

# PARK*watch*

37° 26' 54.63" S, 144° 14' 13.16" E



VICTORIAN  
NATIONAL PARKS  
ASSOCIATION



DECEMBER 2025 #302



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## PARKwatch

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VNPA acknowledges the many First  
Peoples of the area now known as  
Victoria, honours their continuing  
connection to, and caring for, Country,  
and supports Traditional Owner joint-  
management of parks and public  
land for conservation of natural and  
cultural heritage. Our office is located on  
traditional land of the Wurundjeri people  
of the Kulin Nation. We offer our respect  
to Elders past, present and future.

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IMAGE: MARK WEBBER.



From the President



MARILYNE CRESTIAS, NEWLY ELECTED VNPA PRESIDENT, WELCOMES YOU TO THE DECEMBER 2025 EDITION OF *PARK WATCH*

It's a real honour to take on the role of VNPA President. I'm originally from the south of France, and first came to Australia as an exchange student at Melbourne University. There I was introduced to the Australian bush by university friends. They took me on scuba dives in Port Phillip Bay, on long hikes at the Prom, rock climbing at Mount Arapiles/Dyurrite, skiing in the Alpine National Park, on day trips to Cape Woolamai. I fell in love with the vast landscapes, the astonishing diversity of marine life, the distinctive scent of eucalyptus in the forests. These precious habitats are facing growing challenges, and that's why it's really important for VNPA to continue our critical work to protect nature.

Now more than ever, strong advocacy, scientific evidence and community support are essential. I look forward to supporting VNPA in my role as President. VNPA Council is already rolling up its sleeves by running a recruitment drive to refresh the membership of our Committees and prepare for upcoming Council vacancies. I look forward to sharing more about this recruitment process – and the work of Council more broadly – in future editions of *ParkWatch*.

In this issue we're thrilled to celebrate the long-awaited legislative approval of new protected areas in our state: Wombat-Lerderderg, Mount Buangor and Pyrenees

national parks; Cobaw, Hepburn and Mirboo North conservation parks; the Wellsford Forest addition to Bendigo Regional Park and Wimmera Heritage River extension. Our special eight-page spread will help you explore each new park's journey to protection, cultural significance, and the wildlife finally granted greater protection. Celebrations continue with marking 20 years of the Great Otway National Park, honouring three titans of nature with VNPA Life Memberships, and farewelling some wonderful staff members. But of course we can't let our guard down. We take a deep dive into the Victorian Government's retreat from nature protection with the release of the Great Outdoors Taskforce report, a review into the *Wildlife Act*, and the actions by veteran park rangers to safeguard what we have. Adrian Marshall reports on the alarming rate of destruction of precious roadside grasslands, plus we look at protecting nature on private land, and eliminating feral deer from the Grampians/Gariwerd. I hope you enjoy some rest and relaxation in nature with your family and friends over the holiday season. Stay safe, and don't forget to check out our quiz below for tips on how to help our wildlife on those extra hot days. 🔥

Park Watch Hot Weather Quiz

1. How do kangaroos cope with hot weather?

a. They find shade during the hottest parts of the day  
b. They pant like a dog  
c. They lick their forearms to cool through evaporation  
d. All of the above!
2. What is the reason for a possum to be on the ground during daylight hours in hot weather?

a. Having a nap      b. Suffering heat stress  
c. Getting a tan      d. Looking for a mate
3. What can you do to help wildlife on hot days?

a. Put out shallow containers of water  
b. Provide artificial shade  
c. Mist trees and shrubs with water  
d. All of the above!
4. Should you try to make a wild animal drink when they're heat stressed?
5. What job do the black tips of an Emu's feathers have in hot weather?

a. To cool it down      b. To ward off flies  
c. It's a summer fashion statement!
6. How do vertically hanging leaves help beat the heat?
7. What is 'aestivation' and how does it help amphibians cope with hot weather?
8. Who should you call if you find a heat stressed Grey-headed Flying Fox?

a. No one, you can help the flying fox yourself  
b. Wildlife Victoria's Emergency Response Service  
c. Flying Fox Busters!
9. How is tree hugging beneficial for Koalas on hot days?
10. True or false, every single type of fungi avoids hot weather and only pops up its sporing body in Autumn?

Answers on p.38

From Great Outdoors to great letdown: the Victorian Government's green retreat



AFTER YEARS OF CONSULTATION, REPORTS AND PANELS, THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT HAS LITTLE TO SHOW IN TERMS OF PERMANENT NATURE PROTECTION SAYS MATT RUCHEL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In 2019, the Victoria Labor Government announced a series of 'Immediate Protected Areas' (IPAs), described by the then environment minister as 'the largest environmental protection plan in our state's history'. After six years, two panel processes, a taskforce, and three Victorian Environment Assessment Council (VEAC) reports, there's little to show for it.

Phase 1: Mirboo North and Strathbogie Ranges

In 2021 an Eminent Panel for Community Engagement (EPCE) began phase 1 of its work, looking at two IPAs, Mirboo North and Strathbogie Ranges. Informed by a VEAC desktop assessment and bio-cultural study, plus community consultation, the phase 1 report was released in August 2022. It provided 14 recommendations to enhance the future use and management of the Strathbogie Ranges, including a trial of new tenure called Cultural Reserves. It also recommended a Nature Conservation Park be created in Mirboo North. Three years later,

these recommendations have been committed to and Mirboo North included in legislation to create new parks in the central west (see p. 22). These decisions all predate the end of native forest logging. Originally, the government proposed to wind down logging by 2030. In May 2023 they brought the date forward, with logging to end on 1 January 2024. The media release at the time promised 'The Government will establish an advisory panel to consider and make recommendations to Government on the areas of our forests that qualify for protection as National Parks...' This flagged the establishment of what we now know as the Great Outdoors Taskforce (GOT).

Phase 2: Central Highlands

Meanwhile, phase 2 of the EPCE considered the future of the Central Highlands. As part of this process, VEAC completed an interim desktop assessment in December 2023. It concluded that:  
*A large protected area such as a national park is commensurate with the outstanding natural values of three*

*large areas in the north and south ...and would link the existing Yarra Ranges, Kinglake, Lake Eildon and Baw Baw national parks and the Bunyip, Cathedral Range and Moondarra state parks.*  
Sounds suspiciously like a big chunk of a potential Great Forest National Park! Unfortunately, the community consultation around phase 2 was hijacked, or at least deeply flawed. Drop-in sessions were dominated by noisy anti-park groups. Many locals were not aware sessions were being held, and if they did attend, found the experience to be intimidating. Misinformation was rife. In late 2024, the report given to government provided 33 recommendations about the future use and management of state forests in the Central Highlands. It was finally released to the public in October 2025, and included recommendations for significant additions to Yarra Ranges National Park and large forest parks. This included 68,570 ha of new national parks, 8121 ha of state parks, and 105,371 ha of forest parks, more than expected.

continued over page...



↑ Rubicon State Forest, Taungurung Country | JUSTIN CALLY



From great outdoors to great letdown cont...

The government largely ignored these recommendations. Instead, they committed to add Yarra tributaries such as Armstrong Creek catchment and Cement Creek to the Yarra Ranges National Park, which are already in closed catchment areas (total about 5,000 ha; just 6.9 per cent of what was recommended).

Some of the most significant areas for conservation, like the mountainous escarpments surrounding the Baw Baw Plateau, remain completely unprotected.

Backwards steps

It took a year from the announcement of the end of native forest logging for the Great Outdoors Taskforce (GOT) to be established. It was created in April 2024, with a commitment of \$5 million in the 2024 State Budget. GOT took over from the Eminent Person Panel for east Victoria. At this stage, GOT was tasked with identifying areas to add to the national parks estate.

Out of the blue, in October 2024, the purpose of the taskforce was changed. They stated '... the Taskforce will not be making any recommendation for large-scale changes to land tenure, including not creating any new national parks.'

This was a complete backflip on previous promises, which had included commitments to 'The largest expansion to our forest reserve system in our state's history.'

The dismay among conservation groups deepened in July 2025 when Environment Minister Steve Dimopoulos announced at the Electrical Trades Union state conference that the Great Forest National Park was not Labor policy and would not be created. It was a clear signal the government was stepping back from its own process. The writing was on the wall, but the full implications were still unclear.

At the same meeting, plans to open 130,000 ha of Victoria's Errinundra and Snowy River national parks to deer hunting were announced (see p. 10). This contradicts the 2016 Greater Alpine National Parks Management Plan. Another backward step.

Light on, lacklustre, lazy policy

This long and winding process culminated in October 2025 with the release of two GOT reports of close to 200 pages. The government provided only a token response. It included an announcement of \$30 million for various projects.

While strong on rhetoric and guff, what we've been handed is a collection of small projects that don't add up to genuine protection. It's light on, lacklustre, lazy policy. Especially considering the amount of consultation, deliberation and hundreds of hours many community groups spent providing detailed comments.

There were four areas discussed:

1. Protecting our environment

- A small expansion of the Yarra Ranges National Park by adding Yarra Tributaries Forest Reserve and Mirboo North Conservation Park (already in central west legislation).
- Additional signs with 'cues to care' to be installed in national parks to encourage visitors to look after our great outdoors.
- The need for existing legislation changes were cited to end loophole logging, but nothing new was announced.
- Restoration of logging coupes that failed to regenerate after being logged. About 1200 hectares has been completed, but no estimate given about future work.

2. Resetting the management framework for state forests

- Legislating of management purposes for the 3.2 million hectares of state forests to make sure they're managed for multiple outcomes. However, the specifics of this change are unclear. This could be helpful in blocking future logging, but the recommendations were not specific.
- \$4 million for new DEECA education staff (none for enforcement staff).
- Creating a new tenure of 'cultural reserves'. These will likely be included in the long promised new Public Land Act, expected next year.

“While strong on rhetoric and guff, what we've been handed is a collection of small projects that don't add up to genuine protection. It's light on, lacklustre, lazy policy.”

- Enabling Traditional Owner collaborative governance, planning and management of forests. A welcome step but it lacks detail.

3. Working together for healthy forests

- The main emphasis was \$4 million for developing and piloting a new set of Healthy Forest Plans for Noojee and Orbost '...to keep our forests resilient, valued, accessible and open for all to enjoy.'

4. Driving, recreation and tourism investments in regional economies

- A promise of \$20 million for long-term maintenance of visitor infrastructure, a marketing campaign and four priority planning or infrastructure projects.

According to the GOT, 'conservation and biodiversity emerged as the top priority across engagement, with climate change, invasive species (especially deer and blackberries), and old-growth forest degradation identified as urgent threats to be addressed'. These top priorities have been largely ignored. The refusal to look at large new protected areas and the failure to close loopholes are massive oversights in the response.

Native forest logging return?

GOT's recommendation was very clear: 'Change relevant legislation and regulations to prevent the return of large-scale commercial native timber harvesting in state forests.'

While light on specific legislative changes, it notes:

Commercial native timber harvesting has ceased in Victoria and native timber harvesting is not an intended use or value that state forests should be managed for. Healthy Forest Plans must not include management of state forests for native timber harvesting.



A change in policy or government could see native forest logging return with the stroke of a pen. There are obvious loopholes that need to be closed, including:

- **Forest Act 1958:** enables the issuing of forest product licences that include timber/wood. It is the legal mechanism by which forestry was conducted in the 1980s and in the west of the state until it ended. Logging could start again with a simple issuing of licences.
- **Forests (Wood Pulp Agreement) Act 1996:** this gives exclusive access to certain areas of the Central Highlands for pulp.
- **Private land logging:** this is allowed through the state provisions for planning schemes. We've provided the government with detailed advice on how this can be changed to stop new proposals for native forest logging on private land.

The government said that '...there will be no further changes to our state forests...' Their growing aversion to legislating for national parks and protected areas despite recommendations is hard to ignore.

Considering the popularity of parks, we hope wisdom will prevail before Labor trashes their own legacy. If they want any credibility on ending native forest logging, they need to close the loopholes.

And they need to reconsider their position on nature protection, before voters head to the polls next year.

“The refusal to look at large new protected areas and the failure to close loopholes are massive oversights in the response.”

Timeline of parks and protection

**Nov 2019**  
Government announces a series of so called 'Immediate Protected Areas' (IPAs) described at the time by then environment minister as 'the largest environmental protection plan in our state's history.'

**2021**  
Eminent Panel for Community Engagement (EPCE) commences phase 1: IPAs.

**Aug 2022**  
Final phase 1 report released on IPAs Strathbogie Ranges and Mirboo North.

**May 2023**  
Government announces bringing forward end of native forest logging to 1 January 2024 and taskforce to look at '...areas of our forests that qualify for protection as National Parks.'

**2023**  
EPCE begins phase 2: review of Central Highlands.

**Sept 2023**  
Jacinta Allen sworn in as new Premier.

**Dec 2023**  
VEAC produces interim desktop assessment of the Central Highlands.

**Jan–May 2024**  
EPCE commences community consultation.

**April 2024**  
Great Outdoors Taskforce (GOT) established.

**Oct 2024**  
GOT announces they 'will not be making any recommendation for large-scale changes to land tenure, including not creating any new national parks.'

**Late 2024**  
EPCE Phase 2 final report delivered.

**July 2025**  
At ETU conference, Environment Minister Steve Dimopoulos declares 'no Great Forest National Park.' Premier announces opening parts of eastern national parks for deer hunting.

**Sept 2025**  
Central west parks legislation enters parliament.

**Oct 2025**  
GOT and EPCE responses released.

**Nov 2025**  
Central west parks legislation passes parliament.

IMAGES: VICTORIAN GOVT, JUDE LIZARDSTOMP, JUSTIN CALLY, JAMES WHITE, ELIZABETH DONOVAN



# Wildlife Act review falls on deaf ears

 **JORDAN CROOK,**  
PARKS AND NATURE  
CAMPAIGNER  
EXPLORES A LONG-  
AWAITED AND MUCH  
NEEDED REVIEW OF THE  
WILDLIFE ACT, BUT ASKS IF IT  
ACHIEVES ANYTHING

Following the gruesome discovery of over 300 slaughtered Wedge-tailed Eagles in East Gippsland in 2021, then environment minister Lily D'Ambrosio commissioned a review of Victoria's *Wildlife Act 1975*. A chorus of voices across the state, including VNPA, were appalled at the deaths of such majestic animals. We were equally dismayed at the subsequent slap on the wrist the

perpetrators received: one person was fined \$2,500 and jailed for 14 days for this offence. This was, however, the first custodial sentence for killing wildlife in Victoria. The *Wildlife Act* in its current form is now 50 years old. Since its creation, the human population of Victoria has grown almost four-fold from 1.84 million in 1975 to over 7 million today. In this half a century, habitats have been destroyed, increasing interactions between people and wildlife. There's also been a change in community attitudes to one of greater love and care for native wildlife. This was a point explicitly noted in the review report. After sitting on numerous environment ministers' desks since 2021, the *Wildlife Act* review was released to the

public late on a Friday afternoon in October 2025: a tactic journalists refer to as 'taking out the rubbish.' Over 1,000 people made submissions to the process, and attended and participated in hearings. Yet the Allan Government's response to the recommendations are underwhelming. They're dismissive of many crucial changes needed to protect wildlife in Victoria. Despite the strong findings of the panel, the government rejected many much-needed reforms. Wildlife Victoria said '...government response instead has focussed largely on some regulatory updates and compliance rather than the reform required' and the '...response has failed to take the opportunity to drive the structural transformation both recommended by the Expert Advisory Panel and absolutely required to protect our wildlife.'

### Protected invasive species

An important area needed to further protect our wildlife and habitats is the removal of feral deer from the *Wildlife Act* as a 'protected game species.' Yet the government has decided to maintain the status quo, despite widespread confusion and frustration about why deer remain the only invasive species protected under nature laws. Land holders must continue to apply to control feral deer by trapping. Or in some cases can't control feral deer at all. Hog Deer, despite damaging coastal woodlands and wetlands, remain protected on public and private land.

### An independent regulator

The second necessary reform was the need for the Office of the Conservation Regulator (OCR) to be established as an 'Independent and structurally separate regulator', outside of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA). As we've seen over the past few years, the OCR is unable to regulate Forest Fire Management Victoria's operations (which sits within DEECA), with devastating consequences. For

# Plant Blindness with Jordan Crook

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

## Hairy-leaf Triggerplant *Stylidium armeria* subsp. *pilosifolium*

With a lot of our native plants, it's the subtle but amazing adaptations that make them endlessly fascinating. The Hairy-leaf Triggerplant's entire home range is within Victoria's central west. It's stronghold is around south-east Macedon Ranges near Barringo and Riddells Creek, and in the Pyrete Range in the new Wombat-Lerderderg National Park. Unlike the more common Grass Triggerplant (*Stylidium graminifolium*) that can be found with almost-white to very deep pink flowers, the Hairy-leaf Triggerplant flowers range from white to very pale pink. As the name suggests, it's got hairy leaves which likely help it keep cool in fairly harsh conditions of dry, shaley soils.

Like other triggerplants, it has iconic 'trigger' flowers which are like a spring-loaded trap. When an insect lands on them, the central column pops out from behind the flower and whacks the hungry insect. The insect is covered in a good dose of pollen to carry off to the next flower.



↑ Hairy-leaf Triggerplant | DAVID FRANCIS/FLICKR

The trigger column is made up of both male and female reproductive organs (stamen and stigma). The new central west parks will protect Hairy-leaf Triggerplants and so many other incredible wildflowers that live in the area. 🌸



↑ Greater Glider | JOSH BOWELL

## Wildlife Act review falls on deaf ears cont...

example, fuel break clearing (aka loophole logging) in Yarra Ranges National Park destroyed ancient trees and killed at least one Critically Endangered Greater Glider.

### Some positive changes, but who enforces them?

Other changes include increased fines and jail time as well as new offences. These range from destruction of habitat and feeding animals in the wild to wildlife trafficking. There's also a fit-and-proper persons test for people who own wildlife.

These changes have been needed for many years and are good first steps. Other changes include:

- An updated licencing system for wildlife with complex needs such as venomous snakes and monitor lizards.

- Limits on large-scale wildlife breeding to stamp out cruel breeding practices.
- A ban on keeping crocodiles as pets.

Significant investments were also made to a new wildlife hospital in Kyabram, and grants for wildlife carers. Grants include vet outreach, and training to help build skills and capacity following emergencies. These are a step in the right direction to support volunteer wildlife carers.

But with all these much-needed legal changes, who will enforce them? With the OCR already under pressure from the sacking of 33 staff in October 2024, it's unclear how these new offences will be enforced or overseen. 🌿



↑ Wedge-tailed Eagle | LAURIE BOYLE



# Don't shoot! Parks opened up to hunting



THE INCLUSION OF SHOOTING IN NATIONAL PARKS IS A RECIPE FOR DISASTER  
REPORTS MEGHAN LINDSAY, COMMUNICATIONS ADVISOR

The bill to create new parks in central west Victoria wasn't all good news. Alongside long-overdue protections came a deeply disappointing twist — a formal change to the *National Parks Act 1975* allowing deer hunting in parts of our eastern and central west national parks.

This move opens 130,000 hectares of Errinundra and Snowy River national parks for most of the year and parts of Wombat-Lerderderg and Pyrenees national parks to deer hunting between May and September.

National parks exist to protect nature first and foremost. They're places where wildlife and habitats can recover, and where people can safely explore and connect with nature. Turning them into hunting grounds undermines both purposes.

## Serious safety concerns

People visit national parks to camp, bushwalk, birdwatch and immerse themselves in nature. Opening them to hunting raises serious safety concerns. Even the perception of danger would be enough for many visitors to stay away.

Sadly, the risks are real. In 2018, a man was shot and killed while mountain biking in the French Alps. Here in Victoria, there's been at least

five shooting-related injuries since 2008, including incidents in the Alpine National Park in 2020 and 2021, and in Noojee in 2024. Introducing recreational shooting into high-use public areas undermines the sense of safety people expect when they visit parks. And we already have millions of hectares of unprotected state forest in Victoria open for hunting.

More than 50 million people visit Victoria's national parks and conservation reserves each year. These protected places are well loved because they're safe, accessible and focused on nature.

This decision also contradicts the Greater Alpine National Parks Management Plan (2016), developed after extensive consultation and tabled in Parliament. That plan opened limited areas to hunting but excluded Snowy River and Errinundra national parks. At the time, we were told this was as far as hunting expansion would go. Now, it seems the government is backtracking.

As VNPA's long-time Parks Protection Advocate Phil Ingamells said when that plan was released:

*There is no evidence that recreational hunting reduces deer populations, and increased access for amateur shooters risks conflict with other park users.*

Let's be honest, this decision isn't about tackling the feral deer problem. If anything, it distracts from real, coordinated efforts to reduce deer numbers. What's needed are professional, evidence-based control programs combining aerial control, accredited and supervised hunters, and long-term investment to protect sensitive habitats.

The government's own 2021 Statewide Deer Control Strategy acknowledges recreational hunting alone doesn't effectively control deer — a finding repeated in the National Feral Deer Action Plan 2023–28 and other reviews. The

## A welcome amendment for Mount Buangor

There's one silver lining. A last-minute amendment removed Mount Buangor National Park from areas opened to hunting.

When the government accepted VEAC's 2019 recommendations to create the central west parks, there was no mention of hunting in Mount Buangor National Park. Yet the recent bill unexpectedly included it. The park contains the Beeripmo Walk, five campgrounds, Raglan Falls lookout and other well-used recreation areas. Hunting here would have been incompatible with safe and enjoyable outdoor experiences.

Thanks to advocacy from VNPA, Outdoors Victoria, the Australian Camps Association, and support from the Greens, Animal Justice Party and Legalise Cannabis Party, this last-minute change was thankfully overturned. 🌿

Independent Review of the *Wildlife Act* recommended declaring deer a pest species, but this too was ruled out by the government.

Feral deer are a serious and growing problem. They trample habitats, damage wetlands and waterways, threaten rare wildlife. They impact agriculture and cause road accidents. Other states, like South Australia, are working to eradicate feral deer strategically. Victoria should be leading those efforts, not undermining them by relying on recreational hunting as a control strategy.

If hunting proceeds, Parks Victoria will need far more rangers to maintain visitor safety. Yet funding and rangers have been gutted.

VNPA and many others in the conservation community are calling on the government to rethink this approach. Victoria needs a clear, well-funded plan to protect our most important landscapes. To tackle the feral deer crisis properly, and keep national parks for what they're meant to be: sanctuaries for wildlife and people alike. 🌿

# Treaty is here!

AUSTRALIA'S FIRST TREATY BETWEEN FIRST PEOPLES AND GOVERNMENT HAS PASSED THE VICTORIAN PARLIAMENT

Victoria's new Treaty recognises that Aboriginal people are the experts on their own communities, culture and Country. It will mean First Nations people can use their local knowledge to come up with and deliver practical solutions for their communities.

Here's what has been negotiated.

**Decisions about First Nations people made by First Nations people:** The First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria will make sure communities are properly represented. Assembly Members will continue to advocate for First Peoples' needs, hopes and aspirations.

**Power to hold government to its promises:** A new Outcomes and Justice Commission called

Nginma Ngainga Wara will provide independent oversight and accountability for government. It will be able to hold public hearings and question ministers to make sure they are delivering for First Peoples.

**Truth-telling and healing:** The Assembly will set up Nyerna Yoorrook Telkuna to continue the truth-telling and healing process so everyone across the state can understand our past and share a better future.

**Upgrading community infrastructure:** A First Peoples' Infrastructure Fund will help maintain and upgrade Aboriginal-led organisations facilities and infrastructure so they can continue to provide quality services to improve outcomes for communities.

**More First Peoples' place names:** Every mountain, river and beach across this beautiful land has had a First Peoples' place name for thousands of years. To help celebrate this rich history and to share our languages, the First Peoples' Assembly will play a greater role in restoring more place names, including parks, waterways and waterfalls.



**Traditional Owner Treaties:** Traditional Owners across the state will be able to negotiate their own Treaties that reflect their local priorities.

**Teaching our true history:** Under Treaty, all students in Victoria will learn the true history of these lands.

**Celebrating and sharing our culture:** Through Treaty, the First Peoples' Assembly will lead the celebrating and sharing of 60,000+ years of culture in Victoria, something that everyone can embrace and take pride in.

**Building knowledge, skills and leadership:** A First Peoples' Institute will be created to help nurture and support future leaders. 🌿

Discover more at [firstpeoplesvic.org](http://firstpeoplesvic.org)

## Spotlight on Nature with Jorja Stevens

### Australian Owlet-nightjar *Aegotheles cristatus*

Australian Owlet-nightjars are the most widespread nocturnal bird in Australia, living in every state and extending to southern New Guinea and nearby islands. Measuring just 19–25 cm, they're also the smallest nocturnal bird, making them difficult to spot at night! They're occasionally seen peering out of a roosting hollow during the day.

It's not hard to be charmed by these small birds with their big, brown eyes and dainty pink feet. Each bird has unique feathers, commonly grey while some are a reddish-brown (rufous) colour, with pale undersides. Like many Australian birds, their name is misleading. Australian Owlet-nightjars are neither an owl, nor a nightjar, though they look similar to both. They're unique, belonging to a family of nocturnal birds endemic to Australasia. Remarkably, they're the only



↑ Australian Owlet-nightjar | J J HARRISON

type of Owlet-nightjar that lives in Australia. Australian Owlet-nightjars live in open forests or woodlands with tree hollows suitable for shelter and nesting. These cavities are arguably one of the most important habitat resources in

Australia, used by many animals, including birds, possums, gliders, and bats. Australian Owlet-nightjars are insectivorous, dining on a menu of moths, beetles, spiders, cockroaches ants and more.

This year, Owlet-nightjars were recorded by VNPA NatureWatch cameras in bushfire affected roadside reserves and open lowland forest areas in Mount Cole. This includes areas where the local community worked hard to save trees being cleared in post-fire 'clean ups'. Burnt or not, these hollow-bearing trees are important habitat refuges in forests continuing to recover. 🌿

**Jorja Stevens is a NatureWatch student placement studying at Deakin University**



↑ Bushwalkers in dense rainforest in Errinundra National Park | ISAAC CARNE



# Protecting nature on private land

**SARAH BRUGLER AND BENJAMIN J RICHARDSON**  
RESEARCH THE PROTECTION OF GRASSLANDS AND OTHER THREATENED HABITATS ON PRIVATE LAND

It's a critical time to get more landowners involved in nature conservation. Threatened habitats like native grasslands are underrepresented in our reserve system and mainly survive on private land. Preventing damaging land uses like habitat destruction and overgrazing on private land is vital to protect habitats and threatened wildlife like Plains Wanderers and Striped Legless Lizards. An in-perpetuity conservation covenant may be the most effective legal tool for safeguarding nature on private land. In Victoria, 60 per cent of land is owned privately. Protecting grasslands and other threatened habitats therefore relies on private landowners. Nature and planning laws provide some protection to prevent trees from being cut down. However, these laws often fail to prevent habitat destruction or protect threatened wildlife. Notably, harmful land practices – like over-grazing and intensive cropping – are virtually unregulated on private land. Although nature laws do not require landowners to manage land for the benefit of native wildlife, increasingly, private landowners are understanding the importance of, and are committed

to, doing so. Landowners are joining local Landcare programs, replanting shelterbelts and riparian habitat. Farmers are participating in the carbon market to diversify their income and many now engage in natural capital accounting frameworks (which help measure and report on environmental performance). There's also a new national Nature Repair Market which aims to encourage more landowners to participate in private land conservation.

## Conservation covenants

Arguably, the most well established and effective tool for permanently protecting threatened wildlife on private land is the use of conservation covenants. Victoria has the most covenants nationally, covering about 1,800 properties. Across Australia, covenanting bodies struggle to meet the growing demand from landowners wanting a covenant. A conservation covenant establishes a 'privately protected area'. In Victoria, a landowner enters a conservation covenant with Trust for Nature (Victoria) and, with the approval of the Minister, the covenant is registered against the title of their land. The terms of each covenant are specific to the property. They can permanently prohibit land clearing, overgrazing, fertiliser use, subdivision, construction and more. And they remain in place even when the property is sold. Landowners remain responsible for the management of their land, even



↑ Striped Legless Lizard | BENJAMINT444

if it's covered by a covenant. Trust for Nature develops a customised management plan with the landowner and supports landowners with best practice land management through its stewardship program. Conservation covenants are becoming more popular among different types of landowners. Partly, it's because landowners with covenants in Victoria can now get a land tax exemption. Plus, some local councils offer rate rebates, and in some circumstances landowners may receive an incentive payment to enter a covenant. It's not yet clear how the national Nature Repair Market will support landowners with covenants, but there are two project methodologies currently in development – 'Enhancing native vegetation' and 'Protect and conserve.' They could potentially generate financial revenue for landowners with covenants.

We're working on a project funded by the Australian Research Council to study how conservation covenants can continue to help more landowners protect threatened wildlife and habitats on their land. 🌿

*Sarah Brugler is an environmental law professional and researcher*

*Benjamin J Richardson is a Professor of Environmental Law at the University of Tasmania*

Learn more about their project at: [www.utas.edu.au/research/projects/conservation-covenants-for-ecosystem-restoration-and-climate-adaptation](http://www.utas.edu.au/research/projects/conservation-covenants-for-ecosystem-restoration-and-climate-adaptation)



↑ Bababi Djinanang native grassland, Fawkner, in afternoon light | JOHN ENGLART

# Salty Science with Ben Travaglini



## Moon Snail Genus Conuber

You know those sausage-shaped, gelatinous blobs you see washed up on the beach? They aren't jellyfish – they're the egg sacs of moon snails! Specifically, they belong to species from the genus Conuber, the group of moon snails most commonly seen in Victoria. Consisting of more than 95 per cent water, and holding thousands of embryos, the eggs drift in the water column while the young snails develop. The membrane-bound jelly matrix inflates with surrounding seawater, causing the eggs to be far larger than the animals themselves. Breeding presumably occurs from Spring to Autumn, with lunar phases suspected to influence spawning events. But the moon snail has more than one calling card. You may have noticed that some seashells washed up on the



↑ Moon Snail | WAYNE MARTIN

↑ Egg sac | TAYLER

beach have neat, perfectly round holes in them. These aren't the work of a mad beachcomber with a drill – they're the permanent mark left from a moon snail's meal. They trail the sandy shallows in search of a clam, another snail, or even a crab. Once a victim is found, the moon snail latches on using its strong, muscular foot. Then, it excretes enzymes and acids to weaken the prey's shell, allowing the radula (a rasping, tongue-like organ in their mouth) to drill the rest of the way through. Once the hole is made, the contents are then sucked out. Delicious! So next time you stroll along the beach, keep an eye out for the clues: neat holes in shells, odd jelly blobs in the shallows, or trails in the sand. Each one is a reminder of the moon snail's presence, an unassuming yet skilled assassin that leaves its mark across our shores. 🐌 Ben Travaglini is a ReefWatch intern studying marine science at Deakin University

# Energy transition needs marine protection



**WESTERN PORT BAY'S WETLANDS ARE TEETERING ON THE EDGE OF AN IMPORTANT DECISION, REPORTS SHANNON HURLEY, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER**

Western Port Bay, one of Victoria's most important and treasured waterways, is once again at the centre of a major crossroads. This time, it's not a gas terminal or industrial expansion threatening its fragile habitats, but the proposed Victorian Renewable Energy Terminal (VRET). We need renewables, but not at the expense of the web of life they're designed to protect. Local conservation and community groups support the transition to renewable energy. And they're urging the Victorian Government to make sure the process has appropriate

safeguards to protect the bay's habitats and wildlife. In a joint letter to four Victorian ministers, VNPA, Environment Victoria, Western Port Biosphere, Save Westernport, and the Phillip Island Conservation Society called for urgent improvements to the Environmental Effects Statement (EES) scoping requirements. The current draft risks overlooking critical impacts the project could have. Its narrow focus doesn't consider the wider effects on the bay. For example, it addresses how removing seagrass and mudflat habitat will impact birds in the area. But what will the flow on effects be up the chain and in other areas? And how will constant noise disrupt animals migrating across the bay? The message is clear: offshore wind is essential for Victoria's clean energy future. And it must be done right. Our letter highlights the gaps in planning for marine habitats and wildlife and

shows how leaving all decisions to the EES is insufficient. We called on the government to strengthen the EES so it: 

- Aligns with the *Marine and Coastal Act*.
- Implements a long-overdue marine spatial plan for Western Port Bay.
- Fully justifies the project's location and design.

 These steps will safeguard Western Port Bay's unique habitats and wildlife, uphold the credibility of Victoria's environmental assessment processes, and make sure renewable energy development earns the social licence it deserves. It's vital this project restores public trust in the planning process and sets a positive precedent for renewable energy development in Victoria. At the time of writing, the ministers have not yet responded to requests for a meeting. We hope our feedback will be taken on board. 🌊



# Opportunity not to be missed for eliminating feral deer



FERAL DEER SHOULD BE ELIMINATED FROM NATIONAL PARKS NOW, SAYS **PETER JACOBS**, VICTORIAN DEER CONTROL COMMUNITY NETWORK, EXECUTIVE OFFICER

The magnificent Major Mitchell Plateau commands the backdrop to a picturesque property bordering the eastern side of Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park. Tom Guthrie is a sheep farmer and winemaker; his family has farmed this land for a hundred years.

Tom loves this landscape, in particular the River Red Gum woodland with massive, ancient trees around one thousand years old. He sees the importance of farming and nature conservation working hand in hand. Nearly half the 3000-acre property is fenced to protect native habitat.



↑ Red deer grazing on Moora Track, Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park | REXNESS

Tom's seen his share of fires, floods, and drought. But he reckons two recent large fires in the Grampians/Gariwerd happening in quick succession have had a devastating impact on wildlife, livelihoods and community. He lost fencing, pasture and grape harvest but is thankful his house and stock were saved.

He's also seen the population of pests like feral deer in the national park grow and expand. 'Forty years back I might have seen one deer in six months and it was a curiosity. Then, 10 years ago, I was seeing mobs of six to eight feral deer. In the last few years, I am seeing mobs of 60 or more' says Tom.

'The Grampians/Gariwerd is like a land island, and we should be able to eliminate feral deer if park managers and neighbours work together' he adds. 'The extensive fires provide a rare opportunity right now to cull deer efficiently and humanely in the park from helicopters while the tree canopy is sparse. Combined with ground shooting on open adjoining private land, we can eliminate feral deer, but we need to act now, not wait. It's heartbreaking to see feral deer are now munching and tramping nature and farmland as it's recovering.'

'Parks Victoria have recently advised me they are undertaking pest animal control post fires and have invited adjoining landowners to give approval to control pests on their properties, including feral deer. As a conservationist and farmer adjoining

the park I applaud this collaboration with neighbours as it is key to success.'

'However, we must take this opportunity to eliminate feral deer for good and not be left with expensive year to year control programs making no inroads as the population expands. Currently, landowners are left with building expensive deer proof fences or seeing valuable crops and pastures being damaged. I would welcome a commune and database where neighbours can report pests and locations and work together on strategic control.'

'Eliminating feral deer now from bushfire affected places like Grampians (Gariwerd) and Little Desert makes perfect sense, so I say get on with it!' says Tom.

## Expert advice ignored

In November, the government announced it will be ignoring overwhelming public opinion and the advice of its own expert panel that recommended 'deer should be removed from the Wildlife Act so they can be declared a pest' (see p. 8).

Inexplicably, Victoria will remain the only mainland state that still protects feral deer despite having the highest population and spread, continuing this barrier to effective control. 🌿

**Find out more from the Victorian Deer Control Community Network at [vdccn.org.au](http://vdccn.org.au)**



↑ Tree damage from deer rubbing | FRED CUMMING

## Glad tidings Nature news to bring a smile to your face



### 🐸 Tadpoles ahoy!

More than 600 Critically Endangered Spotted Tree Frogs (*Dryopsophus spenceri*) have joined wild populations in the Kiewa River. This Zoos Victoria conservation breeding program aims to boost numbers and genetic diversity after 50% of the frog's Victorian habitat was severely burnt in the 2019-20 bushfires.

Biologists from Zoos Victoria and Wild Research released 265 one-year-old frogs, following a 2024 release of 300 tadpoles and 70 juvenile frogs. So far more than half of those released have been found again.

Spotted Tree Frogs grow to about 6cm long and are well camouflaged with their vivid green spotty skin. They live in mountain streams between Victoria's Central Highlands and Mount Kosciuszko in NSW.

The survey required a huge team effort. Traditional Owners, recreational fishers and citizen scientists joined biologists, walking up and down the stream with



↑ Spotted Tree Frog | ISAC CLAREY

headlamps, looking for frog eyes reflecting back and listening out for calls. Even though the frogs were individually marked (with a skin clip on their toe), finding them again could be challenging. 😊

Read more at [zoo.org.au/fighting-extinction/local-threatened-species/spotted-tree-frog](http://zoo.org.au/fighting-extinction/local-threatened-species/spotted-tree-frog)

# Fosterville Mine a golden deal with a dirty cost



**BEN GILL**, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER, SAYS THE FOSTERVILLE MINE EXPANSION IS A DUD DEAL FOR NATURE

The state and federal governments' approval of the Fosterville Gold Mine expansion marks a backward step for nature protection in Victoria. It's bad news for habitats, water and local communities.

At hearings in Bendigo and Melbourne, groups including the Bendigo and District Environment Council, Bendigo Climate Alliance and Save the Campaspe presented detailed evidence to the Environment Effects Statement (EES). Save the Campaspe, in particular, led an extensive effort to expose the flaws in the assessment process. These local advocates deserve recognition for holding one of Victoria's most powerful mining operations to account.

The conditions attached to the approval attempt to soften the blow:

new surface-water monitoring, and air and vibration controls. But over 10 ha of Grey Box Grassy Woodland, a nationally significant and threatened habitat, will be cleared. However, the company must secure and manage more than 231 ha of offsets – a promise that rarely translates into true ecological recovery.

The community's fears of contamination of the Campaspe River, and ultimately the Murray at Echuca, were confirmed by Dr McCumber, hydrogeologist and expert witness for Save the Campaspe. The governments' attempts to shrug off both immediate and cumulative impacts as being 'acceptably managed' are simply not good enough.



↑ Campaspe River at Axedale, Dja Dja Wurrung & Taungurung Country | PHILIP MALLIS

The bedrock of this region – its wildlife, habitats, waterways, and communities – cannot be traded for a few economic talking points. Bendigo's nature groups have done the hard work; now it's time for the government to do theirs, by enforcing every condition with genuine rigour and transparency. 🌿



# WELCOME OUR NEW PARKS!



## LEGISLATION TO CREATE NEW NATIONAL PARKS AND CONSERVATION AREAS IN THE CENTRAL WEST HAS FINALLY PASSED THE VICTORIAN PARLIAMENT

In November 2025, the Victorian Legislative Council passed the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central west and other matters) Bill, creating three new national parks, plus additions and new conservation parks.

Local communities and nature conservationists spent decades campaigning for better protection of these landscapes.

Back in 2021, the government listened to expert advice from the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC), accepting 76 of 77 recommendations from the Central West Investigation Report. It promised to create three new national parks and several conservation reserves.

The new parks have been carefully designed to balance protecting important wildlife habitat while supporting recreation activities that suit each place.

VNPA has spent over 20 years sticking up for these forests. And now they finally have the protection they deserve!

### GREATER PROTECTION FOR NATURE

These new parks will keep the homes of hundreds of rare animals, plants and fungi permanently safe from damaging industries like mining and logging. They'll let forests and wildlife heal after years of damage.

The headwaters where six major Victorian rivers begin their journey are finally protected by these parks. They'll keep our air clean and lock away millions of tonnes of carbon in healthy forests.

Protected areas like these help us leave a healthy, thriving natural world as a gift to our children, grandchildren and the planet.

For people and communities of Victoria, these new parks provide beautiful places for families to explore, camp, hike and connect with nature. They bring new jobs to local towns through tourism and park management, and help Traditional Owners care for Country.

Protected areas support responsible recreation that doesn't harm nature. They make sure clean drinking water flows to farms and towns by protecting river sources and help us cope with our changing climate. They keep nature connected and communities strong.

With your support, VNPA will continue to monitor the management of these parks and the fate of the many smaller promised conservation reserves in the central west still awaiting protection.

### WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED?

The legislation does not include seven regional parks, 11 nature conservation reserves, 18 bushland reserves and expansions to existing reserves that were promised in the VEAC report. These are expected to be created under different legislation, through an amendment to the *Public Land Act*. VNPA will continue to monitor the progress of these promised protected areas.



We acknowledge these locations are part of the unceded traditional lands and waters of the Wurundjeri, Dja Dja Wurrung, Wadawurrung, Djab Wurrung, Eastern Maar, Wotjobaluk and Gunai Kurnai and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country.





↑ Southern Greater Glider | GAYLE OSBORNE



↑ Wombat Bossaia | GAYLE OSBORNE



↑ Mountain Skink | GAYLE OSBORNE



**GAYLE OSBORNE, WOMBAT FORESTCARE**

Wombat Forestcare members and supporters are celebrating three new national parks. There is so much wildlife, both rare and threatened, that will now have their habitat permanently protected. This is the opportunity for those forests that have been logged to recover and age and provide homes for all the forest animals such as our iconic Koalas. Our community and VNPA have worked hard to have these forests recognised for their incredible wildlife. Many local nature groups have supported the campaign; community members have attended protest events and written letters to politicians. This has been an incredible team effort that has at last resulted in success.



↑ Beeripmo Walk, Mount Buangor National Park | BLAKE NISBET



↑ Lewin's Rail | JINDRA BONE



↑ Mount Cole Grevillea | JORDAN CROOK



**SERA BLAIR, NATUREWATCH COORDINATOR**

NatureWatch has worked closely with citizen scientists, local nature lovers and landowners in surveying the incredible array of wildlife in what will become Mount Buangor National Park. We've conducted post-fire surveys at Mount Cole to look at the recovery of plants and animals, like the Critically Endangered Mount Cole Grevillea. Along with our wildlife monitoring in two other newly protected areas – Wombat-Lerderderg National Park and Cobaw Conservation Park – the boundlessly enthusiastic work of our citizen scientists has helped contribute to increased knowledge, appreciation and understanding of these wonderful natural areas.

**DETAILS**

☑ Wurundjeri, Dja Dja Wurrung & Wadawurrung Country  
📏 44,700 ha



**THREATENED WILDLIFE**

Western Burrowing Crayfish, Platypus, Musk Duck, Grey Goshawk, Little Eagle, Square-tailed Kite, Powerful Owl, Barking Owl, Sooty Owl, Gang-gang Cockatoo, Blue-winged Parrot, Swift Parrot, White-throated Needle-tail, Hooded Robin, Speckled Warbler, Diamond Firetail, Brush-tailed Phascogale, Common Dunnart, Southern Greater Glider, Mountain Skink, Growling Grass Frog, Golden Sun Moth

**THREATENED PLANTS**

Brown Treecreeper, Eastern Bent-winged Bat, Sticky Wattle, Dwarf Silver-wattle, Spotted Hyacinth-orchid, Wiry Bossiaea, Black Gum, Brooker's Gum, Yarra Gum, Clover Glycine, Creeping Grevillea, Basalt Peppercreese, Hairy Beard-heath, Austral Tobacco, Dense Mint-bush, Tangled Pseudanthus, Swamp Bush-pea, Fragrant Saltbush, One-flower Early Nancy, Western Pellitory, Southern Blue-gum, Golden Bush-pea, Pale Swamp Everlasting, Wombat Bush-pea, Small Sickie Greenhood, Brock Knawel, Tiny Violet, Fuzzy New Holland Daisy, Bacchus Marsh Wattle, Large-leaf Cinnamon-wattle, Grey Scentbark, Tasman Fan-fern, Wombat Bossiaea, Werribee Blue-box, Canary Dermocybe, Orange Dermocybe

**SIGNIFICANCE**

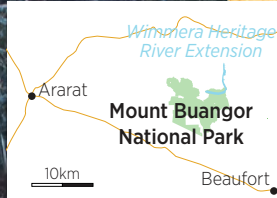
Largest intact forest between Grampians (Gariwerd) and eastern highlands.  
Protects headwaters of six major rivers.

**ACTIVITIES**

Bushwalking, camping, 4WD, mountain biking, fishing.

**DETAILS**

☑ Eastern Maar & Djab Wurrung Country  
📏 5,300 ha



**THREATENED WILDLIFE**

Lewin's Rail, Little Eagle, Square-tailed Kite, Powerful Owl, Blue-winged Parrot, White-throated Needle-tail, Speckled Warbler, Brush-tailed Phascogale

**THREATENED PLANTS**

Brown Treecreeper, Wiry Bossiaea, Yarra Gum, Tight Bedstraw, Shiny Tea-tree, One-flower Early Nancy, Colourful Spider-orchid, Deane's Wattle, Dwarf Boronia, Grampians Bitter-pea, Large-fruit Yellow-gum, Mount Cole Grevillea, Orange Billy-buttons, Slender Fireweed, Penny-leaf Flat-pea

**SIGNIFICANCE**

Protects headwaters of Wimmera River and tributaries.  
Wildlife hotspot with old-growth gullies and dry ridges.

**ACTIVITIES**

Bushwalking, birdwatching, camping, 4WD, mountain biking; features the popular multi-day Beeripmo Walk.





↑ Pyrenees Gum | DEAN NICOLLE/NATURALIST



↑ Lace Monitor  
GREG DRYBURGH



↑ Bristly Bush-pea | JOHN EICHLER

### DAVID TATNALL, NATURE PHOTOGRAPHER

Camping in the forests of the Pyrenees Ranges is so memorable, with experiences such as waking to the sounds of parrots and galahs overhead, and exploring the rich wildflower-filled forests. And the orchid displays there can be remarkable!

This place was long overdue for protection as a national park. I'm very pleased this is finally happening. I hope many more Victorians get the opportunity to discover and enjoy its wonders at the same time as its plants and wildlife get the protection they deserve.



#### DETAILS

Wadawurrung, Dja Dja Wurrung, Wotjobaluk, Djab Wurrung & Eastern Maar Country  
15,126 ha



#### THREATENED WILDLIFE

Platypus, Little Eagle, Powerful Owl, Swift Parrot, Hooded Robin, Southern Whiteface, Speckled Warbler, Painted Honeyeater, Diamond Firetail, Lace Monitor

#### THREATENED PLANTS

Brown Treecreeper, Buloke, Clover Glycine, Bristly Bush-pea, Tucker's Spear-grass, Squat Picris, Late-flower Flax-lily, Pyrenees Gum

#### SIGNIFICANCE

Protects Avoca and Wimmera catchments, reducing erosion and improving water quality. Safeguards 15,000 ha of forest habitat.

#### ACTIVITIES

Bushwalking, scenic viewing, 4WD.



↑ Whirrakee Wattle | BEC SCHWINGHAMMER



↑ Pink-tailed Worm Lizard | INDRA BONE



↑ Large tree in Wellsford Forest | JOHN TIHIA

### WENDY RADFORD, BENDIGO AND DISTRICT ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL

Wellsford Forest is an amazing place with so many varieties of trees and plants. Everyone's always knocked out by the big Ironbarks, but Wellsford has many different special areas.

Its Grey Box Grassy Woodland is a remnant of what the northern plains were once like. This sandy area harbours the Endangered Dookie Daisy, right near a magnificent 300+ year old White Box. Strolling through you'll see Yellow Gum, Red Gum, Grey Box, Green and Bull Mallee. And we'll soon see the amazing Summer blooming of Ironbarks, beginning to yield nectar in early February. No wonder the Swift Parrots drop in here (over 400 counted this year) on their yearly migration from Tassie. They've got good taste!



#### DETAILS

Dja Dja Wurrung Country

7,100 ha added to Bendigo Regional Park



#### THREATENED WILDLIFE

Little Eagle, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Square-tailed Kite, Swift Parrot, White-throated Needle-tail, Hooded Robin, Crested Bellbird, Grey-crowned Babbler, Chestnut-rumped Heathwren, Speckled Warbler, Diamond Firetail, Brush-tailed Phascogale, Pink-tailed Worm-Lizard, Lace Monitor, Brown Toadlet

#### THREATENED PLANTS

Brown Treecreeper, Ausfeld's Wattle, Bent-leaf Wattle, Whirrakee Wattle, Buloke, Clover Glycine, Small-leaf Goodenia, Sand Rush, Dainty Phebalium, Sikh's Whiskers, Crimson Sun-orchid, Inland Red-tip Greenhood, Southern Swainson-pea, Dwarf Cassinia

#### SIGNIFICANCE

One of Victoria's largest and best Box-Ironbark forests. Important to the network of forests around Bendigo and in linking them with the Campaspe River to the east.

#### ACTIVITIES

Bushwalking, biking, bird-watching, camping.  
Protects scar trees, artefact scatters and First Nations cultural sites





↑ Greater Glider in Mirboo North | D STICKNEY



↑ Superb Lyrebird



↑ Fungi in Mirboo North

## MARG THOMAS, PRESERVE OUR FORESTS MIRBOO NORTH

This is significant victory in the campaign by Preserve our Forests Mirboo North to protect this small, yet vital forest area. It contain endangered and vulnerable habitats which are home to so much native wildlife like Greater Gliders, Powerful Owls, Strzelecki Koalas and Superb Lyrebirds, just to name a few.

After an eight year campaign, significantly supported by the Mirboo North community and people from far and wide sharing their expertise, skills and dollars, we can finally celebrate this achievement. The designation of conservation park for this forest is a balance of conservation and recreation.



### DETAILS

Gunai Kurnai Country  
approx 440 ha

### Mirboo North Conservation Park

Mirboo North 2km

### SIGNIFICANCE

This tall wet forest is a vital refuge in an area heavily cleared for agriculture and plantations.

### ACTIVITIES

Bushwalking, birdwatching, geocaching.

The Lyrebird Forest Walk is a moderate one and a half hour bushwalk through the park.

### THREATENED WILDLIFE

Southern Greater Glider, South Gippsland Burrowing Crayfish, Lace Monitor, Powerful Owl, Superb Lyrebird

### THREATENED PLANTS

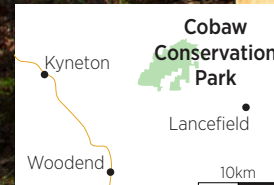
Rush Lily, Strzelecki Gum

↑ Lyrebird Walk, Mirboo North Conservation Park | PRESERVE OUR FORESTS MIRBOO NORTH



### DETAILS

Wurundjeri & Taungurung Country  
2,532 ha



### Brush-tailed Phascogale caught on camera in Cobaw



### THREATENED WILDLIFE

Little Eagle, Powerful Owl, Blue-winged Parrot, Brush-tailed Phascogale, Tufted Club-sedge

### SIGNIFICANCE

Important habitat corridor connecting central west forests to Macedon and beyond. Protects Campaspe River tributaries, improves stream health and reduces erosion.

### ACTIVITIES

Bushwalking, biking, climbing, orienteering. Significant Aboriginal heritage sites, and joint management with Traditional Owners



## BEN GILL, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER

Legislating Cobaw Conservation Park is a meaningful step that shows how science-based recommendations can become lasting protection for nature. It's proof that persistence works, but also a reminder of how long overdue this protection is. It's taken years of community advocacy, science and perseverance to get here.

Protecting Cobaw's forests and granite ridges is a victory for nature. These new protections safeguard rare wildlife and precious bushland, and prove nature conservation and regional prosperity can go hand in hand.

## HEPBURN CONSERVATION PARK

This park will protect forest and woodland in the heart of Dja Dja Wurrung Country. It will safeguard precious habitats, support native wildlife and help strengthen the landscape's resilience to climate change.

We welcome the government's commitment to consult with the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation on the potential granting of Aboriginal title, recognising the deep cultural and spiritual connection Traditional Owners hold with this Country. This partnership offers a chance to care for Country in ways that honour both ecological and cultural values for generations to come.

### DETAILS

Dja Dja Wurrung Country  
2,714 ha



↑ Cobaw Conservation Park | VNPA



# Protecting the legacy & future of national parks



← Red-tailed Black Cockatoos | GABY/FLICKR



VICTORIAN PROTECTED AREAS COUNCIL'S  
**FELICITY BROOKE & CHARLIE PASCOE** ON  
WHY VICTORIA'S PARKS NEED OUR HELP

As park managers, we've spent our combined 70+ year careers protecting Victoria's national parks and conservation reserves. We've tracked threatened animals through remote forests, developed management plans with communities, and helped damaged landscapes recover once logging and grazing have ceased.

We thought we had seen it all. So we were stunned in 2024 when budget cuts led to a Parks Victoria restructure that increased the communications and marketing team while reducing environmental and science staff.

Parks Victoria staff in the regions, long under-resourced, were instructed to list all work undertaken, amounting to a list of 111 items in a 'schedule of services', and make cuts. In order to meet further reduced staff capacities and budgets, they had to choose which must be done, do only if funded externally, or halted. Consequently, 51 services were deferred, many of them conservation programs not resourced through external funding, including Junior ranger programs.

In this 50th anniversary year of the *National Parks Act*, we couldn't just walk away. Retired and former staff, with deep and extensive experience in park management accumulated over decades, formed the Victorian Protected Areas Council (VPAC). VPAC is a professional association for current and former protected area managers that advocates for the critical role of protected areas in conserving natural and cultural values and visitor experiences, supports the professional development of current staff and facilitates ongoing contributions to protected area management by former staff.

## The parks we love

Our national parks and other protected areas are living cultural landscapes, cared for by Traditional Owners for thousands of years. The reserve system we have today was built through passion, dedication and visionary policy but unfortunately not in consultation with First Nations People. Treaty will introduce new approaches to land management with the input of First

Nations People, reshaping nature conservation and protected area frameworks in Victoria.

The story of national parks begins in 1892 with Tower Hill, Victoria's first national park. By 1961, degraded by grazing, resource extraction and pest invasion, it had been downgraded to a state wildlife reserve.

Will the same fate befall our more recent national parks? The government is increasingly expecting them to focus on tourism and cater for incompatible or damaging recreational activities (such as deer hunting and gold prospecting), all whilst defunding critical and often long-term conservation programs.

The modern era of protected areas in Victoria really began with saving the Little Desert from development in the 1960s. This victory led to the establishment of the Land Conservation Council in 1971, now the Victorian Environment Assessment Council (VEAC), which undertook systematic investigations of Victorian public land, incorporating scientific evidence and extensive public consultation. It developed recommendations to government for appropriate uses of public land

across the state. This has resulted in the establishment of a world-class system of parks and reserves, based on evidence, not politics.

The *National Parks Act* gave us as managers the tools to do our jobs properly. This legislation is prescriptive with clear objectives, beginning with the protection of nature and cultural values and concluding with the encouragement of recreation and education, subject to those activities not detrimentally affecting conservation values.

## The unravelling

VEAC has been largely sidelined by the current government. Assessments that were once transparent and science-based with broad public input are now undertaken by government-appointed panels, influenced by political interests and with limited scientific or public input.

The government has announced it will not create any new national parks after the three central west parks. This is an appalling environment policy at a time when the status and future uses of nearly two million hectares of state forests needs to be re-evaluated following the end of native forest logging. It abandons the world-leading land-use assessment process maintained by successive governments for over half a century.

The marine parks story breaks our hearts. We've watched the commitment to protection crumble. The number of fisheries officers, who educate fishers and enforce protections, have been halved and

two fisheries stations closed. Without enforcement, marine national parks are just lines on maps.

This pattern repeats everywhere we look. Management plans we developed with community input are ignored; the contract with affected communities broken. The shift to landscape-scale plans without specific infrastructure direction has created a void that tourism interests fill with their own agendas.

We see a fundamental misunderstanding of – or deliberate disregard for – the *National Parks Act's* objectives as evidenced by the government's decision to no longer fund day-to-day conservation programs and to rely on short-term external grants. Not surprisingly, external funders are unwilling to underwrite the costs for what should be Parks Victoria's basic land management obligations.

We have managed visitor impacts while balancing recreation with conservation, dealing with long-term recovery from bushfires, floods, and the effects of grazing and logging. Alpine peatlands and reintroduced wildlife, like the Southern Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby, need ongoing expertise. Parks Victoria faces persistent funding shortages, restructuring, and staff transfers, including fire and emergency roles moved to DEECA in 2023 and proposed staff transfer to the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority in 2026. This further reduces management capacity and expertise, eroding the professional foundation supporting our protected area system.



← Lemon-scented Sun Orchid | MEGHAN LINDSAY

## Why we're speaking out

We're speaking out for parks, for the communities they serve, and for future generations who deserve to enjoy them. We need to do three things urgently.

First, to alert the community that parks need help. Despite excellent work quantifying environmental, social, and economic benefits, this knowledge hasn't translated into sustainable funding.

Second, to convince politicians about what parks provide: protection for nature, wellbeing benefits for people, and protection of ecosystem services like water catchments, flood mitigation, fish breeding habitats and carbon storage.

Third, to seek a better management model for our parks. Are Parks Victoria's management responsibilities – spanning from Albert Park to national parks – too broad? Would a more conservation-focused entity like NSW's National Parks and Wildlife Service or a federal park management agency, such as those in Canada and the United States, better serve our parks and the community?

We've dedicated our careers to building and strengthening Victoria's system of national parks. Now we're sounding the alarm. It's time we act together to protect our parks. 🌿

**Adapted from a presentation by Felicity Brooke to the VNPA AGM, 21 Oct 2025.**

**Felicity Brooke, VPAC President, was a parks planner, ranger, and regional coordinator of interpretation information and education, 1987-2024.**

**Charlie Pascoe, VPAC Vice-President and VNPA Councillor, was a park and biodiversity planner and manager across Victoria, 1988-2024.**

[victorianprotectedareascouncil.org](http://victorianprotectedareascouncil.org)

**We're speaking out for parks, for the communities they serve, and for future generations who deserve to enjoy them.**

↓ Twelve Apostles, Port Campbell National Park and Twelve Apostles Marine National Park, Eastern Maar Country | PAUL CLIFTON



# Roadside grasslands getting smashed



VICTORIA'S PRECIOUS ROADSIDE GRASSLANDS ARE BEING DESTROYED AT AN ALARMING RATE, REPORTS **DR ADRIAN MARSHALL**, FACILITATOR, GRASSY PLAINS NETWORK

## OCR 'enforceable undertaking'

Earlier this year, the Office of the Conservation Regulator (OCR) hit Powercor with a legally binding 'enforceable undertaking' for damage across 32 locations in western Victoria, including on the Hamilton, Henty and Glenelg highways.

The enforceable undertaking mandates remediation through seeding, weed control, monitoring and reporting, internal education, environmental compliance reporting, adjusting works to avoid wet weather damage, improved identification skills, protection of threatened wildlife and habitat, and increased auditing. 🌱

Our grasslands are the victims of poor management, inadequate enforcement and systemic failures across multiple levels of government and industry. With only 0.5% of original habitat remaining from the Yarra River/Birrarung to Portland, every fragment destroyed represents a step toward ecological collapse.

## Death by a thousand cuts

Recent incidents paint a stark picture of ongoing damage. In May, Moyne Shire cleared 3.5 km of roadside grassland along Castle Carey Road, a crime against nature that highlights the broader crisis. Just weeks earlier, Powercor faced responsibility for 32 separate instances of roadside damage.

Last year alone, 10 km of the Wimmera's finest roadside grassland was cropped for wheat in what can only be described as industrial-scale habitat destruction.

This destruction continues through stock damage, unauthorised clearing, and countless smaller incidents that collectively represent death by a thousand cuts for these irreplaceable habitats.

Roadside grassland conservation exists within a web of competing priorities and legitimate infrastructure needs. Roads require maintenance, utility companies must service their assets, the CFA need firebreaks,

and emergency vehicle access can't be compromised. Wildlife strike prevention and fire risk reduction add additional management pressures.

The key lies not in eliminating these activities but in making sure all stakeholders understand their roles, responsibilities, and the conservation values at stake.

## Problem of recognition

A fundamental challenge lies in grassland identification. In Winter, after burning, or in wet conditions dominated by pasture grasses, valuable native grasslands can be difficult to detect by the untrained eye. This invisibility, combined with absent or inadequate signage, creates a dangerous assumption that nothing of value is present.

Communication breakdowns compound the problem. Council biodiversity officers may know grassland exists, but this knowledge remains siloed unless systematic consultation occurs. Every worker operating near potential grassland habitat requires education about identification and clear protocols for seeking expert assistance when in doubt.

The insidious nature of grassland damage makes matters worse. Vehicle tracks may appear minor but create destruction through soil compaction,

← Roadside grassland clearing on Castle Carey Rd, near Mortlake, May 2025 | ADRIAN MARSHALL

plant mortality, and weed invasion pathways.

With state and federal funding, the Linear Reserves Project has made significant progress in surveying roadside conservation values, and making crucial information publicly accessible through the VVP Linear Reserves Planning Portal. However, substantial geographic gaps remain, rapid assessments provide only general guidance rather than definitive conservation status, and data centralisation requires ongoing work and funding.

Comprehensive mapping of roadside conservation values is essential for effective protection strategies.

## More carrots, more sticks

Current enforcement mechanisms are demonstrably inadequate. Local governments lack sufficient resourcing to fulfil their responsibilities effectively.

Perhaps most concerning is the widespread disregard for smaller offences, despite their cumulative impact. The resulting despair among conservationists, who increasingly abandon reporting minor incidents, signals system failure.

State government must assume greater responsibility for these statewide problems. Education programs require expansion, and structural organisational changes are necessary to prevent institutional memory loss that perpetuates destructive practices.

The current system relies too heavily on punishment while ignoring positive incentives. Landholders who protect adjacent roadsides deserve recognition and rewards. Councils demonstrating improved compliance should receive increased funding. Commercial contracts should favour organisations with a demonstrated ability for nature planning and good track record.

These 'carrots' represent untapped potential for voluntary conservation improvements.

## The grazing dilemma

Roadside grazing regulation presents particular challenges. When conducted responsibly, grazing of roadside grasslands can provide mutual benefits through fire risk reduction and stock feed provision, particularly where



← ↓ The quality and extent of native vegetation can be difficult to see in this grassland in western Victoria in April (left) after a burn compared to December (below) in full floral flush | BEN ZEEMAN



native grassland is absent or can tolerate careful management.

However, excessive stocking rates and stock access to quality grasslands during Spring, in wet conditions or for extended periods causes permanent damage. Regional cumulative impacts can be severe. Permits should be mandatory for all roadside grazing, with conditions reflecting the nuanced relationship between grazing impacts and benefits. Permit compliance requires consistent enforcement. While drought conditions and farmer hardship demand compassionate consideration, precious grasslands cannot be sacrificed when alternatives exist. Expanded education efforts must reach farmers outside traditional Landcare networks, potentially through major industry organisations like Wool Industries Australia.

## Restoration is non-negotiable

Every instance of grassland damage should trigger requirements for high-standard restoration involving seed-based, high diversity plantings with multi-year weed control and monitoring protocols. Currently, native seed shortages hamper quality restoration efforts.

Linking damage incidents to restoration industry development could generate substantial economic and ecological benefits. Seed-based restoration represents an emerging regional economy whose time has come.

## We need a Grassland Czar

Statewide coordination is essential to address behaviours destroying habitat on the brink of extinction. Business as usual has failed. Effective action requires an organisation with enforcement authority and educational capacity capable of delivering real on-ground

improvements. This includes proactive policy development, strategic regulation, and regional solutions engaging local communities.

The Office of the Conservation Regulator (OCR) represents an obvious candidate to lead this effort, but requires additional resources and potentially enhanced powers. The 'enforceable undertaking' imposed on Powercor by the OCR demonstrates one element of effective intervention, but comprehensive change demands dedicated teams focused on the broader challenge and substantial resource commitments.

Roadside grassland conservation represents more than protecting nature — it's about safeguarding the last fragments of habitats that once defined our landscape. With only 0.5% remaining, we can't afford continued destruction through preventable damage, inadequate management, and systemic failures.

The solution requires coordinated action across government, industry, and community. We need better education, stronger enforcement, positive incentives, comprehensive mapping, and dedicated leadership. Most importantly, we need recognition that these grasslands represent irreplaceable natural heritage deserving protection equal to any other critical infrastructure.

The question is not whether we can afford to act, but whether we can afford not to. Our grasslands are counting on us to get this right. 🌱

[grassyplains.net.au](http://grassyplains.net.au)



# Unwanted Visitors

with Feral Beryl

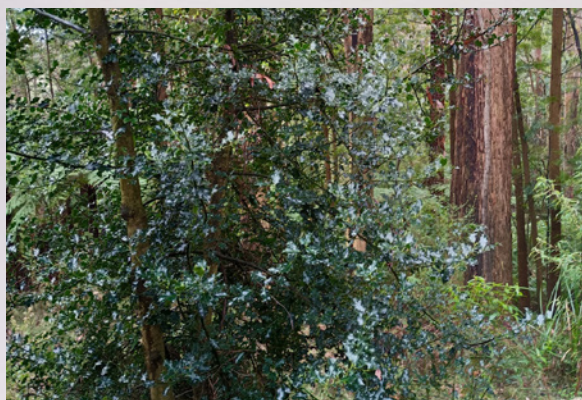


## English Holly *Ilex aquifolium*

While a familiar sight as a traditional Christmas decoration, this weed is definitely on the naughty list. It's a small tree, growing to about 10 metres, with glossy dark green, spiky leaves. It produces loads of bright red berries, but don't let that lovely colour lure you in, they're poisonous!

### Who invited them?

Holly is native to western and southern Europe, western Asia and northern Africa. It's been widely cultivated as an ornamental garden plant in cooler, high rainfall areas of Australia. Birds and other animals eat the berries then travel across large areas, spreading seeds in their droppings along the way. It also gets spread in dumped garden waste.



↑ Holly tree | REINER RICHTER



↑ Holly leaves and berries | REINER RICHTER

### Why is it unwanted?

Holly has invaded the eastern half of Victoria. It can form dense stands, crowding and shading out native plants and destroying habitats for wildlife.

### How do we evict this overstaying guest?

Small seedlings can be removed by hand but be sure to get all the roots. Cut and paint or drill and fill herbicide control methods are effective for young and large plants.

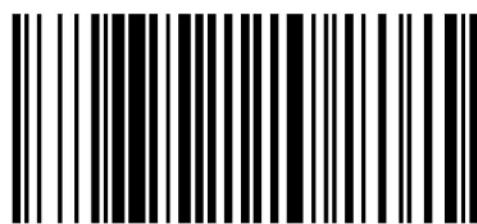
If you're removing it from damp areas, make sure you don't leave any part of the plant touching the ground. If left on damp soil, small branches and trunks of this pesky plant can sprout roots and keep growing. Be aware when using the drill and fill method the remaining dead tree may need to be removed for safety reasons. 🦋

## Container deposit scheme for nature

Having a party during the holiday period? Cleaning up discarded containers in your neighbourhood or in nature? Send your container deposit refund to VNPA! Every eligible drink container will earn 10 cents towards VNPA's work.

**Simply scan or show this barcode or enter our donation partner ID**

Info at [vnpa.org.au/container-deposit-scheme-for-nature](https://vnpa.org.au/container-deposit-scheme-for-nature)



C200 000 8806



## Future of weeding & biocontrol

THANKS TO AN ANONYMOUS DONOR, VNPA SPONSORED STUDENTS **MAGGIE, SAFI, LILY AND JACOB** TO ATTEND THE WEED SOCIETY OF VICTORIA'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The 2025 Victorian Weeds Conference in Hepburn Springs was jam packed with presentations ranging from inspiring to daunting. One of the main highlights was hearing about the story of Buckrabanyule. Acquired by Bush Heritage in 2021, this reserve 18 km east of Charlton is of significant cultural value to the Dja Dja Wurrung people. Shana Nerenberg and Bambi Lees from Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation (DJAARA) shared the beginning of a new chapter for Buckrabanyule, a landscape plagued with invasive Wheel Cactus (*Opuntia robusta*). Through their co-management, experimental weed treatments and intensive survey efforts, Bush Heritage and DJAARA have made significant headway in protecting and restoring the cultural values and habitats of Buckrabanyule.

It was also exciting hearing about the efforts being led by Blackwood and Barry's Reef Landcare Group in collaboration with Wombat Forestcare. Their crusade against English Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) invasion into Wombat Forest has rallied the community and set them to work, trialling different treatments. It was interesting hearing how English Holly not being a declared noxious weed in Victoria has been a

barrier to accessing funding for their project. This is despite the invasion of holly being a significant threat to many of the forests in the central west.

Safi's passion for biocontrol was well catered for with Agriculture Victoria's presentation and display booth. Dr Raelene Kwong told us about the ebbs, flows and future directions of biocontrol in Victoria. There was talk of research to assess if genetic diversity within gorse populations is reducing the efficacy of biocontrol... something we hope to hear more about in the future.

Lily enjoyed the common thread the talented MC, Millie Ross of *Gardening Australia*, wove. Although we may be overwhelmed by the threat weeds pose to nature, there are so many passionate and talented people leading the charge at every level. Whether it's those who dedicate their career to developing weed control



↑ Lily, Jacob, Maggie and Safi at the conference

methods, or someone who pulls the heads off their agapanthus, every effort counts!

We'd like to thank the Weed Society of Victoria and presenters for donating their time and sharing their knowledge and passion unreservedly. We'd also like to thank VNPA for the opportunity to attend this year's conference. 🦋

**Maggie Logan**



↑ Jackie Steele from Agriculture Victoria with Maggie Logan

## Hamilton Field Nats nature app

Hamilton Field Naturalists Club has created a free app covering 96 areas within an easy drive of Hamilton in south-western Victoria. The app is based on the second edition of their book of the same name. It covers Gunditjmara and Eastern Maar Country.

The areas include national parks, unprotected state forests, wetlands and small reserves. Each site is mapped and details the location, landform, geology, history and wildlife.

The app includes an introduction to the district, guides to bushwalking and camping, links to relevant organisations, and lists of wildlife and invasive species.

The app is currently only available for Mac products. To get it, go to the App Store and search for 'Hamilton Nature Guide'. 🦋







# Movement at the station



**DI MARSHALL AND CHRIS SMYTH REPORT ON PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT AT POINT NEPEAN NATIONAL PARK**

Plans for new development at the Quarantine Station in Point Nepean National Park are a missed opportunity to bring this extraordinary heritage site to life through adaptive reuse.

For more than 25 years, VNPA has been part of the story at Point Nepean. In the late 1990s they joined community groups to stop the Commonwealth Government selling off the Quarantine Station and campaigned for its protection as a national park. National parks protect nature, and they also safeguard our shared heritage. At Point Nepean, the vision was always for a living museum that reuses and celebrates its heritage-listed buildings.

Today, the Quarantine Station is home to research and education — a welcome use for part of the site. But broader plans for new development miss the chance to make the most of the park's many magnificent historic buildings.

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

To help change that, Parks Victoria is embarking on an Expression of Interest process for the Quarantine Station. The hope is that new proposals will activate the area as a living museum and make better use of its heritage buildings while offering fresh visitor experiences.

Inside the park there's over 120 heritage-listed buildings from the 19th and early 20th centuries, many now in varying states of repair. Parks Victoria recently signed a 42-year lease for the Point Nepean Research and Education Field Station, a joint project between the University of Melbourne and Monash University.

Disappointingly, the 2017 Master Plan supported a new building



↑ Construction has begun on the Point Nepean Research and Education Field Station | CHRIS SMYTH

← Point Nepean Quarantine Station | CHRIS SMYTH

for staff and students rather than encouraging reuse of existing heritage buildings. Around \$17 million in Commonwealth funding and \$10 million from the universities will go towards constructing this new facility and renovating Badcoe Hall. The planning process for this development is currently underway.

When Point Nepean National Park was created in 2009, it was to protect wildlife, habitats, and heritage. While the full vision of a living museum is yet to be realised, improvements have been made. Parks Victoria has upgraded essential services and delivered projects including:

- The Walk of Welcome, a collaboration with the Bunurong people using large metal stepping stones to trace the area's history.
- Forty-six glamping tents, with shared facilities in heritage buildings.
- Interpretive displays in the Disinfecting and Bathing Complex, sharing the experiences of those who endured quarantine.
- An upgraded Coles Track, now a shared trail with interpretive signage.
- Restoration of the forts at the western end of Point Nepean.

These upgrades, along with the park's natural and cultural values, now attract more than 600,000 visitors a year, with numbers expected to reach one million by 2030. A remarkable achievement given reduced staffing, resources, and the impacts of the COVID pandemic.

Yet the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings, the heart of the community's vision, remains limited. The opportunity is still there to bring that vision to life, and create a true living museum at Point Nepean. 🌿

**Di Marshall is a VNPA Councillor. Chris Smyth is a former VNPA staff member.**



# Expressions of nature



**TERRI MACDONALD FINDS ARTISTIC INSPIRATION FROM NATURE IN HER CENTRAL VICTORIAN HOME**

I work primarily in watercolour, although I do like to experiment! I did my PhD with a focus on traditional natural history illustration, which led me to Ferdinand (Lucas) Bauer and Charles-Alexandre Lesueur — and the use of vellum in natural history artwork. I still work with Kelmscott vellum, which is technically challenging but allows the creation of intricately detailed work which has its own 'glow'.

I have recently started exploring copperplate and drypoint etching. I enjoy the printmaking process which sees a very hands-on approach, with every print unique.

Typically, I work from a combination of photographic references (either my own or from free reference sites), as well as my own drawings and observations. Luckily, I'm not short of reference for amazing and inspiring subjects in regional Victoria!

I'm lucky enough to live on a small property surrounded by farmland and natural bush areas — all of which are perfect for observing nature! We have a wide variety of

birds and other animals that regularly visit. Most recently I saw a pair of Emus; they're certainly high on my list, right after the Tawny Frogmouths.

I've always been obsessed with the natural world, irrespective of what the animal or plant is — from spiders, snakes and insects through to amphibians, birds and mammals, fish or crustaceans. All are fascinating and beautiful in their own way, and my job has been to share that visually. (My dream job is 6 months in Antarctica painting penguins — how amazing that would be!)

My real goal is to show the beauty, intricacy and connection we can have with nature — be that plant, animal, bird, insect. We often live in built up areas that seem devoid of that connection, but

I think that at our core, we still want to have that relationship with nature.

My work is an attempt to help bridge that gap and bring the viewer closer to nature through the depiction of my subjects.



← Queen Bee

← In flight | ALL IMAGES TERRI MACDONALD

↓ Banksia study (section)



↓ In the Gums



I recently finished an exhibition in Kyneton with 15 individual works, primarily around Australian birdlife, in watercolour and copper-plate etchings. Before that I exhibited at the Eucalyptus Distillery Museum's inaugural Eucy Art Show, where my work *In the Gums* won Best in Show. I'm happy to take commissions and chat about projects, if you're looking for a natural history illustrator! 🌿

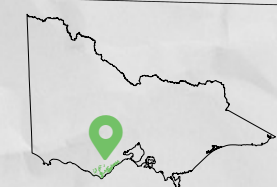
See more of Terri's work  
[terrimacdonaldart.com](http://terrimacdonaldart.com)



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

# GREAT OTWAY NATIONAL PARK

## Location



Traditional lands and waters of the **Wadawurrung, Gadubanud, Gulidjan, Eastern Maar & Girai Wurrung**

110km SW of Melbourne  
103,185 hectares

## Map



## History

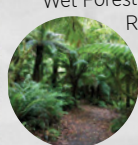
Declared 1 December 2005  
The Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority has been appointed as manager for part of the Great Otway National Park, from 1 July 2025



↓ Surfing at Wye River | CHRIS ORR

## Physiography

Otway Ranges, Otway Plain, Warrnambool Plain bioregions  
Numerous ecological vegetation classes (EVCs) including Wet Forest, Shrubby Wet Forest, Cool Temperate Rainforest, Shrubby Foothill Forest  
~4000 animals  
~2700 plants  
~280 fungi

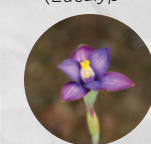


↑ Cool Temperate Rainforest, Grey River | CHRIS ORR

## Features

Wondrous waterfalls: Erskine, Kalimna, Stevensons, She Oak, Triplet, Beauchamp, Hopetoun, Currawong & more

Magnificent Mountain Ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*) forest



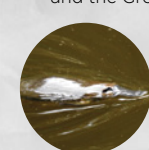
↑ Spiral Sun Orchid | MICHAEL KEOGH

Anglesea Heath with wildflowers and 120 types of orchid

## Features

Wild beaches, many including breeding spots for Hooded Plover

Cape Otway Lighthouse and the Great Ocean Walk



↑ Platypus at Lake Elizabeth | TUE SECHER JENSEN

Lake Elizabeth's iconic walk and plentiful platypus. Great spot for fungi in the Autumn

## Threats

51 plants and animals listed as **Threatened** under state nature laws

39 plants and animals listed as **Threatened** under federal nature laws

Invasive weeds and feral animals (deer, foxes, cats). Inappropriate fire regimes. Inappropriate development and tourism. Habitat degradation caused by visitor impacts and illegal activities

## Friends

**Friends of Eastern Otways**  
feo.org.au  
info@feo.org.au  
Friends of Eastern Otway

**Angair**  
angair.org.au  
admin@angair.org.au  
angairaustalia

**Otway Ranges Environment Network**  
oren.org.au

ON THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF ITS CREATION, WE VISIT GREAT OTWAY NATIONAL PARK

Great Otway National Park was created in 2005 following a strong community campaign. It combined Otway National Park (declared 1981), Angahook-Lorne State Park, Carlisle State Park, Melba Gully State Park, areas of the Otway State Forest and a number of crown land reserves.

With much of its incredible old-growth forest devastated by logging, the forest standing today is vital habitat and now has the chance to recover.

Part of the park's great appeal is that it's where the bush meets the beach. Its forests are home to a multitude animals, plants and fungi. Like incredible orchids, towering Mountain Ash, cryptic Platypus, carnivorous Otway Black Snails, spectacular glow worms, striking Satin Bowerbirds and unique Tea-tree Fingers fungus. The park has been identified by BirdLife International as an Important Bird Area.

The Great Ocean Road runs the length of the park, hosting 6.8 million visitors annually. Responsible control of mass tourism is an ongoing issue, especially with the park's management transferring from Parks Victoria to Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority (GORCAPA). There is concern GORCAPA's focus will be too much on the road and tourism, and not enough on the wildlife of the forest. Early indicators on the treatment of park rangers is not promising.

Anglesea, Aireys Inlet Society for the Protection of Flora and Fauna (ANGAIR), founded in 1969, works to increase awareness of the amazing wildlife that make the landscape so special.

Founded in 1991, Friends of Eastern Otways (FEO) coordinates monthly events (walks, night spotting, wildlife camera surveys), weeding and wildlife monitoring (Yellow-bellied and Sugar Glider surveys, and an annual Koala count at Grey River). This year, FEO and ANGAIR with Barwon Water have begun installing floating islands in the Painkalac Dam to encourage water birds.

FEO have been monitoring orchids for over 20 years, including hosting an annual count of Angahook Fingers (*Caladenia maritima*). Discovered by FEO member Margaret MacDonald in 1998, they only live in the Otways.

Spiral Sun Orchids (*Thelymitra matthewsii*) have also been monitored for many years, and this year were federally declared Endangered. FEO and ANGAIR have started a collaborative program with Parks Victoria, Surf Coast Shire, DEECA and Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria to protect habitat and increase the population.

With thanks to Keith McLean, Margaret MacDonald, Erin Nash

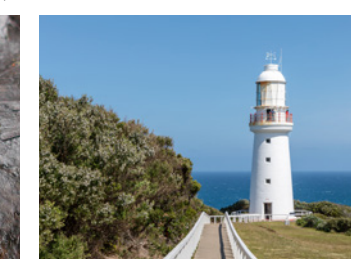
↓ Angahook Fingers | WARREN CAMERON



↑ Hooded Plover, Fairhaven Beach | KATIE PAHLOW



↑ Otway Black Snail | REINER RICHTER



↑ Cape Otway Lighthouse | DIETMAR RABICH

↓ Looking towards the sea from Great Otway National Park | CHRIS ORR





# BEN MAJOR

## FLORA RESERVE



**BEN GILL**, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER, VISITS A FLORAL WONDER IN THE CENTRAL WEST

Ben Major Flora Reserve is an incredible patch of forest in Victoria's central west, north of Beaufort in Pyrenees country, near Waterloo and the Ben Major Forest. Wander the open woodlands and granite boulders and you might spot the star of the show, the locally famous Ben Major Grevillea (*Grevillea floripendula*), thriving in sandy soils. Look up for Yarra Gums (*Eucalyptus yarraensis*) as well, a rare beauty of valley floors and gentle slopes that still persists across this landscape. This reserve helps stitch together habitat between the recently legislated

Mount Buangor National Park and the broader Pyrenees area, protecting threatened wildlife.

We're keen to see protections locked in across the region. We'll keep up the pressure to make sure the more than 30 bushland reserves announced as part of the government's central west package are not forgotten

When visiting, remember to pack water, respect cultural sites, always stick to tracks and keep an eye out for reptile basking spots and delicate seedlings underfoot! Nature thrives when we show care and respect for its grouse parks. 🌿

↑ ↓ Ben Major Grevillea | BILL BLACKBURN



**Ben Major Flora Reserve,**  
Ampitheatre Rd, Chute  
183 km/2:30 hour drive  
NW of Melbourne

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

## Vale Geoff Durham

We were very saddened to learn of the death of Geoff Durham on 15 November.

Geoff was an absolute stalwart for the protection of parks and nature in Victoria, as VNPA president, bushwalking leader and author.

He wrote an extraordinary 88 articles over 23 years for *ParkWatch*,

where his 'In Parks' series ran up to March 2024.

Geoff will be greatly missed, his thoughtful insights and enthusiasm were much appreciated. Our deepest condolences are sent to all his family and friends. 🌿

We will pay tribute to Geoff's long life and enormous contribution in our next *ParkWatch* in March 2026.



## VNPA honours advocates for nature

THREE REMARKABLE VICTORIANS WERE PRESENTED WITH VNPA LIFE MEMBERSHIP AT OUR AGM

### Gayle Osborne

For almost two decades, Gayle has been the heart and driving force behind Wombat Forestcare, transforming a local campaign into one of Victoria's most significant conservation successes. Her leadership, determination and scientific curiosity have changed the future of the Wombat Forest and beyond.

Gayle helped turn years of community concern into action. Working with VNPA and allied groups, she led the push to secure national park status for the Wombat and Lerderderg forests. Her tireless effort culminated in the Victorian Government's 2021 commitment to create the new Wombat-Lerderderg National Park, the first step in a 60,000 hectare parks package across central west Victoria.

Gayle's impact hasn't stopped there. She's guided on-ground research, led surveys for threatened wildlife, and inspired hundreds of volunteers. Under her direction, Wombat Forestcare's citizen science work uncovered new populations of Endangered Mountain Skinks, expanding scientific understanding and strengthening the case for protection.

Her advocacy has even reached the courts, leading her group to a successful Supreme Court injunction halting unlawful native forest

logging in 2023. It was an extraordinary example of community determination and legal courage.

Gayle's commitment is entirely voluntary – countless hours, no expectation of reward – and her achievements go far beyond what's normally expected of any volunteer. Her legacy is written into Victoria's landscape, in new parks, stronger protection, and a community empowered to defend its forest.

### Wendy Radford and Stuart Fraser

This award recognises a remarkable partnership. Together, Wendy and Stuart have dedicated decades to the protection of central Victoria's Box-Ironbark forests, especially the Wellsford Forest near Bendigo. Their work has shaped both local conservation and state-wide park outcomes.

Stuart Fraser, a founding member of Bendigo and District Environment Council (BDEC) in 1988, brought more than sixty years of ecological knowledge and field experience to the campaign. His deep understanding of forest ecology, coupled with an ability to communicate it with warmth and clarity, inspired generations of conservationists. Stuart's leadership ended commercial logging in Wellsford Forest and guided community



↑ Ben Gill with Gayle Osborne and Wendy Radford with their and Stuart Fraser's commemorative nature prints | PAUL CLIFTON

advocacy that led to the listing of its 'Big Trees' on the National Trust Significant Trees Register.

Wendy Radford joined BDEC in 1998 and became its long-serving secretary. Her administrative skill and tireless dedication helped steer decades of submissions, meetings and campaigns – from the first Box-Ironbark parks in 2001 to the 2025 legislation expanding protected areas across the region. She helped build alliances, organise citizen-science surveys, and make sure Wellsford stayed on the political map.

Together, Wendy and Stuart exemplify what sustained community leadership can achieve. They've strengthened VNPA's reach, supported VEAC investigations, and built enduring partnerships between local and state groups. Their advocacy has turned public awareness into tangible protection for nature. 🌿

**Ben Gill, Nature Conservation Campaigner**

## New VNPA Council and President

At our 73rd Annual General Meeting in October, members elected a new Council, and Marilyne Crestias was elected President (see p. 4), replacing David Nugent who has stepped down after four years.

Doug Robinson was elected Vice-President and Secretary (acting), and Askin Morrison is Treasurer.

Elected to Council are Lara Bickford, Dianne Marshall, Bruce McGregor, Gerard McPhee, Jan Hendrik Brueggemeier, Andrew Norman, Chris Hobbart and Charlie Pascoe. Welcome to all new and returning councillors!

Council establishes policy guidelines, approves annual budgets and undertakes strategic planning for the association. Council is supported by a number of active sub-committees which harness the enthusiasm of members and staff on key areas. 🌿



↑ Marilyne Crestias | PAUL CLIFTON

[vnpa.org.au/about/council](https://vnpa.org.au/about/council)



## Caitlin Griffith's tree-mendous commitment to nature!

Over more than 18 years at VNPA, Caitlin Griffith has worn many (fabulous) hats – from NatureWatch Coordinator, Community Projects Coordinator, Manager of Community Learning and Engagement, and even a stint as Acting Executive Director.

From 2007 to 2015, Caitlin developed the NatureWatch program (formerly Park Mates). She recruited over 200 nature volunteers and worked with community groups, land managers and scientists researching and responding to conservation issues across the state. In 2016, she began laying the groundwork for what became the Wild Families program, to connect curious families with nature. Today, over 3000 Wild Families have used our nature activity sheets to explore and learn about forests, grasslands, water and everywhere in between.

Caitlin is passionate about creating experiences in nature for people of all ages, backgrounds and interests. She took many new programs, projects and initiatives under her wing, providing enthusiastic support for their ongoing development.

Caitlin is a creative and highly engaging facilitator of nature-based learning, sparking curiosity and joy in kids and adults alike. She always brought her positive energy, passion

for nature, and the occasional dance move and her enthusiasm was certainly contagious.

Caitlin has been a compassionate leader who incorporates everyone's ideas and values good communication. She was committed to improving how VNPA engages diverse and dispersed audiences, as well as exploring ways to support the wellbeing of staff and volunteers working in conservation. In her own words, 'nature conservation comes from the heart – and our hearts need care, too.' So many of our members and supporters have precious memories of moments spent connecting with nature thanks to Caitlin's efforts. It's hard to put into (page limited) words the legacy she leaves behind. Her compassion for people and nature will live on in the work she has done for almost two decades at VNPA.

As Caitlin starts a new adventure, we thank her for her 'tree-mendous' commitment to VNPA's vision and community and wish her all the very best! 🌿

**Nicole Mertens, Community Learning & Engagement Manager and Sera Blair, NatureWatch Coordinator**



*Over the years, I've become fascinated by the joy that happens when people come together to experience our forests, grasslands and marine habitats.*

*I'm constantly inspired by the spark that lights up a group when they see a sea slug, a Wedge-tailed Eagle, a dolphin, a patch of wildflowers, or the sheer diversity of fungi across a forest floor.*

*I love it when people share their knowledge, experience and care for the nature we love. That joy – the curiosity, wonder and happiness it brings – is infectious, vital, and something I want to keep exploring, because it really does matter.*

*I'm deeply grateful to everyone I've worked with along the way. VNPA has been such a special community to be part of, and I'll always carry that spirit of connection and care into what comes next.*

*I'm excited to explore new ways of helping people and organisations deepen their connection and action for nature in my next chapter. I hope our nature conservation paths cross again!*



↑ Caitlin (left) conducting a Wild Families event at Point Addis, Wadawurrung Country | CONSUELO QUEVADO

IMAGE: MEGHAN LINDSAY

## Adieu Jessie Borrelle, our queen of comms

VNPA recently bid goodbye to Jessie Borrelle after six transformative years. With her deep understanding of how to connect with supporters, decision-makers and the general public, Jessie masterfully shaped the words and images that told our stories, all driven by a profound love for nature.

Jessie's initial grant-funded role in 2019 centred on ramping up communications for the central west national parks. Her work expanded as funding became available, before taking on the newly created role of Digital Engagement and Communications Manager.

The central west parks campaign became a defining project, one that stretched so long it covered the entirety of Jessie's time with VNPA! Yet all our campaigns and activities have the Jessie stamp on them; from championing the Western Port Woodlands, untangling the complexities of marine spatial planning, bringing nuance to nature laws, to sharing nature with kids in Wild Families activity sheets. Her mark is also evident in the celebration of landmark wins like the end of native forest logging, the recent Treaty process, and of course the new central west parks.

One of Jessie's great achievements was building a small but strong comms team to support our many campaigns and activities. Across a wide range of media – from print and radio, to our ever-evolving social media – Jessie threw her considerable knowledge and passion into every nook and cranny. Thanks to her development of editorial guides and comms conventions for writing, style and tone of voice, VNPA's communications now have a strong, consistent foundation for the years ahead.

Jessie's exuberant presence will be greatly missed at VNPA, but we wish her all the best in her exciting new adventures. 🌿

**Paul Clifton, ParkWatch editor**



*There's never a dull moment in nature. And the same is true for nature conservation. Not in the lifting of a leaf to identify its species. Not in the torchlight you fire into the gums, longing to cast a Greater Glider's silhouette. Not in the slow years an old promise takes to become new national parks. And certainly not in drafting these words, when mid-way through, you receive a text from one of your brilliant ex-colleagues: 'Central West just passed the upper house!!!'*

*There's no place quite like VNPA. I entered as a Digital Campaigner and left as Digital Communications and Engagement Manager. Landscape-scale protection, I soon learnt, is a marathon not a sprint. It's sunshine and grease, hope and graft. It's people and persistence, strategy and steadfastness. Nature isn't static, and neither is the movement to keep our miraculous web of life safe and salubrious.*

*So thank you. For reading the words and taking the actions I was lucky enough to be part of for six years. Like a wildflower in Wellsford, a grevillea in Mount Cole and a Wombat in Wombat – it's utter magic to be part of nature. Especially when she's revered and respected.*

*And as that long-awaited message, still lighting up my phone, says: 'Congrats on all the years of hard work!'*

## Farewell NextGen Michael Loo

In October, VNPA farewellled Michael Loo, NextGen Nature Convenor. Since October 2024, Michael was a guiding hand for NextGen Nature, facilitating meetings and curating experiences for 18–35-year-olds keen to spend more time in nature among their peers.

Michael coordinated several Great Victorian Fish Count snorkels, a Great Forest Guardians overnight camp, a tour of kelp restoration sites in Port Phillip Bay, and a working bee to build nestboxes for Critically Endangered Swift Parrots. He also ran many meetings and skills workshops for the NextGen Nature collective.

Michael knew how to host an event – he was well organised, friendly, and always rustled up an impressive



↑ Michael (in yellow t-shirt) with happy NextGen Nature participants

spread for the crucial feed and lively discussions after the activity! We say thank you and farewell for now, and good luck for what we know will be a bright future. 🌿



# Growing skills for Country


VNPA WAS PROUD TO SPONSOR A FIRST NATIONS WOMAN, **ELECTRA GREENE**, TO PARTICIPATE IN THE WELA NATIONAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM IN 2025

Electra is a proud Gunai Kurnai and Monero woman who cares deeply for nature. She is dedicated to supporting others to develop that same passion and care through sharing stories, poetry, and workshops. Electra is a local organiser with Environment Victoria Gippsland Action Network – helping to bring her community together to take action to

protect our climate, land and water. Electra also works with Bug Blitz, a small citizen science organisation, running workshops and events to teach people about invertebrates, leaf matter and water, weaving stories of culture and country into these workshops. 'Getting to join the WELA [Women's Environmental Leadership Australia] National Leadership program is a great opportunity. I'm keen to learn more about campaigning and what else I can learn to be a good activist. In my roles I want to improve my skills and confidence, especially in talking to people and the media. Being an Aboriginal woman, I have an opportunity to make an impact.



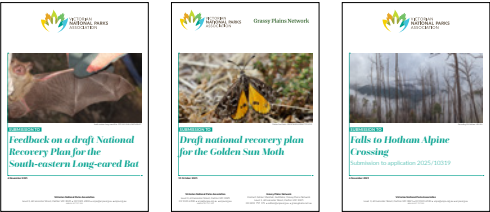
↑ Electra Greene

Because when people listen to me talk about the environment, people are open to hearing what I have to say. As a messenger, they trust in these issues. They seem to have empathy in the feeling, knowing that I really am concerned about the environment. Thank you to VNPA for making it possible for me to grow my skills for country, and for people.' 🌿 

## Recent submissions

- VNPA submissions prepared in the last two months:
- Cairnlea Section G Mixed Use Development, October 2025
- Draft national recovery plan for the Golden Sun Moth, October 2025
- Submission to application 02850 native forest logging operation at Mount Horsfall, October 2025

- Feedback on a draft National Recovery Plan for the South-eastern Long-eared Bat, November 2025
- Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing – Submission to application 2025/10319, November 2025
- Proposed Development at 103 Reid Street and 18b Jonesfield Corner, Ardeer (Grassy Plains Network), November 2025



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



## Quiz answers

- from p. 4
- d) All of the above! You'll most likely see mobs laying in the shade, and often licking their forearms.
  - b) Possums are sometimes seen on the ground, out in the open in daylight when suffering from heat stress. Birds and bats may respond similarly. Ringtail Possums are more prone to heat stress than Brushtail Possums.
  - d) All of the above! Put out small, shallow containers of water at various levels.

Place sticks and rocks in water bowls to prevent small animals from drowning. Replenish the water regularly and avoid placing it in direct sunlight as water can quickly reach undrinkable temperatures or evaporate.



↑ Eastern Grey Kangaroo | CHUDITCH/INATURALIST

4. **No!** Don't try and directly give the animal food or water, it can easily cause them to aspirate (choke). You should provide them with a shallow bowl of water nearby that they can lap if they are well enough, but do not put anything directly in their mouth.
5. **a)** Black tips absorb heat radiating from the sun. The bulk of greyish brown feathers underneath them helps prevent heat transfer to the Emu's skin. Wind can then blow the heat away.
6. Vertical leaves means **less direct sun**, which means less evaporation.
7. **Aestivation is very similar to hibernation and torpor**, except that it's a Summer rather than a Winter sleep. The amphibian just stops moving altogether for months on end until a big rain. After digging backwards into the ground, the frog forms a cocoon of mucous and shed skin as it goes into a dormant state.
8. **b)** Never try to catch a Grey-headed Flying Fox. Call Wildlife Victoria's to report a heat stress and they'll dispatch a trained and experienced volunteer to attend.

- If you encounter a heat-stressed animal, gently pick it up using a towel and protective gloves and place it in a secure box in a cool, dark, quiet indoor area. Make sure the box has ventilation and avoid wrapping the animal in anything so they have a chance to cool down.
9. **It cools them down.** Researchers at the University of Melbourne used thermal cameras to discover Koalas are hugging the trunks of cool trees to keep their body temperatures down.
  10. **False!** Fungi do mostly pop up in Autumn but can emerge at any time of year if conditions are right. The Beech Orange (*Cyttaria gunni*) fungus is a special case, bucking the Autumn trend and popping up at the end of Spring!

If you encounter a heat-stressed native animal, call your local trusted wildlife rescuer or Wildlife Victoria's 24/7 Emergency Response Service on (03) 8400 7300. Sources: ABC Online, Wildlife Victoria, University of Melbourne

# Bear the Koala detection dog

*Bear to the Rescue*, Romane Cristescu & Nic Gill. Illustrated by Sylvia Morris  
CSIRO Publishing, 2025, 32pp, ISBN 9781486314904

Fancy reviewing a book about an adorable working dog called Bear? Yes! A working dog using his canine superpowers to rescue native wildlife! Yes! *Hand it over!* We have a few *ParkWatch* reviews under our belt, but this is the first one that Billie read all by herself. Before I even had a chance to scan the publisher notes, she was on the couch ooo-ing and ahhh-ing. Readers are in experienced hands. The text is co-authored by a koala genetics researcher and a conservation dog handler. The story follows a frenetic puppy hot on the trail of his true calling. A self-employed 'renovator' (read: destroyer of furnishings), Bear is a great character.

Like any working dog without a job, Bear struggles to fit in to his first home. After a few more false starts, he finally meets someone who sees potential in his pandemonium. Billie loved the first-dog narrative; the highs (getting 'hired' by ecologists) and lows (the aftermath of a deadly bushfire). The tone balances authentic emotion with the basic mechanics of dog detection in nature conservation. The text shows readers how trainers teach Bear and his friends to locate vulnerable native animals, and how the animals are cared for. As Billie put it, 'It's giving me hope about how the wildlife are surviving out there. I like that it has a real story at the back and lots of things at the end.' The supplementary information, like the book, is playful and informative. Morris's illustrations are classic and cheerful. Billie was especially



enthralled by the 'little animals you can find' in some of the artwork. Billie did ask if the publisher read her last review in which she emphatically suggested the inclusion of stickers. While she loved the book (stickers or not) and all kids read at different levels, we'd say it's ideal for 5 to 7-year-olds. 🐾 **Jessie Borrelle, former Digital Engagement and Communications Manager, and Billie (aged 7½)**

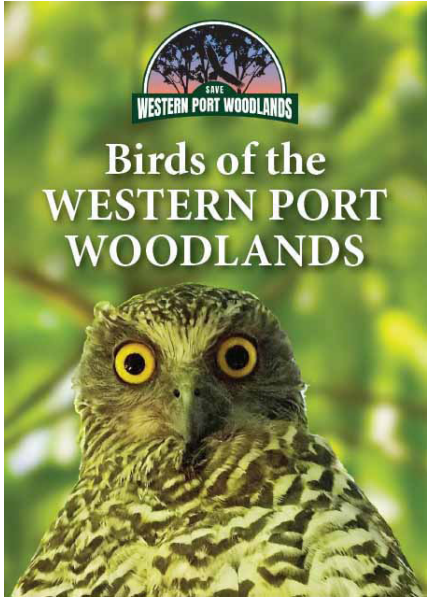
## Discover the birds of the Western Port Woodlands

*Birds of the Western Port Woodlands, Save Western Port Woodlands*  
Save Westernport Woodlands, 2025, 96pp, ISBN 9780645171327  
Save Western Port Woodlands have published their first field guide to the iconic birds of the threatened wildlife corridor from Nyora to Grantville on Bunurong Country.

Discover the birds of the Woodlands with this nifty pocket guidebook, featuring 85 superb full-colour photos. *Birds of the Western Port Woodlands* was launched to a large crowd of woodland lovers in November by Cr Rochelle Halstead, Mayor of Bass Coast, at Gurdies Winery overlooking the woodlands and the bay.



The book is a testament to the passion and commitment to the woodlands of Dave and Jackie Newman, whose stunning photos grace the pages of this great new resource. At just \$15, it's the perfect Christmas stocking filler or a great introduction to birding. It's on sale at Corinella General Store, Bunurong



Environment Centre, Gurdies Winery, Wonthaggi Market and Wonthaggi ArtSpace. Or order online at [savewesternportwoodlands.org/birdsofthewpw](http://savewesternportwoodlands.org/birdsofthewpw). All proceeds go to the Save Western Port Woodlands campaign. 🌿 **Jordan Crook is Parks and Nature Campaigner**

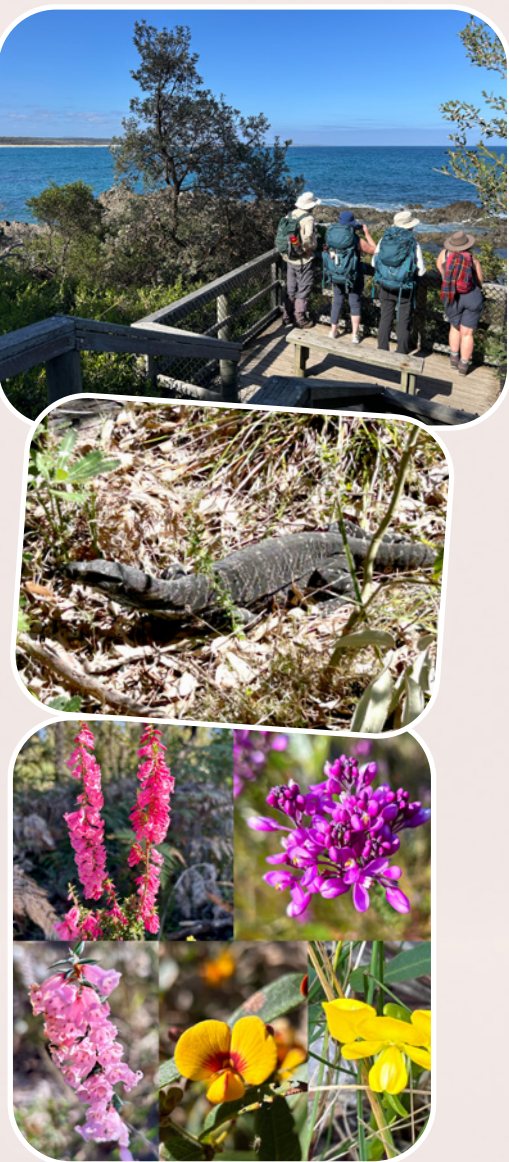




**RICHARD PERRY**  
SHARES THE  
EXPERIENCE OF A  
VNPA BUSHWALKING  
GROUP TRIP TO THE FAR EAST  
OF VICTORIA

In late September, a group of seven set up camp at Banksia Bluff Campground, located within Cape Conran Coastal Park, 36 km south-east of Orbost. The campground was quite busy, as a long weekend camp by the beach should be. Our group had two major walks planned for the weekend. Friday was a lovely day with sun and snakes about. We left the stunning Yeerung River estuary in the morning and immediately swung around to cross the river on the vehicle bridge, before soon leaving the traffic behind to follow a management track. Our destination was Dock Inlet, 12 km due east. It's a beautiful coastal lake nestled in behind the large foreshore dune. This first section was comfortably finished in a couple of hours, followed by lunch overlooking the beach from the dune edge, while

watching dolphins play just offshore. Soon we were commencing the long beach walk back to camp, admiring groups of cormorants along the way. Saturday brought a similarly nice sunny day. As an appetiser to the main event, we enjoyed a circuit of the Heathland Walk. Wildflowers including lovely orchids welcomingly slowed our pace. Then we embarked on the Cape Conran Nature Trail, an exploration of the more distant West Cape, East Cape and its boardwalk. Lunch was at the historic Joiners Homestead site overlooking a small beach and Joiners Channel, an old fishing family site. We continued to West Cape itself and then Salmon Rocks before varying the return route by dropping down onto the shoreline. Eventually we hit the East Cape boardwalk, returning us comfortably to camp. Overall, the camp and its adjoining walks impressed the group greatly, as did the Spring wildflowers and local wildlife. Thanks so much to organiser and Bushwalking Leader Richard Tagg for a great weekend in far east Gippsland!



ALL IMAGES RICHARD PERRY

We acknowledge this location is part of the unceded traditional lands and waters of the Gunai Kurnai, Bidjil and Monero and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country

Keen to join a VNPA bushwalk?  
Find out more at  
[vnpa.org.au/bushwalking](http://vnpa.org.au/bushwalking)

# Where we went in Spring

WE HAD A BUSY TIME IN SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER, ACROSS THE LAND AND WATER

- Families and nudi nerds joined us for a night-time Sea Slug Census at San Remo.
- VNPA ReefWatch and NatureWatch teams presented at the Australian Citizen Science Conference in Melbourne.
- Salty folks took a deep dive into topics such as healthy waterways, mesophotic reefs, and ten years of fishy data for the annual Great Victorian Fish Count kick-off webinar.
- Bushwalkers ventured out to Cape Conran (see p.40), Brisbane Ranges, Mornington Peninsula, Heathcote, Cathedral Range and the Otways.
- Snorkellers and divers across the state took part in the first few weeks of the annual Great Victorian Fish Count.
- NatureWatch citizen scientists took a field trip to Bungal State Forest to retrieve wildlife cameras.
- Budding Nature Stewards started their Spring 2025 courses in Ballarat and Geelong.
- Grasslands tours galore: Merri Creek, St Albans, Illabarook, Royal Park, the Jollys, Toolern Vale, Iramoo, Hobson's Bay, Woollert, Epping, Sunbury, Woorndoo, and Melbourne city centre!
- Grassland lovers learnt about bandicoots, the Western Grassland Reserve and Grasslands of the Murray Valley Plain at monthly grassy talks.

Sea slug at San Remo NICK SHAW

**What's coming up in our activities calendar**

- Great Victorian Fish Count**  
Saturday 15 Nov-Sunday 14 Dec  
Lots of Great Victorian Fish Counts at locations right along the coast. Visit [vnpa.org.au/fish-count](http://vnpa.org.au/fish-count) for more information.
- Woodend Racecourse grassland**  
Saturday 6 December  
A great grassy tour through Woodend Racecourse grassland.
- Lorne bushwalk**  
Saturday 6 December  
Meander past some spectacular waterfalls and interesting geological features on a looping bushwalk around Lorne on the Great Ocean Road.
- Summer Sea Slug Census**  
Friday 2 January to Sunday 11 January  
Featuring rockpool rambles under the bridge at San Remo.
- Brimbank Park walk**  
Saturday 3 January  
A morning walk for the early birds around Brimbank Park.

## Summer 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's plenty of places to join us for an adventure in nature. Check out our online calendar – new activities are added regularly!

Subscribe to our mailing list to receive activities updates  
[vnpa.org.au/activities-sign-up](http://vnpa.org.au/activities-sign-up)

Discover more at  
[vnpa.org.au/activities](http://vnpa.org.au/activities)





# Summer snorkelling

## Sneak a peek at life below the waves

Did you know 70 to 90 per cent of marine life in south-eastern Australia are found nowhere else in the world? Snorkelling in Victoria gives you the chance to see unique marine animals in seagrass beds, kelp forests, rocky reefs and sponge gardens.

## Tips for Summer Snorkelling

**1** Do some research on the best and safest snorkelling spots near you. There's plenty of great places to try snorkelling across the Victorian coast.

**2** Learn about and practice safe snorkelling techniques. Practice using your mask and snorkel in a pool or your bath before you head to the ocean.

**3** If you don't have your own gear (fins and a mask), you might be able to hire some from your local dive store.

**4** Choose calm conditions with little wind and waves. Slack tides will make you feel more comfortable and safe plus the water will be clearer!

**5** Defog your mask by rubbing toothpaste in it and washing it out before you leave home. And don't forget to spit in it and rinse it out before putting it on.

**6** Use fins to propel yourself through the water and for easy return to shore. Try to move your legs from the hips (not your knees), keep your toes pointed, and use gentle, long kicks.

**7** Keep your mask tightly fitted to your face to stop it from leaking. Get someone to check that your hair isn't caught between your mask and face when you put it on.

**8** Look at but don't touch wildlife. It's stressful for the animals, and some might protect themselves with a painful bite or sting.

IMAGES: TESS HOINVILLE, NICOLE MERTENS, PXHERE, KADE MILLS

## Great Victorian Fish Count

Families with experience snorkelling can be marine biologists for the day by taking part in Victoria's largest marine citizen science event, the Great Victorian Fish Count.

To get involved, visit [vnpa.org.au/fish-count](http://vnpa.org.au/fish-count)



ILLUSTRATION: NICOLE MERTENS

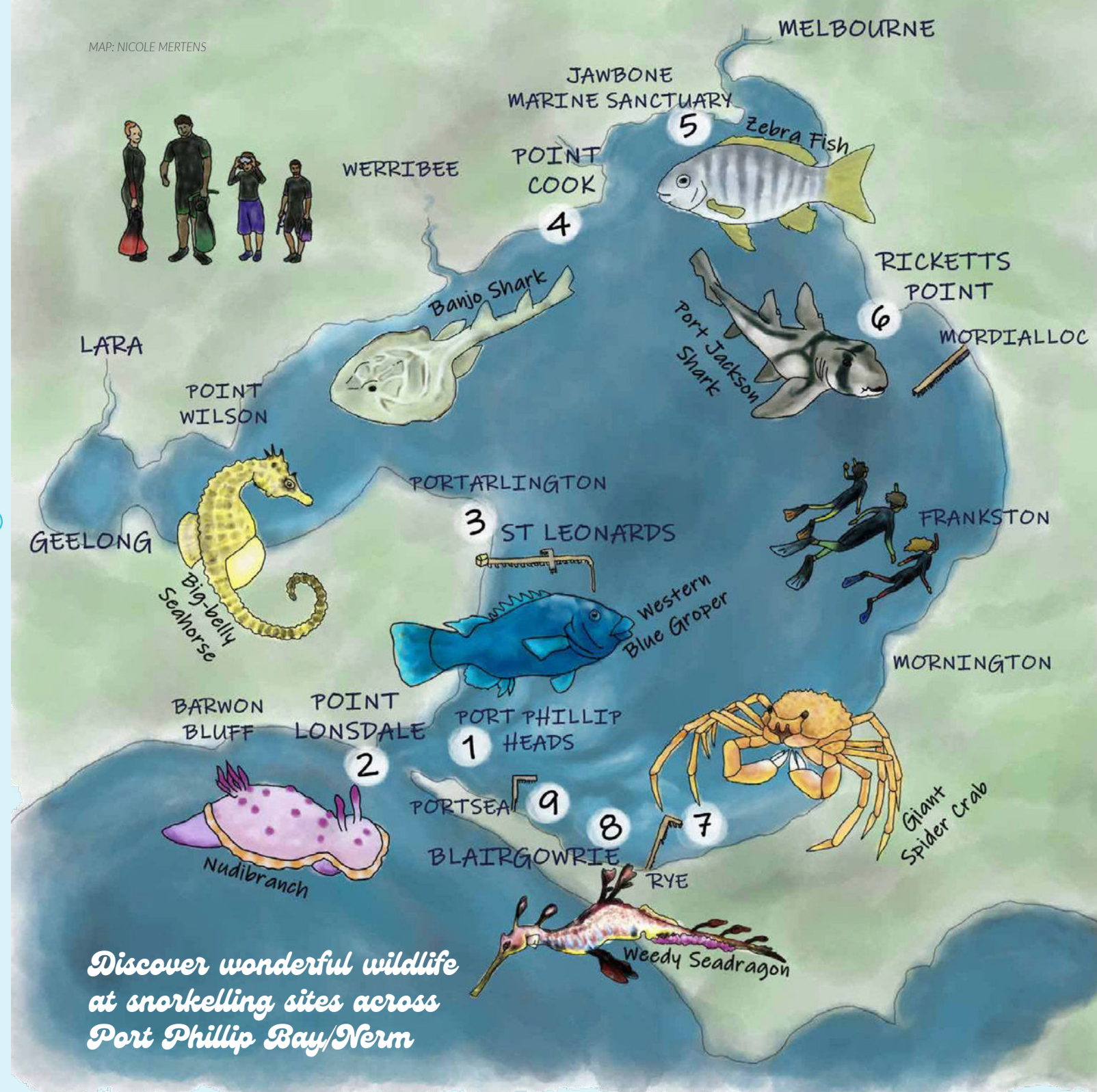
## Safety first snorkelling

Always remember to consider safety on family adventures. Make sure the activities are suitable for your family's abilities, you have competent supervision at all times, and don't forget to check local weather conditions.

If snorkelling is new to your family, we suggest going with a snorkel tour operator. They'll provide the gear, expertise and training you need for a great adventure. Plus they'll share amazing stories and facts about local marine life. You can find a list of snorkel tour operators registered with Parks Victoria at [parks.vic.gov.au/lto](http://parks.vic.gov.au/lto)



MAP: NICOLE MERTENS



## Discover wonderful wildlife at snorkelling sites across Port Phillip Bay/Verm

**1** A boat and snorkel tour to Pope's Eye in Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park is a chance to make friends with a Western Blue Groper. This fish changes colour through its lifetime and can even change from female to male.

**2** Spot a sea slug (nudibranch) in the rockpools at Point Lonsdale. Sea slug are a type of marine snail without a shell, and have feathery, 'nude' gills on their backs.

**3** Glide along under St Leonard's Pier and keep an eye out for the Big-belly Seahorse. These fish have long, curly tails that they use to hold on tight to seaweed.

**4** Meet a Banjo Shark at Point Cook. Banjo Sharks belong to a group of fish including rays and sharks.

**5** Keep an eye out for the friendly Port Jackson Shark hiding under rocky reefs and searching for food in seagrass beds at Ricketts Point.

**6** Swim with schools of black-and-white striped Zebra Fish at Jawbone Marine Sanctuary.

**7** Learn about the marine life at Rye Pier from interpretive signs on the Octopus Garden Trail.

**8** Spot all the colours of the rainbow in the sponge gardens under Blairgowrie Pier.

**9** Search for Victoria's marine animal emblem, the Weedy Seadragon, at Portsea Pier. The male seadragon carries eggs on his long tail until the babies are ready to hatch.

Download our full range of Wild Families activity sheets and wildlife colouring-in sheets at [vnpa.org.au/wild-families](http://vnpa.org.au/wild-families)





# Deirdre Slattery

**DEIRDRE SLATTERY** HAS BEEN A COMMITTED VNPA MEMBER AND GENEROUS SUPPORTER FOR OVER 35 YEARS. SHE SHARES HER STORY

I was born in April 1946, so I'm a very early Baby Boomer. In the 80 years since, my life has been significantly shaped by the ideas VNPA has championed since its own birth in 1952. Enjoyment of our unique and remarkable bush is one of the best things about life in Victoria, and that if more people knew more about it, it would be easier to protect. That's why I left money to VNPA in my Will, so they can continue to push for better protection of the places I love.

The heritage to which I was introduced as a child was mixed. From my grandfather, an East Gippsland farmer, I learned how to kill a snake, that Wombats were vermin and sheep were the centre of life. On the other hand, Dad's idea of a good morning on the farm was to take his several children – with an apple in one pocket and sometimes a block of chocolate in the other – to climb the Hill Paddock, inspect the water holes and the understorey, and look for signs of wildlife as we went.

My father was a teacher and keen bird watcher, and my mother was an expert on native plants. As we moved across Victoria for Dad's work, we explored nature along the way. We picnicked and rockpool rambled at Port Campbell and Apollo Bay, explored the Grampians/Gariwerd and the volcanic hills around Camperdown, found Aboriginal middens and searched for paper nautilus shells at Wreck Beach in Gippsland. At Yarrowonga we knew a forestry officer who was regenerating Murray Pine in enclosure plots in the Warby Ranges, and we played in snow for the first time at Mount Buffalo.

The *Land Conservation Council Study for East Gippsland* that my parents purchased added so much value to the

places in nature I loved, and introduced me to the idea of science being part of appreciating the land. Reading Dick Johnson's *The Alps at the Crossroads* similarly alerted me to the need for protection. Both were foundations of the idea that community consultation can bring good outcomes for nature, if it's founded on sound information and knowledge in that community.

In 1988, I scored the job of my dreams: Schools Education Officer in the then Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands, mainly educating teachers about national parks. Over the next five years, I learned a vast amount about writing and communication from Phil Ingamells and Michael Howes, and came to share their passion for both national parks and VNPA. I also became involved with the Australian Alps, which led by lengthy pathways in both public and private life to my writing *Australian Alps National Parks* and to meeting interstate people with skill and passion like Graeme Worboys, with whom I wrote *Kosciuszko: A Great National Park*.

I'm proud that I've been a VNPA member for 35 years and was a Councillor for more than ten. I also served on the National Parks Advisory Council for ten years and was Chair of the Reference Areas Advisory Committee. I hope that all these contributions, as well as many years of teaching about nature and land management in high schools and at La Trobe University, have made a small difference. 🌿

**For more information on including a gift for nature in your Will, visit [vnpa.org.au/support/gifts-in-wills](https://vnpa.org.au/support/gifts-in-wills)**



← Deirdre Slattery with alpine ecologists Dane Wimbrush and Alec Costin, both aged in their late 80s, Kosciuszko National Park, Feb 2015

↑ Billy Buttons in a Tall Alpine Herbfield | G L WORBOYS

← The pride of Kosciuszko National Park: Anemone Buttercup | BRIAN SLEE, GRAEME WORBOYS COLLECTION

## Give the gift of nature! VNPA Gift Membership

Give the gift that will support nature in Victoria every day of the year, and for years to come.

[vnpa.org.au/gift-membership](https://vnpa.org.au/gift-membership)

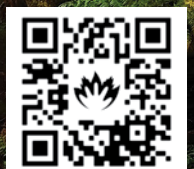


IMAGE: HOPETOUN FALLS, GREAT OTWAY NATIONAL PARK (MAXIMA)