

PARK*watch*



VICTORIAN
NATIONAL PARKS
ASSOCIATION

JUNE 2025 #300

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VICTORIAN
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ASSOCIATION

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.



Show your love of parks with our anniversary shirt or limited edition print

The current *National Parks Act 1975* is the bedrock that keeps our native wildlife and landscapes – and all the adventures we have in them – safe.

To show how much this means to nature-lovers and park-fanatics we've collaborated with local artist Mark Lording to celebrate this epic milestone.

T-shirt \$60 Poster \$100

Order now at support.vnpa.org.au/shop



From the President



DAVID NUGENT, VNPA PRESIDENT, WELCOMES YOU TO THE 300TH EDITION OF PARK WATCH.

We've got plenty to celebrate in this issue. As the striking tattoo-style artwork on our cover proudly declares, we're marking the 50th anniversary of the *National Parks Act* – a landmark piece of legislation that helped shape the protected areas we cherish today. To help spread the word, we've created limited-edition t-shirts and posters so you can join the celebration and show your love for Victoria's national parks. That's not all – this is also the 300th issue of *Park Watch*! Since July 1953, we've proudly brought our supporters the best in inspiring stories, urgent updates, and deep dives into nature in Victoria and beyond. While there's plenty to toast, there's also plenty still to do. Our 'Sticking up for national parks' campaign taps into the powerful memories and deep connections we all have with our special park places – and why they need our ongoing care and advocacy. We've also produced a new explainer

booklet, *The purpose and power of national parks*, to help you confidently speak up for parks in everyday conversations. (See p. 25 to order your free copy.) In this issue, we bring you updates on the fate of Dingoes and Fisheries Officers, and a new group uniting former park rangers. Plus stories of a 'misplaced' green energy and a loopy luge ride. But there's good news too – including rocking results for Southern Rock Lobsters. Our citizen science program NatureWatch visits the fire-affected slopes of Mt Cole, where rare plants and wildlife are emerging from the ashes. Katherine Best gives us a peek into her 'bed and breakfast' research for Greater Gliders. Neil Marriott explores the threatened holly-leaf grevilleas of western Victoria, and we step into the colourful world of nature-loving tattoo artist Fred Bain. Plus all our regular features and more. I hope you enjoy our 300th issue! 🌿

Nominate for VNPA Council and committees

We're looking for people interested in shaping VNPA's conservation work by nominating for a voluntary position on our Council or committees. Step beyond membership to become a guiding voice for VNPA's vital conservation work. Your expertise, perspective, and dedication can help craft policies and initiatives that help look after our unique landscapes and wildlife for generations to come. This is an amazing chance to contribute to a Victoria where nature is healthy, protected, and respectfully enjoyed. Nominations and business for the Annual General Meeting are due by close of business on Tuesday 23 September 2025. The 2025 AGM will be held on 21 October, from 5.30pm at Melbourne City Conference Centre, 333 Swanston St, City. For more information and to nominate, please send an email to vnpa@vnpa.org.au. 🐾

Park Watch National Parks Act Quiz



1. Do national parks protect nature better than state forests?

2. Who manages national parks in Victoria?

3. How many national parks are there in Victoria?

a. 13 b. 45

c. 58 d. 79

4. How many years have we been waiting for the new national parks in central west Victoria to be created since they were promised by the state government?

a. Two b. Four

c. Eight d. 12

5. How many Victorians say national parks are important to them?

a. 21 per cent b. 56 per cent

c. 72 per cent d. 87 per cent
6. Why is dog walking restricted in national parks?

7. How many years has it been since a new marine national park has been created in Victoria?

a. Two b. 15

c. 23 d. 32

8. When was the current *National Parks Act* legislated?

a. 1975 b. 1969

c. 1950 d. 1923

9. Who manages fire on public land in Victoria?

10. Why do we need more national parks in Victoria?

a. They're one of the best ways to protect wildlife and habitats.

b. Only 18 per cent of Victoria's landscapes are covered by protected areas.

c. They're great places to visit and connect with nature.

d. All of the above.

Answers on p.40

← First issue of the Victorian National Parks Association News Letter, July 1953



WE'RE CELEBRATING OUR 300TH ISSUE!

Park Watch has come a long way since its humble beginnings in July 1953, as a six-page brochure titled the *Victorian National Parks Association News Letter*. The inaugural issue, featuring a striking black-and-white cover image of 'Mt Buffalo, view near Crystal Brook', announced the public meeting at the Lower Melbourne Town Hall that birthed the association. By 1961, the publication had grown to 12 pages and cost sixpence for non-members. A shift to a larger format came in 1973, along with a price tag of 20 cents. The name changed to *The VNPA Journal* in 1975, and finally to *Park Watch* in March 1978, a title that has stood the test of time.

With the December 1981 edition, *Park Watch* adopted a larger A4 format, expanding its coverage. Since March 2002, full-colour cover photographs have brought the beauty of Victoria's wild places, animals, plants and fungi to the forefront. Today, it's a 44-page, full-colour print and digital magazine. It remains a vital source of independent news and stories about nature protection and VNPA's many activities. This issue features our first illustrated cover: the magnificent tattoo designed by Frankston artist, Mark Lording, to celebrate our other big milestone: the 50th anniversary of the current *National Parks Act* 1975. From black-and-white brochures to a powerful conservation journal, *Park Watch* has kept nature front and centre, informing, inspiring and mobilising action for over 70 years. 🌿

Landslide for Labor, but what about nature?



WITH THE 2025
FEDERAL ELECTION
DONE AND DUSTED,
MATT RUCHEL,

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ASKS
HOW DID NATURE FARE IN
THE MIX OF CULTURE WARS
AND ECONOMIC POLICIES?

During the election campaign, the Coalition committed nothing to nature. The Greens, 'teals' and other progressive independents supported ambitious policies for nature including:

- One per cent of federal budget for nature
- \$5 billion protected area fund
- \$20 billion for environmental restoration
- Full reform of nature laws
- Creation of a Land and Sea Country Commissioner as an independent First Nations voice.

Labor's only significant nature-related commitment was the 'Saving Australia's Bushland Program'. The \$250 million investment, staged over five years, will help achieve the commitment to protect 30 per cent of land and 30 per cent of seas by 2030. The new investment will:

- Kickstart the Nature Repair Market by investing in private landowners' conservation projects and improving links between the nature repair and carbon markets.

With the ALP's sweeping majority, they now have no excuse but to live up to rhetoric and slogans like 'Only Labor will ensure our iconic native species and precious places are protected for our kids and grandkids'.

- Empower partnerships with philanthropic organisations, and state and local governments that protect high conservation value areas to add to the National Reserve System.
- Provide vital safe havens for endangered wildlife.
- Better protect degraded government land (like Defence property and other crown lands) with actions like feral pig and weed removal.
- Support the establishment of new Indigenous Protected Areas.

The Albanese Government also reinstated their goal of reforming national nature laws and creating a federal Environment Protection Agency (EPA). However, both were dropped after intervention from WA and mining interests.

After the election result was clear, Labor did re-commit to an EPA, using a different model which may include

some reform of national laws, but not what they committed to in the last term. Queensland Senator Murray Watt, new Minister for Environment and Water, will be under scrutiny.

With the ALP's sweeping majority, they now have no excuse but to live up to rhetoric and slogans like 'Only Labor will ensure our iconic native species and precious places are protected for our kids and grandkids'.

Victoria's cryptic pathways to protected areas

Meanwhile here at home, there is a long list of places that should be added to our national reserve system and receive funding. High on the list is the back section of the former Holden Proving Ground, a part of the Western Port Woodlands wildlife corridor.

This remnant of intact coastal forest is still up for sale – the price has even dropped!

There's still radio silence on the expert panel's report on the proposed Great Forest National Park.

The Albanese Government also continues to delay legislating the central west parks. It is now a full four years since the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) recommendations were accepted; this is the longest period any government has taken to legislate a park.

Victoria is out of sync with national and international ambitions for 30 per cent protection of land and sea; in fact, they seem to be working towards a separate set of goals.

Great Outdoors Taskforce missing in action

There are hundreds of thousands of hectares of incredible and unique public forest in the Central Highlands, Yarra Ranges, eastern Victoria and the south-west. Yet it looks like the Albanese Government has officially abandoned Victoria's decades-long legacy of evidence-led nature protection.

The Great Outdoors Taskforce latest update prioritises reform of state forests over giving threatened wildlife and landscapes higher levels of protection.

After a 180-degree flip on its bold nature promises, the State Government appears determined to throw tested and respected conversation models out the window in favour of 'improving state forest management systems'.

Ironically, while dismissing upgraded land tenures, the Taskforce's update reaffirms existing gaps and issues with how state forests are currently managed.

These include investment gaps for recreation and tourism, education and behaviour change, closing legislative 'loopholes' that could revive native forest logging and adequate and long-term funding.

Corner of contrasts – forests in eastern Victoria

One input to the Great Outdoors Taskforce has been released – VEAC's analysis of the values of state forests in eastern Victoria. This is a desktop assessment, not a full investigation. It considers some of the key ecological, social and economic issues in the east of the state.

VEAC describes the complex and rich web of life in East Gippsland as a Corner of Contrasts 'for the unique diversity of environments and bioregions found in a relatively small area'.

The forests are habitat for several hundred threatened plants and animals, like Long-Footed Potoroos, Greater Gliders, Powerful Owls and Orbost Spiny Crayfish.

VEAC identified three areas of irreplaceable wildlife habitat: the Errinundra Plateau, corridors between Coopracambra and Croajingolong national parks, and the Colquhoun State Forest west of Licola, where exceptional nature conservation values compete with mineral deposits.

Central Highlands study

The report only looked at some threatened forest-dependent wildlife, leaving out several critical plants, animals and communities. Nature conservation groups flagged a similar problem with VEAC's Central Highlands study, but those concerns appear to have been ignored again.

Among overlooked wildlife are Critically Endangered Barred Galaxias (rare native fish found around the Mt Stirling part of the investigation area), Vulnerable White-footed Dunnarts (small marsupials), Endangered Lace Monitors (large lizards), and even iconic but Vulnerable Platypuses.

The report makes bold claims without backing them up. For example, it states that 'moving away from centralised governance will help our forests and communities adapt to challenges' but never explains what this means or how it would work in practice.

This vague approach is concerning and echoes the Great Outdoors Taskforce's position. The report does not provide evidence or properly examine these ideas – something that would have happened during a full VEAC investigation. 🌿

Revamped Parks Victoria leadership must refocus on nature

Lee Miezi has been appointed as the new CEO of Parks Victoria. The board has also been overhauled. Incoming Chair, Daniel Miller, will be joined by Professor Kate Auty, Graeme (Gus) Dear, Trent Nelson and Chris Newton, while Lisa Marty and Gill Sparkes AM will remain as board members.

Previously CEO of Environment Protection Authority Victoria, Miezi has held senior executive roles including as the inaugural CEO of Bushfire Recovery Victoria (now Emergency Recovery Victoria) and Deputy Secretary of DEECA.

VNPA welcomes the new appointments but flags a need to refocus on nature protection, including increasing funding. The government's media release failed to even mention national parks and paid scant attention to nature.

The leadership changes follow the unexpected departure of the previous CEO in November 2024. This was followed by a behind-closed-doors review without public consultation, then significant budget and staffing cuts. Victoria's conservation community is concerned this secretive review could undermine decades of hard-won nature protections. 🌿



↑ Then Environment Minister, Tanya Plibersek at Mulligans Flat Woodland Sanctuary, ACT | ABC NEWS

Shock collars, baits and confusion: Dingo/Wilkerr population left in the lurch

 DESPITE THEIR CRITICALLY ENDANGERED STATUS, GOVERNMENT ACTIONS ONLY SERVE TO UNDERMINE NOT STRENGTHEN DINGO CONSERVATION, REPORTS **JORDAN CROOK**, PARKS AND NATURE CAMPAIGNER

Just over a year ago, a historic decision protected the Dingo/Wilkerr population in the Big Desert-Wyperfeld area. This vast, remote landscape spanning Wyperfeld National Park, Big Desert Wilderness Park and Big Desert State Forest is home to fewer than 40 of these remarkable apex predators. It's Victoria's only formally recognised Dingo protection zone.

Agricultural interests are pushing to outfit these wild animals with GPS-enabled shock collars that would alert farmers when Dingoes/Wilkerr venture near properties. There's a concerning discussion about reintroducing leg-hold traps – spring-operated devices that capture animals by the limb. These proposals, progressed without proper consultation with Traditional Owners or conservation organisations, raise serious ethical and scientific concerns.

Agriculture Minister Ros Spence appears to support this measure, while Environment Minister Steve Dimopoulos's position is unclear. VNPA and other conservation groups have written to both ministers about the lack of consultation, animal welfare



↑ A young female Dingo/Wilkerr, Big Desert, Wotjobaluk Country | BIG DESERT DINGO RESEARCH

concerns, and the overall threat to this tiny, vulnerable population.

While tracking collars can be valuable research tools, misused data can place already threatened wildlife at greater risk. With so few surviving individuals, the north-west Dingo/Wilkerr population cannot withstand this additional stress.

Non-invasive methods, however, like camera arrays and genetic sampling, provide crucial insights into movement and behaviour without endangering the animals.

A toxic mistake

In February 2025, 1080 poison baits were discovered in Big Desert State Forest – the heart of the Dingo/Wilkerr range. This directly

contradicted a 2024 ministerial statement acknowledging their risk of extinction and promising stronger protection.

Thanks to swift action by dedicated Big Desert Dingo research volunteers, the baits were retrieved. It's unknown how much poison was consumed by wildlife before removal.

It shouldn't fall to volunteers to hold our elected representatives to account. The incident revealed a fundamental flaw in how our state looks after the welfare of Dingoes.

Responsibility is split between DEECA's biodiversity division and Agriculture Victoria – departments with conflicting approaches.

Instead of a coordinated recovery effort of habitat protection, genetic

TIMELINE OF VICTORIA'S DINGO DECISIONS



2008

Dingo listed as threatened under state nature laws (FFG Act)



April 2013

'Action Statement for *Canis lupus subsp. dingo*' published



May 2023

University of Sydney study (Cairns et al., *Molecular Ecology*) finds low hybridisation with domestic dogs using advanced genetic testing



March 2024

Protection granted to north-west Dingo/Wilkerr population, estimated at fewer than 40 individuals



August 2024

State Government hosts Dingo management 'consultations'



24 Sept 2024

Unprotection order extended in eastern Victoria until Jan 2028; bounty scheme ends



October 2024

DEECA-funded paper (Weeks et al., *Evolution Letters*) confirms minimal hybridisation and flaws in earlier genetic studies



February 2025

1080 baiting discovered in Big Desert State Forest within Dingo protection zone

What next?

DINGO IMAGES COURTESY DR DANIEL HUNTER

Plant Blindness with Adrian Marshall

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



Button Wrinklewort *Rutidosia leptorrhynchoides*

The Button Wrinklewort, as impossibly named in Latin as it is gloriously named in English, is a kind of daisy, and a rare grassland plant.

Some Button Wrinkleworts have two sets of chromosomes. Some are polyploid and have four. This bizarre feature of their genetics makes protecting this little gems all the harder.

Being rare, and a grassland plant, populations are isolated, fragmented, and prone in the long-term to loss of genetic diversity through inbreeding. To strengthen these populations, scientists want to bring in individuals from other populations, but they have to be from the right genetic group, two sets of chromosomes or four. It's both an interesting curiosity and a pain in the butt.

The most important population of Button Wrinklewort hangs out in a cemetery in Truganina in Melbourne's west. Like many old settler cemeteries, it's a tiny hotspot of biodiversity protecting grassland remnants never trashed by sheep, fertiliser or the plough. Thank you, dead people!

But even that most-studied, most cared for population is in peril. For a start, in the last few years the fields have turned into houses. But more importantly, the plants



↑ Button Wrinklewort | HOGGYYY/NATURALIST

aren't reproducing, and no one knows why. Adding to its woes, the Button Wrinklewort is very sensitive to fire at the wrong time of year, just when it's starting to bud.

But our lonely, magnificent friend does have secret fame. Driving into Melbourne on the Hume Freeway, opposite Craigieburn Grasslands, the soundwalls begin to shift and change: the white and translucent bars on those huge panels actually encode the Button Wrinklewort's DNA sequence. What, you didn't know? Talk about Plant Awareness Disparity.

Become a friend of the Lonely Button Wrinklewort at facebook.com/buttonwrinklewort

rescue and non-lethal measures for guarding livestock, we see fragmented policies and confused priorities. The result is poor (and often deadly) outcomes for these iconic mammals.

For the Wotjobaluk Nations, the Dingo/Wilkerr holds profound cultural and spiritual significance. Decisions about this endangered totemic animal must involve genuine partnership with Traditional Owners, not closed-door agreements.

A test of nature leadership

Protecting Dingoes/Wilkerr extends beyond the animal to the health and resilience of entire landscapes and habitats.

As apex predators, Dingoes/Wilkerr maintain a balance in the natural web of life. Their survival is interconnected with countless other native plants and animals.

We need a clear stance from the Environment Minister, reconsideration

from the Agriculture Minister, and leadership from both. The north-west Dingo/Wilkerr population is at a critical threshold. This is a true test of Victoria's commitment to nature conservation.

Will Victoria act decisively and create a future for one of Australia's most iconic wild animals, or have a hand in its extinction?

Find out more about Big Desert Dingo Research at bigdesertdingoresearch.org

Former park rangers unite for nature



THE VICTORIAN PROTECTED AREAS COUNCIL (VPAC) IS DEDICATED TO CONNECTING PARK MANAGERS AND PROTECTING NATIONAL PARKS, SAYS **FELICITY BROOKE**

Former Victorian park managers have formed a new group to advocate for the integrity and future of the national parks estate. The group was formed as a response to increasing concerns over the State Government's neglect and underfunding of national parks.

We know these places, the natural values, their communities and the challenges they face. Protected areas are the cornerstone of nature

conservation in Victoria. They protect places the community have visited and loved for generations.

VPAC members have had long and rewarding careers in national park management. Across Victoria, from the Mallee to the Alps to the coast, they have an affinity with the landscape, plants and animals. They have skills in a range of areas such as natural and cultural heritage management, recreation and tourism that can contribute, and value add to discussions on protected area planning and management.

VPAC provides a platform that brings our collective experience to government and protected area management agencies. It plans to engage with Traditional Owners fully, recognising national parks are living cultural landscapes and the future of their management relies on re-integrating traditional knowledge.

Our goal is to make sure our precious parks and wildlife are properly looked after today and tomorrow, and that community expectations are not only met but exceeded. 🌿

Felicity Brooke is a former park ranger and manager.

Find out more about VPAC at victorianprotectedareascouncil.org



↑ VPAC members in Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park in May celebrating the 50th anniversary of the National Parks Act 1975 | CHARLIE PASCOE/VPAC

Making the most of a sad situation

DECISIVE ACTION CAN HELP ERADICATE FERAL DEER FROM NATIONAL PARKS FOLLOWING BUSHFIRES

We have a great opportunity to aerially cull feral deer populations in large areas of the Grampians (Gariwerd) and Little Desert national parks, as well as Mt Buangor State Park, that were burnt by bushfire over the past few months.

Burnt and recovering canopies and vegetation in the park mean thermally assisted removal of feral deer is easier. Cullers can target feral deer more efficiently and safely.

Victoria's *West Victoria Deer Control Plan 2023-2028* prescribes local eradication

of deer in the Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park over the next five years. It aims to keep deer out of the Little Desert National Park and eradicate the currently low levels in the area.

Following the 2019/20 bushfires, aerial control effectively removed thousands of feral deer, pigs and cattle. The reduction of some deer species was up to 54 per cent in some parks. An entire population of feral cows was removed in the Snowy River National Park.

In March, VNPA and an alliance of state and regional conservation groups and land holders, wrote to both state and federal environment ministers. Together we called for immediate and long-term funding to eradicate feral deer from these parks.

If these park habitats are going to recover (think wildflowers, orchids and gum trees), this is a pivotal time to give deer the boot.

We just need our elected representatives to stomp up funding and support to make the most out of this sad situation. 🌿

Jordan Crook, Parks and Nature Campaigner

Read the alliance letter
vnpa.org.au/eradication-of-feral-deer



Waiting for parks like *Waiting for Godot*



BEN GILL, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER, ON THE GOVERNMENT'S LONG UNFULFILLED PROMISE: THE CENTRAL WEST NATIONAL PARKS

Four and a half years after the Andrews Government accepted recommendations to create new national parks in Victoria's central west, the promised legislation remains missing in action.

This year's State Budget has only deepened concerns. Analysis by the ABC confirms a 20 per cent cut to overall nature protection funding, continuing a trend of under-investment.

While the government continues to say they'll legislate the parks this year, the Budget contained no mention of investment in the central west parks, raising questions about whether the Allan Government is fair dinkum.

Meanwhile, the damage continues. Salvage logging is still occurring in Wombat Forest, with an estimated 4,000 cubic metres of timber now stockpiled near Daylesford. Reports suggest the government may be preparing policy to allow its sale, despite growing alarm over the ecological impacts of such



↑ Wombat Forestcare calling for the national park to be legislated, November 2024 | SANDY SCHELTEMA

operations in one of Victoria's most significant forest habitats.

With no sign of action, the wait for legislation is beginning to feel like a scene from *Waiting for Godot* – except instead of two men under a tree, it's the same old excuses while the trees quietly disappear.

The 2019 VEAC report laid out a clear vision for new parks. The community supported it. Scientists supported it. Even the government supported it – at least on paper.

Every month without legislated protection means more ecological damage, more public trust eroded, and more missed opportunities to invest in nature-based tourism, ecological restoration and cultural heritage protection.

The Allan Government must stop stalling. It is time to legislate the

central west parks, end salvage logging, reject any move to legitimise commercial timber extraction, and reverse the cuts to nature.

Victoria does not need more political theatre. It needs parks with proper resourcing. 🌿

Join our call for the central west national parks to be legislated

vnpa.org.au/centralwestnow



Kentbruck Green Energy Hub: good project, bad placement

 WE SUPPORT THE URGENT NEED FOR CLEAN, RENEWABLE ENERGY – BUT NOT AT THE COST OF OUR MOST PRECIOUS NATURAL AREAS, SAYS **JORDAN CROOK**, PARKS AND NATURE CAMPAIGNER

The proposed Kentbruck Green Energy Hub near Nelson in south-west Victoria will place 105 wind turbines smack bang in the Cobboboonee and Lower Glenelg national parks and Discovery Bay Coastal Park.

A planned underground transmission line through Cobboboonee National Park will impact at least 83 Vulnerable Western Peppermint trees (*Eucalyptus falciformis*), and Critically Endangered Apple Jacks (*Eucalyptus splendens*).

Underground transmission lines don't sound too bad, but when operations like this go wrong it leads to the death of trees over longer periods. From changed hydrology to introduced pathogens and damage to the trees' root structure. All this adds up to unnecessary pressure on habitat trees and threatened wildlife that should be protected within the park boundaries.

Australasian Bitterns, Brolgas and Southern Bent-wing Bats and the Critically Endangered Orange Bellied Parrots are all sensitive to wind farm developments. To put it in even greater perspective, only 50 Orange-bellied Parrots survive in the wild.

The proposed project is 2–3km from the coast which, according to the *Marine and Coastal Act 2018*, is part of the marine and coastal environment. Yet the developer's submission documents make no reference to the responsibilities listed in the Act.



↑ Discovery Bay Coastal Park, Gunditjmara Country | DENISBIN/FLICKR

If approved the project will be a catastrophe for nature in an already heavily cleared area with few surviving habitats. We hold grave concerns the project will negatively impact Cobboboonee National Park and an internationally significant Ramsar Site, and lead to the decline and local extinction of threatened plants and animals.

In our view the Environmental Effects Statement (EES) has downplayed and underestimated the extent of these impacts. The developer has relied too heavily on uncertain measures to alleviate inevitable damage to the area's web of natural life.


VNPA urges the relocation of the project to a less ecologically sensitive site. We need clean energy to protect nature and communities from fossil fuelled-climate disruption. But if we don't make sure all wildlife and habitats are on the life raft, we're simply repeating the mistakes that got us into the climate crisis in the first place.

VNPA presents to the EES Inquiry and Advisory Committee on 7 July 2025



↑ Orange-bellied Parrot | ROGER SMITH/FLICKR

Correction
Our story 'Brolga betrayal' in *ParkWatch* #299 (March 2025) incorrectly stated that Brolgas 'need an area of up to 2 km' around wind farm sites. The correct buffer zone is 5 km around such sites. The online version of the article has been corrected.

 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

Spotlight on Nature with Ella Darling



Golden Sun Moth *Synemon plana*

When we take a walk in nature it's easy to forget the whole other world bustling beneath the surface. For Golden Sun Moth larvae it's all they know. They live underground for up to three years, tunnelling through the soil and feeding on the roots of tussock grasses.

Come mid-October through January, when conditions are just right, adults will emerge for the flying season to breed. They will know this life above ground for just a few days. With no functioning mouthparts they cannot eat or drink and live only to reproduce.

Males fly in a distinctive zigzag pattern, searching for the females who sit flashing their bright orange hind wings. Females lay their eggs in the base of a tussock grass, their most preferred host species being Wallaby Grass (*Rytidosperma* spp.) and Spear Grass (*Austrostipa* spp.).

As the name suggests, the Golden Sun Moth is most active on warm, sunny and still days. Open space where the moths can soak up some rays is an important habitat requirement.

They once graced an area stretching from central NSW, through the ACT and Victoria's north and west, all the way to the SA border. They are now listed as Vulnerable in Victoria and nationally due to the widespread loss



↑ Golden Sun Moth | SIMON BENNETT/FLICKR

and degradation of their only habitat – grasslands. Given their short adult lifespan and females' mostly sedentary nature, they cannot disperse very far. This makes populations particularly vulnerable to the effects of habitat fragmentation and leads to local extinctions.

Like many things that can be found in a grassland, the Golden Sun Moth is rather unassuming and easy to miss, but by taking a closer look you can see how fascinating they are. They're yet another reason to continue the fight to save our grasslands.

Grassy Plains Network intern Ella Darling recently completed a Diploma of Conservation and Ecosystem Management at Melbourne Polytechnic

Loopy luge plan in Arthurs Seat State Park

Mornington Peninsula residents and conservationists have begun pushing back against an inappropriate proposal for a theme park-style 'luge' in the state park at Arthurs Seat/Wonga in Bunurong Country.

The application remains on hold awaiting further details, but will progress to formal public notice and a full assessment. As the development is valued at over \$20 million, there will be a streamlined process, with a shortened consultation period and limited opportunities for community to have their say.

But the local community hasn't waited to be sidelined, appearing on ABC's 7.30 and holding events to raise awareness. In March, VNPA proudly spoke at the Save Our Seat community meeting, alongside more

than 100 passionate locals. Together, we highlighted the need to protect this iconic state park from over-development.

Victoria's state and national parks are not playgrounds for the privileged. They exist for the benefit of all – especially the wildlife that call them home – now, and into the future.

Turning treasured public parks into exclusive, pay-for-use theme park attractions devalues not only the natural experience they offer, but also undermines Victoria's proud conservation legacy. It prioritises the interests of a wealthy few over the broader community and nature itself.

Once the application moves forward, we'll have only a short window to respond. We'll be ready to speak

out and help knock this misguided proposal out of the park.

Find out more and sign the petition: saveourseat.org



↑ Anti-luge sign in Dromana | BLAKE NISBET

↓ Southern Rock Lobster | JOHN TURNBULL/FLICKR



Clawsome results of marine protected area research



SOUTHERN ROCK LOBSTERS ARE THRIVING IN VICTORIA'S MARINE NATIONAL PARKS, SAYS SHANNON HURLEY, NATURE CONSERVATION



CAMPAIGNER WITH JESSIE BORRELLE, ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

There's a formidable presence in our coastal waters. A battalion of maroon-red and orange creatures patrol the ocean floor with powerful claws, having survived multiple mass extinctions over 100 million years. Southern Rock Lobsters (*Jasus edwardsii*) are ocean engineers that shape seafloor communities with their foraging behaviours. These ancient crustaceans help balance our delicate underwater habitats and serve as important bioindicators of reef health. And they've also just finished collaborating with researchers on a fascinating project that measures the effects of marine protected areas

(MPAs). The Parks Victoria and Deakin University study, published in the *Journal of Biological Conservation* (vol. 306, June 2025) confirms that MPAs and especially 'no-take' zones, are essential for the survival of marine animals like Southern Rock Lobsters.

Rocking results

Over a decade, 2,000 rock lobsters were sampled across six MPAs and adjacent fished areas, including Discovery Bay, Merri Marine Sanctuary, Point Addis, Port Phillip Heads, Wilsons Promontory and Cape Howe. The results were profound: protected sites had over double the number of lobsters, averaging 3.05 per pot compared to 1.4 in fished zones. Not only were these armoured sentinels more abundant within MPAs, but they were also significantly larger. The study used advanced spatial modelling to account for differences in reef structure, depth and ocean conditions. Even with these factors controlled, protection status stood out as the key driver of lobster abundance and size. Rock lobsters have small home ranges, making local protection efforts really effective.

Quick facts: Southern Rock Lobsters & MPAs

Species

Southern Rock Lobster
Jasus edwardsii

Habitat

Rocky reefs along Victoria's coast

Size matters

Lobsters inside MPAs were significantly larger than those in fished areas

No-take zones

MPAs where fishing is prohibited are key to lobster recovery

Big picture

Protecting lobsters boosts biodiversity and supports surrounding fisheries

Some of the most dramatic findings came from deeper, more complex reefs in the western parts of the state waters, like Discovery Bay and Merri Marine Sanctuary. These areas showed particularly high numbers of large, legal-sized lobsters. 'This research shows marine protected areas are making a real difference,' says Michael Sams from Parks Victoria. 'It's a clear sign these areas are helping to restore marine habitats – and potentially boost populations beyond park boundaries too.' Victoria's network of marine national parks is proving its worth: protecting our diverse sea country, supporting sustainable fisheries, and letting these ancient warriors continue their evolutionary legacy. 🦞

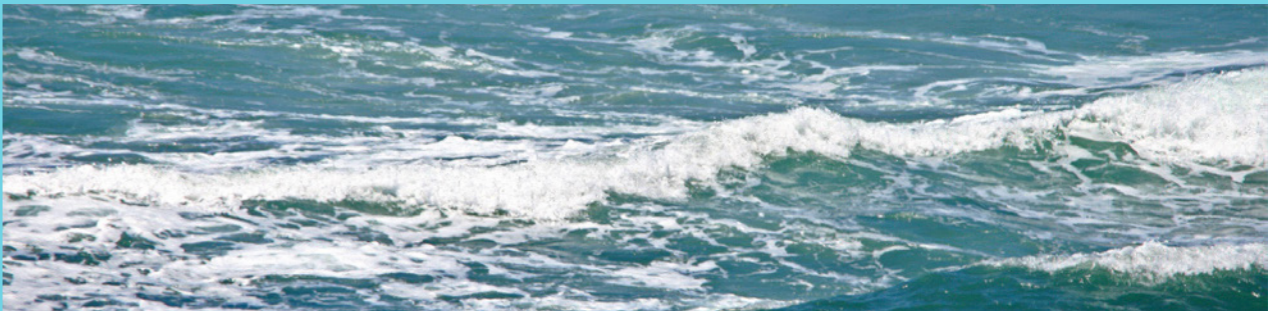
Salty Science with Shannon Hurley



Swell

Whether you're a surfer or not, it's hard to ignore the breathtaking sight of swell lines rolling steadily toward the shore. But what exactly is swell, and how is it formed? Swell refers to a group of waves that have travelled long distances across the ocean, often arriving in rhythmic sets visible on the horizon. These waves can originate from powerful weather systems located thousands of kilometres away – an impressive demonstration of nature's energy at work. When wind blows across the ocean's surface, it transfers energy into the water. This energy radiates outward from the storm or weather event that created it, forming the long, even lines we recognise as swell. The spacing between these wave lines – known as the period – can reveal a lot about their journey. Swell lines

that are close together generally result from local wind conditions and tend to carry less energy. In contrast, swell with longer periods between waves usually comes from far-off storms and carries significantly more power. The strength and consistency of a swell are influenced not just by the wind itself, but also by the fetch (the distance over which the wind blows uninterrupted) and the duration of that wind. The longer and stronger the wind blows over a large stretch of ocean, the more energy is transferred into the water, producing larger, more organised swells. Not all waves are created equal. Wind waves are generated by local winds and tend to be shorter, choppier, and less consistent. In contrast, groundswells – which form from distant storms – are longer, more powerful, and provide the clean, well-formed waves surfers chase around the world. Mother Nature is more than swell, she's fascinating! 🌊




↑ Passengers on the Western Port Bay boat trip, Bunurong Country

Marine spatial plan floats our boat

Exploring Western Port's wetlands by boat offers a rare and stunning view of its vibrant habitat. With support from Patagonia, VNPA hosted 40 passionate advocates – including Council reps, conservationists and local MPs – for a special tour and discussion on the bay's future. From Crawfish Rock's colourful reef to the tidal rhythms that guide birdlife, the trip highlighted both natural wonders and industrial impacts. We set sail with Wildlife Coast Cruises and enjoyed expert insights from Parks Victoria, Phillip Island Nature Parks and Western Port Biosphere. Together, we're championing a vision and plan to guide collaborative care for the bay, and \$1.2 million to launch Victoria's first marine spatial plan. 🌊

Protecting the protectors

 **THE STATE GOVERNMENT'S ATTACK ON FISHERIES OFFICERS WILL SERIOUSLY AFFECT ENFORCEMENT, SAYS KAREN BATT, CPSU BRANCH SECRETARY**

In February, the Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA) announced a proposal to slash the number of Victoria's frontline Fisheries Officers by over half.

The proposed restructure involves replacing 73 Fisheries Officers, who work on the frontline to enforce and protect our marine and river environments and fisheries, with 36 'Engagement Officers'. This would change their focus from compliance to education, leading to less enforcement.

When Fisheries Officers are cut, illegal activities go unchecked, leaving marine habitats and fisheries subject to damaging activities they may not recover from.

You don't get a second chance at saving them. Once they're gone, they're gone – forever.

In response to the proposals, the Fisheries Officer Association (a sub-branch of the CPSU), unanimously passed a vote of no confidence in the VFA CEO. This vote was not taken lightly. These important reasons were cited:

- The perceived deterioration of staff safety, wellbeing and culture.

- The proposed reduction in Fisheries Officers despite increases in non-compliance.
- VFA's inability to meet objectives of relevant legislation, especially concerning sustainability.
- VFA's inability to adequately address the current stock levels of Victorian fisheries.
- VFA's lack of thorough and considered planning.
- The decline in support of VFA's management of Victorian fisheries, as indicated by the recent VRFish survey.
- The lack of support for Fisheries Officers and the failure to meaningfully consult with them.

FOA requested a meeting with the VFA Board in the hope of discussing these issues and the upcoming expiring tenure of the CEO. However, the board has been evasive and are yet to facilitate any such meeting.

Given the urgent nature of the matters to be discussed, we are genuinely troubled and are losing confidence in the VFA leadership. Furthermore, we have made endless unsuccessful attempts to facilitate a meeting with Minister Dimopoulos following his unexplained last-minute cancellation of three pre-planned meetings.

We are left further troubled by this disingenuous approach and consequent lack of consultation.

Victoria's Fisheries Officers are frontline workers who deserve respect for the critical work they do protecting these environments for everyone. 🌿

Opposition the State Government's fishing cuts has united VNPA with the Victorian Recreational Fishing Peak Body (VRFish), Seafood Industry Victoria, Abalone Council Victoria and the CPSU. We all share the view that slashing frontline fisheries officers is a big mistake that poses significant threats to marine health, sustainable fish stocks and public safety on Victorian waters.

Add your voice

vnpa.org.au/action-stop-cuts-to-marine-protection

savevicfisheries.com



F1 agreement is the pits

The Victorian Government slashed \$95 million from Parks Victoria while promising the owners of Formula One, Liberty Media, a \$350 million pit building extension as part of a deal to extend the grand prix contract a further two years to 2037.

'Protecting Victoria's dry and over-grown national parks... takes a backseat to further lining the pockets of Liberty Media,' said Peter Logan from Save Albert Park.

'It is in Liberty Media's interest to keep the Grand Prix in Melbourne because the State Government is willing to pay annual exorbitant fees to host a four-day event on top of revenue the owners of F1 receive from trackside advertising.'

Liberty Media will reap an estimated \$30 million annually from the pit building extension. Revenue from that facility had previously gone to the Australian Grand Prix Corporation.

This is one of Melbourne's major public parks, not a motor racing circuit. Victorians are the losers. Again. 🌿

[Read more at savealbertpark.org](https://savealbertpark.org)



↑ Southern Blue Devil, Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park, Bunurong Country | SHANNON HURLEY

Glad tidings Nature news to bring a smile to your face



Hot nesting saves eggs

The ingenuity of the Malleefowl (*Leipoa ocellata*) has helped it to survive recent bushfires which extensively burnt through Little Desert National Park. It is estimated there are only a few dozen nests in the park, but Parks Victoria chief scientist Mark Norman said the birds remain active.

Much of the success comes down to the Malleefowl's ingenious nest building technique: they typically lay their eggs to incubate inside large above-ground nests until they hatch. The fact that the nests were filled with compost and the temperature regulated to around 33°C could have helped them survive the bushfire.

'The mounds are good insulation, so the fires don't cook or burn the eggs or chicks, and they can survive afterwards,' Dr Norman said. 😊

Source: abc.net.au/news/2025-03-30/malleefowl-survive-bushfires-in-little-desert-national-park/105050998



↑ Malleefowl in Little Desert National Park, Wotjobaluk Country | DONALD HOBERN/FLICKR

Doggies discover dragons

Wildlife detection dogs trained by Zoos Victoria have successfully sniffed out 13 Critically Endangered Victorian Grassland Earless Dragons (*Tympanocryptis pinguicolla*) in previously unknown burrows in Melbourne's west.

After a year of training, Daisy, a 6-year-old Lagotto Romagnolo, and Kip, an 8-year-old Kelpie cross, sniffed out the dragons in return for treats, cuddles, ball games and praise. Daisy and Kip were chosen for their safe behaviour around small animals and experience surveying for threatened animals, including Baw Baw Frogs and freshwater turtles.

Zoos Victoria also trained two other dogs to search for dragon scats. While the dogs were effective at finding them, they were limited by how quickly scats were scavenged by ants and other invertebrates in the wild. 😊

Source: theguardian.com/environment/2025/apr/08/earless-dragons-presumed-extinct-victoria-australia-wildlife-detection-dogs-found-them



↑ Dr Nick Rutter with Daisy | ZOOS VICTORIA



↑ Nature Stewards rambling at Mushroom Reef Marine Sanctuary, Bunurong Country | NICOLE MERTENS

Reef rambling

Nature Stewards Mornington Peninsula Autumn 2025 course ventured down to Mushroom Reef Marine Sanctuary, near Flinders, with ReefWatch's Kade Mills to explore the intertidal zone of this special place.

The class learned about the geological history of the area before getting up close with the creatures that live there including chitons, elephant snails, brittle stars and sea slugs! 🌿



↑ Sea slug, *Jorunna* sp. | NICOLE MERTENS

Unwanted Visitors

with Feral Beryl 

Gorse

Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), also known as furze, is a perennial shrub up to 4 metres high and 3 metres diameter. It is a multi-generational contaminant – an unwanted visitor that well and truly overstay its welcome.

Who invited it?

Gorse was introduced into Australia deliberately, but also arrived unwittingly in imported grass seed and fodder. Once it invaded, it thrived. In Victoria, it can grow almost anywhere, including on soil degraded by mining operations and on the edges of swamps.

Why is it unwanted?

Gorse outcompetes most other plants. It dominates. Within six months of germination a gorse seedling grows tough spikes that stop it being eaten. Within two years it will flower and produce seeds. They remain viable in the soil for decades, often germinating years after the parent plant was destroyed. This makes gorse a multi-generational land contaminant that prevents other plants growing, elevates fire risk, and is a safe haven for foxes, feral cats and rabbits.



↑ Gorse regrowing after being treated because some was missed

How do we evict this overstaying guest?

The first key to preventing gorse infestations is to prevent it arriving. Quarantine any soil, fill or fodder that may have gorse seed in it to a specific area of your property so you can find and manage any seedlings. Gorse seeds spread down catchments in floods, as well as by equipment such as mowers. The second key is to use the excellent resources on the Victorian Gorse Taskforce website to identify gorse and get the best control outcomes. The Atlas of Living Australia has a broad picture of where gorse is and where it has historically infested land in Victoria. You can contribute to the infestation data by adding your records via iNaturalist or the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas (VBA). VBA assists councils and government with ensuring land managers comply with their obligations under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* to prevent the spread of gorse. VBA also evidences where gorse has been so all future land managers can be alert to where it has grown. 🐾



↑ Gorse growing amongst native vegetation, Hopkins River, Allansford, Eastern Maar Country | ALL IMAGES: LISETTE MILL

Victorian Gorse Taskforce
vicgorsetaskforce.com.au

Victorian Biodiversity Atlas
environment.vic.gov.au/biodiversity/victorian-biodiversity-atlas

Atlas of Living Australia
ala.org.au



Darren McClelland

↓ Darren on a VNPA trip to Flinders Island in 2007



DARREN McCLELLAND, A VNPA MEMBER SINCE 2002, HAS LED BUSHWALKS AND VOLUNTEERED ON A NUMBER OF COMMITTEES. HE SHARES SOME THOUGHTS ON HIS INVOLVEMENT WITH VNPA, AND HOW HIS CONTRIBUTION MAKES A DIFFERENCE TO NATURE

Tell us how you first came to care for nature.

I grew up in regional Victoria, on a farm in the Wimmera. My parents were very conscientious about the value of regeneration for productive farming and amenity. Accordingly, they extensively planted native species windbreaks along our property. They were also members of the local History and Natural History group and took me along on many excursions to places like Wyperfeld National Park.

Do you have a favourite national park in Victoria?

If I was to be boring, I would say Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park, as I visited regularly in my childhood and am still a member of two local friends groups. For something out of the ordinary, I recommend everyone visit the Lower Glenelg National Park in far south-western Victoria. The Glenelg is renowned for its paddling, but there's a great walking track along it too! I've walked it three times, and never tire of its broad expanses and lovely gorges.

You have been a Bushwalking Leader with VNPA for several years. Can you tell us about a memorable VNPA walk?

In 2007, I took a group of VNPA members to Flinders Island for a week of walking. It became evident very quickly that the island is a 'Prom escapee' with its similar granite terrain. Lots of walks to enjoy there, and a wonderful sense of remoteness.



← Darren at a NatureWatch Caught on Camera activity in Bunyip State Forest, Bunurong Country, 2022


What was your motivation for joining VNPA committees?

I was previously a member of the Finance and Governance and the former Marketing and Community Engagement committees. I wanted to contribute my professional skills to the running of VNPA to help it make a difference for our parks system and environment more generally.

You've let us know that you've left a gift in your Will for VNPA. Can you share some thoughts on your decision?

While I don't have children I have several nieces and nephews who all have children. I want them all to have the same opportunity to enjoy nature that I have had. It's more important than ever that VNPA is a strong organisation that can fend off the many threats to our parks. 🐾

Back to Beeripmo

 **PETER WHELAN** TAKES US ON THE BEERIPMO WALK AND REVEALS THE BONDING POWER OF CHICKPEAS

We were a diverse group of walkers starting the Beeripmo Walk at Mt Cole/Bereep Bereep, an amazing 22 km overnight walk in the Pyrenees Ranges just north of Beaufort over a weekend in late March.

Impressively, the Beeripmo camp site on Saturday evening was full to overflowing with younger bushwalkers.

That night, the key topic of conversation around our campsite was none other than chickpeas. Namely how to soak, fry, turn into curries, make burgers and soups. We were so lucky to have a member of our group, a farmer from Stawell who shared stories of chickpea farming.

In 2024, a large bushfire burnt most of Mt Cole. Regardless, we were all struck by the amazing regeneration along the walk, and that some parts were not impacted, despite the scale. We were particularly overjoyed to see many Critically Endangered Mt Cole Grevilleas.



↑ Mt Cole Grevillea seedling | JULIE ANDREW

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



↑ VNPA Bushwalking group on the Beeripmo Walk | EVA LIU

Even though we saw many amazing examples of the regenerative power of nature, decades of logging and land clearing have degraded many parts of the forest.

The State Government has made a commitment to create a national park covering Mt Cole and Mt Buangor, but little action has taken on this important issue. The relentless advocacy of VNPA supporters for the creation of this national park will, we hope, bear fruit with time.

When it does, our actions will have guaranteed the survival and future regeneration of these beautiful, wooded plateau areas.

We encourage everyone to fully support ongoing actions for the central west national parks!

As bushwalkers who bonded around chickpeas, we encourage all VNPA members to become involved in community volunteering and citizen science in protection of Mt Cole, Mt Buangor and the Pyrenees. 🌿

Love nature? Share it with others!

We're on the lookout for new volunteer leaders to help more people get into and learn about nature.

Our Bushwalking Program is entirely volunteer-led – but it's about so much more than just walking. Our leaders run a wide range of activities, including birding, wildflower wanders, forest tours, overnight hikes, nature-based art and photography, bike rides and more!

We provide training and support through a friendly mentoring program, so you'll be well-prepared and welcomed into a great community.

If you're passionate about nature and enjoy sharing it with others, we'd love to hear from you. Find out more at:

vnpa.org.au/explore/become-a-bushwalking-leader

Where we went in Autumn

WE HAD A BUSY TIME IN MARCH, APRIL AND MAY, ON LAND AND IN THE WATER

-  Bushwalkers enjoyed the beach and heathland at Anglesea, and great views on an overnight hike at Mt Cole.
-  Grassland lovers visited Burns Road and Ajax Road Grasslands.
-  Curious communities learnt all about their local nature at Nature Stewards courses in Knox, Ballarat, Geelong and Mornington Peninsula.
-  Grassy meadow enthusiasts learnt all about orchids, fire in grasslands and the scattered trees and grassy savannah of western Victoria at Grassy Plains Network monthly meetings.
-  Citizen scientists surveyed wildlife in the soon to be Wombat-Lerderderg and Mount Buangor national parks and the proposed Great Forest National Park.
-  Western Port Woodlands supporters learnt about fire and its impacts on wildlife and habitats in the woodlands at a webinar.
-  Marine lovers snorkelled through restored kelp forests at Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuary.
-  Slug lovers searched for sea slugs at San Remo and Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuary.
-  Picnickers shared food, laughter and stories about Victoria's amazing forests and national parks at Mount Donna Buang.
-  Western Port Bay fans explored the wonders of Coolart Wetlands near Somers.

↓ NatureWatch volunteers at Mt Cole | SERA BLAIR

↓ NextGen Nature kelp restoration at Ricketts Point | MICHAEL LOO



Join our Winter activities

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

New activities are added regularly!

Sign up to get our latest activities
vnpa.org.au/activities-sign-up

Discover more at
vnpa.org.au/activities



↓ Sisters Hilary and Liz Howes at Turpins Falls on the Campaspe River, 1993 | SUPPLIED: HILARY HOWES

*We're
sticking
up for*

NATIONAL PARKS



OUR NATIONAL PARKS ARE UNDER SIEGE. WE MUST STICK UP FOR THEM BY ACTING NOW SAYS **MATT RUCHEL**, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Victoria's national parks protect the very best of our state; from snow-dusted mountain ash forests to rich coastal wetlands teeming with birdlife. They are places of beauty, connection, and deep meaning. Woven into the fabric of our families and our lives, they are a legacy for all living things, and for all of us.

But now, that epic legacy is under threat.

Not just from the growing impacts of climate change. Not just from the relentless march of feral animals and weeds. But from the very people entrusted to care for it.

Instead of stepping up for nature, our elected leaders are stepping aside. In recent years, we've seen alarming failures to safeguard Victoria's parks and protected areas:

- Walking away from commitments to create large new national parks in eastern Victoria after the end of native forest logging.
- Ignoring decades of community support for a Great Forest National Park in the Yarra Ranges.
- Repeatedly delaying long-promised legislation for new central west national parks.
- Launching a questionable review of Parks Victoria's role, while slashing funding for rangers and park management.
- Withholding key reports and policy recommendations on nature protection.
- Cutting Fisheries Officer numbers in Port Phillip and Western Port, our busiest fishing and boating waters.

We're stepping up for nature

At a time when invasive species, climate disruption and disinformation are all on the rise, we need properly resourced, science-backed management more than ever.

Yet instead, the people and programs tasked with protecting nature are being dismantled. VNPA is stepping

up where the government is stepping back.

We're calling for a properly funded, independent parks agency – one guided by expert science and by people who truly care about nature.

This is a pivotal moment. If we don't act now, we risk losing a 50-year legacy of conservation – and with it, the future of the wild places we love.

Your support today can help us push back. A tax-deductible donation will help VNPA continue the fight to protect Victoria's parks and nature.

Together, we can ensure these special places are cared for, forever. 🌿

Support our work sticking up for national parks

[vnpa.org.au/
stickupforparks](https://vnpa.org.au/stickupforparks)



We asked VNPA staff and supporters why they're sticking up for national parks. Here are their stories.

Sera Blair

NatureWatch Coordinator

Alpine National Park

Bidwell, Dhudhuroa, Gunaikurnai, Jaithmathang, Taungurung & Nindigudjam Ngarigu Monero Country



I got married on Mount Buffalo – as a Canadian moving to Australia I thought it was the most beautiful place! The wildflowers were amazing, and I wore everlastings and gum leaves in my hair. It was perfect. It was already a special place for us as my husband grew up nearby and the Alps were his playground. We used to hike, camp and rock climb there. So, we got married in the park in a very simple ceremony standing on a slab of rock – the 'wedding slab' to us.

Keeping that mountain as wild as possible but still accessible and safe is very important. I am opposed to any development there beyond a few tweaks. We also spread my husband's ashes there, on the wedding slab. I think one of the best things about national parks is they don't change much. They don't get wrecked. You can come back decades later and it is familiar, so you maintain your connection to the place.



Hade Mills ReefWatch Coordinator

Wilsons Prom National Park

Gunaikurnai & Bunurong Country

Excitement levels were at 11 in the car on the way to Squeaky Beach at Wilsons Prom. My cousin (the tall one standing on the rock next to me) had raved about this magical beach where the sand actually squeaks! I still remember hitting the sand at full speed, running in circles just to hear that sound. I still do it today, a slightly embarrassing attempt to relive those childhood moments.

The granite boulders scattered along the beach are a kid's paradise, criss-crossed with narrow passages and offering access to the top, where you can strike a pose for a photo while your parents shout reminders to be careful.

Our national parks spark curiosity, adventure and joy. No gear is required, just the shirt on your back (or in my case, shorts).

Jacob L'Huillier Lunt

Digital Campaign Producer

Great Otway National Park

Eastern Maar, Gadabanud & Wadawurrung Country

Phil Ingamells, a fierce nature protector and VNPA campaigner (and my godfather) taught me how to be present in nature.

We had many trips through our great national parks, like this one in the Great Otway National Park, where I would walk alongside Phil as he provided a narrative of the many stories of the forest intertwining with each other.

We'd stop regularly as he brought out his camera, lay down on the forest floor and took photos of tiny orchids. His passion for protecting these places was obvious in every step he took,



every plant he pointed out, every moment he spent crouched among the ferns with his camera.

He taught me that our natural areas aren't just nice places to visit. To look closer, spend a bit of time and learn to respect the beautifully complex world around us.

A world that deserves and needs protection for the generations that follow ours.

Howes family
VNPA supporters

Organ Pipes
National Park

Wurundjeri Country

Our dad, Michael Howes, worked for Parks Victoria as Interpretation and Education Officer and later as VNPA Publications Editor, so national parks were an obvious choice for family day trips and longer holidays.

Organ Pipes National Park was within easy reach of our family home. We have so many happy memories of eating picnic lunches under the She-oaks, accompanied by the squeaking of Superb Fairy-wrens. And of walking along the creek to marvel at the bizarre geological formations of the Organ Pipes themselves.

Dad designed an information display 'Rock Around the Park' (he never could resist a pun!) featuring cartoon characters Sally and Sammy Sheoak. He knew many of the founding Friends of the Organ Pipes; their success in restoring a severely degraded landscape remains inspirational today. It's a great reminder that volunteer efforts really make a positive difference.



Kristian Lang
Fundraising Executive



Yarra Ranges
National Park

Wurundjeri Country

This was my first time seeing snow, sometime around 2001 at Mt Donna Buang. Coming from the suburbs of Melbourne, it felt like stepping into another world – we were surrounded by towering forests, deep valleys and tall peaks, yet we were only an hour or so out of the city!

It is absolutely essential to me areas like this are protected for future generations to appreciate.

Martin Lenard
VNPA supporter

Grampians (Gariwerd)
National Park

Djab Wurrung & Jardwardjali Country



We visited the Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park numerous times when we lived in Stawell. So much to see and do for the entire family.

From clamouring up Elephant's Hide to visiting the kangaroos at Zumsteins to a picnic at Golton Gorge, each visit was a delight. Spotting the fish and crayfish in a crystal clear stream or just being awe-inspired by the magnificent sandstone cuesta landscapes.

My particular delight was just to observe the wonderful natural order and patterns of the undisturbed native vegetation. You only find this in our national parks!



Order your free copy of 'The purpose and power of national parks' (available late July)

vnpa.org.au/purposeandpower



Speak
out against
misinformation

OUR NEW EXPLAINER GIVES YOU THE TOOLS TO STICK UP FOR NATIONAL PARKS

The web of life we all depend on is under extreme pressure. Victoria's national parks and conservation reserves are a core solution to many problems. But how do they work and what makes them so special?

It's up to all of us to protect the places that protect nature, and to stick up for them in conversations with friends or online.

Our new explainer, *The purpose and power of national parks*, maps out the purpose and power of national parks. It sets out clear explanations of the role they play in keeping wildlife and landscapes safe.

Deepen your knowledge and empower those around you with the right information.

↓ Twelve Apostles Marine National Park, Eastern Maar Country | MEELAN BAWJEE/UNSPLASH



50 years of the National Parks Act

Golden milestone



ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR DON GARDEN TAKES

A LOOK BACK AT THE GENESIS AND PASSAGE OF THE LEGISLATION THAT COVERS VICTORIA'S PROTECTED AREAS

The Victorian *National Parks Act* 1975 marked a significant point in the evolution and development of the state's national park and wider land conservation system. It has served Victoria's natural areas well over the last 50 years.

From grassroots advocacy to legislative reform

The 1975 Act didn't emerge in a vacuum. Its roots trace back to VNPA's early advocacy in the 1950s.

Following our concerted campaign, in 1956, the Bolte Government established a limited national parks administration. Its first director was the inaugural VNPA President, Crosbie Morrison. This was the first example of centralised park management, replacing ad-hoc local committees with a single body to ensure consistent policy and adequate resourcing for all national parks.

Progress towards increasing the number of parks and improving

protection was slow as environmental issues and land use were not major issues. Funding for management was poor. The agricultural, mining and forestry industries were fairly free to access Crown Land as they wanted. However, by the late 1960s, there was a worldwide stirring of environmental consciousness that was beginning to find a voice in Australia.

VNPA was deeply involved in the process, providing submissions, expertise and advice, although frustrated at the slowness of the system and the limited creation of new parks.

The Little Desert spark

The first time conservation became a significant public and political issue in Victoria was in late 1960s. The government had proposed to subdivide most of the Little Desert in the west of the state for farming, leaving a small area for a national park. A surprisingly strong public protest campaign threatened Bolte's future and he backed down.

Bolte was nothing if not pragmatic and, taking advice from Bill

Borthwick (whom he made Minister for Conservation in June 1970), Bolte agreed to establish the Land Conservation Council (LCC). It would examine the remaining unalienated Crown Land in Victoria and make recommendations about its future use, including national parks, and theoretically take the process away from politicians and replace it with one led by experts. The legislation was passed in 1971, the LCC was established and it set to work over months and years on a series of regional studies to analyse and recommend future land use.

VNPA was deeply involved in the process, providing submissions, expertise and advice, although frustrated at the slowness of the system and the limited creation of new parks.

A modern approach to parks

The early 1970s brought new challenges. Commercial interests were increasingly eyeing off Crown Land and trying to obtain access to existing national parks. Pressure was also building for greater recreational use of parks as motor vehicles enabled easier travel and off-road vehicles penetrated into remote and rugged regions.

In 1972, Bolte was replaced as Premier by Dick (later Sir Rupert) Hamer whose more progressive government included Borthwick as Minister for

Conservation. Borthwick decided a rethink was required about how national parks should be defined and administered and what types of use should be permitted.

In December 1974, he introduced the National Parks Bill into Parliament to revise the 1956 Act and later amendments. It was further debated, passed and assented to on 16 May 1975.

What the 1975 Act achieved

The *National Parks Act* 1975 brought major reforms. It clarified aspects of the administration of the national parks regime, including a revised National Parks Service (NPS) and a strengthening of the role of its Director. A National Parks Advisory Council (NPAC) was established, consisting of a 'balanced' mixture of nominees of conservation groups, industry and government departments and authorities. VNPA was designated to occupy one of the nominee positions, though this no longer applies.

The legislation widened the scope of the NPS to administer not only traditional national parks but also allowed for the designation of zones in national parks and for the creation of more varied types of parks on Crown Land. There was a clear recognition of the need for the increasingly urbanised population to have a 'countryside experience' while protecting prime natural areas. This was the foundation of Victoria's current tiered tenured or multi-use system of parks.

Borthwick used this definition of a traditional park:

A national park is a relatively large area set aside for its features of predominantly unspoiled natural landscape, flora and fauna, permanently dedicated for public enjoyment, education and inspiration, and protected from all interference other than essential management practices, so that its natural attributes are preserved.

He explained the provision for the creation of zones within national parks and 'other' types of parks as follows:

These parks will include areas which may have significant eco-systems but are not large enough to be classified as National Parks; areas of natural bushland which are set aside for recreation and enjoyment by the people; areas which may include a number of uses such as boating, fishing, swimming, hunting, and which are zoned according to the use; and areas for environmental education or areas for scientific reference or study.

It was this latter element, the much wider range of types of protected public lands and spaces that it facilitated, which was arguably one of the most important achievements of the 1975 Act. It also required the adding or removing of national parks to be undertaken by legislation, the development of management plans and tightened leasing requirements.

The legislation embedded a direct link between the Director of National Parks and the Minister. However, it failed to clearly define the relationship

on the key issue of funding, a problem which remains today.

Legacy and future challenges

When the Act came into force in 1975 there were 26 national parks totalling over 226,000 ha. This significantly increased over time as the LCC took the opportunity to recommend a wide range of levels of protection and the number of new categories grew steadily to include Reference Areas, Wilderness Areas, National Parks, State Parks, Regional Parks, Flora and Fauna Reserves, Natural Features and Scenic Reserves, Bushland Reserves and State Forests.

In due course, there would be nine categories in the *National Parks Act* and a raft of other classifications from other legislation, which are now managed by Parks Victoria, and which periodically cause more confusion and debate than clarification.

A number of VNPA's concerns about the original Bill were addressed as it passed through Parliament. Overall, VNPA welcomed the 1975 Act and commended the government for this critical step towards better conservation of Victoria's national parks and natural environment. What remains constant is the core mission set out in 1956 and reaffirmed in 1975: to safeguard natural and cultural values for future generations while allowing the public to experience and learn from Victoria's magnificent parks. 🌿

Don Garden is the author of *Conservation Journeys – A History of VNPA*



↑ Wilsons Promontory National Park in the 1970s, Gunaikurnai and Bunurong Country | ALAN JORDAN/STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA

Evolution of parks management

THE MANAGEMENT OF VICTORIA'S NATIONAL PARKS HAS CHANGED DRASTICALLY OVER THE LAST 135 YEARS

The *National Parks Act 1975* has been amended dozens of times over the last 50 years, partly as product of the need to create new national parks which can only be done via legislation.

However, there have also been amendments which both strengthened and weakened the Act and its core role in the protection of nature in perpetuity.

Committees of Management 1890–1956

The first national parks, such as Mount Buffalo and Wilsons Promontory, were reserved under the *Land Act 1890* and managed by local committees of management. They often had to log or graze the parks to generate income.

National Parks Authority 1956–1975

Established by the *National Parks Act 1956*, it was a fairly modest authority until strengthened in 1975.

National Parks Service 1975–1996

Established under the *National Park Act 1975*, it managed larger national parks and conservation reserves as part of the then Department of Natural Resources and Environment.

Parks Victoria 1996–2025

Established in 1996 as separate statutory authority reporting to the Minister for Environment. It absorbed staff from the National Parks Service

and was merged with Melbourne Parks and Waterways (originally part of the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works) which look after metropolitan parks like Braeside and Albert Park. National parks were essentially managed by delegation from Secretary of the Department of Environment.

Traditional Owners

The first Traditional Owner co-managed park was introduced in 2009 with the Yorta Yorta People in Barmah National Park. The *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* allowed the Traditional Owners to jointly manage certain national parks through agreements and boards. There are around 30 co- or jointly-managed national parks in Victoria

Other legislative changes

Parks Victoria's authority was strengthened by the Andrews Government's *Parks Victoria Act 2018* which essentially re-established the authority with an expanded mandate, clarified its functions and strengthened accountability, reflecting the maturation of the agency.

In 2021, the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority took control of significant national parks and coastal reserves in the Otways and along the Great Ocean Road, like the Twelve Apostles, fragmenting responsibility for management.

2025 and beyond

The future will most certainly see an increased role and strengthening of Traditional Owners in either cooperative, joint or even potential sole management of Victoria's protected area estate. Time will tell what other changes are afoot.

Matt Ruchel, Executive Director

Marilyne Crestias' legacy for nature



VNPA TREASURER **MARILYNE CRESTIAS** RECENTLY MADE THE GENEROUS DECISION TO LEAVE A GIFT FOR NATURE IN HER WILL. HERE SHE SHARES SOME THOUGHTS ON HER CHOICE

I have always felt most myself when I am out in nature. There is something grounding about being among tall trees, hearing birdsong, or feeling the wind come off the sea. Whether it is walking through bushland or camping under the stars, those moments remind me of what really matters.

That is a big part of why I support VNPA. They're tireless advocates for the natural places I love – and for the wildlife, plants and habitats that need our help more than ever. Their work is grounded in science, but it's also driven by heart.

I joined VNPA Council five or so years ago because it felt like the right way to give back. The organisation brings together passionate people who care deeply about protecting nature – not just for today, but for future generations. It is an honour to be part of that.

I recently decided to leave a gift to VNPA in my Will. It was a surprisingly easy decision. I want to know that the places I have loved throughout my life – the forests, coastlines, and wild places – will still be here long after I am gone. And with constant attacks on nature and biodiversity, a bequest is one way I can help make that happen.

Gifts in Wills are incredibly important for VNPA. They allow the organisation to plan for the long term and take on big, ambitious projects – the kind that can create lasting change. Every bequest, no matter the size, becomes part of something bigger: a legacy of care for nature.

And if you are thinking, 'But I am still working – do I need a Will now?' the answer is yes! Life can be unpredictable, and having a Will means your wishes are clear. It is also a great opportunity to reflect on what matters to you and how you want to leave the world a little better. 🌿



COVER IMAGE: SANDY SCHELTEMA

A gift in your Will to VNPA is a simple but powerful way you can continue to help care for and protect nature into the future.

To obtain your complimentary copy of *Give nature a future voice*, our guide to gifts in Wills, please visit vnpa.org.au/bequest-guide or contact Kristian on support@vnpa.org.au or 03 9341 6506.



Citizen science and recovery at Mt Cole



SERA BLAIR,
NATUREWATCH
COORDINATOR,
AND **BEN GILL,**
PARKS AND NATURE
CAMPAIGNER ON
THE LIFE AFTER FIRE
PROJECT AT MT COLE
AND MT BUANGOR

One year on from the devastating bushfires that swept through Mt Cole State Forest and Mt Buangor National Park, the forest is showing early signs of recovery – and so is the community.

Since the fires, I've been visiting regularly with VNPA campaigner Ben

and working alongside our wonderful partners – the Mount Cole Pyrenees Nature Group and Upper Mt Emu Creek Landcare – to run our Life After Fire citizen science project. Together, we're uncovering how the forest and its wildlife are responding to fire, while deepening community connections with nature.

Tracking wildlife after fire

This year, NatureWatch teams completed three expeditions to Mt Cole, each spanning two days. Our focus has been on monitoring wildlife in areas that burned, including sites where the elusive Brush-tailed Phascogale had been recorded before the fire. While we

haven't captured the phascogale on our wildlife cameras yet, other animals are returning – including Agile Antechinus, Swamp Wallabies, Eastern Grey Kangaroos, Common Brush-tailed Possums, White-winged Choughs, Grey Shrike-thrush, Grey Currawongs and Spotted Pardalotes. Sadly, we also recorded pest species like Sambar and Fallow Deer, foxes and a feral cat.

Night spotlighting surveys were quieter than usual – we didn't see any gliders or possums in the burnt forest this time. We were treated to sightings of Gang-gang, Sulphur-crested and Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos, as well as a Tawny Frogmouth and a Southern Boobook Owl.

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



↑ Volunteers setting up cameras on Mt Cole | SERA BLAIR

↓ Ben Gill and local volunteers surveying plants in the post-fire landscape | SERA BLAIR



Rare plants rising from the ashes

In truly uplifting news, Mt Cole Grevillea (*Grevillea montis-cole*) seedlings are sprouting where mature plants once stood. This threatened plant is found nowhere else in the world, and we counted over a thousand seedlings across our survey sites. However, they remain vulnerable – many are growing in exposed spots and are still quite small. We'll return to monitor their progress over time, with the help of local volunteers.

Community stepping up for wildlife

We've also installed wildlife cameras along roadside reserves between farms – areas that provide vital habitat corridors but are under threat from post-fire clearing. Community concern has been strong, and the cameras are providing important evidence of wildlife using these strips. So far, we've recorded Agile Antechinus, Swamp Wallaby, Eastern Grey Kangaroo, Common Brush-tailed Possum, Echidna, Crimson Rosella,

Grey Currawong, Grey Shrike-thrush, Red-browed Finch, Superb Fairy-wren, White-browed Scrubwren, Australian Owllet-nightjar, Fox, Cat, European Rabbit, European Hare, House Mouse and Eurasian Blackbird.

Beyond the fieldwork, we've hosted two community events to share campaign updates on protecting the central west forests, including Mt Cole, as a new national park. We've offered locals the chance to get involved in citizen science and learn about the recovery of Mt Cole Grevillea.

A recent community seminar featured grevillea expert Neil Marriott, researchers from the Arthur Rylah Institute and Parks Victoria staff, who spoke on the plant's recovery and the future reopening of Mt Buangor National Park.

A growing community of citizen scientists

It's been a real joy to work with the Mount Cole community, whose enthusiasm for the natural world is infectious. Together, we've trained local residents to set up wildlife cameras, nest boxes and song meters on their own land – empowering them to collect and understand data from the very places they fought to protect after the fires.

We'll be back in Spring, continuing our Life After Fire work and – we hope – celebrating the declaration of a new national park for Mt Cole. 🌿

Helping hands needed for Grow West planting day in July

Grow West is seeking the help of green-thumbed volunteers to join a community planting day from 9:30 am to 4:00 pm on Sunday 20 July, to plant 4,000 native seedlings along Korjamnunnip Creek on Wurundjeri Country in Ballan.

This year's planting day will focus on two zones to improve links between the creek and nearby habitats for native wildlife. Volunteers will plant indigenous seedlings grown locally at the Moorabool Landcare Network Nursery. Rangers from the Wurundjeri Narrap Unit will be assisting with planting and guarding on the day, aiming to enrich and heal Country.

Grow West is an ambitious landscape restoration program that works with local communities, west of Melbourne, to create a sustainable future for our native plants and animals.

For more information and to register, visit:
growwest.com.au



Hail the holly-leaf grevilleas



NEIL MARRIOTT
TAKES A LOOK AT
SOME OF WESTERN
VICTORIA'S LESSER-
KNOWN ENDANGERED
HOLLY-LEAF GREVILLEAS

Western Victoria is a biodiversity hot-spot for 'holly-leaf grevilleas' – those plants that have slightly to deeply divided leaves that look superficially like English Holly. The geology of the region has allowed isolated pockets of bushland and mountain ranges to rapidly evolve a host of unique plants. Sadly, nearly all are under extreme threat, and with the onset of climate change this is becoming worse and worse by the year. Let's look at some of these and the threats they face.



↓ Enfield Grevillea | ARTHUR CHAPMAN

We acknowledge these locations are part of the unceded traditional lands and waters of the **Djab Wurrung, Eastern Maar & Wadawurrung** and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country

Enfield Grevillea (*Grevillea bedgoodiana*)

Confined to the Enfield State Park south of Ballarat, Enfield Grevillea was never a common plant. In the wild it presents as a most attractive ground cover or low, spreading shrub; size is to 0.3m tall and up to several metres wide.

Sadly, and despite many warnings, Forest Fire Management Victoria trialled a technique of fire-break creation using a powerful mulching machine which totally pulverises everything in its path – this included over 30 large and healthy grevilleas, all of which were wiped out.

Ben Major Grevillea (*Grevillea floripendula*)

This wonderful plants is found exclusively growing on the lower slopes of Mt Ben Major and around the Musical Gully Flora Reserve in the hills just north of Beaufort.

Interestingly, the Ben Major Grevillea is highly variable in habit, from semi prostrate to an upright shrub to 0.6m. Its pendulous toothbrush flowers range from bright red to yellow all the way through to green and black, while its holly leaves can be grey-green or bright green and can vary from almost entire to deeply divided! This genetic diversity means the Ben Major Grevillea is under greater threat from fragmentation: the loss of even one or two populations can mean the total loss of that genetically distinct form.

Tragically, many populations have suffered from severe die-back as a result of Grevillea Leaf Miner



↑ Ben Major Grevillea | MELBURNIAN

infestations and over-zealous controlled burns. Climate change may be the last straw, as many young plants are now dying out before they have had the chance to flower and set seed. Although it may be too late for this beautiful plant in the wild, fortunately Cranbourne Botanic Gardens and the Grevillea Study Group have numerous plants in cultivation. Of course this will never be as good as preserving the plants in the wild.

Mt Langi Ghiran Grevillea (*Grevillea brevistyla*)

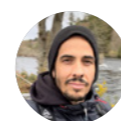
Formerly known as *Grevillea montis-cole ssp brevistyla*, this beautiful, but extremely rare grevillea is in fact a new species, following DNA research carried out by Gareth Holmes in 2014. Sadly, the most abundant population amongst granite boulders on the top of Mt Langi Ghiran has completely died out as our climate dries.

Growing in shallow soils, it relied on regular rain and cloud cover to maintain soil moisture levels. This plant is rapidly heading towards extinction, although another population has been discovered by my wife Wendy and myself at a lower altitude and in a more sheltered location. 🌿



↑ Mt Langi Ghiran Grevillea | MELBURNIAN

Inked in nature



FRED BAIN, THE ARTIST BEHIND THE TATTOO IN OUR RECENT 'FOREVER FORESTS' CAMPAIGN, DISCUSSES HIS ART PRACTICE AND FOCUS ON WILDLIFE

My earliest memories were endless hours drawing and a sense of wonder at nature that continues to this day. In my head the two are so inextricably intertwined that it's probably not exaggerating to say that they've made me who I am. I've always been fascinated by the natural world: birds and animals, plants, bugs, everything really! Not just a placid, passive appreciation but the obsessive must-know-everything-about-everything type. I'm deep into

my bird-watching era (coming up 500 species worldwide!), with forays into butterflies, moths and snakes as well.

Artistically, I draw (pencil, ink, markers, digital) and oil paint (I have my first gallery show in October). And most importantly, I tattoo!

I started as a tattoo artist in 2006, and started focussing on wildlife realism in 2011. I found my niche tattooing fellow nature-fiends. Wildlife carers, vet nurses, ecologists and similar like-minded folks make up the bulk of my clientele, some of these kindred spirits have since become close friends.

Although there's other artists that deal with animal portraits and realism, I think having an interest in the animal or plant for its own sake, rather than just as an artistic subject, gives me an eye for capturing the important parts of an animal or plant's physiology.

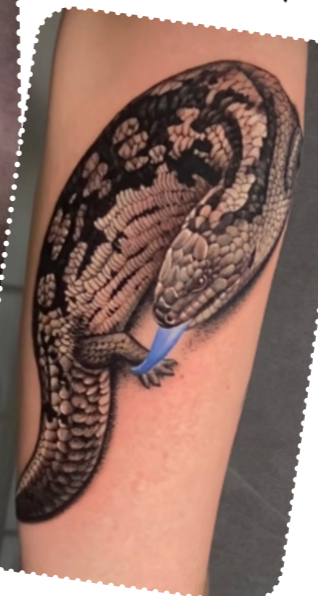
I try to emulate the spirit of botanical illustration, where the technical accuracy is just as important as an artistic statement – something I think my nature-nerd clients appreciate!

Tattooing is a deeply personal art form, with an ancient history stretching back further than written language, and it's a matter of almost sacred trust to be able to mark someone's body permanently.

I'm often acutely aware of the weight of history and lineage hanging over me as I work, and it's a huge privilege to collaborate with people on these designs that pay homage to the creatures we share the earth with, and tie us to the beautiful landscapes that we live in.

My books are always open, I would love to hear from more nature lovers! 🌿

Fred Bain works out of Fitzroy and can be found on Instagram @frederickbain_tattoo



↑ ALL IMAGES: FREDERICK BAIN

Bed and breakfast for Greater Gliders



KATHERINE BEST
IS RESEARCHING
HABITAT
AUGMENTATION
STRATEGIES TO MAINTAIN
GREATER GLIDER
POPULATIONS WHERE
NATURAL HOLLOWS ARE
UNAVAILABLE

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

We acknowledge these locations are part of the unceded traditional lands and waters of the **Wurundjeri, Taungurung and Bunurong** and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country

What's the elevator pitch for your PhD?

The cessation of native forest logging in Victoria's Central Highlands marked a pivotal shift in forest management. Logging significantly reduced the number of old-growth trees, and thus also hollows. Hollows can take over 120 years to form, leaving a multi-decade gap where few suitable ones are available to cavity-dependent animals like Greater Gliders (*Petauroides volans*), threatening their populations.

While restoration activities such as tree planting and re-seeding are planned, these strategies fail to address the immediate lack of hollows. Greater Gliders are currently facing a 'bed and breakfast' bottleneck: while there is still plentiful high-quality browse ('breakfast'), suitable shelter sites ('beds') are scarce.

By focusing on hollow augmentation strategies (i.e. insulated nest boxes and artificially carved hollows), this research offers a potential stopgap solution to maintain glider populations during the critical period when natural hollows are unavailable.

The rapid acceptance of specially-designed, thermally-suitable nest boxes by some Greater Gliders following the 2019-2020 bushfires indicates that habitat augmentation at a landscape scale could significantly

aid in population recovery. Building on that research, I will investigate whether the addition of nest boxes can help Greater Gliders recolonise previously logged forests, which may have abundant browse trees but lack natural hollows.

Since nest boxes have a limited lifespan, I will also explore whether Greater Gliders will use artificially carved hollows, which could provide a longer-term, more cost-effective solution to the lack of hollow-bearing trees in young forests.

Additionally, I am conducting a small-scale radio-tracking study to better understand Greater Glider movement patterns, shelter selection, and habitat use in relation to these artificial hollows.

Ultimately, my research aims to determine whether we can successfully put the 'bed' back into 'bed and breakfast.' The findings will help inform and improve future decision-making, leading to better forest restoration outcomes for Greater Gliders.

By filling critical knowledge gaps about artificial hollow use and their efficacy, my work will hopefully build the scientific foundation needed to support more effective, evidence-based restoration strategies for hollow-dependent species in degraded forests.

← Greater Glider nest box in a tree
WWF-AUSTRALIA/TIM CLARK

Searching for suitable nest box locations →
KATHERINE BEST

↓ Greater Gliders in a nest box | WWF AUSTRALIA/KITA.ASHMAN



What led you to do this PhD?

I was about 20 when I became aware of native forest logging in Victoria. I remember being unable to comprehend it. How could anyone look at these magnificent trees and see only profit? Around that time, I came across the Great Forest National Park campaign, and Sarah Rees connected me with the Wildlife of the Central Highlands (WOTCH) team. That conversation, more than eight years ago, marked the beginning of my deeper involvement in forest conservation.

Somewhere along that journey, I fell completely in love with these forests and their inhabitants. There's something about being in those landscapes that feels like home, and when I'm away, I long to return. Maybe, in some prior life, I was a forest creature... who knows!? What I did know is that if I were ever to undertake a PhD, it had to be on the forests of the Central Highlands.

After years of emotionally intense involvement in the so-called 'Forest Wars' – campaigning, surveying and documenting destruction – the chance to focus on restoration feels deeply meaningful. That work often felt reactive, urgent and emotionally exhausting. In contrast, this PhD offers a different kind of contribution; it allows me to shift from resistance to restoration, and to engage in work that

builds toward long-term solutions for the recovery of Greater Gliders and the ecosystems they depend on.

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

I'm still in the early stages of my PhD, but one of the most eye-opening lessons has been the complexity of implementing habitat restoration in the Central Highlands in a way that is both scientifically rigorous and logistically feasible. It is a mammoth undertaking!

What challenges have you had to overcome?

One of the biggest challenges has been identifying suitable trees for artificial hollows; trees that are close enough to existing glider populations to be useful, but that are also structurally sound, free of natural hollows, and located in hollow-deficient areas. These trees must also be large enough to support a carved cavity big enough for a Greater Glider, while remaining safe for field crews to work on.

Logistical constraints add another layer of complexity. Sites need to be accessible for equipment and personnel, reasonably close to roads for efficiency, but not so close that it compromises the study design or creates risks for other forest users. It's been a real Goldilocks situation – trees that are not too big, not too small,

not too close, and not too far. Finding those 'just right' trees has taken much longer than expected, but it's also revealed how much potential still exists in using nest boxes.

What impact do you want your research to have?

I want my research to help develop practical, science-based solutions that support hollow-dependent species during this critical transition period. While the focus is on Victoria's Central Highlands, the findings could inform broader conservation efforts across the full range of the Greater Glider.

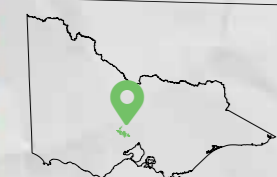
By identifying which habitat augmentation techniques are most effective, affordable, and scalable, I hope to shape conservation practices that prevent local extinctions and promote species recovery at the landscape level. Importantly, these interventions should never be seen as a substitute for protecting natural habitat. They are temporary stopgaps, designed to buy time while forests recover. The goal is to support biodiversity, not to justify the removal of hollow-bearing trees. 🌿

Get in touch
[linkedin.com/in/
katherine--best](https://www.linkedin.com/in/katherine--best)

WOMBAT-LERDERDERG NATIONAL PARK

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

Location



Traditional lands and waters
of the **Wurundjeri, Dja Dja
Wurrung and Wadawurrung**
90km NW of Melbourne
approx 44,000 hectares

Map



History



Physiography

Central Victorian Uplands
bioregion
Numerous ecological
vegetation classes (EVCs);
mostly Shrubby Foothill
Forest, Herb-Rich Foothill
Forest and Heathy Dry Forest
Approximately
290 native animals
Approximately
750 native plants

Features

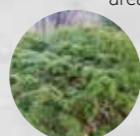
Discovery of Endangered
Mountain Skink in 2020
Two fungi – Stemless
Earpick and *Sarcodon
austroribulatus* – listed as
threatened on IUCN Red List
Heritage
listed
Lerderderg
River



↑ *Sarcodon austroribulatus*
JOHN WALTER/NATURALIST

Features

Babbington Hill,
McLaughlins Lookout and
Lyonville Springs
Sedgy Riparian Woodlands
around Trentham with large
areas of sphagnum
moss and coral
fern
Volcanic
vent on
Kangaroo Creek



↑ Coral fern

Threats

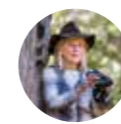
54 plants and animals listed
as **Threatened**
Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 (Vic)
10 plants and animals
listed as **Threatened**
EPBC Act 1999 (C'wth)
Inappropriate planned
burns, salvage logging,
firewood removal, pest plants
and animals, illegal recreation
activities including 4WD
and trail bike tracks, mining,
climate change

Friends

Wombat Forestcare
wombatforestcare.org.au
info@wombatforestcare.
org.au
facebook.com/wombat.online
Friends of Cornish Hill
**Friends of Trentham Creeks
and Reserves**
Trentham Landcare
**Blackwood and Barry's Reef
Landcare Group**

← Dry Diggings Track
SANDY SCHELTEMA

Domino Trail →
SANDY SCHELTEMA



WOMBAT FORESTCARE'S **GAYLE
OSBORNE** TAKES US TO A NATIONAL
PARK THAT WAS PROMISED, BUT IS YET
TO BE LEGISLATED

The future Wombat-Lerderderg National Park — made up of Wombat State Forest and the adjoining Lerderderg State Park — forms one of the region's biggest areas of largely intact native vegetation. This remarkable patchwork of forest plays a vital role as a climate refuge and a sanctuary for many threatened plants, animals and fungi.

Wombat and Lerderderg forests were extensively logged and mined in the 1800s. From the 1970s, they were heavily logged again. Due to community pressure, logging ceased in 2006. Wombat Forestcare was formed in the same year.

Today, many areas still contain high-quality habitat, home to vulnerable and threatened species like Greater Gliders, Brush-tailed Phascogales, Powerful Owls, Gang-gang Cockatoos and Mountain Skinks. The forest's damp gullies — filled with towering eucalypts, Blackwoods and Musk Daisy bushes — are a haven for migratory birds. They seasonally come alive with the calls of Rufous Fantails, Satin Flycatchers and Sacred Kingfishers, many of which raise their young here.

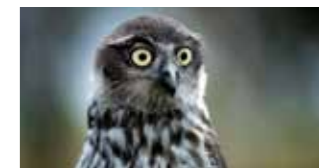
Wombat-Lerderderg is also a fungi 'hotspot', with more than 400 species, including several rare and little-known varieties. And it's a critical water catchment, protecting the headwaters of six major Victorian rivers.

Wombat Forestcare engages in a range of activities, with a strong focus on community involvement and education, such as undertaking wildlife surveys. We also enjoy the social aspect of a forest group, with picnics and bushwalks for people who love being in the bush.

In 2010, with VNPA and other groups, we launched a campaign for national park status for the area. In June 2021, the government accepted the recommendation to create a new national park — a huge win for nature and the community. Yet we are still waiting for the park to be formally legislated. We need action now to bring this park to life!



↑ Blackwoods | SANDY SCHELTEMA



↑ Barking Owl | SANDY SCHELTEMA



↑ Brush-tailed Phascogale | KEN STEPPELL



↑ Lerderderg River

↓ Ferns in Wombat Forest | SANDY SCHELTEMA



PAKENHAM

GRASSLAND RESERVE

↑ Pakenham Grassland Reserve | JORDAN CROOK



↑ Matted Flax-lily in flower | JORDAN CROOK

also some great interpretive signs explaining the plants and animals that call the place home, and how Traditional Owners have managed this part of the world for millennia.

This is likely the largest patch of this ecological community left in existence, so next time you're in the area drop in and visit this beautiful – and grouse – park. 🌿

Pakenham Grassland Reserve,
Between Webster Way and Arden Avenue, Pakenham
60 km/70 min drive SE of Melbourne

JORDAN CROOK
HEADED OUT TO SEE ONE OF THE LARGEST PATCHES OF REMNANT GRASSLAND IN THE SOUTH-EAST OF VICTORIA. YES, THE SOUTH-EAST!

Say 'grassland' and you might think the Victorian Volcanic Plains (VVP) stretching from Melbourne's western suburbs to the South Australian border. Or up north, maybe Terrick

National Park. But south-east? Hell yeah!

Unlike the grasslands of the VVP that are usually hard and dry, those at the Pakenham Grassland Reserve are damp and quite soft underfoot across most of the year.

This ecosystem is listed as Natural Damp Grasslands of the South East Coastal Plain under Commonwealth legislation and is a Critically Endangered community. It's a remnant of the grassy fringe around what was once the state's biggest wetland, Koo-Wee-Rup Swamp before we drained it [sigh!].

I have called into this reserve many times over the years. Every time I do there is another type of bird or wildflower visiting or blooming. Although the site is surrounded by houses and bitumen, this little patch of the past is still very much alive.

Before the suburbs came to swallow up the surrounding landscape, the reserve was an airfield. You can almost imagine planes landing amongst the Kangaroo Grass!

When I recently visited, the orchids had finished flowering and were getting ready to set seed. The dianella, including endangered Matted Flax-lily, were in full-bloom.

There is a short cement walking trail and surrounding walking paths for folks with limited mobility. There are



↑ Pollinated native orchid | JORDAN CROOK

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

Scientist and adventurer, Grant Da Costa

As a young and enthusiastic writer, photographer and bushwalker, Grant Da Costa served as VNPA's Director in 1984, edited our newsletter and was closely involved with the production of VNPA's very successful 1985 calendar.

Grant passed away in May 2024, aged 67. His wife Leanne has shared with us some highlights of Grant's very full life.

Grant's career was in engineering and he will be remembered for his work on cochlear implants through the University of Melbourne and as a Senior Research Engineer at CSIRO's Division of Atmospheric Research.

He became an adventurer from a young age falling in love with bushwalking, nature and wild places. After buying a camera, Grant soon found he had a natural ability to

capture the world in all its beauty.

He became a celebrated author and wilderness photographer. He adored going to the wildest places of Australia by 4WD and was the first to publish many images of remote gorges and landscapes that were difficult to get to at the time.

Grant's adventures extended to the water and he was a keen cruising yachtsman and swimmer.

In 2017, Grant was diagnosed with an aggressive form of melanoma, not from sun exposure but caused by a genetic mutation. He managed to fit in two more marvellous adventures: a six-week trip to Antarctica which he captured extensively on film; and in May to June 2023 when he helped sail a 46 foot catamaran from Tasmania to Coffs Harbour.

Grant's wonderful adventure videos can be viewed at: youtube.com/@gdc.photowords/playlists. 🌿

Jane Crouch, Fundraising Manager

Leave a legacy for nature

Grant's story reminds us that one person's passion can greatly assist nature 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



↑ Grant Da Costa photographing nature in Lincoln National Park, Naou Country, South Australia | SUPPLIED

Thanks and farewell to Blake Nisbet

Nature Conservation Campaigner Blake Nisbet is moving on from VNPA after three years, having worked with great passion and ability for Victoria's wildlife, plants and habitat.

Blake has played a vital role in some of our most important conservation efforts – from challenging private land logging alongside local communities and regulators, to supporting the first community-led Critical Habitat Determination for the Mt Donna Buang Wingless Stonefly. His on-ground field work, detailed reports and mapping helped build the case to end native forest logging on public land. He also led frontline efforts to expose impacts of poorly planned fuel breaks.

Blake is renowned for his uncanny ability to spot an Endangered Leadbeater's Possum or Great Glider from 100 metres away in the dark, often after camping out in the bush. He is just as proficient in using a range of technologies to meticulously document his findings in technical reports that strengthen the case for these iconic animals' protection, not to mention posting informative and engaging social media content.

We thank Blake for his outstanding contribution and wish him all the best for the future. We're sure he'll continue to be a strong voice for nature in Victoria, after a well-deserved break. 🌿



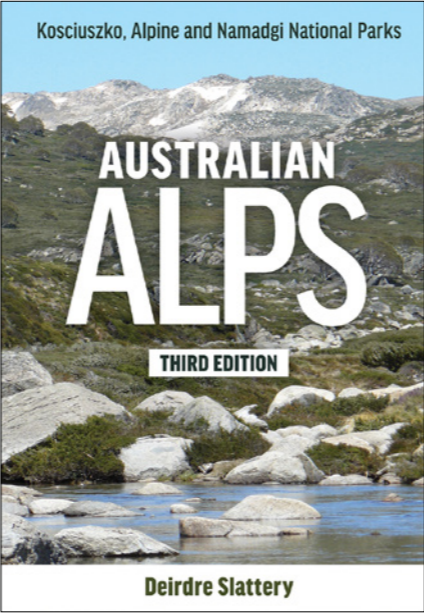
↑ Blake Nisbet in the ex-Holden Proving Grounds, Western Port Woodlands, Bunurong Country

Exploring the Australian Alps through time

Australian Alps, Deirdre Slattery
CSIRO Publishing, 3rd edition, 2025,
328pp, ISBN 978-1486318841

Australian Alps is more than a guidebook – it's an invitation to explore, reflect on and protect one of Australia's most breathtaking and ecologically important landscapes. This richly illustrated, fully revised third edition by Deirdre Slattery reveals the extraordinary diversity, deep cultural heritage and enduring natural values of the alpine national parks that crown south-eastern Australia. It covers the Alpine National Park in Victoria, Kosciuszko National Park in New South Wales, and Namadgi National Park in the ACT – weaving together their shared story as the Australian Alps. Slattery brings these mountain ranges to life by sharing the voices of the First Peoples, scientists, historians and conservationists who have shaped – and been shaped by – this remarkable

region. From ancient stories of Aboriginal gatherings and Bogong moth feasts, to the legacy of high country grazing and the creation of national parks, *Australian Alps* traces both the ecological evolution and human history of this treasured landscape. Professor Dick Williams, who provides the foreword, says 'stories and the Australian Alps are natural companions'. This multitude of stories – from climate and geology, to conservation and the hard fought creation of national parks – are all explored in this wonderful book. At a time when climate change and land use place the Alps under growing stress, this book offers vital context and inspiration. It highlights the importance of collaboration among communities, governments and Traditional Owners in caring for these fragile, high-altitude habitats. *Australian Alps* is essential reading for anyone with an interest in the



ecology and land use of the Alps, but also conservation policy and practice, and how people can and must work together to manage country. 🌿

Recent submissions

VNPA campaign staff have been busy writing submissions on a variety of important topics:
Future investment in the You Yangs and Serendip Sanctuary, April 2025
Gippsland Offshore Wind Transmission, April 2025.
Draft Scoping Requirements for the Victorian Renewable Energy Terminal EES, March 2025.

Draft Orchid Action Statement, March 2025.
Proposed Kentbruck Green Power Hub, March 2025.
Planning scheme and permit at Point Nepean Quarantine Station, March 2025.
Read these and all previous submissions on our website. 🌿

[vnpa.org.au/
publication-category/
submissions](https://vnpa.org.au/publication-category/submissions)

Quiz answers

- from p. 4
- 1. Yes!** The aim of national parks is to protect nature while allowing for recreation that doesn't clash with that goal. State forests allow habitat destruction through extractive industries like logging and mining.
 - 2. Parks Victoria** manage over 130 land and marine parks – national parks, state parks, regional parks, metropolitan parks and most conservation reserves. State forests, some conservation areas, and other public lands are managed by DEECA.
 - 3. c) 58.** There's 45 terrestrial national parks plus 13 marine national parks in Victoria.
 - 4. b) Four years.** The Victorian Government committed to creating three new national

parks in the central west in June 2021: Wombat-Lerderderg, Mt Buangor and Pyrenees national parks.

- 5. d) 87 per cent.** And 80 per cent support the creation of new national parks like Great Forest and news parks in the central west.
- 6.** Dog walking is restricted in national parks because their scent, noise and presence can disturb native animals, alter their behaviour, spread disease and sometimes harm wildlife directly. But there's still plenty of places where dogs can adventure, such as regional parks.
- 7. c) 23 years.** In 2002, Victoria's marine national parks network was a remarkable achievement, but there are significant gaps and areas in need of better protection.

- 8. a) 1975.** The *National Parks Act* is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year.
- 9. Forest Fire Management** Victoria manages fire on public land in Victoria. It's a serious and complicated thing, and it's managed the same in national parks as in state forests.
- 10. d) All of the above!** National parks are one of the best ways to protect and connect with nature, yet only 18 per cent of Victoria is covered by protected areas. That's why we need more.



Cape Paterson ↑
Bunurong Marine National Park
ZAC PORTER

Getting to know your Great Forest

Great Forest Park Guide: Get to know your Great Forest, Sarah Rees and Katya Cameron
2024, 134pp, ISBN 978-1763776609

We were thrilled at the VNPA Office to get our hands on the much-anticipated *Great Forest Park Guide*, the people's guide to the proposed Great Forest National Park stretching from Healesville to Kinglake, Marysville to Baw Baw. This beautifully presented guidebook offers the maps, insights and inspiration you need to explore the breathtaking wild country that spans Wurundjeri, Bunurong, Gunaikurnai and Taungurung Country. The visionary Great Forest National Park proposal would see 355,000 hectares added to the existing 170,000 hectares of public forest, creating a 525,000 hectare sanctuary for nature, wildlife and people. Backed by strong community support and expert research, the park would offer a permanent home for endangered wildlife and a thriving destination for nature-based tourism. Inside the *Great Forest Park Guide* you'll find stories and wisdom from conservation champions like Professor David Lindenmayer, Rick Ridgeway, Dr Kita Ashman, Steve Meacher and Brett Mifsud, as well as VNPA's own Jordan Crook and Blake Nisbet.

Adventurous souls Erchana Murray-Bartlett, Mitch Docker, Majell Backhausen, Beau Miles, Liam O'Connor, Mike Hampton and Sean Marler share their favourite tracks and tales, helping you plan your own unforgettable experience in the forest. Whether you're after a peaceful picnic or planning a multi-day expedition, this guide makes it easy to discover everything the region has to offer: from waterfalls and mountain peaks to dog-friendly destinations and hidden paddling spots. It's a book to dip into for quick inspiration, or dive deep into the nature and culture of the Great Forest. Gorgeous photographs and rich storytelling bring the region to life on every page. Clear, easy-to-read maps use a simple icon system to show key activities like hiking, biking, fishing, and kayaking. Another set of icons highlights facilities including picnic areas, toilets, visitor centres, food outlets, cultural attractions, and even bike repair and fuel stops. The activities section of the guide is packed with tips on the best places for mountain biking, 4WD touring, trail bike riding, horse riding, rock climbing and more. Whether you're a local Victorian familiar with the region or a first-time visitor from further afield, the *Great Forest Park Guide* is your essential companion to discovering this majestic region of Victoria. By exploring this guide, you're supporting the campaign to secure the Great Forest National Park; a lasting gift for wildlife, communities and future generations. 🌿

Jane Crouch, Fundraising Manager
Purchase online at greatforestnationalpark.com.au/merch



Wild Families

Fun facts about national parks

You can stick up for national parks by telling your family and friends your favourite things about parks!



National parks are homes for amazing animals like fluffy Greater Gliders, carnivorous Otway Black Snails and mysterious Powerful Owls



National parks are PERFECT for adventures! You can go bushwalking, ride your bike, go for a swim, a snorkel, watch birds and generally explore!



Only one fifth of Victoria is covered by protected areas like national parks. That means we need MORE national parks to look after wildlife and their homes!



Park rangers and First Nations people take care of parks. They protect all the plants, animals and fungi from threats like weeds and feral animals



Dogs usually can't visit national parks because they might scare native animals. But don't worry - there are other types of parks to take your furry friend



There are many different types of parks: national parks, nature conservation reserves, state parks and state forests. National parks give the BEST protection to everything that call them home. So do nature conservation reserves - they're like national parks, but smaller!

IMAGES: JOSH BOWELL, NICOLE MERTENS, JUSTIN CALLY, PARKS VICTORIA, PAUL CLIFTON, MEGHAN LINDSAY

Be a nature detective

Next time you visit a park, try these fun activities:

Animal tracker

Search for signs that animals have been around - like footprints, scats (poop), or chewed leaves. Who do you think was here?



Bird watcher

Spot two different birds. How are they different? Is one bigger? Do they have different coloured feathers?



Plant counter

How many different types of plants can you find in one small area? Count the different shapes and sizes!



IMAGES: PAUL CLIFTON, SIMONE WALSH, GAAB22, MEGHAN LINDSAY, MARTIN GRIFFITH, JOHN ENGLART



Explorer's Corner

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



CAITLIN GRIFFITH, COMMUNITY LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT MANAGER, EXPLORES BEING ONE THING AT A TIME, IN ONE PLACE

This activity is all about getting to know a special place in nature over 20 different visits. On each visit you choose just one thing to observe.

Choose a national park or place in nature that you can visit regularly. Make sure it's safe, accessible and interesting to you.

Visit this place regularly. On each visit, focus intently on just one element of nature.

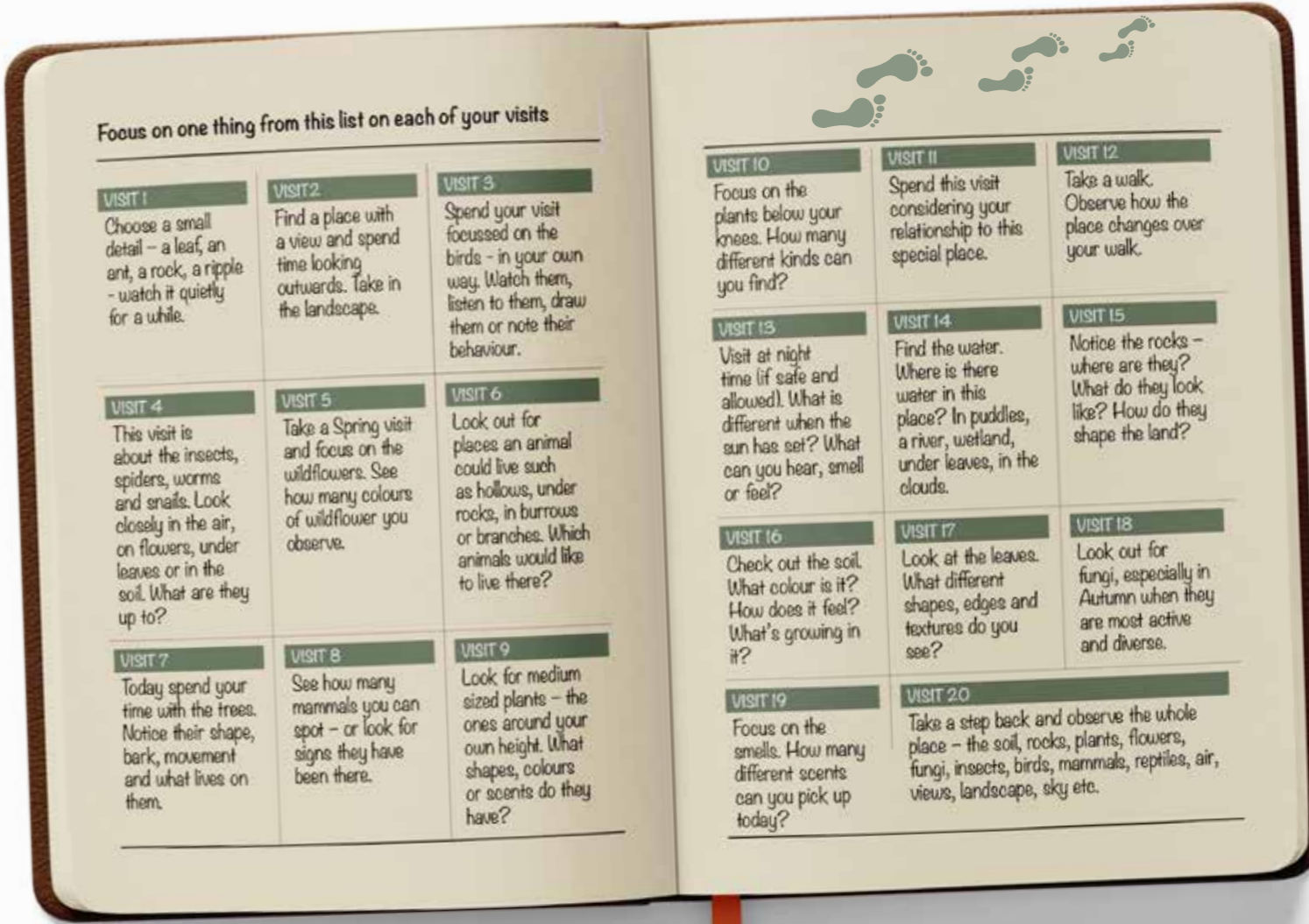
How you focus on each element is up to you. You might choose to photograph it, sit quietly and watch, draw it, write

about it, or study it closely. Follow your curiosity - there's no right or wrong approach.

After all of these observations, what is really standing out to you? What does this place mean to you now? What would you like to do for this place now?

You don't need much - just yourself and your powers of observation. You could also bring a notebook and pen, field guides, binoculars, camera.

Remember to be respectful of nature and culture in this place and leave no trace.



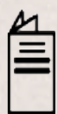
How can I stick up for my national parks legacy?



Donate to support our work using this form or online at vnpa.org.au/stickupforparks



Take action at vnpa.org.au/parksunderattack



Request your free copy of our explainer ***The purpose and power of national parks.*** Full details on p25 of this issue of *Park Watch*.



Follow us on social media

    @vicnationalparks



VNPA bushwalk, Wilsons Promontory National Park, 1985. Glenn Hilling



Amongst the wildflowers in Little Desert National Park, 1990
Martin Lenard



Mike Howes with daughter Hilary, Brisbane Ranges National Park, 1990
Dorothy Howes

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