

PARK *watch*



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VICTORIAN
NATIONAL PARKS
ASSOCIATION

MARCH 2026 #303

In this issue...



JUDITH DELAND



LAURIE BOYLE



FRIENDS OF ORGAN PIPES

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JORDAN CROOK

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MEGHAN LINDSAY

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

Your voice matters!

Share your views and help shape the protection of Victoria's parks
and nature through our Supporter Connection Survey.

We'd love to hear your perspectives to help us remain a strong,
effective and influential voice for nature across Victoria.

By sharing your thoughts, interests and priorities, you're helping us
better understand what matters most to you — and how you'd like to
connect with and support our work.

Survey should take 5-10 min to complete. All responses confidential.

Complete the paper survey sent in the mail or
complete online at surveys.cdata.com.au/vnpa



Complete the survey by
Tue 31 March to enter the
draw to win one of ten
nature prize packs!



From the President



MARILYNE CRESTIAS, VNPA PRESIDENT, WELCOMES YOU TO THE FIRST PARKWATCH FOR 2026

In the seasonal calendar of the Wurundjeri people, we've just emerged from Biderap (the dry season) and stepped into Luk (Eel season). Next comes Waring (Wombat season), stretching from April to July. This is the time of year that gets fungi fanatics fizzing with excitement. Our fungi quiz (below) should keep them happily occupied until the spores really start flying, while our glorious fungi cover celebrates this damply wonderful season.

This issue takes a hard, clear-eyed look at where the Victorian Labor Government has lost its way on nature. We examine the rejection of expert advice in the Central Highlands; the devastating staff cuts gutting the management of our parks and the protection of wildlife; and the shocking proposals to abolish Victoria's key nature institutions. These are not minor missteps. They are decisions with lasting consequences for the parks and wildlife we love.

We also explore the aftermath of recent bushfires across Victoria's parks and the wildlife caught in their path; report on a renewable energy project that's a good idea in the

wrong place; and give a mixed scorecard for the Melbourne Strategic Assessment.

But there is real cause for hope. It's an election year, and a powerful alliance of nature organisations, grassroots groups and community leaders are preparing to mobilise as never before. Read on, and get ready to stick up for nature!

Social media is increasingly where we show our love for nature, but it can also be a fraught, fractured and exhausting place. In this issue, we take a deep dive into how nature supporters can not only survive, but thrive in the online world.

In the tangible, mud-on-your-boots world of people helping nature, we visit Organ Pipes National Park – the state's smallest national park, with Melbourne's oldest friends group – tucked away on Melbourne's north-western fringe. And Jordan Crook introduces us to the 'grouse little gem' of Toora H4 Bushland Reserve in South Gippsland.

We pay tribute to the late Geoff Durham OAM, an extraordinary supporter of nature and contributor to VNPA in a multitude of ways over decades. Current VNPA Councillor Dr Jeannette McGill shares why she wanted to get involved with VNPA; and young writer and activist Roger Chao reflects on his passion for and connection with nature.

Plus all our regular features: our many activities, the latest nature research and much more.

Whether you're a fungiphile or not, savour the season of Waring and the gloriously earthy colours it brings to Victoria's landscapes. 🍄

ParkWatch Fungi Quiz



- When did we realise fungi are so different from plants and animals they deserve their own Kingdom?
 - 1779
 - 1825
 - 1920
 - 1969
- What is guttation?
 - The smell of mature mushrooms
 - Droplets of liquid exuding from fungi
 - The way fungi reproduce through spores
 - When a mushroom has eaten too much
- How many types of fungi live in Australia?
 - < 5000
 - 10,000 to 20,000
 - 50,000 to 250,000
 - > 500,000
- How many of those have we named and described?
 - 0
 - 1
 - 6
 - 18
- Which of these is NOT a type of fungus sporting body?
 - Coral
 - Jelly
 - Stinkhorn
 - Mushroom
 - Doughnut
 - Puffball
- True or false, all fungi in Victoria sprout their sporting bodies in Autumn?
 - Rotting logs
 - Leaf litter
 - Animal bones
 - Poo
 - Living beings
 - All of the above
- Which of these fungi are introduced to Victoria?
 - Orange Pore Fungus (*Favolaschia calocera*)
 - Fly Agaric (*Amanita muscaria*)
 - Ghost Fungus (*Omphalotus nidiformis*)
 - Both a) and b)
- How many fungi are threatened with extinction in Victoria?
 - 0
 - 1
 - 6
 - 18
- True or false, there are bioluminescent fungi in Victoria?



↑ Coral Fungi | MEGHAN LINDSAY

Answers on p.38

Bushfires hit parks and wildlife



JORDAN CROOK, PARKS AND NATURE CAMPAIGNER, LOOKS AT HOW RECENT BUSHFIRES HAVE AFFECTED VICTORIAN PARKS

From mid-January 2026 bushfires raged across parts of Victoria. Our thoughts are with the people and wildlife affected. And we're grateful for the many volunteer and forest fire fighters on the front line, and emergency services including SES and volunteer wildlife rescuers.

Wyperfeld National Park Wotjobaluk Country

This fire burnt almost 60,000 ha impacting critical habitat for Wilkerr/Dingoes (*Canis dingo*), Malleefowl (*Leipoa ocellata*), Pink Cockatoos (*Cacatua leadbeateri*) and other fire-sensitive Mallee wildlife. Large-scale fire across continuous habitat has likely altered shelter and food availability. This will affect movement patterns for surviving wildlife, creating both immediate and longer-term pressures.

For the genetically distinct and geographically isolated Wilkerr population, already estimated to number fewer than 100 individuals, post-fire management will be especially important. Wilkerr play a key role in regulating foxes and feral cats, whose populations often increase following fire. This can have big impacts on recovering native wildlife. Broad-scale fox baiting following fire should not occur where Wilkerr live as they are susceptible to eating poison baits. It may also undermine the natural recovery processes, as fox and cat suppression is supported by Wilkerr presence.

The fires have also affected nesting and foraging habitat for Malleefowl and Pink Cockatoos. Retaining fallen trees and woody debris will be important for maintaining habitat complexity during recovery, providing shelter for reptiles and small mammals, supporting invertebrate communities, and helping stabilise sandy soils. Intensive post-fire 'clean-up'

approaches that remove this habitat may reduce ecological resilience and slow recovery.

Academics and conservationists have called for targeted support measures such as temporary water points for Wilkerr and other surviving wildlife. While DEECA established several water sources following the fires, further planning and monitoring are needed to make sure water placement supports wildlife within park boundaries, reduces movement pressure toward agricultural interfaces, and assists recovery for wildlife like Red Kangaroos and Emus.

Mt Lawson State Park Dhudhuroa Country

Escaped being burnt in the Black Summer fires of 2019-20, but burnt in 2026. The park is known for its Black Cypress Pine Woodland which is fire sensitive, and a small isolated Clay Heathland community (not well represented in existing parks and reserves). It's also home to threatened wildlife including Mountain Dampiera, Cupped Bush-peas, Barking Owls, Spotted-tailed Quolls and Lace Monitors. Three First Nations art sites are recorded in park.

Wabba Wilderness Park Yaitmathang Country

The park was 99 per cent burnt by the 2019-20 Black Summer fires. It's home to Critically Endangered Booroolong Frogs (*Litoria booroolongensis*) and Spotted Tree Frog (*Ranoidea spenceri*) and Endangered Greater Gliders

(*Petauroides volans*). Feral deer and pigs became a threat after the 2019-20 bushfires and will need immediate action following this fire. Due to the previous bushfire in 2020 and this one in 2026, deep concerns are held for this park's recovery.

Mt Alexander Regional Park Dja Dja Wurrung Country

Current assessments indicate two-thirds of the park has been burnt, including habitat of endemic Critically Endangered Southern Shepherd's Purse (*Ballantinia antipoda*). This park is the only place these plants live, so their future is currently uncertain.

The park is also home to the Threatened Victorian Temperate Woodland Bird Community, Vulnerable Brush-tailed Phascogales (*Phascogale tapoatafa*), and significant recreational assets like Leanganook Camping Area and La Larr Ba Gauwa Park mountain bike tracks.

Other areas

Fires in the Longwood-Ruffy area impacted many small reserves. There's also a large fire in the Alpine National Park between Dargo and Mt Howitt.

We'll dig deeper into the fires in Great Otways National Park and Otway Forest Park, and their impacts in the next *ParkWatch*.

As the climate crisis deepens, bushfires, floods and wind storms are becoming more common. We need proper funding and resources pre and post-fire to make sure habitats and wildlife can recover and adapt. 🍄



↑ Pink Cockatoo, Wyperfeld National Park, Wotjobaluk Country | DANNY STUART/INATURALIST

Government gutting key nature institutions



MATT RUCHEL,
EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR, SAYS
THE GOVERNMENT
HAS LOST ITS WAY ON
NATURE

The Allan Government is showing a lack of cohesive vision for nature in our beautiful state. Labor has been giving with one hand and taking with the other, souring any perception of progress and running the risk of trashing its well-earned legacy as a pro-nature party.

The Andrews Government phased out native forest logging, but the Allan Government has yet to close all the loopholes. The government did pass new legislation to create the central west national parks, after a four year delay and much public pressure.

On the flip side, they abandoned plans to create '...the largest environmental protection plan in our state's history' and 'the largest expansion to our forest reserve system in our state's history' including new national parks in the east of the state.

Over the last year, the Allan Government has arbitrarily opened up the Snowy River and Errinundra national parks to deer hunting and made dramatic cuts to fisheries officers, Parks Victoria and

Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action staff. They have now turned their attention to gutting long-standing institutions that safeguard nature.

Abolishing VEAC and VMCC

At the time of writing, the Entities Legislation Amendment (Consolidation and Other Matters) Bill 2025 had passed the Legislative Assembly and is about to be debated by the Legislative Council. Shockingly, this legislation will largely abolish the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) and the Victorian Marine and Coastal Council (VMCC).

Independent expert councils like VEAC and VMCC are the quiet champions of Victoria's nature protection system. They've shaped millions of hectares of national parks, protected our coasts from development pressures, and made sure threatened wildlife have a voice. Now, they're being eroded.

VEAC has been instrumental in creating our national parks and protected areas for more than 50 years. If abolished, its functions will be handed to the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability: reduced to a single public servant, with no independent council of experts.

Some of the requirements for community consultation will be transferred over, but key

provisions like the mandatory duty for departments to act in accordance with government accepted recommendations will be removed. This leaves hundreds of areas not yet properly protected in limbo.

VMCC, which oversaw protection of our incredible marine life and coastline, will be cut entirely. At a time when our coasts face growing pressures from climate change, development, and illegal fishing, we're losing the independent voice that holds government accountable (see p 16).

Its work is far from over. A new Marine and Coastal Strategy is due in 2027, and VMCC has a key role in advising and monitoring.

The government's own *Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037* plan highlights a gap of almost 2.1 million hectares in the Victorian reserve system against international and national benchmarks. This would have been a focus of future VEAC investigations and assessments.

These low-cost institutions, made up of independent experts, are the backbone of our nature protection system. They harness knowledge from leading experts in their fields. They're a drop in the ocean of the state budget, yet they're being axed in the name of 'cost saving'. At the same time, key biodiversity staff are also

being cut, creating a recipe for poorly informed decisions for which nature will pay the price.

Without VEAC and its predecessors (the Land Conservation Council (LCC) and the Environment Conservation Council), Victoria would look very different. The Grampians (Gariwerd), Alpine and Barmah national parks, our marine national parks and sanctuaries, and the Mallee parks (to name just a few) would not exist in the way they do today – carefully designed and informed by science and community.

The government of the day has always had the final say. But now they seem to prefer a process where they can make deals, or decisions based on political whim. In this recipe nature loses out.

The situation is made worse by a lack of political contest from major parties. Labor has been erratic in protecting nature. The National Party's policy is to return native forest logging. They also had a long-standing policy to abolish VEAC. The Liberal Party has

largely been silent on nature for the last decade, with the agenda often dominated by National Party interests.

The LCC (1971–1997) was a creation of the Hamer Liberal Government, championed by Minister Bill Borthwick. VEAC in its current form was created by the Bracks Labor Government. VMCC was created in 2018 under the Andrews Labor Government.

Sadly, Victoria's major parties are in a race to the bottom, dismantling their own reform initiatives.

What else is on the chopping block?

The government has supported a recommendation in the recent Silver Review of the public service to 'Confirm the need for 90 advisory committees, with the assumption that 90 per cent will cease and other mechanisms could be utilised if a need for external advice exists.'

So, other key nature safeguarding and advisory bodies are on the chopping block for the next tranche of cuts. This is likely to be done in separate legislation. It's unclear what review process is being undertaken and how the decision will be 'confirmed.' Cutting these institutions should simply be ruled out. Here's what's being considered in future cuts:

- **Scientific Advisory Committee**, which provides the pathway for listing threatened plants, animals and fungi under Victoria's nature laws, the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee*

Act. Cutting it would make our threatened wildlife protection laws largely useless.

- **National Parks Advisory Council and Reference Areas Advisory Committee** which protect our parks from inappropriate development and other damaging activities. They're a critical voice in safeguarding our protected area network.
- **Gippsland Lakes Coordinating Committee** which looks out for nature across the Gippsland Lakes area. It coordinates and implements projects to keep the lakes healthy.

There are also plans to merge the Victorian Fisheries Authority and Game Management Authority into a single regulator. This could weaken protections for marine wildlife and protected areas.

The legislation currently being debated also includes changes to enforcement for Parks Victoria staff, with a greater role being given to the Office of the Conservation Regulator.

Enforcement is critically important, both for the safety of the people who make 50 million visits to national parks each year, and for the protection of habitats and wildlife in the parks. Without the right numbers of rangers on the front line, parks and protected areas are just lines on maps.

Together, we're working hard to stick up for nature. Now's the time to escalate our efforts, to protect nature from the people who're supposed to be protecting it. 🌿

Independent expert councils like VEAC and VMCC are the quiet champions of Victoria's nature protection system... Now, they're being eroded.

↓ Errinundra National Park
Bidwell, Ngarigo Monero &
GunaiKurnai Country |
JUDITH DELAND

When renewables are bad news for nature

JORDAN CROOK,
PARKS AND NATURE
CAMPAIGNER, SAYS
KENTBRUCK WIND
FARM IS A GOOD PROJECT IN
THE WRONG PLACE

The Kentbruck Wind Farm development has almost got the green light after a rushed and unsettling Environment Effects Statement (EES) process. The final decision is now with the Federal Environment Minister, Murray Watt. Three kilometres from Portland on Gunditjmarra Country, this proposal has raised the concerns of ecologists, conservationists and bushwalkers for many years. Topmost is its proximity to

the Cobboboonee and Lower Glenelg national parks, and Discovery Bay Coastal Park. It's also in the flight areas of Critically Endangered wildlife like Southern Bent-wing Bats (*Miniopterus orianae bassani*) and Australasian Bitterns (*Botaurus poiciloptilus*).

The plan is to place an underground powerline through Cobboboonee National Park, risking damage to Critically Endangered Apple Jacks (*Eucalyptus splendens*) and Vulnerable Western Peppermints (*Eucalyptus falciformis*). We need renewables, but not at the expense of the wildlife and habitats they're supposed to protect.

Victorian Planning Minister, Sonya Kilkenny, believes the impacts on nature and animal welfare can be acceptably managed. This is based on

untested mitigations and curtailment techniques, and the financing of an 'ecology fund'. The fund is supposed to pay for recovery efforts of Southern Bent-wing Bats, offsetting the loss of any bats killed. Sounds like a cheap way to greenwash a destructive development.

The level of harm mitigation will be determined by collecting the animals killed and injured. A truly concerning way to 'look after' threatened animals teetering on the edge of existence.

Once these turbines are installed and start to cause damage, will they ever be removed or switched off? That's unlikely, given the significant investment to build the infrastructure. So nature cops it while corporations profit.

We absolutely need renewable energy to combat the impacts of the climate crisis. But to endanger wildlife like Southern Bent-wing Bats, Australasian Bitterns and Brolgas (*Antigone rubicunda*) represents the same mindset that has led to the climate and biodiversity crisis.

Renewable energy projects that drive destruction of nature not only jeopardise wildlife and their habitats but also the social licence of these projects. Let's hope Murray Watt can see this project for what it is: a good project, in the wrong place.



↑ Brolgas | PATRICK KAVANAGH/FLICKR



Want to learn more about doing citizen science?

DIY Cit Sci is a new VNPA program to teach you more about planning, fieldwork, data analysis, reporting and all the other ways you can act to help nature.

Online and in person training workshops are open to groups and individuals.

Contact Sera Blair, NatureWatch Coordinator sera@vnpa.org.au



Photos: Cam Suttie

Plant Blindness with Sera Blair

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



Round-leaf Pomaderris *Pomaderris vacciniifolia*

The Critically Endangered Round-leaf Pomaderris is a slender shrub that only lives in a few areas of Victoria like Toolangi, Kinglake, Christmas Hills, St Andrews, Eltham, Doreen, Whittlesea, Flowerdale and Chum Creek (Healesville) with isolated populations in the La Trobe Valley around Tyers and Cowwarr.

They grow to four metres tall with thin branches and small elliptic leaves, dark green on top and white underneath, with velvety hairs. They differ from other pomaderris by having petals on their creamy-white flowers that appear in Spring.

They're threatened by clearing (particularly along roadsides), weeds, feral deer, browsing by wallabies and fire. With estimates of between 150 to 350 mature plants remaining, efforts need to be made to protect each surviving plant.

The community have played a key role in the push to save Round-leaf Pomaderris. Calling out the destruction of mature plants during the construction of the North-South Pipeline in 2008 led to it being listed as threatened under our state nature laws, the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act*. Now, Kinglake Friends of the Forest (KFF) are working hard to protect 40+ plants from

destruction along a planned 23 km fuel break.

You can help, too! Learn to identify this plant and go for walks in their range next Spring.

See if you can find more of them and add your sighting to iNaturalist. Or support groups working to save Round-leaf Pomaderris (like KFF) by joining survey days to map plants in high-risk areas, or support legal actions to stop avoidable damage. If you live in their range, you can work with your local Landcare group to look after Round-leaf Pomaderris on private land.

For details on where to survey and how to report new discoveries, contact Sera Blair, NatureWatch Coordinator, sera@vnpa.org.au



↑ Round-leaf Pomaderris | CHRIS COBERN/INATURALIST

Tiny reserves are a big deal

DOZENS OF SMALL RESERVES ARE AWAITING PROTECTION

Scattered across Victoria's central west are dozens of bushland and nature reserves quietly holding the line for nature. Right now, 30 existing and 18 newly recommended bushland reserves remain unlegislated or unformalised. They were promised as part of the package including the new national parks in the central west. Altogether, they will add 7,076 hectares to the Victorian parks estate. From the Macedon Ranges to the Pyrenees, they act as islands and connective corridors, allowing wildlife to survive in landscapes fragmented by roads, farms and development.

Some are small but powerful. Tylden, Black Forest, Slaty Creek

and tiny Lerderderg River protect crucial remnants of woodlands and waterways. Others provide scale, with Ben Nevis, Bungal, Waterloo and the expanded Ben Major reserve protecting thousands of hectares. Even very small reserves like Rosyth help link larger habitats.

Together, these reserves form a living network. Formalising them is one of the simplest ways to secure a future for nature under pressure. Once legislated, they'll exclude damaging activities like firewood collection, grazing and recreational hunting, giving nature room to recover. After years of delay, it's time for government to honour its promise and finish the job by formally protecting the full central west parks network.

Ben Gill, Nature Conservation Campaigner



↑ Tylden Nature Reserve, Dja Dja Wurrung Country | BEN GILL

Grassland audit: some wins, many worries



ADRIAN MARSHALL,
FACILITATOR, GRASSY
PLAINS NETWORK,
ON MSA'S 2024 AUDIT

Released at the end of last year, the long-awaited 2024 audit of the Melbourne Strategic Assessment (MSA) focuses on its progress on expected conservation outcomes. It reveals a mixed report card.

The 2010 MSA deal between the Victorian and federal governments greenlit development in Melbourne's growth corridors, regardless of threatened wildlife or habitats at development sites. In exchange, developers paid a levy which funds purchase of the promised Western Grassland Reserve (WGR), Grassy Eucalypt Woodland Reserve, 36 Conservation Areas, and 1600 ha of additional grassland habitat.

The wins

There's more Striped Legless Lizards (*Delma impar*) across the WGR than expected. Matted Flax-lily (*Dianella amoena*) populations are stable, as are Southern Brown Bandicoots (*Isodon obesulus obesulus*). Large-fruit Groundsels (*Senecio macrocarpus*) are going well. Wyndham City Council's interim management program, aimed at looking after future WGR land before it gets handed to Parks Victoria, is producing great results.

The worries

Golden Sun Moths (*Synemon plana*) are in decline, with declining suitable habitat. The range of different plants usually found in Seasonal Herbaceous Wetlands is disappearing. Spiny Rice-flowers (*Pimelea spinescens*) are dying with few new plants growing, for no clear reason. Rabbits are still destroying the country's most important population of Button Wrinklewort (*Rutidosia leptorrhynchoides*).

Developers are trashing grasslands before the government can purchase them. This means a lot of hard work and extra expense to turn them around. Plus, developers waste MSA resources playing legal games.



↑ Striped Legless Lizard | IAN R MCCANN/MUSEUMS VICTORIA

Once land is acquired, it improves. But before purchase, habitat health has mostly been in decline. Faster acquisition is therefore vital. But funds aren't available because the levy is paid only as Melbourne grows. There are two options: raise the levy, or pay for upfront purchase. Both are essential to stop the decline.

Land purchase challenges

We need to protect the last best bits of our grasslands before they're destroyed.

A lot of the WGR is in poor health. It's important, but not the priority. High-quality patches of grassland should be purchased and protected first. The Conservation Areas include some excellent values and should be a priority.

Practically all the promised Grassy Eucalypt Woodland Reserve is privately owned with no way to acquire it without a politically risky Public Acquisition Overlay. A big challenge.

As compensation for impacts within Melbourne's growth corridors, the MSA is required to purchase good, occupied habitat in rural Victoria for Matted Flax-lilies (529 ha), Spiny Rice-flowers (394 ha) and Golden Sun Moths (680 ha) – a total of about 1600 ha.

A focus on purchasing that 1600 ha could bring real wins. In other words, good-quality grassland, not yet trashed by developers, that can be protected. These would be reserves providing much-needed green spaces for local

communities while protecting the best of our grasslands.

The MSA needs to act now before they're destroyed.

When fully acquired, the WGR is promised to include at least 10,000 ha of grassland to offset grassland destroyed in growth corridors. Current estimates suggest a 3000 ha shortfall. Plus, a huge restoration effort is needed in purchased grasslands. But there's no sign that's happening. Where's the infrastructure to produce the vast amount of seed needed to restore thousands of hectares of grassland?

Audits threatened

The recent Silver Review into the public service recommends changing audits from every two years to five. That would be a disaster.

The MSA needs strong public oversight. Only two years ago the MSA declined to tell us how many of the 36 Conservation Areas had been purchased and what condition they were in. We had to do our own People's Audit just to find out. Last year they stood by while 40 ha of grassland at Faulkners Road, Mount Cottrell, was methodically destroyed.

The MSA is a hugely important conservation program for one of the country's most threatened habitats. For it to succeed, we need transparency. Diminishing scrutiny and progress towards conservation goals could have drastic consequences. 🌿

Hog Deer on the hoof

I couldn't believe it when I had to slow down for a feral Hog Deer (*Axis procinus*) crossing the road in front of me in Coldstream recently.

The main population of Hog Deer is found along the Gippsland coast from Wilsons Prom to the Gippsland Lakes.

Hog Deer were introduced to Victoria in 1866 by the Acclimatisation Society of Victoria. This invasive species is bad news for native habitats, munching their way through native plants, ringbarking trees and causing erosion.

I was dismayed to see yet another species of feral deer in the Yarra Valley, chopping, stomping and wallowing its way across threatened wetlands and forests. My immediate thoughts went to Critically Endangered Lowland Leadbeater's Possums (*Gymnobelideus*

leadbeateri) and Helmeted Honeyeaters (*Lichenostomus melanops ssp. cassidix*). Both rely on the Yarra Valley swamplands as their only home. The same habitat Hog Deer trash with their ringbarking and hard hooves.

How did this deer make it all the way to the Yarra Valley? Have deer made their way across hundreds of kilometres of farmland and housing developments? Or have shooters moved animals?

No matter how it travelled the distance, it's a terrible discovery. An eradication plan needs to be initiated immediately before they establish a population in the area.

The Victorian Deer Control Strategy makes clear that prevention, eradication and containment of new



↑ Hog Deer | JORDAN CROOK

populations of feral deer is of the highest priority.

We've written to the Conservation Regulator, Game Management Authority, Melbourne Water and Yarra Ranges Council calling for swift action to eradicate feral Hog Deer. We're calling for a swift and timely response to initiate an eradication program as soon as possible. And to remove the protection feral Hog Deer have under the *Wildlife Act* to enable effective control on public and private land. 🌿

Jordan Crook, Parks and Nature Campaigner

Spotlight on Nature with Meghan Lindsay



Ghost Fungus *Omphalotus nidiformis*

Head out for a nocturnal wander once the Autumn rains begin and you might spot a ghostly glow at the base of an old eucalypt. Ghost Fungus earn their eerie title through an extraordinary ability called bioluminescence.

This gilled mushroom typically pops up its sporing bodies in Autumn, though a downpour can sometimes coax them out at other times of the year. They grow in overlapping clusters on decaying and living trees. Their funnel-shaped caps are usually creamy white, with some brown to black mixed in.

After dark it's a different story. Once you've let your eyes adjust to the darkness, you'll notice a faint glowing coming from the fungus. Similar to the Aurora Australis, the glow is much more impressive in a long-exposure photo than with the naked eye.

Pro tip: it can be easier to search for them during the day, so you know exactly where to visit after dark!

Ghost Fungi live in lots of Victorian habitats, from arid Wyperfeld National Park to subalpine, coastal and rainforests and even in urban gardens. They live on lots of different trees including eucalypts, banksias, hakeas, and even introduced species like Radiata Pines.

Next time you're out for a night walk, see if you can spot a ghost! 🌿

Meghan Lindsay is VNPA's Communications Advisor and resident fungi fanatic



↑ Ghost Fungus | MEGHAN LINDSAY

Is Western Port Bay's Ramsar protection being weakened?



SHANNON HURLEY, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER, SAYS VRET IS TESTING RAMSAR'S INTEGRITY

With the proposal to incorporate the Victorian Renewable Energy Terminal (VRET) within Western Port Bay's wetlands, it's fair to ask: could plans for the development be clouding objective assessment?

There's concerns the impacts of commercial development on Western Port Bay's internationally significant wetlands are being glossed over in the push to progress the VRET. The project represents the largest dredging campaign in the area since its Ramsar listing in 1982. This clearly warrants a careful, detailed assessment of impacts on nature in the bay, as any major development should.

These concerns have intensified following the finalisation of the Environmental Effects Statement (EES) scoping requirements and the release of the draft review of the Western Port Ramsar Management Plan.

With local communities watching closely, our submission identified a significant and troubling gap between

the previous Western Port Ramsar Management Plan and the 2025 draft.

The Victorian Government is obliged under international agreements to properly manage Western Port Bay's Ramsar-listed wetlands, addressing threats and protecting their ecological character.

Ramsar management plans are reviewed every seven years with the process overseen by Melbourne Water. A clear and concerning change in the 2025 draft is the downgrading, and in some cases, omission of commercial development pressures. The latest draft downplays the threat of commercial development and fails to properly acknowledge or assess impacts such as direct habitat destruction. These pressures were explicitly recognised in the previous plan, yet are now absent.

The timing of this shift is difficult to ignore. The proposed VRET involves precisely the kind of commercial activity and habitat destruction that



is no longer being meaningfully addressed in the draft plan.

As a result, the risk of physical damage to wetlands has been downplayed, leaving the draft plan failing to address one of Western Port Bay's most serious threats.

We've raised these concerns in our submission. Ignoring known risks only undermines community trust in environmental decision-making.

More broadly, this highlights the urgent need for a marine spatial plan (MSP) for Western Port Bay, backed by a dedicated fund to run in parallel to the VRET. An MSP would bring community, industry and government together to plan the bay's future in a coordinated way. It would protect habitats and wildlife, provide certainty, close planning gaps and restore confidence that Western Port Bay is being managed responsibly. 🌿

Glad tidings Nature news to bring a smile to your face



Skink babies boost colony

Eleven Endangered Guthega Skinks (*Liopholis guthega*) released into a protected community in the Alpine National Park could soon become 13, with a female known as Omeo due to give birth in March.

One of Australia's only alpine lizards, Guthega Skinks live on 'sky islands' above 1,600 metres in two isolated alpine locations – the Bogong High Plains and Mt Kosciuszko. As the climate warms, their alpine zone has been retracting, and there is nowhere higher for them to go. More frequent bushfires pose an additional threat to their survival, with multiple colonies lost in the 2003 fires.

A captive breeding program by Zoos Victoria has culminated in the release of the lizards to a specially designed enclosure furnished with granite rocks and hundreds of plants, including Alpine Mint Bush and Snow



↑ Guthega Skink | ZOOS VICTORIA

Beard-heath, their favourite food. In December, seven skinks joined an initial cohort of four. All have survived, with the imminent arrival of babies a huge milestone. 'It's going awesome,' said skink specialist Dr Zak Atkins. 'It just looks like a normal functioning wild colony, which is exactly what we wanted.' 😊

Source: theguardian.com/environment/2026/jan/29/skink-endangered-alpine-lizard-numbers-alpine-national-park-victoria



Salty Science with Tilly Webb

Tasmanian Blenny *Parablennius tasmanius*

If you're patient, still and keep your eyes trained on rocky crevices in shallow waters, you might just be rewarded with a visit from a Tasmanian Blenny!

Spotting this elusive, character-filled fish can be done in tidal pools; however, your best chance is with a snorkel in very shallow waters. Large rocks covered with tube worm clumps are usually where I strike gold.

The Tasmanian Blenny is a small slender fish covered in a tough slimy skin (no scales), mottled brown, with two distinctive fringed tentacles over their eyes. If you've ever had the pleasure to spot one of these fish then you'll already know they're exceedingly odd. Common blenny behaviours include erratically whipping themselves to face any disturbance head-on and watching with a tilted head, each eye aimed individually like a chameleon tracking two errant flies.

Many unique features of the Blenny are adaptations that help them weather the dramatically dynamic intertidal habitat they call home. Like a cat's whiskers (specifically the eyebrow whiskers), the blenny's tentacles (or cirri) are sensory organs that help them understand and navigate their environment. Cirri are covered in microscopic hair-like sensory cells that record and translate minute changes in water temperature, chemistry, and movement.

Pectoral and pelvic fins are rounded and positioned to allow blennies to sit comfortably on their undersides and push themselves in small increments over their rocky



↑ Tasmanian Blenny | SASCHA SCHULZ/INATURALIST

habitat. This particular movement is often described as 'walking', but I would argue that a better descriptor is 'flinging'.

Over 100 species of blenny can be found in Victoria but the Tasmanian Blenny is my favourite. I always find them grouped together, weaving in and out of the crevices in a single rock. It makes me imagine that each rock holds an internal Blenny city, and all the rocky shallows are a vast Blenny Empire.

Next time you find yourself in shallow waters, do yourself a favour and investigate all the hidey-holes in sight. You might just find a Tasmanian Blenny. 🌿

Tilly Webb is studying marine science at Deakin University

Stonefly makes federal list

After years of advocacy by VNPA, academics and the Entomological Society of Victoria, Mt Donna Buang Wingless Stoneflies (*Riekoperla darlingtoni*) have been listed as Critically Endangered under federal nature laws (*Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*).

In 2020, Yarra Ranges Council proposed building a mountain bike development straight through their home. In 2024, the Victorian Government knocked back our application to have a two to four square kilometre area declared critical habitat under state nature laws (*Flora*

and *Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*). This was despite the independent Scientific Advisory Committee agreeing with the need for a declared critical habitat.

With the Federal Government finally listing this iconic animal, Mt Donna Buang Wingless Stoneflies will get recognition and the increased protection of federal nature laws. Hopefully this will end further attempts to build inappropriate developments in their tiny home range. 🌿

Jordan Crook, Parks and Nature Campaigner



↑ Mt Donna Buang Wingless Stonefly | ANDREW DOUCH

Opportunity lost

Epic failure for an epic park



JORDAN CROOK,
PARKS AND NATURE
CAMPAIGNER,
UNPACKS A LONG-
AWAITED REVIEW

When the Andrews Government ended native forest logging, they promised big additions to Victoria's protected area network, particularly in the Central Highlands. In late January 2026, the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) handed down its 'Assessment of the values of state forests in the Central Highlands'. The report is based on findings from the Eminent Panel for Community Engagement (EPCE) released in October 2025.

However, the EPCE process has delivered protection for just 13,500 ha: the Yarra Tributaries Forest Reserve, which the government agreed to add to Yarra Ranges National Park. That reserve currently sits within a closed water catchment where public access is prohibited. This closed status will be retained. So realistically, this patch of forest was already a protected area.

Expert advice rejected

The Eminent Panel's final recommendations included expanding the national parks estate to link many existing smaller parks, establishing significant areas as a forest park, which potentially permits forestry practices similar to those in the Otways Forest Park. It also recommended creating a new land tenure type, 'cultural reserve', featuring high levels of Traditional Owner management.

On the other hand, in its final assessment VEAC maintained that a large, expanded national park in the Central Highlands (unit areas 1 to 4 on the map) remains necessary, despite the government's rejection. VEAC's suggestion for 'a large, protected area' encompassing areas with outstanding natural values would have linked the existing national and state parks. It was not supported.

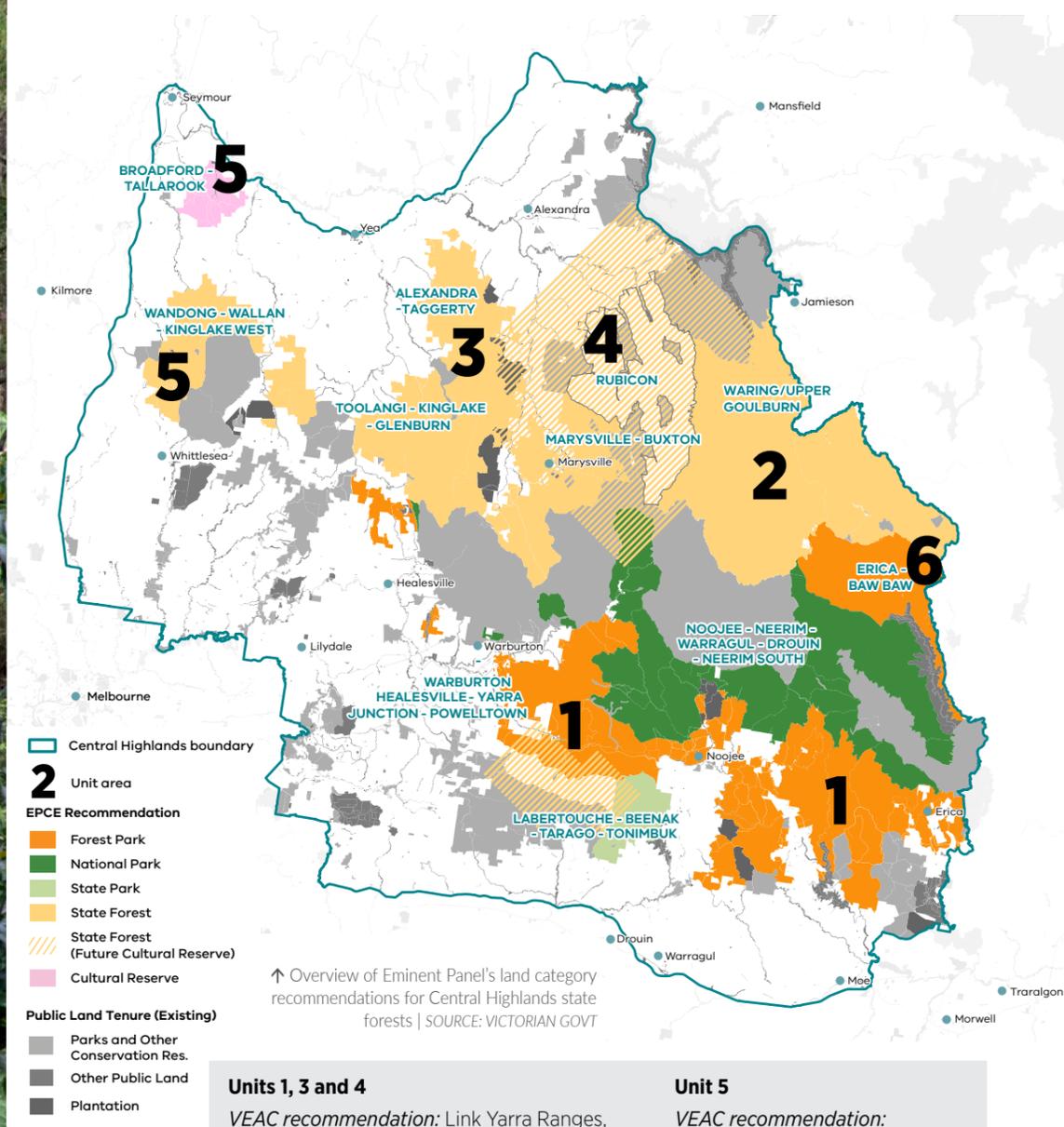
↑ Noojee State Forest, Wurundjeri Country | JUSTIN CALLY

There's strong community support for nature protection and expanded national parks. This disappointing outcome is a missed opportunity for the Allan Government to create the Great Forest National Park. A missed opportunity to give habitats and wildlife the chance to recover from decades of logging damage.

Hopes and threats

There's still hope. While threats from logging (which could return with the stroke of a pen), mining and inappropriate development persist for these forests, so does the campaign to protect them through new and expanded national parks.

VEAC's final assessment strengthens the case for expanded protection in the Central Highlands. 🌿



Units 1, 3 and 4

VEAC recommendation: Link Yarra Ranges, Kinglake, Lake Eildon and Baw Baw national parks and Bunyip, Cathedral Range and Moondarra state parks as an expanded national park.

EPCE proposal: Small additions to national parks, large areas to forest park, addition to Bunyip State Park. A cultural reserve above Bunyip State Park and the Rubicon area, with large areas to the north to remain state forests (unprotected).

Govt decision: Yarra Tributaries Forest Reserve added to Yarra Ranges National Park. Currently already protected in a closed water catchment where public access is not permitted.

Unit 2

VEAC recommendation: Could provide an opportunity to link the Yarra Ranges and Lake Eildon national parks. Has a high level of uses not generally compatible with national parks like hunting and minerals extraction. Forest park or regional park would be commensurate with the values and allow for these uses.

EPCE proposal: State forest.

Govt decision: No change.

Unit 5

VEAC recommendation: Several public land categories commensurate with the broadly lower natural values and uses that would conflict with protected area designations. More detailed information, including information from community engagement, is required for this unit.

EPCE proposal: Cultural reserve for Tallarook State Forest area. Rest to remain state forest.

Govt decision: No change.

Unit 6

VEAC recommendation: Area of outstanding natural values commensurate with a national park designation. Covers upper Thomson Catchment with crucial importance for water supply. Conflict with protected area status such as mineral extraction.

EPCE proposal: Forest park.

Govt decision: No change.

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

Who's protecting our marine parks?

SEVERE GOVERNMENT CUTS ARE PUTTING OUR MARINE HABITATS AT RISK, SAY SHANNON HURLEY, MARK RODRIGUE AND CHRIS SMYTH

Victoria's busiest marine waterways and protected areas are now being asked to fend for themselves. For those working in marine management, the warning signs are too familiar and increasingly hard to ignore.

Shannon Hurley, Nature Conservation Campaigner with VNPA, sees the consequences of recent government decisions already being felt on the water. After the state government pushed ahead with cuts that removed more than half of frontline fisheries officers in Port Phillip and Western Port bays, large stretches of our most heavily used and most loved waters are left with far fewer guardians looking out for them.

Nature groups, recreational fishers and industry bodies all raised the same concern at the time: fewer officers on

the water means fewer checks, weaker deterrence, and more opportunity for illegal fishing to slip through the cracks – particularly in marine protected areas that rely on active enforcement to maintain protection.

The recent cuts further weaken an already overstretched compliance system. With fewer fisheries officers on the water, the rules become easier to ignore and more tempting to test.

When enforcement does occur, it sheds light on the scale of the problem. Just last month, two men were caught at Mt Eliza with 147 abalone – 144 of them undersized. For context, the daily bag limit is just five per person! The uncomfortable question is how many similar cases fly under the radar.

While community members are increasingly stepping in to report illegal activity, they cannot – and should not – be expected to take on the role that should be carried out by trained enforcement officers. It's a risky place to be for the health of our bays, and for the communities that depend on them.

Recovery and risk at Barwon Bluff

One of the clearest examples is playing out at Barwon Bluff Marine Sanctuary, where locals have been watching both recovery and risk unfold side by side. Mark Rodrigue, a member of Friends of the Bluff, has spent years observing changes in this small but ecologically important sanctuary.

Community members at Barwon Bluff, and at several other marine sanctuaries, have observed encouraging signs of recovery after only a few years of protection. Rock lobsters have been recorded in locations where they were previously absent, in some cases within metres of the shoreline at low tide.

Southern Rock Lobsters (*Jasus edwardsii*), play a critical role on Victoria's rocky reefs as both keystone predators and scavengers. Healthy lobster populations regulate herbivorous grazers such as sea urchins, maintaining the balance of reef habitats. Large lobsters are even capable of preying on Black-spined

Sea Urchins, which are causing significant damage to kelp forests across south-eastern Australia.

Since Victoria established its no-take network of 13 marine national parks and 11 marine sanctuaries over 20 years ago, research has shown clear benefits to nature, including more and larger rock lobsters inside protected areas like Point Addis, Merri, Discovery Bay, and Wilsons Promontory, than in nearby unprotected sites.

However, this success also brings risk. Despite clear signage and spatial information readily available through the Victorian Fishing Guide app, community members have repeatedly witnessed lobsters being illegally taken from protected areas. While these incidents have been reported, enforcement responses have often been limited. In small sanctuaries, even the loss of a few large lobsters can quickly undo years of recovery.

Pattern across the network

What's happening at Barwon Bluff isn't isolated. Similar reports of illegal recreational fishing are emerging from Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuary near Beaumaris, and Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park.

No doubt we'll receive more reports of illegal fishing from protected areas across Victoria while these draconian cuts remain.

Adding to these challenges, management responsibility for seven marine

protected areas along the Great Ocean Road, from Torquay to Warrnambool, has shifted to the recently established Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority (GORCAPA). These include Point Addis and Twelve Apostles marine national parks, and five marine sanctuaries: Point Danger, Eagle Rock, Marengo, The Arches and Merri.

While the transition to GORCAPA continues, there is little clarity on future management of these marine protected areas. Key questions remain about long-term research, compliance and enforcement, and how protection benefits will be maintained.

Without clear commitments and effective on-water enforcement, Victoria's 'national parks for the sea', risk being undermined, leaving globally significant habitats vulnerable to illegal poaching and degradation.

Declining commitment to nature

For former VNPA marine campaigner Chris Smyth, these local reports point to a much bigger problem. Despite marine national parks and sanctuaries being established with overwhelming community support and a bipartisan parliamentary vote, political support for the network has waned.

In 2014 both Labor and Liberals announced a moratorium on the establishment of any new marine national parks and sanctuaries.

Are the cuts a backdoor to undermining the network, without the need for the messy political process and community outrage that would come with any attempt to downgrade its high-level protection?

A pattern is clearly emerging of a declining commitment to protect nature. These cuts are coupled with the government's recent announcement that it would not establish any more land-based national parks, and the removal of both the Victorian Environment Assessment Council and the Victorian Marine and Coastal Council (see p. 6).

Under the Silver Review, the government plans to merge Fisheries and Game Management into a new Outdoor Regulation body to cut costs. With fisheries enforcement already gutted and marine park compliance stretched thin, it's unclear whether this will strengthen oversight or simply widen the growing enforcement gap.

It's time for the government to reverse the cuts, and the major parties to renew their commitments to marine conservation. They need to support adequate management, strong compliance, and expansion of the marine national parks and sanctuaries network. 🙌

Shannon Hurley (Nature Conservation Campaigner), Mark Rodrigue (Friends of the Bluff) and Chris Smyth (former VNPA marine campaigner)

↓ Southern Rock Lobster | JOHN TURNBULL



Time to stick up for nature!



AS POLITICAL LEADERS CONTINUE TO MAKE DECISIONS THAT UNDERMINE NATURE, A BOLD AND HOPEFUL MOVEMENT DETERMINED TO TURN THE TIDE IS TAKING SHAPE, REVEAL **MATT RUCHEL**, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND **SHANNON HURLEY**, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER

A new long-term campaign is launching to defend and expand Victoria's national parks. With a state election in November, an alliance of nature organisations, grassroots groups and community leaders is preparing to mobilise as never before.

VNPA is joining forces with fellow nature organisations to show that nature protection is mainstream, bipartisan and deeply Victorian. Together, we aim to defend our legacy and strengthen our protected areas for future generations.

To understand why this campaign is so urgently needed, let's look at what has happened to our parks in just a few short years.

An alarming shift

Victoria's national parks protect the very best of our state: from towering Mountain Ash forests to windswept coastal wetlands where migratory birds thrive. They're places of beauty, refuge and memory, woven into the fabric of who we are as Victorians. Visitation is at record highs. People are seeking connection to nature in greater numbers than ever before.

Yet at the very moment nature needs us most, our state government is abandoning our protected areas and dismantling the independent voices that give Victorians a say.

Plans for long-promised park additions in the Central Highlands and East Gippsland have been abandoned (see p 14). Parks Victoria has been put through destabilising reviews and restructures, with 145 staff moved to other authorities in 2023 and forecast budget cuts of at least \$94 million. Staffing levels are at all-time lows. Park

funding sits at less than half of one per cent of the state budget.

The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council is being abolished, along with the Victorian Marine and Coastal Council (see p 6). Thirty-three Wildlife Officers from the Office of the Conservation Regulator have been sacked. Thirty-nine Fisheries Officers and hundreds of staff at the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action have been axed. Meanwhile, an illegally created track network in Chiltern–Mt Pilot National Park was legalised rather than rehabilitated, and then announced by the Environment Minister over social media. Deer shooting has been allowed in Errinundra and Snowy River national parks, legitimising activity that was previously unlawful. Promised reforms to the *Wildlife Act*, including declaration of feral deer as a pest species and establishment of an independent regulator, have stalled. Logging loopholes remain open.

In 2023, Premier Daniel Andrews told Victorians: 'The end of native forest logging will deliver the largest expansion to our public forests reserve system in the state's history.'

By 2024, the message had shifted, with Premier Jacinta Allan declaring: 'The government will not be creating any new national parks.'

The situation has worsened with the change in premier. The Opposition offers no comfort either, with the

National Party promising to reinstate native forest logging if they win the election. The progressive crossbench (the Greens, Animal Justice and Legalise Cannabis Party) are working hard to give nature a voice. But we're still sliding backward.

Escalating our efforts

This is not the time to weaken protections or reduce oversight. It's the time to strengthen them.

The threat is very real. If we want our national parks protected and expanded, funding restored, conservation returned to the core purpose of park management, to make sure native forest logging can never creep back through loopholes, and habitats across the state properly looked after, we need to escalate our efforts.

We've been working with fellow nature organisations to stick up for nature. It's clear to us we must work together, urgently and strategically, to counter this assault on nature. This means:

- Uniting and activating all our networks.
- Building deeper relationships in our communities.
- Being highly visible to state MPs and election candidates across all parties.
- Using shared messages and coordinated tactics to demonstrate broad public support.
- And importantly, lifting up new voices in regional communities, tourism operators, health advocates, young people – to show that nature protection is mainstream. It's bipartisan. It's Victorian.

Victorians have always shown up when nature is under threat. Now it's time to turn our deep love for nature into political power.

Look out for our next update on how you can get involved. Something exciting is coming! 🙌

VNPA is joining forces with fellow nature organisations to show that nature protection is mainstream, bipartisan and deeply Victorian. Together, we aim to defend our legacy and strengthen our protected areas for future generations.

Nature advocacy in the digital age



JACOB L'HUILLIER LUNT, ACTING MANAGER, COMMUNICATIONS,

ON MAKING YOUR VOICE COUNT ONLINE AND AVOIDING DIGITAL EXHAUSTION

The online world has certainly become a confusing, and often volatile, space to exist in. Its influence is undeniable. Social media platforms, blogs and independent media posts have become crucial spaces where campaigns are won or lost, where public opinion is shaped, and where nature defenders amplify their message.

This digital landscape is increasingly complex, with sophisticated algorithms, organised disinformation campaigns, emerging deepfake technology and the constant risk of burnout. But it's a place we can all have a big impact on sticking up for nature! Whether you're an infrequent social media user or a regular scroller, here's some tips to help you survive, thrive and increase your impact in the digital world.

Social media algorithms continue to evolve at a rapid rate. When you

engage with content about national parks or nature protection, you're not simply communicating with other users, you're also communicating with the platform itself.

Research has shown false information spreads six times faster than verified content, and is therefore more valuable to the platform. Sensational, emotionally charged content, whether accurate or not, receives algorithmic priority over careful, factual advocacy.

To help combat this it's important to know how different types of engagement work. Sharing content pushes it beyond your immediate network, signalling strong endorsement to the platform. Thoughtful, substantive comments demonstrate genuine engagement to both human readers and algorithmic systems. Even simple 'likes' contribute to visibility, though less significantly.

In 2026, algorithms prioritise 'meaningful interaction'. Posts that generate substantive discussion from authentic accounts get amplified while generic responses or behaviour resembling bot activity get suppressed.

When you contribute a considered comment to nature content, you're helping train these systems to recognise nature conservation as valuable public discourse. Although 'substantive discussion' doesn't always need to be public. There is considerably more value in sharing posts to group chats or direct messages.

Navigating hostile engagement

The tactics used to derail nature discussions have become more sophisticated. Traditional trolls, with their inflammatory language and attention-seeking behaviour, remain easy to identify. But newer approaches pose greater challenges.

'Concern trolls' adopt a sympathetic tone while systematically undermining conservation positions. Another tactic, known as 'sea-lioning', involves endless disingenuous questions designed to exhaust advocates into abandoning the discussion.

Perhaps most concerning is coordinated inauthentic behaviour. During debates over Victorian park legislation and bushfire management policy, waves of suspiciously similar comments have appeared across nature posts within hours. Common indicators include recently created accounts, generic usernames with number sequences, minimal posting history, and eerily similar phrasing across multiple accounts.

The tactics used to derail nature discussions have become more sophisticated. Traditional trolls, with their inflammatory language and attention-seeking behaviour, remain easy to identify. But newer approaches pose greater challenges.

The AI deepfake threat

The technology for creating convincing fakes is now widely accessible, while detection technology remains inadequate. We're reportedly 'decades away' from having technology that could conclusively tell a real from a fake. This creates a dangerous asymmetry: bad actors can generate convincing fakes faster than defenders can debunk them.

Even more troubling is the 'liar's dividend' – as awareness of deepfakes grows, bad actors can dismiss authentic evidence by simply claiming it's fabricated. Genuine documentation of destruction of nature can be waved away with 'that's obviously AI', and the claim alone creates enough doubt to neutralise the evidence. On top of that, research has shown the more educated people become in AI deepfakes, the less likely they are to believe real content. People who take the time to educate themselves on this threat find it increasingly hard to believe anything they see online. This makes combating AI deepfakes very difficult.

Supporting trusted sources is incredibly important. Always track something you've seen online to a trusted source before believing it.

Strategic engagement

Not every online argument deserves your time and energy. Genuine questions from real people merit thoughtful responses. But there's no point burning yourself out engaging with bad actors.

Here's an important reality: research shows when people encounter false or misleading content, only 16.2 per cent actively intervene to counter it. Nearly half choose to ignore it, while a small percentage actually share it further. Those who do intervene face



↑ AI-generated image of a dead whale in front of wind turbines, accompanying a fearmongering story about offshore wind | GIZMODO/DALL-E

significant barriers – fear of social conflict, concern about damaging relationships, uncertainty about effective correction strategies, and sheer exhaustion from the perceived effort required.

Bad-faith actors, however, aren't seeking understanding. Before engaging, consider: Is this account genuine? Will this exchange reach persuadable audiences? Do you have the energy for this conversation?

You're never obligated to educate hostile strangers, particularly when doing so comes at personal cost.

When you encounter serious misinformation or coordinated attacks, documentation often proves more valuable than direct engagement. Screenshot the content, report it through proper channels, and move on. Liberal use of blocking functions isn't retreating from debate, it's protecting your capacity to continue sticking up for nature over the long term.

Misinformation vs disinformation

Understanding the difference matters for determining your response. Misinformation means incorrect information shared without malicious intent – perhaps outdated information about park boundaries or management plans. Gentle correction typically works: 'I think this information may be outdated – here's the current situation.'

continued overpage....

Nature advocacy in the digital age continued...

Disinformation involves deliberately false content designed to deceive – e.g. coordinated campaigns falsely claiming protected areas harm local economies or that national parks increase bushfire risk. Directly arguing against disinformation often backfires by amplifying the false claim.

Fact-checking isn't enough

Recent research reveals something uncomfortable: even when people know information is false, it can still influence their beliefs. In one study, participants who read negative content about a minority group showed increased prejudice – even when they were explicitly told, with a disclaimer, the content was fabricated and misleading. The disclaimer didn't prevent the attitude change.

Why? Because people evaluate information through the lens of their existing beliefs and social identities, not primarily on factual accuracy. Someone who sees conservation as threatening their livelihood or lifestyle will be more receptive to anti-nature disinformation, regardless of fact-checking labels.

This doesn't mean we abandon fact-checking or corrections. It means we need to do more of this:

- **Build relationships before presenting facts.** People are more likely to accept corrections from someone they know and trust than from a stranger's debunking article. The social relationship provides an authentication layer that platform warnings cannot.
- **Address underlying concerns.** If someone fears that park expansion threatens rural communities, simply correcting their factual errors won't shift their position. Acknowledge the concern, then provide evidence that conservation supports community wellbeing.
- **Focus on proactive truth-telling.** Rather than chasing every false claim, consistently share compelling, accurate information that helps people develop better frameworks for evaluating what they encounter.

Sustainable advocacy

In 2026, people are overwhelmed by sheer volume and distressing content of what's posted online and are increasingly retreating from political topics. Many people in our community report feeling this exhaustion.

The mental health impact of online advocacy is real and measurable. International research tracking young people's engagement with social media found that frequent exposure to false news and problematic online engagement correlated with significantly higher depression and anxiety scores. The mechanisms are clear: cognitive overload from constant monitoring, exposure to emotionally charged content, disruption of sleep and offline relationships, and the psychological toll of watching misinformation spread faster than you can counter it.

Here's how to increase your impact while combating the online overload:

- **If you're creating content, post less frequently but more meaningfully.** Use accessible language that connects nature protection to values people already hold – a love of being in nature, community wellbeing, children's future, public health. Avoid jargon that excludes non-specialist audiences.
- **Recognise the emotional labour.** That exhaustion you feel from online advocacy isn't personal failure, it's a rational response to an environment designed to overwhelm. Studies show that the psychological toll of countering misinformation is significant: fear of conflict, concern about relationships, uncertainty about effectiveness, and sheer cognitive fatigue from the constant vigilance required.
- **Manage your own digital consumption ruthlessly.** Unfollow accounts that spike stress without adding value. Establish clear boundaries around when and how much you engage with social media. Sustainable activism cannot coexist with constant doom-scrolling. Your

effectiveness depends on maintaining your own wellbeing.

- **Build support networks.** Connect with other advocates who understand these unique pressures. Having peers who can confirm you're not overreacting to organised disinformation makes the work sustainable.
- **Accept that stepping back is strategic, not surrender.** Research shows that when people encounter false content, nearly half choose to ignore it rather than engage. While active intervention matters, passive avoidance isn't moral failure, it's sometimes necessary self-preservation.

The longer view

Effective online advocacy isn't measured in won arguments or consumed content. It's built through strategic engagement that amplifies accurate information, strengthens community connections, and preserves your capacity to show up consistently.

Algorithms, trolls, AI deepfakes and misinformation campaigns aren't disappearing. But neither are committed advocates. Your consistent presence – showing up when it matters, stepping back when needed – shapes culture over time. Every thoughtful comment, every genuine share, every moment you choose not to feed the outrage machine contributes to building the public support that ultimately protects Victoria's parks and wildlife.

As the campaign for the central west national parks demonstrated, lasting victories come from sustained effort over years, not viral moments. That model remains our strength in the digital age. The conservation movement needs people who can maintain this work for the long haul. 🌿



How to boost your impact

A guide to online engagement for nature advocates



ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE	TIME	IMPACT ON THE ALGORITHM (Robots)	IMPACT ON PEOPLE (Real humans!)	RISK
01 Like/react a post Lowest effort, still contributes to visibility. Every like signals value to the algorithm.	~2s	Low impact	Low impact	Low
02 Share to direct message/group chat Highest value-to-effort ratio. Reaches people who trust you, and platforms score private shares highly.	~10s	High impact	High impact	Low
03 Share/repost (public) a post Pushes content beyond your network. Signals strong endorsement to the platform.	~10s	High impact	High impact	Med
04 Report & block a user Protective action. Reduces bad-faith visibility and preserves your capacity for the long haul.	~30s	Low impact	Low impact	Low
05 Screenshot & document More valuable than engaging directly with disinfo. Creates a record without amplifying the content.	~1 min	Low impact	Low impact	Low
06 Thoughtful comment Trains algorithms to value nature conversations. Genuine engagement is amplified in current algorithms.	~2 min	High impact	High impact	Low
07 Correcting misinformation Worth it for genuine questions from real people. Can backfire by amplifying the false claim.*	~3 min	High impact	High impact	Med
08 Engaging a bad-faith actor High cost, low return. Drains your energy while giving the troll exactly what they want: attention.	5 min+	Low impact	Low impact	High

Risks include: emotional toll, amplifying false claims, time lost from constructive advocacy, exposure to coordinated harassment. *For tips on correcting misinformation, search online for the 'truth sandwich' method.

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Roger Chao



✦ Roger Chao on the Australian Alps Walking Track, Baw Baw National Park, Wurundjeri & Gunaikurnai Country | SUPPLIED



ROGER CHAO IS A WRITER AND ACTIVIST WHO RECENTLY LET US KNOW HE'S INCLUDED A GIFT TO VNPA IN HIS WILL. WE ASKED HIM ABOUT HIS PASSION AND CONNECTION WITH NATURE

How did you first come to care for nature?

My first true teachers were the bush gullies near my home, where moss and leaf-litter held universes invisible to hurried eyes. Even from a young age, I felt that there was something more to life than just acting in our own interests.

As I grew older, that intuition ripened into conviction. I saw that societies which honour their landscapes tend to be wiser, calmer, more enduring than those that merely extract from them. The destruction of nature began to appear to me not as an environmental issue, but as a moral one, and a recognition that we are part of nature. To care for nature, then, is to care for the best part of ourselves: our capacity for wonder, restraint, and gratitude.

Every birdcall at dawn, every filament of fungal thread beneath the soil, reminds me that life is a chorus, not a solo. The task of an ethical human being is not to dominate that chorus, but to listen, to harmonise, and to leave space for others to sing.

How did you first come to support VNPA?

When I first encountered VNPA's work, I was struck by its moral clarity. It was not driven by outrage or vanity, but by something rarer, care that is steady, informed, and deeply human. The Association seemed to me less a lobbying body than a civic conscience. It reminded me that stewardship is not just a political act but a civilisational one, involving citizen science, habitat restoration and nature connection. The parks, forests, and coastlines it defends are not luxuries but valuable in their own right.

I have previously participated in ReefWatch, and more recently I attended a NatureWatch spotlighting event in the Dandenong Ranges where I was again reminded about the forgotten voices affected by salvage logging.

Supporting VNPA felt like aligning myself not merely with conservation, but with civilisation, with the idea that progress must never come at the expense of nature. I have often thought that every healthy society needs its teachers and its stewards: one to remind us what beauty means, the other to ensure it survives. VNPA bridges both callings.

Tell us about a plant, animal or place that is special to you.

There is a stand of Snow Gums (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*) near the top of Mount St Phillack (in Baw Baw National Park, Gunaikurnai Country) which I visit whenever I can. They are not the tallest trees, or the most dramatic, but they possess a quiet eloquence that humbles me. Their trunks twist like slow-moving rivers of colour, silver, jade, ochre, violet. After rain, the colours are even more vibrant and magical.

Each time I stand among them, I feel as though I am in the company of elders: beings that have endured fire, frost, and drought, yet continue to sculpt beauty from hardship.

The Snow Gum's beauty lies not in abundance but in restraint. It survives the harshest conditions, yet never crudely. There is philosophy in that, a lesson about how to live wisely on a volatile planet: to be supple yet steadfast, scarred yet serene; to bend without breaking one's essence.

Can you share with us some of what your writing about nature tries to capture?

In my writing about nature, I try to restore a language civilisation has half-forgotten, the grammar of belonging. Modern speech often treats the natural world as backdrop or commodity. I write to resist that. My aim is to help readers rediscover nature as kinship, not scenery,

as conversation, not possession. Language should be a bridge, not a boundary, between people and the planet. At its core, my writing is a meditation on reciprocity. Every act of seeing is also an act of shaping. The way we attend to the world alters what it becomes. I try to capture not just the appearance of nature but the feeling of reverence, the discipline of noticing, the humility of co-existence.

I write to remind myself, and others, that the deepest intelligence is not invention, but attention.

Nature, to me, is not a pastime, it is the text in which I read the meaning of life itself.

You reached out to let us know you've included us in your Will. Can you share some thoughts on your decision to include such a gift?

Including VNPA in my Will was not an act of charity but of coherence. It seemed only natural that what has guided my life, care for the earth, should also guide what I leave behind. To support nature's defenders beyond my own lifetime is to affirm that gratitude is stronger than mortality.

A bequest, to me, is not a transaction but a continuation of conversation. It says to future generations: We saw you coming, and we tried to leave you something unbroken. In a culture obsessed with the immediate, there is deep dignity in thinking beyond one's own horizon.

This bequest feels like a thank-you note to the planet, a final act of gratitude written in the language nature understands best: the language of care, continuity, and courage that outlives the hand that signs it. 🌿

Roger Chao's longform reflection on bushwalking, 'The Track Through the Scribbly Gums' can be read online at vnpa.org.au/publications/the-track-through-the-scribbly-gums

Make nature part of your legacy

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

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

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

Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park Paul Schliebs

For questions or more information on how to leave a gift, please visit vnpa.org.au/gifts-in-wills



SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES CURRENTLY AVAILABLE FOR

Grassland Resurrection

Connecting knowledge, research and management
8 MAY 2026 @ FITZROY TOWN HALL

Be part of a collaboration of restoration leaders securing the long-term conservation of grassland remnants.

- Align your brand with best practice and current research on bush regeneration practice.
- Be recognised for your leadership within the restoration industry.

• Connect with individuals and organisations who deliver change within their sector.

- Access and engage with people from bush regeneration, conservation, government, land management and consultancy sectors.
- Increase your brand visibility.



Contact Suzanne Pritchard: education@aabr.org.au, 0407 002 921. Event details: aabr.org.au/event/vic-forum-grasslands

Unwanted Visitors

with Feral Beryl 

Orange Pore Fungus

When we think about invasive species threatening our parks and reserves, deer, foxes, and blackberries spring to mind. But it's not just introduced plants and animals causing problems. We've got weedy fungi too! And there's a bright orange culprit spreading across Victoria.

Orange Pore Fungus (*Favolaschia calocera*) is small but hard to miss. It lives on fallen logs, popping up clusters of small bright orange, ping pong-shaped sporing bodies in Autumn. As the name suggests, underneath they're covered in distinctive tiny pores.

Who invited it?

This weedy fungus is native to Asia. It first popped up in a few bushland reserves in Melbourne in 2004, likely arriving as microscopic spores hitching a ride on imported goods. It's now spread from south-east Queensland to Tasmania and to south-west Western Australia.

Why is it unwanted?

Orange Pore Fungus breaks down decaying wood for dinner, much like many of our native fungi. Every log it colonises is one less food source.

Much the same as a weedy plant, it's taking over habitats, crowding out native fungi.

How do we evict this overstaying guest?

Once established, this invasive fungus is extremely difficult to control. The best strategy is stopping it spreading to new places.

Its spores stick easily to clothing and shoes, turning every bushwalker into an unwitting courier. You can help stop the spread by cleaning your shoes thoroughly after every walk. A stiff brush to remove dirt in boot treads and a spray with a 70% methylated spirits in 30% water mix can make a real difference in slowing the spread.

Pop a cleaning kit in your car with a stiff brush and spray bottle of disinfectant, to use after visiting parks and reserves. This will also help stop the spread of weeds and plant diseases! 🌿



↑ Orange Pore Fungus | MEGHAN LINDSAY

Art imbued with nature



PENELOPE AITKEN
IS AN ARTIST DEEPLY
CONNECTED TO NATURE

I make paintings, objects and installations that reflect on the impermanence of living things; on reincarnation, rust, decay and new life. Many works are also informed by history, religion, botany and poetry.

My strong desire to create sits in tension with not wanting to create more waste. I frequently rework old paintings and make new things from existing and salvaged materials where possible or, better still, make new materials from plants and earth.

For instance, *All that we are (Eucalyptus ellipse)*, portrays the life cycle of part of one tree. It includes eucalyptus leaves, the ink distilled from the leaves depicted and the mould spores that grew on the ink as it cooled.

Rock gods (& residuals) is a painting I've reworked several times over 16 years.

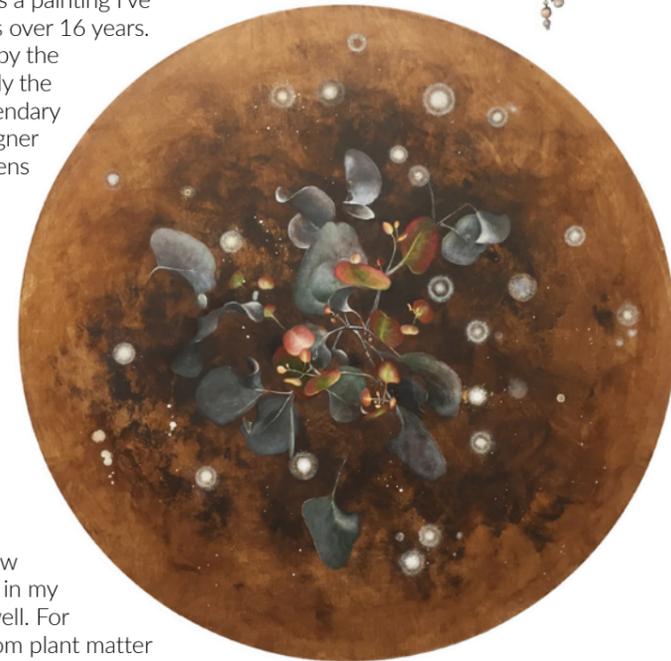
It was initially inspired by the gardens, and specifically the rock placement, of legendary Eltham landscape designer Gordon Ford. His gardens helped Australians let go a little, to allow indigenous plants to grow straggly around artfully placed rocks, and to make new spaces for local wildlife.

While I've painted plants, fungi and rocks for a long time, the shapeshifting and ephemeral qualities of natural systems are now increasingly embodied in my making processes as well. For instance, I make ink from plant matter which adds many rich brown tones to my palette of more conventional oil paints. I think about whether these handmade paints will last, or become 'fugitive', and whether that ultimately matters in 100 years' time.

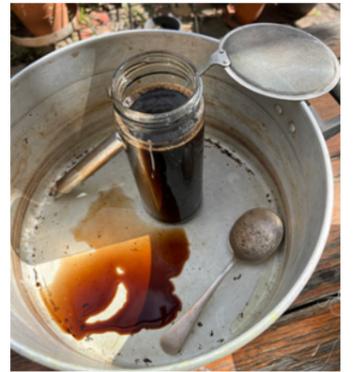
I'm also a member of Paradoxa Collective. Most recently, Paradoxa developed 'Grassroots action draw: Postcards from friends' held in Federation Square and Toolangi State Forest to inspire people to send messages to policy makers about the wildlife and habitats they love and want to protect. 🌿



↑ *Rock gods (& residuals)*, 2011-26, oil and plant ink on linen, wild clay & bead tassel, 120 x 99 cm



↑ *All that we are (Eucalyptus ellipse)*, 2017, oil & plant ink on board, 90cm



↑ Eucalyptus ink making



↑ Paint making with plants

See more of Penelope's work at
penelopeaitken.com
paradoxacollective.net

ALL ARTWORK: PENELOPE AITKEN. PROFILE PHOTO: ROD CEBALLOS

DISCOVERING THE LATEST EXCITING RESEARCH INTO NATURE IN VICTORIA

↓ Measuring the diversity of plant reproductive traits and key environmental drivers like temperature and pH in a Gravelly Pavement Herbfield. It's a very rare, range-restricted, groundwater-driven ecosystem in the Australian Alps, characterised by open rocky substrate, high water flow and a mosaic of cushion-forming plants | JERONIMO VAZQUEZ-RAMIREZ

ALPINE PLANT SURVIVAL IN A WARMING WORLD



DANNY WHITE DESCRIBES HIS RESEARCH INTO THE REPRODUCTION OF ALPINE PLANTS



↑ X-ray image of a Silky Snow-daisy seed collection showing high seed fill rates. High levels of seed predation and variable seed set made sourcing seed for this plant challenging.

We acknowledge this location is part of the unceded traditional lands and waters of the Bidwell, Dhudhuroa, Gunaikurnai, Jaithmathang, Taungurung & Nindj-Ngudjam Ngarigu Monero and recognise their ongoing role in caring for Country

What's the elevator pitch for your PhD?

My research investigates how climate change in the Victorian Alps—shorter snow seasons, warming, and drought—threatens keystone wetland plants by altering germination and seedling establishment. This work extends to a study on the population genetics of one of the most striking members of spring-fed wetlands – the Silky Snow-daisy (*Celmisia sericophylla*).

On Australia's highest peaks, hillside springs give life to a unique diversity of plants. These spring-fed habitats are highly restricted in their extent and distribution and support a remarkable diversity of semi-aquatic plants. Many of these are rare and threatened.

The survival of these plant communities in our landscape will depend on future water supply and snow cover, and we need to learn how well these iconic plant communities will cope with more stressful future conditions. Climate change is happening fast in the Alps – snow cover is dwindling year to year, rainfall is less predictable,

and heatwaves are becoming more frequent and intense.

For plants to maintain healthy populations, successful reproduction is critical. Many alpine plants can reproduce both clonally (a common adaptation to extreme conditions) and by seed. However, regeneration from seed is important because it produces the variation species need to adapt to environmental change.

Alpine seeds often have complex germination requirements, for example, many require a prolonged cold treatment from long-lying snow to break dormancy and 'tell' the seed that conditions are safe for germination to begin. And beyond this stage, specific conditions relating to soil moisture and temperature must be met for seedlings to successfully grow.

Wetland plants are at particularly high risk of local extinction from dryer and warmer conditions. Given the fragmented distribution of spring-fed wetlands in the Australian Alps, population level variability in environmental stress tolerance could be the key to their survival.

↓ A classic trio of alpine wetland plants: Alpine Sundew (*Drosera arcturi*), the rusty-green foliage covered in sticky hairs; Alpine Marsh-marigold (*Psychrophila introloba*), the arrowhead-shaped vibrant green leaves; and a small tuft of Silky Snow-daisy (*Celmisia sericophylla*), the silver leaves to the right | DANIEL WHITE



What led you to do this PhD?

Starting work in the Victorian Conservation Seedbank at the Royal Botanic Gardens in 2022 introduced me to the world of seed science. Learning about the intricacies of seed biology in the lab, and observing the diversity and beauty of plants in the Victorian alpine landscape, led me to do a PhD in this space.

What challenges have you had to overcome?

As my supervisor often reminds me, a PhD is all about problem solving. From an entire field experiment being washed away by unseasonally heavy rain, to equipment breakdown at critical moments... the PhD has been a colourful journey.

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

We're finding considerable variation in germination responses to different periods of simulated snow cover (periods of cold in the lab) across populations, suggesting that some populations are at more risk of

decline than others. Seedling establishment and drought responses appear to also vary considerably.

Population genetics results for Silky Snow-daisy show strong genetic clustering by wetlands, strong isolation by distance, and lower rates of clonal reproduction than expected. This demonstrates that seeds (although production is highly variable amongst populations) play an important role in driving population dynamics.

What impact do you want your research to have?

I hope this work can highlight the hidden diversity of our most threatened (and seldom seen) plants. I hope it can be used to guide conservation efforts and bolster the resilience of these plant communities in the face of climate change.



↑ Silky Snow-daisy growing at the source of a spring-fed alpine wetland
↓ Sealed containers of sand saturated with a drought-imposing chemical used to test effects of drought and warming on germination and seedling establishment. Here you can see the effect of no drought (left), moderate drought (centre) and extreme drought (right) under typical growing temperatures on the establishment of Silky Snow-daisy | DANIEL WHITE



My research adds to the evidence that maintaining within-species variation across entire geographic distributions is essential for supporting a species' ability to adapt to environmental change.

Danny's research is supported by Deakin University and the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria

To learn more about Danny's research:
d.white@deakin.edu.au
daniel.white@rbg.vic.gov.au

IN PARK FRIENDS WE VISIT A VICTORIAN NATIONAL PARK TO VIEW ITS HISTORY, FEATURES, THREATS AND FRIENDS

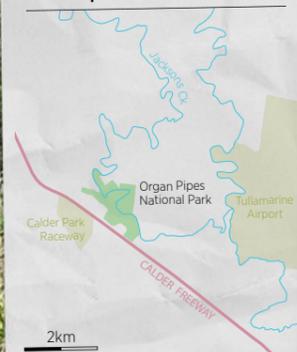
ORGAN PIPES NATIONAL PARK

Location



Traditional lands and waters of the **Wurundjeri**
 28km NW of Melbourne
 121 hectares

Map



History

Declared 12 March 1972 following a donation of 65 hectares by the EA Green Charitable Foundation
 Additions in 1978 (20 ha) & 1997 (36 ha)



Physiography

- Victorian Volcanic Plain bioregion
- Ecological vegetation classes (EVCs) include Plains Grassy Woodland, Plains Grassland, Escarpment Shrubland, Stream Bank Shrubland
- 326 animals
- 164 plants



↑ Eastern Grey Kangaroos | FOOPS

Features

The Organ Pipes: vertical, hexagonal basalt columns formed when ancient lava cooled and cracked, to resemble the pipes of a giant church organ.



↑ Tessellated Pavement | FOOPS

Tessellated Pavement: a natural mosaic of flat, geometric basalt tiles.

Features

Rosette Rock: a rare circular basalt formation

Jacksons Creek: perfect for spotting native wildlife. In a steep, winding valley carved through the basalt plains, it offers dramatic views.



↑ Growing Grass Frog | FOOPS

Home to the Growing Grass Frog.

Threats

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

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

Invasive plants, feral cats & foxes. Goats & cows roaming from nearby properties. Historical land clearing and European settlement impacts. Habitat fragmentation and altered fire regime.

Friends

Friends of Organ Pipes
 friendsoforganpipes.org.au
 info@friendsoforganpipes.org.au
 Friends of Organ Pipes
 @foopsnp

Friends of Kororoit Creek
 fokc.org.au
 secretary@fokc.org.au
 friendsofkororoitcreek
 @friendsofkororoitcreek

← The basalt column 'organ pipe' formation that gives Organ Pipes National Park its name | FOOPS

Friends of Organ Pipes removing Prickly Pear in the park | FOOPS →

WE VISIT VICTORIA'S SMALLEST NATIONAL PARK, WITH ONE OF THE OLDEST FRIENDS GROUPS

Organ Pipes National Park is known for its striking volcanic formations and amazing wildlife. It's the closest national park to Melbourne, offering one of the most accessible opportunities to step instantly into a beautiful, dramatic landscape.

When first established, Organ Pipes was far from the thriving park visitors enjoy today. Decades of farming, grazing, erosion, and weed invasion had left the basalt valley severely degraded and in urgent need of restoration.

It was in this context the Friends of Organ Pipes National Park (FOOPs) formed in 1972, becoming one of Victoria's earliest and most influential volunteer conservation groups. Their early work focused on removing invasive plants, stabilising eroded slopes, and re-establishing the native plant communities that once dominated the Victorian Volcanic Plain. Over more than fifty years, their dedication has transformed the park into a leading example of successful nature restoration.

Today, the Friends group continues to play a vital role in the park's care. Volunteers regularly plant natives, control weeds, collect seeds, and monitor wildlife, working closely with Parks Victoria to support long-term restoration and community education. Their ongoing partnership with park managers helps protect threatened wildlife, enhance habitat along Jacksons Creek, and make sure this unique landscape remains healthy and resilient for future generations.

FOOPs recently received funding to purchase audio recorders to record frog calls in the park. Consistent audio monitoring will help establish the location of Growing Grass Frogs (*Ranoidea raniformis*), and other frogs within the park, and estimate population sizes of these vulnerable amphibians.

Thanks to Friends of Organ Pipes

↓ Jacksons Creek, Organ Pipes National Park | FOOPS



↑ Fragrant Saltbush | MINKI6114



↑ Sacred Kingfisher | ANDREW/FOOPS



↑ Endangered Basalt Podolepis, Organ Pipes National Park | JANE CANAWAY



TOORA H41 BUSHLAND RESERVE

JORDAN CROOK
VISITS A LIVING
GEM IN A SEA OF
CLEARED FARMLAND
IN GUNAIKURNAI COUNTRY



↑ Tree Lomatia (*Lomatia fraseri*)

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

On a warm Summer day, seeking respite from the heat, we ducked up to Toora H41 Bushland Reserve to have a look around and see what this landscape once looked like.

We were not disappointed! At just under 20 hectares, with Eastern Grey Kangaroos darting through the bush and Superb Fairy Wrens dancing around, this place truly is alive.

Looking down on the groundstorey we discovered it is scattered with the leaves of next season's orchids and wildflowers, with a few orchids still flowering beautifully.

Many large old trees are scattered around the reserve. There were plenty displaying torn up stringybark on their trunks, indicative of wildlife making their bedding. It really highlights the practical importance of these little reserves in a heavily cleared landscape.

If you head here, make sure to pack some binoculars so you experience the

extraordinary display of nature it has to offer.

If you've visited other places beforehand, make sure to give your boots a good scrub to help look after this beautiful living remnant. Check out Feral Beryl's advice (*see p 26*) on how to clean your boots to stop the spread of weeds, weedy fungi and diseases like Phytophthora. This disease kills many susceptible native plants like grasstrees, grevilleas and eucalypts. Next time you're in the Foster/Port Welshpool area, do yourself a favour and visit this grouse little gem! 🦋

Toora H41 Bushland Res,
Old Welshpool Rd,
Hazel Park
202 km/2 hr 45 min drive
south-east of Melbourne



← Toora H41 Bushland Reserve
ALL PHOTOS JORDAN CROOK



↑ Rosy Hyacinth-orchid (*Dipodium roseum*)



↑ Termite mound in the reserve



↑ Walckenaer's Studded Triangular Spider (*Arkys walckenaeri*)



↑ Variable Groundsel (*Senecio pinnatifolius* var. *lanceolatus*)



↑ Walking under the eucalypts at Toora H41 Bushland Reserve

FRIENDS OF WYPERFELD 50TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION!

Wyperfeld National Park's friends group is proud to be turning 50 years old in 2026.

We will be celebrating this milestone over the King's Birthday weekend (6–8 June). All are welcome to join the activities within the park, meet old and new friends, share stories, pictures and a special lunch.

Camp at the Wonga Campground for the weekend, take part in the AGM and working bee activities, or just come for the Saturday celebration. For more info or to indicate your interest email friendsofwyperfeldnp@yahoo.com.au.

Please let us know what activities you would like to join so we can plan and cater appropriately. If you know anyone who may be interested or has a connection to the park, please tell them about the celebration – all are welcome!

IMAGE: JOHN MILLER

Farewell Geoff Durham OAM: father, friend and great protector of nature (1931–2025)

WE WERE SADDENED TO HEAR OF GEOFF DURHAM'S DEATH ON SATURDAY 15 NOVEMBER 2025, AGED 94. **DOUG HUMANN AM**, VNPA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR 1989-97 HONOURS THE REMARKABLE LIFE OF A DEAR FRIEND AND DEFENDER OF NATURE

To quote VNPA past president, Stephen Johnston, 'Geoff was VNPA's wise, elder statesman who cared deeply for the organisation and the fulfilment of all its environmental objectives and whose words therefore carried great weight.'

Geoff cultivated the VNPA family and embodied the spirit of VNPA like no other. His second office was at the law firm, Hall & Wilcox where he was Managing Partner for many years until his retirement in 1992. His first was that of VNPA which he came to frequently first thing in the morning, over lunch and often after work. He was all of intimidating, exacting, no-nonsense, passionate, logical, and constructive. We periodically

disagreed, we had great discussions, and he always had my back.

Geoff had an abiding interest in nature and outdoor activity. He understood the generational connections and lifetime commitments that underwrite community-based conservation. Through his connections to VNPA's origins, and his own knowledge and wisdom, he carried the flame for future generations.

James Ensor, who was both a campaigner and VNPA president (1998-2001), remarked that Geoff, with contemporaries such as Dick Johnson, Joan Lindros and Stephen Johnston 'combined passion, principle and decency to transform VNPA into a grassroots and politically influential conservation powerhouse in the 1980s and 1990s.'

Geoff connected people with nature in any way he could: through Friends of Parks groups, his 'Walk, Talk and Gawks', work in the office, or through publications, both his own and those VNPA's publications team. He did all those things himself, that he encouraged others to do, so as to become involved at VNPA and to meet its objectives.

Geoff knew, or at least was aware of, pretty much anything going on in parks. He was knowledgeable and respectful of the science, operations and governance of parks based on lived experience and wide engagement and reading. He respected people at every level, particularly public servants doing the hard yards under changing governments. He was a major asset in VNPA's engagement with government.

Former Executive Director, Amanda Martin remarked: 'Geoff had brilliant judgement of character and situations and while he was no diplomat he was an effective negotiator.'

In fact, Geoff was a sheep in wolf's clothing. His laugh, enthusiasm and passion were infectious.

Geoff's broader contribution is both immediately evident by his various public roles and achievements, including an extended stint on the government's principle advisory body for national parks, the National Parks Advisory Council. It's also evident through his incidental but time-consuming efforts in other ways (see sidebar). He was awarded the Order of Australia Medal 2002 for services to scouting, conservation and community.

Geoff spent many years leading the management of 'Wanderslore' a magnificent property at Launching Place. Owner, Constance Coleman, inherited Wanderslore and through Geoff's encouragement donated the property for its long-term protection to the Victorian Conservation Trust (now Trust for Nature). Constance had inspired Geoff as a student, and he retained a lifelong connection with her. After Constance died in 1990, Geoff became convenor of the Friends of Wanderslore and worked tirelessly to keep the site healthy and well known to the wider community, for 30 years.

Werribee Gorge was a park and area of lifetime interest to Geoff. Here his life at VNPA went full circle: from the decision to join VNPA after a walk in the Werribee Gorge in 1959, to conversations about furthering park protection there in 2024 – 65 years of interest and care!

The Victorian parks system has been the envy of Australia and Geoff helped make it such. Countless people have benefitted from his support and wisdom. We all tackle things differently but have been influenced by knowing Geoff, his analysis, his standing, honesty and integrity, his loyalty, his humility and his authenticity.

Wyperfeld National Park and The Friends of Wyperfeld were a very significant part of Geoff's life. He described attending the annual Queen's Birthday weekend as 'spiritual rejuvenation'. The friends are celebrating their 50th anniversary this year, see p 33 for details.



Geoff Durham's contributions to nature and VNPA

Geoff was an absolute stalwart for the protection of parks and nature in Victoria. He made an enormous contribution to VNPA through a range of our programs and associated initiatives:

- Joined VNPA as a member in 1959.
- VNPA Council member 1974–2000 – 26 years!
- VNPA President 1978–1981.
- Active member of the Bushwalking and Activities Group (now Bushwalking Program), leading over 379 bushwalks, 'Walk, Talk and Gawk' events, 'Daylight Saving Strolls' and in later years, 'Easy Going Ambles'.
- Very active in the formation and support of Friends groups around Victoria and in establishing the Victorian Environmental Friends Network. With Leon Costermans, for eight years he produced a quarterly newsletter with a section titled 'Geoff's Group Grapevine'.
- VNPA Best Friend Lifetime Achievement Award in 2020.
- Active member of the Friends of Wyperfeld National Park, 1976–2024.
- Author of *Wyperfeld – Australia's First Mallee National Park*, published by Friends of Wyperfeld National Park, 2001.
- Established the Friends of Red Gum Triangle (St Kilda) and attended twice weekly pulling out weeds and picking up rubbish.
- Wrote an extraordinary 88 articles over 23 years for *ParkWatch*, up to March 2024. His 'In Parks' series covered his visits to Victoria's protected areas.
- And many other wonderful things...

The parks estate in Victoria needs more 'Geoffs' right now and his passing reminds all of us of the need to continue to be a voice for nature. Like you all, we are the richer for knowing Geoff as a colleague and friend and carry his legacy. If we were to reach for a single person who epitomises generational commitment and dedication, it's Geoff. We and Victoria owe him a great debt. Our thoughts are with Geoff's daughters, Sue and Robyn, and his extended family and friends. 🍷



↑ Geoff Durham at Wonga Campground, Wyperfeld National Park, Wotjobaluk Country, 2017 | ROBYN DURHAM



↑ Geoff on Vereker Track, Wilsons Promontory National Park, Gunaikurnai & Bunurong Country, 2000 | JUDY DURHAM

Bruce McGregor honoured

CHAMPION OF VNPA AND NATURE RECOGNISED

Dr Bruce Allan McGregor has been awarded a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) 'for significant service to conservation and environment, in a range of roles.'

Bruce has held an incredible number of volunteer roles with VNPA, including President (2018–2022) and a member of various committees. With his wife Ann, he founded the Nature Stewards Program in 2017, which became part of VNPA in 2024.

Bruce has also been a driving force in the rehabilitation of Merri Creek. With Ann, he founded Friends of Merri Creek, was inaugural Vice-President of Merri Creek Management Committee in 1989, Vice-President of Merri Creek Coordinating Committee (1980–1989), part of Melbourne Water's Merri Creek Concept Plan Steering Committee during the 1990s, and co-author of *A Planting Guide for the Merri Creek Valley* (1980).

Bruce has also been involved with the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria, Australian Natural History Award, Australian Environmental Grantmakers Network, Australian Mohair Research Foundation, Australian Society of Animal Production Victorian Branch, and International Goat Association. Bruce has been a benefactor for various nature organisations including

VNPA, Women's Environmental Leadership Australia, Birdlife Australia, Environment Victoria, Environment Centre NT, Indigenous Desert Alliance, Country Needs People, and was co-winner of Philanthropy Australia's Environmental Philanthropy Awards three times.

Reflecting on his years of achievement, Bruce says 'The most satisfying work has been the restoration of the lower Merri Creek Valley. Once it was threatened by a freeway and concrete lining. It is very satisfying to walk along the pathway to enjoy it now as an older citizen, and to see people using it as it was intended. It's a long way from the days when it was a rubbish dump, smothered in weeds and ignored by the community. It's great to have that completely turned on its head. This was collaboration with many others who provided their skills, knowledge and time pro bono over many years.'

'My motivation has been the protection and restoration of what makes Australia special, our nature. And the adage "Think Global Act Local" has resonated as it is largely at the local level that change is made.'

'Volunteer community engagement has also been a focus. My parents and the scouting movement moulded my values. Seeing the results keeps me going. You can take learnings and apply your skills and time elsewhere. And I work closely with my wife Ann, who has always been a nature champion.'



↑ Bruce and Ann McGregor | JESSIE BORRELLE

'My volunteer work shows that we can achieve a lot when we collaborate with others, with local and state governments. However, I believe many agencies need to do more to facilitate the use of freely given skills, networks and often funding. So many Australian agencies and senior staff seem scared of meaningful engagement with constructive citizens.'

Even after an incredible 50 years of protecting nature, Bruce isn't done yet. His next focus is 'saving the rivers in Victoria, then Australia. Getting into the bush more, visiting those special places. And we are determined to support those NGOs who are sticking up for nature protection in Australia.'

We are incredibly grateful for Bruce's years of hard work, and congratulate him on his well-deserved AM! 🌿

Kristian Lang, Philanthropy Executive

VNPA strengthens governance with new appointments

As the regulatory environment becomes more complex and competition for grants and donations intensifies, strong governance is more important than ever. We need to make sure we have enough people, with the right mix of skills, to govern the organisation effectively.

With a number of longtime Council members flagging intentions to retire, we saw an opportunity for renewal and expansion. In accordance with VNPA's constitution, we ran external recruitment for new Councillor and Committee members, with a particular focus on finance, governance, and

fundraising expertise. We received applications from highly experienced people across these sectors.

Council has appointed eight people to Council and committee positions. We welcome their participation and inputs, value the variety of views they bring, and look forward to leveraging their expertise to strengthen VNPA's work protecting nature in Victoria.

VNPA is governed by a volunteer Council elected annually at the AGM. Council sets the strategic direction, approves the annual budget, and establishes policy guidelines. It's

supported by several committees that harness the enthusiasm of members and staff in key areas.

New appointments in 2026

Council: Jeannette McGill (see p 37).

Finance Committee: Judy Chen, Kim Daire, Mark Briglia.

Strategic Comms & Fundraising Committee: Matthew Landolfo, Will Richards.

Governance, Policy & Legal Committee: Arne Bucholz, Jeannette McGill. 🌿

Marilyne Crestias, VNPA President

↳ Dr Jeannette McGill

Jeannette McGill



DR JEANNETTE MCGILL IS A TECHNOLOGY EXECUTIVE, EXPEDITION LEADER AND MENTOR. AS AN INCOMING VNPA COUNCILLOR AND MEMBER OF THE GOVERNANCE, POLICY & LEGAL COMMITTEE, WE ASKED HER THOUGHTS ON NATURE IN VICTORIA, AND VNPA'S ROLE IN PROTECTING IT

How do you use your experience to help VNPA and nature in Victoria?

I've spent most of my career in environments where decisions really matter, places where preparation, judgment, and looking ahead make a tangible difference. I bring that same mindset to VNPA, alongside a deep personal love of being outdoors.

For me, it's about supporting good thinking, asking useful questions, and helping VNPA continue to be a strong, thoughtful voice for nature in Victoria, so it's protected not just now, but well into the future.

What drew you to support VNPA?

I've admired VNPA's quiet persistence. It's an organisation that takes the long view, grounded in care for nature, respect for Country, and a willingness to stick up for places that can't speak for themselves.

Supporting VNPA felt like a natural way to give back to the landscapes that have given me so much over the years.

Do you have any message for other VNPA supporters or Victorian nature lovers?

With the creation of new parks, it's a great time to get out and visit places that might be new, or newly protected. Even small micro-adventures count.

The more time we spend in these landscapes, the more connected we feel to them, and that connection is what ultimately drives protection.

If you were hosting an international visitor to Victoria, where would you take them?

I'd show them Victoria through a slow, winding tour of the mountainous areas rather than a single highlight – definitely including the Dandenong Ranges, the Macedon Ranges, the high country, and also the Grampians/Gariwerd. Each place feels completely different, and together they really capture how diverse and special Victoria's landscapes are.

If you could invite a famous person on a bushwalk with you, who might it be?

Interestingly for me: Kate Winslet. I admire her groundedness, grit, and obvious love of nature. She strikes me as someone who'd be genuinely happy walking and talking without fuss or fanfare.

I love how time outdoors fast-tracks real conversations, and I suspect she'd be great company on a long walk. And if she happened to leave as a VNPA supporter as well, even better!

What has time in nature taught you?

That very few things are improved by rushing, and that most problems feel more manageable after a long walk, some quiet, or a night under the stars.

Nature has a way of restoring perspective when things feel noisy or complicated.

What's your favourite season to get into nature?

Winter. I love the stillness, especially that moment when you're walking along a normal bush track, and suddenly snow patches start to appear, until it quietly becomes a snow trail. It's calm, a little wild, and deeply grounding. 🌿

Vale Liz Sarrailhe

21 JULY 1934 – 9 SEPT 2024

Elizabeth (Liz) Sarrailhe was a member of VNPA, as well as of many other like-minded organisations. She was actively involved in many outdoor activities on the Mornington Peninsula, especially at Coolart Wetlands and Homestead near her home. Liz was also involved in other pursuits including scuba diving, sailing,



travelling and bird banding with the Victorian Wader Study Group. Life for Liz was not, of course, all roses. Her husband, Stuart passed away in 2005 and her youngest daughter, Jennie (at one time a VNPA employee) passed away after a battle with cancer, in 2015. Liz will be remembered by many as a unique character who was always on the go. She was a highly sociable person who always delighted in talking to friends or complete strangers. She will be missed by many. 🌸

Find out more on leaving a gift in your Will at vnpa.org.au/gifts-in-wills

In addition to being a member and monthly donor throughout her life, Liz made the thoughtful decision to include a gift to VNPA in her Will.

We're incredibly grateful for Liz's gift and her many wonderful contributions to nature.

Pop up!

In November 2025, VNPA's ReefWatch program published *Pop-up! Developing & delivering short-notice marine volunteering events*. It outlines the trial of a series of short-notice ('pop-up') marine volunteering events in Port Phillip Bay. The aim was to improve participation, diversify engagement, and reduce the number of activities cancelled due to unfavourable weather conditions. 🌸
Read online at vnpa.org.au/publications/pop-up



Recent submissions

- Over Summer, our campaign staff have been busy writing submissions on a wide range of topics.
- Draft National Recovery Plan for Grassy Eucalypt Woodland*, Jan 2026
- Greater Avalon Employment Precinct public consultation*, Dec 2025
- Derrimut Logistics Hub Industrial Development*, Dec 2025
- Draft National Recovery Plan for Greater Gliders*, Dec 2025
- Draft Master Plan for Werribee Township Regional Park*, Dec 2025
- Western Port Ramsar Site Management Plan (draft)*, Dec 2025
- Draft National Recovery Plan for Southern Brown Bandicoot (Eastern)*, Dec 2025

Northwest Alliance (NWA) submission regarding the documentation for the Geelong Strategic Assessment (NWGGA), Nov 2025



Proposed development of 62 Collins Rd and 170 Boundary Rd, Dromana, Nov 2025



Read these and all previous submissions on our website. 🌸

vnpa.org.au/publication-category/submissions

Quiz answers from p. 4

- d)** 1969. Fungi used to be lumped in with plants. Ecologist Robert Whittaker proposed to separate them out because of their stark differences from plants and animals.
- b)** Guttation (right) is a metabolic process where fungi exude droplets of liquid. For some fungi it can be used to identify the species.
- c)** There's estimated to be between 50,000 to 250,000 types of fungi in Australia.
- We've only formally described roughly **12,000** types of fungi in Australia so far.



- e)** Corals, Jellies, Stinkhorns, Mushrooms and Puffballs are all types of fungal sporing bodies. Doughnuts, sadly, are not.
- False.** Most fungi do pop up during Autumn, but a bit of rain at different times of the year can bring them up! There are also some types of fungi, like Beech Oranges, that buck the Autumn trend and typically pop up at the end of Spring/beginning of Summer.
- f)** All of the above. Fungi get their nutrients from all types of organic materials, including rotting logs, leaf litter, animal bones, poo, and even living beings like trees and insects.
- d)** Both Orange Pore Fungus (*Favolaschia calocera*) and Fly Agarics (*Amanita muscaria*) are introduced to Victoria.



- c)** There's six different fungi threatened with extinction in Victoria, including Tea-tree Fingers (above) and Canary Dermocybe. Sadly, fungi have (and still do) received a lot less attention than plants and animals, so it's possible there's more threatened with extinction that we haven't discovered yet.
- True!** The widespread Ghost Fungus is bioluminescent, meaning they have the incredible ability to glow in the dark.

PHOTOS: MEGHAN LINDSAY, MELVIN XU/NATURALIST

Help a bee find a home

Billie the Blue Banded Bee, May Fu, Jonathan Leske & John Ravesi
2023, 40pp, ISBN 978-1-7640696-32

Blue-banded Bees (*Amegilla cingulata*) are native Australian bees known for their striking blue bands and important role in pollination. Small in size but buzzing with big purpose, Billie is on a mission to find her way home through the once-vast Victorian grasslands. These threatened grasslands are home to a vibrant tapestry of plants, animals and fungi found nowhere else on Earth – and Billie needs help to protect them. Through a carefully balanced interplay of real-world photography and hand-rendered illustration, *Billie* invites young readers into an ecologically rich yet often overlooked landscape. *Billie*

helps spark curiosity, empathy and nature protection. More than just a beautifully told story, *Billie the Blue Banded Bee* is a powerful educational resource designed to inspire curiosity, empathy, and action. The authors also provide teachers with a free Billie Educational Resource Pack which includes a rich e-book, curriculum-linked lesson plans for junior and senior students, and hands-on activities that bring Billie's world, and its challenges, to life in the classroom. This book came to life thanks to a remarkable group of people who shared their time, knowledge, and love for grasslands; from ecologists and grassland experts to landscape architects, nature communicators,



passionate primary school teachers, and librarians. Their insights helped shape a story that's not only engaging but deeply rooted in truth and care. All profits are generously donated to VNPA's Grassy Plains Network, working to protect and restore Victoria's rare and precious grasslands. So you can help Billie find her way home, and become part of a movement to protect our most wonderful places. 🌸

Purchase at billiebluebandedbee.com.au

Tale of toilets, traps & tenacity

The Very Stinky Fly Hunt, Andrea Wild. Illustrated by Karen Erasmus
CSIRO Publishing, 2025, 32pp, ISBN 978-1-4863187-80

Flies. If any creature is overdue for a PR makeover, it's the humble fly. Add public toilets to the mix and you've got a match made in olfactory heaven. Andrea Wild's lively text follows a real-life scientist in hot pursuit of bush dunny residents, turning field research into an adventure story. We laughed at the toilet humour. But after a few reads, we realised what had been missing from our own understanding of the natural world: an appreciation for the small creatures quietly doing the dirty work. This isn't just a funny, educational nature story. It's an ode to the science of noticing, and to the value of all beings, great and small. Inspired by the work of dipterist Dr Keith Bayliss, *The Very Stinky Fly Hunt* gently exposes how little attention we pay to the less charismatic contributors to our web of life. From *Achias australis* to *Zinza grandis*, we gained new respect for the modest fly.

Illustrator Karen Erasmus brings the insects to life with expressive eyes, comic determination and delirious mischief. Billie especially loved the 'little tufts of hair on the flies' heads – and the little possum.' The book also highlights the role our national parks' pit toilets play in the life of the story's other lead character – the rare and elusive *Clisa australis*. Even the least glamorous habitats matter. As Billie put it, 'I love that it shows flies aren't just little creepy things you want to swat. They're actually really interesting.' She was so intrigued she even asked whether there might be a follow-up about other fly species Dr Keith has discovered. And that's precisely why our country's many flies deserve a little more acknowledgement. They're quietly sustaining nature's remarkable cycle of life. And yes, the only thing this book is missing is... stickers! Preferably not the scratch-and-sniff kind though. 🌸
Jessie Borrelle, former Digital Engagement and Communications Manager, and Billie (aged 8)



Little Desert Biolink Planting Weekend

A dedicated Landcare team is organising a planting weekend near Dimboola on 20-21 June. The aim is to plant 3,000 trees, shrubs, herbs and grasses. Join us for a great weekend of planting camaraderie. Camping is available onsite. Lunch and bbq dinner catering will be provided. It will be great to see you there!
For more info, contact Jonathan Starks jstarks@hindmarsh.vic.gov.au

Where we went in Summer

 Snorkellers and divers took to the bays and shallows to take part in the annual Great Victorian Fish Count.

 We toured the Jollys' Parwan Grassland, an outstanding privately owned site we've enjoyed seeing change over the season.

 Bushwalkers enjoyed a meandering loop around Lorne, soaking up some wonderful waterfalls.

 Sea slug enthusiasts of all ages took part in a series of sea slug searches at San Remo for the Summer Sea Slug Census (see p 42).

 A keen crew of walkers kicked off 2026 with an early morning stroll around Brimbank Park.

 We tuned in to more Grassy Talks: one about the vital work that Wyndham Council is doing to manage private land in the future Western Grassland Reserve before it's handed over to Parks Victoria, and another rethinking management for threatened grassland reptiles and frogs.

 A Grassy Tour invited us to discover the hidden treasures of the Woodend Racecourse grassland.



↑ Lorne waterfalls meander, Great Otway National Park, Eastern Maar & Gadabanud Country | EVA GODNJAVEC



↑ Great Victorian Fish Count 2025 | KADE MILLS/JANE BOWMAN/OCEAN DIVERS



Upcoming activities

Our online Activities Calendar brings opportunities to get into nature through bushwalking, citizen science, short courses and events for all ages. Come and join us for an adventure in nature! Check out our online calendar – new activities are added regularly.



Nature Stewards course

What's coming up in our activities calendar

 **Autumn Nature Stewards courses**
March–June

We have five courses running in Ballarat, Mornington Peninsula, Inner East Melbourne (Malvern, Blackburn, Mt Waverley), Knox, and North West Melbourne (Glenroy, Broadmeadows, Sunbury). Check out vnpa.org.au/naturestewards for dates and to apply.

 **Long Point bushwalk**
Saturday 14 March

Follow sections of the Two Bays walk along Cape Schanck for a relaxing meander through eucalypt forest and bracken ferns.

 **Sea Slug Census**
3–12 April

The 28th Melbourne (Vic) Sea Slug Census will be held this April. Keep an eye out for sea slugs in your local patch anywhere along Victoria's coastline.

 **Community rockpool ramble**
Monday 6 April, 8:30–9:30 am and 10–11 am

Join us at San Remo Bridge to learn how to take part in the Sea Slug Census.

 **Tunnel Point Loop bushwalk**
Friday 24 April

A circuit walk with historic features and great views in the new Wombat-Lerderderg National Park.

 **Plus more bushwalks in various locations in late April and May!**

 **NatureWatch field days**

Citizen science activities coming up for Mount Cole, Pyrenees National Park and Wombat-Lerderderg National Park. With one- and two-day fieldwork wildlife monitoring opportunities using cameras, audio recorders and spotlighting surveys.

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

Discover more information at
vnpa.org.au/activities





Searching for sea slugs by the sea shore

KADE MILLS,
REEFWATCH
COORDINATOR,
SHARES HIS SUMMER
OF SEA SLUGGING

Every season, we ask people to pause, crouch low, and peer into a world that most of us hurry past. The Sea Slug Census is a gentle invitation to slow down and discover the astonishing life hiding in plain sight along our coastline.

In Summer, families, locals, visitors from around the world, and people who travelled from Melbourne and beyond gathered at the water's edge, eyes scanning rock pools and seaweed for flashes of colour and

movement. For many, it was the first time they had ever seen a sea slug. It's an encounter that turns fascination into connection, and connection into confidence to explore their own local shores.

With more than 150 people taking part, the day was filled with small moments of wonder and shared discovery. It's always a joy to watch people meet these often-overlooked animals for the first time, and to know that, long after the census ends, they'll return to the coast with new eyes, ready to keep exploring, learning, and joining us again.

We run a Sea Slug Census every season, and we'd love to see you at one!

This year's Summer Sea Slug Census was held as part of Summer by the Sea, with support from Coastcare

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

Keen to join a VNPA ReefWatch event?
Find out more at
vnpa.org.au/reefwatch



↑ Sea slugs seen at San Remo | NICOLE MERTENS

Discover a world of kids nature activities

EXPLORE OUR WILD FAMILIES ACTIVITY SHEETS AND COLOURING-IN SHEETS

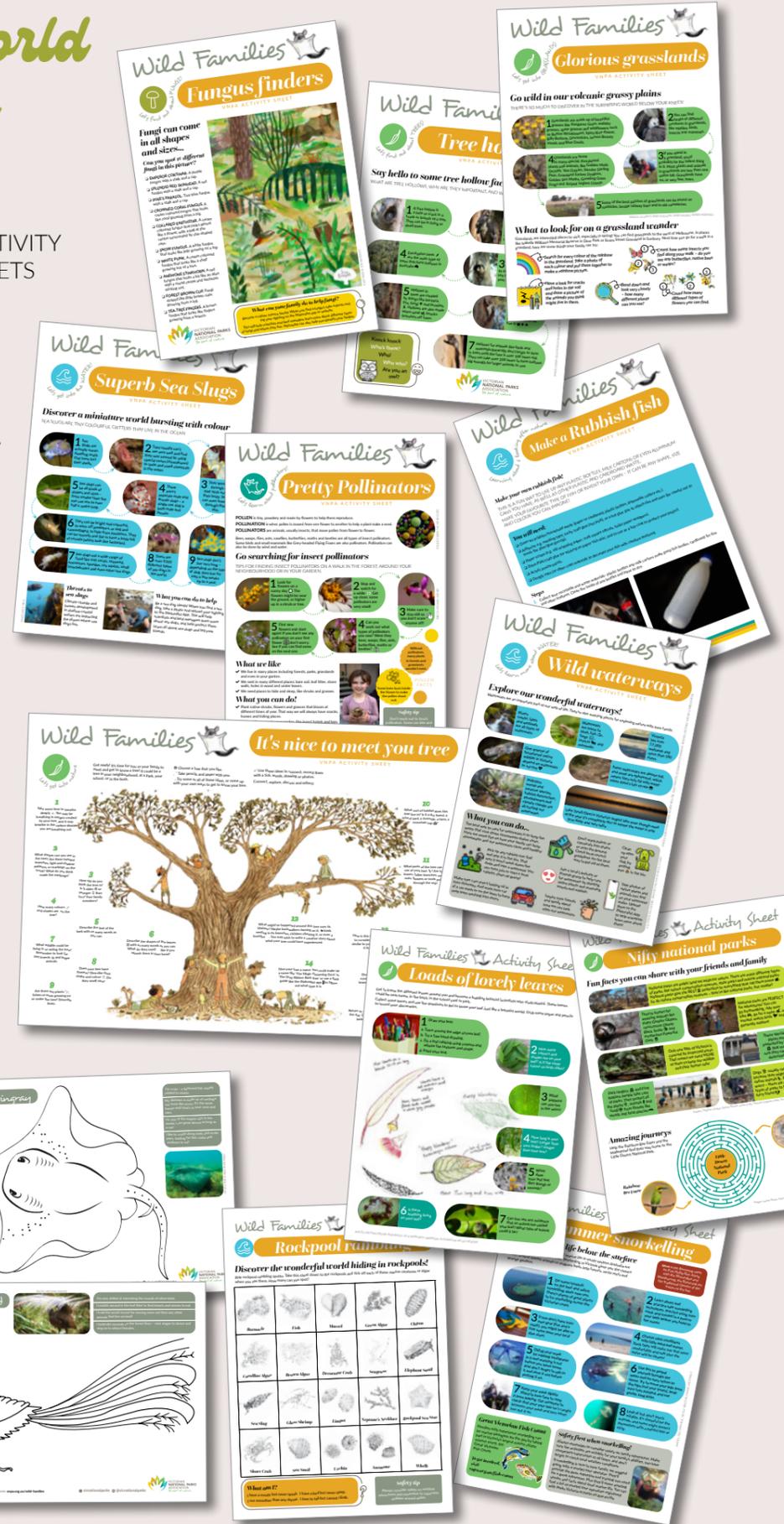
Our Wild Families program has an incredible range of resources created especially for families with children aged up to 12 years. And they're all free to download from our website!

With our bright and easy to follow Activity Sheets, you can join the kids in your life in exploring beautiful places, learning about the family lives of our native wildlife, and finding ways to look after our incredible web of life.

Our collection of colouring-in sheets will keep your young ones busy with Grey-headed Flying Foxes, Sugar Gliders, Growling Grass Frogs, Smooth Stingrays and more.

Our Wild Families program is designed to provide stronger relationships built on positive experiences; first-hand learning about nature and the great outdoors; better physical and mental health through exercise; and opportunities to get messy and have fun!

Download all Wild Families activity sheets and colouring-in sheets
vnpa.org.au/wild-families



Celebrate Victoria's newest national parks and protected areas with our patches and stickers!

Patches: set of 3 for \$25

New parks, new patches! We're excited to unveil our embroidered patches celebrating Victoria's three new national parks: Wombat-Lerderderg, Mount Buangor and Pyrenees.

Each patch features unique wildlife that make these parks so special. A wombat for Wombat-Lerderderg, Critically Endangered Mount Cole Grevillea for Mount Buangor and Critically Endangered Pyrenees Gum for Pyrenees.

These Australian-made patches can be ironed or sewn onto hats, jackets or backpacks. Get all three and wear your love for our new national parks!



Get the
Combo Pack:
3 patches +
3 stickers
\$30

Available at vnpa.org.au/shop

Items available in sets of three. Not sold separately.



Stickers: set of 3 for \$10

Featuring Wombat-Lerderderg National Park, Cobaw Conservation Park, and the Wellsford addition to Bendigo Regional Park.

We've made the Wombat-Lerderderg National Park patch available as a sticker, and created vibrant stickers for two more new protected areas in Victoria's central west: Cobaw Conservation Park (featuring a Brush-tailed Phascogale) and the long-awaited Wellsford addition to Bendigo Regional Park (featuring its iconic Red Ironbarks).

Now you can stick your park pride anywhere and spark conversations about this newly protected landscape.