

PARK *watch*

37° 50' 58.2" S, 144° 57' 3.4" E



VICTORIAN
NATIONAL PARKS
ASSOCIATION
Be part of nature

MARCH 2025 #299

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View online at vnpa.org.au/parkwatch



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Undaria pinnatifida at Kerferd Road Beach, Albert Park, Bunurong Country
KADE MILLS

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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.



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IMAGE: SANDY SCHELTEMA

From the President



VNPA PRESIDENT, DAVID NUGENT, WELCOMES YOU TO THE MARCH ISSUE OF PARK WATCH

I hope you had the chance to get out and enjoy nature this Summer! As we welcome the cooler days of Autumn, this packed issue of *Park Watch* explores the challenges and opportunities ahead for nature protection.

The pressure's on for the Allan Government to keep its promises and expand our parks estate. With opposition politicians pushing for the return of native forest logging, our forests face an uncertain future. Our 'forever forests' campaign shines a light on important unprotected areas.

Meanwhile, the long-promised central west parks remain unlegislated – when will we see action?

We take a deep dive into tackling *Undaria* in Port Phillip Bay and sit down with *Eat the Invaders* star Tony Armstrong to talk about the fight against invasive species through food.

We also shine a light on illegal activities threatening nature: from grassland destruction to unauthorised tracks in national parks to habitat destruction on private property. But there's plenty to be inspired by too! PhD candidate Ahalya Suresh explores regenerative tourism in blue carbon ecosystems, and Kate Carrillo shares how a Nature Stewards course transformed her painting.

Plus, we head out rockpool rambling and fungus spotting – perfect Autumn adventures. Let's keep working together for Victoria's natural places. Enjoy the issue! 🍄

Park Watch East Gippsland Quiz



- When was Errinundra National Park created?
 - 1988
 - 2010
 - 1954
 - 2018
- Jones Creek in East Gippsland is home to:
 - The southern-most Myrtle Beech trees in Australia
 - Endangered Jones Creek Crayfish
 - Mount Donna Buang Wingless Stoneflies
 - The largest patch of Warm Temperate Rainforest in Victoria
- Where is Combiobar State Forest?
 - South of Mallacoota
 - East of Snowy River National Park
 - Between Errinundra National Park and Cooperambra National Park
 - In western Victoria
- The Barn, Sooty, Powerful and Masked are all types of what?
 - Dances
 - Owls
 - Fungi
 - Frogs
- How many types of threatened grevilleas live in East Gippsland?
 - 0
 - 5
 - 13
 - 62
- What are the six major rivers that flow through East Gippsland?
 1. The Mitchell River
 2. The Snowy River
 3. The Campaspe River
 4. The Campaspe River
 5. The Campaspe River
 6. The Campaspe River
- Which of these bushwalks in East Gippsland is the longest?
 - The Wilderness Coast Walk
 - Errinundra Old Growth Walk
 - Genoa Peak
 - McKenzie River Rainforest Walk
- How many types of orchids live in East Gippsland?
 - Under 20
 - About 60
 - About 180
 - About 290
- What's the smallest national park in East Gippsland?
 - Errinundra National Park
 - Croajingolong National Park
 - Lind National Park
 - Alfred National Park
- True or false? The only type of rock wallaby in Victoria can be found in East Gippsland?
 - True
 - False

Answers on p. 40



↑ Errinundra Old Growth Walk ISAAC CARNE

Our parks under attack in a swarm of spin



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MATT RUCHEL, SAYS THE VICTORIAN

GOVERNMENT'S APPROACH TO PARKS AND PUBLIC LAND MANAGEMENT IS VEERING INTO DANGEROUS TERRITORY

VNPA is concerned that the Minister's actions appear more like creating a political cover and we remain deeply worried this is a Trojan horse for dismantling or delaying hard won nature protections.

Slashing funding, gutting expertise, and dodging long-standing commitments, all while spinning a narrative that defies reality. This is the new normal for parks in Victoria.

On the last sitting day of parliament for 2024, Environment Minister Steve Dimopoulos announced a wide-ranging review of Parks Victoria (PV). He also announced the departure of PV CEO Matthew Jackson '... by mutual agreement'. It's obvious Mr Jackson was pressured to leave.

Minister Dimopoulos said, 'It's clear that Parks Victoria's current operations need to be improved to meet community expectations'.

This comes on the back of severe budget cuts to PV. It's hard to see how major funding cuts, combined with an out-of-the-blue review meets community expectations.

Ironically, on the same day as this attack on PV, the annual report of the *National Parks Act* was tabled. It showed overall satisfaction index across all parks of 85.9 per cent, and satisfaction in park management of 80.3 per cent (see Fig. 1). This is a statistically significant increase from 78.8 per cent in 2021–22.



Fig. 1: Victorian parks satisfaction levels

Source: Parks Victoria Annual Report 2023–24

PV need to improve in some areas, particularly having the resources, skills and knowledge to look after our unique habitats and wildlife to a high standard. But dramatic budget cuts and the exodus of experienced rangers will only achieve the opposite.

Likewise, there's plenty of evidence that state forests are poorly managed, given they have traditionally been left in hands of destructive logging. VNPA is concerned that the Minister's actions appear more like creating a political cover and we remain deeply worried this is a Trojan horse for dismantling or delaying hard won nature protections.

Victorians love their parks!

It's clear the cloud of misinformation around national parks and their role in protection has influenced government agenda. The government likes to say things like 'Our focus is to bring more families to the bush and more jobs to the regions while still protecting our

National parks size vs visitors



State forests size vs visitors



Fig. 2: Size vs visitors for Victorian parks

environment' or 'We want as many Victorians as possible to enjoy the great outdoors', but the figures suggest otherwise.

The broader Victorian community (over 80 per cent) supports the idea of national parks (see *Park Watch*, Dec 2024). They also enjoy parks for peace and quiet or passive activities, and they vote with their feet.

In 2022–23, there were over 54 million visits to state and national parks (and probably more than double that if other assets like metropolitan parks or jetties managed by PV are included). By contrast, the 16 million visits annually to state forests equate to at least three times less, for roughly the same size area (see Fig. 2).

Many people visiting state forests find the behaviours there alarming: loud shooting parties, random 4WD hooning, illegal off-track dirt biking and chainsaws. It's a free for all.

continued overpage...



↑ Toolangi State Forest, Taungurung Country JUSTIN CALLY

Our parks under attack in a swarm of spin *continued...*

Policy frolic

The Victorian Government invested \$9 million in making camping free in national parks – basically replacing the amount that PV would have received in camping fees. While this sweetener looked good on the surface, the lack of fees led to a huge increase in ghost bookings (people not turning up to booked sites due to no financial incentive to cancel). This led to many campers missing out, while many popular campsites remained unused.

The globally recognised idea of national parks and protected areas is about conserving places for the future survival of wildlife and habitats, which we all depend on and appreciate. They're about managing recreational uses consistent with nature protection, not excluding them. They're part of our way of life and identity. And certainly a reason many international and national visitors come to Australia and Victoria.

Most Australian's love hanging out in the bush through passive activities like bushwalking, picnics, birdwatching and camping in peace and quiet. The debate around their protection has drifted into culture war territory, which is deflecting attention from their protection. National parks have been around for 150 years, they're hardly a new idea!

Parks and protected areas are at the core of efforts to protect nature and one of the few mechanisms that protect whole habitats and landscapes.

It seems the government is on a policy frolic, rejecting global and national commitments and agreements, and even their own environmental policies. All the while trying to tell the community it's for their own good. It begs the question, why is nature being deprioritised for the benefit of the few and noisy?

Fantasy games

The government has dropped its commitments for looking at new protected areas in the east of the state. It's so-called Great Outdoors Taskforce (GOT) seems to have arrived at a foregone conclusion. It appears

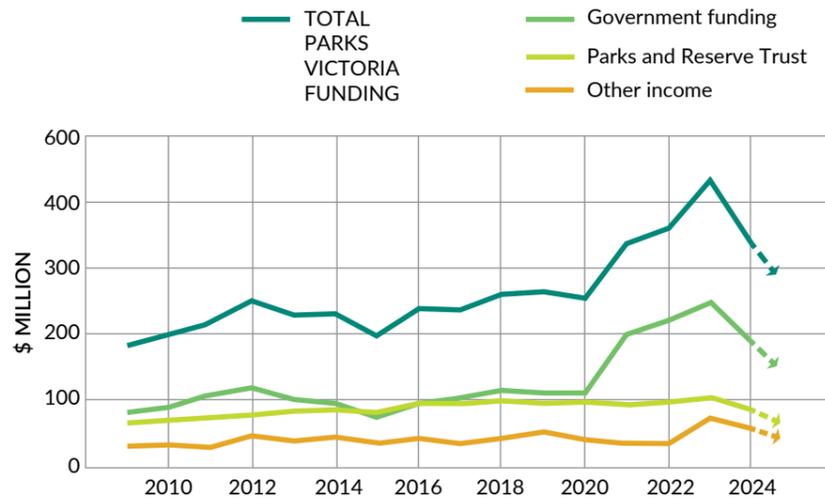


Fig. 3: Understanding Parks Victoria's budget and the latest cuts

to be a largely pointless process – as much theatrical fantasy as the other GOT, the *Game of Thrones*.

GOT will not be making any recommendations for large-scale changes to land tenure, such as national parks. All this really does is leave the door open for the return of native forest logging, if we get a change of government. Not only re-introducing a destructive industry, but wasting close to \$1.5 billion in industry transition funding.

The Allan Government also promised to legislate new central west parks by the end of 2024, but this legislation failed to materialise. The government reaffirmed in *The Age* on 7 February 2025 that legislation to create the two national parks would be introduced to parliament this year.

The debate around their protection has drifted into culture war territory, which is deflecting attention from their protection. National parks have been around for 150 years, they're hardly a new idea!

But with repeated delays it's no wonder many voters are losing trust in major parties and government as a whole.

VNPA will, of course, continue to push hard for this promise from 2021 of new central west parks to be delivered. We'll also defend our parks system and inspire people to stand up for the places they love. There's no doubt public land and park management in Victoria and Australia need more resources.

Current funding for PV is less than half a per cent of the state budget. It needs to be a minimum of at least one per cent per year. Cuts and sackings are not the answer.

At a national level the environment is also losing out. Much needed reforms to national environmental laws have been dropped. As a percentage of federal government spend, the environment received about 0.1 per cent in 2024. As with Victoria, national nature spending needs to be at least one per cent.

A recent report by the Biodiversity Council found subsidies with a medium to high negative impact on biodiversity was \$26.3 billion in 2023-24. That's over 50 times larger than \$475 million per annum the Federal Government has invested in biodiversity over the last decade.

continued opposite page...

Dramatic cuts to PV budget

Parks Victoria doesn't just manage national parks and conservation areas, it manages regional parks, metropolitan parks like Albert Park and piers and jetties in Western Port and Port Phillip, as well as many beaches and wetlands. It's stretched very thin.

PV has three major sources of funding which vary from year to year:

- **Government funding** (approx. 50–60 per cent of total). This funding stream is made up of core national/state park and reserve funding from government (between 30–45 per cent of total government funding) and capital or project funding which makes up the rest of government contributions.
- **The Parks and Reserve Trust** (approx. 20–30 per cent of total). This is collected via water bills in parts of Melbourne's metropolitan area but can be spent largely only in metropolitan and adjacent areas. The Parks and Reserve Trust also funds other things like the Royal Botanic Gardens and the Shrine of Remembrance.
- **Other income** (approx. 15–20 per cent of total). Some is from interest, but it is mostly fees from accommodation, camping, leases, licences, project firefighting refunds and other miscellaneous sources. It's expected that capital works projects may vary from time to time, such as responding to major weather events or the need to renew expensive infrastructure like jetties.

Parks Victoria has had dramatic cuts on all fronts. Core funding has been reduced by approximately \$6 million, and capital funding by approximately \$40 million. Allocations from the Park and Reserve Trust have been cut by approximately \$18 million, and fees from project firefighting reduced by approximately \$9 million (see Fig. 3). Like everybody else, government departments are not immune from the cost of living crisis and other costs inevitably rise. This includes substantial increases in insurance costs and other operational expenses. So, the cuts are doubly problematic. VNPA will continue to stick up for the places we all love and push for the care they deserve – because once they're lost, they're gone forever.

Protecting the thin green line



JORDAN CROOK,
PARKS AND NATURE
CAMPAIGNER,
CELEBRATES PARK
RANGERS IN THE FACE OF
GOVERNMENT CUTS

Victoria's park rangers are vital and amazing! It's a huge job looking after 18 per cent of the state and facilitating visits by over 55 million people a year and growing. All this while their budgets shrink and threats to ecosystems increase with invasive species and climate change.

At a time when habitats and wildlife need greater care, park rangers are critical workers. They care for and protect our national parks and natural areas while facilitating sustainable recreation and experiences.

Rangers are on the frontline of the extinction and climate crisis and are the thin green line between existence and extinction.

They're essential planetary health workers. Rangers play a crucial role in achieving global commitments on biodiversity, climate change mitigation and adaptation, preventing zoonotic diseases and meeting Sustainable Development Goals.

In Victoria, rangers also protect and manage thousands of Aboriginal and post-European cultural and heritage sites and around 70 per cent of Victoria's coastline.

The International Ranger Federation (IRF) recently released the inaugural *State of the Ranger* report. Designed to present a snapshot of the issues rangers face, it collated data and perspectives from rangers in the field and their conditions.

Rohit Singh, IRF Vice President, says an estimated 1.5 million new rangers will be required worldwide to meet the goal of protecting 30 per cent of our planet's land area by 2030.

These findings are in stark contrast to the actions of the Allan Government. They're planning further cuts to the resourcing of park rangers across Victoria at the cost of ranger numbers and their working conditions.

Cuts to park ranger numbers and resourcing will be a devastating blow to Victoria's national parks and conservation reserves. And to wildlife and habitats found nowhere else on earth.

The work of park rangers saves the state billions in avoidance of disease, mortality and lost productivity in the agricultural sector. Not to mention their efforts in water purification, flood mitigation, coastal protection and carbon sequestration.

Thank you to our rangers for their critical work in protecting our parks and wildlife and the many special places we all hold close to our hearts.

Our elected representatives need to look after the people caring for our wildlife and places we love, not cut their resources and numbers.



↑ Parks Victoria rangers at Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuary, Bunurong Country PARKS VICTORIA

Undermining nature in Chiltern-Mt Pilot

JORDAN CROOK,
PARKS AND NATURE
CAMPAIGNER, SAYS
THE ENVIRONMENT
MINISTER'S INTERVENTION
WITH ILLEGAL TRACKS LEFT
A NATIONAL PARK IN WORSE
SHAPE

When Parks Victoria rangers in Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park were alerted to kilometres of illegal tracks created by fossickers and off-road enthusiasts, they duly followed the law and closed the tracks. But a small number of loud users managed to convince the Environment Minister, Steve Dimopoulos, to intervene and force rangers to reopen the destructive illegal tracks.

The creation of illegal track networks through natural areas by mountain bikes, trail bikes and 4WDs is a growing issue across many national parks and reserves. Over 50 km of tracks have been created in Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park, more than 30 km in Dandenong Ranges National Park and over 600 km in the Great Otway National Park and Otway Forest Park.

The cumulative impact on nature is severe. The tracks don't seem overly destructive to those creating and using them. But they impact wildlife and water quality. They cause habitat destruction, soil erosion and facilitate the spread of invasive species. These impacts accumulate to degrade the parks and add pressure to wildlife in places where they should be safe.

The closure of illegally created tracks is a standard management action for park rangers. It protects wildlife and habitats, discourages illegal and damaging behaviour, maintains compliance with laws, and is in line with park management plans.

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

Fossicking at Reedy Creek

The illegal track network around Reedy Creek in the Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park has expanded over the last decade. A vast area of native habitat has been cleared within the park so vehicles can directly access the river or camp alongside the creek edge. The tracks are leading to issues with erosion, sedimentation and pollution of the creek, impacting local wildlife like Platypuses.

The park's management plan outlines the importance of Reedy Creek as a hot spot for large old trees (rare in Box-Ironbark ecosystems), a refuge for wildlife and an important site of Aboriginal heritage values.

In September 2024, park rangers closed and revegetated the illegal tracks. However, a small group took to social media to complain about the closure. These complaints were reported by local media. The following week, the Environment Minister ordered the illegal tracks reopened via social media.

This is an insult to the public servants who were upholding state and federal laws by closing the illegal tracks, and the volunteers who spend countless hours caring for the park. And of course, it's hugely detrimental to wildlife, habitats and river health.



↑ Damage caused by cars driven into Reedy Creek, Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park JORDAN CROOK

This is an insult to the public servants who were upholding state and federal laws by closing the illegal tracks, and the volunteers who spend countless hours caring for the park.

No, Minister!

To have a Minister intervene to such an extent, to approve illegal activities in a national park via social media, with no public consultation or due process, is extraordinary. It highlights the conflict in the Minister's portfolios of Environment vs Outdoor Recreation. And it shows a terrible lack of care for his staff, and for the parks he's been entrusted to protect for current and future generations.

By December 2024, Parks Victoria had begun reopening the illegal track network as ordered by the Minister.

In late December, I went with the Friends of Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park to inspect the closure of the

continued opposite page...



↑ Erosion cause by illegal track construction, Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park, Yorta Yorta Country JORDAN CROOK

illegal track networks. I've seen a lot of damaging impacts on parks, but these tracks were some of the worst I've ever seen.

The tracks run right up into the creek, causing erosion. They lead to massive, cleared areas where people have cut down trees and destroyed other native plants, set up camps and built campfires.

These illegal tracks must be kept closed and visitors educated on the impact these networks have on water quality, wildlife and other park values.

Ordering them to be reopened doesn't just threaten this park. It threatens all national parks and conservation reserves across the state, by encouraging, and even condoning damaging illegal behaviour.

Box-Ironbark beauty

Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park is a truly special place, home to the highest number of mammals, birds and reptiles of any Box-Ironbark site in Victoria. It's home to the largest protected population of Black Cypress-pine (*Callitris endlicheri*) in Victoria and many other wildflowers, including orchids endemic to the park.

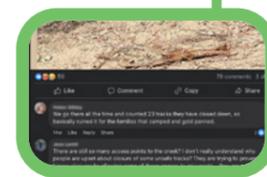
It's a truly remarkable place, cared for by the park rangers and Friends of Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park. An absolute living treasure of our national parks estate that deserves to be managed with care, not with recklessness.

These illegal tracks must be kept closed and visitors educated on the impact these networks have on water quality, wildlife and other park values.

Tell the Minister to reinstate the park rangers' closure notice
vnpa.org.au/action-illegal-track-closure



Sept/Oct 2024
Parks Victoria closes and revegetates illegal track network. Plans a more structured approach to camping.



1-3 Nov 2024
Prospectors complain about track closures on social media.



13-14 Nov 2024
Stories appear in regional media (Weekly Times and WIN Media).



14 Nov 2024
Via social media, Environment Minister Steve Dimopoulos assures users the illegal tracks will remain open.



28 Nov 2024
Minister announces review of Parks Victoria. CEO steps down.

Burnt and battered, but not beaten



BEN GILL, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER, SAYS RECENT FIRES HIGHLIGHT THE NEED FOR PARKS PROTECTION

Western Victoria has been hit by wave after wave of bushfires in recent years, with over 168,000 hectares lost to flames. The Grampians/Gariwerd have barely had time to recover before being scorched again. Just a year ago, 98 per cent of Mount Cole burned intensely, and large sections of Little Desert National Park have been obliterated.

Lightning strikes, careless campers, arson – whatever the cause, Victoria is one of the most fire-prone places on Earth. In the west, national parks are the last large patches of native forest, islands in a sea of farmland. These fires have gutted habitats, leaving behind a patchwork of scorched landscapes struggling to recover. But recover they will – especially if resources are directed toward controlling key threats like feral cats, foxes, and deer.

Central west still waiting

Amidst so much habitat loss, the unburnt forests of Wombat, Wellsford, and Cobaw are more critical than ever, providing essential refuges for wildlife. The Victorian Government promised to legislate new national parks in the central west years ago. But delays continue, leaving these forests vulnerable.

In Wombat Forest, an outlier population of Greater Gliders hangs on, isolated from their larger eastern range. Mountain Skinks and Brush-tailed Phascogales cling to what remains of their habitat. Over in Cobaw, an island refuge in a cleared farming landscape, Powerful Owls and Brush-tailed Phascogales persist in fragmented forest.

Meanwhile, in Enfield, the rare Enfield Grevillea fights for survival. The Mt Cole Grevillea is even more precarious with 98 per cent of its range burned in the fires. Though an impressive flush of seedlings has emerged, no adult

plants have yet been found resprouting from lignotubers. These plants take five years to mature before they can seed, and reduced rainfall underscores their vulnerability.

A recovery program led by the Arthur Rylah Institute and the Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne is underway, but long-term support is critical.

The government knows these forests matter. Independent studies confirmed their importance in 2019. A formal commitment was made in 2021. Yet here we are in 2025, and nothing has been done. Meanwhile, these forests remain at risk from salvage logging, fragmentation, and further damage. Protecting them now is the only way to give biodiversity a fighting chance while fire-hit landscapes recover.

People love parks!

A Monash University survey found that 72 per cent of Australians support new national parks – a sentiment echoed in VNPA polling.

Yet, the central west forests have been in limbo for over five years. The government's own science supports their protection. But with every year of inaction, they face increasing threats – whether from salvage logging, land clearing, or the next major fire season. The Allan Government Government said legislation to create the central west national parks will be introduced to parliament this year. We must make sure that promise is delivered.

This isn't just about conservation – it's about keeping a promise. It's about making sure future generations inherit a Victoria where nature is valued, where forests continue to provide vital ecological services, and where real action is taken on climate change. Cuts



↑ Mt Cole two months after being hit by bushfire in 2024 BEN GILL

to parks agencies don't help, and we need more resources, not less.

Serious fire impacts

The Grampians/Gariwerd fires burnt more than 76,000 hectares. Ecologists have said recovery could take decades, with important wildlife like the Critically Endangered Brush-tailed Rock-wallabies, Long-nosed Potoroos and other small mammals badly impacted.

The burns weren't uniformly harsh, and less-burnt pockets now provide critical habitat. Park managers, ecologists and wildlife carers are assisting recovery with emergency feeding and temporary shelters.

Fears for Brush-tailed Rock-wallabies were eased when remote cameras spotted a mother and joey feeding on carrots dropped as part of emergency feeding operations – including a trial using a specialised drone to deliver food.

The Little Desert National Park fires burnt more than 90,000 ha, mostly in the eastern block of the park, while

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Spotlight on Nature with Ben Gill



Yarra Gum *Eucalyptus yarraensis*

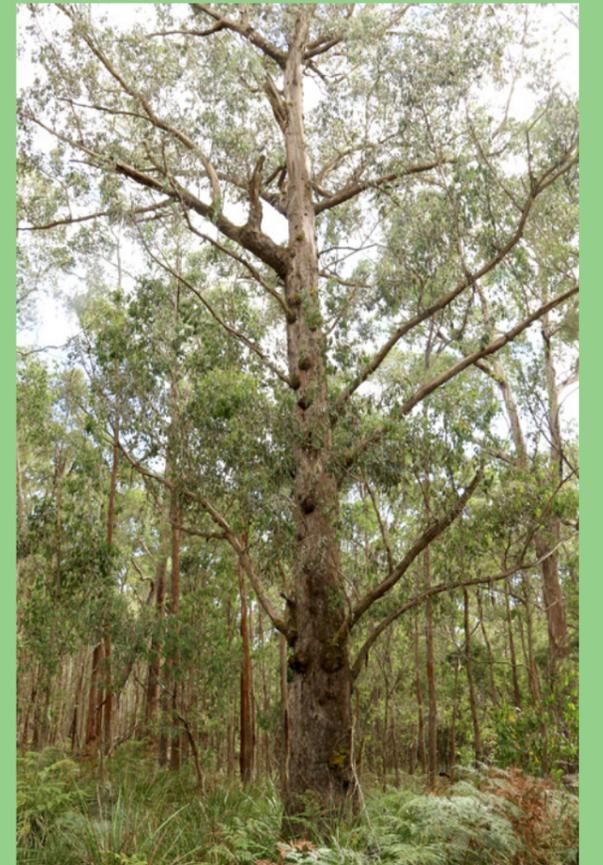
Nestled along Victoria's riverbanks and floodplains, Yarra Gums (*Eucalyptus yarraensis*) stand as quiet sentinels of the wetlands.

These mid-sized eucalypts, typically reaching 15–25 metres in height, are often mistaken for their more famous relatives, River Red Gums (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*). However, they can be distinguished by their patchy, smooth grey bark that peels away to reveal pale cream or pinkish hues beneath. Their leaves are long and narrow, a muted green with a slightly glossy sheen. Their clusters of white flowers bloom in Spring and Summer, attracting a host of pollinators.

Yarra Gums play a crucial role in sustaining Riparian ecosystems. Their roots stabilise soil along waterways, helping to reduce erosion and slow floodwaters. Their canopies provide habitat for native wildlife, including Sacred Kingfishers and threatened Grey-headed Flying Foxes. Their nectar-rich flowers support pollinators like native bees and butterflies, and their fallen branches and leaves contribute to soil health.

Despite their ecological importance, Yarra Gums face increasing threats. Urban expansion, altered water flows, repeat bushfires and invasive species are shrinking their habitat. These trees rely on periodic flooding to regenerate, yet with increasing wetland drainage and climate-driven droughts, many stands are struggling to persist.

Protecting Yarra Gums means safeguarding Victoria's floodplains and soaks. Restoring natural water flows, preventing land clearing, and strengthening riparian protections are critical steps. Next time you walk along



↑ Yarra Gum BEN GILL

a river track, look for their peeling bark, narrow leaves, and delicate blossoms. These floodplain guardians are a living testament to the intricate balance between land and water – one well worth preserving. 🌿

Ben Gill, Nature Conservation Campaigner

the west was spared. Sadly, the much-loved Little Desert Lodge was lost.

Strike now against invasives

While visitor access and facilities can be replaced, action against invasive species is time-critical. The control of predators like cats and foxes is crucially important post-fire to protect small mammals, while control of deer and goats will reduce grazing pressure on plants.

Now is the time to act. Fire-affected areas have an open canopy for only a short period, creating an ideal

opportunity for aerial shooting. The West Victoria Deer Control Plan 2023-2028 prescribes local elimination of deer, and now is the time to bring forward these plans. Victoria's western landscapes have been burnt and battered, but they're not beaten. Nature will recover, but only if we give it the support it needs.

The fires have made the case for stronger protections clearer than ever. The Allan Government must deliver on its commitment to legislate new national parks in the central west. Victoria's forests and wildlife can't afford to wait any longer. 🌿

Ask the Premier why nature is still waiting!
vnpa.org.au/action-natureiswaiting



Discover a bay of wonder

SHANNON HURLEY, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER, DIVES INTO THE DISCOVERY BAY MARINE NATIONAL PARK AND ITS MONITORING PROGRAM

Discovery Bay Marine National Park is Victoria's gateway to the Great Australian Bight and the Southern Ocean, framed by Cape Bridgewater's cliffs to the south and Discovery Bay's sand dunes to the north. The park's coastline, formed by ancient volcanic lava, is part of the largest coastal basalt formation in western Victoria. It's subject to one of the state's highest wave energy environments.

The vibrant sea life here thrives thanks to the cold, nutrient-packed waters of the Bonney Upwelling, brought to the surface by summer winds and currents. This feast of nutrients sparks a bloom of tiny plants and animals, attracting fish, whales, penguins, and a colourful array of seafloor life – like swaying sea fans, lush mosses, colourful sponge gardens, and curious sea-squirts.

Monitoring is crucial in the park due to threats like illegal fishing, disease, climate change, and the spread of marine pests from nearby harbours. Warming waters have caused declines in some macroalgae, though the cooler waters may provide some refuge. Monitoring is essential to track the park's health and determine if management interventions are needed.

Monitoring a park 14 to 75 metres deep is not without its challenges. Luckily, the experienced researchers at Deakin University have it covered. They've deployed high tech underwater vehicles and baited video stations to record what fish and habitat types lie beneath. The monitoring revealed:

- **Rock lobsters are going strong.** A higher abundance (three times in fact!) and larger-sized Southern Rock Lobsters within the park, compared to outside. This reiterates the importance of marine national parks to protect important reef wildlife.
- **Diverse fish call the park home.** Including Scad, Redbait, Jackass Morwong and Rosy Wrasse.
- **Threatened sharks and rays sighted.** Namely, Critically Endangered School Sharks, Vulnerable Melbourne Skates, protected Blue Groper and Elephantfish.
- **More fish in the park.** Richness increased both within and outside the park, but abundance increased only inside the park. This indicates the long-term benefits of protection.

Overall, Discovery Bay's ecosystem remains strong, serving as a key climate hotspot for studying the effects of climate change on marine life. However, like any marine environment, monitoring is often hindered by weather conditions. Ongoing monitoring is crucial to better understand how climate change impacts wildlife movement, in an area that remains poorly understood along Victoria's coastline.



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



↑ Marine life in Discovery Bay Marine National Park, Gunditjmara Country PARKS VICTORIA VIDEO

Western Port news

VRET at Port of Hastings

Work has begun on the first phase of the environmental assessment process for Victoria's renewable energy terminal (VRET) at the Port of Hastings.

VNPA commissioned Dr Matt Edmunds from Australian Marine Ecology to review the adequacy of the draft scoping requirements. One key issue raised was the importance of clearly communicating the reasons behind the choice of Port of Hastings for the renewable energy terminal, as well as exploring alternative project locations and designs.

Local communities are questioning why this internationally protected wetland area was selected. It's worth noting that Geelong Ports could be a viable option.

VNPA is part of the Community Reference Group which will provide a platform for feedback on VRET planning, construction and operation.

Western Port Bay Framework

Our advocacy is ongoing for the Western Port Bay Framework. After hosting two successful webinars last year, we have one more event in March, made possible by a Coastcare grant and our collaboration with the Western Port Biosphere.

Additionally, we ran a boat trip to highlight the beauty of this vital marine wetland to local decision-makers and influencers. This initiative is supported by a generous Patagonia grant.

Shannon Hurley, Nature Conservation Campaigner

Salty Science with Kade Mills



Evan's Sea Spider *Anoplodactylus evansi*

It might look like a spider, scuttle like a spider, and... well, maybe not quack like a spider – but sea spiders aren't just underwater versions of their land-loving cousins. Sure, they've got eight legs and belong to the arthropod club (the largest animal phylum, named after their jointed legs – arthron meaning 'joint' and podos meaning 'leg'). But that's where the family resemblance ends. Sea spiders have been doing their own thing, evolution-wise, for at least 500 million years. Talk about a long-distance relative!

Here in Victoria, we've got a few species of sea spiders, but none get me as pumped as spotting an Evan's. Half of my excitement is because they're rare to find, and the other half? Well... I really want to witness one slurp on a sea slug. Morbid? Maybe. But watching any kind of predation in action is pretty cool.

Despite their tiny size (a mere 1 cm body with a 3 cm leg span), these little folks can feed on prey six times their size. How? They use their front-leg claws to grab hold of their victim, then whip out their proboscis to slurp up the internal soup. Delicious, right? They're known to dine on at least 13 different types of sea



↑ Evan's Sea Spider NICK.SHAW/INATURALIST

slugs, but their favourite seems to be the sea hare *Aplysia parvula*.

So, if you ever spot one of these elusive hunters, do me a favour – let out a little squeal of excitement (optional but encouraged) and follow it! I'd love to see a photo of anything besides another sea slug munching on a sea slug... but hey, that's a salty science story for another day.

Fun Fact: Evan's Sea Spider has neither lungs nor a bum! Instead, they diffuse gases and wastes through their cuticle (skin), especially through their legs.

Kade Mills is ReefWatch Coordinator

Cuts to fisheries officers could spell disaster for marine life

Proposed cuts to the Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA) will leave the state's marine parks and wildlife virtually unprotected and vulnerable to widespread illegal fishing.

The VFA restructure would see 73 fisheries officers replaced with just 36 engagement officers across the state, severely compromising Victoria's ability to protect its marine life and enforce fishing regulations.

This will leave Victoria's marine national parks and sanctuaries wide open to illegal fishing, spelling disaster for our precious marine ecosystems. With marine parks already experiencing a 56 per cent non-compliance rate, it's incomprehensible that the government would slash the number of officers responsible for protecting these areas.

These officers are our eyes and ears on the water, protecting vulnerable wildlife like Giant Spider Crabs during their shallow water migrations, Abalone in our intertidal zones, and Snapper in our bays. Without adequate enforcement, marine wildlife faces devastating risks from illegal and unregulated fishing.

This is a big concern for conservation. It's also a safety concern. With minimal personnel out there, both our marine environment and those who use it are at risk.

We need more enforcement, not less. The government must at least reverse these cuts if it's serious about protecting Victoria's precious wildlife and marine areas.

Shannon Hurley, Nature Conservation Campaigner

Call on the government to reverse these VFA cuts and champion marine protection
vnpa.org.au/action-stop-cuts-to-marine-protection



↑ Giant Spider Crabs JOHN GASKELL

Protection failures lead to grassland destruction

ADRIAN MARSHALL
FACILITATOR, GRASSY
PLAINS NETWORK,
REPORTS ON THE
FAILURE OF GOVERNMENTS
TO PREVENT MORE
GRASSLAND DESTRUCTION

Another irreplaceable grassland has been bulldozed, with local, state and federal authorities all failing to protect it despite knowing the destruction was happening.

The privately owned land at Mt Cottrell in Melbourne's west was grassland intended to become part of the long-promised 15,000 hectare Western Grassland Reserve (WGR).

The WGR is part of the Melbourne Strategic Assessment (MSA), a program put in place in 2010 to protect our last native grasslands.

But developers ignore the law and clear grasslands, hoping their profit-at-any-cost habitat destruction can create a path to future riches. It's a practice we're sadly all too familiar with.

Free pass from authorities

More galling is when our elected officials stand by and let it happen!

We are told Melton Council chose not to order work to stop despite knowing the clearing was ongoing. Their legal



↑ Extent of the destruction at the property
ADRIAN MARSHALL

advice apparently suggested it was 'too risky'.

And the MSA has no compliance powers in cases like this. The federal government also knew the destruction was happening and did not act.

Clearing this grassland destroyed a Critically Endangered ecosystem, home to threatened wildlife. It also robs future residents in Melbourne's west of a beautiful public reserve to connect with nature.

Our elected representatives need to stop this wanton destruction of what precious few grasslands survive.

We need an overhaul of how compliance with environmental law is enforced. And we need the government to commit to protecting replacement grassland in compensation for what was destroyed as they looked on. 🌿



↑ Drone footage of illegal clearing at the Mt Cottrell property VNP



'Win' no deterrent at moonscaped Conservation Area 9

A landowner who destroyed a Critically Endangered grassland has got away with a slap on the wrist.

In 2022, Conservation Area 9 was totally destroyed – cleared and smothered in asbestos-contaminated fill. This biodiversity hotspot was promised protection as part of the Melbourne Strategic Assessment. It was compensation for allowing developers to clear native vegetation across the new urban growth corridors.

After pleading guilty, the landowner and his company were fined \$170,000, plus \$90,000 costs. But they escaped criminal conviction.

The prosecution considered it a win, but in reality it highlights Victoria's toothless environmental laws.

The sentence fails as a deterrent. If the landowner ever succeeds in developing the land, his profits will likely far exceed even the maximum penalty for these breaches of Victoria's *Planning and Environment Act*, which is just over \$1 million.

Last year, the contractor who carried out the works was convicted and fined \$150,000 and \$60,000 costs.

The legal fight now moves to federal authorities prosecuting the landowner under the EPBC Act. Penalties can be much higher.

Compensation should include the landowner paying offsets for clearing 19 hectares of Natural Temperate Grassland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain.

We need a replacement grassland to be protected within Melbourne's urban growth boundary. Saving Solomon Heights, Broadcast Australia or Ajax Road Grasslands would be a good step towards justice. 🌿

Adrian Marshall, Facilitator, Grassy Plains Network

Plant Blindness with Blake Nisbet

Plant Blindness is the inability to notice plants in everyday life, to recognise their importance, and a belief they are inferior to animals



Colquhoun Grevillea *Grevillea celata*

There are 61 species of grevillea native to Victoria, but to see them in the wild you often need to be extremely selective with your explorations. They exhibit extreme levels of endemism, meaning they're often restricted to very small geographic ranges and habitat requirements.

The Colquhoun Grevillea are a prime example. Its population of up to 1,500 plants is restricted to a tiny range of Dry Sclerophyll Forests north of Lakes Entrance in Gunaikurnai Country. Its range is about 11 km in length, entirely within state forests. This includes unburnt refuges from the 2019–20 bushfires.

It forms an erect root-suckering shrub with stunning red and yellow flowers which appear from July to February. The flowers produce copious nectar, and are thought to be pollinated by both birds and insects. It's likely that ants also play an important role in the collection and dispersal of their seeds.

The scientific name stems from the Latin *celatus*, meaning something hidden or concealed within. This is a reference to the previous taxonomic confusion with the closely related Mountain Grevillea (*Grevillea alpina*) and Golden Grevillea (*Grevillea chrysophaea*). It's thought the Colquhoun Grevillea is a relatively recent and partially stabilised product of hybridisation between



↑ Colquhoun Grevillea STAN WAWRZYCZEK

these two plants. It has since become geographically isolated from both.

Grevilleas face many threats including damage caused by creation and maintenance of fuel breaks, inappropriate fire regimes, introduced herbivores, illegal firewood collection and off-road driving. It's listed as threatened with extinction under state and federal nature laws and is considered Critically Endangered in Victoria.

All known populations of Colquhoun Grevilleas occur within state forests which fall outside of Victoria's protected area network. This was highlighted as a major flaw and concern when the plant was first described in 1995 and remains a key issue that needs to be addressed by government. 🌿

Progress on Alps protection

Tucked away in a project status update in late 2024 was a big win. For the Victorian Alps, for equitable access to public lands and all those who have campaigned long and hard to protect Victoria's high country.

The glamping huts that Parks Victoria (PV) proposed as part of the deeply unpopular Falls to Hotham development have been shelved, for now. PV's own documents say the project won't include all 80 overnight accommodation huts and infrastructure as part of the construction, but they do remain in the master plan.

There will now only be one communal non-sleeping shelter at High Knob

and a new toilet block, but also tent platforms where there weren't any and hardening of existing tracks.

PV's consultation report found that:

There were high levels of concern raised from participants about the project. These concerns related to potential impacts on the environment, the project not aligning with the purpose of national parks, over visitation, concerns about the community consultation process, the potential cost to stay in the huts.

Such developments are deeply unpopular. Some 78 per cent of Australians reject the commercialisation of our parks and protected areas.

Wins like this don't happen by accident. They happen due to people speaking up for nature, parks and protected areas. So, thank you if you sent in letters, submissions or spoke to your local MPs about this disastrous idea! Special mention must go to the late and great Phil Ingamells and Dr Michael Feller who worked long and hard for protecting the integrity of the Victorian Alps.

VNPA is still concerned the glamping huts remain in the master plan and could be revived at the signing of a cheque. We've requested PV amend the plan to remove the huts entirely.

For now, Victoria's precious high country Snow Gums and Alpine bogs can breathe a sigh of relief. We'll continue as a community to advocate for a more ecological and equitable approach to development and walking trails across the Alps. 🌿

Unwanted Visitors

with Feral Beryl 

Feral cats

It's estimated that feral cats (*Felis catus*) kill millions of native animals in Australia every night (see 'Feral feast', p. 28). The Australian Government Threat Abatement Plan defines feral cats as 'those that live and reproduce in the wild (e.g. forests, woodlands, grasslands, deserts) and survive by hunting or scavenging; none of their needs are satisfied intentionally by humans.'

Who invited them?

Multiple introductions of cats occurred around Australia beginning in the 17th century, increasing following the arrival of European settlers.

Why they're unwanted

Australian wildlife did not evolve behaviours to avoid predation by cats. Small and medium-sized animals are most vulnerable – particularly where vegetation has been disturbed. Cats predate birds, reptiles, mammals, amphibians and invertebrates and will kill more prey than required to sustain themselves. Cats are established across all of Australia including many islands, from Tasmania to the Tiwi Islands. They're only absent where there has been specific effort to eradicate populations on islands or within fenced enclosures.

Domestic cats that are not contained can readily transition into the unowned/feral population.

Cats have contributed to the extinction of animals as well as failure of threatened wildlife reintroduction programs. Diseases and parasites carried by cats further contribute to declines in wildlife populations and cause economic losses to agriculture.



↑ Feral cat with a Skink, French Island National Park
MICHAEL JOHNSTON & JULIE TREZISE

Evicting overstaying guests

Predation by feral cats is listed as a key threatening process. In Victoria, feral cats were declared as pests in 2018 but this has done little to reduce the pressure on wildlife populations given the constraints applied to the use of management tools.

Evidence of cats

While feral cats may not be regularly seen, their footprints, scats and kill sites can be more obvious. Unlike domestic animals, feral cats do not typically bury their scats. They're used as territorial markers and are commonly placed in prominent landscape features.

You can record the presence of feral cats with the iNaturalist app, Victorian Biodiversity Atlas or the FeralScan app to help land managers monitor their movements. 🐾



↑ Feral cat with a Mallee Fowl DBCA



↑ Feral cat with a Brush-tailed Phascogale MARIKA MAXWELL

Nudi spotto

The Sea Slug Census draws people of all kinds to the shore, inviting them to observe, reflect, and explore a miniature marine world filled with stars, worms, algae – and of course, plenty of slugs!

During the January census, local Phillip Island/Millwoll artist Zev Landes joined in, using his talent and technology to sketch some of the slugs while offering a fresh perspective on my work. His cartoon (left) perfectly captures how I spend most of my time during Sea Slug Census events!

The next census is 4-13 April with a public event on Monday 7 April (during school holidays). 🐌

Kade Mills, ReefWatch Coordinator



CARTOON BY ZEV LANDES

Glad tidings Nature news to bring a smile to your face

Perched for a comeback

In January, the Olive Perchlet (*Ambassis agassizii*) was returned to the wild – reversing its extinction in Victoria. This tiny fish, just 5 cm long, was last seen in 1929 and officially declared extinct in the state in the 1980s. Now, thanks to a dedicated conservation effort, it's making a long-awaited return to wetlands and rivers.

North Central Catchment Management Authority released 200 Olive Perchlet into Cameron's Creek in Gunbower National Park, on Tati Tati Country. 'Now that we know Olive Perchlet thrive in surrogate wetlands and we have a backup population, we can target more wild sites for releases,' said Program Manager Shenandoah Bruce.

A vital part of wetland ecosystems, Olive Perchlets help control smaller aquatic pests and provide food for waterbirds. If we lose these small-bodied animals, it has



↑ NICMA

major consequences for the entire food web. Ecologist Damien Cook is calling for more projects like this to restore wetlands and strengthen rural communities against climate change. 😊

Read more at abc.net.au/news/2025-01-19/rare-fish-olive-perchlet-once-extinct-in-victoria-makes-comeback/104825572

Swampies' island getaway

Healthy colonies of Swamp Antechinus (*Antechinus minimus maritimus*) are thriving on islands off Wilsons Promontory, offering hope for this vulnerable animal.

A team of 11 scientists and rangers from Parks Victoria and Zoos Victoria recently spent four days monitoring these isolated populations. Their findings confirm that the Prom continues to serve as a crucial refuge for wildlife.

'Documenting these animals is a powerful sign,' said Dr Mark Norman. 'It highlights the Prom's role as an ark, offering safe harbour for vulnerable species as the climate changes.' 😊 Read more at parks.vic.gov.au/media-releases/2024/12/21/05/17/windswept-island-paradise-for-rare-sex-crazed-marsupial



↑ Swamp Antechinus CRAIG BOASE

Discovering the forest's past & future



VNPA ACTIVITIES LEADER, **DARREN MCCLELLAND**, TOOK A GROUP OF NATURE ENTHUSIASTS ON THE STUNNING LERDERDERG RIVER HERITAGE WALK

In October last year, 15 walkers met at the Garden of St Erth's cafe in Blackwood after a lovely bushwalk along the Lerderderg River Heritage Walk. Over coffee and delicious scones they heard from VNPA Nature Conservation Campaigner, Ben Gill, about the future Wombat-Lerderderg National Park. As a member of Wombat Forestcare, I thought it important to provide an opportunity to experience the forest but also understand why VNPA's campaigning is so important.

Ben explained the impact on the Wombat Forest of habitat logging and other activities by Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMV). This highlighted why VNPA encourages everyone to keep the pressure on the Victorian Government to legislate the promised Wombat-Lerderderg National Park by writing to the Minister for the Environment and other MPs.

As I was about to take the group on the Lerderderg River Heritage Walk, Ben asked them to contemplate the impact on the walk's steep gullies if FFMV was allowed to continue. Its activities cause significant erosion and impact on wildlife habitat.

'Preventing habitat logging in the future Wombat-Lerderderg National Park is essential to allow the forest to regenerate naturally, making sure



↑ On the Lerderderg Heritage River Walk DARREN MCCLELLAND

critical habitat for threatened wildlife like the Greater Glider and Powerful Owl is restored and protected,' explained Ben. 'Logging disrupts ecosystem recovery, exacerbates biodiversity loss, and undermines the park's role as a climate refuge for vulnerable wildlife.'

The 9 km Lerderderg River Heritage Walk follows two water races adjacent to the Lerderderg River, passing

through wet forest and ferny gullies and under Blackwoods and eucalypts. The water races were dug by hand to direct water both to and from gold mining areas. At the halfway point, it takes some imagination to picture the Crown Dam that supplied water to a mine at the Simmons Reef Goldfield.

The feedback from the group was very positive and most importantly, the weather was sensational! 🌿

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- 🌱 BECOME A SEEDLING CARETAKER
- 🌱 GET INVOLVED TODAY!



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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.

Where we went in Summer



ALL THE FUN ACTIVITIES WE DID DURING THE HOT SUMMER MONTHS



Bushwalkers enjoyed meandering along the beach and past wetlands on the Mornington Peninsula.



Marine citizen scientists snorkelled at Williamstown, Portsea and Kitty Miller Bay to count fish for the Great Victorian Fish Count.



Grassy meadow enthusiasts learnt all about seasonal herbaceous wetlands and the future of grasslands at Grassy Plains Network monthly meetings.



Citizen scientists surveyed threatened wildlife in the soon-to-be Wombat-Lerderderg National Park and the Central Highlands.



Slug lovers searched for sea slugs under the San Remo Bridge.



↑ Pre-dive instructions at the ReefWatch and NextGen Nature event at Crystals Steps in Williamstown, December 2024 NICOLE MERTENS



Mt Donna Buang LONG ZHENG

A snapshot of our Autumn activities calendar

- 🌳 Picnic for forests at Mt Donna Buang**
Sunday 23 March
Bring a picnic lunch and hear the latest news about our campaign to protect Victoria's forests. There'll also be short walks with local experts.
- 🏕️ Overnight hike - Mt Cole**
Saturday 29 March
Enjoy the views and get into nature on this 21 km overnight walk in the soon-to-be Mt Buangor National Park.
- 🐌 Sea Slug Census**
11:30 am & 1pm on Mon 7 April
Join us as we take rockpooling to the next level searching for sea slugs under San Remo Bridge. You'll also see Hermit Crabs, Brittle Stars and Sea Spiders!
- 🦋 Citizen science trips**
Help us survey for threatened wildlife with wildlife cameras, spotlighting surveys and audio recorders:
Life After Fire - Mt Cole
Thursday 10 April
Thursday 8 May
Great Forest Guardians
Saturday 5 April
Saturday 3 May
Spotlight on Wombat Forest
Thursday 15 April
Friday 16 May

Join our Autumn activities!



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

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

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

Discover more at
vnpa.org.au/activities





← Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo tattoo FREDERICK BAIN
 ↑ Nunniong State Forest LISA ROBERTS
 ← Cool Temperate Rainforest near the Ada Tree MEGHAN LINDSAY
 ↓ Rubicon State Forest BLAKE NISBET



Keeping the promise of protection



WITH A STATE ELECTION DUE NEXT YEAR AND SOME OPPOSITION POLITICIANS ADVOCATING FOR A RETURN TO LOGGING, THE FUTURE OF OUR FORESTS HANGS IN THE BALANCE SAYS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, **MATT RUCHEL**

A year ago, we celebrated a groundbreaking pledge by the state government – the largest forest reserve expansion in Victoria’s history. Following the end of native forest logging, this commitment was a beacon of hope. Our breathtaking forests and diverse wildlife were set to be protected for generations to come. But that promise is now at risk. Contradictory government actions and statements have cast doubt on whether these vital protections will ever materialise. Victoria’s forests are more than just trees. They’re living ecosystems, home to threatened wildlife and offer people a peaceful retreat into nature.

The Great Outdoors Taskforce was established to guide the creation of new protected areas. Its directive was clear: evaluate and recommend which forests should become national parks. Yet, in a concerning reversal, the taskforce has now stated it ‘will not be making any recommendation for large-scale changes to land tenure.’ This raises serious concerns that the Allan Government is backtracking on its promise.

Key areas at risk

The forests under discussion are a stunning mix of lush rainforests, towering eucalypts, and serene wetlands.

Like Brown Mountain in East Gippsland: a spectacular landscape of ancient ferns and towering eucalypts, home to rare wildlife like Greater Gliders and Sooty Owls. This area should be added to Errinundra National Park for lasting protection. Or Nunniong Plateau, a vital but vulnerable landscape of Alpine Ash forests and delicate sphagnum bogs. Without protection, threats like cattle grazing and feral horses could degrade these fragile habitats, impacting wildlife like Eastern Pygmy Possums and Spot-tailed Quolls. It should be included in an extension of the Alpine National Park.

Delays, secrecy and inaction

The Victorian Government also commissioned an Eminent Person’s Panel to assess forest protections in

the Central Highlands. That report, submitted last year, remains hidden from public view – while damaging activities continue.

Meanwhile, the long-promised Wombat-Lerderderg and Mt Buangor national parks, announced in 2021, have yet to be legislated.

This pattern of delay and secrecy threatens to undo years of conservation progress. Every moment lost increases the risk that shifting political winds could allow habitat destruction to resume under a future government.

The time to act is now

VNPA is calling on the government to fulfil its commitments – finalise protections, create new national parks, and secure Victoria’s natural heritage. Through ecological surveys, advocacy,

and community petitions, we’re keeping the pressure on.

Imagine a Victoria where forests thrive, wildlife flourishes, and future generations can explore lush and ancient landscapes. That future is within reach – but only if promises are kept. 🌿

Support our work to protect these forests

vnpa.org.au/foreverforests



Undoing Undaria



KADE MILLS,
REEFWATCH
COORDINATOR,
SAYS WHEN
IT COMES TO INVASIVE
SEaweEDS, IF YOU CAN'T
BEAT 'EM, OR EAT 'EM, YOU
CAN ALWAYS COMPOST 'EM!

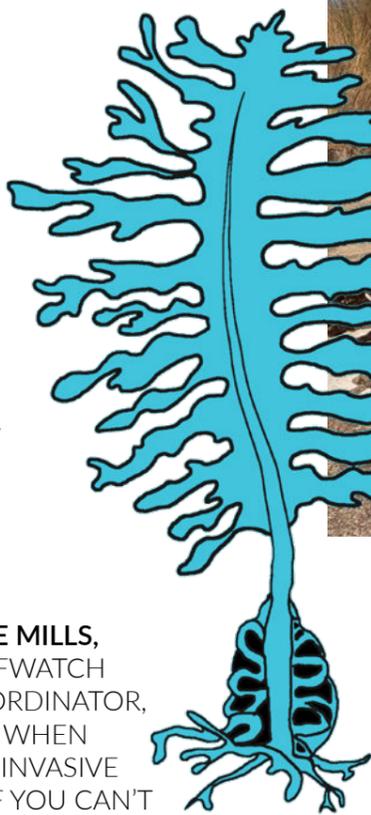
Picture this: you're floating in the waters of Port Phillip Bay/Nerm, marvelling at the vibrant marine life in an underwater forest of seaweed. Beautiful, isn't it? But often, that seaweed forest is dominated by an uninvited guest – *Undaria pinnatifida* (Undaria).

This fast-growing, highly reproductive invasive algae has spread throughout the bay since 1996, displacing native seaweed in many locations. But here's the good news: divers and community volunteers are fighting back through hands-on conservation and even a little culinary creativity!

Managing unwanted guests

Port Phillip Bay is home to over 160 invasive marine species. Among them, Undaria is one of a few listed on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) top 100 worst invasive alien species. First detected at Point Wilson in 1996, it has since spread to Apollo Bay, Portland and Port Welshpool, attaching itself to reefs, pylons, and boat hulls.

Completely eradicating Undaria isn't realistic. Instead, management efforts focus on preventing its spread to



← Ocean Divers with their Undaria haul, Brighton Beach, Bunurong Country
LIZ HARPER

new areas and reducing its numbers. While boating regulations help limit its spread, many recreational divers and snorkellers remain unaware of the problem lurking beneath the surface. With Undaria poised to invade new coastal areas, awareness and action are more important than ever.

Why is Undaria such a bad guest?

The secret to Undaria's success lies in its adaptability. It grows rapidly, reproduces prolifically, and can pause its development during unfavourable conditions.

Reaching up to three metres in height, a single plant can release up to 700 million microscopic spores (marine seeds) over its lifetime. To make matters more challenging, these microscopic 'seeds' can survive for up to 2.5 years, making eradication particularly difficult.

With such resilience, Undaria has quickly outcompeted native seaweed, reshaping underwater ecosystems.

Underwater Weeding Project

To bring Undaria's spread to light, the Underwater Weeding Project was launched in 2022. The initiative empowers divers to take action by manually removing the invasive seaweed.

But it goes beyond conservation – the project explores the growing potential of seaweed as a sustainable food source.

By incorporating seaweed into diets, we could reduce reliance on traditional crops. Instead of treating Undaria as

waste, it has been composted, cooked, and repurposed, turning an ecological problem into an opportunity.

The results? A sea of change!

Environmental impact: Volunteers removed 11,767 Undaria plants from 12 sites across the bay. That's a lot of underwater gardening!

Community engagement: 422 participants took part, educating 356 curious beachgoers about why tackling this marine pest matters.

Beyond just weeding: While at it, volunteers also removed Northern Pacific Seastars (another uninvited guest) and marine debris.

How did we make a splash?

Training divers to weed like pros: Participants learned to safely remove Undaria without damaging native seaweed.

Perfectly timed weeding missions: Events were scheduled during Undaria's peak growth season in Winter, keeping divers active during the off-season.

Sustainable solutions: Removed seaweed was composted, cooked, and explored for alternative uses instead of being sent to landfill.

What's next?

Undaria removal is now a dive club tradition: Many groups have added Undaria hunts to their annual dive calendars.

Tracking the impact: A dedicated portal on the Atlas of Living Australia allows for ongoing data collection and collaboration.

Bigger and bolder conservation efforts: Can public involvement help control other marine pests? Absolutely! More hands mean fewer invaders.

Long-term studies needed: Researchers and community groups need to monitor native seaweed recovery for 5–10 years post-Undaria removal.

Scaling up kelp restoration: By combining invasive species removal with restoration efforts, we can help native seaweed reclaim its underwater kingdom.

The Underwater Weeding Project proves that conservation can be hands-on, engaging, and even delicious. Through community action, education, and creative solutions, we're fighting back against invasive species and protecting Port Phillip Bay for future generations.

So whether by weeding, composting, or even eating the invaders – every effort counts! 🌊

Note: All work was conducted under a permit, which is available from the Victorian Fisheries Authority. If you're interested in tackling some weeding yourself, contact us for guidance on obtaining a permit.



Read the full report on the Underwater Weeding Project
vnpa.org.au/publications/underwater-weeding-in-port-philip-bay

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

↓ One of the large dams on the property which has become an important wetland habitat. SERA BLAIR

Proof of life

Secrets and wonders in the ex-Holden Proving Ground



DR SERA BLAIR,
NATUREWATCH
COORDINATOR AND
JORDAN CROOK,



PARKS AND NATURE
CAMPAIGNER,
REPORT ON SURVEY
WORK IN A VITALLY

IMPORTANT PART OF THE
WESTERN PORT WOODLANDS

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.

The historic value of the ex-Holden Proving Ground to car lovers is easily understandable, but the natural values have remained largely unobserved. Scientists and land managers have wondered about the 877 hectare site from afar, curious about what secrets it holds.

Which plants, animals and fungi live there? How disturbed is it? Would it be a suitable fenced refuge for threatened animal and plant translocations?

So it was an incredibly exciting opportunity when VNPA was invited to investigate the mammal population of the area. The program is part of a biodiversity survey run by the Bass Coast Shire Council and the Gippsland Threatened Species Action Group.

On every visit to the site we encountered new areas as the property continued to reveal itself. The more we explored, the more we realised what a beautiful and rare gem this property is and the importance of keeping it protected.

Say cheese!

Between February and October 2024, we deployed 68 wildlife cameras. We recorded for a total of 1504 days, taking 32,835 photos and 322 videos. We also conducted six spotlighting surveys and installed audio recorders at multiple sites.

In total, we recorded 42 different animals via camera or spotlighting. Swamp Wallabies were the most common across all camera sites, followed by foxes and Eastern Grey Kangaroos.

The large grassy areas on the property are extremely popular with macropods and we often thought it would be a beautiful place for tour buses to visit as one could guarantee seeing a lot of kangaroos and wallabies in a short drive. No chance of disappointed overseas visitors!

While we recorded one Long-nosed Bandicoot, we were disappointed not to find any Southern Brown Bandicoots. We made educated



↑ Jordan Crook is excited to discover *Hymenochaetopsis*, the host fungus for Tea-tree Finger fungus

The more we explored, the more we realised what a beautiful and rare gem this property is and the importance of keeping it protected.

guesses on potential habitat areas and focused our cameras there, but no luck. This is despite recent records of them just north in Adam's Creek Nature Conservation Reserve.

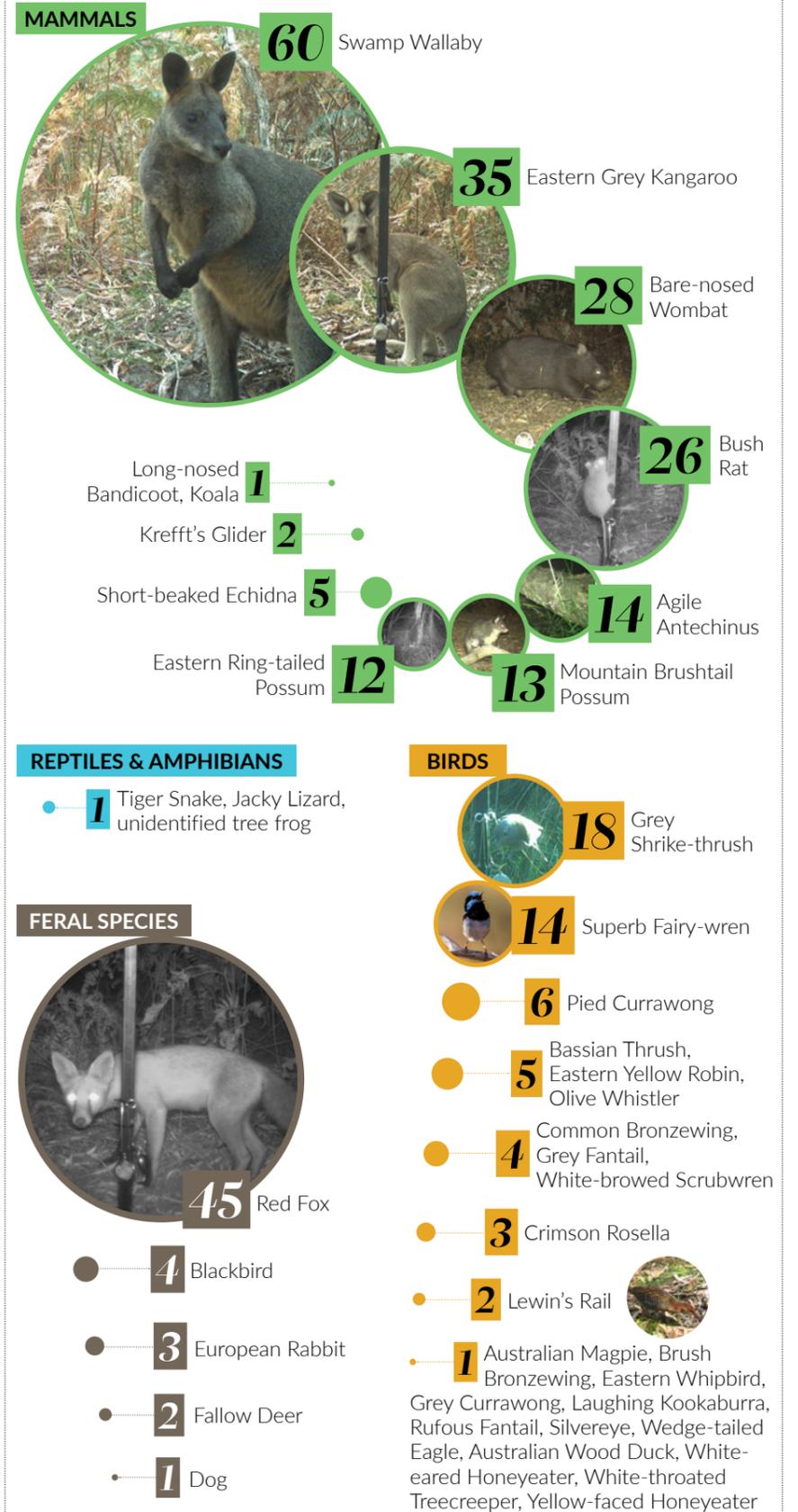
Our audio data was checked for the presence of eight threatened birds, two amphibians and two mammals. None were present, but the cameras did capture a threatened Lewin's Rail.

Strzelecki success

Following desktop surveys of the Holden Proving Ground's vegetation communities and surrounding records, we did a targeted survey for Strzelecki Gums (*Eucalyptus strzeleckii*). This Critically Endangered tree has beautiful pink to red mottled bark on its white smooth trunks and wavy sweet-smelling leaves.

continued overpage...

Holden Proving Grounds 2024 surveys wildlife list indicating number of sites recorded for each



→ Blake Nisbet, VNPA Parks and Nature Campaigner, shows his approval of the ex-Holden Proving Ground site

Proof of life continued...

After a full day's survey – with a botanist on hand to verify our findings – it soon dawned on the team that the Strzelecki Gums at the site are likely the largest known population left in Victoria. There are probably over 1000 Strzelecki Gums in this incredible area!

This further enhances the importance of the ex-Holden Proving Ground to Victoria's natural heritage.

Elusive Tea-tree Fingers

In surveying for Tea-tree Fingers (*Hypocreopsis amplexans*), we teamed up with a consultant and a volunteer with expertise in this unusual and Critically Endangered fungus.

For many years, it was the only fungi listed under Victorian legislation as threatened with extinction. It relies on occupying dead, standing and partly elevated fallen branches of a handful of heathy woodland plants such as Banksia, Melaleuca and Kunzea.

Although past survey work within the site has found Tea-tree Fingers, we were unable to locate any during our surveys. However, the host fungi on which the target fungus relies for suitable habitat was discovered outside previously known sites, indicating Tea-tree Fingers may very well occur there.

Helping hands

On the survey, we were joined by enthusiastic plant and bird experts from the Gippsland Threatened Species Action Group, a highly educational experience. Bass Coast Shire Council did a great job supporting the biodiversity survey report and continues to search for ways to protect the integrity of this property. We hope we get to work with them again!

Members of the Gippsland Threatened Species Action Group recorded 89 birds, including threatened Powerful Owls and Blue-winged Parrots, across their year of on-ground bird surveys.

A big thank you to the amazing VinFast staff who manage the site. They not only allowed us to visit, but escorted us around, helped with fieldwork, told us about the history of the property and shared personal insights into its intrinsic values.

One staff member, who has worked there for over 40 years, said 'I never knew why it was special, I just always knew it was.' We feel privileged to be part of a team that has helped them to understand the significant natural values behind this property's charm. It's also inspiring VinFast staff to find the right buyer to continue the protection and legacy of care they have given over the years. 🌿



↑ Jordan Crook searching for Tea-tree Fingers



↑ Strzelecki Gum MEGHAN LINDSAY



↑ Spectacular habitat on the property MEGHAN LINDSAY

Robyn in Wombat Forest ↓

Robyn Tarrant



ON A RECENT SPOTLIGHTING EVENING IN BEENAK STATE FOREST, NATUREWATCH COORDINATOR **SERA BLAIR** SAT DOWN FOR A CHAT WITH **ROBYN TARRANT**, TOP NATUREWATCH VOLUNTEER AND VALUED FIELD SCIENTIST

Robyn has been helping with NatureWatch activities since 2022, joining me on six projects and contributing 22 days of fieldwork support. Robyn's skills in the field, her unwavering enthusiasm and knowledge makes her fantastic field support.

I always enjoy field days with Robyn around; she is reliable, flexible, happily donates the use of her 4WD vehicle to fieldwork, and always offers around a flask of hot coffee!

What drew you to join VNPA's NatureWatch expeditions and what keeps you coming back?

I was out hiking at Mt Worth one day and came across a park ranger with a small group of people working on the track. I asked how to get involved and she told me to sign up to ParkConnect where groups listed their volunteering opportunities. VNPA was advertising for volunteer citizen scientists to help with camera trapping, scat surveys and spotlighting near Marlo to monitor wildlife after recent fires. This sounded very interesting, so I signed up and loved it!

I have kept going back because it's rewarding monitoring wildlife and their habitats. We get to go to extraordinary forests. Sera has taught me a lot about the diverse range of wildlife in different environments. I had never seen Greater Gliders, Brush-tailed Phascogales or Mountain Skinks before.

Tell us about a favourite Victorian park and what aspects of it you especially enjoy?

It's hard to pick a favourite when each park is so different. I spend a lot of recreational time in Kirth Kiln, Gembrook and Mortimer reserves as they're just down the road from where I live. After volunteering there with Sera it was very exciting finding Southern Brown Bandicoots, Greater Gliders and Yellow-bellied Gliders. I really hope this area is included in the new national park.

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

First up it would be the Great Forest National Park, this area covers an immense area of amazing forest full of diverse wildlife and flora that needs protection. Then Wombat because that forest is being lost to continued logging and avoidable burning, and I have seen firsthand the destruction in habitat for endangered plants and animals.

I would also allocate more funding for scientific programs and regeneration of degraded areas.

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

We were out in the Wombat Forest one day recording hollow-bearing trees and putting out camera traps when we came across a large black box. It was literally the size of a coffin. After further investigation we discovered a life-like naked robotic doll! After the initial 'this is creepy', we had a good laugh. Luckily the paperwork with the owner's address was still in the box so the police could return it to its rightful owner.

What has time in nature taught you?

It has taught me to slow down and appreciate the natural environment. I am more aware of the all the different plants and animals since I started volunteering. I have always spent a lot of time in the forest in the past, but generally camping, walking or cycling through.

What is your favourite season to go bush?

Spring because of all the new life, birds, orchids, new growth on the plants. Streams and waterfalls are flowing healthy from the Winter rain providing such an ambience you do not want to leave. 🌿

Feral feast



 PARK WATCH EDITOR,
PAUL CLIFTON
SPOKE TO TONY
ARMSTRONG

ABOUT HIS BOLD TAKE
ON AUSTRALIA'S FERAL
PESTS AND THE FUTURE OF
INVASIVE SPECIES CUISINE

When Tony Armstrong, the charismatic host of ABC's *Eat the Invaders*, declared that the tastiest meal he'd enjoyed during filming was cat – specifically, 'the most delicious rotisserie chicken' he'd ever had – he certainly stirred the pot. It wasn't just a quirky culinary confession, but a provocative call to rethink how we view feral species. After all, he wasn't too worried about ruffling the feathers of cat lovers across the nation.

Armstrong's bold statement is part of a larger message: feral cats aren't the cuddly creatures many pet owners see them as – they're ruthless, high-powered killing machines. With somewhere between 1.4 and 5.6 million feral cats in Australia, each one capable of slaughtering seven native animals a night, their impact is undeniable. As Armstrong points out, 'Cats have helped make Australia a global leader in extinctions.'

But the problem isn't just with feral cats. Domestic cats, though lovingly kept as pets, also contribute to this ecological crisis, killing an estimated 300 million native animals each year. The solution here is relatively simple: keep them indoors. If started on an indoor life as kittens, cats can adapt well.

However, tackling the issue of ferals is far trickier. No amount of adventurous bush grub or gourmet dining will solve this massive problem. It's a theme



↑ Chef Vince Trim prepares deer for cooking
SUPPLIED: ABC

that runs throughout the series, as Armstrong explores the challenges of controlling six invasive species, each more stubborn than the last.

Take camels, for example. While camel meat is a global delicacy, in Australia we cull thousands every year. The challenge lies in their remote habitats, making meat production a logistical nightmare. Then there are the infamous carp – dubbed 'ghetto trout' and 'sewer salmon' because of their reportedly unpleasant taste – mostly due to the difficulty of preparing them properly. Meanwhile, rabbits, once a staple during Australia's tough times, are still multiplying despite repeated attempts at population control through the calicivirus.

Next there's the cane toad, a particularly tricky, sticky and icky invader. While some bush cooks have embraced it as a delicacy, no lab in Australia could guarantee a safe, toxin-

free meal for human consumption. Ironically, birds like Kookaburras and Australian White Ibises have figured out how to feast on these toxic creatures without damage to themselves. And while markets in Southeast Asia could potentially create demand for thousands of cane toads caught annually, the infrastructure simply isn't there to support it.

The science behind solutions

To navigate these invasive species issues, Armstrong consulted experts Professor Andy Lowe and Professor Phill Cassey from Adelaide University's Invasion Science and Wildlife Ecology Group. The scientists brought down-to-earth solutions to the show, debunking some of the more whimsical ideas about culinary control. One intriguing possibility is the use of genetic editing, a technique that could alter sex ratios within populations, quickly leading to their demise. This would be particularly effective with smaller, fast-reproducing mammals. 'For invasive species like rabbits, it would probably work really well,' explains Dr Lowe. But for larger creatures like deer or camels, culling remains the most practical approach.

When it comes to feral deer, controlling their population is more about management and legislation than science. South Australia, for example, has made strides in eradicating deer from the Mt Lofty

Ranges, taking out thousands of animals over just two years. The key, as Dr Lowe points out, is long-term commitment from governments.

One of the more controversial ideas? Reintroducing apex predators like the Dingo to help control populations of rabbits and cats. While this could be effective, it would require significant government involvement. It's a complex issue, but similar programs in places like Yellowstone National Park have proven it's not only possible, but also eminently successful.

So... will we be eating tabby tacos?

Despite the exotic-sounding meals like tabby tacos or camel burgers (apparently delicious!), Armstrong acknowledges that we're not likely to see these dishes on Aussie menus anytime soon. Still, his hope is that *Eat the Invaders* will serve as a conversation starter, encouraging Australians to rethink the food they consume – and how their eating habits might influence the battle against invasive species.

After all, the issue isn't just about what's on the plate, but the impact those choices have on the land we share with the native wildlife fighting for survival. 🌿

Eat the Invaders is available on ABC iView



↑ Tony Armstrong with Kiwirrkurra women in the Western Desert preparing feral cat
SUPPLIED: ABC

Choppy combo at Crystal Steps

MICHAEL LOO,
NEXTGEN NATURE
COORDINATOR,
TELLS OF HOW
YOUNG NATURE ENTHUSIASTS
COMBINED FISH COUNTING,
MARINE CONSERVATION AND
CHRISTMAS CARDS

In December, a dozen young nature enthusiasts from NextGen Nature braved the choppy waters of Port Phillip Bay at Crystal Steps,

Williamstown, to take part in the Great Victorian Fish Count. This adventure was more than just a snorkelling trip – it was a chance to contribute to valuable marine citizen science, and connect with like-minded young adults passionate about nature.

Led by the expert team at Diveline, we explored the breakwater and coastline, spotting an impressive variety of marine life despite low visibility and fading light. Among the seagrass, algae, and rocks, we counted Zebrafish (*Girella zebra*), Dusky Morwong

(*Dactylophora nigricans*), Six-spined Leatherjackets (*Meuschenia freycineti*), Sea Sweeps (*Scorpius aequipinnis*), Gurnard Perches (*Neobastes sp.*), as well as Smooth Toadfish (*Tetractenos glaber*) and Globe Fish (*Diodon nithemerus*).

Beyond the fish count, we had the chance to learn about marine conservation and even got creative – making Christmas cards using beautiful pressed algae.

This immersive experience strengthened our connection to nature, place, and community. By diving beneath the surface, we not only deepened our appreciation for Victoria's marine life but also played an active role in protecting it. 🌿



↑ NextGen Nature crew at Crystal Steps, Williamstown, Bunurong Country

ARCHISMAA SIVAGANESH SHARES HER EXPERIENCE OF THE NEXTGEN NATURE MARINE ADVENTURE AT CRYSTAL STEPS

As an international student from India studying veterinary science, attending the NextGen Nature snorkelling event made me appreciate the rich marine environment surrounding Melbourne and the community looking after it. I recently started snorkelling and love how there is always something new to see underwater with every snorkel.

I heard about NextGen Nature while attending a Sea Slug Census via VNPA's ReefWatch program. It sounded like a fun opportunity to explore more snorkelling spots while making new friends!

In the briefing at Crystal Steps, ReefWatch Coordinator Kade Mills talked to us about the Great Southern Reef and how important its kelp forests are to providing habitat and food for fishes like Herring Cale, which feed on Golden Kelp fronds. Despite the cloudy and choppy waters, I could make out the blades of the Golden Kelp and observed other algae as they swayed underwater.

Back on land, Sandy, a local legend from Jawbone Marine Sanctuary Care Group, taught us how to arrange and press small samples of algae, capturing the plant's underwater form on paper. She encouraged us to observe and appreciate the 'background' – kelp forests, seagrass and algae – which are equally important as the fish they house.

The event was a fantastic opportunity to connect with nature and reinforce the importance of conserving these complex ecosystems. 🌿

↓ Seaweed pressing for making Christmas cards



I never imagined seeing a seaweed canopy and fish and so many marine creatures in Williamstown, which is so close to the city! This helps me to learn about the marine ecology in Victoria and also raise my awareness to protect the coastline.

– Karen

↓ Brolgas at Point Wilson, Wadawurrung Country
TRAKKA53/INATURALIST



Brolga betrayal

JORDAN CROOK
QUESTIONS
THE EFFECT ON
BROLGAS OF THE
ENGAGEMENT PROCESS FOR
WIND FARMS

VNPA has long supported moves to renewable energy across Victoria. Yet development, be it on land or in the sea, must be accompanied by strong planning rules to protect biodiversity.

In 2020, our feedback to the draft standards for Brolga Assessment and Mitigation Standards for Wind Energy Facilities, noted the very vague and worrying objectives, including no aspiration to protect Brolga (*Antigone rubicunda*) populations, and removing the need for Brolga surveys to cut costs for energy companies.

This is an outcome we are forcing on them which they had no hand in creating, but they will bear the greatest risk of harm.

Beauty of Brolgas

Brolgas are large birds standing up to 1.8 metres tall with a 2 metre wing span. Large birds need large and safe areas to live in and move safely across their homelands.

You'll never forget the first time you see a Brolga. The first time I saw one was near Heywood on Gunditjmarra Country, flying low across a paddock and landing to meet up with its partner where they honked and danced in joy. It's an astounding sight.

These giant birds are in decline in Victoria, and are listed as Endangered. They're feeling the effects of feral pests and the destruction of their wetlands.

But there's a new risk in the Brolgas' homelands, and how we manage this risk may culminate in these majestic birds being squeezed to the edge of existence.

The State Government's recent process, 'Managing the Biodiversity Impacts of Renewable Energy' included a proposed Handbook for renewable energy developers to navigate their responsibilities to wildlife and ways of mitigating risks.

Although the process is welcome and much needed, massive knowledge gaps

in the decision-making process and impacts on wildlife like Brolgas need further study and investment. This is also true for Grey Headed Flying Foxes and Southern Bent Wing Bats.

The impact of wind energy development needs to be assessed at a landscape scale, and not through a project by project approach where cumulative impacts on nature are overlooked. For example, in North America the Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*), a creature much like our Brolga, are 20 times more likely to select a 'rest stop' during their migrations at locations at least 5 km away from wind turbines.

Evidence on the Victorian Brolgas seems to suggest they too need bigger buffer zones between their wetlands and flying routes.

The government is suggesting buffer zones of 900 metres around wetlands where Brolga are breeding will be sufficient. Yet studies show they need an area of up to 5 km around such sites.

Sensitive development

The industrialisation of the Brolga's homelands (as well as those for the Southern Bent Wing Bat and Grey Headed Flying Fox) to create electricity for humans will likely have severe impacts.

Further information is needed on the movements and impacts on local wildlife to make an informed and useful submission.

There's no doubt that the climate crisis requires fast and meaningful transitions to non-fossil fuel energy sources. But the hasty nature of the process, and the quality of documents provided, makes it appear that the government is rushing to a solution which may seriously impact the Brolgas. Nature protection must be at the forefront of a sustainable transition. 🌿

Read our submission
[vnpa.org.au/publications/
a-better-approach-to-
managing-biodiversity-
impacts-of-renewables](https://vnpa.org.au/publications/a-better-approach-to-managing-biodiversity-impacts-of-renewables)



Land clearing laws broken

LOUISE COSTA, GOULBURN VALLEY ENVIRONMENT GROUP (GVEG), LOOKS AT THE CONTINUING FAILURE OF NATIVE VEGETATION PROTECTION IN VICTORIA

It's almost 35 years since regulations prohibiting unauthorised clearing of native vegetation on freehold land were introduced. By then, Victoria had already lost close to 60 per cent of its original tree cover. Since then, another 300,000 hectares of native vegetation has been cleared – the regulations are clearly not working.

- Removal of multiple, government-funded habitat works established to help threatened wildlife in the Goulburn Valley such as Superb Parrots, Squirrel Gliders and Grey-crowned Babblers.
- The rise of commercial logging on private land in central west, Central Highlands and East Gippsland.

This ongoing loss is mostly on freehold land, much of it unregulated and unlawful. The loss includes Victoria's most imperiled ecosystems: a reduction of 89,000 hectares of seasonal wetlands, 76,000 hectares of native grasslands and derived grasslands, 52,000 hectares of shrublands and 37,000 hectares of scattered trees.

Altogether, these losses represent almost 10 per cent of the total extent of native vegetation estimated to remain in Victoria on freehold land. In the Goulburn Valley, where our group is based and where at least 90 per cent of native vegetation has been removed since European colonisation, the ongoing losses represent the final wounds to our scarred ecosystems.

There are many other examples across Victoria of unauthorised native vegetation loss on freehold land, including:

- An estimated loss of 6000 hectares of native grasslands on the Northern Plains west of Echuca since 1990, with about 500 hectares illegally cleared in the last year.
- Up to 45 per cent increase in cropping of shallow wetlands since 2010.

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

In an area in the Goulburn Valley where GVEG has reported illegal clearing, the extent of tree cover has decreased substantially since 2018. A year on from our reporting of multiple incidents of native vegetation removal, there's been no formal response and no action taken against the landowner. Using statistics from DEECA's annual reports on native vegetation removal, between 100 to 500 hectares of native vegetation is being approved for removal each year. However, Land Cover Time Series data indicates about 10,000 hectares per year is cleared – testimony to the stark reality that most clearing isn't happening through formal processes.

In its 2022 report *Offsetting Native Vegetation Loss on Private Land* the Victorian Auditor-General's Office concluded that 'Victoria is not achieving its objective of no net biodiversity loss from native vegetation clearing on private land.' The report further stated that '... DELWP, which is responsible for setting policy and regulations, including reporting on the no net loss objective, has been slow to address known issues to support councils' implementation of the regulations'. The report made some excellent recommendations including for better data collection and real-time monitoring of clearing activity across the state. It concluded by suggesting a

better strategic approach is needed to effectively manage native vegetation clearing on private land.

GVEG believes it's the development of this strategic approach which is lacking. In our native vegetation protection policy, we have proposed that:

- Mapped native vegetation on a property should become a standard part of Section 32 sale documents.
- DEECA and councils should establish planning overlays for native vegetation that's mapped as part of identified threatened vegetation communities or habitats protected under Victorian and federal environmental laws.
- Use of the 'critical habitat determination' mechanism in the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act* should be expanded to help conserve land with significant habitat features is critical to the survival of listed plants, animals and fungi.

We also think the compliance function needs to be centralised and managed either by a separate agency or a statewide enforcement branch. In parallel, the government's commitment in its Biodiversity 2037 Plan to a whole-of-government approach to implementing that Plan (Priority 19) needs to be applied to all public authorities involved in native vegetation management.

Finally, the process of enforcing the regulations where there's been alleged illegal clearing needs to be simplified to increase the effectiveness as a real deterrent.

Goulburn Valley Environment Group
gveg-enviro.com



Capturing the bush

↑ Sketching at Warringine Wetlands, Hastings, Bunurong Country KATE CARRILLO

↑ The Missing Peace is Found KATE CARRILLO

KATE CARRILLO'S PAINTING AND SKETCHING IN NATURE WAS TRANSFORMED BY A NATURE STEWARDS COURSE

I have been painting in oils for eight years, embracing the challenge of outdoor painting and sketching. I work mainly around the Mornington Peninsula but also in the Grampians, Horsham and Lord Howe Island. While exploring my local national parks a couple of years ago, I realised I knew little about the vegetation and

biodiversity I was observing and I felt like this was holding my painting back. As if by magic, a few days later, I saw an ad for a Nature Stewards course and I eagerly signed up!

From the start, I felt at home among like-minded, friendly people. It's a fantastic program, not only for learning but also for making meaningful connections.

My favourite sections of the course were the field trips, being guided by experienced tutors who took us back into the landscapes I love to paint and answering many of my questions! My curiosity was sparked by the tiny worlds of mosses, fungi, orchids, invertebrates and shellfish, while my passion for trees remains as strong as ever.

Nature Stewards has transformed my painting. It's given me purpose and direction, helping me find my voice and the emotion I want to express in my landscapes. I now strive to capture the presence I feel in the bush; the stillness, energy and colour.

Painting allows me to pour my love for these wild spaces onto canvas. The experience of being immersed in nature, surrounded by its sounds and scents, fuels my creativity and strengthens my sense of self and well-being.

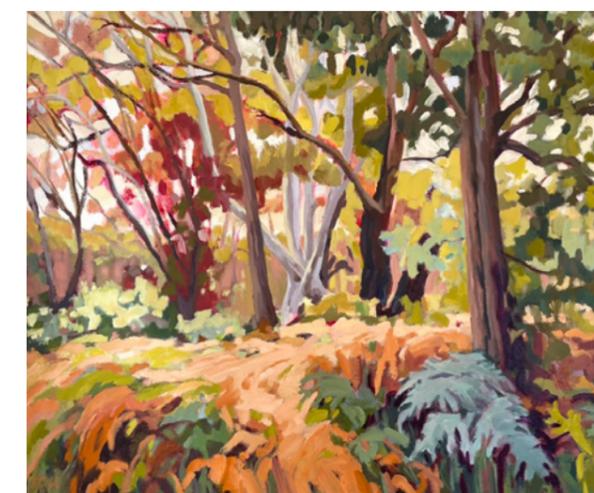
I'm passionate about stepping away from technology and embracing the outdoors. Nature is here to heal us, offer perspective, and remind us that we're deeply connected to it. As Andy Goldsworthy says, 'When we say that we have lost our connection to nature, we have lost our connection to ourselves.'

I hope my art keeps me grounded and provides others with a sense of inspiration, peace and belonging.

Kate can be found on Facebook and Instagram kate.carrillo.art



↑ Sketching on the Wimmera River KATE CARRILLO



↑ Moorooduc Magic KATE CARRILLO



Turning the Tide



AHALYA SURESH

FROM RMIT UNIVERSITY OUTLINES HER RESEARCH IN REGENERATIVE TOURISM FOR BLUE CARBON ECOSYSTEMS

PHD PROGRESS REVEALS THE LATEST EXCITING UNIVERSITY RESEARCH INTO VICTORIA'S NATURAL WORLD

Science communication about blue carbon tourism at Melbourne Comedy Festival, 2024
AGUSTINA



What's the elevator pitch for your PhD?

Blue carbon ecosystems (BCEs), specifically mangroves and seagrasses, store vast amounts of atmospheric carbon, making them powerful allies in the fight against climate change. But despite their value, they're under threat, including by unsustainable tourism development.

I explore how the tourism industry can help reverse impacts of blue carbon loss, by conserving and restoring these ecosystems through a novel tourism model called 'regenerative tourism.'

By involving tourists, tourism operators/business and other stakeholders in blue carbon restoration, I aim to create a model where tourism funds and supports ecosystem recovery rather than harming it. I'm using choice modelling coupled with economic valuation, stakeholder perceptions analysis and tourism climate index techniques.

My PhD project has flourished thanks to a strong partnership between my lab at RMIT (Centre for Nature Positive Solutions) and The Long Run, a collaborative network dedicated to sustainable tourism. Their support has been instrumental in engaging tourism operators and key stakeholders across the globe, encouraging them to actively participate in this research.

Together we're working to promote the regeneration of BCEs; demonstrating how the tourism industry can transition from being a passive beneficiary of nature to an active force in its restoration.

What led you to do this PhD?

Growing up in Sri Lanka, a stunning tropical island, I was always fascinated by how much the country thrives on coastal tourism. Tourists flock to its shores for boat rides, diving and snorkelling, often in places filled with mangroves and seagrasses.

During my Masters, I worked on mangrove blue carbon projects in Sri Lanka and saw first-hand how human activities – especially (eco)tourism – can unintentionally degrade these sensitive ecosystems. I became particularly interested in the potential of tourism as a force of good. And it sparked a question in my mind: Could the very industry that threatens these habitats also become part of their solution?

This question led me to explore how tourism can actively invest in and contribute to blue carbon restoration and, in turn, how the industry itself can benefit from healthier ecosystems.

My goal is to bridge restoration with tourism in a way that supports both nature and communities, ensuring these ecosystems don't just survive but thrive for generations to come.

← ↓ Mangrove restoration by tourism operators near an ecotourism spot in Kalpitiya, Sri Lanka
AHALYA SURESH



→ Aftermath of the fieldwork in the mudflats of Suncheon, Busan, South Korea
AHALYA SURESH



What challenges have you had to overcome?

Like any research that involves multiple stakeholders, my PhD has come with its fair share of challenges. One of the biggest has been getting tourism operators to see the long-term value of investing in ecosystem restoration. While many are interested in sustainability, convincing them that regenerative tourism isn't just an ethical choice but also a viable business strategy has required extensive discussions, data and prediction models.

Another hurdle was navigating the complexities of stakeholder interests. Restoration/regenerative practitioners, tourism operators and locals all have different priorities. Aligning them towards a shared vision for blue carbon restoration took time, patience and a lot of negotiations.

On the scientific side, quantifying the tangible benefits of restoration-based tourism activities, both for ecosystems and businesses, is a work in progress.

While I'm not an economist or a sustainability expert, this challenge has expanded my skill set and allowed me to approach blue carbon restoration from different perspectives.

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

It's amazing how regenerative tourism can be a true game-changer in ecosystem restoration, especially in BCEs, where it's linked with climate change mitigation, carbon credits and ecosystem resilience.

Convincing tourism operators/businesses to get involved and invest in such a novel tourism model is quite hard. But it was surprising how many of them got interested in the concept, how they can implement it and at what scale.

What's particularly exciting is how this creates a sustainable cycle (or a loop): healthy ecosystems attract more eco-conscious tourists and absorb carbon which, in turn, helps the industry grow and be green.

What's particularly exciting is how this creates a sustainable cycle (or a loop): healthy ecosystems attract more eco-conscious tourists and absorb carbon which, in turn, helps the industry grow and be green.

It's fascinating to see how aligning tourism with environmental stewardship can create benefits for the environment, businesses and local communities.

What impact do you want your research to have?

I want my research to demonstrate that ecosystem restoration and tourism sector can co-exist to benefit ecosystems, economies and communities. By developing a model where tourism directly contributes to the restoration of BCEs, I aim to shift how the industry view its relationship with nature – not as something to exploit but to preserve and nurture.

The tourism industry is a major contributor to carbon dioxide emissions, but BCEs offer a unique opportunity to turn the tide. As natural carbon sinks, these ecosystems can play a crucial role in offsetting emissions, making them a perfect fit for such a tourism model.

With the growing interest in blue carbon credits, many stakeholders are beginning to see the potential of investing in tourism that actively supports restoration. It's an exciting shift, where tourism isn't just reducing harm but becoming part of the climate solution. 🌿

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ERRINUNDRA 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 **Bidwell, Ngarigo Monero and Gunaikurnai**
485 km E of Melbourne
43,090 hectares

Map



History

Proclaimed 1988
Additions in 1991, 1996, 2010 and 2020
Anti-logging protest, Errinundra Plateau, 1984 CHRIS HARRIS

Physiography

Highlands Far East, Monaro Tablelands, East Gippsland Uplands bioregions
9 EVCs including Damp Forest, Wet Forest, Cool & Warm Temperate Rainforest, Montane Wet Forest, Shrubby Dry Forest, Blackthorn Scrub, Montane Riparian Thicket, Rocky Outcrop Shrubland
Over 200 native animals
Over 850 native plants

Features

The largest area of temperate rainforest in Victoria
Some of world's best mixed forest – emergent eucalypts over a dense understorey of rainforest
Large parts of the park are old growth forest

↑ JOHN HASLER

Features

Large areas are relics of pre-European fire regimes
Undisturbed natural water catchments including the Goolengook and Errinundra Heritage Rivers
More than 130 bird species and 32 native mammals

↑ Satin Bowerbird RICARDO SIMAO

Threats

79 plants and animals listed as **Threatened** under Victorian legislation *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*
14 plants and animals listed as **Threatened** under federal legislation *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*
Feral species including deer, foxes and pigs

Friends

Friends of Errinundra
friends-of-errinundra.square.site
@friendsoferrinundra@gmail.com
Friends of Errinundra
Main activities: Assisting PV rangers by holding working bees, hosting botanical tours and scientific presentations. Obtaining grants to support activities. Updating social media with park information.



PRUE THWAITES FROM FRIENDS OF ERRINUNDRA TAKES US TO A PARK RICH IN NATURAL WONDERS

Nestled in the remote and rugged terrain of far East Gippsland, Errinundra National Park includes the Errinundra Plateau, the southern-most extension of the Monaro Tablelands. Rising to an average height of 1,000 metres, the plateau receives around 1,000 mm of annual rainfall, creating a cool, damp environment that nurtures its ancient forests and rich biodiversity.

For thousands of years, the Traditional Owners of this land have cared for its forests, waterways and wildlife. The area was an important meeting place, with people travelling along ancestral trails to the Snowy and Bogong High Plains to take part in the annual Bogong Moth feasts – a key cultural and food-gathering event.

Following years of determined campaigning to protect the area from logging, Errinundra National Park was established in 1988, recognising significant natural, cultural and recreational values. Its diverse tree-dwelling animals, mix of rainforests and tall wet eucalypt forests and many undisturbed water catchments, are considered highly valuable for conservation.

When the park was created, fire had been absent from the plateau for more than 150 years. Bushfires in 2014 and 2020 affected large areas of the park's rare Cool Temperate Mixed Forest. Despite this, key parts remained untouched, providing a vital refuge for threatened wildlife.

Conservation groups, including VNPA, have long advocated for Errinundra's protection. Through initiatives like Forest Forever camps, VNPA has helped people connect with the park's rich biodiversity and natural heritage. But advocacy continues, with calls to expand the park's boundaries to permanently protect more of its unique ecosystems.

There's concern that support and resources for the park may be reduced even further, increasing the risk of threats like invasive weeds and decaying infrastructure.



↑ Highlands Copperhead FRANK KÖHLER

↑ Errinundra Shining Gum DEAN NICOLLE



↑ Dawsonia moss JOHN HASLER

↓ Rainforest gully JUDITH DELAND



MT WORTH STATE PARK



↑ Fern-lined path in Mt Worth State Park JORDAN CROOK

JORDAN CROOK
COOLS DOWN
IN AN ANCIENT
SANCTUARY IN THE
LA TROBE VALLEY

Mt Worth State Park is a beautiful place on a hot day, with its towering Mountain Ash trees and lush tree fern gullies. It's a living remnant of



↑ Park Notes for Mt Worth JORDAN CROOK

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.

the Strzelecki Range forests that once stretched from the La Trobe Valley down to the coast. They're now only found in a few beautiful places spared from the saws and bullocks.

I found respite in the park when the weather was heating up. As you climb up Mt Worth, the significance of this special place increases. Monocultures of pines and paddocks chase this last living sanctuary to the top of the hill. Here, the tall Mountain Ash and tree ferns come into view, protected and safe within the park.

The temperature drops significantly under the canopy of the tall trees and spreading tree ferns, and the creeks and river run with clear water.

The giant trees are not the only giants in this park. Below the rich loamy and damp soils squelch another giant, and an animal close to my heart, the Giant



↑ Bracket fungus found fallen on the track

Gippsland Earthworm (*Megascolides australis*). They can grow to over a metre long and are one of the largest earthworms in the world!

The worms are in decline across their range, with Mt Worth State Park being the only protected public land the worm calls home.

In the steep valleys of the park, large and old midstorey plants like Musk Daisy Bush (*Olearia argophylla*) and Austral Mulberry (*Hedycarya angustifolia*) further shade the soil and creeks. And a plethora of small birds seek refuge from the heat in the trees' dense canopies – as they have for hundreds of years in these ancient plants.

How lucky are we that people advocated strongly to protect these natural wonders. And that the park rangers and amazing Friends of Mount Worth continue to look after this life raft in a sea of cleared habitat.

Thank goodness for our grouse state and national parks! 🌿

**Mt Worth State Park,
Allambee**
128 km/1 hr 45 min drive
SE of Melbourne

A generational legacy caring for nature

IN 2023, VNPA RECEIVED A GENEROUS BEQUEST FROM MARY CHANDLER OAM. HER COUSIN, **DAVID CHANDLER** SHARES THE STORY BEHIND MARY'S GENERATIONAL CONNECTION TO CONSERVATION

For Mary Chandler, leaving a gift in her Will to VNPA was more than a personal choice – it was the continuation of a three-generation legacy of dedication to nature. It began with her grandfather Robert Chandler's deep appreciation for the bush, followed by her father Les Chandler's pioneering work in bird photography and conservation. And then came Mary herself – a relentless defender of Australia's natural landscapes, wildlife and history.

A family steeped in nature

Robert Chandler was a bushman and artist, living in the foothills of the Dandenongs. His love of the wild inspired his son Les, who became one of Australia's first bird photographers in the 1920s. Les was involved in early conservation groups like the Bird Observers Club and the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria.

Les suffered lifelong lung damage from gas exposure in World War I. He was granted a 25 acre soldier settler block near Mildura, where he and his father established a productive farm despite many hardships.



↑ Mary Chandler (left) and Margaret Dominelli celebrate the demise of the Nowingi toxic waste facility plan PARK WATCH #242, SEPT 2010

He later married and had a daughter, Mary. Despite his severely affected breathing, Les worked the land until retirement and remained deeply engaged with conservation and his local community.

Protecting Hattah-Kulkyne

Les's greatest conservation passion was the Hattah-Kulkyne region. He first visited Hattah Lakes in 1912 and immediately recognised its incomparable beauty and ecological importance. From the 1940s to the 1960s, he campaigned tirelessly for its protection, believing it should be a national park.

His efforts included organising community tours and meetings, writing letters and articles, and leading local conservation groups.

His persistence paid off. In 1960, Hattah Lakes National Park was declared, and in 1980, just months before Les passed away at 92, his vision of a combined Hattah-Kulkyne National Park became reality. Though he didn't live to see it officially gazetted, he knew his life's work had succeeded.

Mary carried forward her father's legacy with determination and passion. In 2004, when a proposal emerged to build an industrial waste dump at Nowingi, bordering Hattah-Kulkyne National Park, she was furious.

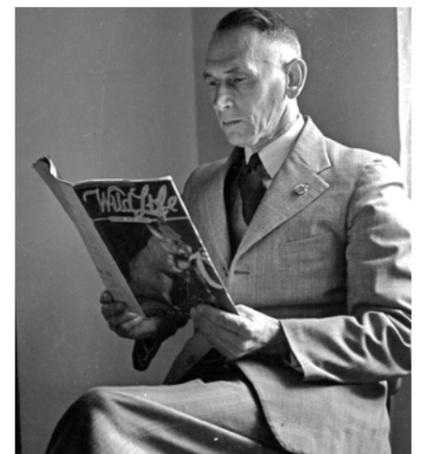
Like her father, Mary was described as 'a dog with a bone – never letting up until the job was finished.' Her relentless advocacy and political pressure forced the government to abandon the project, safeguarding the park once again.

Beyond conservation, Mary was deeply involved in her local Red Cliffs community. She researched and recorded regional history, publishing several books featuring Les Chandler's historic photographs, first-hand accounts of early settlers, and the story of Mary Woorlong, a First Nations woman from Kulkyne. Her dedication was recognised with an Order of Australia Medal, sadly awarded posthumously.

Mary had no children, but her love for nature and conservation lives on through VNPA. It's now up to our community to continue the wonderful Chandler legacy of displaying curiosity and persistence to understand and protect Victoria's unique treasures. 🌿



↑ Mary Chandler OAM



↑ Les Chandler reading Wild Life magazine

Leave a legacy for nature

Mary's story reminds us that one person's passion can shape the future of conservation. By leaving a gift in your Will, you too can help protect Victoria's unique landscapes and wildlife for generations to come.

To learn more about leaving a gift to VNPA in your Will, visit our website or call us on 03 9341 6506 for a confidential conversation.

vnpa.org.au/gifts-in-wills

A chronicle of floral wonders

Wildflowers of East Gippsland, Jennifer Wilkinson and James Turner
Bairnsdale and District Field Naturalists Club, 2024, 380pp, ISBN 978-0992487737

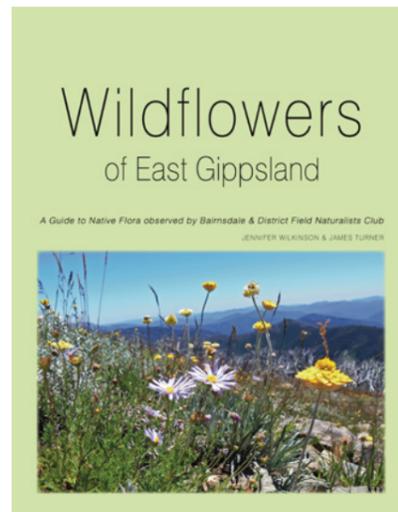
As frequent visitors to the wilds of East Gippsland over 25 years, my husband John and I enjoy investigating and photographing native wildflowers. It's a wonderful way to chart the seasons, altitudes and aspects of each special area.

From the coast to the Alps, the tallest trees to the tiniest of groundcovers, the authors of *Wildflowers of East Gippsland* have provided detailed descriptions, including habitat and distribution, of each native plant (apart from orchids) in East Gippsland. Richly illustrated, the many glossy photographs of plants are a feature on each page.

With assistance from fellow members of the Bairnsdale and District Field Naturalists Club, authors Jennifer Wilkinson and James Turner have worked for 10 years to publish this remarkable hardback guide to 1,500 plants. A marvellous volunteer contribution to botanic literature.

The information is easily accessible to the casual nature enthusiast or the armchair or serious botanist. With an easy-to-read style and user-friendly features including comprehensive background explanations, maps and diagrams, an index of common and scientific names, vegetation types, threat status and description, this is an inviting book to use and enjoy.

The book was launched by Neville Walsh, retired Senior Conservation Botanist at the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, who reviewed the technical information and taxonomy.



John and I now enjoy recognising plants we see on our travels, adding to our knowledge and appreciation.

Use the *Wildflowers of East Gippsland* to inspire your travels, appreciate the botanical richness of East Gippsland and understand the threats. 🌿

Prue Thwaites

Safe pathways for all!

Creature Corridors, Billie Rooney
Illustrated by Anke Noack
CSIRO Publishing, 2025, 32pp, ISBN 9781-486318100



We don't often think about the actual everyday lives of animals, but *Creature Corridors* has brought awareness to everyday things that make life dangerous for them.

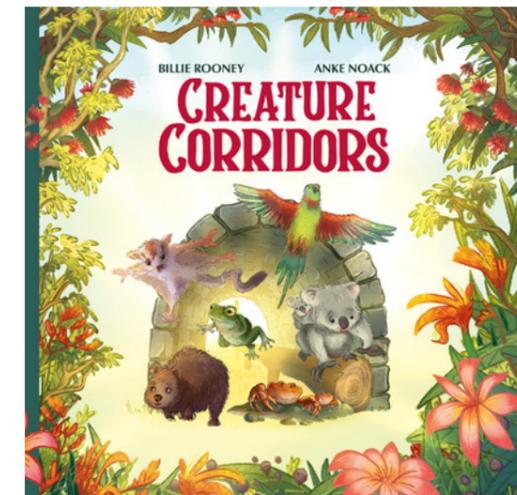
The book's bird's eye view showing breaks and blockages is particularly helpful. It illustrates how human changes have made life difficult and dangerous for wildlife.

We learnt that a little help, such as providing safe connections, can make a big difference to the animals we don't always see, but who live their lives around us.

What is making life dangerous for the animals?

'The Emu's babies might get hurt by the train if they want to get to the lake.'

'If they don't stop, look and listen, they might get squashed.'



'The farm has cut down all the trees. There's nowhere for the birds to lay their eggs.'

'Lucky the Echidna has spines if a car runs over it.'

What do the animals need to be safe? 'Bushes and trees so they can hide.'

'They need to move around without getting hurt.' 🌿

Gerard Drew and Murray (aged 3½)

Recent submissions

VNPA campaign staff have been busy writing submissions on a variety of important topics:

A better approach to managing biodiversity impacts of renewables, Feb 2025.

Dyurrite Cultural Landscape Management Plan Amendment, Feb 2025.

Case against salvage logging in the future Wombat-Lerderderg National Park, Dec 2024.

Draft Southeast Marine Park Network Management Plan, Nov 2024.

Draft Strategic Extractive Resource Areas (SERA) planning changes, Nov 2024.

Better management of ecological impacts of fire management works: Submission to Consultation draft - Code of Practice for Bushfire Management on Public Land, Oct 2024.

Read these and all previous submissions on our website. 🌿



Quiz answers from p. 4

- a)** Errinundra National Park was created in 1988 and since then has had its boundaries extended four times, in 1991, 1996, 2010 and 2020.
- d)** The largest patch of Warm Temperate Rainforest can be found in Jones Creek, which is near Genoa.
- c)** Combiobar State Forest is nestled between Errinundra National Park and Coopracambra National Park.
- b)** Barn, Sooty, Powerful and Masked are all types of owls that live in the forests of East Gippsland.
- c)** There are 13 grevilleas threatened with extinction in East Gippsland, including the Critically Endangered Buchan River Grevillea (*Grevillea pachylostyla*), Critically

Endangered Colquhoun Grevillea (*Grevillea celata*) and Endangered Cobberas Grevillea (*Grevillea brevifolia*).

- The **Genoa, Cann, Bemm, Snowy, Nicholson and Mitchell** rivers all flow through East Gippsland.
- a)** The Wilderness Coast Walk in Croajingolong National Park stretches 100 km (one way) along the coast from Bemm River to the NSW border. Errinundra Old Growth Walk near Errinundra National Park is 5 km return, meandering past ancient Shining Gums. Genoa Peak is 3.5 km return with spectacular views across East Gippsland. McKenzie River Rainforest Walk is 1 km return through lush Warm Temperate Rainforest.
- d)** 288 types of orchids live in East Gippsland, including 85 threatened

orchids like the Critically Endangered Genoa Spider-orchid (*Caladenia ancylosa*), Endangered Lizard Orchid (*Burnettia cuneata*) and Endangered Mountain Helmet-orchid (*Corybas grumulus*).

- Lind National Park** is the smallest national park in East Gippsland at 1370 hectares. Alfred National Park comes in a close second at 3022 hectares. Errinundra National Park is over 43,000 hectares. Croajingolong is the biggest at over 88,000 hectares.
- True.** The Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby is one of 16 types of rock-wallaby in Australia, and the only one that lives in Victoria. They are Critically Endangered, with only a few individuals living in the Snowy River National Park.

Revealing the ocean's transformative power

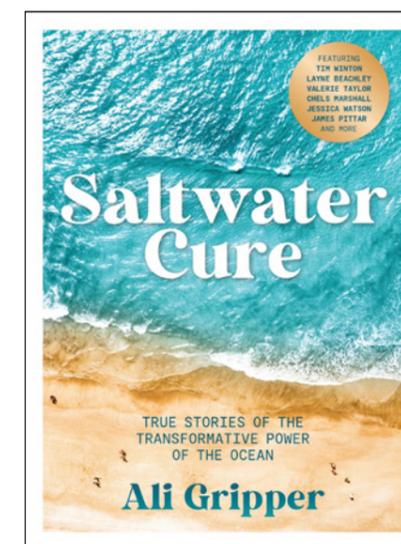
Saltwater Cure: True stories of the transformative power of the ocean, Ali Gripper

Murdoch Books, 2024, 224pp, ISBN 978-1761500008

How many times have you felt the healing powers of the sea? Whether it's from plunging into the salty goodness on a hot summer's day, donning a wetsuit with a boogie board under your arm, or just simply breathing in the salty air.

No matter how far we live from the coast many of us have experienced how the sea shapes our mind, body, soul and planet.

If you're a seasoned ocean-goer or simply curious about your own connection to the sea, you won't want to miss Ali Gripper's *Saltwater Cure*. A collection of tales exploring the lives of the people who've been gripped by the transformative powers



of the ocean, including surfer Layne Beachley, conservationist Valerie Taylor, solo sailor Jessica Watson, and blind swimmer James Pittar.

These are the personal journeys of some of Australia's most iconic ocean figures who share a unique connection to the sea. It ignites a deep, soulful passion within them – one that resonates with us as well.

The stories include the inequality faced by female surfers in competitive surfing; the transformation of a spearfisher into a passionate conservationist; and the challenge of losing one's sight and discovering the true freedom and vitality that comes from moving through the water as a competitive swimmer. Their stories inspire in ways only the ocean can.

The tales in this book will cause you to reflect on how your own connections are influenced through the seascapes in your lives. A highly recommended read for any season. 🌿

Shannon Hurley, Nature Conservation Campaigner

Wild Families



DISCOVER THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF ROCKPOOL WILDLIFE!

Play rockpool rambling spotto. Take this sheet down to some rockpools and tick off all the marine wildlife you see. How many can you spot?

- Barnacle
- Green Algae
- Fish
- Chiton
- Coralline Algae
- Decorator Crab
- Seagrass
- Elephant Snail
- Mussel
- Brown Algae
- Sea Snail
- Whelk
- Sea Slug
- Glass Shrimp
- Neptune's Necklace
- Shore Crab
- Rockpool Sea Star
- Urchin
- Limpet
- Anemone



Explorer's Corner

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



TIPS FOR YOUR NEXT FUNGUS FORAY

Autumn is here so fungus season is upon us! Here's some tips to help you marvel at morels, journey for jellies, peek at puffballs and seek out stinkhorns.

When should you start seriously searching?

The best time to look for fungi in Victoria is between March and July, as the weather gets wetter and cooler. After the Autumn rains hit (which varies from year to year), that's when you'll really want to ramp up your fungus forays.

Having said that, you can find fungi at anytime of year, particularly after rain. So always keep your eyes peeled!

Places to go

Fungi live in all sorts of places, from beaches to the tops of mountains. But there's a way to maximise your fungus finds – focus on where they're most prolific. Moist gullies, wet forests and rainforests are peak fungus habitat.

Some places to explore:

- Maits Rest Rainforest Walk in Great Otway National Park.
- Sherbrooke Forest in the Dandenong Ranges National Park.
- Ada Tree Walk near Yarra State Forest.
- Tarra Valley Rainforest walk in Tarra Bulga National Park.
- Errinundra Saddle Rainforest Walk in Errinundra National Park.

Images from top: Octopus Stinkhorn aka Devil's Fingers; Orange Fans; Ada Tree Walk; Elegant Blue Webcap MEGHAN LINDSAY

Tips for finding fungi

The biggest mushroom in Australia, *Phlebopus marginatus*, can be over 70 cm wide, but it's the exception to the rule. Most fungi are very small. So, on your fungi forays, walk slowly, look closely and take in tiny details.

Different fungi like to grow on different substrates. Scrutinise rotting logs, tree trunks and leaf litter on the ground. Shady areas with damp ground are your friend.

Snow Fungus jellies (*Tremella fuciformis*) can often be found growing out of fallen logs. Whereas Toothed Jelly fungi (*Pseudohydnum gelatinosum*) prefer living tree trunks.

On the other hand, Elegant Blue Webcaps (*Cortinarius rotundisporus*) grow straight out of the leaf litter on the ground.

Some fungi are ultra specific. Like Critically Endangered Tea-tree Fingers (*Hypocreopsis amplexans*) which grow on top of another fungi, on dead branches about 5 cm wide of

Prickly Tea-tree, Banksia and Melaleuca. Or Small Dung Buttons (*Poronia erici*), which grow on the poo of herbivores.

Take a photo!

When you find a fungus, snap a photo! Upload your fungus sightings to iNaturalist to help scientists and land managers learn more about them.

Pro-tip for snapping your pics: to get photos of the gills, turn your phone upside down so the camera is close to the ground. That way you can rest it right underneath the mushroom and get a good shot of the gills. 🍄



Robin Carter

ROBIN CARTER SHARES HER JOURNEY FROM EXPLORING NATURE TO SUPPORTING ADVOCACY

How did you first come to appreciate nature?

My first real experience of nature was in the 1960s when I was introduced to the bush by my colleague, physiotherapist Geoff Luke (VNPA member, 1976–2014). He was a passionate lover of Australian, and more particularly Victorian, native plants, with an amazing depth of knowledge.

Caught up in his enthusiasm, we went on many annual trips from Genoa Peak in the east, to the Little Desert in the west.

Some of the highlights for me were finding the Tinsel Lily in the Little Desert and the Red Beak orchids flowering after fire. The Mountain Gentian on Mt Buller, Fairies Aprons in the Grampians/Gariwerd and festoons of rock orchids on Genoa Peak.



← River Red Gum, Hattah-Kulkyne National Park DAVID NEILSON

← Kiata campground, Little Desert National Park VECTEEZY



↓ Mallee Fowl PETER ROWLAND

← Robin on a trip to Antarctica

My other lasting memory is of Kiata campground, sitting around the fire in the early evening with a Mallee Fowl scratching about in the leaf litter close by.

Sadly, Mallee Fowl are now threatened with extinction.

Later, Geoff purchased a large block of what was originally soldier settlement land adjoining the Little Desert National Park. He placed a covenant on it and allowed it to regenerate to its natural state.

About the same time, he encouraged us to join Urimbirra Cooperative, a group with a large holding close by and with similar aims.

Tell us about a special place in nature for you

For some years now I've been going back to the Little Desert regularly. It's like a spiritual home for me. I love the vast landscapes, the plants and animals and its big skies day and night. There's a real sense of peace there.

How did you come to support VNPA?

I've been a member of VNPA for many years. I joined after a trip to the High Country, seeing the damage done by introduced animals and hearing about the advocacy work done by VNPA to ban grazing in the area.

Since then, I've learned so much about their great work from *Park Watch* magazine.

In mid-2024, I went on a fascinating day trip to the Toolangi State Forest with Jordan Crook. I was thrilled to see first-hand the areas of original vegetation with their towering eucalypts, but shocked at the devastating damage done by logging, both legal and illegal.

I think VNPA's work is vital for the preservation of these precious areas. I'm very happy to donate on a regular basis and to leave a gift in my Will. 🙌

To find out more about leaving a gift in your Will or about becoming a monthly donor to support VNPA, please call us on 03 9341 6506 or email support@vnpa.org.au