

PARK *watch*



37° 22' 1" S, 144° 15' 43" E



VICTORIAN
NATIONAL PARKS
ASSOCIATION
Be part of nature

SEPTEMBER 2024 #297

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View online at vnpa.org.au/parkwatch

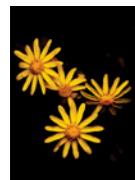


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PARKwatch

ISSN 1324-4361/2653-8040 (Online)
 Published by Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA) ABN 34 217 717 593
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Front cover: Variable Groundsel (*Senecio pinnatifolius* var. *lanceolatus*), Babbington Hill, Wombat Forest, Dja Dja Wurrung Country.
 MEGHAN LINDSAY

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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.



Join the Parks Protector community!

As a Parks Protector monthly donor, you're at the heart of our work safeguarding parks, wildlife and nature across Victoria.

Your regular support means we can keep nature protection on the agenda.

To join the Parks Protector community, please visit vnpa.org.au/support/parks-protector or call us on 03 9341 6500.



IMAGE: SANDY SCHELTEMA

From the President



DAVID NUGENT, VNPA PRESIDENT, WELCOMES YOU TO THE SEPTEMBER 2024 EDITION OF *PARK WATCH*.

The arrival of Spring brings bursts of wattle-yellow, busy pollinators and Australian Wood Ducklings. It also brings a renewed sense of optimism – primarily that we may actually witness the creation of our central west national parks. By mid-September, when you read this, we hope legislation will have finally made its way through the Victorian Parliament.

We cover the Federal Government's commitment to the '30 by 30 target' and in further good news, Ben Gill reports on the fruits of our relentless labour to rescue the Mt Cole Grevillea from extinction.

Sera Blair reflects on the ups and downs of two decades of pushing for protection of the iconic Leadbeater's Possum. Elsewhere, Shannon Hurley updates us on the marine implications of renewable energy, Adrian Marshall reports on progress for our precious grasslands, and we share the results of our *Park Watch* reader's survey.

Plus, all our regular features and so much more!

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

Park Watch Central West Quiz



- How many rare and threatened plants and animals call the forests of the central west home?
 - about 40
 - about 100
 - about 200
 - about 400
- How many 'brush-tailed' animals live in the central west?
 - None
 - 3
 - 6
 - 10
- Where does Wombat Forest get its name from?
 - The forest is crawling with wombats.
 - It's named after the nearby town Daylesford, which was originally called Wombat.
 - It was named after the local naturalist Sir Charles Wombat.
 - The boundaries of the forest are square-shaped, like wombat poo.
- Which six major river systems have their headwaters in the Wombat Forest?
- True or false: Wombat Forest is home to four threatened peas?
- Speaking of peas, how many places within Wombat Forest does the Critically Endangered Wombat Leafless Bossiaea live?
 - 5
 - 9
 - 13
 - 2
- Who am I? I live in Wellsford Forest. I forage for insects beneath the bark of fallen trees. I sleep and nest in tree hollows. I don't live very long and I'm mostly active at night. Some people call my tail a 'dunny brush'.
- What is the westernmost forest of the central west area?
 - Mt Cole
 - Wellsford
 - Landsborough Hill
 - Pyrenees Ranges
- How many types of birds live in the Pyrenees Ranges?
 - Over 100
 - About 50
 - 64
 - 27
- The Beeripmo Walk meanders across alpine plateaus and down through fern gullies at Mt Cole. How long is this bushwalk?
 - 5 km return
 - 12 km return
 - 21 km return
 - 21 km one way

Answers on p. 37



→ Beeripmo Walk at Mt Cole
BLAKE NISBET

Blooming heck! Mt Cole Grevillea thrown a lifeline



BEN GILL, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER, SAYS OUR RELENTLESS ADVOCACY TO RESCUE THE MT COLE GREVILLEA HAS BORNE FRUIT

Here's a quick recap: In 2019, the Mt Cole Grevillea (*Grevillea montis-cole* subsp. *montis-cole*) was listed as Critically Endangered under our national nature laws. In 2021, the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council recommended creating the Mt Buangor National Park to give the grevillea the protection it needed.

But everything changed this year when a fire ravaged 100 per cent of its known range. The intense blaze left little behind. We were faced with the grim reality that the Mt Cole Grevillea might become Australia's first new extinction.

The forest remained closed to the public until 1 July, when we visited to

assess signs of recovery. The scene was bleak. No new growth from roots, and signs of heavy grazing that would put any surviving seed under severe pressure. Here's where our glimmer of hope appears.

In a recent meeting with the recovery team, we learned that our collaboration with the Department of Energy, Environment, and Climate Action (DEECA) has paid off. The Environment Minister has activated emergency funds for the grevillea. These funds will support recovery efforts by scientists at the Arthur Rylah Institute and DEECA's biodiversity team. With only 232 seeds and three plants in the Royal Botanic Gardens' collection, this support couldn't have come at a more critical time.

We've urged DEECA to fence off any known sites to prevent grazing by feral species. They've also launched a pest eradication program to reduce grazing pressures and restore the magnificent glades of Mt Cole/Bereep Bereep. VNPA would like to see a long-term



↑ ILLUSTRATION: JESSIE BORRELLE

program established to expedite the plant's return.

We commend the minister's swift action. The impact would be even greater if the government quickly legislated the promised national parks, reserves, and conservation areas. 🌿

Plant Blindness* with Les Sprague

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

Spotted Hyacinth Orchid *Dipodium pardalinum*

For orchid watchers, the Spotted Hyacinth Orchid is a standout, literally. Between late November to late February, it presents up to 40 flowers on a strong leafless stem rising up to 90 cm from a sub-surface bulb. The most exquisite blurry pink spots cover the five petals against a pink background which begins to fade as the flower ages.

It was first described in 1996 and is classified as Endangered under state nature laws. In Victoria, it is often found in the company of the more abundant *Dipodium roseum*, and can be distinguished from that species easily, by comparing the labellum of each: *Dipodium pardalinum* has one with pink blotches. It takes its name from the Greek *pardos* = leopard.

The Spotted Hyacinth Orchid lives across a fairly discrete habitat range in Victoria and SA, and can be found in the Wombat Forest, the Creswick and Smythesdale districts and Enfield State Park. It mostly favours open Messmate forest with an understorey of bracken, heath and other shrubs and grasses in coarse sandy loams and quartz clays, which are probably fairly acidic. Its chief pollinators are native wasps and bees, although the stems are strong enough to support small honeyeaters.

Its perennial bulb system and the absence of a species-specific management plan puts this marvellous orchid at risk of damage from fire management activities.



↑ Spotted Hyacinth Orchid. LES SPRAGUE

Inadvertent mulching damage by FFMV in 2022 led to DEECA implementing small exclusion zones around individuals. Ongoing observations of these plants will reveal germination cycles and provide data on post disturbance recovery potential. 🌿

Unlocking the next level of nature protection

THERE'S GOOD (AND NOT SO GOOD) NEWS FOR THE PROMISED CENTRAL WEST NATIONAL PARKS

We've lost count of the articles written, meetings held and emails sent in the last seven years on the long-overdue creation of protected areas in the central west. But, after years of procrastination and inertia, a glimmer of hope has emerged. Earlier this year, correspondence from the Premier's office to conservation groups noted that:

...the legislation to create the first two national parks, Wombat-Lerderderg National Park and Mount Buangor National Park is planned for introduction into parliament later in 2024.

So far, it's taken three times longer for these parks to progress from commitment to legislation than any other new national park in the past 25 years. And that's only one part of the promised package!

The first round of legislation includes 45,000 ha of Wombat Forest – a hotspot for threatened wildlife including Greater Gliders, Mountain Skinks and Brush-tailed Phascogales.

An area of 24,000 ha was slated to be added to the existing Lerderderg State Park to form the larger Wombat-Lerderderg National Park and will likely include some form of joint management with Traditional Owners.

The proposed Mt Buangor National Park will also integrate existing protected areas, adding only 2,832 ha from Mt Cole State Forest (home of Critically Endangered Mt Cole Grevillea – see report, p. 5) to the existing 2,450 ha Buangor State Park. This addition represents a mere 16 per cent of Mt Cole State Forest.

Lost in the woods – what's missing in the new parks

We understand this piece of legislation won't encompass every regional and conservation park initially committed to. Very recent correspondence from the government to local groups indicating the development of a second piece of legislation 'as soon practicable thereafter' is welcome progress.

National parks aren't the only type of protected area in Victoria; conservation parks, nature reserves and bushland reserves are all counted as their primary purpose is for conservation.

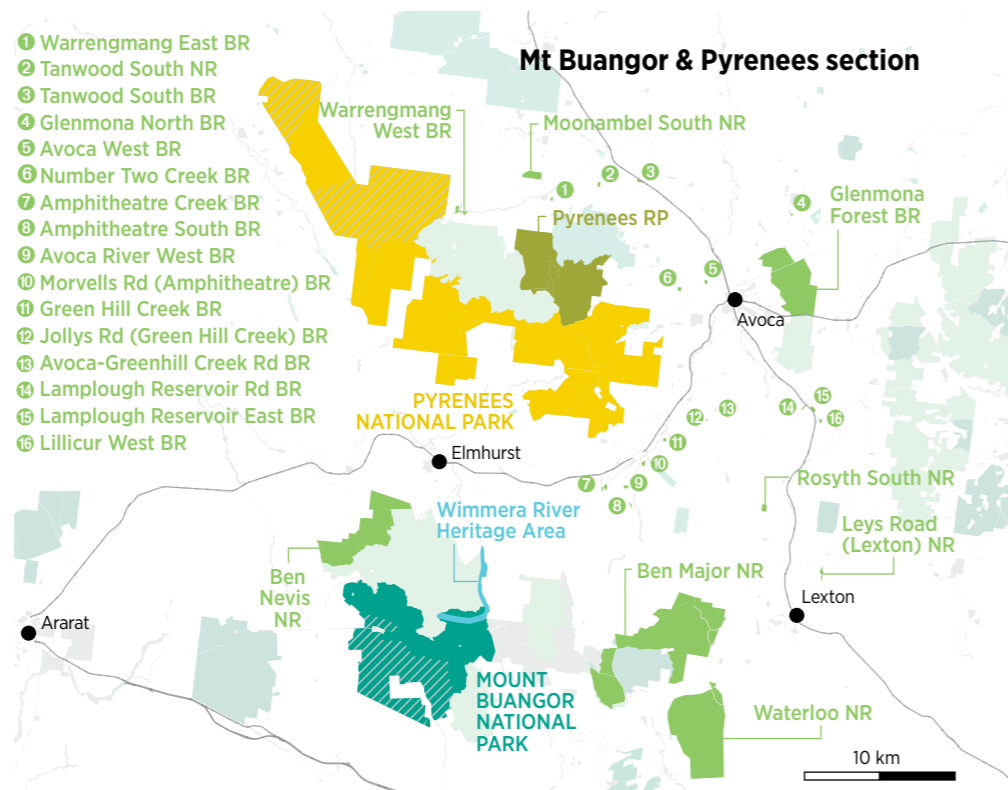
Regional parks aren't considered formal protected areas, as they allow for multiple uses and broader range of recreational activities. However, they do protect places from large-scale commercial habitat logging.

Legislating only new national parks at Wombat Forest and Mt Buangor will miss about half (around 26,275 ha) of promised protected areas including:

- A Pyrenees National Park, adding 10,683 ha to the existing nature



↑ Greater Glider. JOSH BOWELL



SOURCE DATAVIC @VNPA 2024

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.

- reserve (443 ha), to create the new 15,000 ha national park.
- Two conservation parks at Hepburn and Cobaw, adding some 5246 ha.
- A network of ten nature reserves and over 40 small bushland reserves, adding around 6029 ha.

Many of the proposed regional parks don't reflect the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's (VEAC) expert recommendations. VEAC recommended Wellsford Regional Park become part of Greater Bendigo National Park. Instead, the then Andrews Government downgraded this rare Box-Ironbark Forest, despite dedicated decades of work by local conservation groups.

While the forest's big trees, Regent Honeyeaters, Barking Owls and Lace Monitors won't receive proper protection, commercial logging will at least come to an end.

Large areas of regional parks were also added by the government around the Wombat Forest but were not originally recommended by VEAC.

The second phase of legislation must include a significant number of regional parks (24,764 ha) including:

- Wellsford Forest addition to the Bendigo Regional Park (3950 ha)
- Pyrenees Regional Park (2016 ha)

- Barkstead Regional Park (4855 ha)
- Blackwood Regional Park (3707 ha)
- Spargo Ck Regional Park (1693 ha)
- Fingerpost Regional Park (5442 ha)
- Addition to Macedon Regional Park (154 ha) and Hepburn Regional Park (2947 ha).

Unless the rest of the central west parks are legislated, the remaining areas, intended to become regional and conservation parks, will stay state forests. This leaves them vulnerable to mining and logging.

The Victorian Government has yet to give a clear timeline for the creation of the promised bushland and nature reserves or regional and conservation parks. For the sake of our wildlife, communities and climate, we hope 'as soon as practicable' means early in 2025. It's beyond time to stop procrastinating and start celebrating our new national parks.

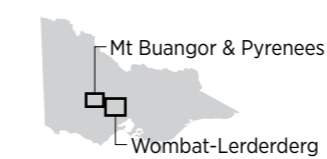


National parks are the key to protecting nature for everyone, forever. They're not just lines on a map or words on a page.

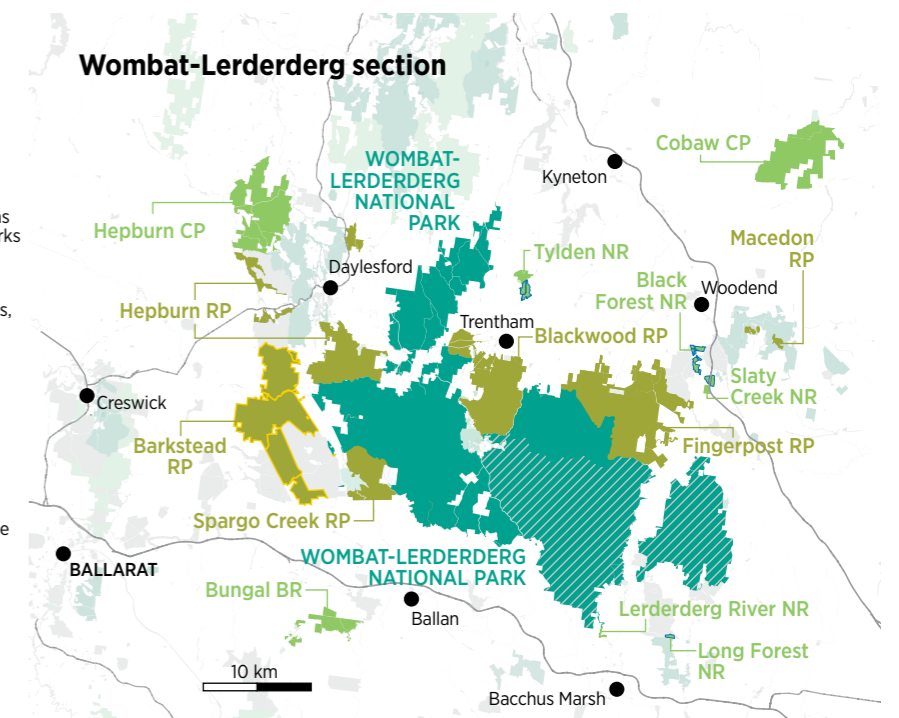
Victoria's environment department says they'll legislate the Wombat-Lerderderg and Mt Buangor national parks. This year. The thing is, 26,000 hectares of promised protected forest isn't included.

Join us and applaud our elected leaders. And tell them it's time to create all of our parks. To finally make something to celebrate.

vnpa.org.au/keytonature



Central west new parks & reserves



SOURCE DATAVIC @VNPA 2024

New national roadmap to give nature a fair go

MATT RUCHEL,
EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR, REPORTS
ON THE PROGRESS
OF NATURE PROTECTION AT
HOME AND ABROAD

Australia leads the world in mammal extinctions, with one-in-five Australian mammals threatened and declining. An astounding 19 of our ecosystems show signs of collapse but don't panic just yet – there is hope amongst the doom and gloom. The Federal Government is embarking on an ambitious protection plan. But the rubber won't hit the road without decent funding.

The Australian Government has committed to a national target to protect and conserve 30 per cent of land and 30 per cent of marine areas by 2030 (referred to as the '30 by 30 target'). All state and territory environment ministers have agreed to work together to achieve this ambitious goal. The target aligns with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

In June 2024, the Federal Government released a consultation on *Achieving 30 by 30 on land: Draft National Roadmap for protecting and conserving 30 per cent of Australia's land by 2030*. It built on previous work such as the National Reserve System Strategy (NRS), adopted by all Australian governments in 2009. While it required each state and territory to prepare a five-year implementation plan, it was never done in Victoria.

According to Victoria's key strategy *Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037*, the estimated gap in protected areas required to meet Australia's criteria for a comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system is 2.1 million hectares. This figure accounts for both public and private land – and that was before new 30 by 30 stretch targets.

Right now, the Australian Government allocates just 0.1 per cent of total spending on protecting our unique and vulnerable nature. This is



↑ Eastern Grey Kangaroo, Lakes Entrance. GRAHAM HOLTSHAUSEN

Right now, the Australian Government allocates just 0.1 per cent of total spending on protecting our unique and vulnerable nature.

completely inadequate to achieve the 30 by 30 commitments. Federal funding towards nature must rapidly and radically increase if we are to have any chance of halting (and reversing) the current crisis.

If we invested just one per cent of the federal budget in nature, we could stop that decline by 2030. Without it, we will not meet our global commitment.

The draft Roadmap introduces a new form of conservation area as part of the Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures Framework (OECMs). It says, which VNPA supports:

A site's suitability for Protected Area designation should be considered first and Conserved Area recognition considered where formal Protected Area designation is not possible, appropriate or supported.

There is, however, a real risk states and territories might exploit this to

green light paper protection while claiming biodiversity outcomes. Any 30 by 30 initiatives on land shouldn't be just a race to cover the most hectares. Much of our surviving bush is rich in threatened wildlife and of high conservation significance, but it's often in smaller blocks, whereas the less intensively developed states have larger blocks.

This is writ large by the high number of individual reserves in Victoria – over 4000 individual reserves, covering four million hectares. We have almost twice as many individual reserves as other jurisdictions, even though they have much larger networks in terms of total hectares.

Victoria is currently third from the bottom in both proportion protected (about 18 per cent of the state) and raw hectares managed for conservation. To achieve any national target, we must position protected and conserved land strategically. Comprehensive, Adequate, and Representative (CAR) principles are traditionally used to identify gaps in the reserve system. These are then applied to bioregions and subregions.

The Roadmap notes the importance of effective land management. This includes active participation of First Nations people, such as support for Indigenous Protected Areas –

continued next page...

What can you do in our parks?

National parks and conservation areas are critical for the survival of threatened wildlife. Not only that, they're open for a wide range of activities – from trail bike riding to beekeeping to 4WDing. You can even prospect or hunt in certain places, or at certain times of the year.

Here's a quick reckoner for what you can and can't do in the different types of protected areas in Victoria's parks system.

Activity	National parks (incl. state parks)	Conservation parks	Regional parks	Nature reserves	Bush-land reserves	State forests
Apiculture ¹	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bushwalking	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Camping ²	✓	✓	✓	● ³	● ³	✓
Nature observation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4WD ⁴	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Trail bike riding ⁵	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bike riding (incl. mountain biking) ⁶	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Horse riding ⁶	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Car rallies	● ⁷	● ⁷	✓	● ⁷	✓	✓
Prospecting	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓
Dogs	● ⁸	● ⁸	✓	✓	✓	✓
Domestic fire-wood collection	✗ ⁹	✗	● ⁹	✗	✗ ⁹	✗
Recreational hunting ¹⁰	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Timber harvesting	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓

✓ Allowed ● Allowed with conditions ✗ Not allowed

↓ Bike riding at Lake Mountain. R BOWEY



1. At licensed sites. 2. In designated areas where provided and in other areas as specified. 3. May not be provided in smaller reserves, where there is high day visitor use or where there are ample camping opportunities adjacent. 4. In registered vehicles on formed roads that are open to the public and on other formed roads and tracks as specified; off road driving is illegal on public land. 5. By licensed riders on registered vehicles on formed roads that are open to the public and on other formed roads and tracks as specified. 6. On formed roads that are open to the public and on other roads, tracks and trails as specified through management planning. 7. Competitive sections generally not allowed in national parks, conservation parks and nature reserves; transport sections through these areas allowed subject to policy and procedures. 8. May be allowed in visitor areas or a limited number of tracks. 9. Some current domestic firewood coupes will be allowed to be completed and a phase-out in some regional parks is recommended. 10. Recreational hunting for pest animals will be allowed on other public land if part of an authorised control program at the discretion of the land manager. Source: VEAC

New national roadmap to give nature a fair go *continued...*

currently scarce in Victoria. Joint or co-management of national parks is becoming more common across the state. Increased and targeted resources would better meet the aspirations of many Victorian Traditional Owners.

A new vision is clearly required and it's about time the Commonwealth put some money in to give nature a fair go.

With the end of native forest logging there's a clear question about the future of almost two million hectares of Victorian state forest. The processes for better protection in the Central Highlands and Yarra Ranges are currently being done through an Eminent Person Panel for Community Engagement, with input from the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC). A report is expected at the end of September 2024, to be followed by further VEAC assessment. The Great Outdoors Taskforce has commenced consultation in East Gippsland and is expected to report in May 2025.

We know that biodiversity across the country is in decline. None of

our biodiversity indicators look good, national or state. A new vision is clearly required and it's about time the Commonwealth put some money in to give nature a fair go.

We're working with state, national and international groups as part of the 30 by 30 Alliance to push for the investment nature needs.
vnpa.org.au/30by30

An elephant crossing the Alps



THE VICTORIA GOVERNMENT'S SCHEME FOR THE FALLS TO HOTHAM ALPINE CROSSING STANDS AS A HUGE WHITE ELEPHANT, SAYS GERARD MCPHEE

Earlier this year, the Allan Government received a second Environmental Impact Statement for the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing which fails to alleviate fears of damage to one of the state's most important protected areas.

As long-time *Park Watch* readers will be aware, the project will see the construction of four tourist hubs in the Bogong High Plains and Mt Feathertop area, the heart of the Alpine National Park. Parks Victoria will build these hubs, but private operators will manage them.

This project isn't about park management; it represents taxpayer-funded exploitation of the nature and wildlife the park was established to protect.

In 2022, a feedback process on the draft designs saw more than 6,000 people visit the Engage Victoria project page. Dozens attended 'pop-up' sessions in local towns, with over 640 responses submitted.

A report summarising the feedback revealed widespread vocal opposition to the proposal. Concerns included environmental impacts, misalignment with the purpose of national parks, over-visitation, the potential cost to stay in the huts, the accuracy of economic information in the business case, and safety issues.

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing project should be scrapped entirely and the money refocused along with its key premise of monetising the wild.

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

A litany of threats

The 2024 Preliminary Environmental Assessment (PEA) identified that the project would affect 66 threatened plants, including three listed as Critically Endangered. Raising concerns about the habitat for 137 threatened plants, it recommended targeted surveys to examine their presence, location and population size.

The list includes 17 plants endemic to Victoria and 15 confined to the Bogong High Plains/Mt Hotham area, including precious long-unburnt Snow Gums. Of the 73 native animals recorded, ten are threatened and five Critically Endangered, including Alpine Tree Frogs, Spotted Tree Frogs, Guthega Skinks, Alpine She-oaks and *Colubotelson joyneri*, a freshwater isopod.

The report clearly states the project would need to be referred under national nature laws as there would be adverse impacts on a number of Matters of National Environmental Significance. This would likely trigger a formal Environmental Effect Statement process adding further costs and delays.

The proposal will exclude some lower-income Victorians from the alpine areas they have loved and enjoyed for decades. Some of the best free camping spots will be reserved for those able to pay \$400 per night for more comfort. The well-off 'comfort in nature' seekers are already well accommodated in the Alps.

Despite years of delays, the project isn't due for completion until late 2025. Steve Dimopoulos, Minister for Environment, told Parliament on 25 June 2024, that Parks Victoria has yet to determine the final project scope, design, and operating model.

So, we don't know the scope, cost, or even the route of the project, despite an apparent spend of about \$15 million out of the possible \$40 million in the project business case since the first imagining of the trail in 2015!



↑ Alpine Tree Frog

Monetising the wild

Nature-based tourism in the state would be better served by promoting Victoria as a great short walk destination, supported by a range of accommodation adjacent to parks.

The Bogong High Plains can easily host a remarkable and memorable series of walks accessed from existing shelters. But, for developers, every night in a free public hut is seen as a missed business opportunity!

The money earmarked for this project could be much better used dealing with the raft of management problems or even fixing some of the existing facilities. The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing project should be scrapped entirely and the money refocused along with its key premise of civilising and monetising the wild. 🐾

Find out more at vnpa.org.au/stop-alpine-park-development



↑ Mt Feathertop. MARK DARRAGH

Glad tidings Nature news to bring a smile to your face



You little beauty!

The Southern Pygmy Perch (*Nannoperca australis*), an attractive small fish (6-8 cm long) which displays bright colours when breeding, was once widespread but hadn't been seen in Bendigo Creek since the mid-1800s.

A community-driven captive-breeding and reintroduction program was developed by the Tri-State Murray NRM Alliance. In 2018, volunteers collected more than 100 wild fish from two nearby river systems, delivering them to a captive breeding program. At the same time, new homes for the fish were created in local wetlands. In January 2020, 800 fish were released across four wetlands.



GRETA VALLEY LANDCARE

The program has been a huge success. All populations are thriving, have maintained vital genetic diversity, and have spread to more areas. 😊

Read more at theconversation.com

Lynx's 9 lives

The Iberian Lynx (*Lynx pardinus*) is 'continuing its dramatic recovery from near extinction thanks to sustained conservation efforts'. The population increased exponentially from 62 mature adults in 2001 to 648 in 2022.

Downgrading its status from Endangered to Vulnerable, IUCN said the improvement 'shows that successful conservation works for wildlife and communities alike'. 😊

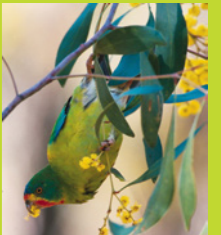
Read more at euronews.com/green



JEVGENI FIL

Swifties win case

In a great outcome for Swift Parrots and their habitat, a Supreme Court case brought by Bob Brown Foundation was ended in August due to Forestry Tasmania abandoning plans to log two areas in the Eastern Tiers central to the case.



CHRIS TZAROS

In these critical Swift Parrot breeding forests, about half of the areas targeted for logging, and subject to this case, are still standing. 😊

Read more at bobbrown.org.au

Donate your walking maps to Maps for Change

Do you know why it's important to carry and plan trips with paper maps when bushwalking? Maps For Change wants to answer this exact question for the next generation of walkers.

We love paper maps and are planning an event in May 2025 to honour their importance and how to use them. We'll be selling second-hand maps on

the day for a gold coin donation.

All funds raised will go to directly to VNPA and Victorian Mountain Tramping Club (VMTC) conservation projects.

Led by paper map nerds at VNPA and VMTC, Maps for Change is a novel opportunity to celebrate and recirculate paper maps to a new league of walkers. 🐾



Do you have any unused Australian walking maps? We'd love to include them in for Maps for Change.

You can drop them off or send them to the VNPA office Level 3, 60 Leicester St, Carlton VIC 3053

Follow us on Instagram @mapsforchangevic

Sign up to our mailing list:





↑ Conservation Area 9 after contamination with asbestos
ADRIAN MARSHALL
↓ Grasslands story in *The Age*, 2 July 2024



Precious grasslands and holding decision-makers to account



GRASSY PLAINS NETWORK FACILITATOR, ADRIAN MARSHALL, REPORTS GRASSLANDS MIGHT BE GETTING THE ATTENTION THEY DESERVE

in 2022. Two years later, their minimal response has just slipped onto their website.

Often the state just thinks it knows best. Sometimes bureaucrats channel their political masters and simply avoid risk, perversely creating additional risks in the process, or they like to keep their brief too tight. Sometimes teams full of hard-working and well-intentioned staff are constrained by the legacies of previous bad decisions, or political winds blow them off course. Sometimes the resourcing is just not there, ask anyone from Parks Victoria and they'll tell you that's no joke.

In a sign of the times, our recently published *A People's Audit of the 36 MSA Conservation Areas* gained some important traction in the media, getting a front page of *The Age*. But behind every silver lining there's a dark cloud.

The *People's Audit* assessed the health of 36 grassy conservation areas in Melbourne's growth corridors and the results were not good. Decline, mismanagement, their promised size cut down, weeds spreading, no monitoring of condition, and little oversight from the authorities that allows bad things to happen like clearing and dumping.

The public airing of such failures to actually protect, rather than to blithely promise, is important. Emails came in from many, from across the state, including from within the Environment Department itself, comments saying 'good work', 'about time', 'I wished I could have said that myself, I'm glad you could'.

The government departments responsible for the protection of these 36 conservation areas were audited by the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability

Nature is often at the bottom of the pile for decision-makers. So, holding to account those tasked with looking after our web of life is a big part of what we do at VNPA. This happens in small steps with the occasional great leap forward.

Grasslands are copping it from every direction, and it's often a game of whack-a-mole. For example, a report just came in from the Wimmera where 10 km of great roadside grassland has been ploughed up by Big Agriculture just for shareholder profit. It's far from being an isolated case. Business as usual destruction of the environment – on public land – and irreversible.

Will the 'responsible authority' actually respond? Often these go into the too hard basket, allowing bad actors to think they are above the law. When crimes do get

continued next page...

Precious grasslands and holding decision-makers to account continued...

successfully prosecuted, often the fines are so small they become just the cost of doing business.

In a recent court case about the burying of Conservation Area 9 under asbestos-contaminated fill, a contractor was fined a pathetic \$160,000 plus costs. Conservation Area 9 is one of those 36 Conservation Areas that our *People's Audit* focused on.

There is no statewide plan for protecting our grasslands. We need

to resource councils to be better able to do the right thing by grasslands. And we need reform to create a legal system better structured to protect the environment. Grasslands need love. They need dedicated attention.

With community action, the generous support of members and donors, and our message that our environment is too important to ignore, perhaps we can change the narrative.

Precious grasslands. An important headline. 🌿

Read *A People's Audit* at vnpa.org.au/publications/a-peoples-audit

Join Grassy Plains Network mailing list:

Spotlight on Nature with Xiao Xiao

Victorian Grassland Earless Dragon *Tympanocryptis pinguicolla*

Victorian Grassland Earless Dragons are small grey to reddish-brown lizards unique in their lack of ear openings and functional eardrums. The last confirmed sighting was in 1969. However, they were recently rediscovered by ecologists in farmland west of Melbourne/Naarm. Once commonly spotted across the western basalt plains, they're now at risk of disappearing again: this time, forever.

It's hard not to be captivated by the beauty of these little lizards; each one sports a jacket of delicate scales in a dazzling mosaic of sandy hues, neatly tucked between subtle beige stripes. Every shade of grassland earth is represented, letting them seamlessly camouflage into their surroundings.

Earless Dragons reach maturity within a year, living for less than two years in the wild. Some studies show they may reproduce only once within their lifetime. This makes Earless Dragons vulnerable to annual environmental changes, with an already dwindling lizard population struggling to recover.

Surveys are needed to understand the true extent of their possible habitat range. But spotting a small reptile across kilometres of grassland is no easy feat. The current technique consists of installing pitfall traps and artificial spider burrows in the hope of capturing the lizard. The traps are

checked daily, with some lizards carefully transported to Melbourne.

A Zoos Victoria breeding program has hopes of one day creating enough offspring for release into the grasslands. Some of the Earless Dragons spotted have been placed in a breeding program. So far (as of August 2024) this has yielded 49 hatchlings. Zoos Victoria are training detection dogs to survey for Earless Dragons in the wild, and field trials have commenced.

Victorian Grassland Earless Dragons are listed as Critically Endangered at both a state and national level. The Federal Government has released a Conservation Action Plan that aims to restore Victorian Grassland Earless Dragon populations across its natural geographical range.

Xiao Xiao is on a student placement with VNPA/ Grassy Plains Network and is studying Environmental Science at Monash University



↑ Victorian Grassland Earless Dragon. CSIRO

Western Port at risk from rising seas

SHANNON HURLEY
ON WHY SEA LEVEL RISE, COUPLED WITH A PROPOSED RENEWABLE ENERGY TERMINAL, UNDERSCORES THE URGENCY OF PROTECTING WESTERN PORT'S WETLANDS

The historic fishing village of Tooradin, located in the city of Casey, has long boasted beautiful views of Western Port Bay. For years, it's been a sanctuary for migratory shorebirds, its mangrove nurseries habitat for fish.

In our increasingly disrupted climate sea levels are already on the rise. Projections indicate an 80 cm rise in sea level by 2100. A new report commissioned by the City of Casey reveals that the region faces the highest risk of erosion from sea level rise among the city's coastal communities.

The City of Casey is experiencing the fastest urban growth in the state, with the population in the Western Port catchment expected to double within

the next 20 years. This is a challenge for the people who live, work and play on its shores and for local wildlife's ability to persist or retreat.

It's clear the bay needs a plan and a partnership to bring together local communities. This is why VNPA united with the Western Port Biosphere, Save Western Port and over 70 other groups, businesses and interested parties to advocate for the Western Port Bay Framework.

One reason climate impacts should be addressed in concert with development, biodiversity conservation, or restoration, is their irrefutable inter-connectedness. As Professor David Kennedy noted in *The Age*, if the coast becomes dominated by concrete walls, we risk destroying vital parts of the bay's web of life, like fish breeding grounds.

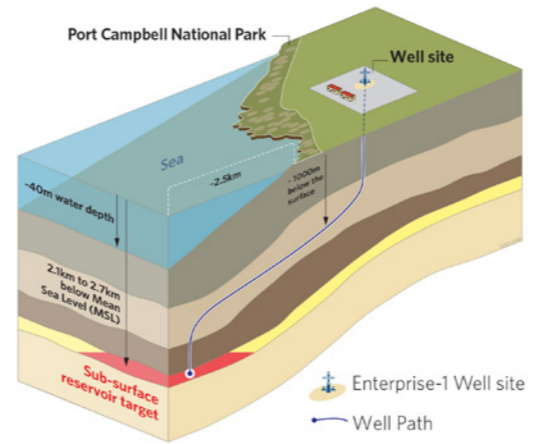
Meanwhile, the Port of Hastings is advancing its proposal for Victoria's Renewable Energy Terminal to support the development of offshore wind along the coast. Clean energy projects are vital for combating climate change, but it's crucial to implement them in a way that minimises risk to marine and coastal ecosystems.

After the initial proposal was rejected by the Federal Government due to unacceptable impacts on Western Port's Ramsar-listed wetlands, the port is taking another approach. The revised proposal, as we understand, will involve less dredging and land reclamation (see 'Terminal Diagnosis', *Park Watch*, Nov 2022).

Whether it's new development, sea level rise, restoration, or water quality, Western Port requires an all-inclusive plan that addresses current and future threats while bringing together decision-makers and community.

VNPA, in collaboration with groups like the Western Port Biosphere, is organising a series of events in the coming months. These events will provide opportunities to learn, share knowledge, and take action for a healthy, well-planned Western Port Bay.

Sign up to learn more:
actforwesternportbay.au/support-now



Offshore gas extraction at the 12 Apostles

THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT RECENTLY APPROVED A NEW GAS EXTRACTION PROJECT CLOSE TO THE ICONIC TWELVE APOSTLES

In June, the Allan Government green lit Beach Energy to drill and extract gas under the ocean close to the Twelve Apostles.

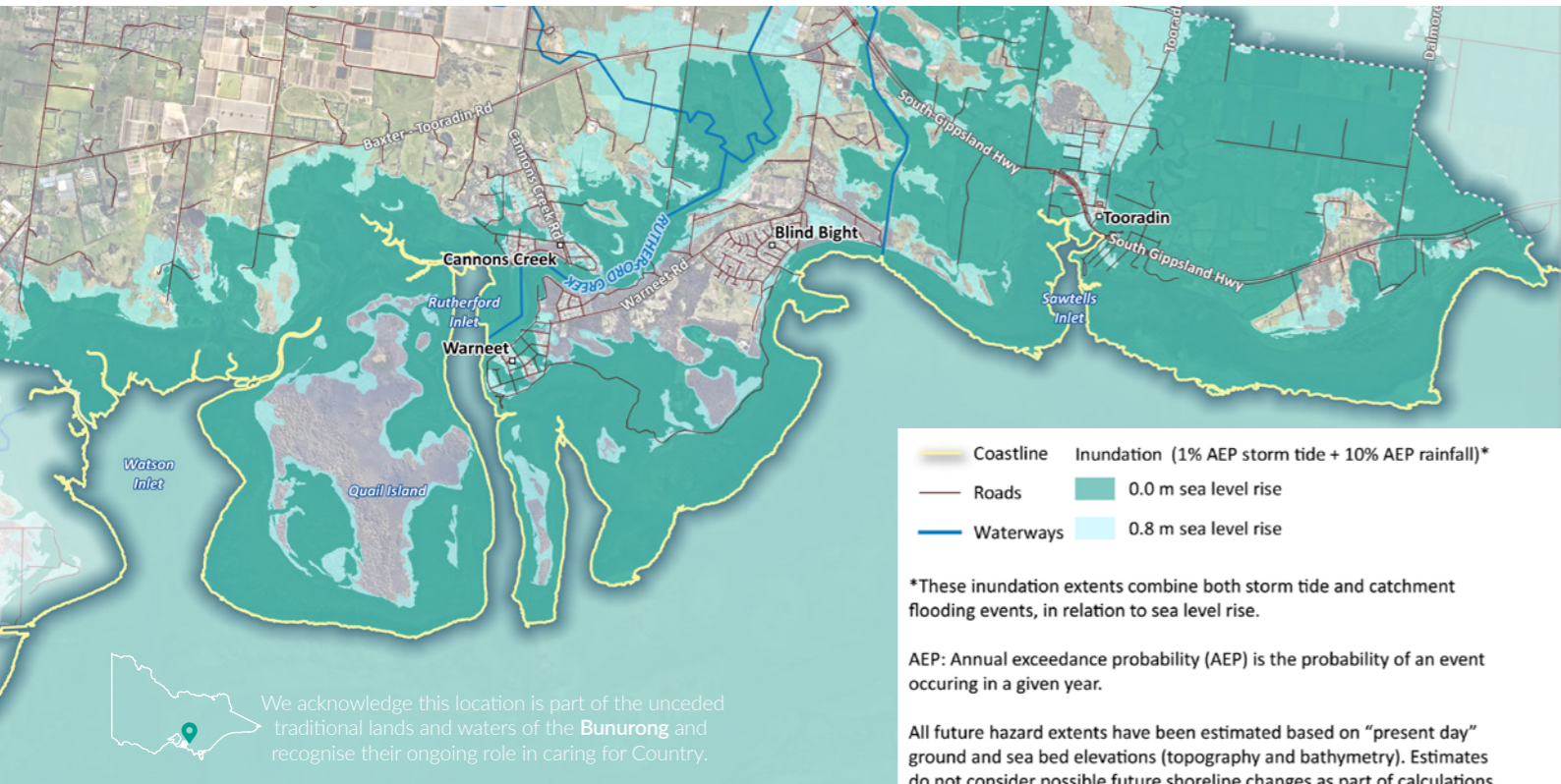
In 2021, then-Environment Minister Lily D'Ambrosio approved gas exploration under the *National Parks Act*. This upgraded extraction status allows Beach Energy to conduct 'onshore to offshore directional drilling,' which differs from traditional offshore drilling that accesses gas directly from the seabed.

Instead, this project taps into gas reservoirs from an onshore wellsite, with a well path running under Port Campbell National Park to an offshore reservoir and an underground pipeline leading to the Otway Gas Plant. Various groups and First Nations representatives have opposed this approval.

It's disheartening to see the approval of new fossil fuel projects that contradict the Allan Government's stated goals of mitigating climate change. This risky and controversial operation has now begun.



↑ Twelve Apostles Marine National Park. PAUL CLIFTON



Salty Science with Jayde Courtney Thomas



↑ Port Jackson Shark. RICHARD LING

Port Jackson Shark *Heterodontus portusjacksoni*

When snorkellers or divers spot a Port Jackson (PJ) shark in local waters, it's often met with excited squeals and a chance for leisurely observation. These 'puppy dogs of the sea' can rest on the seafloor for up to 27 hours in the one spot, giving swimmers plenty of time to check them out.

Being able to rest is unusual for a shark as most need to be moving to force water over their gills to breathe. However, PJs use what's called 'buccal ventilation' where they inhale and exhale oxygen-rich water. This explains how they can stay immobile and may be the reason they are one of only two cartilaginous fish to show evidence of sleep.

Despite appearing 'lazy' while resting, they migrate long distances between feeding and breeding grounds, made easy by their advanced memory which allows them to return to the same spot every year. They have been found to feed in Bass Strait during Summer then head to shallow coastal water (including Port Phillip Bay) to breed in late Winter into Spring.

While breeding, they can spend up to 90 per cent of their time on a single reef, hiding in caves or resting on ledges. Unlike most sharks that give birth to live pups, PJs lay eggs made of keratin, the same protein in our hair and nails. After laying, the mother wedges the egg into a rock crevice for protection while it develops over 10-12 months. Despite this, up to 89 per cent of eggs are eaten, often by male PJs. This may explain why, during this time, the females congregate in large groups away from their male counterparts.

Now you're acquainted with the unique shark that calls Australia home, try spot them next time you are in the water. During the day you'll find them lounging in large groups on the sea floor, and at night they will be out and about looking for dinner.

Jayde Courtney Thomas is studying marine science at Deakin University, and is on student placement with ReefWatch at VNPA

Taskforce to crackdown on escalating firewood theft



BRADY CHILDS,
STRATEGIC
OPERATIONS
TASKFORCE

MANAGER WITH VICTORIA'S CONSERVATION REGULATOR, REVEALS THE DEVASTATING EXTENT OF PUBLIC LAND FIREWOOD THEFT AND THE ACTIONS COMBATTING IT

As Victoria wakes from its winter slumber, nature is springing back to life with colour and energy. Unfortunately, along with the beloved sound of native birdsong comes the revs of chainsaws from illegal firewood operations.

Firewood thieves are stealing native trees from state forests and parks at an alarming rate, with many Victorians unknowingly supporting this destructive practice by purchasing illegally sourced wood.

To combat the growing issue and the threats it poses to native wildlife and Aboriginal cultural heritage, the Conservation Regulator and Parks Victoria have created Taskforce Ironbark, a joint statewide initiative aimed at disrupting the firewood black market.

Impact of illegal tree destruction

Firewood theft has emerged as one of the most serious and pressing concerns for nature in Victoria, with recorded incidents of illegal damage and tree-felling doubling between 2021-22 and 2022-23.

Intelligence data shows firewood thieves damaged or destroyed more than 9,200 native trees or cleared roughly 462 hectares – approximately 180 MCGs – of public land in Victoria in 2023, with much of the wood sold on to the unsuspecting community.

Firewood theft is not a victimless crime. Thousands of native birds, reptiles and small mammals – many endangered – relied on the nearly 10,000 trees destroyed by criminal firewood activities in the last year.

Taskforce Ironbark

The Conservation Regulator's mission to disrupt illegal commercial firewood operations is twofold – empowering Victorian firewood consumers to make responsible choices and penalising criminals who remove trees from public land.

Together with Parks Victoria we are working to target both ends of the firewood black market by:

- **Creating credible disincentives.** Authorised Officers are conducting targeted patrols across public land and using intelligence-gathering methods. This includes tactics like concealed cameras and community reports to increase detection of firewood thieves and deterring others with penalties, including legal action.
- **Highlighting harm.** Making the short- and long-term consequences of illegal firewood activity visible to the public. It's hard to ignore vivid images of critical habitat destruction and the loss of cultural heritage sites, like those involving ancient River Red Gums.
- **Promoting alternatives.** Informing the public about responsible firewood collection methods, advice on finding reputable suppliers, and providing resources on alternative heating and financial support.



↑ Authorised Officers Jodie and Libby inspect damage from firewood thieves in the Gunbower State Forest CONSERVATION REGULATOR

Public involvement

Community engagement is crucial to the Conservation Regulator's work protecting Victoria's forests, parks and reserves, native plants and animals, and critical wildlife habitats.

Members, volunteers and supporters of VNPA and the public can support Taskforce Ironbark by:

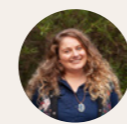
- Spreading the message about the natural and cultural consequences of firewood theft.
- Looking out for suspicious activity related to firewood theft such as illegal take, tree-felling, and firewood sellers. Recording and reporting detailed information, such as times, dates, locations, descriptions of people and cars, and photos (if safe) helps us investigate and take appropriate action.

Taskforce Ironbark will help prevent and reduce the negative impact on nature caused by the illegal commercial take of firewood from public land.

Together, we can 'cut' out firewood theft from public land and protect Victoria's natural estate for future generations. 🌿

**Report firewood theft and suspicious sellers
136 186**

**For more info on Taskforce Ironbark and sourcing your firewood legally:
vic.gov.au/sourcing-firewood**



NICOLE MERTENS,
NATURE STEWARDS
COORDINATOR,
SHARES SOME

INSPIRING REFLECTIONS FROM THE AUTUMN CROP OF GRADUATES

A whopping 138 participants made up the Nature Stewards graduating class of Autumn 2024, which wrapped up in June.

All participants are asked to reflect on their course. One of the recurring takeaways was around empowerment, with a very high number saying the course had taught them that they can make a difference – as individuals and through a connected community.

These struck me as poignant for our times. We can all feel overwhelmed by the bad news, the slow progress, the seemingly inescapable march towards the catastrophes of climate and biodiversity. But it's always worth remembering that from little things big things grow, and we can all make a difference.

As the days grow longer and brighter, I hope you all have a chance to spend a moment or two in nature each day and think of all the ways you can and do make a difference. 🌿

Courses were run in partnership with host councils of Mitchell, Macedon, Hepburn, Mornington Peninsula, Ballarat, Knox, Bendigo, Merri-bek and Moonee Valley.



This word cloud shows most of our Nature Stewards started with a desire to learn more about nature near them, and connect with their community.



↑ Participants in the Knox program MEGHAN LINDSAY

“ I can make a difference by helping in nature. ”

“ Take action where you can, little things can make a difference. Join a group, groups can get more done and have a bigger voice. ”

“ That we all can, use our hearts, hands and mind, make a difference to our environment. ”

“ Get out there, get connected, all actions make a difference, you never know what you will learn from a passing conversation. ”

“ Small ideas can grow into big, effective projects with good coordination and collaboration. ”

“ It all counts and makes a difference – big actions, small everyday actions. ”



Labouring for Leadies

20 years of Friends of Leadbeater's Possum



SERA BLAIR,
NATUREWATCH
COORDINATOR
AND INAUGURAL
PRESIDENT OF FRIENDS OF
LEADBEATER'S POSSUM,
REFLECTS ON TWO DECADES
OF PUSHING FOR POSSUM
PROTECTION

Twenty years ago, the small but influential Friends of Leadbeater's Possum (FLbP) was established at the encouragement of Julie Kirkwood, then Victorian coordinator of the Threatened Species Network, sitting within VNPA.

I researched the issues in Leadbeater's Possum (*Gymnobelideus leadbeateri*) conservation, quickly pulling friends together to form the group's first committee.

The first decade was a blur of activity. FLbP were heavily involved in community outreach, helping scientific research through stagwatching, spotlighting and nest box surveys. We had stalls and sold merchandise at lots of events. We wrote content for the Victorian curriculum. Where Leadbeater's Possum habitat was deficient, we planted trees and put up nestboxes.

And when the Black Saturday bushfires decimated Lake Mountain, we showed up twice a week through winter to walk out fresh supplementary food for the few surviving Leadbeater's. The group lobbied politicians, ran bus trips to the logging coupes, read every report or policy and wrote numerous submissions.

The second decade of FLbP was equally busy and eventful. Court cases, advisory groups, recovery plans, industry taskforces, campaigns for a new national park, the end of native

forest logging in Victoria and the closure of VicForests.

As FLbP enters its third decade the work of securing the future of Leadbeater's Possum goes on. Today, we fight to protect critical habitat for Leadbeater's Possum, the Southern Greater Glider and Yellow-bellied Gliders.

As president, I learned a lot about threatened species conservation. Most noteworthy is that scientific knowledge is essential as 'modelling' of conservation actions is not as accurate, and we don't have time for guessing. Conservation is mostly a political game, so get the community involved and vocal. There is strength in numbers so ally with other groups and share the burden. Be prepared to play the long game and surround yourself with a team of equally passionate people.

The group's current president, Steve Meacher, recently shared his reflections with me. His experience further reinforced these valuable lessons: 'There have been moments of frustration and disappointment, but we have learned that persistence pays.'

Ultimately, I learned to be kind to yourself when you need to take a break and be thankful when there are amazing people (like Pam Miskin and Steve) who can elevate the group to match growing challenges! 🙌

← FLbP volunteers at a planting day in Yellingbo
TONY SCHNAEDELBACH

"I loved being a rabble-raising community advocate that was able to say or question the controversial things the scientists and government employees were constrained by."

Sera Blair
Inaugural FLbP President

↓ Leadbeater's Possum
JUSTIN CALLY



"Now logging of our possum's habitat in publicly-owned forests has ended there is no compelling reason against the new Great Forest National Park to protect them in perpetuity."

Steve Meacher
Current FLbP President

↓ FLbP TIMELINE



7 Sept 04

Threatened Species Day, a fitting date for the first meeting of FLbP.



2005

Eric Wilkinson shares his story of rediscovering Leadbeater's Possum in April 1961 on a visit to a spot near Cambarville.

2006

Death of last Leadbeater's Possum in captivity in Australia at Healesville Sanctuary.

July 06

Sera Blair successfully lobbies then environment minister, John Thwaites to reconvene the Leadbeater's Possum Recovery Team and update the Recovery Plan.

6 Oct 2006

Leadbeater's Possum Recovery team reconvened for the first time in over 6 years with FLbP at the table. Key issues: the proposed Leadbeater's Possum permanent reserve system and revision of the 1995 Action Statement and 1997 Recovery Plan.



June 2007

FLbP get a grant from Threatened Species Network to run a three-day Leadbeater's Possum habitat assessment training course with key scientists and government agencies.

2008

Leadbeater's Possum permanent reserve system comes in. Still no new Action Statement.

2008

New 'Project Possum' adopt-a-nestbox program starts for the highland Leadbeater's Possum population. Initial nestboxes by Dr Dan Harley, with FLbP fundraising for hundreds more.

continued over page...

3 April 2011

50th anniversary of Leadbeater's Possum rediscovery event at Melbourne Museum. Eric Wilkinson is honoured for his contribution. A Mountain Ash seedling is symbolically given from Eric to Elly Robertson, a young Leadbeater's Possum advocate, to signify the passing of the responsibility of saving the possum and their habitat to the younger generation.



3 Sept 2010

'Stop Beating Around the Bush: Help save the endangered Leadbeater's Possum' fundraising art exhibition raises \$15,000.



2010

Leadbeater's Possum Recovery Team visits logging coupes to learn about compliance issues.



2009

Yellingbo planting day: members spend many days planting trees to help the forests of Leadbeater's Possum's lowland range recover from serious dieback.



7 Feb 2009

Black Saturday Bushfires rage across the Central Highlands, with 43 per cent of Leadbeater's Possum's permanent reserve system burnt, much of it catastrophically. Dan Harley and Parks Victoria find a few Leadbeater's Possums surviving in a small unburnt tea tree gully on Lake Mountain. Emergency feeding program started and nestboxes installed. FLbP takes on the twice-weekly supplementary feeding for five months each winter for three years; we all-day trek to the area by walking, skiing or snowshoeing.

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

↓ FLbP TIMELINE

continued from previous page

10 Sept 2011

The symbolic Mountain Ash seedling is planted at Cambarville and a plaque installed by Parks Victoria to commemorate the anniversary of the re-discovery. The tree remains there today and is thriving.



2011

DSE and Parks Victoria collect the last three Leadbeater's Possums from Lake Mountain after a feral cat is filmed hunting near their feeding station and the other Leadbeater's Possums were gone. They are taken to Healesville Sanctuary and later highlighted in Zoos Victoria's new 'Fighting Extinction' program.



25 Aug 2011

After five weeks of community blockades and many arrests, the 'Save Sylvia' campaign wins a court injunction to stop the logging of the Gunbarrel coupe in the unburnt forest near Toolangi.



2012

Healesville Sanctuary begins a new Captive Breeding Program for lowland Leadbeater's Possums from Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve.



Oct 2012

Retirement of Sera Blair as president and election of Pam Miskin.

Aug 2013

The Great Forest National Park campaign begins with calls from community groups and Prof David Lindenmayer for the expansion of the Leadbeater's Possum permanent reserve system.

Nov 2019

Announcement that native forest logging in Victoria will be phased out by 2030.

June 2019

The full hearing of the Leadbeater's Possum case over three weeks in the Federal Court.

Nov 2017

Opening of Federal Court case, *FLbP v VicForests*, alleging that logging in areas of Leadbeater's Possum and Greater Glider habitat has not been done in accordance with the Central Highlands Regional Forest Agreement and therefore is not exempt from the EPBC Act.



Oct 2017

150th Anniversary of description of Leadbeater's Possum as a new species, with an exhibition at Toolangi Forest Discovery Centre.

April 2015

Leadbeater's Possum's conservation status in the EPBC Act is uplisted to Critically Endangered. This is challenged by the timber industry lobby groups but is reconfirmed in 2019. Consequent Commonwealth Action Plan promises a new National Recovery Plan in place by mid-2016.

July 2014

A new Victorian Action Statement based on the LbP Action Group (replacing the Recovery Team) is released including new 200 m buffers (harvesting exclusion zones) around confirmed Leadbeater's Possum sightings.



2014

Pam Miskin sadly passes away and Steve Meacher is elected as President.

May 2020

Judgment in the Leadbeater's Possum case in favour of FLbP on all counts. This results in injunctions restraining logging in 66 coupes. Bunnings announces that it will no longer sell VicForests' timber.



May 2021

VicForests partially successful on appeal but findings of breaches of Victorian law stand and VicForests ordered to pay costs.

23 May 2023

Budget announcement: native forest logging to end by 2024.

31 Dec 2023

Logging by VicForests ends.

6 March 2024

New Leadbeater's Possum Recovery Plan comes into effect.



30 June 2024

Closure of VicForests, ending a 7552-day nightmare!



Find out more and get involved with the ongoing work of FLbP:
leadbeaters.org.au
 Facebook group: facebook.com/LeadbeatersPoss
 Instagram: [@leadbeatersposs](https://instagram.com/leadbeatersposs)

Denise & Anthony Fernando

BUSHWALKING PROGRAM LEADERS **DENISE AND ANTHONY FERNANDO** TELL US WHERE THEY FOUND THEIR PASSION FOR THE BUSH AND VOLUNTEERING FOR VNPA



What are some of your first memories in nature?

Denise: My earliest awareness of nature is a rural pocket of my native Sri Lanka where we lived surrounded by jungle habitat. Butterflies, scorpions, deer, snakes, monkeys, jungle fowl and elephants at close range were not unusual. Once, while out walking with my mother and baby sister, we came upon a herd of elephants milling across our road ahead, so we turned around, much to the disappointment of five-year-old me! It was a calm, quiet experience; we weren't afraid.

Anthony: Mine goes back to when I was about three-years-old, visiting my aunt's farm and bush property at Manangatang in the Mallee, a place my family and I continued to frequent throughout my childhood. It's left me with a lasting love of the Mallee and nearby lower reaches of the Murray River.

How did you become VNPA bushwalking leaders and what has kept you involved?

Having enjoyed countless VNPA Bushwalking Program day walks and pack-carries with amazing leaders, we were inspired to have a go. We led mostly overnight walks reasonably regularly over several years. As beginners, we benefitted from the mentorship of experienced leaders who accompanied us on overnight walks.

What do you find rewarding about it?

Whether it's leading or participating as non-leaders, we've learned a lot on VNPA walks over the years through shared interests in nature and conservation issues. We've made many friends and had some memorable experiences in beautiful natural settings. Leading has enabled us to introduce our participants to some of our own favourite places and share their pleasure in discovering them through us.

Why do you lead bushwalks for VNPA?

As members of VNPA for over 35 years, we support its important work through our membership. Leading a VNPA group activity is an opportunity to engage with participants about current issues of environmental concern, particularly in Victoria; and to discuss VNPA's important advocacy. As bushwalking leaders, we work at 'spreading the news' in the hope that those who may be unaware gain some understanding and feel encouraged to join up if they aren't members. For us, leading bushwalks is more than just only bushwalking.

Tell us about a favourite bushwalk in Victoria

We've loved hiking the High Country, Mallee and coastal areas, and have covered them over many, many years. Our most special one has to be the overnight hike to Little Waterloo Bay at Wilsons Promontory National Park, both as leaders for VNPA as well as on our own; about 25-30 times in all! Our preferred route is from the Telegraph Saddle to Little Waterloo Bay, sometimes stopping off for a second night at Little Oberon Bay, returning to Norman Beach via the coastal track. This walk is an absolute stunner!

No two walks there have ever been identical. The ocean colours, sandy beaches, tannin-stained waterways and wildlife keep drawing us back again and again. A scene of mauve trigger plants flowering en masse on the headland at the northern end of Little Waterloo Bay against a backdrop of granite boulders in swirling turquoise waters is captured in a huge, framed photo that stands in our kitchen to take us there in spirit. Little Waterloo Bay is indeed our spiritual place.

Why do you think people should bushwalk with VNPA?

Walking with VNPA has a cerebral aspect given we often gain knowledge about our Victorian environment and connect with those similarly interested. This adds to exercise gained in our beautiful natural areas.

We're looking for new bushwalking leaders!

Being a volunteer bushwalking leader involves bringing people together in nature to connect with in a positive, enjoyable and supportive way.

Express your interest via email to activities@vnpa.org.au

Learn about the Bushwalking Program and becoming a volunteer leader by scanning the QR code



Getting out in The Gurdies

CONSUELO QUEVEDO,
NEXTGEN NATURE
COORDINATOR,
CONTINUES TO INSPIRE
YOUNGER GENERATIONS
BY TAKING THE CREW ON A
CAMPAIGNING TRIP

Within minutes the diverse ecosystem unfolded before us, teeming with life from the forest floor to the treetops. We marvelled at the native orchids, birds, various fungi, and multiple types of grasses and shrubs, some of which could be over a hundred years old.

Wonderful and knowledgeable VNPA facilitators, amazing lunch spread, and enjoyed learning about the Western Port campaign.

In June, the Nextgen Nature hosted a remarkable event showcasing the tireless work that VNPA campaigners and the local community have done to protect the Western Port Woodlands. Led by Jordan Crook, VNPA Parks and Nature Campaigner, we embarked on a walk through The Gurdies Nature Conservation Reserve, just outside Grantville on Bunurong Country.

I learnt a lot about how to structure a campaign and how it can look realistically. I also got to explore an area that I wouldn't normally go to and learn more about it.

When we reached a small pond near an old sand mining site, we stood in silence, eyes wide with wonder, as several birds flew about, including a Scarlet Robin (*Petroica multicolor*) and a Striated Pardalote (*Pardalotus striatus*). Jordan then detailed the threats facing the area due to the expansion of sand mining activities. Currently, the mining takes precedence over conserving this fragile yet crucial habitat, despite the wishes of local communities.

The walk through the Gurdies Conservation area, the insights from the organisers on particular species there, and the walkthrough about how the campaigning works were great! The food was also great!

After returning to the picnic area and enjoying a well-deserved lunch, the group engaged in an in-depth discussion about the Western Port Woodlands campaign. Through a collaborative approach, we mapped out key stakeholders and campaign strategies relevant to the area. We concluded the day with a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in protecting critical habitats and were inspired by the dedication of the local community.

If you're interested in hearing more about NextGen Nature go to: vnpa.org.au/nextgen



↑ Jordan Crook (left) with the NextGen crew in the Western Port Woodlands

Where we went in Winter



IN WINTER WE BRAVED THE COLD TO DIVE INTO MARINE ACTIVITIES, HABITAT BUILDING AND MORE!



Ocean lovers explored the innovative, coast protecting Dell Eco Reef.



Grassland enthusiasts learnt all about trends in grassland protection, Plains Wanderers and growing Kangaroo Grass at Grassy Plains Network monthly meetings.



Grassland lovers joined a planting day at Woorndoo to help restore and recreate roadside grasslands.



Young adults built nest boxes for wildlife at Yalukit Willam Nature Reserve. Wild Families decorated those nest boxes and learnt all about the wildlife that live in them.



Young adults went on a tour of the Western Port Woodlands and learnt what campaigning is all about.



Wild Families built insect hotels for their gardens.



Marine citizen scientists searched for sea slugs at San Remo.



↑ NextGen Nature crew building nest boxes
CONSUELO QUEVEDO



Taking part in the Sea Slug Census under San Remo Bridge

A snapshot of our Spring activities calendar

Bushwalk - Werribee Gorge

Saturday 21 September
Join Bushwalking Program volunteer Eva Klusacek for a walk around the Werribee Gorge Circuit.

Spring Sea Slug Census

Friday 18 to Sunday 27 October
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.

Bushwalk - Lerderderg River Heritage Walk

Saturday 12 October
Join Bushwalking Program volunteer Darren McClelland and VNPA campaigner Ben Gill for a walk in Wombat Forest.

Upload your sightings to iNaturalist to help us learn more about these amazing molluscs.

Bushwalk - Four Brothers in Bunyip State Park

Friday 29 November
Join Bushwalking Program volunteer Doug Palmer and explore Bunyip State Park

Sea Slug Census at San Remo

6pm, Friday 18 October
Join us to search for sea slugs under the bridge at San Remo.



Join our Spring activities!

Check our online Activities Calendar and find a bushwalk, citizen science event, short course or other nature activity. There are plenty of opportunities for people of all ages to join us for an adventure in nature.

You can sign up for these activities through our online activities calendar. Keep an eye on the calendar, 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





Keeping renewables in the friend zone

SHANNON HURLEY, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER, ON THE ECOLOGICAL COSTS WE CAN'T OVERLOOK IN THE RACE TO REACH RENEWABLE ENERGY TECHNOLOGIES

Victoria's south-eastern seas and shores are unusually abundant. Some 80 per cent of the marine life occurs nowhere else on our blue planet. Gippsland's waters and coast are no exception. Sponge-lined caves in Wilsons Promontory, a fur seal colony, offshore islands busy with seabirds feeding and breeding, and a Great White Shark nursery, to name a few.

The sandy plains of Gippsland may look devoid of life but don't be fooled. They're thought to have one of the highest diversities of life on Earth, with 860 species discovered within ten square metres! Sand-dwelling wildlife include tube building

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

worms, small molluscs and many tiny crustaceans.

Many of these marine wildlife and habitats face large-scale, multi project, cumulative impacts from the construction and ongoing operation of wind farms. The six project licenses granted so far in the Gippsland Offshore Wind Farm Zone open the flood gates for even larger repercussions. This is especially true where rare habitats and migratory threatened wildlife are concerned.

If we put offshore wind and protecting marine life on the same page, we'll achieve the best outcomes through creating intelligent and nature-safe planning.

Our raising of these concerns is not to shut down the offshore renewables transition (as would appear to be the case from the anti-wind farm lobby), but to call for better planning decisions.

Unfortunately, the ship has already sailed for highlighting marine hotspots before declaring the Gippsland Offshore Wind Farm Zone. But it's not too late to work towards coordinating planning decisions within it. Baseline knowledge, habitat mapping and species sensitivity mapping is crucial to inform and lead better planning decisions.

Offshore ocean environments are often out of sight, but they shouldn't be out of mind. It's well-known

that avoiding potential negative impacts is the easiest, cheapest, and most effective strategy. Waiting to address these impacts with mitigation measures later is often too late for marine wildlife.

We can see the consequences of poorly managed nature-safe transitions in other parts of the world. For example, in France, wind turbines had to be dismantled because strategic planning failed to account for their impact on eagles.

To prevent delays in establishing nature-safe offshore wind farms, VNPA is calling for the following strategic marine planning steps:

- 1. Marine research.** A government-led framework to build knowledge and data on marine ecosystem values, so areas with higher biodiversity are identified and avoided, including:
 - Data inventory and analysis of data gaps and needs (ecosystem and individual species).
 - Information and data collected by developers be stored in government portals and made available for strategic planning purposes.
 - Habitat mapping and baseline studies on abundance, distribution and behaviour of priority/high risk species.
 - Regional-scale biodiversity sensitivity mapping for priority

← Australian Fur Seals
ED DUNENS

Shy Albatross →
ERIC WOEHLER

species, habitats, and high-value areas such as marine national parks.

2. Advisory body to consult on impacts of the energy transition on nature (including marine issues).

3. Strategic marine planning, such as marine spatial planning, should be used to identify no-go areas in federal and state waters to protect high-value marine biodiversity. Similarly, priority development areas should be identified in regions with lower biodiversity sensitivity.

Impacts on marine life

Let's take a closer look at what flies above and lies beneath Gippsland's waters, potential impacts on them and the role of regional-scale strategic planning.

The most obvious negative impacts are direct collision with marine life, like seabirds, and harm to seafloor



habitat. Baseline studies, habitat and biodiversity-sensitivity mapping for species like birds, where data is available, are crucial for a nature-safe energy transition.

A taste of the work so far

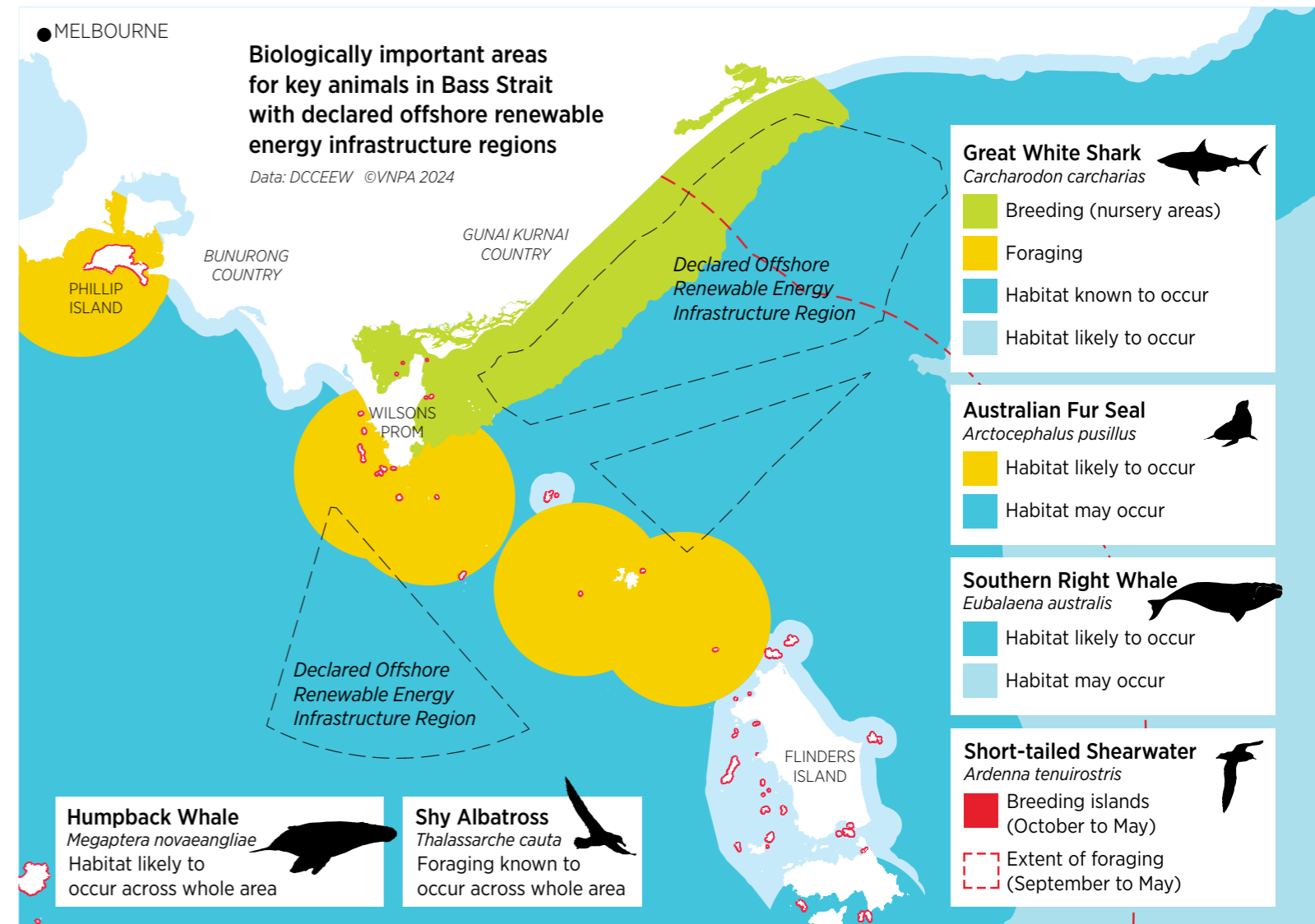
Although there is much to be done, it's important to acknowledge the efforts already made to identify wildlife at risk and guide developers.

A statewide DEECA analysis using available data identified 144 species

relevant to the Gippsland offshore wind farm zone (known as planning areas 6 and 7 in the marine spatial planning guidelines). Of those 144 species, 51 are listed under state nature laws and 121 under national nature laws.

At a federal level, the National Environmental Science Program (NESP) is creating an inventory of existing environmental and cultural data on distributions of priority

continued over page...



Keeping renewables in the friend zone continued...

species, like Southern Right Whales (*Eubalaena australis*)/Kooitapool for the Gunditjmarra. It's unclear how this research will inform the planning of offshore wind in high value biodiversity areas.

There's also work being undertaken by developers like Southerly Ten (formerly Star of the South) and others as they prepare environmental assessments.

Marine values of Gippsland

Seabirds

The waters of southern Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand are global hot spots for albatross, petrels, shearwaters and Storm Petrels. Around half of the world's pelagic species occur in the region, including 17 of the world's 22 albatross species. Areas off Victoria are national seabird 'hotspots' with many seabirds foraging in these areas. Offshore wind generation poses significant impact on birds due to direct collision, displacement from preferred habitat, and alteration of flight paths.

There are two main ways bird collision strike on turbines is reduced – avoid siting them in direct flight paths or near feeding/breeding areas, and curtailment (reducing turbine speed) to avoid collisions.

Over 246 bird taxa have been identified in Bass Strait, 80 of which are high risk. These include Critically Endangered migratory shorebirds, albatrosses and migratory parrots that cross Bass Strait, as well as range-restricted endemic coastal nesting birds. Albatross such as the Black-browed, Shy, Wandering and Grey-headed; Swift and Orange-bellied Parrots, Curlew Sandpiper and the Sooty Shearwater are at high-risk.

Fish and sharks

Many important fish and sharks live within the project area, which also hosts a Great White Shark nursery ground.

Globally, there is very little research on the impact on our scaly friends from offshore development. Over 30 fish have been identified in the project area including the Blue Warehou, Australian Grayling, King George Whiting, School Shark and Southern Bluefin Tuna.

Potential high level marine impacts from energy development	Positive	Negative
Loss of marine and coastal fauna and/or flora as a result of habitat loss, modification or degradation		👎
Increase in marine and coastal fauna and/or flora as a result of installed infrastructure providing new habitat and refuge	👍	
Displacement of marine fauna (from, for example, feeding, breeding or resting areas)		👎
Colonisation of structures by invasive, non-indigenous marine species. These species may compete with native species for food, habitat etc.		👎
Colonisation of structures by indigenous species may provide habitat availability	👍	
Colonisation of structures by indigenous species may interfere with ecosystem dynamics		👎
Changes to marine and coastal habitat – provision of new habitat	👍	
Changes to marine and coastal habitat – loss, modification or degradation		👎
Modification of water quality		👎
Marine pollution		👎
Changes to coastal processes – e.g. reduced wave or tidal action which may modify habitats near installed infrastructure		👎
Changes to coastal processes – e.g. reduced wave or tidal action leading to reduced erosion or increased accretion	👍	

Marine mammals

Marine mammals, including whales and dolphins, are particularly susceptible to the negative impacts of offshore wind farms. The impact level is dependent on the individual species. Underwater noise from construction phase (i.e. pile driving) is of most concern and is likely to cause hearing impairment at close range, with impacts felt kilometres away. Behaviour changes, like migration away from the physical presence of turbines and vessel strikes, must also be considered.

Over ten species have been identified in the area. Those of high concern include Southern Right, Blue and Humpback whales, Australian Fur Seals and Short-beaked Common Dolphins.

Habitats of Gippsland

In state waters, habitat types have been classified on a range of levels, down

to 'sub-biotopes', the finest scale. In Gippsland there are 20 distinct habitats, meaning there is a diversity of valuable marine ecosystems that many animals depend on.

Although some surveys and mapping have been conducted in federal waters where offshore wind farms will be located, additional work within specific offshore zones is vital.

It's the obvious and responsible way to make sure our decisions are nature-safe and marine life can thrive. 🌿

Find out more in the Winds of change discussion paper:
vnpa.org.au/publications/winds-of-change



← VNPAC song meter installed on a tree

Join the ecoacoustics revolution! Download the instruction sheet to quickly set up a project in Arbimon and start analysing your own recordings:
vnpa.org.au/arbimon-guide

Sing me a song

Ecoacoustics: a new tool in our conservation toolbox



CLARE WILSON
 DESCRIBES HOW WE CAN SURVEY WITH OUR EARS INSTEAD OF OUR EYES THROUGH ECOACOUSTICS

Ecoacoustics is an efficient monitoring method transforming the way we search for hard-to-spot animals. It uses sound recorders to collect audio data that is analysed to identify an animal by its unique sounds/songs.

For example, you can tell a Magpie and a Kookaburra apart by their songs, but if you weren't there to hear them, how would you know which birds are around? Birds are just the beginning with this method as surveys are now searching for choirs of rare frogs and using ultrasonic microphones to listen to the imperceptible calls of bats.

A recent surge in eco-acoustic research has been spurred by the availability of modern sound recorders that are relatively inexpensive and easy to use, making it a valuable instrument in the conservation toolbox.

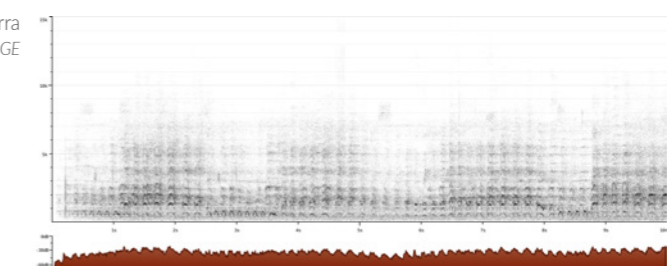
Whilst it is easy to collect audio data, it can be challenging to analyse. Identifying animals from their songs can take experts several minutes. When you multiply that by thousands of recordings per site, you're probably wondering how this is a good solution! Luckily, bioacoustic software programs that use artificial intelligence to listen on our behalf are constantly being developed and refined, saving us a substantial amount of time. One of these programs is Arbimon, a free online tool easily accessible to all.

During my student placement with VNPAC, I used Arbimon to analyse thousands of recordings collected by the NatureWatch team at the Holden Proving Grounds in Western Port Woodlands and from the 'Sounds of Recovery' project in East Gippsland to determine which animals call these places home. I paired previous NatureWatch data, which used wildlife cameras set to record small mammals, with audio recorders at the same sites and found three times as many birds were identified than with cameras alone. Listening closely to what birds have to say is bringing in exciting results for NatureWatch projects. 🌿

Clare Wilson is studying Bachelor of Science (Honours) in BioSciences at the University of Melbourne, and is on a student placement with NatureWatch

→ Ecoacoustic of a Laughing Kookaburra
 KEN GEORGE

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.



Where have all the trees gone?



MICHAEL SPENCER'S OBITUARY FOR VICFORESTS IS AN INSTRUCTIVE GUIDE AGAINST THOSE WHO WANT TO RESTART LOGGING

VicForests, the Victorian Government's logging and wood sales 'business' closed its doors on 30 June ending a 20-year experiment with a market-based approach to logging of state forests.

VicForests knew it was out of wood more than a decade ago. Even as legislation to remove VicForests from the statute books was going through Parliament, MPs were still jumping to their feet proclaiming that logging state forests was 'sustainable'; a victim of 'treachery' and caving-in to environmentalists.

As much as this argument suits protagonists, the reason was a failure of management by successive governments and the inability of public policy to withstand the pressure for private profit from public assets – a classic tragedy of the commons.

The idea that markets could manage forests better than government agencies was formed at the height of Australia's love affair with neoliberalism at the turn of the century.

VicForests inherited a culture committed to industrial wood production and an arrogance toward other forest users; a technocratic culture of we, the experts, know best.

Public servants, who were supposed to be overseeing the forest assets, auditors who were supposed to audit the books, and the ministers who continually wound back controls and requirements also need to take responsibility.

Under attack from an emerging environmental movement in the 70s, foresters moved from being protectors of forests to protectors of wood production. In 1982, the Forest Commission was abolished due to lack of public confidence and government's desire to pursue commercial principles.

Forestry operations were expected to be run as a business achieving commercial returns. Environmental controls were separated. Assistance was provided to reduce demand on overharvested forests.

The 1990s saw commercialisation accelerate, egged-on by the Victorian Auditor-General. Parliament approved a 30-year agreement with the Maryvale pulp mill to supply wood from state forests around the mill. The price benchmark was the price of office paper.

Concerns grew about overharvesting, impacts on water and biodiversity and whether commercial goals were leading to high grading rather than sustainable management.

In 1999, the Bracks Government accepted institutional arrangements had been captured by industry. It identified a 20 per cent over-commitment of logs and under-pricing.

The idea that markets could manage forests better than government agencies was formed at the height of Australia's love affair with neoliberalism at the turn of the century.

'There were cosy relationships when we came to government that were not being market-tested,' Bracks said in 2020. These resulted 'in over-commitment, subsidies and undervaluing of the forest estate'.

Bracks reduced harvest levels and introduced an independent process to monitor sustainable yield, VicForests was intended to separate commercial and regulatory functions and put the industry on a path to being efficient and competitive.

With logging and marketing under VicForests, the Department would focus on sustainable forest management through allocating areas for harvest, regulatory controls and reporting against sustainability criteria.

It was to sell logs to the highest bidder through an auction system to ensure prices reflected supply and demand and the wood would go to the highest value use. An annual review of logging against sustainable yield was an additional check.

Economist David Pollard was appointed VicForests CEO and saw the job as an opportunity to bring modern

management to Victorian forestry; 'to transform a clunky forest management system in the public sector to a modern market-based system.'

But the challenge of achieving commercial return was immense. This was an industry accustomed to subsidy. Bracks was aware that cosy relationships would attempt to reassert themselves but retired four years later.

Apart from the first few years, VicForests never got close to commercial success and by the end of the decade (that included three significant bushfires), the idea of a market-based system had all but disappeared.

First the four per cent annual rate of return was dropped, then subsidies returned as grants and payments, separation between the department and VicForests dissolved, the annual review of wood yield was cancelled and the auction system was jettisoned.

None of this could patch over falling wood supply from overharvesting and successive bushfires.

The decline had been there for all to see in the Annual Reports of the Department. But no one, including the Auditor-General, chose to look.

The reports tracked the value of standing timber from the mid 1990s. From 2000, it was calculated as net present value based on discounted future cash flow. Between 2003 and 2008, the value fell from \$258 million to \$32 million.

In 2013, the net present value of timber assets had fallen to \$10 million and the entire timber estate was allocated to VicForests. Minister Walsh either didn't understand the valuation, didn't believe it or didn't care. After this, the time series on standing timber value disappears. VicForests mixed accounting standards so the number was meaningless. The Auditor-General waved this through.

Creative accounting, huffing and puffing and regulatory changes did not create more wood. VicForests' 2014 Resource Outlook showed the area available and commercially suitable for harvesting declining. By 2017, VicForests was unable to meet commitments to its largest sawlog customer.

Heyfield mill took two-thirds of VicForests' sawlogs. It threatened to close if VicForests couldn't meet

Creative accounting, huffing and puffing and regulatory changes did not create more wood.

commitments. Government knew the supply limitations but bought it anyway. Reality finally hit in 2019. Government announced a \$110 million plan to phase-out state forest logging by 2030 and a 30-year plan to transition to plantations. Similar announcements had been made before.

As VicForests tried to push on it was forced to harvest in more problematic areas – hotly contested forest areas of the state where other forest users were well-organised.

While the department had been weak in carrying out its regulatory role, environmentalists filled the gap and took civil proceeding against VicForests for harvesting that threatened endangered species.

Eventually, the government set up an Office of the Conservation Regulator. The litigation increased costs of doing business for VicForests and placed restrictions on where it could harvest. Those mourning the demise of logging believe the government should have outlawed civil cases against VicForests.

With Maryvale mill closing its office paper line – the main user of VicForests' logs – and the costs of keeping VicForests going mounting, the Government decided to end logging on 1 January 2024.

Legislation to abolish VicForests received assent on 26 June and the doors closed on 1 July. Just over 20 years after it was launched.

Most people are in no doubt there will be efforts to reopen logging in the future. You can be sure the old team will try to get control. That is why all involved need to understand clearly what happened and how the crew that want to reopen forestry mucked up.

Michael Spencer is a writer, researcher and part time academic at Monash Business School.

This is an abridged version of an article published in The Fifth Estate, 16 July 24.

↑ Logging in Wombat Forest. BLAKE NISBET



Restoring the grasslands of the sea



LANEY CALLAHAN
UNPACKS HER
PHD RESEARCH
INTO SEAGRASS
RESTORATION IN WESTERN
PORT BAY

What's the elevator pitch for your PhD?

My PhD is focused on developing tools and knowledge to improve seagrass restoration techniques. Seagrass ecosystems are vitally important marine habitats that support fishery nurseries, sequester blue carbon, cycle nutrients and protect coastlines.

However, seagrass ecosystems are declining worldwide at a staggering rate. Some estimates suggest we have already lost about 30 per cent of our seagrass globally, and the rate of decline is approximately 7 per cent per year, mostly due to pressures from people.

Occasionally, even when environmental stressors are removed, seagrass meadows fail to re-establish due to isolation from reproductive material. In these cases, or where recolonisation is slow, active seagrass restoration may be necessary to support meadow re-establishment. Seagrasses are marine flowering plants and can reproduce asexually with clonal growth, or sexually by producing flowers and seeds (just as a terrestrial plant do). Restoration efforts are varied, with some involving transplanting adult plants and other methods involving seeds.

Seed-based restoration methods which maintain a relatively high rate of genetic

variation, can be more easily upscaled and minimise detrimental impacts on donor meadows. However, seed-based efforts are marred by highly variable results, and successful restoration projects seem few and far between.

Through a long-term collaboration between Deakin University and Melbourne Water, my project focuses on *Zostera muelleri*, an intertidal seagrass species in Western Port Bay. The main aim of assessing how local environmental conditions and site selection may increase the success of seed-based restoration efforts.

What led you to do this PhD?

Towards the end of my Honours and Bachelors degree, I started working in the ecotourism space as a snorkel guide on the Great Southern Reef. I loved every minute I got to spend underwater with Weedy Seadragons, Australian Fur Seals and resident dolphins. Beyond my own enjoyment, I came to be passionate about science communication and connecting people with the underwater world.

When tourists came face-to-face with these incredible animals and the biodiversity of temperate reef systems they would ask questions: How many are there? Does the changing environment impact them? Do they prefer to be around seagrass or seaweed? With my science

← Picking seagrass seeds in the field

MAUREEN HO

↓ Seagrass seeds collected from Western Port



→ Aftermath of fieldwork in Western Port

ABIGAIL WOOKEY



PHD PROGRESS
PRESENTS 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 **Bunurong** and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country.

background, I researched these systems to satisfy my own curiosities and also to be a better science communicator, but I was left wanting. There are a lot of things about marine ecosystems, particularly the Great Southern Reef, that we have yet to discover.

This curiosity led me to reach out to VNPA to see if I could get involved in any of the research they were conducting, and I was lucky enough to be involved in the Weedy Seadragon habitat association project as a volunteer. This was my first official introduction to seagrasses, and the first time I came to think more about what seagrass is, and how beneficial the ecosystem can be to biodiversity.

What challenges cropped up that you've had to overcome?

As with any PhD project, there are always trials and tribulations, especially in the field of ecology and restoration. We are working with seasonal cycles (seeds are produced in Summer, need to be stored over Winter, planted in Spring and monitored for months) and these cycles mean a lot is riding on getting the work done in the right season lest you have to wait a year for another planting opportunity in the next Spring.

Even so, these seasonal cycles bring some welcome variety to the work

throughout the year, and I look forward to each season as it comes. Anyone who may be familiar with the environment in Western Port will know that the intertidal region (the area between low tide and high tide) can be a pretty tricky place to work. There is a lot of variation around the bay, and some of our restoration sites are incredibly muddy, which means getting around at these sites can be laborious and take a long time.

In addition, we can only access the sites when the tide is low, and some months this means heading out onto the mudflat after dark and getting back during the early hours of the morning. This also means I have had the pleasure of enjoying many beautiful sunsets and sunrises. Western Port is an incredible biosphere, I'm always excited by the bird and marine life we get to see, and the awesome mangrove ecosystems. I can't complain too much!

What's the most interesting thing you've learnt so far?

To be blunt, seagrass restoration is really hard.

There are so many factors that play into planning and executing a seagrass restoration project: seed collection, storage, germination, growth and deployment methods. Through the hard work of previous PhDs on the

Deakin University-Melbourne Water seagrass restoration project and collaboration with other researchers in the field, I was lucky to join this project at a time when we can store our seeds effectively and reach high levels of germination. We also have a functioning seagrass nursery Advance Community College Nursery where we can grow our seedlings.

This means I can reliably grow seagrass seedlings and it allows me to attempt to answer some interesting questions about seagrass restoration.

What impact do you want your research to have?

I would love for my research to answer some of the many questions we still have when it comes to restoring seagrass, and make seagrass restoration a little bit easier and more successful.

There are so many things we still don't know in this field, and if I can knock one or two big questions off the board, that would be amazing. I'd also like to introduce as many people as possible to seagrass ecosystems; to know them is to love them! 🌿

Get in touch:
lcallahan@deakin.edu.au

Strolling the Bib



CHRIS HARVEY
REFLECTS ON HIS 60-DAY 'STROLL' ON THE BIBBULMUN TRACK

The Bibbulmun Track runs for over 1000 km from its northern terminus at Kalamunda in the Perth hills to Albany on the south coast of Western Australia, traditional lands and waters of the Nyoongar People. The track has been well planned, linking numerous national parks and conservation areas with state forests and some sections of private land. Stunted She-oak, Wandoo, Banksia forest and the rocky granite peaks of the Darling Ranges dominate the northern sections. Taller Jarrah, Yarri (Blackbutt), Karri and Stringybark forests are found in the mid-sections, before transitioning to the coast across the flat, scrubby and sand-based Pingerup Plains – often flooded in winter and early spring. Coastal heath, white sandy beaches, estuary crossings and magnificent views from headlands highlight the final sections to Albany. First conceived and proposed by bushwalking enthusiasts in the 1970s, the Bibbulmun Track is managed by

the WA Parks and Wildfire Service supported by the Bibbulmun Track Foundation. The Foundation plays a critical partnering role in monitoring track conditions and maintaining it, and boast a register of over 400 volunteers, many of whom are allocated a shelter or section of the track to surveil and look after. Based on our observations of the condition of track infrastructure, this system of 'ownership' works very well. The cooler days of Autumn and wildflowers of Spring determine the best times to walk on the 'Bib', which can be traversed in either direction. On the suggestion of the Bib Foundation, we chose the south-to-north direction to avoid Southern Ocean squalls in June.

Vast areas of the track were logged by early European settlers, and evidence of earlier mining can be seen. Fortunately, the previously logged forests are now protected and the trees are 100-years-old, so they are magnificent to wander under. Vehicles and motorbikes are prohibited in the national parks. The track itself is well marked with 49 open sleeping shelters located at regular intervals, each with picnic tables, water tanks, camping sites and a pit toilet. For individuals and small groups, bookings are not required and there are no fees. The infrastructure and absence of fees enables a wide cohort of people to experience the parks without diminishing the natural appeal.

We soon discovered that the best place to camp was at the shelters as they were positioned close to features worth spending time at, had the only reliable source of drinking water and, particularly at the southern end, there were very limited spots for camping. The shelters also function as the social hubs along the track. I underestimated how important these interactions were going to be for us. If I had to pick a favourite section of the walk it would be between the

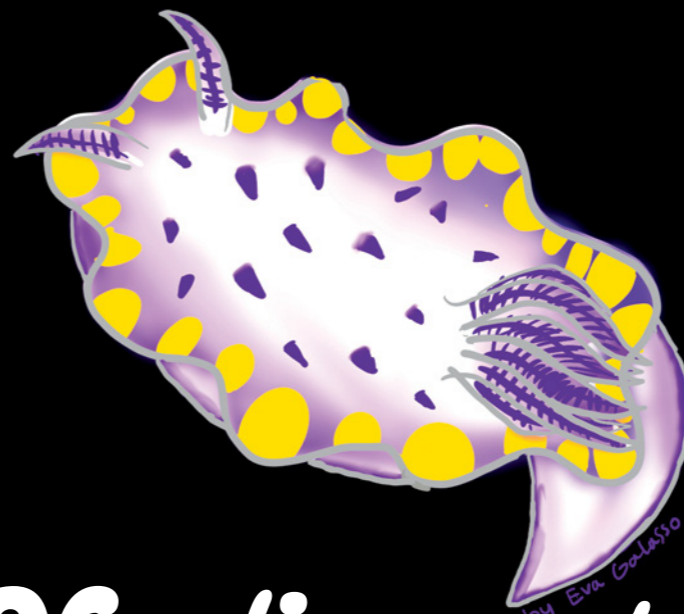
towns of Walpole and Denmark. The aptly named track shelters create a vivid image as to why this sector is so special: 'Franklin River', 'Giants', 'Rame Head', 'Peaceful Bay', 'Boat Harbour' and 'William Bay'. Highlights of our trek were too numerous to list but include: the 360-degree views from Mt Cuthbert, close encounters with kangaroos and cockatoos, the tall trees, the aqua coloured sea and vivid white beaches, sunrise from Mt Dale, the solitude, the bush, the local community members who fed us at Northcliff, the canoe crossing of Irwin Inlet, and meals with track friends.

As we approached Kalamunda and the end of our epic 60-day walk, I had a strong sense that we'd done something that would have prolonged and meaningful impact. The 'Bib' had infused itself into us. Walking the track had become a 'way of life', an existence dominated by natural stimuli. We had lots of time for a depth of reflection... lots of time to think about what's important. I suspected that I'd miss it. And I do! 🌿



ALL IMAGES COURTESY CHRIS HARVEY

← *Mexichromis macropus*, artwork by Eva Galasso
↓ Eva out sea slugging with ReefWatch



Nerding out on nudibranchs



EVA GALASSO IS A YOUNG NUDIBRANCH ENTHUSIAST WHO REGULARLY HEADS OUT SEA SLUGGING WITH VNPA'S REEFWATCH TEAM

Nudibranchs! Or as they're more commonly known, sea slugs. They really are truly marvellous, fascinating and beautiful creatures. Hi! I'm Eva, I'm 14-years-old and I love marine life (especially invertebrates). When I say my favourite sea creature is a sea slug (or nudibranch) people tend to look a little confused, but when I show them a picture, they often look amazed and curious. I've even had some friends who have come along to the sea slug census

with us. Occasionally, I come across people who are also interested in sea slugs (other than at the sea slug census). One day I was helping out at a science school holiday program and I was wearing my sea slug t-shirt when one of the Prep kids walked up to me and pointed at my shirt and exclaimed, 'SEA SLUGS!'. I was surprised, impressed and excited. I first found out about sea slugs in 2022, when we were on a family holiday in Eden. We were exploring



the rock pools when I saw a colourful moving blob. I thought it was beautiful. Intrigued, I wanted to learn more.

When we got back to Melbourne we found the sea slug census! I really love going to the sea slug census events, it's so much fun. As well as sea slugs you can find so many other things: octopuses, sea stars, crabs, other marine molluscs, small fish and stingrays. Once we even found a Blue Ring Octopus!

I remember when I found my first sea slug; I was so happy. It's also really inspiring to see the experts in their field. I love learning about nudibranchs and they have also made their way into my art. My latest drawing was of a *Mexichromis macropus*.

The sea slug census is now a regular activity in our family. We all really enjoy it and I highly recommend you check it out! 🌿



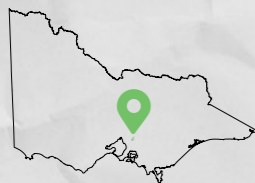
Find out more about how you can get involved with the Sea Slug Census:
vnpa.org.au/sea-slug-census

← Eva's sea slug swag including notebooks, pins and a plushie and hoodie made by her friends

DANDENONG RANGES NATIONAL PARK

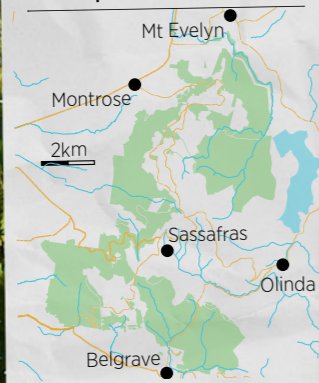
IN PARK FRIENDS
IN WE VISIT ONE OF
VICTORIA'S NATIONAL
PARKS TO REVEAL ITS
FEATURES, THREATS
AND FRIENDS

Location



Traditional lands and waters of the **Wurundjeri**
35km east of Melbourne
3540 hectares

Map



History

Proclaimed 13 Dec 1987, amalgamating Ferntree Gully National Park (est. 1927), Sherbrooke Forest and Doongalla Estate

In 1997, Olinda State Forest, Mt Evelyn and Montrose Reserve were added

→ Ferntree Gully in the Dandenong Ranges, Eugene von Guérard (1857)
COURTESY NGV



Physiography

Highlands-Southern Fall bioregion

16 ecological vegetation classes ranging from pockets of Cool Temperate Rainforest in the gullies to Grassy Dry Forest on the western slopes



Cool Temperate Rainforest
440 species of native plants
MEGHAN LINDSAY

Features

Habitat for Slender Treefern, Mountain Bird-orchid and two species of amphipod



↑ Powerful Owl
JAMES WHITE

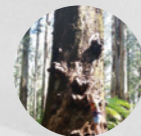
Breeding populations of threatened large forest owls such as Powerful Owls and Sooty Owls

16 regionally significant plants

Features

Regionally significant animals such as the Superb Lyrebird and Swamp Wallaby

Closest Mountain Ash forest to Melbourne



↑ Mountain Ash
JORDAN CROOK

Headwaters of Dandenong Creek and part of the upper catchment of the Yarra River

Threats

20 plants and 14 animals listed as **Threatened** under Victorian legislation *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*

3 plants and 11 animals listed as **Threatened** under federal legislation *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*



← Powelltown Correa, which is listed as Threatened
MEGHAN LINDSAY

Friends

Friends of Sassafra Creek
fosc.org.au

Friends of Sherbrooke Forest
friendsofsherbrookforest.blogspot.com

Save the Dandenongs League
sdl.org.au

Southern Dandenongs Landcare Group
southerndandenongslandcare.online

← Dandenong Ranges National Park
GAGANDEEP SINGH

Pixie Parasols →
ALL IMAGES THIS PAGE
MEGHAN LINDSAY



ROBERT PERGL VISITS THE MAGICAL DANDENONG RANGES, VICTORIA'S FIRST PROTECTED AREA

The Dandenong Ranges sits as a prominent landscape feature protruding on the eastern flank of Melbourne/Naarm. These ranges have long been a source of inspiration for First Nations people, artists and conservationists. For tens of thousands of years, the Bunurong and Wurundjeri made the annual journey to the ranges seeking reprieve in the warm summer months.

Fern Tree Gully became Victoria's first official protected area in 1882 as a 'site for public recreation'. It was popularised for day-trippers picnicking to escape the hustle and bustle of 'Marvellous Melbourne' and visit the tree-fern clad gullies.

Save the Dandenong's League, one of the earliest conservation groups in Victoria, formed in 1950 to prevent inappropriate development throughout the hills. Successful campaigning by the league following the 1960s bushfires instigated the buy-back of fire prone private land now incorporated into the national park.

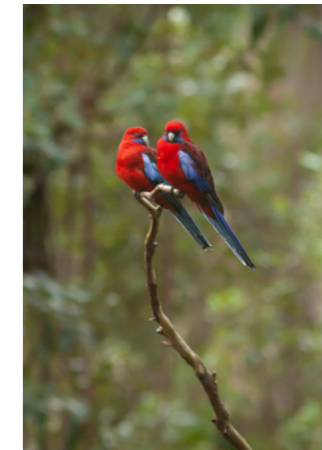
The park safeguards the headwaters of Port Phillip catchment. Here we find Cool Temperate Rainforest in the deepest, darkest gullies marked by dominant Southern Sassafras shouldered by the tall-towering Mountain Ash trees. If you're lucky, you might catch a glimpse of a Superb Lyrebird. These enigmatic residents inspired naturalist Tom Tregellas to observe their biology and ecology from a hollow log in Sherbrooke Forest in the 1920s.

The collaborative vision of many conservationists has protected the cultural and natural heritage values. The park, however, needs increased resources to manage recreational infrastructure and deal with imminent pressures of invasive species, notably the scourge of feral deer and weeds.

Robert Pergl is studying Wildlife and Conservation at Deakin University, and is on student placement with VNPA



↑ Swamp Wallaby



↑ Crimson Rosellas



↑ Echidna

↓ Soft Tree-ferns



ILLABROOK GRASSLANDS NATURE CONSERVATION RESERVE

JORDAN CROOK
CHECKS OUT A
GROUSE LITTLE
GRASSLANDS IN
GOLDEN PLAINS



↑ Fungi

→ Woodland at Illabrook Grasslands

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.



The Illabrook Grasslands Nature Conservation Reserve is a beautiful 118 hectares of Grassy Woodlands roughly 40 minutes south-west of Ballarat on Wadawurrung Country.

The reserve was established in May 1996 and is managed by Parks Victoria.

It sits just outside the Victorian Volcanic Plains (VVP) bioregion, instead being on the Central Victorian Uplands bioregion, but a Stubble Quail could easily make the short flight between the two bioregions, it's that close to the VVP.

Grasslands are complex ecosystems full of detail on the smallest scale,

from flowering plants and pollinators, to cracking soil that is home to reptiles and mammals.

They are all about the ground story, where the diversity of plants and animals is truly astounding and easily overlooked.

To truly appreciate grasslands, you need to get on your hands and knees and observe the worlds below: ants collecting food and materials for their colonies; lizards sunning themselves between the tussocks of grasses with a watchful eye on the sky for predators; and the leaves of orchids and other annual plants starting to push up through the soil, building their energy reserves for their coming flowering.

← Looking out across Illabrook Grasslands →

↓ Peach Heath

↘ Sheoak pods

ALL IMAGES JORDAN CROOK



↑ Cranberry Heath

Although I visited the reserve in early Winter, a few wildflowers were still around including Common Everlastings (*Chrysocephalum* sp.) and a species of Hypoxis that managed to pop their heads up through the Kangaroo Grass tussocks.

Taking a stroll around the reserve from the grassy plain, across the dry creek bed to the restored woodland of Yellow Gum (*Eucalyptus leucoxylon*) and Drooping Sheoak (*Allocasuarina verticillata*), I startled a mob of Eastern Grey Kangaroos who were resting from the midday sun amongst the trees.

Illabrook Grassland and the nearby Illabrook Rail Line Nature Conservation Reserve provide a living

insight into the vast grassy woodlands that once covered a large chunk of Victoria but have been pushed to the roadsides, railways lines and small patches of remnant vegetation.

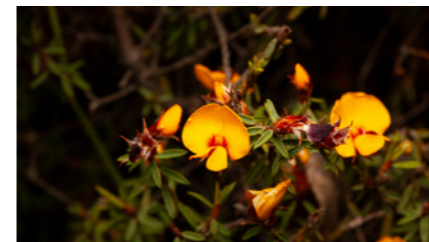
One can only imagine how alive these grassy plains were before European colonisation, where you could walk to Gunditjmarra Country (today's South Australian border) across the plains and marvel at their diversity of plants, animals and geologic formations.

Visiting grassland reserves always puts more fuel in my tank, and drives me to help protect more grassy ecosystems in our public land estate. Illabrook is one such reserve and is definitely a grouse park. 🌿

Illabrook Grasslands Nature Conservation Reserve, Cape Clear-Rokewood Rd, Illabrook, Golden Plains
145 km/2 hour drive west of Melbourne

Quiz answers from p. 4

- d.** The central west is home to about 400 – a staggering 380, to be exact – rare and threatened plants and animals.
- b.** There are three 'brush-tailed' animals that live in the central west: Brush-tailed Phascogales, Common Brushtail Possums and Mountain Brushtail Possums.



↑ Wombat Bush-pea. MEGHAN LINDSAY

- b.** Wombat Forest gets its name from the nearby town Daylesford, which was originally called Wombat.
- The **Moorabool, Werribee** and **Lerderberg** rivers begin their journey in Wombat Forest and flow south. The **Loddon, Coliban** and **Campaspe** rivers flow north.
- False.** Wombat Forest is home to six threatened peas! Golden Bush-pea, Penny-lead Flat-pea, Swamp Bush-pea, Wiry Bossiaea, Wombat Leafless Bossiaea and Wombat Bush-pea.
- a.** The Wombat Leafless Bossiaea can only be found in Wombat Forest. Within Wombat Forest it grows in five different places.
- I'm a **Brush-tailed Phascogale!**

- c.** Landsborough Hill Nature Conservation Reserve is the westernmost reserve in the forests of the central west area. It extends just a tad further west than Mt Cole.

- a.** Over 100 types of birds live in the Pyrenees Ranges.
- c.** The beautiful Beeripmo Walk is a 21 km return hike with views out to Langi Ghiran and Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park.



↑ Landsborough Hill. DAVID TATNALL

Acacia were wondering about wattles!



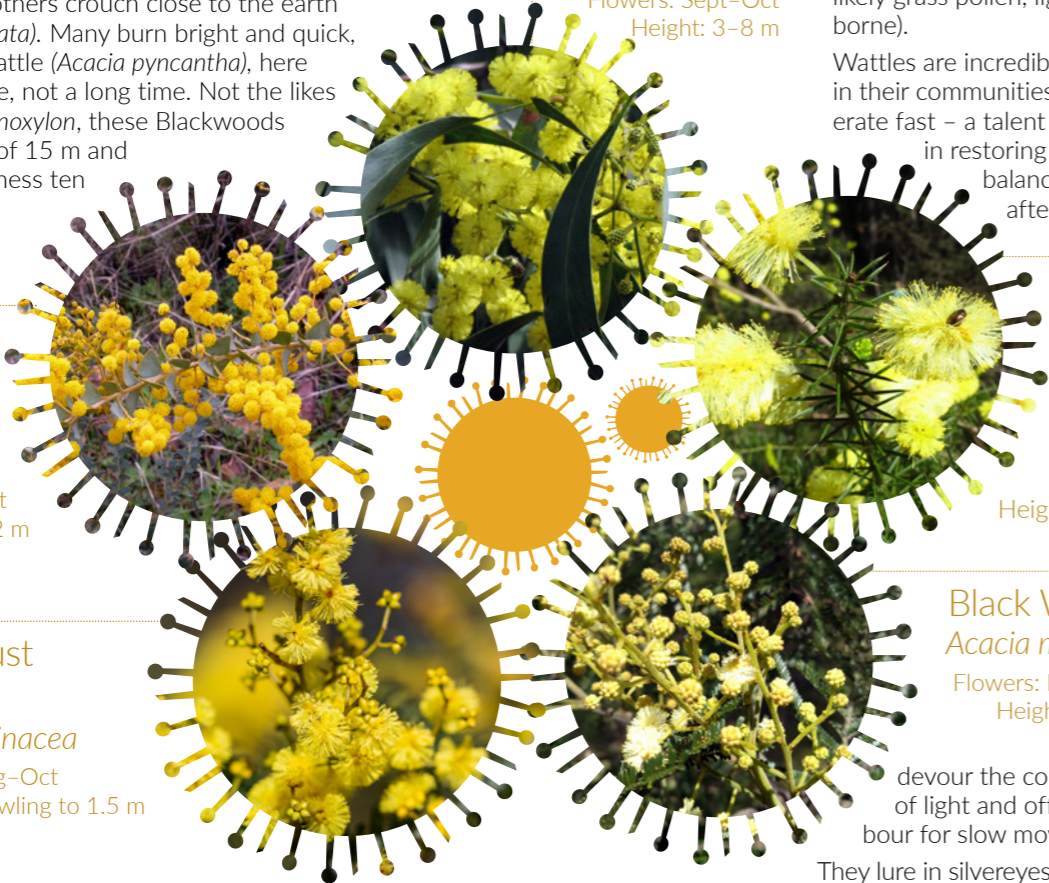
JESSIE BORRELLE, DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER, ON CELEBRATING OUR OWN GOLDEN GLOBES

You don't need to look for wattles after July, they'll find you. To take a walk in early Spring is to witness a slow-motion fireworks display. It's as if, after being dimmed for months, the lights in the bush have been turned back on. There are some 90 species native to Victoria and they vary greatly, in kind and in habit. Some loom large (*Acacia mearnsii*) and others crouch close to the earth (*Acacia verticillata*). Many burn bright and quick, like Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*), here for a good time, not a long time. Not the likes of *Acacia melanoxylon*, these Blackwoods reach heights of 15 m and frequently witness ten decades.

Acacia pollen has heft. Once wattle pollen departs the flower it can't move far at all, often hitching a ride in the feathers of birds. Despite this, it's often unfairly accused of triggering runny noses and swollen eyes. (The culprit is more likely grass pollen, light and wind-borne). Wattles are incredibly influential in their communities. They regenerate fast – a talent instrumental in restoring the nitrogen balance of soils after fire. Wattles

IMAGES: DONALD HOBERN, ALEX PROIMOS, COWIRRIE, GRAMPYANSHIKER, MELBOURNIAN

Silver Wattle
Acacia dealbata
Flowers: Sept
Height: 6–12 m



Prickly Moses
Acacia verticillata
Flowers: Sept–Oct
Height: 0.5–3.5 m

Gold Dust Wattle
Acacia acinacea
Flowers: Aug–Oct
Height: sprawling to 1.5 m

Black Wattle
Acacia mearnsii
Flowers: Nov–Dec
Height: 6–9 m

devour the copious beams of light and offer safe harbour for slow moving plants.

They lure in silvereyes, honeyeaters

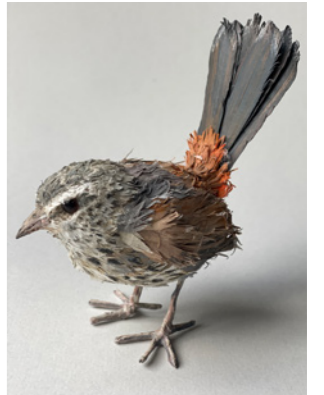
and thornbills with a sugary fluid expressed during flowering. Red-tailed Black Cockatoos, Gang Gangs, Emus, Superb Fairy-wrens and Brush Bronzings all feed on their seeds. They're sometimes used as an indicator of the presence of Leadbeater's Possum, who seek out the carbohydrate-rich sap of acacias in the Central Highlands.

If you too are hypnotised by these blooming beauties, I recommend the classic Field Guide to Victorian Wattles by FJC Rogers, illustrations by John Truscott. Each species is expertly illustrated, with scientific and common names, occurrence, flowering, appearance and size. Published in 1978, it may be an oldie, but (if you can get hold of it) it sure is a goodie!



Now you see us...

↑ Major Mitchell's Cockatoo
Plains Wanderer ↗
Chestnut-rumped Heathwren →
ARTIST: MARY-JANE WALKER



ARTIST AND SCIENTIST, **DR MARY-JANE WALKER** IS CREATING PAPER SCULPTURES OF THE BIRDS FOUND IN THE GEELONG AREA THAT ARE LISTED AS THREATENED

The hyper-realistic paper taxidermy sculptures which comprise the Now You See Us project are made from recycled and other papers with steel skeletons where required. The



↑ Mary-Jane Walker in her studio

project aims to elicit an emotional connection and response to the ecological crisis which is going on all around us. Its intention is to highlight the scale of risk happening at the local level, all over Australia, as we enter the global era of the Anthropocene, the age of humanity's overwhelming influence on the planet.

The project began with the realisation by Dr Mary-Jane Walker, who has a PhD in genetics and is a practicing artist, of the scale of threat to birds in her local area of Geelong. The work will eventually see sculptures of all the birds in the City of Greater Geelong listed as threatened under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act*.

So far, the project has completed 21 threatened birds. Mary-Jane is currently working on the last two owls, the Masked Owl and the Powerful Owl. These last two, together with the already made Barking Owl, will hopefully form part of a project looking at owl conservation. This will be in conjunction with researchers at the University of Melbourne and other community groups next year.

Mary-Jane says, 'I am probably biased but I do feel art can engage people even more strongly with the big environmental issues of our time, through the emotional connection it makes.'

The focus of the project is a positive one; it hopes to raise the profile of

this issue and offer a call to action. It is about making people think about how they can support these birds through research and conservation efforts. It also highlights the activities that city councils and others could and are doing in the conservation of native bird habitats. Time is running out for many of these beautiful and unique birds, the opportunity to save them is now.

The birds have featured in an exhibition at the National Wool Museum, which has the Plains Wanderer on permanent exhibition as part of their 'On the Land' gallery, and another at Barwon Park, a National Trust property near Winchelsea. The Barwon Park exhibition is featured in a short film online (see link below).

Although the majority of the birds are not currently on show, they do spin off other projects. Mary-Jane has done a number of related-school residencies and the birds were the starting point for the Alphabet Bird Project and Nature, Our Backyard Event in last year's Nature Festival in Geelong. This project also features in a film on The School of Lost Arts website and tells the story of the six seasons from a Wadawurrung perspective.

Find out more at:
theschooloflostarts.com.au/now-you-see-us

Park Watch survey results



PAUL CLIFTON, PARK WATCH EDITOR, REVEALS THE RESULTS FROM OUR RECENT SURVEY, AND THE CHANGES WE'RE MAKING TO THE MAGAZINE

A huge thanks from VNPA's Communications Team to the over 180 readers who completed the readers survey in June's *Park Watch*. We're pretty chuffed with the results, which indicate a majority are more than happy with what they're reading. Some of the main takeaways are:

- Almost three-quarters (72 per cent) read every edition of *Park Watch*. Over half read most of each issue, with one-third reading it all.
- Most (70 per cent) read it in print format (a rarity which many of you appreciate, and which we're definitely planning to continue), 20 per cent online, and 10 per cent both paper and screen.
- More than half rated the value of content, 'keeping me up-to-date', quality of writing and layout and design as excellent; more than 90 per cent rated them all as good to excellent.
- A high proportion (70 per cent) rated the photography as excellent – kudos to all our wonderful contributors.

There were plenty of interesting suggestions, including more positive nature news and local success stories; more coverage of Friends groups and visits to parks; and more information about VNPA activities and programs.

We've pored over all your comments and suggestions, and already made some changes to our content in this issue, with more to come.

In response to many requests for a dash of good news, our new 'Glad Tidings' section (p. 11), will deliver positive 'nature news to bring a smile to your face'.

In 'Park Friends' (p. 34) we'll visit a different Victorian national park to discover its facts, features and threats, and the vitally important Friends groups that help look after it. With 45 (and rising!) national parks in Victoria, it should only take us until 2035 to get through them all... The inaugural national park for the series is Dandenong Ranges, Victoria's first protected area with one of the oldest Friends groups.

These join recent additions 'Grouse Parks' – Jordan Crook's lowdown of little known gems (p. 36) – and 'Salty Science', a look at marine wildlife from Victoria's seas (p. 15). 🌿

Congratulations to Kevin & Margo Heeley of Yarra Glen, winners of the survey prize, a copy of David Lindenmayer's beautiful book, *The Great Forest*



Vale Betty Whitehand

Betty Whitehand was a VNPA member from 1999, and we were saddened to learn of her passing last year at age 98.

A keen bushwalker and nature lover, Betty was a member of the Melbourne Women's Walking Club (MWWC) for over 70 years. MWWC President Desma Burford remembers her as a strong walker with a keen sense of humour.

Betty loved walking and camping in the Victorian Alps and Wilsons Promontory. She regularly sketched and photographed on walks, and was a talented painter of landscapes – some of which are now owned by fellow walkers.

One MWWC member recalls 'Betty scouted and went on many walks and backpacks. She was good at navigation with a map and compass... [She] had a quiet sense of humour and was aware of our foibles – her comments usually accompanied by a twinkle in her eyes'.

Betty made the wonderful decision to help protect the wild places she loved by leaving a gift in her Will to VNPA. We are incredibly grateful for her generosity and look forward to making sure future generations have the opportunity to explore Victoria's wilderness like Betty did.

Thank you, Betty! 🌿

To find out more about leaving a gift to VNPA in your Will, please get in touch with Kristian Lang, via email kristian@vnpa.org.au or phone 0480 487 898

A stinky Sisyphian saga

Dung beetle on a roll, written and illustrated by Sandra Severgnini

CSIRO Publishing, 2024, 32pp, ISBN 9781486318872

Mention poo or beetles to a child and their eyes light up with excitement and curiosity. Offer them a book that features both, and you know you're on a winner!

This was the reaction I received from my grandnephew Orson, aged 7¾ (the fraction is important) when I offered him this terrific new book to read.

In this fascinating story we learn all about the incredibly important role that tiny dung beetles play in our environment; from pushing dung balls that can weigh up to 50 times more than the beetles do, to recycling nutrients in our soil – these beetles

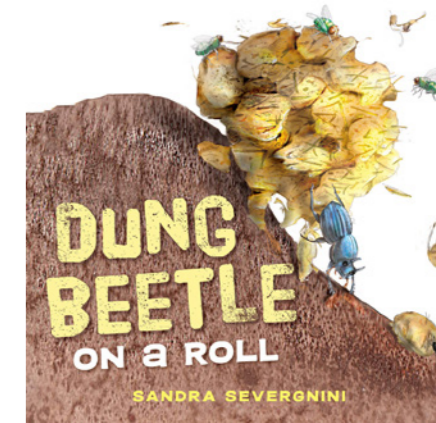
are amazing. Ten out of ten for clever, says Orson!

Orson told me 'I learnt that there are three different types of dung beetles: the rollers, tunnellers and dwellers, who each have different roles in the way they move poo. I like the rollers best – they're really cool the way they can roll up a big ball of slimy stinky poo and move it around.'

'But they can't make it too big or it all falls apart', Orson said, shrieking with laughter!

Orson very much liked the illustrations and especially enjoyed the ant trail mazes inside the front and back covers. He would recommend the book for children aged four to eight.

Being at the older end of this range, Orson was able to read the more



detailed 'fabulous facts about dung beetles' at the end of the book. This includes that the dung beetles have been around since the time of the dinosaurs, there is a dung beetle for every kind of poo, and in Australia there are more than 500 species of native dung beetles.

This book is a delightful celebration of the critical role that dung beetles play in our environment and is engaging for both young readers and the adults in their lives. 🌿

Jane Crouch, VNPA Fundraising Manager, and Orson (aged 7¾)

Bushwalks with your bestie

Dog Trip Melbourne, Evi O and Andrew Grune

Thames & Hudson, 2023, 240pp, ISBN 9781760762650

Our four-legged friends enjoy discovering new parks as much as we do, but any dog owner will know the annoyance of travelling all the way to a new spot, only to find your dog isn't welcome.

Dog Trip Melbourne, from the authors of the *Day Trip* nature adventure series, takes the guesswork out of finding new dog friendly adventures. All 52 walks are within a 130 km radius of the CBD, which generally means no more than a two-hour drive to get to your destination.

There's a lovely simplicity to both the

design and the maps, but the guide is still jam-packed with plenty of information and images. Each entry helpfully lists if the walk is on or off leash, its distance, time, difficulty, climb, facilities, parking, suitability for kids and wheelchairs, distance from Melbourne and the Traditional Owners.

We headed out to the Flinders Peak Walk in the You Yangs Regional Park with our 3½-year-old English Staffy, Burger one afternoon. I would never have thought to visit, especially with a dog, if not for this guide. And boy was it worth it!

The You Yangs are glorious with wattle in early Spring, and we enjoyed the spectacular views of the surrounding plains, the bay and the city skyline at the top of



the somewhat strenuous walk. I was thankful I had a strong and impatient dog to drag me up some of the steps!

The car park was surprisingly busy for a weekday, and although we saw plenty of people on the walk, we only spotted one other dog. Possibly a sign most people are unaware our four-legged besties are allowed in some parks – although always on leash, of course. Clearly, they need a dog-friendly guidebook! 🌿

Paul Clifton, Park Watch editor, and Burger the English Staffy

VNPA Get Together & Annual General Meeting

Meet our campaigners and councillors at the VNPA AGM

6pm, Tues 22 October 2024

Melbourne City Conference Centre, 90 Little Lonsdale St, Melbourne and streamed online

RSVP ESSENTIAL

Please confirm by Tues 15 Oct via vnpa.org.au/agm-2024 • email support@vnpa.org.au • phone (03) 9341 6506



Hear guest speaker Wiradjuri man, Associate Professor Richard Swain on 'working towards healing Country, perspectives on opportunities for Indigenous management of feral species and protected areas.

Executive Director, Matt Ruchel and senior staff will also present, followed by AGM formalities.



Wild Families

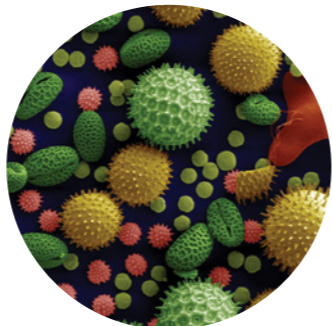


POLLEN is tiny, powdery and made by flowers to help them reproduce.

POLLINATION is when pollen is moved from one flower to another to help a plant make a seed.

POLLINATORS are animals, usually insects, that move pollen from flower to flower.

Bees, wasps, flies, ants, sawflies, butterflies, moths and beetles are all types of insect pollinators. Some birds and small mammals like Grey-headed Flying Foxes are also pollinators. Pollination can also be done by wind and water.



↑ POLLEN UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

Go searching for insect pollinators

Here are some tips for finding insect pollinators on a walk in the forest, around your neighbourhood or in your garden

- 1** Look for flowers on a sunny day ☀️. The flowers might be near the ground, or higher up in a shrub or tree.
- 2** Stop and watch for a while 👁️. Get up close; some pollinators are very small!
- 3** Make sure to stay still so you don't scare anyone off! 🙅
- 4** Can you work out what types of pollinators you saw? Were they bees, wasps, flies, ants, butterflies, moths or beetles? 🐝
- 5** Find new flowers and start again! If you don't see any pollinators on your first flower 🌸 don't worry. See if you can find some on the next one.

IMAGES: MEGHAN LINDSAY

What we like

- ✓ We live in many places including forests, parks, grasslands and even in your garden.
- ✓ We nest in many different places: bare soil, leaf litter, stone walls, holes in wood and under leaves.
- ✓ We need places to hide and sleep, like shrubs and grasses.

What you can do!

- ✓ Plant native shrubs, flowers and grasses that bloom at different times of year. That way we will always have snacks, homes and hiding places.
- ✓ Add nesting areas to your garden, like insect hotels and logs.
- ✓ Don't prune all the dead stems off your plants and leave some areas of bare ground. We love patches of leaf litter!



Without pollinators, many plants in forests and grasslands wouldn't exist.

POLLEN FACTS
Some bees buzz inside the flower to make the pollen shoot out.

Safety tip

Don't reach out to touch pollinators. Some can bite and sting. Or you might accidentally scare them away or hurt them.

Play the pollinator and plant game!

Some pollinators prefer to visit certain flowers or lay their eggs on specific plants. Can you match the pollinators with their favourite plants?

POLLINATORS	PLANTS
Blue-banded Bee	Weeping Grass
Orchid Dupe Wasp	Saw-sedge
Swordgrass Brown	Chocolate Lily
Green Grass-dart Butterfly	Prickly Tea-tree
Spotted Flower Chafer Beetle	Small Tongue-orchid

IMAGES: REINER RICHTER, MEGHAN LINDSAY, WARREN CAMERON

Hints

- **Blue-banded Bees** eat yummy nectar from flowers. They're fond of blue and purple flowers.
- **Green Grass-dart Butterfly** caterpillars are also fussy. They like to munch on different types of grasses.
- **Spotted Flower Chafer Beetles** love feeding on the tasty nectar of eucalypt trees and a particular type of shrub.

ANSWERS UPSIDE-DOWN BELOW

POLLEN FACTS

- Flowers often smell nice or look bright and colourful to attract pollinators. Sometimes they offer delicious nectar rewards.
- Pollinators help pollinate many of the plants we eat.

MATCHING GAME: Blue-banded Bee > Chocolate Lily; Orchid Dupe Wasp > Small Tongue-orchid; Swordgrass Brown > Saw-sedge; Green Grass-dart Butterfly > Weeping Grass; Spotted Flower Chafer Beetles > Prickly Tea-tree

POLLEN FACTS
Almost 90% of all flowering plants depend on animals to help pollinate them.

There are 10,000 different types of butterflies and moths in Australia!

Riddle me this!

I wear stripes of blue upon my bum,
In forests and meadows, you'll hear me hum.
I flit and buzz from bloom to bloom,
Collecting pollen, watch me zoom.

I'm not a beetle, or a butterfly in flight,
I visit flowers all day, not at night.
In your garden, you might see,
This small pollinator.
Can you guess me?

Bee-come a citizen scientist!

Take photos of us and upload them to the iNaturalist app. This helps nature-lovers, scientists and land managers learn more about us. It's easy and fun to use!

[inaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org)

Learn how to identify us and take part in the Australian Pollinator Count – the census for pollinators that happens every November.

[australianpollinatorweek.org.au](https://www.australianpollinatorweek.org.au)

Download all our Wild Families activity sheets
[vnpa.org.au/wild-families](https://www.vnpa.org.au/wild-families)





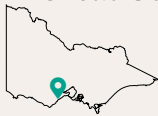
Explorer's Corner

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



HERE ARE FIVE PLACES TO VISIT FOR A WILDFLOWER WANDER. MAKE SURE YOU ALLOW FOR EXTRA TIME TO STOP AND ADMIRE EVERY FLOWER YOU FIND!

Great Otway National Park



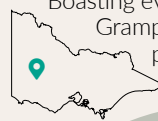
Heathland is always a great place to visit in Spring.

And the heathlands around Anglesea, part of the Great Otway National Park, are no exception. This spectacular area is home to a quarter of all plant species in Victoria!

Wander through the web of tracks close to town off Harvey Street. Or head out further into the heathland and explore the Yan Wurring Mirr 4 km loop.



Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park



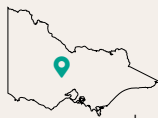
Boasting even more plants than Anglesea Heath, Grampians/Gariwerd protects a third of Victoria's plants. There are even 49 plants living there that can't be found anywhere else.

Head up to Chatauqua Peak from Halls Gap and loop back via Clematis Falls, or check out the Mount Stapylton Loop Walk.

If you're in Halls Gap, the Grampians Flora Botanic Garden is well worth a visit. It's full of local plants, a great way to learn what plants you spotted on your walk out in the park!



Grampians Thryptomene (*Thryptomene calycina*)



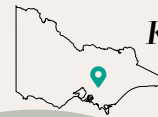
Wombat Forest

Wombat Forest is home to spectacular lillies, grevilleas and orchids. It's even home to plants that don't live anywhere else, like the Wombat Leafless Bossiaea.

There are plenty of fantastic walks to explore in Wombat Forest. You could start at Nolans Creek Picnic Ground and head for a long walk starting along Pumphouse Track or Lerderberg Track. Or check out the 9 km Lerderberg Heritage River Walk starting near Blackwood.



Wombat Leafless Bossiaea (*Bossiaea wombata*)



Kurth Kiln Regional Park

Closer to Melbourne you'll find Kurth Kiln Regional Park. It's home to delightful little spring treasures like sun orchids, pink bells and baeckea.

Explore the short but pretty walk to Shiprock Falls. Or head to the end of Ure Rd and wander through the network of tracks and their many lovely wildflowers.



Rosy Baeckea (*Baeckea ramosissima*)

Your local bushland reserve!

Last but certainly not least, spring is a great time to visit your local bushland reserve.

Even small urban reserves can be home to a surprising variety of spring flowers.

Wander through slowly, look closely and see how many you can spot.



Hyacinth Orchid (*Dipodium roseum*)

You can even bring your canine friend with you (on lead) for the adventure!

IMAGES: MEGHAN LINDSAY, GAYLE OSBORNE