



37° 28' 11" S, 144° 19' 16" E



VICTORIAN
NATIONAL PARKS
ASSOCIATION

SEPTEMBER 2025 #301

In this issue...



SANDY SCHEITEMA

6



DAN WELLER

14



REINER RICHTER

22

View online at vnpa.org.au/parkwatch



JORDAN CROOK

23

Campaigns and updates

- 5 Treaty will help heal Victoria
- 6 Central west parks enter the home straight!
- 10 Cracking the new fire code
- 12 Community alliance reaps reward for iconic Woodlands

- 13 Marine national parks: necessities not luxuries
- 14 Ports, plans and a precious wetland
- 16 Shine a light on citizen science
- 18 When the sea turns deadly
- 19 Who's the boss? A day of Dingo education



MEGHAN LINDSAY

12



16

PARKwatch

ISSN 1324-4361/2653-8040 (Online)
Published by Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA) ABN 34 217 717 593

Wurundjeri Country, Level 3, 60 Leicester St, Carlton, VIC 3053 • (03) 9341 6500
vnpa@vnpa.org.au • www.vnpa.org.au

President: David Nugent
Executive Director: Matt Ruchel
Editor/Designer: Paul Clifton
Copy Editor: Jessie Borrelle
Proofreader: Harriet Searcy



Front cover: Spotlighting in the future Wombat-Lerderberg National Park, Wurundjeri and Dja Dja Wurrung Country
SANDY SCHEITEMA

Park Watch is published under Creative Commons



CC BY-NC-ND 2.0. All text, maps and images ©VNPA 2025 unless stated. Content may be quoted without permission provided that acknowledgement is made. Opinions of contributors are not necessarily VNPA's.

To reply to articles or ideas in *Park Watch*, or discuss ideas for future articles, please email the Editor, Paul Clifton paul@vnpa.org.au.

To advertise in *Park Watch*, please email paul@vnpa.org.au. All advertisements should be compatible with VNPA policies. Publication does not imply endorsement by VNPA of a product or service. VNPA reserves the right to refuse advertisements.

Park Watch is printed with material from well-managed FSC®-certified forests, recycled materials, and other controlled sources.



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.

Our community

- 20 Goodnight, Blinky Bill
- 21 Wired in Wyperfeld
- 22 Up close and personal: Reiner Richter
- 24 Nominate for VNPA Council and committees
- Dr Timothy O'Hara awarded OAM



Annual Impact Report 2024-25

included with this issue

Regular features

- 4 From the President
- Citizen science quiz
- 11 Plant Blindness: Common Wallaby Grass
- Glad Tidings: Hello Possum!
- 13 Spotlight on Nature: Tea-tree Fingers
- 15 Salty Science: Sea Urchins
- 19 Glad Tidings: Great Koala National Park
- 23 Grouse Parks: Nar Nar Goon Bushland Reserves
- 24 Recent submissions
- 25 Reviews: *Planet Fungi* and *Rakali of the Riverbank*
- 26 Wild Families: Lovely leaves
- 27 Activities update: where we went in Winter and what we're up to in Spring

VNPA Get Together & Annual General Meeting

Meet our campaigners and councillors at the VNPA AGM

6pm, Tues 21 Oct 2025

Melbourne City Conference Centre, 190 Little Lonsdale St, Melbourne and streamed online



RSVP ESSENTIAL

Please confirm by Tuesday 14 Oct via vnpa.org.au/agm-2025 • email support@vnpa.org.au • ph (03) 9341 6506

Guest speaker: Felicity Brooke, President, Victorian Protected Areas Council

"Protecting the legacy and future of national parks: Parks Manager perspectives"

Felicity has 37 years in protected area management in Victoria and is committed to the role of the ranger and national park management being multi-disciplinary and holistic.

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



From the President



September is Poorneet (tadpole) season in the Wurundjeri calendar, when we welcome warm, wet and windy days. In this issue, we look at how we're almost at the point of celebrating the long-awaited central west national parks.

This month we're shining a light on citizen science. Our staff and volunteers are out year-round collecting vital data to help restore and protect nature.

In this issue we're also cracking the fire code, keeping watch on the Port of Hastings, learning about Dingoes, keeping an eye on the South Australian algal bloom and much more.

A personal reflection

As I finish my third term as President, I keep coming back to one truth: our national parks are priceless. They give us joy, connection and renewal. They are where we laugh, walk, swim,

camp, talk, watch, listen – peaceful recreation. On every visit I marvel at the mix of people our parks draw. Families with picnic rugs, friends setting off on hikes, kids chasing birds or taking a dip in the water, campers relaxing, people exercising, connecting and peacefully enjoying the surroundings – all sharing the same simple gift of nature.

One moment stays with me. Deep in the Alpine National Park, I camped beside a group leading twenty teenagers on a three-night bush adventure. Around the campfire, the leader told me about the success of this program, providing an experience in our unique natural bush and how he watched these kids change before his eyes: from anxious and withdrawn to smiling, laughing, and confident. 'Three nights in the bush can have a big impact.' That is the transformative power of nature.

Our 2024 polling confirmed our national parks are highly popular. And yet, government action doesn't match community expectation. Funding is shrinking. Support for proper protection is half-hearted. Policy lags far behind the reality of what people want and need from these special places.

You only need to spend some time in the Dandenong Ranges National Park. Every week, thousands of walkers and picnickers head out from the Upper Ferntree Gully trails carpark, to spend time wandering from towering Mountain Ash, to fern-filled gullies and drier Stringybark woodland, spotting Superb Lyrebirds, wallabies and countless native birds. And yet a handful of mountain bike riders cut rough and illegal tracks, scarring the bush and destroying so much of what others value and enjoy. A tiny minority, a huge cost.

We need our leaders to back policy and funding for supporting nature conservation, and public awareness programs to educate and manage the minority who view our precious areas as a playground for destructive activities.

This is why our VNPA community matters so much. Through your generosity, and the commitment of our team, we continue to champion stronger protections, appropriate funding, and the awareness needed to restore and safeguard these places for generations to come.

Thank you – for your support, your passion, and your belief in what we do together. 🌿

ParkWatch Citizen Science Quiz



1. What is the name of the app that helps you identify plants and animals, and add your records to online databases that everyone can access?

2. Which of these items would NOT be found in a NatureWatch citizen science field kit?

a. Binoculars

b. Rolling pin

c. Secateurs

d. Garden stake
3. What is a benefit of using a white-flash wildlife camera to get colour photos when surveying small animals?

a. To identify sub-species

b. To better see variations in fur

c. To activate a freeze response

d. To check eye colour
4. What are the two main type of surveying for nocturnal possums and gliders?

a. Spotlighting

b. Singalonging

c. Stillness listening

d. Stagwatching
5. What are two ways citizen scientists can tell if a type of animal is in an area without seeing or hearing them?

a. Sniffing the air

b. Scat surveys

c. Track surveys

d. Ask a local
6. Do you have to be a scuba diver or snorkeller to find sea slugs during the Sea Slug Census?
7. To date, what percentage of Victorian sea slug species have citizen scientists observed during the Sea Slug Census?

a) 5 per cent

b) 30 per cent

c) 50 per cent

d) 90 per cent
8. The Great Victorian Fish Count aims to find 35 types of bony fish, sharks and rays. Which of the following has NEVER been spotted during a count?

a) Blue Devil

b) Varied Carpetshark

c) Australian Ghost Shark

d) Dusky Morwong

Answers on p.24

Treaty will help heal Victoria



Victoria is making history. For the first time in Australia, First Peoples and a state government are negotiating a Treaty. This is a powerful step toward truth-telling, justice and a more respectful future.

Treaty reiterates that First Peoples have always been the original custodians, carers and leaders of this land. It creates a system where:

- First Peoples can make decisions about their own lives and communities.
- First Peoples and government work together to make important choices.
- Everyone works together to look after the land and nature led by First Peoples.

This is a chance for all Victorians to acknowledge our past, heal and move forward together. In the words of Ngarra Murray, the co-chair of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria:

Treaty recognises that Aboriginal people are the experts on our own lives and communities, cultures, and our countries and it's an opportunity to make sure we can use our local knowledge to come up with and deliver practical solutions at a community level.

VNPA and Treaty

VNPA is proud to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of all the lands where we do our nature conservation and community engagement work across Victoria. With profound respect for the sovereignty, culture, and rights of First Peoples, we are pleased to support a Treaty.

We recognise that First Nations cultural and natural heritage are indivisible. Traditional Owners' cultural practices and stewardship of nature are woven together with nuance, knowledge and history.

The destruction of nature across Victoria and Australia - both in the past and today – is unacceptable. It

has seriously damaged and disrupted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' connection to their ancestral lands.

To build a fair world where everyone can thrive, governments and communities must change how they make decisions about nature and First Nations' deep relationship to Country. Treaty agreements are essential to making this happen.

Our vision is a Victoria with a natural web of life that is protected, respected and enjoyed by all. To bring it to life, we must listen to and work with First Nations communities.

Together, we can create a future where First Peoples' voices are heard, rights are respected, and justice is realised for generations past and those to come.

Why is this so important for nature protection?

Victoria has cleared and settled on more of its original forests, grasslands and wetlands than any other Australian state. It's hard to comprehend and yet it could not be more important to try.

The process of colonisation forever altered Victoria's landscapes. Depending on whose Country you stand, in some places, only 10 per cent of the original remains. Today, nature and wildlife are still under extreme pressure.

Victoria's native grasslands once covered a third of the state and were cared for by Traditional Custodians. They were essential food bowls for First Nations communities. Wallaby grass seeds made excellent bread, leaves and stems were used for



fishing and hunting nets. Strategic fire encouraged edible ground-level plants that attracted grass-eating animals like kangaroos – an important protein source. It only took 200 years to destroy what was cared for by Victoria's First People's for millennia. Today, only one per cent of our wildflower meadows survive.

Treaty will strengthen Victoria by:

- Recognising First Peoples' rights and long-standing connection to Country.
- Sharing decision-making when it comes to caring for land and water.
- Creating a more inclusive future, where everyone's history and culture is valued.

How to support Treaty

For non-Aboriginal people, Treaty is about acknowledging the past, listening deeply, and helping build a more honest and fair relationship with the First Peoples of this land.

The journey to Treaty must be led by First Peoples – but it's a journey we can walk together. There are many ways to show your support – check out the Treaty information on our website for more details and links. 🌿



↑ Eel traps at Tyrendarra, Budj Bim Cultural Landscape, Gunditjmara Country | FOLLY FOTOS



↑ ParkWatch covering the central west, Sept 2021 and June 2022 | SANDY SCHELTEMA

Central west parks enter the home straight!

AFTER THE LONGEST OF WAITS, THE PROMISED CENTRAL WEST NATIONAL PARKS ARE REACHING THE LAST HURDLES TO CREATION, REPORTS **MATT RUCHEL**, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

VNPA members and supporters are celebrating a historic win for nature, climate, and community. On 11 September, legislation for new central west national parks and conservation reserves was tabled in Victorian Parliament by Environment Minister Steve Dimopoulos.

The new parks will protect hundreds of rare and threatened plants, animals and fungi, including Mount Cole Grevilleas, Brush-tailed Phascogales, Mountain Skinks and Powerful Owls. The legislation fulfills several long-standing government commitments:

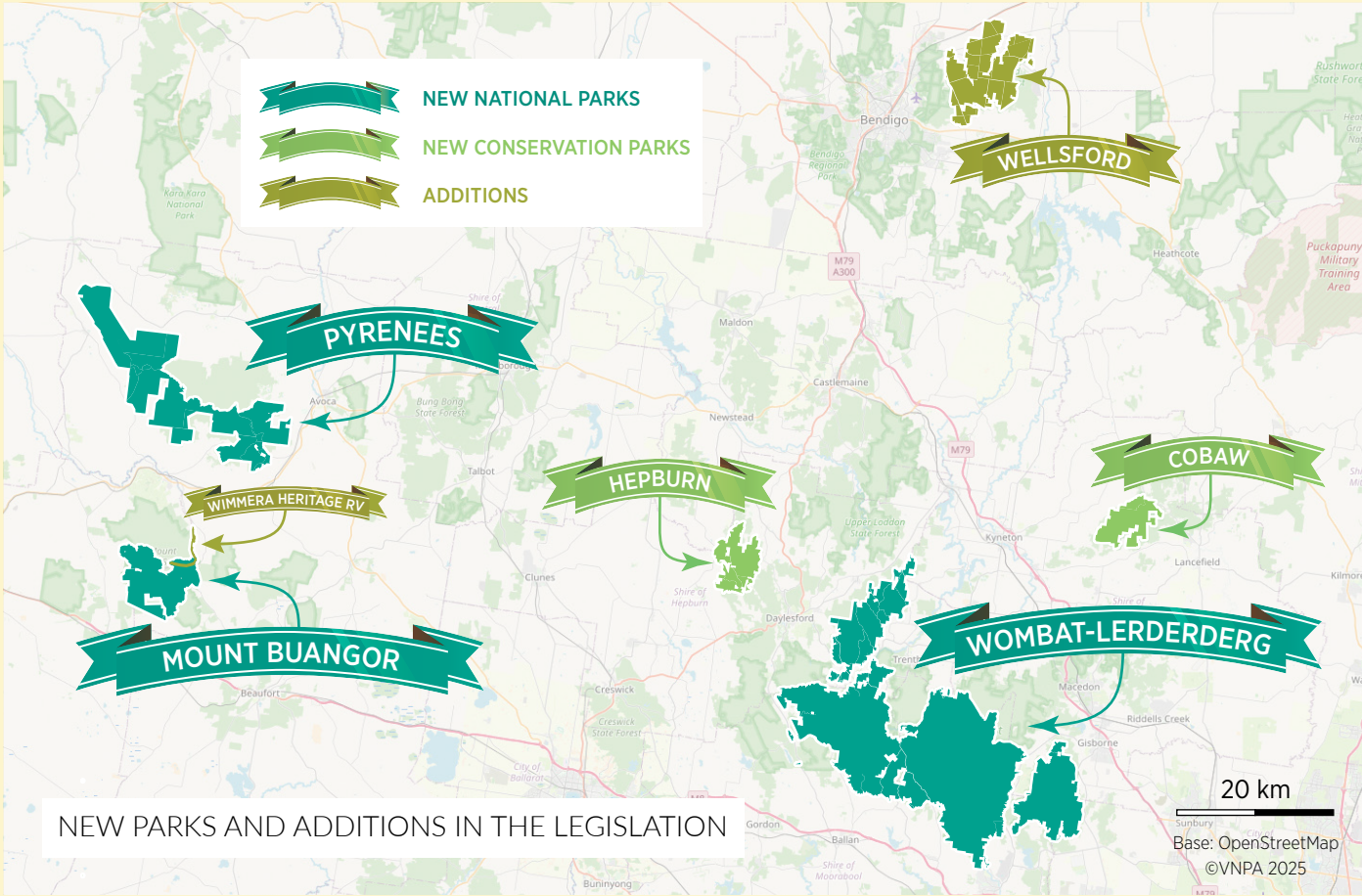
- **Three new national parks:** Wombat-Lerderderg, Mount Buangor and Pyrenees.
- **Two new conservation parks:** Cobaw and Hepburn.
- **Expanded protection:** Addition of Wellsford Forest to Bendigo Regional Park and extension of the

Wimmera Heritage River around Mount Cole.

They'll be Victoria's first substantial new national parks in 14 long years. Places that generations of people will come and enjoy. None of it would have happened without the dedication of nature-lovers like you – the members and supporters of VNPA.

The legislation, first promised in 2021, is a result of decades of tireless advocacy to keep irreplaceable landscapes and wildlife safe from logging, resource exploitation and neglect.

This is a major milestone for Victoria's natural heritage and climate resilience. National parks are the gold standard of protection. After four years of advocacy, we're thrilled the legislation is finally ready. These fragmented forest remnants are vital refuges



in a landscape heavily cleared for agriculture.

Premier Jacinta Allan said Victorians will be able to 'get into nature and do the things they love including bushwalking, camping, horse riding, four-wheel driving, dog walking, fishing, seasonal deer hunting and more.'

continued overpage...



↑ VNPA central west poster and postcard campaign from 2020 | ARTWORK: JESSIE BORRELLE

CENTRAL WEST NATIONAL PARKS TIMELINE



Cracking the new fire code

 THE NEW BUSHFIRE CODE TAKES SMALL STEPS BUT LEAVES BIG GAPS, SAYS **MATT RUCHEL**, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Victoria's Code of Practice for Bushfire Management on Public Land has been quietly updated. The 2012 version was bursting with wishy-washy high-level commitments. It had no measurable accountabilities or clarity on how its vague sub-strategies and implementation plans would translate into the real world. VNPA has documented serious problems with fire management works under the 2012 Code ('Cracking the fire code', *ParkWatch* December 2024). Examples include:

- Fuel break construction in Yarra Ranges National Park that destroyed 100 hollow-bearing trees and killed at least one Greater Glider.
- Storm clean-up and tree removal across Dandenong Ranges National Park, Silvan Reservoir, Wombat and Cobaw forests.
- Five hectares of bush mechanically mulched in Macedon Regional Park when it was too wet to burn, destroying threatened plants.
- Planned burning of two-thirds of the nationally threatened Enfield Grevillea population in Enfield State Park despite limited knowledge of how fire affects the plant.

Big gaps in the new code

When government agencies do work under the guise of fire safety, they don't have to follow the normal rules that protect forests and native vegetation (like the Code of Practice for Timber Production). Regular forestry has strict guidelines and clearing native plants requires permits, but fire management work is exempt from these protections. There's no independent watchdog checking what they're doing to nature – like when the Conservation Regulator used to oversee VicForests. This matters because they're using the same contractors. In practice,

their 'storm clean-up' and 'fuel break' work often looks just like logging – or worse, permanent land clearing. Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMV) keeps growing. Last year, they took over all Parks Victoria fire staff. They've added over 300 VicForests contractors and around 80 former VicForests employees. While other government departments face budget cuts – especially nature protection agencies – FFMV seems immune. In our submission, VNPA identified five major problems:

1. Lack of transparency and accountability.
2. Failure to protect hollow-bearing trees and threatened wildlife.
3. Poor fire zoning and unclear definitions.
4. Weak site assessments and no role for citizen science.
5. Insufficient support for cultural and nature protection goals.

Small steps forward

The new code slightly improves recognition of conservation issues but repeats many old mistakes. The word 'biodiversity' appears 15 times (up from five in 2012). Key improvements include:

- Requiring environmental and cultural assessments at every planning stage.
- Identifying actions to reduce bushfire impacts on threatened

- wildlife, old-growth forests, and Aboriginal cultural heritage.
- Contributing to positive outcomes for biodiversity and threatened wildlife.
 - Creating exclusion zones where planned burning is banned in fire-sensitive areas.

These tweaks are welcome but the code as a whole is not sufficient for protecting Victoria's unique wildlife and forests.

Making fire management more accountable and transparent

FFMV must be answerable to the public and follow best practices that look after nature and people. In our feedback on their new guidelines, we pointed out how other states do things better. New South Wales, for example, has detailed rules for bushfire management. The new code doesn't include independent oversight – just processes that promise 'continuous improvement.' This falls far short the 2009 Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission recommendation for a significant upgrade to long-term data collection to monitor how prescribed burning affects our native wildlife and habitats. VNPA and community groups will keep monitoring FFMV and draw attention to any problems that emerge. We hope that we don't have to wait another decade for a bushfire code and department that protect lives and look after our natural living web. 🌿



↑ BERT KNOTTENBELD/FLICKR

Plant Blindness with Taya Lacey

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

Common Wallaby Grass *Rytidosperma caespitosum*

Ready to add some Australian native grasses to your garden and don't know where to start? Common Wallaby Grass might be just what you've been looking for. In a world obsessed with flashy flowers, it's easy to overlook the quiet power and incredible beauty of grasses that are often seen as just background. But this plant shouldn't be relegated to the background as it's a star. Common Wallaby Grass grows in low tussocks and tufts between 30–50cm. The flowering stems rise above the plant, topped with white-purple fluffy seed heads that turn golden as they ripen. Pull off a seed and its common name makes perfect sense – each seed resembles a wallaby in profile, with a twisted awn forming a long 'tail'. *Rytidosperma* species have cultural significance: Aboriginal Australians used their seeds to make bread, applied leaf extracts to treat skin ailments, and wove leaves into fishing and hunting baskets and nets. It's also an ecosystem powerhouse. For pollinators, it is like a 24/7 supermarket. It's a larval food plant for the beautiful Shouldered Brown and White-banded Grass-dart butterflies. The Critically Endangered Golden Sun Moth spends 99 per cent of its life chewing its roots. It attracts larvae-eating birds and seed-eaters like the Red-browed Finch and provides habitat for small lizards. It's also an important food source for wallabies and kangaroos.



↑ Common Wallaby Grass | REE GREEN/NATURALIST

Common Wallaby Grass is an excellent garden plant, great for underplanting, texture and movement. Unfussy, it tolerates perfect or poor-quality soil and copes well with acidic soil, alkaline soil, heat, drought, frost, full or partial sun. It just prefers dry feet and dislikes waterlogging. Its ability to control soil erosion makes it ideal for embankments and retaining walls. The weeping clumps can be used to soften path edges, or if planted densely it could serve as a lawn alternative. It flourishes in winter, so won't outcompete summer growers. Common Wallaby Grass can be sourced at many native nurseries. With many native grasses to choose from, your garden, soil, and local wildlife will thank you! 🌿

Grassy Plains Network intern Taya Lacey is studying Botany and Computer Science at La Trobe University

Glad tidings Nature news to bring a smile to your face

Hello Possum!

A Leadbeater's Possum (*Gymnobelideus leadbeateri*) has been detected in Kosciuszko National Park near the Yarrangobilly Caves. This extraordinary discovery is the first live record of this Critically Endangered possums outside of Victoria. NSW government researchers, Fred Ford and Martin Shultz, made the discovery during camera trap surveys for the Endangered Smoky Mouse (*Pseudomys fumeus*). The Biodiversity Council says the discovery 'highlights the importance of conserving large areas of high-quality habitats, even if significant species had not previously been detected.' 😊 Read more at biodiversitycouncil.org.au/news/first-leadbeater-s-possum-detection-in-nsw-shows-importance-of-protecting-big-conservation-areas



↑ Camera trap image of a Leadbeater's Possum captured in Kosciuszko National Park, Monaro Ngarigo Country | NSW DCCEEV

Community alliance reaps reward for iconic Woodlands

 WESTERN PORT WOODLANDS HAVE FINALLY BEEN DECLARED A DISTINCTIVE LANDSCAPE, REPORTS **JORDAN CROOK**, PARKS AND NATURE CAMPAIGNER

It's official! The Western Port Woodlands are now recognised as a Distinctive Area and Landscape (DAL) in the Bass Coast.

The planning minister released the final planning policy in June. This milestone is a result of an enormous community effort. Thanks to people like you, these incredible woodlands are now officially recognised as the important natural habitat we always knew they were.

While the minister's Statement of Planning Policy (SPP) recognised the Woodlands, it stopped short of putting robust controls in place to stop further habitat destruction.

Instead, it recommends a strategic environmental assessment and an evaluation of whether the protection of high biodiversity values under the existing planning and extractive industry regulations are effective.

The SPP calls for a balance between nature protection and extractive industries in the Bass Coast. This would be laughable if it wasn't so tragic. The Western Port Woodlands are an oasis in a desert of one of Victoria's most cleared natural landscapes.

There's already a large pool of data from citizen scientists and others proving the Woodlands are home to threatened wildlife. There's Southern Brown Bandicoots, Powerful Owls, Strzelecki Gums and – my personal favourite – Tea-tree Fingers fungus.

Incredibly, this corridor is still threatened by industrial sand mining operations and other pressures.

Enough talk; it's time for action. As part of the Woodlands Alliance, we're pushing State Government for immediate funding to survey and properly map the Woodlands. Then we need an evidenced and community focussed plan to protect this special place. Wildlife, plants, and people all depend on it. 🌿

Find out more at vnpa.org.au/western-port-woodlands



↑ Former Holden Proving Grounds, Western Port Woodlands, Bunurong Country | MEGHAN LINDSAY



↑ Powerful Owl, Western Port Woodlands, Bunurong Country | JAMES WHITE

What's a DAL?

Distinctive Area and Landscape (DAL) is a planning declaration that aims to 'guard against inappropriate development in sensitive areas across Victoria and safeguard their unique features for future generations'.

Bass Coast was declared a DAL in 2019. It will guide planning in the shire over the next 50 years.

Strangely, the first iteration of the Bass Coast DAL planning documents completely ignored the Western Port Woodlands. Instead they looked to protect the landscape values of the largely cleared Bass hills.

VNPA joined Save Western Port Woodlands and the South Gippsland Conservation Society in a coalition to point out the oversight and request an Environmental Significance Overlay on Bass Coast's last functional forest.

More than 500 organisations and individuals put in submissions seeking protection of the woodlands. Our Coalition also presented eight expert witnesses to the DAL panel. 🌿



Spotlight on Nature with Meghan Lindsay



Tea-tree Fingers *Hypocreopsis amplexans*

Tea-tree Fingers are an incredible fungus that live in only three places in Victoria. Including the Western Port Woodlands.

This Critically Endangered fungus has some pretty specific needs. They only grow on top of another wood rotting fungus (which means they're a mycoparasite – that is, a parasitic fungus). They grow on dead branches of Banksia, Kunzea, Leptospermum and Melaleuca. And those dead branches need to be about 5–10cm in diameter.

They also haven't been found anywhere there's been fire in the last twenty years. This highlights the importance of long-unburnt habitats.

They look pretty whacky too. Like tiny fingers bursting through bark. Despite their remarkable appearance, they can be pretty hard to find. Firstly, their yellowish brown colour blends in pretty well to their surroundings. Plus, they're only up to 6cm long. Not to mention their specific habitat requirements. In fact, they're so cryptic they were only discovered by Western science in 1992.




↑ Tea-tree Fingers fungus | MELVIN XU

Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria and Zoos Victoria tried out a novel approach to search for these sneaky fungi. They teamed up to sniff out Tea-tree Fingers with Daisy, a wildlife detection dog. And Daisy managed to find more fungi in a shorter time compared to human detectors!

There's so much we still don't know about fungi. And plants and animals for that matter. With so much yet to discover, it's yet another reason we need to protect habitats like Western Port Woodlands. 🌿

Marine national parks: necessities not luxuries

 WHEN MARINE NEGLECT IS BEING SOLD AS A BUDGET SOLUTION WE SHOULD ALL BE CONCERNED, SAYS **SHANNON HURLEY**, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER

The Victorian Government has pressed ahead with deep cuts to frontline marine staff – slashing half of the state's Fisheries Officers.

The scale of the cuts is staggering. Two stations in the busiest fishing grounds on the Melbourne's doorstep – Altona and Braeside – are already closed. Marine sanctuaries such as Ricketts Point are struggling with illegal fishing, and existing enforcement stretched thin. The decision to slash frontline ocean guardians confirms widespread

concerns that marine protection is slipping down the priority list.

Fisheries officers not only help protect marine habitats, they also look after the public's safety. They enforce boating safety; an issuing growing more urgent as jet ski ownership surges and accident rates climb. With fewer officers on the water, who will step in to prevent tragedies?

More than 20,000 Victorians called for a parliamentary inquiry into the cuts, a clear signal of public alarm. We hope the inquiry gains support from the Legislative Council and gives the issue the transparency it deserves.

The stakes couldn't be higher. Victoria's marine protected areas shelter abalone, rock lobsters and countless threatened marine wildlife. They support a vibrant coastal culture and sustain livelihoods. By treating them as expendable budget lines, our elected representatives are



↑ Seagrass meadow, Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuary, Bunurong Country | SHANNON HURLEY

gambling with the future of nature and community wellbeing.

Marine national parks and sustainable fishing aren't luxuries: they're necessities. The question is whether the government is causing more harm than good. 🌿

Ports, plans and a precious wetland

SHANNON HURLEY, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER, ON RECENT CHANGES TO THE PROPOSED PORT OF HASTINGS PROJECT

The Victorian Renewable Energy Terminal (VRET) at the Port of Hastings has cleared its first major hurdle. The Albanese Government has declared the project a 'controlled action', triggering the next stage: detailed investigations into impacts on Western Port's protected wetlands. This will guide their final decision: approve the project or protect the Bay's habitats.

What's changed since the VRET proposal was rejected in 2024?

The biggest concerns are the massive dredging and wetland destruction from land reclamation. After the initial



↑ Curlew Sandpiper, Western Port Bay, Bunurong Country | DAN WELLER

rejection, the Port redesigned the project to reduce its impact on the Bay's natural web of life. The revised plan cuts land reclamation by 35 per cent to 16.5 hectares and slashes dredging by 70 per cent to 525,000 cubic metres of seabed sediment.

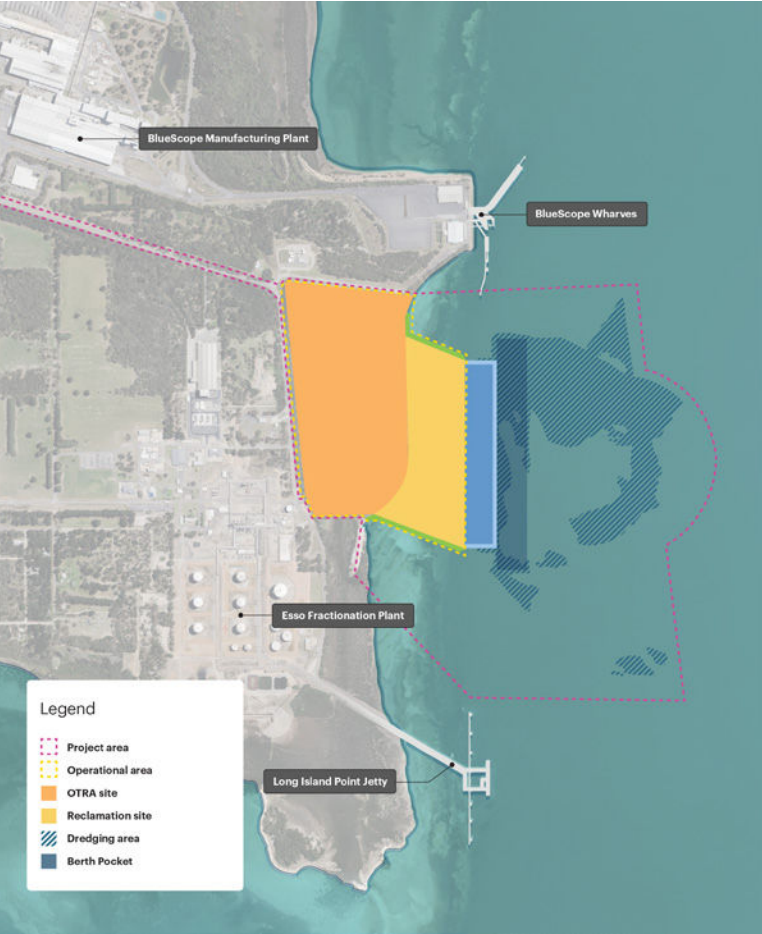
Getting the science right

The Port has done studies to support its renewable energy terminal proposal. These follow state planning rules and requirements, that cover marine life protection under state and federal law.

Good science is crucial – but major gaps remain. Environmental assessments often ignore habitat-wide effects. The Western Port investigations must go deep

- enough to understand this complex, interconnected web of life.
- We know more than we used to, but there are still big holes in our knowledge:
- **Baseline science and monitoring** – Without proper baselines, we can't measure true impacts.
 - **Dredging impacts** – Key data on seagrass light conditions is missing, tropical comparisons are misleading, and suspended sediment above 2 mg/L could cause serious harm.
 - **Noise impacts** – Long-term effects on marine mammals are unstudied. Up to 18 months of pile driving could disrupt fish, squid, sharks and whiting.
 - **Critical wildlife overlooked** – School shark nurseries, Crawfish Rock, seagrass diversity, and microphytobenthos that support vital bird habitats.
 - **Birds and connectivity** – Destruction of vital migratory bird habitat and poor understanding of habitat connectivity raises red flags.

Despite these gaps, the Port claims impacts will be small, localised, and won't harm the protected wetland's integrity. We believe this is misleading – without understanding the full impact the Terminal will have on the Bay's nature, such claims can't be verified.



↑ Port of Hastings construction footprint | COURTESY PORT OF HASTINGS CORP

Salty Science with Erin Brereton



Sea Urchins *Heliocidaris erythrogramma*

If you've ever limped out of the shallows in Port Phillip Bay/Nerm* with a spine in your foot, knee or elbow, congratulations, you've had a run-in with one of our native Sea Urchins. Commonly known as Helio, these spiky locals are a rite of passage for salty swimmers, snorkellers and rock-hoppers alike.

Sure, they come in pretty colours – from deep purple to reddish hues – but it's usually their pointy ends people remember. Despite their reputation as a spiky menace, Helios are actually incredible little survival machines.

In just three and a half days, a Helio goes from egg to larvae to a fully-formed mini urchin; a lightning-fast transformation in ocean terms. Even at this tiny stage, Helios know what they want. Once they hit the sea floor, they 'sniff' out adult urchins and algae-covered rocks: prime real estate and a food source rolled into one.

But here's where things get messy. Once Helios find each other, they form dense gangs. Just 10 urchins per square metre is enough to flatten a golden kelp forest, stripping away the canopy and turning lush underwater jungles into desolate rocky plains known as 'urchin barrens'.

And the problem's been growing for nearly a century. Over the past 95 years, their numbers have exploded by up to 420%, munching their way through the habitat like tiny bulldozers. When food runs low, they don't die off, they shrink. Reabsorbing their own skeletons they



↑ Urchin barren at Kirk Point, Wadawurrung Country | SCOTT BRESCHKIN

survive on their own tissues like real-life marine zombies. Yes, it's gross. But also weirdly impressive!

Luckily, we're not helpless. Scientists, divers and marine managers are tackling the issue on multiple fronts: culling urchins to rebalance populations and restoring kelp by planting new seedlings, giving nature a fighting chance.

So are Helios the bad guys? Not really. They're native, they're oddballs, and right now, they're wildly out of balance. Fixing the urchin barrens won't happen overnight, but it's a vital part of restoring our reefs and protecting marine biodiversity for the future.

Erin Brereton completed a student placement while studying a Masters of Environmental Management at UQ

***Nerm is the Boon Wurrung name for Port Phillip Bay**

Ports, plans and a precious wetland continued...

What happens next?

The key question: can this project proceed without unacceptable impacts on the wetland? With current knowledge gaps, it's not clear.

VNPA will keep working with the Port – through submissions and our Community Reference Group participation – so all impacts are properly understood. Any measures must make sure that habitat restoration that protects the wetland trumps simple 'environmental offsets'.

From the start, we've asked why Western Port was chosen for this terminal. While bits of information have emerged, a proper comparative risk assessment of alternative sites is still missing.

We know a confidential cabinet report ranked Geelong a close second, but it remains secret despite our calls to make the report public.

A holistic, science-led roadmap for Western Port Bay

The revised proposal reveals a critical gap: Western Port has no strategic plan to balance nature conservation and sustainable development.

This goes beyond nature – it's about governance, community trust, and the Bay's future. With growing pressures from shipping, pollution, and climate change, we need coordinated planning to avoid ad-hoc decisions and missed opportunities.

VRET data could kickstart proper marine planning so that looking after marine and coastal landscapes, community values and sustainable development work together.

We're calling for \$1.2 million to establish our Western Port Bay Framework. Backed by Traditional Custodians, tourism, local businesses and conservation groups the Framework sets out clear steps and solutions to defend the bay from inappropriate development, pollution and climate change.

From Eastern Curlews in sea grass meadows to salty mangrove flats, Western Port Bay's a rich natural tapestry. We need to see nature-positive standards that keeps this tapestry safe and supports responsible development.

Shine a light on citizen science



DR SERA BLAIR, NATUREWATCH COORDINATOR, REVEALS THE IMPORTANCE OF CITIZEN SCIENCE TO NATURE IN VICTORIA

In the depths of a Victorian forest, a torch beam cuts through the darkness, illuminating a hollow forty metres above. The silence breaks with a Boobook Owl's call, then suddenly – a glint of eyeshine. A Leadbeater's Possum, once thought extinct until 1961, peers down from its Mountain Ash sanctuary. This single sighting will trigger protection for 200 metres of surrounding forest.

Across Victoria, dedicated citizen scientists are becoming the eyes and ears of nature, filling critical gaps left by government inaction and budget cuts.

Their work has never been more important as our web of life faces unprecedented threats from land clearing, invasive species, climate disruption, and inappropriate development.

Committing to the Great Forest

Victoria's Central Highlands exemplify the conservation crisis. After a century of logging and repeated wildfires, research warns of catastrophic collapse in hollow-bearing trees unless urgent protection is implemented.

This threatens the local extinction of hollow-dependent wildlife like Leadbeater's Possums and Greater Gliders. When citizen scientists discovered a dead Greater Glider near a felled habitat tree last year, it provided clear evidence of nature protection law violations. Yet despite promises and the end of native forest logging, the government refuses to commit to creating a Great Forest National Park in the Central Highlands.

VNPA's NatureWatch program coordinates wildlife cameras, spotlighting surveys, sound recorders and satellite data to document forest health and keep pressure on decision-makers. The clearer the evidence of what's at stake, the harder it becomes for politicians to ignore.

Grasslands treated like dirt

Victoria's Volcanic Plain grasslands, now the state's most threatened habitat, face similar neglect. Home to Critically Endangered wildlife like Victorian Grassland Earless Dragons and Spiny-rice Flowers, these subtle landscapes were promised major protection a decade ago. Progress has been painfully slow.

Dr Adrian Marshall and the Grassy Plains Network conducted a 'People's Audit' revealing the dire condition of conservation reserves. Volunteers documented threatened plants crushed by contractors, habitats damaged by heavy vehicles, and in one shocking case, a rare grassland buried under asbestos-contaminated rubble. This evidence finally forced prosecution, though fines remained inadequate.

Marine world out of sight

Beneath Victorian waters, invasive algae displace native seaweeds while over-abundant sea urchins create marine deserts. Despite national obligations, the government has ruled out new marine national parks and cut fisheries officers.

Our ReefWatch program mobilises divers and snorkellers for underwater weeding and monitoring. Since 2002, the Great Victorian Fish Count has engaged thousands in Victoria's biggest citizen science event, providing baseline data to track marine threats and hold leaders accountable.

Building capacity for nature

Citizen scientists are documenting wildlife and advocating for landscape-scale protection. From central west forests where Brush-tailed Phascogales thrive in areas earmarked for fuel reduction burns, to coastal reefs facing development pressure.

This grassroots movement needs equipment, training, and ongoing support. Wildlife cameras, sound recorders, and spotlighting surveys generate data that flows directly to decision-makers and scientific databases, preventing habitat destruction and wildlife deaths.

Every camera click and sound recorded builds the case for protection. In an era of political inaction and public service cuts, citizen scientists represent hope – ordinary people stepping up to defend Victoria's extraordinary natural heritage before it's too late. 🌿



Help shine a light on nature protection by supporting critical citizen science activities.

vnpa.org.au/shinealight



NatureWatch citizen science volunteers spotlighting in Wombat Forest, Wurundjeri and Dja Dja Wurrung Country | CAM SUTTIE



← Leafy Seadragon washed up on Aldinga Beach, South Australia, 23 July 2025 | JULIE BURGHER/FLICKR

When the sea turns deadly



SHANNON HURLEY, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER, ON THE LESSONS FOR VICTORIA FROM SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S TOXIC ALGAL BLOOM

On a quiet stretch of South Australia's coast, locals walked down to the beach expecting the usual – gulls wheeling overhead, waves lapping gently, perhaps the flicker of a dolphin fin offshore. Instead, they found a graveyard: sharks, fish, seadragons, cuttlefish, even sea lions, all washed ashore. Australia is no stranger to disasters – we've endured floods, fires, and droughts – but this is different. Just across the border we are witnessing one of the worst marine crises in living memory, a tragedy unfolding loudly above, and below, the waves, while political action remains disturbingly quiet.

The cause is a catastrophic toxic algal bloom – a marine disaster so vast it now stretches over 500 kilometres of coastline. Scientists are calling it one of the worst in Australian history, with over 32,000 dead animals recorded by citizen scientists, with the true toll likely far higher.

This isn't just South Australia's problem. The ripple effects will touch

habitats across the country. For Victoria, with our own vulnerable bays and coastal waters, the question is: what can we do to avoid being next?

A perfect storm

Algal blooms themselves aren't unusual – microscopic plants in the ocean sometimes grow quickly under the right conditions. But what's happening now is different: this is toxic, widespread and lethal. Scientists believe the bloom is the result of 'a perfect storm'. The marine heatwave, driven by climate change, pushed sea temperatures well above average. Floodwaters from the Murray River carried nutrient-rich freshwater into the ocean, acting like fertiliser. Then, weeks of unusually calm seas stopped the algae from dispersing.

The death toll is staggering. More than 480 marine animals have been affected – from sharks and rays to delicate seadragons and the giant cuttlefish that draw divers from around the world.

Entire underwater forests of kelp and seagrass have withered. Threatened animals, including Endangered Australian Sea Lions and the Giant Kelp

community, are among the casualties. Benthic habitats – the seabed ecosystems that anchor marine life – are barren.

Local economies built on tourism, diving and fishing now face uncertain futures.

Communities are urging state and federal governments to treat this as a national disaster. The Biodiversity Council's report calls for seven actions, including emergency measures for wildlife at risk, \$10 million for immediate research, and a long-term monitoring program for the Great Southern Reef.

A wake up call for Victoria?

It's tempting to see this as a South Australian crisis. The conditions that triggered the bloom don't stop at state borders.

Victoria needs to act now, including:

- **Early warning systems:** Monitoring for harmful blooms in high-risk bays could give us precious time to respond.
- **Emergency planning:** A marine disaster response plan would mean we aren't scrambling if a bloom hits here.
- **Cutting pollution:** Stronger controls on nutrient run-off from rivers, farms, and cities could help prevent future blooms.
- **Restoring habitats:** Investing in kelp, seagrass, mangroves and shellfish reefs would boost resilience and help marine life recover, with strategic planning critical for places like Western Port Bay.

Victoria has a choice: to prepare, or to wait until the same thing happens here. The ocean is sending us a message. Ignoring it could cost us dearly. 🌊

Find out more at greatsouthernreef.com/2025-algal-bloom-june-update



↑ Dead Dusky Morwong on Sellicks Beach, South Australia, 27 August 2025 | WARWICK MOYSE/INATURALIST



Dingo/Wilkerr at a waterhole, Big Desert Wilderness | DR DANIEL HUNTER

Who's the boss?

A day of Dingo education



JORDAN CROOK, PARKS AND NATURE CAMPAIGNER, ON THE RECENT DINGO EDUCATION DAY

For over 200 years, Dingoes have been persecuted, culled and mistreated. Debates about their genetics, origins and behaviours have resulted in a blurring of an undeniable truth: Dingoes are the boss of Country and pivotal to its health and resilience.

Recently, more than 140 people packed into Yellingbo Hall for a Dingo Education Day, seeking science-based information about managing relationships between Dingoes and livestock. It follows what organisers described as an inadequate government consultation earlier this year. That community consultation – conducted by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) and Agriculture Victoria – left attendees with more questions than answers about Dingo management practices. In the

absence of clear scientific guidance, misinformation has begun circulating.

The event featured a presentation by Professor Euan Ritchie from Deakin University, who has conducted extensive research on Dingo ecology across Australia. But the star of the show was Pumbah the Dingo, alongside Lyn and Mel from the Australian Dingo Foundation.

One benefit of the day was speaking with local landholders and discussing non-lethal techniques for managing Dingo and stock interactions. Like collecting DNA samples from animals they shoot for genetic analysis.

The Dingo is culturally significant to First Nations communities across Victoria. Decisions about Dingoes and other culturally significant wildlife must be made in partnership with Traditional Owner. These must be culturally safe and include genuine shared decision-making processes.

If we are to truly learn to live in and love this place called Australia, we must put down the bait, the guns and 'wild dog' myths and learn to live with this iconic and pivotal native animal. That can only be done with collaboration between farmers, First Peoples and scientists.

We look forward to keeping these conversations going and helping both people and Dingoes. 🐾

The Dingo Education Day was run by VNPA with support from the Australian Dingo Foundation and Wildlife of the Central Highlands (WOTCH)

Glad tidings Nature news to bring a smile to your face



Great news for our iconic marsupial

In September, the New South Wales Labor Government revealed the proposed outlines of the Great Koala National Park, fulfilling its 2023 election commitment. The park will protect 176,000 hectares of state forest and connect with existing national parks to create a 476,000 hectare reserve to protect more than 12,000 Koalas in the state's north. A moratorium on logging within its boundaries began in mid-September.

'We congratulate the NSW Government on finally making the Great Koala National Park a reality,' stated National Parks Association of NSW (NPA) President, Liz Jeremy. 'This is an incredible moment for Australia's national parks, the culmination of more than a decade

of determined advocacy for the future of Koalas by local communities and conservationists'. The road between NPA's original 2015 report and this decision 'has been a long and often frustrating one, but emphatically worth it', she added. 😊

Read more at npansw.org.au/2025/09/07/the-great-koala-national-park-announced



↑ Koalas | JEAN BEAUFORT



Goodnight, Blinky Bill

← Koala in Budj Bim National Park, Gunditjmara Country | ISABELLA TOMA

on population 'control'. As long as the state can point to a superficially 'thriving' overall population, the hundreds of tiny enclave populations dotting across the state can be neglected.

This wasn't always the case. By the 1920s, disease and the fur trade had reduced mainland Victoria's Koalas to a handful of remnant populations. In the decades that followed, large-scale translocations became central to their recovery. But these efforts relied heavily on small, disease-free island populations from French and Kangaroo Island, Koalas with alarmingly low genetic diversity but no chlamydia. We now know this carries cascading consequences beyond obvious issues like birth defects and weaker immune systems. It also disrupts the delicate symbiotic gut bacteria essential to a Koala's survival.

Unlike most herbivores, a Koala's stomach functions as a fermentation chamber, relying on specialised bacteria to extract nutrients from gum leaves. Inbred populations suffer reduced bacterial diversity, meaning they extract less energy from their food. This can cause them to strip trees bare and still show signs of malnutrition.

The 2023 DEECA strategy acknowledges 'unsustainable densities' in parts of Victoria's far east and says that lethal control should only ever occur following 'health assessments.' Yet when the Budj Bim fires destroyed vast swathes of habitat, depriving thousands of Koalas of food, that language was stretched to its limit. In April, some 1,000 Koalas were killed by helicopter shooting despite surrounding Blue Gum plantations they could have accessed. A slower process cull had been carried out in the national park under the auspices of 'health checks'.

Our elected officials have chosen the more short-sighted, morally bankrupt option. The issue could be solved by putting money into renewed efforts. This would see Koala generations returned to areas to restore genetic variation and symbiotic pathogens. 🌿

Geoff Pharo is a NatureWatch volunteer and recent Bachelor of Science graduate with a deep interest in Australia's prehistoric ecosystems and today's rapidly changing biosphere.



GEOFF PHARO
REFLECTS ON
GOVERNMENT
MISMANAGEMENT
OF KOALA POPULATIONS IN
VICTORIA'S WEST

In 1954, 160 chlamydia-free Koalas were introduced to Mt Cole near Beaufort, moved from French Island in the hope of restoring them to their former range. They never thrived in

their new home. By the time of the 2023 Mt Cole fires, perhaps only a dozen individuals could be found on the mountain. Today, they are absent and for the first time in 70 years; Koalas are once again missing from a vast stretch of western Victoria.

Earlier this year, VNPA NatureWatch conducted three months of wildlife surveys to catalogue what survived the fires. There was some relief; most of Mt Cole's historic inhabitants endured, albeit in drastically reduced numbers. But the Koalas did not.

Also this year, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) updated its Koala Management Strategy, marking a quiet but profound shift in policy. Where Victoria once prioritised wildlife reintroductions and boosting genetic diversity, the new focus is

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



Golden Whistler in Wyperfeld National Park, Wotjobaluk Country | IAN MORGAN



Wired in Wyperfeld



JOHN MILLER
OF FRIENDS OF
WYPERFELD
INTRODUCES NEW
TECHNOLOGY FOR ONE OF
VICTORIA'S MOST REMOTE
NATIONAL PARKS

In what we believe is a first for a Victorian national park, the Friends of Wyperfeld National Park has published an app for Wyperfeld, Victoria's third largest national park, located in Wotjobaluk Country in the Wimmera.

It answers common questions about Wyperfeld: Where is it? Why should I go there? What can I see when I am there? When is the best time to visit?

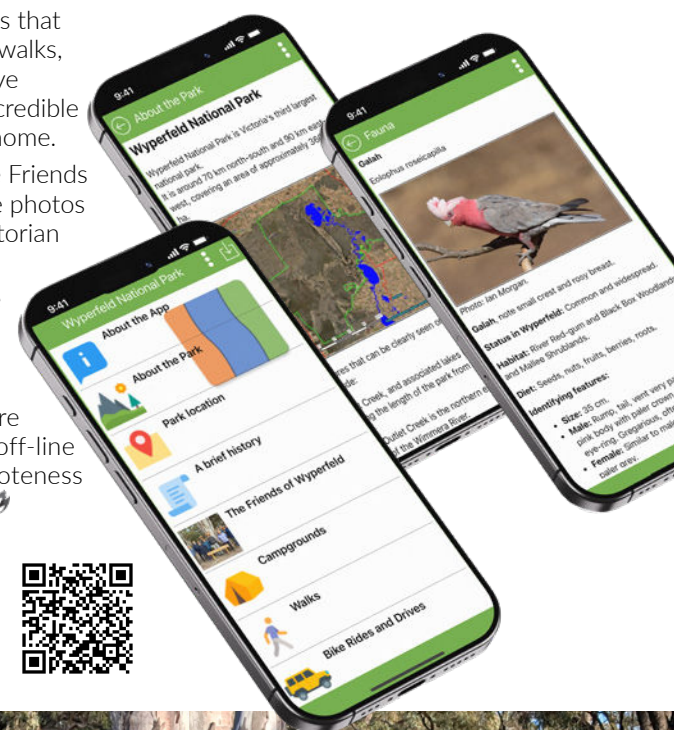
The app is designed for the full range of park visitors, from individuals and families to school and other groups. Experienced long-term visitors will find it as useful as those visiting for the first time. With a wide range of useful information about the park, the app can be used for pre-trip planning or in-park information. It describes the history, location and facilities of the

park, as well as various features that can be enjoyed there, such as walks, bike rides, 2WD and 4WD drive tracks, and of course all the incredible plants and animals that call it home.

The app was developed by the Friends of Wyperfeld with many of the photos provided by other western Victorian field naturalists.

It is free to download from the Android Play Store and the Apple App Store. Just search 'Wyperfeld' or scan the QR code. Download the app before venturing out: it can be used off-line while you're enjoying the remoteness of this glorious wilderness. 🌿

App feedback can be sent to friendsofwyperfeld@gmail.com



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



↑ Friends of Wyperfeld in June 2025 | SOPHIE NEGRI/PARKS VICTORIA

Up close and personal

CITIZEN SCIENCE MACRO-PHOTOGRAPHER, **REINER RICHTER** HAS LOGGED OVER 382,500 OBSERVATIONS ON INATURALIST, TOPPING ITS LEADERBOARD WORLDWIDE

I am out most days (when it is not raining, I'm not totally crazy) walking around the bush with my camera taking photos of small things in particular.

I take photographs of plants, animals and fungi for the pleasure of finding new species for myself, but also so they are in the public record. I like that my observations and those of others may be helpful in the future for the rest of humanity.



↑ Golden Rhinifly (*Stenomorphina subapicalis*), Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park, Yorta Yorta Country

I like to find unusual organisms, something that people would normally overlook. Although I am not a twitcher I may even photograph a bird. I don't actually record that many birds (they make up less than 3 per cent of my records) as there are already a lot of records out there (87 million on the Atlas of Living Australia out of a total of 151 million).

But with all that I have yet to explore underwater or that entire other universe of microscopic life.

I have been using iNaturalist for recording my observations since 2016, as have more than 100,000 people across Australia. Although possibly overwhelming at first, the platform is quite powerful in what it can do, including suggesting identifications (based on previous observations) and complex filtered searches.

There are phone apps you can use but I mainly use the web interface via a desktop browser for efficiency. My observations can be found via the iNaturalist link. 🌿

Check out Reiner's observations on iNaturalist
inaturalist.ala.org.au/people/reiner



← Australian Bluetail Damselfly (*Ischnura heterosticta*)
ALL IMAGES REINER RICHTER



↑ Bee *Megachile canifrons*, Little Desert National Park, Wotjobaluk Country



↑ Caddisfly *Plectrotarsus gravenhorsti*, Baw Baw National Park, Wurundjeri & Gunaikurnai Country



↑ Lovable Jewel Beetle (*Castiarina erasma*), Alpine National Park, Bidwell, Dhudhuroa, Gunaikurnai, Jaithmathang, Taungurung and Nindi-Ngudjam Ngarigu Monero Country

NAR NAR GOON BUSHLAND RESERVES

↑ ↓ Nar Nar Goon Bushland Reserves | ALL IMAGES JORDAN CROOK



JORDAN CROOK
TAKES US TO THREE
SMALL YET EPIC
BUSHLAND RESERVES

The Nar Nar Goon Bushland Reserves consist of three separate but close parks known as Nar Nar Goon G74, G75 and G76 Bushland Reserves.



↑ Skirt Webcap fungi (*Austrocortinarius australiensis*)

Ever wondered why some of these reserves have random letters and numbers in their names? They link back to past land uses and natural features recorded in investigations that form the legal basis of their protection. Who knew?

Now back to the reserves!

I visited the reserves in the middle of Winter when a light film of water was on the ground from recent drizzle. The fungi were out, and a few of the gum trees were in flower.

Small in stature, these reserves are a backbone of protected habitat among dwindling native vegetation on private land. They are well used by wildlife such as wallabies, wombats and owls.

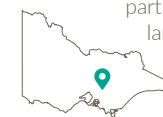


On the groundstorey, these reserves have incredibly diverse grasses as well as sundews, violas and orchids.

With no defined walking tracks, make sure to give your shoes a wash before and after to avoid spreading weeds and pathogens.

Get out there and have a look at these oddly named – but grouse – parks. 🌿

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



↑ Endangered Cobra Greenhood; Common Heath



Nar Nar Goon Bushland Reserves G74, G75 & G76, Morrison and Dore Roads, Nar Nar Goon
76 km/1 hour drive SE of Melbourne



Nominate for VNPA Council and committees

We're looking for people to shape our nature protection work by nominating for voluntary positions on our Council or committees!

We're keen to recruit new Council and committee members with experience in finance, fundraising, cyber/IT, communications, campaigns, advocacy and outdoor activities. We're actively seeking Victorians from a range of backgrounds that reflect our diverse and multicultural society.

Step beyond membership and become a guiding voice for our vital conservation work. Your expertise and dedication can help craft policies that protect our unique habitats and wildlife for generations to come.

Council plays an important role in VNPA's life. Councillors establish policy guidelines, undertake strategic planning, and approve annual budgets. Council is elected at the Annual General Meeting.

Our Council is supported by active sub-committees. These harness the enthusiasm and expertise of members and staff.

Committees include: Finance; Governance, Legal and Policy; Conservation and Campaigns; Strategic Communications and Fundraising; Citizen Science and Nature Education. 🌿

To nominate, email Matt Ruchel, Executive Director
vnpa@vnpa.org.au



↑ Dr Timothy O'Hara OAM | MUSEUMS VICTORIA

Dr Timothy O'Hara awarded OAM

A hearty congratulations to Dr Timothy O'Hara who was recently awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in the General Division for service to science in the field of marine biology.

Tim has been a supporter of VNPA since the mid-80s and was our President from 1993–95. We're delighted that he has received this very well-deserved accolade. 🌿

The forgotten kingdom

Planet Fungi; A Photographer's Foray, Catherine Marciniak, Stephen Axford, Tom May
CSIRO Publishing, 2025, 320pp, ISBN 9781 486318186

This is a visually striking photographic book, where fungi form the catalyst of a much bigger story.

The wacky and often colourful kingdom of fungi is brought to life by the macro photography of Stephen Axford, who has been capturing fungi for over 20 years. His images do an incredible job of showing the impressive features of often-forgotten fungi. By bringing the reader onto the level of fungi, Axford brings out their hidden complexity and beauty.

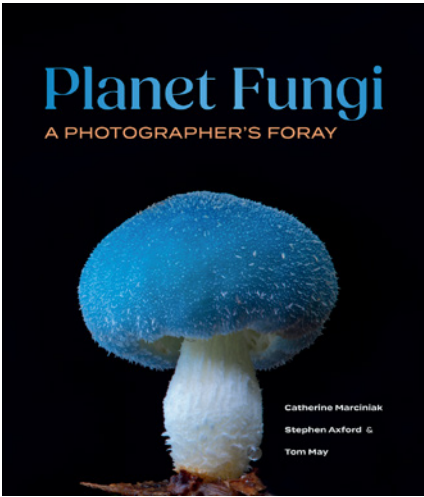
Planet Fungi is extremely informative with co-authors documentary filmmaker and journalist Catherine Marciniak and scientific advisor Dr

Tom May. Together, they take us to different corners of the globe, through both photography and writing. There are two especially interesting portions of the book that take us to Yunnan in southern China and Patagonian Chile, showing readers the globally diverse world of fungi.

Although the authors take us on a journey around the globe, the book still has a very Australian feel, with a consistent narrative about the relationship between plants, animals and fungi.

The book contains a message about the way we still know little about the two to five million species of fungi on Earth, and the lack of understanding about the importance they bring to our planet. It strives to educate and raise awareness among its readers.

Planet Fungi keeps things relatively simple, and does at times stray away from the subject of fungi and instead



follows the author's story. If you want an overview of this underappreciated kingdom, with human stories mixed in, and incredibly powerful visuals involved, it's definitely worth the pickup. 🌿

Oliver Ledger is a VNPA Communications and Engagement intern studying a Bachelor of Communications (Media) at RMIT University

Recent submissions

- Future investment in the You Yangs and Serendip Sanctuary, April 2025
 - Wildlife Act reforms briefing paper, May 2025
 - Parliamentary Inquiry into Wildlife Roadstrike, June 2025
 - Victorian Renewable Energy Terminal EPBC referral, July 2025
 - VicGrid Draft Transmission Plan, July 2025
 - From conservation vision to depauperate weedscape, briefing for Federal Environment Minister Murray Watt, July 2025
 - Submission into public inquiry into the algal blooms in SA, Aug 2025
- Read these and all previous submissions on our website. 🌿



Quiz answers from p. 4

1. **iNaturalist.** If you see an interesting bird, fungi or sea slug and you don't know what it is – add the observation and some photos to iNaturalist. It will suggest identifications for you and, once you post your observation, other people can have a look and help verify it. Once the identification is verified by an expert, the record will be uploaded to the Atlas of Living Australia database.
2. **B.** Though a rolling pin might come in handy in the bush from time to time, it's not a normal inclusion in our NatureWatch field kits.
3. **B.** Colour photos at night are helpful for identifying nocturnal animals with colour variations in the fur. This is particularly helpful if you are surveying for Yellow-footed Antechinus!
4. **A and D.** Spotlighting surveys involve slow walking and using a high-powered torch to search for the shapes or the eyeshine of animals, primarily in the trees. On stagwatching surveys, observers sit under stag trees that show a range of decay and resulting tree hollows, for an hour from just before sunset to after sunset. They watch the stag trees to see what animals emerge from the tree hollows.
5. **B and C.** Scat and track surveys are indirect evidence of an animal. While not all scats are as easy to identify as a wombat's cubed shaped ones, or all tracks as easy to see as kangaroo footprints, you can narrow the identification to one or two animals and refine it with local knowledge.
6. **No,** you don't even have to get your feet wet as long as you wear gumboots. You can search for sea slugs in all marine habitats. Best to search at low tide, standing still while looking in pools of water for movement – sea slugs are always on the move!
7. **C.** 306 of an estimated 600 species in Victoria have been recorded in 25 censuses over the past 7 years. 125 have been recorded at San Remo. 136 is the highest number of species found during one census in March 2024.
8. **C.** While Australian Ghost Sharks (or Elephantfish) are relatively abundant, they only come to the shallows to breed (around March). Our Great Victorian Fish Counts happen in November and December, so we've never counted them!

Rakali's night out on the river

Rakali of the Riverbank, Stephanie Owen Reeder, Illustrated by Rachel Gregg
CSIRO Publishing, 2025, 32pp, ISBN 9781 486317547

Rakali must be one of Victoria's most underrated animals.

Rakali of the Riverbank follows a night in the life of a Rakali (aka Australian Water Rat), tracking it as it hunts, protects and feeds its pups, and navigates a landscape fraught with natural and manmade threats.

Lifted by soft watercolour illustrations, the book has a lovely blend of narrative non-fiction and lyrical nature writing.

The book balances story, natural sciences and heart. The pages include engaging, dramatic scenes ('patrols the riverbank,' 'dodges threats') alongside educational content.

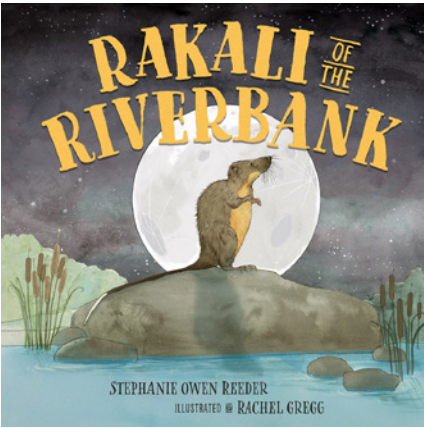
As Billie puts it: 'I like that it has all the details and I also like the pictures

of when it's like SNAP and the fish is biting its tail. I really like the pictures. I learnt that Rakali eat yabbies and I also learned that they could throw away toxic toads.' I learnt that too – in a battle of Rakali vs Cane Toad, Rakali wins!

Rachel Gregg's realistic, playful artwork in aquas, teals, blues, and browns heighten the picture book's charm and bring the narrative to life.

The book encourages awareness and active protection of aquatic habitats and native wildlife. The glossary, factual pages, habitat maps and tips for identifying and protecting Rakali shore up readers' chances to make real-world impact.

At seven and a half, Billie is bang in the middle of the recommended age group (5–9). The book could benefit from interactive elements for younger readers, or as Billie suggested when I asked what she'd like more of: 'Stickers! It needs stickers.'



A great text for families, educators, and conservation-minded folks to explore the world of rakali and aquatic stewardship. A little more insight into First People's connection with Rakali would be welcome.

Imagine if our rivers and waterways were once again decorated with flashes of their signature white tails. Hopefully this book will help bring this world back to life. 🌿

Jessie Borrelle, VNPA Digital Engagement and Communications Manager, with her daughter Billie (7½)

Wild Families



Get to know the lovely leaves around you!

This activity is a chance for you and your family to be botanists (scientists who study plants) by investigating the leaves around you. They could be near home, in the bush, in the school yard or park.

Simply find a leaf (or many) and use the questions to get to know your leaf, just like a botanist would. Grab some paper and pencils to record your discoveries.



1 How many colours and shades are on your leaf? Is it the same colour on both sides?



2 What patterns can you see in the veins?



3 How long is your leaf? Longer than your finger? Longer than your arm?



4 What does your leaf feel like? Smooth or rough?



5 Is there anything living on your leaf?



6 What proof can you find that an animal has visited your leaf? What type of animal could it be?



7 What type of plant did your leaf come from? Was it a tree, a grass, a bush? Something else?



8 How many other leaves do you think are on your plant? Count them, or guess.



9 Is there a pattern to the way the leaves grow? Do they grow all the way around a stem, or on opposite sides of the stem?



10 Why is your leaf important for your plant?



11 Who or what else might your leaf be important for?



12 Can you work out what leaf your plant belongs to? Hint: the iNaturalist app might help narrow it down!



13 Draw your leaf! You can:
a. Trace around the edge of your leaf.

b. Try a free hand drawing.
c. Do a leaf rubbing using crayons
d. Paint your leaf.



Download and print all our Wild Families activity sheets for free
vnpa.org.au/wild-families

Where we went in Winter



Marine-lovers experienced the magic of Western Port Bay at a community day.



Wild Families created mini forests together at Campbells Creek.



Young adults built nestboxes for Critically Endangered Swift Parrots.



Nature-lovers learned all about Dingoes at a community education day.



Citizen scientists searched for sea slugs at San Remo.



Nature protectors learned all about national parks and why we need to stick up for them at a webinar.



Grassy meadow enthusiasts learnt all about Victorian Grassland Earless Dragons, bats and seed collecting at Grassy Plains Network monthly meetings.



Bushwalkers enjoyed a coastal stroll from Gunnamatta to Fingal Beach.



Curious residents discovered their local grasslands at Epping, Wollert and Aurora.



Green thumbs got stuck into nature restoration at the Woorndoo, Grow West and Brimbank Park community planting days.

Upcoming 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 information at
vnpa.org.au/activities



A snapshot of our Spring activities calendar

Grassland tours

We're hosting a dozen grassland walks across the state, between Sat 4 October and Sat 6 December. Find out more on our online calendar.

Grassy Talk: Western Grassland Reserve

Tuesday 7 October

Join an online talk to hear a Parks Victoria perspective on the complex rehabilitation of the Western Grassland Reserve.

Sea Slug Census

7.30pm Friday 10 October

Join us as we search for sea slugs under the bridge at San Remo. This event takes rockpooling to the next level!

Bushwalk - Mornington Peninsula National Park

Saturday 11 October

This gentle 12km circuit walk partly follows the serene Two Bays nature trail, with beautiful scenery and glimpses of local wildlife.

Spring Fling Grassland Festival

12 to 4pm Sunday 12 October

Join us for an afternoon of grassland fun: music, food, a tour, kids activities, a plant giveaway and more.

Grassland Guardians Sunday Rambles

Sun 19 Oct & Sun 16 Nov

For curious residents to discover your amazing local grasslands in Epping, Wollert and Aurora.

Bushwalk: Great Otway National Park

Saturday 25 October

Join a 16km loop walk through the Great Otway National Park, to finish along Fairhaven Beach with the Southern Ocean at your feet.

Bushwalk: Cathedral Range State Park

Saturday 15 November

Join a 6-8km bushwalk to explore Cathedral Range State Park and enjoy the lovely wildflowers.

Bushwalk: Rubicon River

Saturday 15 November

This 4km nature walk is for people joining the Cathedral Range and/or Mt Torbreck bushwalk and camping overnight.

Bushwalk: Mt Torbreck

Sunday 16 November

Join a 5-6km bushwalk up Mt Torbreck through alpine forest to enjoy the amazing views.

Help shine a light on nature protection by supporting critical citizen science activities

WHAT'S IN A NATUREWATCH FIELD KIT?



Will you donate to boost VNPA's citizen science programs?

Your gift will support:

- Buying equipment for surveying wildlife.
- Training volunteers in effective survey methods.
- Increased participation in the collection of data.
- Working with the media to show where nature needs protection.
- Pressuring decision-makers to increase protections for threatened wildlife.

VNPA.ORG.AU/SHINEALIGHT



Make nature part of your legacy

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.

We all know that nature in Victoria is under threat – whether it be from rogue logging, inappropriate development, or a plethora of other reasons. But you can be part of the solution.

By leaving a gift to VNPA in your Will you help protect national parks, nature and wildlife long into the future.

For questions or more information on how to leave a gift, please visit

vnpa.org.au/gifts-in-wills



Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park Paul Schliebs