic fire break?', p. 18). The kicker? Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMV) has contracted VicForests to do the on-ground works.

For the more than 15 years that SFBs have been in place, maintenance has involved mowing regimes to suppress any regrowth. Now it involves the widespread logging of standing trees, including (allegedly hazardous) old-growth trees. This season alone 80km of SFBs are planned for logging. It's not just trees within the breaks being targeted for removal: FFMV approves logging up to one tree length from the breaks! That's about 800 hectares of the national park and neighbouring forests subject to rogue logging this season alone.

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.



Logging in critical habitat for the Leadbeater's Possum in Yarra Ranges National Park, April 2024
WOTCH

Homes not hazards

Citizen science group Wildlife of the Central Highlands (WOTCH) thoroughly surveyed the latest break targeted for logging – the Forty Mile Break north of Noojee. They documented trees FFMV identified as hazardous and marked for removal, indicated by a pink spray painted symbol on the base of the tree. WOTCH recorded at least 480 trees, including over 100 hollow-bearing trees. This includes trees citizen science surveyors identified as active denning/nesting trees for endangered Greater Gliders. Endangered animals are living inside these trees marked for removal.

continued overpage...



Forty Mile Break (SFB) bordering the Yarra Ranges National Park. WOTCH

STOP PRESS: Greater Glider killed

We're furious. Livid actually. An endangered Greater Glider is dead. Found by VNPA Nature Campaigner and WOTCH member, Blake Nisbet in a habitat tree cut down by FFMV in the Yarra Ranges National Park.

They were warned. We told state and federal ministers this tree had Greater Gliders living in it. Several times.

But they did not stop.

This poor glider paid the price for our leaders' inaction. It should've been safe in its national park home.

This is out of control. It's a fatal failure to take the survival of threatened wildlife seriously. FFMV's cavalier approach to nature protection is costing endangered animals their lives.

We can't bring this Greater Glider back, but we can stop more from being killed. Demand the ministers cease all works until a proper ecological assessment is done. FFMV's operations have virtually no independent oversight or transparency.

These rare, hollow-bearing homes shouldn't have been felled. This endangered glider shouldn't have been killed.

If you've already called or emailed, thank you. Let's spread this far and wide. We don't want to see any more native animals killed by a frankly ironic, terrible attempt by FFMV to protect wildlife through uncouth logging.



Despair by Jake and Blake upon discovering the dead Greater Glider
WOTCH

Join our call for an immediate halt to these works to protect Greater Gliders and other threatened wildlife:
vnpa.org.au/gliders



Mowing the trees instead of the grass continued...

VNPA and Friends of the Leadbeater's Possum have commissioned tree assessments from an independent arborist (Melbourne Treecare) of a sample of the trees identified by FFMV. The arborist assessed 16 trees at the site, including some hollow-bearing trees.

The results cast serious doubt on the current policy and processes used by FFMV to assess for hazardous trees. All 16 trees were found to have a risk of 'one in a million' for harming humans – a broadly acceptable level of risk – with attributes that warrant a high retention value. The arborist found that none of the 16 trees need to be felled or removed, and recommended pruning works for six of them.

We observed that some trees initially earmarked for removal had their pink symbol scratched-off, undermining the integrity of FFMV's hazardous tree assessments.

A litany of loopholes

This loophole logging is merely the latest onslaught on Victoria's protected land network, conducted with zero transparency, regulation or oversight. It's entirely inconsistent with a myriad of state and federal nature laws and policies. The Leadbeater's Possum Recovery Plan, for example,

was signed off by both the state and federal governments in March this year. It promised to protect all large and hollow-bearing trees, and prevent any modification or destruction of current and prospective Leadbeater's Possum habitat. Still, logging machinery was seen destroying habitat just weeks after the plan's release.

To date, FFMV has not referred these logging operations to the Federal Government for an assessment of significant impacts under the *Environment Protection & Biodiversity Conservation 1999* (EPBC Act). Recent court proceedings from Save Our Strathbogies Forests prove that fire management operations are not exempt from federal nature laws.

We are calling for an immediate halt of these works until an assessment for significant impacts takes place. It's incumbent on our state government to actively reverse any extinction trajectories of animals that call these forests home, animals like Leadbeater's Possums, Greater and Yellow-bellied gliders, the Smoky Mouse and Tooarrana (Broad-toothed Rat). The government must establish independent regulation and oversight of FFMV operations. Marking your own homework didn't fly in school and it certainly doesn't fly in our precious native forests. 🌿

What is a strategic fire break (SFB)?

Strategic fire breaks (SFBs) are cleared vegetation gaps, between 20–40m wide, with very few or no retained overstorey trees connecting either side of the break.

Their purpose is to give firefighters a clear, safe space to operate from during suppression and extinguishing efforts, including backburning or fuel reduction burning.

In the years leading up to the 2009 bushfires, over 250km of SFBs were cleared along the borders of, and within Yarra Ranges National Park. Some old-growth trees were retained in the breaks during the initial clearing.

There was major pushback during the initial construction of these breaks, particularly given the impacts of on wildlife of widespread hollow-bearing tree removal. These concerns were heightened due to the ongoing uncertainty around the effectiveness of SFBs. A growing body of scientific research suggests backburning increases wildfire footprints.

Many of these SFBs are extremely remote, begging the question as to whether any on-ground firefighters would actually be deployed there to fight fires in extreme conditions. 🌿



Likely Leadbeater's Possum nest tree (indicated by the key-hole entrance hollow) felled within the Yarra Ranges National Park, December 2023. WOTCH

Where we went in Autumn



Autumn was a busy season for VNPA activities, out and about in the bush and the water.



Bushwalkers enjoyed walks at Mt Macedon, Mt Alexander, Brisbane Ranges and Budj Bim.



Two-wheel explorers cycled and birdwatched from Williams Landing to Williamstown.



Marine citizen scientists searched for sea slugs at San Remo.



Grassland enthusiasts learnt all about the Victorian Volcanic Plains, tiny grasslands plants and railway grasslands at Grassy Plains Network monthly meetings.



Ocean lovers went for a snorkel at Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuary for the Great Victorian Fish Count.



Citizen scientists went spotlighting and set up wildlife monitoring cameras in Wombat Forest.



Tree lovers toured through the Central Highlands, visiting some of the biggest trees on mainland Australia.



Sea Slug searchers at San Remo



Fungus hunt training

Tuesday 11 June, 5.30-6.30pm

It's time to prepare for the annual Tea Tree Fingers Fungus hunt in Western Port Woodlands. Fungi expert Dr Sapphire McMullan-Fisher will run an online training session on covering identification and reporting.

Nestbox building

Thursday 13 June

Join the NextGen Nature crew and build a nestbox to create habitat for local wildlife.

Nestbox painting

Saturday 15 June

Bring your family and decorate nestboxes. Plus learn all about the wildlife that live in tree hollows, or nest boxes when there aren't enough hollows left!

Western Port Woodlands campaign tour

Saturday 22 June

Join NextGen Nature to learn all about campaigning and how VNPA and local groups are working to save the Western Port Woodlands.

San Remo Sea Slug Census

Friday 28 June to Sunday 7 July

Head out for a rock pool ramble, snorkel or scuba dive anywhere along the Victorian coast to search for sea slugs during this week-long census.

Nature Stewards courses

Throughout Winter

Learn about local plants animals, fungi and what you can do to help nature locally in Whittlesea, Geelong, Ballarat and Boroondara/Stonnington/Monash hub.

Warm up with our Winter 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.

Subscribe to our mailing list to receive activities updates
vnpa.org.au/activities-sign-up

Discover more at
vnpa.org.au/activities





A blaze of concern

The Mt Cole Grevillea's survival saga



THERE IS A VERY REAL POSSIBILITY THAT THIS BEAUTIFUL AND UNIQUE FLOWERING PLANT WILL FACE EXTINCTION IN THE WILD UNLESS WE PROPERLY RESOURCE AND PRIORITISE A RECOVERY PLAN, SAYS **BEN GILL**, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER



Mt Cole Grevillea. BILL BLACKBURN

Recent fires at much loved Mt Cole/ Bereep Bereep have severely impacted the homes and habitats of several threatened plants and animals, including the Critically Endangered Mt Cole Grevillea (*Grevillea monita cole*).

These stunning forests, rising up on an extinct volcano surrounded by blankets of farmland, feature 16 unique habitat types (known as ecological vegetation classes) that support an array of wonderful critters and plant life.

It's vital that, after the devastating fires devoured 95 per cent of greater Mt Cole, a properly funded recovery plan is carried out for this popular future national park.

The southern end resembles the tree fern-clad valleys and mountainsides of the Dandenongs, whilst one of the state's most westerly populations of Snow Gums lay twisted and hunkered into the mountain tops amongst the granite boulders. The northern end near the Pyrenees are drier open forests. The unique terrain provides haven and habitat for threatened plants and animals like Brush-tailed Phascogales, Grampians Bitter Peas and Mountain Brush-tailed Possums.

Potential extinction

Mt Cole is home to the eponymously named Mt Cole Grevillea, found nowhere else on earth. After these fires, there's a devastatingly high chance this endemic red flowering beauty may become extinct in the wild. The fire caused the near entire loss of the understorey layer, impacting 100 per cent of known records within the study area.

The decline in extent or potential extinction of the Mt Cole Grevillea is a significant risk due to the loss of the understorey layer. It regenerates from seed stored in the soil following fire, but seed longevity is unknown. The Mt Cole Grevillea reaches sexual maturity after three years, with a generation length estimated to be somewhere between 30 to 70 years.

In 2019, following a nomination from VNPA, the Scientific Advisory Committee assessed the Mt Cole Grevillea and recommended it be listed on the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act*. It was currently listed as Critically Endangered, the last step before extinction in the wild.

For many years, VNPA has advocated for the creation of the Mt Cole-

Buangor National Park to formalise the plant's protection and limit the impacts of threats like inappropriate fire regimes and logging.

The Mt Cole Grevillea is also vulnerable to browsing by various herbivores. Estimates put the plant's decline in recent decades at 75 per cent, with a reduction in its range from 2570 hectares to a mere 700 hectares before last Summer's fires.

The Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria holds three living Mt Cole Grevillea specimens, with 220 seeds available for reseeded in the event of widespread in-situ recruitment failure.

A day of horror

Thursday 22 February 2024 was a day of total fire ban. I was alerted by a local environment group member and watched in horror as the scale of the fire grew, huge pyrocumulus clouds hinting at the ferocity of the fire beneath it. The fire burned for seven days until it ran out of fuel, having consumed nearly all of Mt Cole's forest. The next day I wept as I reviewed the satellite imagery, and the impacts became clear. There was barely a valley or safe haven for the creatures of the forest that remained.

VNPA were contacted by Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) Rapid Response Assessment Team. It felt good to work constructively with a government department toward a shared goal of identifying the issues faced for Mt Cole's biodiversity recovery. DEECA adopted many of our recommendations into their final report that will become



Bracken surrounds the charred remains of a Mt Cole Grevillea

the basis for a funding bid. But now comes the hard part – finding the resources for the gamut of urgent work necessary to help this wonderful forest return to its past grandeur.

Millions of dollars were provided for recovery after the 2019/2020 fires in East Gippsland, setting a new benchmark. Whilst not of the same scale, the severity of the fires at Mt Cole requires urgent investment. VNPA undertook our own recovery report to feed into the State Government's response. We covered key themes such as threatened species recovery; monitoring of the fen or bog; impacts on important regional plants such as the Snow and Yarra gum populations; mapping burn impacts and severity; invasive species control; pathogen control and exclusion of heavy machinery to minimise chance of spread of *Phytophthora* or *Armillaria*; visitor and park infrastructure such as the popular Beeripmo Walk; and finally legislating the promised parks to cement the protections.

Salvage logging underway

It's now four months since the forest was closed to the public. With that exclusion comes a concern that some form of salvage logging is taking precedent over preventing the likely extinction of an endemic and truly unique plant.

Post-fire photos of known Mt Cole Grevillea show one lone burnt stem that still stands, forlorn, on an embankment. Mere months ago the same patch was flush with a healthy population. In recent years, we'd found



Charred remains of a Mt Cole Grevillea
ALL IMAGES BEN GILL

several baby plants just starting to become big enough to survive grazing by feral deer. We've yet to see decisive actions, like fencing-off of known areas to prevent the threat of fresh young regrowth from grazing by herbivores.

Holding Council to account

Recently, VNPA was contacted by locals horrified that Pyrenees Shire was heavy-handedly removing nearly all roadside trees in the rural living zone around the base of the mountain.

It was a tough drive through the devastation. Nearly every tree glinted with a silver aluminium tag – its fate sealed by an over-zealous arborist who appears to underestimate the resilience of our mixed species trees to recover from fire.

A tight-knit group of dedicated locals has leapt into action. They questioned arborist assessments and argued against the mindless cutting down of many trees that would have otherwise recovered.

So far, they've reduced the removals to trees that pose an immediate risk to road users. It's a sad day when locals have to offer to assess trees and give days and weeks of their time to protect not only the homes of surviving creatures, but an essential part of the forest's recovery.

At the cost of just one of 110 rail crossing removals planned for Melbourne, we could save many plants and animals, including Mt Cole Grevillea. I know I'd be fine waiting a few minutes at a rail crossing if it meant that I could show my son the beauty of the Mt Cole Grevillea. 🌿



With no groundcover, erosion and silting such as this will be an ongoing concern

Native forest logging on private land

Talk about noisy neighbours!

Private land native forest logging in Yarra Ranges Shire, Wurundjeri Country. PROVIDED ANONYMOUSLY TO VNPA, MARCH 2024



THE STATE GOVERNMENT'S LANDMARK DECISION TO END NATIVE FOREST LOGGING BY 1 JANUARY 2024 WAS WELCOMED BY THE VICTORIAN COMMUNITY, BUT IS IT REALLY OVER?

BLAKE NISBET, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER, TAKES A LOOK AT LOGGING ON PRIVATE LAND

Logging loopholes are unravelling across the state. We're now observing native forest logging stealthily roll from state forests to private land, in some cases both a figurative and literal hop over the fence.

A monumental Supreme Court ruling on protections for Greater and Yellow-bellied Gliders was announced in late 2022, which largely halted native forest logging throughout 2023 up to the 2024 ban.

But in some areas, like the Central Highlands, native forest logging may be more active now than in the bad old days pre-2022, before court cases stymied the destruction and the state-wide ban kicked in.

Over the last 18 months, VNPA has been made aware of native forest logging (commenced or planned to) on four privately-owned forest blocks in the Central Highlands, as well as in western Victoria and East Gippsland. It's likely this loophole is being exploited across the state. Wildlife such as Critically Endangered Leadbeater's Possums, Vulnerable Yellow-bellied Gliders and Endangered Long-footed Potoroos are threatened by these damaging operations.

Same same but different

In many ways, private land logging comes with more challenges than its public counterpart. It's important to understand how it operates on private land, compared to in state forests.

On private land:

- Logging is approved and regulated by poorly-resourced and ill-equipped local governments instead of Victorian Government and

Private land native forest logging in Baw Baw Shire, Bunurong and Gunaikurnai Country PROVIDED ANONYMOUSLY TO VNPA, MARCH 2024



their Office of the Conservation Regulator (OCR).

- The sources of permission for logging are often historical permits with no conditions or expiry dates.
- The logging is often difficult to monitor, due to access restrictions on private land and a lack of transparency.
- Pre-harvest survey requirements are more relaxed and are unlikely to detect resident populations of threatened plants and animals that require protections from logging.
- Protections for environmental values such as threatened plants and animals are weaker, and inadequate for mitigating any ecological risk and impacts.
- The risks to threatened plants, animals and communities from future logging is not assessed. This would determine whether additional protections are required during the Victorian Government's assessments in accordance with the Regional Forestry Agreements.

The rules governing native forest logging on private land are set out in the Code of Practice for Timber Production. However, the sections that apply can be cherry-picked and don't include all the species-specific protections ordinarily applied in state forests. For example, under the Code,

native forest logging in state forests was prohibited within 200m of a verified Leadbeater's Possum.

On private land, that provision doesn't directly apply. VNPA has observed satellite imagery (see photo above) that shows recent native forest logging on private land that breaches the 200m Leadbeater's Possum special protection zones.

It's not just the Code that sets out rules and regulations for logging on private land. Many pieces of state and Commonwealth legislation must be complied with. Victoria's key nature laws, the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* (FFG Act), also demand 200m special protection zones around Leadbeater's Possum records.

Local governments are required to give careful consideration to these laws when giving the tick to private land proposals on. Councils, especially smaller regional ones, are under-resourced and appear ill-equipped to deal with the complexities of regulating native forest logging. Our threatened wildlife and their homes are the unwitting victims of poor regulation and decision-making. There are hundreds of thousands of hectares of merchantable (suitable for sale) forest vegetation on private land, illustrating the scale of this issue.

The burden placed on local governments to regulate native forest

logging on private land is substantial, and comes with major legal, political and compliance risks.

Consideration and approvals of logging operations by councils suck up critical time and resources. Paired with native forest loggings' loss of social licence, this leaves local councils and shires vulnerable to legal challenges by the public and increases in political pressure.

We've written to 58 rural councils expressing the complexities and risks faced if they approve native forest logging operations on private land. We've also written to relevant state ministers to align their native forest logging ban by closing this private land logging loophole. 🐾

Tell the government to put an end to the private land logging loophole
vnpa.org.au/action/end-private-logging



Gone with the winds



SHANNON HURLEY, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER, ON THE RECEPTION TO *WINDS OF CHANGE*, AND FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS WITH OFFSHORE ENERGY

The publication in March of VNPA's discussion paper, *Winds of change*, grabbed the attention of the media across the state. It led to interviews with ABC radio's regional and metro drive programs, coverage in daily and weekly newspapers and a front-page feature in *The Age*.

After sharing the paper with state and federal environment and energy ministers, relevant departments and energy and nature groups, the idea that marine spatial planning (MSP) is the way forward is finally taking hold.

Winds of change is a solution-focused paper about addressing challenges in the offshore wind energy industry. It's already achieving its aim – to create conversations about the role proper (and early) MSP plays in protecting marine biodiversity values, saving time and costs, and avoiding problems and potential rejections.

While energy and environment representatives see the value in MSP, a tool enshrined in Victorian legislation for coordinating ocean uses in state and federal waters, there's still no commitment to use it by either level of government.

Criteria without merit?

Since the release of *Winds of change*, there have been moves to bring offshore wind energy development closer to fruition.

On 1 May 2024 the first six feasibility licenses were given to five companies in the Gippsland offshore wind farm zone by Chris Bowen, Federal Energy Minister. With a total of 37 applications, the successful candidates were High Sea Wind, Gippsland Skies, Blue Mackerel North, Kut-Wut Brataualung, Offshore

Australia 1 and Star of the South Wind Farm.

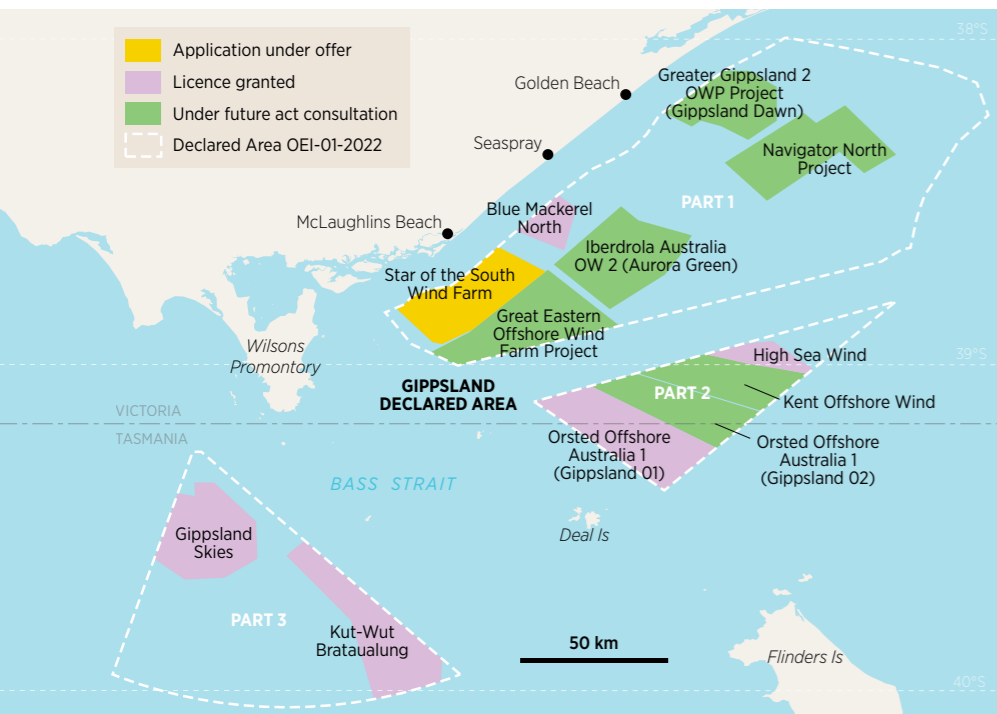
Feasibility licenses let developers progress the feasibility of an offshore infrastructure project and conduct assessments, surveys and potential approvals before applying for a commercial license.

There are a further six potential companies who could obtain licenses, subject to First Nations consultation. The merit criteria applied by the offshore wind regulator, NOPSEMA (the same body used for oil and gas projects) includes: the technical and financial capacity to carry out the project; the viability and suitability to hold a license; and whether the project is of national interest.

It's disappointing to see that natural values aren't included in this criteria for decision-making. This reinforces the issue that energy planning is not coordinated with environmental planning/assessment but treated separately. Again we're looking at a future where instead of protecting the web of life, renewable energy projects end up contributing to its destruction – if not located in the right places.

This was further emphasised in the amendment regulations to support offshore wind infrastructure. Disappointingly conservation organisations weren't listed as interested parties to be specifically consulted. We hope this is an oversight, and not a deliberate exclusion.

VNPA compiled a submission (vnpa.org.au/publications/submission-southern-ocean-region-offshore-renewable-energy-zone) and sought a briefing from the Federal Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water to clarify these issues.



Salty Science with Kaitlin Mussett



Neptune's Necklace *Hormosira banksii*

Commonly referred to as Neptune's Necklace, after the Roman god of the sea, *Hormosira banksii* belongs to the family Hormosiraceae. It is a type of brown algae characterised by branching, cylindrical fronds similar to small textured beads, thus resembling a beaded necklace.

These beads are actually air-filled bladders known as pneumatocysts and are crucial to providing buoyancy to the seaweed, allowing it to float and remain upright. This maximises its exposure to sunlight allowing for better photosynthesis.

Native to Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, *Hormosira banksii* can be found in dense mats on intertidal rocky shores. With each strand growing up to 30cm long, this seaweed is probably best known for giving many fond memories to children while they squirted the 'water' hidden inside during an afternoon at the beach.

The importance and magnificence of seaweeds are constantly ignored, and people tend to forget that seaweeds like the *Hormosira banksii* are essential in stabilising coastal ecosystems. They fulfil this role by offering essential habitat for intertidal invertebrates, gastropods and crustaceans. They serve as a nutrient rich food source, boasting the highest iodine and zinc levels among other species, benefiting sea urchins, crustaceans, and fish. On top of that, they contribute to erosion mitigation through their competitive edge over other species and their resilience in adapting to fluctuating environmental conditions.

Seaweed can be harvested for several different uses such as food, or even art or other creative ideas; you just need



Neptune's Necklace. LOUIS CALLAS

to remember, like a terrestrial plant a seaweed's root system is imperative to its growth and reproduction, so don't pull from the root, harvest from higher up.

With a fresh taste and crunchy texture similar to cucumber you might even like to try some *Hormosira banksii* beads pickled on your next cheeseboard!

Kaitlin Mussett is a ReefWatch Student Placement from Charles Sturt University

Back on the Victorian front, the state Budget included:

\$17 million to continue planning and designing a renewable energy terminal at the Port of Hastings, where the infrastructure for offshore wind farms can be assembled.

We interpret this as confirmation that the Victorian Government will keep pushing the development of Western Port Bay, even after it was rejected by the Federal Environment Minister due to unacceptable impacts on the Bay's Ramsar wetland. Yet another reason marine spatial planning is direly needed.

While we appreciate the complexity of coordinating a swift roll out of an entire national energy industry, we hope that state and federal governments see the sense in adopting upfront marine planning.

We will continue to raise this important issue with the Allan and Albanese governments, industry, local, state and national groups, ocean users, Traditional Custodians and the media.

A summary of *Winds of change* can be found in the March 2024 *Park Watch* at vnpa.org.au/the-winds-of-change

You can help by sharing the *Winds of change* discussion paper:

vnpa.org.au/publications/winds-of-change





Spotlight on Wombat



DR SERA BLAIR,
NATUREWATCH
COORDINATOR,
ON LOOKING FOR
MOUNTAIN SKINKS AND
BRUSH-TAILED PHASCOGALES
IN THE FUTURE WOMBAT-
LERDERDERG NATIONAL PARK

From November 2023 to May 2024, the NatureWatch team returned to Wombat Forest to support our work to end rogue logging and improve protection for wildlife living in the forests.

We partnered with Wombat Forestcare, aligning our citizen science program to their search for two very interesting, threatened critters: Mountain Skinks and Brush-tailed Phascogales.

Mountain Skink

Mountain Skink (*Liopholis montana*) are difficult to survey as they zip under protective plants or rocks as soon as they hear you approach and then wait a while before re-emerging.

With the help of Wombat Forestcare's Gayle Osborne, we searched in areas of typical Mountain Skink habitat. We started by walking around slowly, looking and listening for any skink movement. As they are relatively large, we saw potential Mountain Skinks a few times, but they moved so quickly it was difficult to confirm an ID.

So, we set up a series of cameras on the ground, directed towards potential skink holes tucked in the sides of rocky mounds and embankments. Rather than take photos, the cameras were set to record 10 second videos when triggered by movement. Our assumption: while difficult to

photograph with good enough clarity for identification, a short video may offer the chance to assess body size and colouration.

It worked! We recorded two videos of Mountain Skinks in one area, along with an array of other animals such as Agile Antechinus, Bush Rat, Swamp Wallaby, Eastern Grey Kangaroo, Ring-tailed Possums, Echidna, Crimson Rosella, Grey Currawong, Grey Shrike-thrush, Red-browed Finch, Superb Fairywren, White-browed Scrubwren and Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos. Wombat Forestcare's habitat assessment was spot on.

These Mountain Skink records are being verified by experts. If confirmed, they'll be added to other sightings that are challenging the destruction of their habitat in areas of storm clean-up or planned burns.

Brush-tailed Phascogale

Brush-tailed Phascogales (*Phascogale tapoatafa*) prefer open, drier forests with plenty of hollow-bearing trees with fibrous ('stringy') bark and decaying logs to nest and forage for insects and small invertebrates. Generally, these features are found in long-unburnt forests. (To learn more about Brush-tailed Phascogales, see Spotlight on Nature, p. 29).

NatureWatch has spent over ten years surveying wildlife in Wombat

Opposite page: NatureWatch volunteers setting up a wildlife camera in the Wombat Forest

Right: Undertaking habitat tree surveys. SERA BLAIR

Forest and only recorded Brush-tailed Phascogales twice (2013, 2014).

Our previous surveys didn't target phascogale habitat specifically, but this year we did. We focused on an area of potential habitat scheduled to be burned in Autumn 2024. The forest hadn't been burnt since the Ash Wednesday fires in 1983.

Evidence of these fires remained as residual burnt bark in patches and larger trees with triangular fire scars at the base, now decaying inside. There are many logs on the ground, in varying degrees of decay. Some were likely created in the fire and are now heavily decayed and full of holes – perfect for animals like phascogales, Bush Rats and antechinus to forage and nest in.

The forest is a combination of Heathy Dry Forest and Shrubby Foothill Forest, typically quite open. The dominant trees are medium-sized Messmate (*Eucalyptus obliqua*), Red Stringybark (*Eucalyptus macorhyncha*) and Broad-leaf Peppermint (*Eucalyptus dives*) with few understorey shrubs and a low, sparse ground cover of heaths, peas and tussock-grass (*Poa sieberiana*).

Because the forest hadn't burned in 40 years, we were told that the 'overall fuel hazard in the burn is modelled as extreme' by Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMV).

Phascogale campaign

After recording Brush-tailed Phascogales at seven sites, we pursued actions to try and delay, modify or cancel the planned fuel reduction burn. Our phascogale records were immediately uploaded to the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas and working with Nature Conservation Campaigner, Ben Gill, we notified DEECA and FFMV of the locations and requested the planned burn be reconsidered.

continued overpage...



Laughing Kookaburra investigating the camera bait



Brush-tailed Phascogale caught on our wildlife camera

Wildlife camera surveys

NatureWatch volunteers installed 20 wildlife cameras, positioned along logs, at sites across the southern end of the planned burn area. We recorded Brush-tailed Phascogales at seven of these sites. We also conducted nighttime spotlighting and stagwatching around the phascogale sites, recording many Eastern Ringtail Possums.

Wildlife recorded on cameras and spotlighting surveys across all 35 sites in Wombat Forest

Native mammals		Native birds	
Agile Antechinus	22	Australian Magpie	5
Brush-tailed Phascogale	7	Crimson Rosella	3
Bush Rat	8	Grey Currawong	15
Common Brushtail Possum	1	Grey Fantail	1
Eastern Ringtail Possum	16	Grey Shrike-thrush	9
Eastern Grey Kangaroo	6	Laughing Kookaburra	3
Echidna	10	Little Raven	1
Koala	2	Pied Currawong	2
Mountain Brushtail Possum	7	Red-browed Finch	1
Swamp Wallaby	28	Superb Fairy-wren	4
Sugar Glider	1	Tawny Frogmouth	1
Wombat	4	White-browed Scrubwren	2
Native reptiles		White-throated Treecreeper	2
Mountain Skink	1	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	3
		Introduced animals	
		Cat	1
		Red Fox	14

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

Our key concerns:

- 1. Loss of hollow-bearing trees,** especially those with fire scars and hollows at their base. These are very vulnerable to fire getting inside and destroying the whole tree. (In other areas of Wombat, DEECA have used chainsaws to cut new tree hollows for Brush-tailed Phascogales. Here they seem okay with destroying existing, natural ones).
- 2. Removal of decaying burnt logs,** critical for nesting and invertebrate feeding grounds for Brush-tailed Phascogales. Loss of moist, rotting logs increases future fire risk.
- 3. Loss of 'stringy' bark,** another key Brush-tailed Phascogales feeding area for invertebrates under the bark of the trees.
- 4. Killing Brush-tailed Phascogales prior to the breeding season.** Males only live for one year, and females just marginally longer. This local population could be wiped out before they produce the next generation.
- 5. Regrowth of bracken and shrubs,** stimulated by the fire, creating a denser shrub layer that reduces the habitat suitability for phascogales and increases fire risk in future.



Tree raking for fire preparation. SERA BLAIR

Both of our requests to cancel the burn were denied. DEECA stated they mitigate risks to hollow-bearing trees and habitat logs by raking around their base to reduce the risk of them catching fire.

We saw evidence of this raking, done on very few trees along the road only, and next to smaller trees they had already pushed over as safety hazards in the upcoming burn.

We then received notification the burn would take place within the next 10 days, when conditions were suitable. Not confident that the mitigation efforts would be adequate to save habitat trees, we returned with NatureWatch volunteers to survey phascogale habitat pre-burn so we could return post-burn and measure any damage.

We measured the logs and trees directly around logs where we recorded phascogales. We photographed them, noted key features such as hollows, bark type, diameter at breast height (DBH), and any presence of burn scars.

We surveyed habitat logs, noting their size, structure, stage of decay and presence of any visible habitat features. We took a series of photo points around the area to help us monitor any phascogale habitat loss from fuel reduction burning.



Volunteer Leo collecting NatureWatch cameras

Satisfying science

This field season was an agile one. It required flexibility in planning, fast data analysis and quick turnaround survey trips, all-in-all an exciting edition of citizen science to support a critical conservation campaign!

Our pressure, coupled with Wombat Forestcare's efforts and wetter weather, has prevented the site from being burnt. This may change, but it's likely any burning will be held off until Spring.

NatureWatch continues to contribute to our campaign to protect precious Brush-tailed Phascogale and Mountain Skink habitat in the future Wombat-Lerderderg National Park!

Great thanks to the amazing volunteers who helped on this project – Robyn, Rosemary, Penny, Elodie, Mick, Clare, Allannah and Anastasia. There were a few surprises along the way, but you helped make our research trips very enjoyable as we got to know these amazing areas of the Wombat Forest.

Keep up to date with upcoming NatureWatch activities by joining our email list or checking the activities calendar

vnpa.org.au/naturewatch

Spotlight on Nature with Jasmine Spencer



Brush-tailed Phascogale *Phascogale tapoatafa*

The Brush-tailed Phascogale is a captivating yet vulnerable marsupial, maintaining a discreet presence within Victoria's ecological tapestry.

Preferring open, dry forests where eucalyptus trees dominate and ground cover is sparse, these elusive creatures navigate their habitat with stealth, utilising up to 30 distinct tree hollows per animal throughout the year as their sanctuaries. Their range spans from South Australia to mid-coastal Queensland, and in Victoria includes the Brisbane Ranges, Wombat Forest, and urban forest surrounding Bendigo.

As carnivorous opportunists, these marsupials forage nocturnally amidst the arboreal landscape for insects, small vertebrates and nectar, often traversing trees, logs and forest floors in search of sustenance.

The reproductive life of Brush-tailed Phascogales unfolds with a touch of drama. Males die after a year, ending in a frenzy of mating activity. Females often perish after weaning their first litter, though some persist for another breeding cycle. Such characteristics make them vulnerable to localised extinctions, underscoring the importance of concerted conservation efforts.



Brush-tailed Phascogale. KEN STEPPELL

As arboreal mammals, Brush-tailed Phascogales rely on tree hollows as sanctuaries. However, monitoring this cryptic species presents a challenge, with traditional trapping and monitoring methods proving ineffective.

Preservation initiatives hinge on mitigating anthropogenic impacts, notably habitat loss and degradation from forest clearing and fire. Innovative habitat replacement strategies, such as artificial chainsaw hollows in the Wombat Forest, could bolster Phascogale populations and help maintain their presence within Australia's ecological mosaic.

Jasmine Spencer is a NatureWatch Student Placement from Deakin University

Rogue logging continues in Wombat

In what can only be described as an ongoing 'make work' exercise, contractors from the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA)/Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMV) continue logging with fervour in Wombat Forest.

Despite it being a year since the announcement of an end to native forest logging, trees in the future Wombat-Lerderderg National Park are still being removed for firewood and mill shortfall. Logs are being trucked great distances from Barkstead and Bullarto in the Wombat Forest to as far afield as Mansfield and Gippsland.

VNPA recently took forest policy staff from DEECA on a tour of the rogue logging sites. We thought it was about

Let's build a Phascogale Alliance!

VNPA is building a Phascogale Alliance to work together to monitor populations and protect habitat in Victoria. If you know someone or a group involved in Phascogale research or a habitat protection project, please connect them with Sera Blair, NatureWatch Coordinator, sera@vnpa.org.au

time our decision-makers gained an on-ground appreciation of the impacts of salvage logging on the forest recovery. We hope the experience gave them a better understanding of the ramifications of their decisions.

VNPA continues our work to advocate for the legislation of the promised central west national parks – Wombat-Lerderderg, Mount Buangor and the Pyrenees national parks.

Delays by the Victorian Government to legislate promised parks are now longer than ever before (see 'Victorian

national parks creation on a go slow', *Park Watch* 295, March 2024). For parks' sake, let's get this done!

Ben Gill, Nature Conservation Campaigner



Logging machinery in Wombat Forest. BEN GILL



Glossy Black Cockatoos
EMMA WITHERS

Feathers to the flames



GLOSSY BLACK COCKATOOS ARE THREATENED BY PLANNED BURNS IN EAST GIPPSLAND SAYS **LOUISE CRISP** FROM GIPPSLAND ENVIRONMENT GROUP (GEG)

Few people have seen the gentle reclusive Glossy Black Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus lathami*) with its magnificent red tail feathers and quiet calls. To observe a family of 'Glossies' hanging out together in a Black She-oak tree is a magical experience.

The unburnt coastal forest between Colquhoun (near Lakes Entrance) to the Snowy River at Marlo is the heartland of Victoria's Glossy population. Numbering a tiny 35 to 40 individuals, they're listed as Critically Endangered in Victoria and Vulnerable nationally.

Glossy Black Cockatoos have a very specialised diet. In East Gippsland they feed exclusively on seeds from the cones of Black She-oak trees (*Allocasuarina littoralis*), also known as She-oak. Black She-oaks often occur

as extensive stands within coastal Lowland Forest. The chewed cones, known as orts, can be found under Glossy's feed trees.

Black She-oaks are particularly susceptible to fire. High intensity fires kill them, and even low intensity fire triggers the cones to open and shed their seed. Glossies will not feed on seeds on the ground.

The Black Summer bushfires in Victoria had an extreme impact on the Glossies' food supply. The bushfires burnt through two-thirds of Glossy Black Cockatoo modelled habitat, with one quarter of their habitat burnt at high severity. The forests east of Orbost were the worst affected.

Young regenerating Black She-oak take five to 20 years to produce viable seed. Consequently, every stand in unburnt forest in East Gippsland is now critical for the survival of the Glossy population.

Unbelievably, Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMV) has scheduled planned burns across a huge area of this unburnt coastal refuge. Over the next three years, they plan to burn approximately 11,000 hectares of forest containing Glossy Black Cockatoo habitat, including in parks and reserves. In this current year, FFMV is targeting approximately 4,000 hectares.

Needless to say, these burns will have a significant impact on their available food supply.

Glossies nest in old hollow trees which are especially vulnerable to collapse from fire. Identified nest trees will be protected by a 250m radius buffer, but very few nest sites have been recorded. Inevitably, unidentified nest trees will be destroyed in planned burns. Research by the Department

of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) reports that 26 per cent of all habitat trees reached by fire in a planned burn will collapse.

After the 2019-20 bushfires, DEECA and Birdlife Australia carried out extensive surveys for Glossies in the unburnt coastal forest. They mapped Black She-oak stands and recorded Glossy feed trees. FFMV has access to all that information, yet this has not deterred them from burning.

Gippsland Environment Group has undertaken Glossy Black Cockatoo surveys in the planned burns and recorded Glossies and their feed trees. We reported these records to DEECA and FFMV and advocated for their protection but – with only one exception – FFMV still intends to burn Black She-oak. FFMV staff have admitted to GEG there will be a loss of Glossy habitat.

When an appeal was made to the Office of the Conservation Regulator (OCR), GEG was advised that OCR does not regulate DEECA fire management activities.

We encourage concerned Victorians to write to the Victorian Minister for Environment, Steve Dimopoulos, and demand that FFMV exclude all Glossy Black Cockatoo habitat from planned burns. We won't stand by as this critically endangered population is driven to extinction. 🐦

Find out more at
Gippsland Environment
Group
[geg.org.au/
fire/glossies](http://geg.org.au/fire/glossies)

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



Illegal bike tracks in Greater Bendigo National Park
NORM STIMSON

Bootleg bike tracks

ONGOING ILLEGAL MOUNTAIN BIKE TRACKS THREATEN THE BIODIVERSITY AND HERITAGE VALUES OF BOX-IRONBARK FORESTS IN THE GREATER BENDIGO PUBLIC LAND ESTATE

Increasing harm is being done to Box-Ironbark bushland across the Bendigo region by the illegal construction and use of mountain bike tracks. This trend must be stopped, and illegal tracks in public areas closed and rehabilitated.

To date, Parks Victoria have been ineffective in preventing habitat loss and destruction wrought by illegal track construction and use. There are only two rangers for all of the national and regional parks in the Bendigo region, clearly insufficient to combat illegal activities in the parks. Additionally, there is only one officer from the Office of the Conservation Regulator (OCR).

We're calling on our elected representatives to condemn the illegal construction and use of tracks. They must provide sufficient resources and

powers to Parks Victoria and the OCR to:

- prosecute the offenders
- stop the illegal construction of tracks, and
- restore lost habitat.

A footy oval in a national park?

According to calculations from crowd-sourced trail network sites, parts of the mountain bike community has illegally constructed at least 177km of tracks throughout the Greater Bendigo National Park, Bendigo Regional Park and nearby public land (deduced from trailforks.com), much of it over the past 10 years. The One Tree Hill and Wildflower Drive areas of the Greater Bendigo National Park, in particular, are riddled with such tracks.

There are already plenty of formal tracks through the forest for cyclists to enjoy. Some of the illegal tracks are even utilised for mountain bike sporting events, despite national and regional parks being highly inappropriate venues. Clearing of native habitat and heritage sites within a national park to install a football oval or cricket pitch, for example, would never be acceptable, but the area of native vegetation lost to illegal bike tracks impacts a larger area than this. Vegetation loss from 177km of tracks is equivalent to the loss of at least 17 hectares of bushland. All in places that have been protected for their biodiversity and heritage values.

Damage caused by tracks

Clearing of vegetation and rocks, and subsequent use for riding, creates damage to biodiversity and habitat by fragmenting the vegetation and causing erosion.

A key aim of Box-Ironbark Forest conservation and management is the recovery of native wildlife and habitat, as well as the protection of those that are not threatened. Greater Bendigo National Park and Bendigo Regional Park are home to many notable, rare or endangered plants and animals such as the Eltham Copper Butterfly, Pink-tailed Worm-Lizard, Brush-tailed Phascogale, Powerful Owl and Mclvor Spider Orchid.

Another aim is the protection, conservation and interpretation of historic places and relics, and significant cultural landscapes. Years ago the Bendigo community worked closely with the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council and its predecessors to protect the beautiful Box-Ironbark forests from further damage.

The community documented the wonderful plants and animals and their historic and cultural importance so that national parks, regional parks and nature conservation reserves could be created. Now we need to stop the damage being done by the creation and use of illegal tracks. 🐦

Bendigo & District Environment Council, Convenor Jenny Shield

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



Peddalling perspectives



DISCOVERING
GEELONG'S
EXTREMES OF
INDUSTRIAL GRIT

NEXT TO NATURAL DIVERSITY,
WITH VNPA CYCLING LEADER
IZZY SCHERRER

The cycling trip – from North Shore to Lara – was a journey of exploration, conservation and community collaboration. I was joined by guide Graham Possingham, Hon. Secretary of the Geelong Field Naturalists Club and Richard, cycling guide from Cycling Geelong, and 11 intrepid cyclists.

Starting from North Shore Train Station, the first hurdle was a chorus of 'Oh, I forgot my helmet!'. Luckily, no one forgot their bike or binoculars and the helmet crisis was solved with a kind helmet drop off.

With the motto 'If you're breaking out in a sweat, you're doing something wrong', we navigated through the industrial area of North Shore. Towering besides us was the wheat silos, ships, storage towers of industry and massive wind turbine parts, waiting to be assembled at their final destination. We felt like tiny spectacles navigating our way through the industrial maze.

Further on we passed the Viva Oil refinery outflow into Corio Bay. Marked by the the eternally burning flame – a reminder of the unfortunate persistence of fossil fuels and Geelong's industrial economy that takes a while to transition.

It was a relief to leave the industrial grit behind us and cycle towards the amazing Ramsar-listed Limeburners

Lagoon State Nature Reserve, with 131 bird species identified. Graham proved to be an invaluable guide, enriching the experience with his deep knowledge and passion for birdwatching. He pointed out 25 bird species, describing their behaviours and unique characteristics.

While birds did take precedence, Graham also identified the Christmas Jewel Spider and key wetland plants including Grey Mangrove (*Avicennia marina*), Beaded Glasswort (*Salicornia quinqueflora*), Shrubby Glasswort (*Tecticornia arbuscula*) and Sea Heath (*Frankenia pauciflora*).

Graham's guidance not only enhanced the enjoyment of the ride but also deepened the group's appreciation for this area and its intricacies.

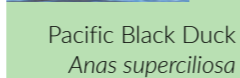
Managed in partnership with Parks Victoria, Limeburners Bay is a survival story. Despite the stresses it faces from farming, an old waste site and Viva, it still provides a home for a wide range of water and wading birds, highlighting its importance under the internationally recognised Ramsar Convention. As the cyclists discovered, this wetland is home to a myriad of bird species, a vital ecosystem that must be protected for future generations.

The ride culminated in Lara, a perfect place for lunch and endpoint for our adventure. The expedition was a true collaboration, bringing together three groups in a shared passion for nature and adventure. It was a resounding success, showcasing the beauty of Limeburners Bay and highlighting the importance of conservation efforts in and near industrial landscapes.

Some of the birds sighted



Black Swan
Cygnus atratus



Pacific Black Duck
Anas superciliosa



Musk Duck
Biziura lobata



Grey Teal
Anas gracilis



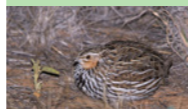
Chestnut Teal
Anas castanea



Australian Pied Oystercatcher
Haematopus longirostris



Stubble Quail
Coturnix pectoralis



Pied Cormorant
Phalacrocorax varius



Little Pied Cormorant
Microcarbo melanoleucos



Little Black Cormorant
Phalacrocorax sulcirostris



White-faced Heron
Egretta novaehollandiae



Whistling Kite
Haliastur sphenurus



Nankeen Kestrel
Falco cenchroides



Superb Fairywren
Malurus cyaneus



IMAGES: MIKE PM, LEO, NATURALIST, SID, MOSDELL, MARTIN GRIFFITH, TAN KOK HUI, OWEN LISHMUND, ALLAN LUGG, ANNA LANIGAN, SEA-KANGAROO, IAMBIRDS/POETRY, EUAN MOORE, JOHN BROMILOW, DAVID PAUL

Discover VNPA bike rides, bushwalks and more with our Activities Calendar
vnpa.org.au/events

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

Evelyn Portek

EVELYN PORTEK HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF VNPA SINCE 2014, AND A MONTHLY DONOR SINCE 2019. FIND OUT WHY SHE FINDS EVIDENCE-BASED ADVOCACY FOR NATURE SO IMPORTANT

What are some of your first memories in nature?

I grew up in suburban Melbourne with parents who both worked seven days per week, so we never had an opportunity to explore nature. My earliest memory of nature is of ordinary Geraniums growing along the driveway. When I moved to Canberra to study, my share house had a vegetable garden and some native trees which created in me an awareness of the natural world. I started walking in some of the areas around Canberra, such as Deua National Park. My eyes were opened and I was hungry and curious to explore more of the natural environment. I moved to Brisbane and did long walks in Lamington National Park, which is where my love affair with rainforests began. I was fascinated by the abundance and variety of ferns, the Antarctic Beech, mosses and fungi.

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

When I returned to Melbourne in 1992, I started to explore Victorian parks, including Wilsons Promontory and Wombat Forest. My friend Dr Linden Gillbank introduced me to VNPA via my volunteer conservation work at the annual Hindmarsh Landcare planting weekend and Grow West. I spent part of every Summer in the high country combing the area looking for the noxious Hawkweed as a volunteer with Parks Victoria until the pandemic intervened.

As I became more familiar with VNPA's activities, I was increasingly impressed by the extent of the work the organisation does in advocating for the protection of remaining natural environments. The ongoing work encouraging the State Government to use evidence-based information to create better policies; the persistent reminders that logging, burning and neglect are not useful strategies to rehabilitate and protect the environment, and the targeted lobbying to increase protected areas are impressive.

VNPA is a small organisation which has a hefty impact. The forces which destroy the environment – political, corporate and climatic – do not intimidate VNPA. The



least I can do is regularly donate to assist VNPA achieving its objectives. Holding governments to account to legislate, regulate and protect is fraught. VNPA have been steadfast and persistent in calling out delays (in gazetting new national parks for example), lax protection or wilful neglect.

Is there a particular plant, creature or place that you feel especially passionate about?

There have been a few occasions when I've seen Platypuses unexpectedly in the wild. The precariousness of water quality and flow is so important to these creatures that I am grateful when I see them. However, there are so many animals and plants that are at risk – I'm passionate about all of those that need protection!

You recently made the generous decision to increase your regular giving to VNPA. Can you share a little more about why you made this decision?

VNPA has decades of experience identifying important areas to address. The expertise of the staff and volunteers who gather data, write informed submissions to the government and encourage members to lobby has greatly impressed me. The organisation is inclusive, encouraging children, and organising excursions for all abilities.

The work VNPA does is so important, given how little old growth forest remains, for example. Some endemic and native species are so vulnerable that I will give whatever I can. After all, I believe we should leave the world in a better state by whatever means we have. And giving money enables the experts to do their specialised work.

What's something you have learned from nature?

How little we know about it and how clumsy and arrogant humans are in believing that we are superior to it. The controlling of nature has led to too much destruction. Simply being in nature is restorative for the soul – there should be more of it!



Renewing native grasslands in our cities



KATHERINE HORSFALL IS A PHD CANDIDATE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE, RESEARCHING URBANISATION AS A HUGE DRIVER FOR THE LOSS OF NATIVE GRASSY ECOSYSTEMS IN SOUTHEAST AUSTRALIA

WELCOME TO THE FIRST INSTALMENT OF **PhD PROGRESS**, WHERE WE'LL PRESENT *PARK WATCH* READERS WITH THE LATEST EXCITING UNIVERSITY RESEARCH INTO VICTORIA'S NATURAL WORLD

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.

I investigate novel ways to reinstate species from critically endangered Natural Temperate Grassland and Grassy Eucalypt Woodland plant communities in cities and towns, by creating native wildflower meadows.

This work builds on pioneering research by Paul Gibson Roy, John Delpratt and others which shows we can restore native grassy ecosystems using direct seeding, providing that adequate site preparation is used to overcome the challenges of elevated soil nutrients and weeds. Their innovative methods use soil scalping, or removing surface soils prior to sowing, which gives seeds the best chance of establishing by limiting competition from nutrient-hungry exotics.

These techniques create species-rich and resilient restorations full of native wildflowers. They, however, cannot be used in some sites, such as those with contaminated soils or underground services. These situations are common in cities, so we need additional techniques to bring native grassy ecosystems back to urban streets.

Trialling techniques for seeding grassland species

During my Masters research, I was lucky to work alongside the City of Melbourne to refine approaches to direct seeding indigenous grassland species in Royal Park.

We sowed plots around the park, only to see seed washed away in heavy rains, followed by an extended dry period with little germination. At the time I was investigating northern hemisphere efforts to reinstate urban biodiversity through the creation of wildflower meadows.

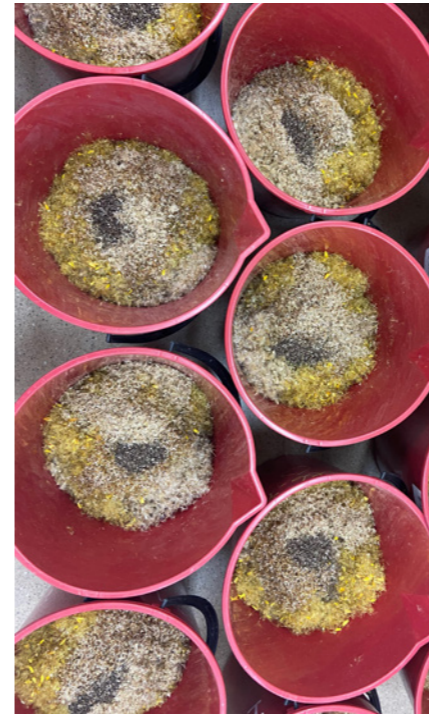
These plantings showcase flowering plants, consistent with the research that tells us people are more likely to be accepting of 'messier' urban vegetation if it is full of flowers in a range of colours.

Wildflower meadows are also designed to reduce maintenance costs, requiring cutting or mowing once a year as opposed to the regular mowing required for turfgrass.

Meadows are direct seeded, and typically feature a cosmopolitan selection of species from around the world, selected for their capacity to establish from seed and persist in densely layered, rich plantings. They also rely on techniques to reduce weed competition, such as using a layer of low-nutrient sand mulch to bury weed seeds.

As a horticulturalist, I wanted to see if we could combine some of these techniques with direct seeding of indigenous species to achieve restoration outcomes. So, the imperilled Masters research quickly became a pilot of using sand and

Opposite: Inner city grassland. MATTHEW STANTON
Right: Field station experiment, Burnley Campus.
Below: Seed mixes. Below right: Oak St meadows.
KATHERINE HORSFALL



irrigation to push rapid germination in our sown species. And it worked!

Experiments in sowing native seeds

This led on to PhD research. My initial experiment investigated what was possible at a larger scale, with 27 indigenous grasses and wildflowers sown in Royal Park on two depths of sand and site soils, with or without jute mesh.

We were keen to see if there were differences in the plant community that emerged on the different sand depths, as well as to understand if sand reduced labour requirements for hand weeding during the first year of plant establishment.

We found weeding requirements were the least on the deepest sand profile and we had greater species richness and more of our beautiful forb species on this treatment. However, the addition of jute led, interestingly, to greater dominance of sown grasses, lower species richness and a greater abundance of slugs. Native slugs are not a feature of our grassy ecosystems, so our grassland plants have evolved with few defences against slug grazing.

We concluded that jute was improving habitat for introduced slug species and that slugs were in turn reducing the abundance of vulnerable forb seedlings.



Beyond these research outcomes, we also found that there was a good level of enthusiasm for the indigenous meadow planting in the local community. People often stopped by the meadow, interested to learn more and admire the flowers.

Developing techniques for scale and sustainability

The balance of my PhD research considers how we can adapt these techniques to make them more sustainable.

Having established the sand layer worked, I wanted to consider the viability of recycled waste subsoils as an alternative to sand. Subsoils are also low-in nutrients and weed seeds as they occur deeper in the soil profile and are more like the low nutrient soils we find in remnant grasslands.

So, in later experiments I compared sand and subsoils, finding plants sown in subsoils grow bigger and faster, above and below ground. This means that plant cover is more rapidly achieved in the recycled product, leaving fewer gaps for weed invasion. This has budget-friendly implications for larger scale restorations, or in lower maintenance landscapes that may not receive as much effort to manage weeds during establishment.

This is promising, as we have a massive restoration effort ahead of us if we're to meet commitments in Victoria to restore native grasslands and grassy woodlands. This research is already escaping the laboratory, with Metro Trains recently sowing

indigenous species onto a subsoil cap to determine if they can use this method to achieve their ambition of restoring degraded grasslands along the rail network.

Bringing wildflowers back to our cities

Alongside the PhD research I am also helping other organisations, including City of Melbourne and Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, to create new meadows around the city. Beyond this, a successful Australian Research Council linkages project means our terrific team of researchers will get to continue working with fantastic partner organisations, to refine approaches to making meadows with recycled, low nutrient construction wastes.

All in all, there is huge scope for this work to snowball into widespread restoration outcomes, but we need the right support for seed production, which is currently not produced commercially at sufficient scale.

Without seed, we're limited in what we can do. I'm passionate about growing our capacities in this critical industry in future. Wildflower meadows are a promising approach to curb biodiversity loss, bring beauty and nature back into cities and towns while creating new ways for us to better care for this country. I hope these approaches continue to grow legs, or petals, or leaves...

Helping to sow a new meadow at the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria. JACK DEWHURST



SNOWGUMS

BUSHLAND RESERVE, BEAUFORT



SNOW GUMS ON VICTORIA'S VOLCANIC PLAINS? YEP, SAYS **JORDAN CROOK**, AND IT'S GROUSE!

WELCOME TO THE INAUGURAL GROUSE PARKS, WHERE WE'LL FOLLOW VNPA PARKS AND NATURE CAMPAIGNER, JORDAN CROOK TO SOME OF HIS FAVOURITE PARKS ACROSS THE STATE

Snowgums Bushland Reserve. JORDAN CROOK



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

About four kilometres out from the charming town of Beaufort, 50km north-west of Ballarat, sits this small but impressive reserve. Home to some large and old Snow Gums (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*), as well as some funky trees that have decided to have a lie down but continued to grow.

The reserve is managed by Parks Victoria and is technically Grassy Woodland/Heathy Dry Forest Complex (Ecological Vegetation Class 896) and is an Endangered vegetation community for this bioregion.

Normally associated with the snowy peaks of the Alps, Snow Gums also inhabit lowland environments. But it still remains a surprise to meet such iconic alpine species down on the flat lands, let alone the grassy Volcanic Plains.

Their iconic white trunks contrast with the largely cleared agricultural landscape surrounding the reserve; the groundstorey is dominated by weedy pasture grasses, with a few native grasses and herbs still there as well.

A visit in Spring will provide great understanding of the plants that call the groundstorey home.

When I visited, some cheeky stray sheep were on the edge of the reserve and someone had dumped a few car tyres, showing the pressures these small but incredibly important reserves are under. A few days after I reported the dumped tyres via the Snap Send Solve app, Parks Victoria called to ask where they were so they could remove them from the reserve – a great outcome.



Opposite: Snowgums Bushland Reserve.

Clockwise from below: One of the reserve's magnificent Snow Gums; Snow Gum seeds; Track through the reserve; discarded tyres; a resident Fickert's Tomopsis spider. ALL IMAGES JORDAN CROOK



Next time you're in Beaufort, drop into the Snowgums Bushland Reserve and meet some stunning old trees. It's a special place on the Victorian Volcanic Plains, and a grouse park! 🦋

Snowgums Bushland Reserve,
Racecourse Rd, Beaufort
160km/2 hour drive from Melbourne



Container deposit scheme for nature!

A big thanks to the dozens of VNPA supporters who have returned 3,777 drink containers, yielding donations of \$377.70 to VNPA thus far. You too can join this team of super-recyclers and help clean up your neighbourhood, by participating in Victoria's Container Deposit Scheme.

Step 1: Collect eligible drink containers.

Step 2: Take the containers to a refund point near you.

Step 3: Scan the barcode or enter VNPA's donation partner ID C2000008806



C2000008806

Find out how to donate to VNPA via the Container Deposit Scheme at vnpa.org.au/container-deposit-scheme-for-nature



Vale Wally Thies

1925–2024

W altraud (Wally) Thies passed away in March this year at the age of 98. Wally was awarded Honorary Life Membership of VNPA in 1984.

Wally's family described her as 'a gentle kind perceptive and strong lady, who embraced life to the end.'

A keen bushwalker, Wally used to volunteer in the VNPA office as well as accompanying her husband Arthur, who led VNPA bushwalks. Friend Jean Phipps said they made a great team, with Wally being the back marker to ensure everyone kept together and was safe.

Arthur started leading walks in 1985, eventually leading a record 860 bushwalkers for over 16 years, many of them accompanied by Wally. During their time leading bushwalks, Wally and Arthur took walkers on a journey of discovery of Victoria's beautiful natural places. Arthur led his last walk to the Ferntree Gully section of the Dandenong Ranges in May 2002. At the end of this last walk, 'Wally organised a magnificent morning tea' and Margaret Hattersley acknowledged the work Arthur and Wally had done over the years.

Our sympathy is extended to Wally's three children, five grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. 🌿



Rod Webster: educator and marine enthusiast

1952–2024

R od Webster played a pivotal role in bringing the Great Victorian Fish Count (GVFC) to Bunurong Marine National Park, and later Harmers Haven, during his tenure as the Education Convenor at South Gippsland Conservation Society a number of years ago. Renowned for his excellence in mathematics and science education (as evidenced by his former student Caitlin Griffith, now VNPA Manager of Community Learning and Engagements) Rod's passion for marine biology always shone through.

Over the years, Rod dedicated himself to organising the GVFC

along the Bass Coast, effectively introducing a diverse audience to the wonders of the underwater world right at our doorstep. A master at managing crowds of fish counters, Rod orchestrated events with finesse, ensuring each participant had a memorable experience.

The post-count gatherings, where the barbecue sizzled and identification books were consulted, became cherished moments, fostering community cohesion and camaraderie.

Rod's departure leaves a palpable void in our salty community. His legacy as a dedicated educator and marine enthusiast will be fondly remembered and sorely missed. 🌿

Alan Hall: a wonderful legacy for nature

1955–2022

A lan Hall was a VNPA member between 1999 and 2016 and particularly active with our bushwalking and activities group. Sadly, we only learnt recently that Alan had died in July 2022, aged 67.

If you were active with the VNPA bushwalking and activities group (BWAG) between 2000 and 2011, you may have met Alan as he led over 40 bushwalks and a handful of bike rides during those years. Some of these include to Mount Worth State Park,

Tyers Regional Park, Arthurs Seat, Marysville, Dandenong Ranges, Avon River, George Bass Coastal Track and Powlett River.

Alan certainly got out and about, leading VNPA supporters to many beautiful places over the years. He had a regular group of people that came on his trips. Alan is remembered by fellow BWAG leaders as a gentle man, quiet and good company on a walk. He clearly loved his time immersed in nature.

Alan's good friend Gillian tells us that in recent years Alan found

spiritual comfort at Bancoora Beach, east of Breamlea in Wadawurrung Country, a beautiful place set between craggy points and reefs.

Alan generously left a large proportion of his estate to VNPA, which will make an extraordinary difference to protecting parks and nature in Victoria for many years to come. A most wonderful legacy for nature! Vale and thank-you Alan. 🌿



Mark Rodrigue's inspiring marine leadership

SHANNON HURLEY, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER, PAYS TRIBUTE TO A MARINE CHAMPION UPON HIS RETIREMENT

M ark Rodrigue is one of those true inspirational people that touches everyone's hearts with his passion for marine conservation. After being one of Victorian marine life's biggest cheerleaders, VNPA wants to take a moment to acknowledge this wonderful human who has given so much to our marine world.

Mark started his Parks Victoria career in 2002 when Victoria initially established our network of marine national parks and sanctuaries – a world first at the time. After 20 years working for Parks Victoria, plus decades before that in marine education, Mark has decided to take a well-earned break into retirement.

Mark has dedicated his life's work to improve marine conservation efforts

in Victoria in many ways. As the statewide leader of marine and coastal programs for Parks Victoria, Mark has created a legacy of a program plan to improve the way marine parks are managed and share the love for these protected pockets of marine life. He has brought agencies together, made significant advancements in managing marine pest projects in parks (one of their biggest threats), inspired young people and led marine ranger training programs, to name a few.

Throughout his career, Mark had a knack for being a strong collaborator and made connections between people and parks. This is such a huge part of what is needed in caring for our marine environment. An example was his initiation of a series of Sharing the



Mark Rodrigue at Malpelo Flors and Fauna Sanctuary, Colombia

Love forums, bringing together marine friends groups across Victoria to share stories, passions and feel supported to continue caring for their patch.

Mark's legacies are everywhere in marine conservation, and Victoria's seas and shores are better off because of his life work. Enjoy your travels and retirement Mark, and we look forward to seeing you in the water! 🌿

Let us know your views about Park Watch!

With *Park Watch* soon reaching the milestone of 300 issues, we're keen to ensure VNPA's flagship publication remains to be a magazine of great interest, use and inspiration for our members and supporters.

If you're a regular reader, or this is the first time you've picked up *Park Watch*, we'd love to hear your thoughts via our online readers' survey.

It only takes a few minutes to complete! Get started by scanning the QR code or visiting our website.



vnpa.org.au/park-watch-survey



Complete the *Park Watch* survey for your chance to win a copy of *The Great Forest*



Slaying the ugly myths about our tall forests

The Forest Wars: The ugly truth about what's happening in our tall forests,
David Lindenmayer

Allen and Unwin, 2024, 288pp, ISBN 9781761470752

Professor David Lindenmayer's *The Forest Wars* provides a candid examination of the clash between entrenched myths and evidence-based realities. This cleverly structured book provides both an engaging and informative read.

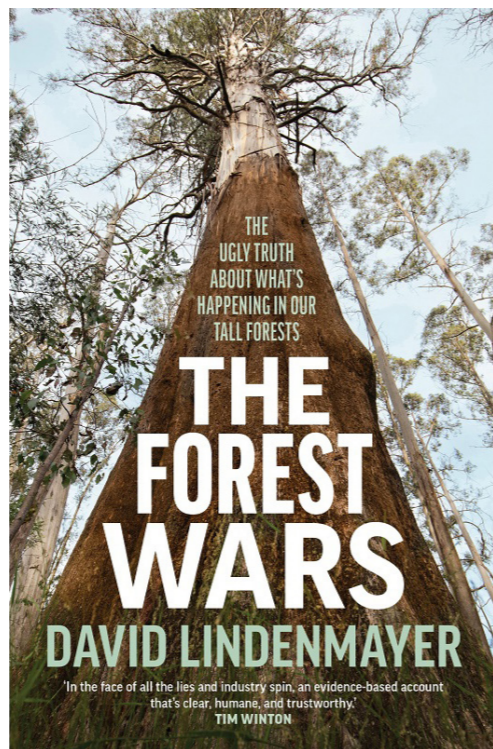
Presented through 37 myths, Lindenmayer laces history, politics and storytelling to explain the myths, and presents the fact using 40 years of evidence gathering, research and science.

Lindenmayer exposes the disturbing alliance between state forestry, unions and the paper industry. For decades, the native forest industry has destroyed ecosystems and biodiversity, adversely impacted water catchments,

made our forests more fire prone, and cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars: all for the sake of heavily subsidised wood chips and pulp for foreign companies. As an industry it has a reputation steeped in spin and misinformation.

The reality is distressing. Enabled by poor government policy, weak regulation and the arrogance to operate illegally, our state-owned enterprises such as VicForests have caused extensive economic and environmental damage. The last remaining areas of our precious old growth forests are in a state of collapse. Despite recent announcements regarding native forest logging in Victoria and Western Australia, there remains strong political support for native forest logging in those states, as well as New South Wales and Tasmania.

The native forest logging industry is not going away. Its well-financed spin machine continues to evolve in an insidious manner. Fire management, carbon capture and storage, ecological thinning, forest clean-up, salvage logging, timber-for-housing and working forests are all weasel words for the industry to continue the spread of misinformation and keep logging our native forests.



Encouragingly, Lindenmayer presents a 'new vision for Australia's native forests', one that prioritises regeneration, restoration and sustainable management to bolster ecosystems, biodiversity, carbon capture and storage, economies, employment and community involvement.

Lindenmayer has written the definitive summary of native forest logging in Australia that should book-end the debate. The native forest logging debate should be over and done; it is time to focus on investment, research, policy, planning and execution in pursuit of the new vision.

David Nugent, VNPA President



Professor David Lindenmayer

Quiz answers from p. 4

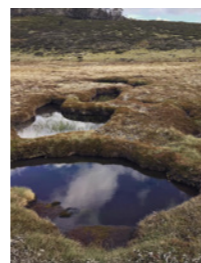
- c)** Alpine National Park was officially declared on 2 December 1989.
- a)** There are 13 marine national parks in Victorian waters, plus 11 smaller marine sanctuaries.
- c)** Some of the best patches of remnant grassland can be found on rural roadsides, railway lines and in colonial cemeteries.



Grassland in Donnybrook Cemetery. ADRIAN MARSHALL

- a)** The *National Parks Act* was created in 1975. It sets out protections for 'land characterised by its predominantly unspoilt landscape, and its flora, fauna or other features'.
- d)** The tallest tree in Victoria, Slinky Sloan, is a whopping 93m tall and lives in the Central Highlands.
- d)** Grasslands are also called savannahs, tundras and rangelands!
- b)** The Victorian Government committed to create new national parks in the central west in 2021, but they still haven't legislated the parks to make their promise a reality.
- a)** The Western Port Woodlands extends from Nyora across to Glen Forbes.

- b)** Cattle grazing was first banned in the Alpine National Park in 2005, but it was again banned in 2014. This time, legislation was introduced to make sure it isn't overturned.
- c)** Yaringa, Point Addis and Wilsons Promontory are all marine national parks, but Lakes Entrance Marine National Park is not. The closest protected marine area to Lakes Entrance is Beware Reef Marine Sanctuary, off the coast of Cape Conran.



Alpine recovery from cattle grazing. PHIL INGAMIELLS

An A to Z of Australian plants

Plantabulous! More A to Z of Australian Plants, Catherine Clowes. Illustrated by Rachel Gyan

CSIRO Publishing, 2024, 64pp, ISBN 9781486317202

Pitched as an accessible, educational text for budding botanists aged 6-12, it is engaging and artful, if not a little over-ambitious.

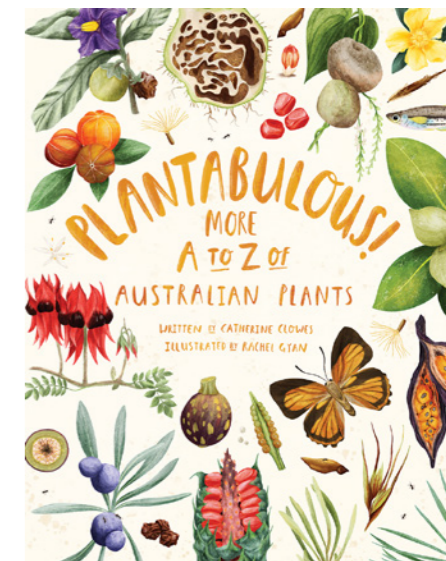
Snatch a glimpse of any primary school yard and you'll see planet six-year-old and planet 12-year-old are worlds apart. While Billie, my six-year-old, didn't clock the alphabetised structure, arranging information in this tried and tested device is as compelling as any for young readers.

The illustrations are exquisite in their detail. Each plant is unpacked using tactile and evocative, yet biologically faithful, language. Inclusion of First Nations names and uses telegraphs the cultural significance of each entry. A lot of energy has gone into cross-referencing plant qualities, though this congests the text a little.

It veers wildly between engaging prose and assumed scientific knowledge. If another edition was on the cards, a distribution map per plant and a more dynamic organising of information into sections would further elevate this lovely book.

Activities are tethered to the geographical location of the 26 plants, showcasing the incredible diversity of plant life on this land. It also means that this broadness ends up limiting the number of activities you can do – though with so many garden escapees and botanical migration, a lot of these activities do apply outside of the plant's original distribution.

Plantabulous is a delightful addition to a domestic library. For littler kids, having an adult or older child to help articulate the copy helps bring it to life. With custom teachers notes, it's a promising resource for science/biological/First Nations inquiry in a school curriculum. For plant-fanciers, it's a coffee-table treasure, ideal for idle browsing.



In Billie-speak 'I like how it makes me learn', but 'the pictures are kind of fun but kind of not fun' and 'the words are too small for me, I like how some [plants] grow yummy stuff and cool flowers'.

Jessie Borrelle, Digital Engagement and Communications Manager, and Billie (age 6)

Storytime in the deep blue sea

Oceans at Night, Vanessa Pirota. Illustrated by Cindy Lane

CSIRO Publishing, 2024, 32pp, ISBN 9781486317233

Books about the underwater world are a common sight in our house. I've had a lifelong habit – or perhaps addiction – of collecting books about all things wet and salty. Having kids has only provided me with a convenient excuse to further indulge in my passion.

The premise of *Oceans at Night*, specifically exploring what happens in the ocean during the nighttime, immediately captured my six-year-old son Zeke's attention.

Diving into the relationships between marine animals, this book showcases how all things are connected and doesn't fail to subtly mention human impact.

From the familiar (Whale Sharks, Manta Rays and penguins) to the more

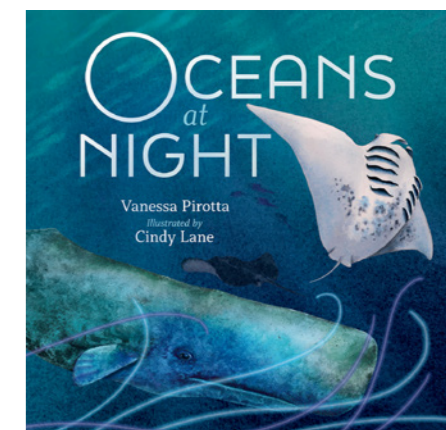
obscure (Dumbo Octopus, Cuvier's Beaked Whale and nautilus), a diverse array of marine creatures grace the pages of this beautifully illustrated and cleverly written book.

Zeke had many questions about how Angler Fish find their partners and maintain connections, and he was astounded to learn that Giant Squids boast eyes as large as soccer balls thanks to the handy additional information at the end of the book.

Oceans at Night is a fun read and was thoroughly enjoyed by a six-year-old who has already been exposed to numerous books about marine life.

This book has sparked and will undoubtedly continue to spark many discussions – the best part of sharing a book with a child.

Kade Mills, ReefWatch Coordinator, and Zeke (age 6)



Wild Families



GRAB YOUR COLOURED PENCILS AND BRING OUR SUGAR GLIDER FAMILY TO LIFE!

Sugar Gliders live in many national parks in Victoria. They even live in backyards in some parts of Melbourne/Naarm! Sugar Gliders are small gliding possums with black, white and grey fur. When they're not out and about looking for food, they live in hollow trees. Sugar Gliders sleep in tree hollows, with families sleeping together in a bed of soft fresh eucalyptus leaves. Huddled together, they are able to keep warm during cold Winter weather. Have a go at colouring in these Sugar Gliders and drawing their home. 🌿

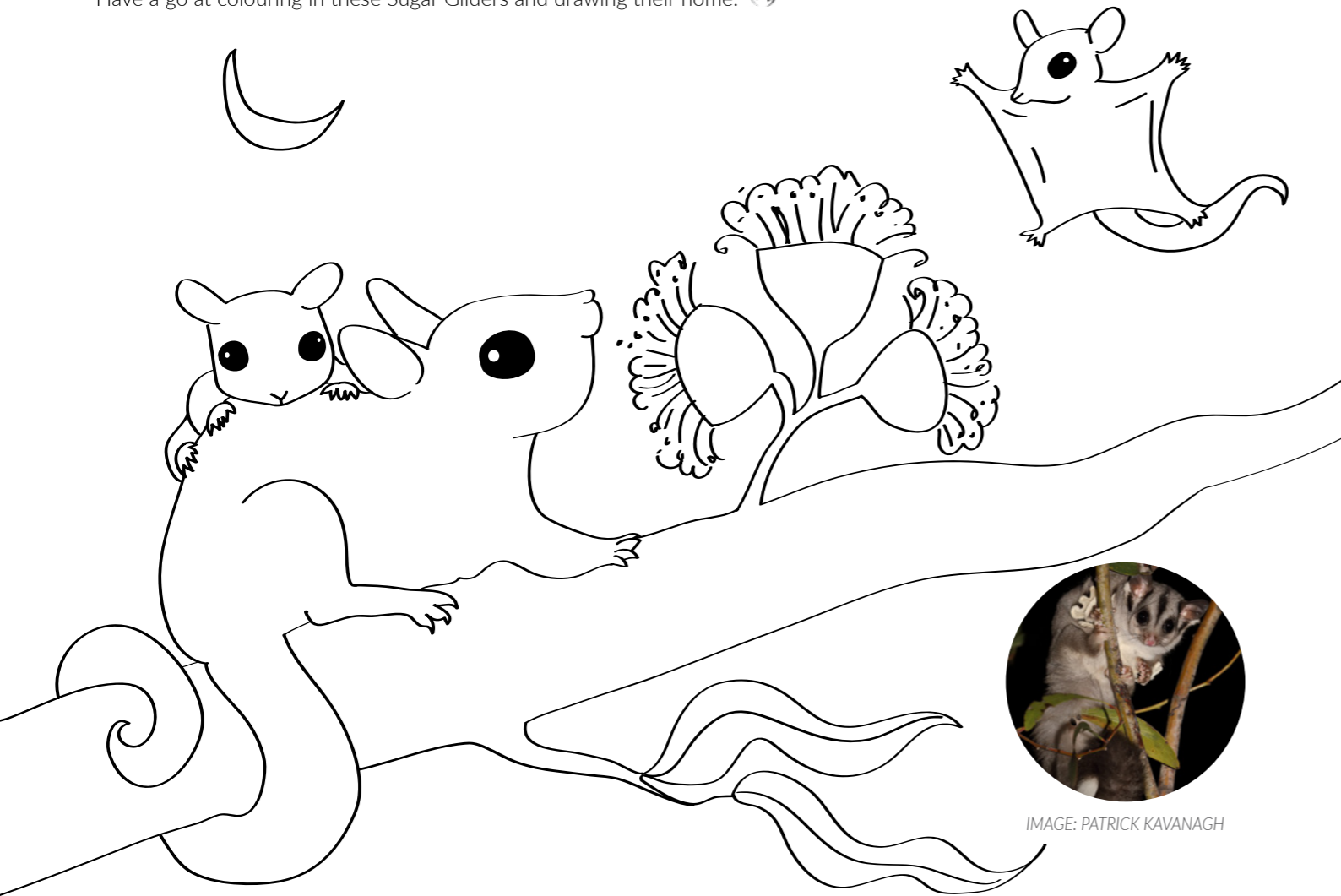


IMAGE: PATRICK KAVANAGH

Sugar Glider fun facts

- I eat tree sap, nectar and insects.
- I have a membrane of skin connecting my fingers to my ankle, which I use to glide between trees.
- I'm nocturnal, so I'm mostly active at night.
- My long bushy tail helps keep me stable and lets me change direction when I'm gliding.



Download all Wild Families colouring and activity sheets: vnpa.org.au/wild-families



Explorer's Corner

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



ADVICE ON KEEPING OUR NATURAL PLACES FREE OF UNWANTED NASTIES

Let's talk about outdoor hygiene. No, not how to stop smelly feet after getting hot and sweaty on a strenuous hike. I'm talking about spreading pests.

There's a bunch of pests we can unknowingly spread from one place to another if we're not careful. We might have some weed seeds stuck to our shoelaces, like the small seeds of invasive Sweet Vernal Grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*). We might have the spores of introduced fungi like Orange Pore Fungus (*Favolaschia calocera*) stuck to the bottom of our boots. Or we could have some mud on our shoes or tent contaminated with the plant pathogen *Phytophthora cinnamomi*.



Pests can be disastrous for natural areas

Weeds can take over and crowd out native plants. They can be very difficult and costly to control, and often impossible to get rid of once established in an area.

Similar to weeds, introduced fungi take up space, leaving less habitat for native fungi. This can have the added effect of also impacting the plants and animals that native fungi have beneficial relationships with.

Phytophthora cinnamomi is a devastating plant pathogen that kills susceptible plants like grass trees and eucalypts. Over 40% of native plants are susceptible. Once it's introduced to an area, it's there forever.

Left: Orange Pore Fungus, an introduced pest. MEGHAN LINDSAY
Above: Example of dieback caused by *Phytophthora cinnamomi*



What can we do to make sure we don't spread weeds, seeds and disease?

The good news is, there are some easy steps we can take to help stop the spread!

Here's a few hygiene tips to help reduce the spread of pests and protect our favourite places:

- Arrive and leave clean – take a scrubbing brush with you when hiking or camping to clean soil and seeds off camping gear, clothes and shoes.
- After you've removed the soil from your shoes, spray them with a 70 per cent methylated spirits, 30 per cent water mix to kill off *Phytophthora cinnamomi* and other pathogens.
- Stick to designated tracks where possible.
- Obey track closed signs in parks – they might be closed because of a pest infestation. 🌿



Above: Cleaning shoes before and after a bushwalk. Left: Track closure sign

Parks for life!



We need more national parks now, for the health and happiness of all life in Victoria



VNPA'S CURRENT PARK CAMPAIGNS



KEY HISTORICAL PARK CAMPAIGN WINS



Base: Google Earth

The future of 1.8 million hectares of our native forests is being decided right now. We have a unique chance to push for the highest protections.

Together we've closed the door on native forest logging, but the window for exploitation is still open. Our wild places still aren't safe. But they would be in national parks and protected areas.

Your tax-deductible donation will help:

- Persuade decision-makers to support new and expanded national parks.
- Work with Traditional Owners and local communities to mobilise support.
- Survey priority areas to discover natural values that help make the case for protection.
- Counter opposition from short-term interests.
- Engage and inspire more supporters to join the push for new and better parks.

National parks benefit our mental and physical health. They support the living web of life. When a passionate community defends them, they protect whole habitats forever. This is true protection – for life!

Please support the push for new and expanded national parks.

Make a donation today at
vnpa.org.au/parks-for-life

