

PARK *watch*

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VICTORIAN
NATIONAL PARKS
ASSOCIATION

JUNE 2026 #304

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Wurundjeri Country, Suite 3.05, 60 Leicester St, Carlton VIC 3053 • (03) 9341 6500
vnpa@vnpa.org.au • vnpa.org.au

President: Marilyn Crestias
Executive Director: Matt Ruchel
Editor/Designer: Paul Clifton
Copy Editor: Meghan Lindsay
Proofreader: Harriet Searcy



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REINER RICHTER

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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.

From the President



MARILYNE CRESTIAS, VNP
PRESIDENT, WELCOMES YOU TO THE
WINTER EDITION OF *PARK WATCH*.

In Victoria right now the days are short, with misty mornings and cold, rainy afternoons. In the Wurundjeri calendar, we're in the middle of Waring, named for the Wombats who bask and forage in the Winter sunshine. Moths are out, fungi flourish on rotting logs, Superb Lyrebirds perform their elaborate courtship rituals, and during the long nights possums and gliders mate (you gotta keep warm somehow).

Back in the human realm, with the state gearing up for an election in November, we look at what Labor's three terms

have meant for nature. The community of Mirboo North celebrates its new conservation park, and a huge grassy gathering in Melbourne gives hope for the future. But news is less encouraging from Arthurs Seat, Western Port Bay and Mount Macedon, with bureaucratic shenanigans putting nature on the back foot. Thankfully, a coalition of nature organisations has formed to push back.

Elsewhere in this issue we've prepared a hearty range of stories: from NatureWatch monitoring grevilleas to artistic terraforming, and from the beauty of Wyperfeld National Park to facts on Batwing Moths and Spotted Wobbegongs. This edition's cover celebrates those small but vitally important members of our web of life – the invertebrates. Reiner Richter's spectacular photo of an Edwards' Alpine Crane Fly is the first invertebrate to ever grace the cover of *ParkWatch*, a testament to the immense difficulty of capturing high-resolution photographs of such tiny animals, and Reiner's skill at doing so. 🌱

ParkWatch Invertebrates Quiz by Rhi Lloyd-George, Rosemary John, Kelly Gilbert & Mia Klein



- Which Victorian insect was recently listed as Critically Endangered under federal nature laws?
- Which Victorian marine invertebrate is often mistaken for a plant because it resembles a colourful flower?
 - Waratah Anemone
 - Banksia Bluebottle
 - Daisy Crab
 - Rosebud Starfish
- Why are Otway Glowworms (*Arachnocampa otwayensis*) popular with visitors in the Great Otway National Park?
 - They eat pesky mosquitos
 - They're Critically Endangered
 - They're only active during the day
 - They glow in the dark
- Which marine invertebrates are distantly related to humans?
 - Sea anemones
 - Sea squirts
 - Barnacles
 - Sea slugs
- True or false, all sea stars start as larvae that drift in ocean currents before transforming into little sea stars?
- Why are Golden Sun Moths in decline across Victoria's grasslands?
 - Increased predation by birds
 - Their habitat is being destroyed
 - Not enough sunshine
 - Too much competition for resources with invasive snails



Sea slug *Polycera janjukia* | NICK SHAW

- How many species of jewel beetles are there in Australia?
 - 180
 - 560
 - 1,300
 - 2,200
- Where might you find a sea slug?
 - Rock pools
 - Estuaries
 - The bottom of the ocean
 - All of the above
- Which region in Victoria is home to Australia's largest earthworm?
 - Wimmera
 - Gippsland
 - Otways
 - Victorian Alps
- Sea sponges have no mouth or digestive tract. How and what do they eat?

Answers on p.38

Labor seeks a historic fourth term, but what does it mean for nature?



MATT RUCHEL,
EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR, REFLECTS
ON 12 YEARS OF
LABOR GOVERNMENT AND
WHAT IT HAS MEANT FOR
NATURE IN VICTORIA

The next Victorian election is looming and Labor is seeking a historic fourth term in government. It's already the longest-serving government in the state's history. As the election approaches, we look back at what the past 12 years have meant for nature policy, and ask whether the promise of 2014 has survived into 2026.

Coalition set the scene

Labor had held power since 1999, but was pushed out when they were defeated by the Coalition in 2010. That election led to a one-seat majority for the Coalition in both houses. A result almost no one anticipated. For nature policy, the four years of the Baillieu/Napthine Government were a disaster.

High-profile arguments over the return of alpine cattle grazing and inappropriate development at Point Nepean National Park, combined with the gutting of native plant removal regulations, set a damaging precedent.

Labor returns: ambition in the first term

In opposition, led by Lisa Neville as Shadow Environment Minister, Labor had worked hard on nature issues. A day before the 2014 election, they released a substantial nature policy, *Our Environment Our Future*. Labor won that election and returned to power under Daniel Andrews.

Andrews' first term showed genuine ambition. In many ways it reversed the backward steps of the short-lived Coalition government. Across the first and second terms Labor introduced some important reforms. But they failed to sustain this ambition. In too many areas, interest simply faded. Meanwhile, the Coalition offered virtually no constructive nature policies of its own. The real policy contest was with the progressive minor parties, mainly the Greens.

Nature groups campaigned hard for a Great Forest National Park in the lead-up to the 2014 election. But it wasn't reflected in formal policy. Instead, a Forest Industry Taskforce was created. The then environment minister was publicly quoted supporting the Great Forest National Park, but it never materialised into action.

In March 2017, Energy, Environment and Climate Change Minister Lily D'Ambrosio asked the Victorian Environment Assessment Council (VEAC) to begin the Central West Investigation – a significant step forward.

continued overpage...

Andrews' first term showed genuine ambition... Across the first and second terms Labor introduced some important reforms. But they failed to sustain this ambition.



↑ Wombat Forestcare calling for creation of the Wombat-Lerderderg National Park in 2019 | SANDY SCHELTEMA



↑ Old growth forest like this in East Gippsland were protected by the end of native forest logging | ISAAC CARNE

Though the process was delayed and interfered with multiple times, legislation was finally passed in late 2025, creating the first new national parks in 15 years. But it came with a sting. The Allan Government has since ruled out any new national parks.

The 'Danslide' and a retreat from nature

The cracks began to show after Labor's first term. There was no standalone nature policy at either the 2018 or 2022 elections, with the focus shifting to recreation, fishing and urban parks. The majority from the 2018 'Danslide' election seemed to reinforce an appetite for regressive positions, including refusing to create any new marine national parks or sanctuaries.

Progress on key forest issues was slowed by the Forest Industry Taskforce, which ran from 2014 to 2017, until the industry largely walked away. That process probably helped set the scene for the ultimate end of native forest logging. But the broader protection ambition, like declaring the Great Forest National Park, has effectively disappeared under Jacinta Allan. We're now heading sharply backwards on some key issues.

End of native forest logging: a win undermined

On a positive note, the announcement of an end to native forest logging in May 2023 (which was implement

in January 2024) was a huge milestone. But it came with a \$1.5 billion transition package, with very little directed toward nature-based initiatives like helping forests recover.

In some ways the end to logging was only on paper. Key loopholes remain. Logging and logging-like activities continue on public land through the rebranding of many VicForests contractors as Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMV) staff. And on private land. We've seen a sharp increase in logging-like 'fire preparation' and so-called 'storm clean-up' works in the Yarra Ranges, Dandenong Ranges and Wombat-Lerderderg national parks. The Eminent Person Panel and Great Outdoors Taskforce were poorly designed processes, and many of their useful recommendations for protecting nature were simply ignored.

In a big win for nature, the central west parks were eventually legislated in late 2025. But this was easily three to four years later than they should have been, and only after sustained pressure from full-page newspaper advertising and regional social media campaigns across Ballarat and Bendigo, year after year.

This big win was tainted with the devastating news that the Allan Government ruled out of any additional new national parks, ignoring recommendations from the Eminent Person Panel's assessment of the Central Highlands.

Since Jacinta Allan became Premier, there's been a marked shift. The government now appears almost openly hostile to nature, with numerous backward steps or dropped commitments. These include recently abolishing key expert bodies like the Victorian Environment Assessment Council and the Marine and Coastal Council, a shake-up of Parks Victoria with a new CEO and Chair, and staffing levels at their lowest since the 1990s.

What comes next?



Labor began with real ambition on nature policy in 2014, but since then that ambition has disappeared. The approach became patchy: some genuinely important decisions were made – the end of logging, the new central west parks – but these were undermined by backward steps and deals with certain sectors.

Today it looks like more than a mere lack of ambition. The Allan Government now appears openly hostile to nature.

All the indicators point in the same direction: nature in Victoria is in decline. And meaningful ambition from either of the major parties is seriously lacking.

By banding together, we can make it clear Victorians want nature on the priority list. With combined pressure, we can push back on backward steps and raise Labor and all major parties' ambitions to look after nature in Victoria. 🌿

Timeline of Labor's three terms 2014-2026

1st Term 2014-2018							
	Cattle grazing The legislative ban on cattle grazing in the Alpine and Red Gum national parks was undertaken very quickly in 2015.	Point Nepean Legislation to repeal the 99 years head lease put in place by the previous Coalition Government was introduced and passed in 2015.	Rivers Regional Riparian Action Plan got five years funding (2015-20) and exceeded its own targets, then got cut as a stand-alone program in 2021.	Forests Progress on the key forest issues were delayed due to the Forest Industry Taskforce 2015-17, until the industry largely walked away.	Marine health State of the Bay report launched to monitor the health of coasts, bays and waterways. Later expanded to be a State of Marine and Coastal Environment.	Anglesea Heath This biodiversity hotspot was added to the Great Otway National Park after Alcoa surrendered its lease.	
							
	Land clearing The Coalition had completely trashed regulations designed to stop broad scale land clearing. The regulations were updated in 2017 as promised.	Yarra River Yarra River/ Birrarung was legally recognised as a living entity and a framework was established for its protection, management and cultural stewardship.	Biodiversity 2037 Statewide biodiversity plan updated for the first time since the 1990s. Received important funding, but much less than required. Many aspects of the plan remain unactioned, and funding has now largely run out.	Marine and Coastal Act Passed in 2018 with important reforms like establishing a marine spatial planning framework. But many tools have not been used.	FFG Act review A commitment from the first term, but legislation not updated until 2019. <i>Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act</i> reviewed and 'modernised.' Included useful things like a clear cut capacity to do 'critical habitat determinations' and a revamped listing process. However, to date they have refused to use many of the new tools.		
							
	Tourism, fishing, boating Election commitments in the second term were more modest, focusing on infrastructure for tourism, fishing and boating. Commercial fishing in key bays was shut down, but largely for social not ecological reasons.	New parks & trails Bunurong Marine and Coastal Park (2,046 ha) was established in 2020. Urban parks were also a focus, with 6,500 ha of new urban parks and walking and bike trails created across Melbourne.	Sea to Summit Labor committed to the Sea to Summit trail, an iconic nature walk from the Errinundra Plateau to Cape Conran Coastal Park, but this was never delivered.	Forestry Plan Announced in 2019, the Victorian Forestry Plan aimed to secure a long-term sustainable forestry industry future, with commercial native timber harvesting in state forests phased out by 2030. The 2019-20 bushfires and COVID soon changed these settings.			
2nd term 2018-2022							
	Urban waterways Following the 2022 election, with a lack of major policy around nature, announcements focused on urban waterways.	End of native forest logging In May 2023, Labor brought forward the end of native forest logging to 1 January 2024, with a transition package claiming to remove the uncertainty 'that has been caused by an ongoing court and litigation process and increasingly severe bushfires.' \$1.5 billion has been spent on this transition, but loopholes remain.	Reviews, reviews, reviews There were time-consuming reviews in this period: the Eminent Person panel on Community Engagement for the Central Highlands, the Great Outdoors Taskforce, and a review of the outdated <i>Wildlife Act</i> . Only minor elements were picked up, and key recommendations were ignored.	Central west parks VEAC's Central West Investigation commenced in 2017, but was delayed for many years. Three new national parks were finally legislated in late 2025, to be formally established in October 2026.			
3rd term 2022-2026							

↑ VNPA, PARKS VICTORIA, BLAKE NISBET, CHRIS ORR, PAUL CLIFTON, MEGHAN LINDSAY, ROBYN FOX, DEBOROD, RICHARD LING, JORDAN CROOK, SASCHA SCHULZ, ROBERTO SERBA, JUDITH DELAND, BEN GILL, BRIAN YAP, ISAAC CARNE, JOSH BOWELL, SANDY SCHELTEMA

Determining the fate of nature after the Ruffy-Longwood fire

CONTINUING OUR LOOK AT THE IMPACT ON NATURE OF THE JANUARY 2026 BUSHFIRES, **JORDAN CROOK**, PARKS & NATURE CAMPAIGNER, ASSESSES THE RUFFY-LONGWOOD AREA

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

In early January 2026, the Ruffy-Longwood fire burnt 138,000 hectares of mostly private land, destroying 113 homes. Our thoughts are with the people affected, as well as the wildlife and livestock. We're grateful to the many volunteer and forest fire fighters on the front line, and emergency services including SES and volunteer wildlife rescuers. Many small bushland reserves were impacted, as well as roadside trees and habitat. Even though the area impacted was extensive, many large patches of bush escaped unscathed thanks to the dedicated work of fire fighters and the historic nature of land clearing in the region. Altogether 37 reserves were impacted, ranging from bushland and conservation reserves to scenic and streamside reserves.

Of deep concern are reports of many large old Red Gums being cut down along roadsides by Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMV). We're working with local groups to raise these concerns with the local council and FFMV. We're calling for genuine tree risk assessments based on the species of tree and risk level, rather than just chopping trees because they burnt. Red Gums are notoriously tough and recover quite well from fire. If trees aren't impacted by other threats like soil compaction and root damage, and they get enough rain, they will recover. As a lot of these reserves recover from the fires, the threats of feral deer and weed invasion from the surrounding landscape are high. How these threats are managed will determine which plants recover and flourish.



↑ Post-fire recovery in Ruffy | PETER BRIDGES

Spotlight on Nature with Kelly Gilbert



Batwing Moth *Chelepteryx collesi*

Have you heard of an insect that resembles a bat soaring through the air? Well, we have one! Batwing or White-stemmed Gum Moths are out right now in Victoria.

Native to Australia's east coast, Batwing Moths are closely linked to eucalypt forests, where both the caterpillars and adults spend most of their lives. In Summer, the caterpillars drop from the trees, looking for a place to weave their cocoon. Then in Autumn they emerge from the cocoons as moths, with large



↑ Batwing Moth | PAUL WHITTINGTON/INATURALIST

wingspan, with their angular wings creating a bat-like silhouette.

While the moth poses no danger, the bristles on the caterpillar can pierce skin and cause uncomfortable irritation. The cocoon is similar, as the caterpillar transforms the spines are discarded and punch through the silk walls of the cocoons creating a protective layer. Batwing Moths remind us of the remarkable adaptations that exist in nature.

Keep your eyes open for these beautiful moths over the next few weeks.

Kelly Gilbert is a NatureWatch Student studying science and global studies at Monash University



↑ Batwing caterpillar | SERA BLAIR

brown and grey wings, intricate patterns and accents of yellow.

The caterpillars can grow to 12 cm long, making them the largest in Australia! Their size and bold, defensive spines make them difficult to miss. Once transformed, adult moths can reach an impressive 16 cm

Mirboo North celebrates

WE JOINED THE LOCAL COMMUNITY TO MARK THE CREATION OF A NEW PARK

We were lucky enough to join the Mirboo North community in April celebrating the creation of the Mirboo North Conservation Park in Gunaikurnai Country. Speakers included Uncle Lloyd from Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation, Eminent Panel for Community Engagement chair Karen Cain, local poets and musicians and the citizen scientists who've spent years exploring the forest and understanding its wildlife.

Almost 10 years ago, VicForests planned to log this tiny fragment of Strzelecki forests for paper

pulp. Little did they know the community had other plans. From packed out community meetings at the footy club, and hundreds of hours of citizen science and advocacy work, the Mirboo North Conservation Park was protected for everyone forever in legislation last year.

It's 440 hectares of native forest safeguarding the future of iconic wildlife like Greater Gliders, Powerful Owls, Lace Monitors and Burrowing Crayfish.

Well done to Preserve our Forest Mirboo North and the community for your years of dedication and perseverance!

Jordan Crook, Parks & Nature Campaigner



← VNPA Mirboo North stickers created to celebrate the new park



↑ Community event in Mirboo North | MATT RUCHEL

Huge grassy gathering gives hope for future



ADRIAN MARSHALL,
FACILITATOR,
GRASSY PLAINS
NETWORK, REPORTS
ON THE RECENT GRASSLANDS
RESURRECTION FORUM

This May, the biggest grassland get-together in a decade focused on building capacity across the grassy restoration sector and highlighted heroic efforts to reverse the decline of our Critically Endangered grasslands.

Three hundred land managers, academics, researchers and community members gathered for a sold-out Grassland Resurrection forum, co-hosted by the Grassy Plains Network, VNPA, Merri Creek Management Committee and the Australian Association of Bush Regenerators.

It began with a profound Welcome to Country by Dr Mandy Nicholson. The Arthur Rylah Institute's Dr Steve Sinclair then opened our eyes to a global perspective, highlighting spatial reasons for the vulnerability of our grasslands to weed invasion.

5 takeaways from the Grasslands Resurrection Forum

1. Business as usual has not been enough for many years now.
2. Protection of the few remnant grasslands remaining is vital. So many of them are very vulnerable.
3. Restoration of impacted grasslands can be achieved with consistent good management over decades.
4. Creation of new grasslands through seed-based techniques is an important tool to reverse ongoing decline that must be increasingly implemented.
5. Building the community who will support grasslands is fundamental.



↑ Dr Adrian Marshall presenting the event at a packed out Fitzroy Town Hall | VIRGINIA BEAR

Keynote Dr Megan O'Shea showed that persistence, community, and the right combination of people can reverse decline. The work that's been done at Iramoo Wildflower Grassland Reserve is a beacon of hope.

Lauren Talbot's presentation on Parks Victoria's Wilsons Prom work using fire to rescue coastal grassland from shifting to coastal tea tree monocultures was similarly inspiring. It showed the power of long-term evidence-based science driving positive outcomes for nature.

The transformative power of fire used well was a strong theme throughout. CFA's Dr Joshua Hodges detailed how burning native grassland is a win-win for nature and bushfire management. His map of a fire exhausting itself within Mt Mercer Grassland while running unchecked through crop stubble was a definitive moment.

Wurundjeri's Narrap Rangers' keynote highlighted the increasing nature and social benefits of Traditional Custodians managing Country. Those benefits were also strongly evident in young Kai Lane's schools-based grassland work through Eco Warriors Australia, a predominantly First Nations organisation. A remarkable energy striving to create a remarkable future.

Another theme was creating new grasslands directly from sowing seeds. Prof. Nick Williams from the University of Melbourne, and John Delpratt and Susan Bosch from the Woorndoo-Chatsworth Landcare

Group, talked about the scrape and sow method and the emerging cap and sow technique.

Dr Cindy Hauser took us through rigorous modelling of grassland quality outcomes compared to management inputs to highlight successful scenarios that may reduce the risk of future decline.

The vital connection between research and practice was continued by Ben Courtice, the first Facilitator of the Grassy Plains Network, with a fascinating analysis of how Ecological Vegetation Community (EVC) benchmarks don't work for restoring grassy escarpments. EVC's, and the mapping that underpins them, are 20 years old and need serious revision to be fit for purpose.

Case studies delved into the details of on-ground management. Lincoln Kern from Practical Ecology gave a masterclass in monitoring-driven biomass management for positive nature outcomes. Taylor Gundry detailed carefully chosen herbicide application. Tim Connell and Alex Hodgson from the City of Whittlesea showed the virtues of a committed team and long-term wildlife monitoring driving management.

Gidja Walker's talk on the calcareous swale 'grasslands' of the Mornington Peninsula wove a story from a lifetime's profound observation, from green slimy algae that captures carbon to rocks that grow.

continued opposite page...

And then there were the Basalt Buddies, an urban restoration collective inspiring everyone with their tales of liberating seeds and the radical alternatives that can mobilise at the grassroots level.

The skills, willingness, and commitment to protecting the last of our grasslands were on show. The Forum was genuinely uplifting. A strong positive experience to build change.

And yet, as Michael Goddard from Biosis emphasised, decline is ongoing. Our grasslands are spiralling towards extinction as they become increasingly rare and increasingly under pressure.

Policy and funding at the state and federal level are currently inadequate. We have a habitat on the verge of collapse, desperately in need of sustained government action backed by significant funding. The Forum was inspiration to keep the momentum going to push for better outcomes. 🌱



↑ Happy grassy people at stalls during the forum | VIRGINIA BEAR

Plant Blindness* with Ben Gill

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

Enfield Grevillea *Grevillea bedggoodiana*

Hidden in the dry woodlands southwest of Ballarat grows one of Victoria's least known native shrubs, the Enfield Grevillea. With their sharply toothed holly-like leaves and unusual pink-green flowers, these threatened plants are both striking and highly localised.

Found only around Enfield and Smythesdale, they live nowhere else on Earth. Most known populations survive in Enfield State Park, where they grow low across heathy woodland beneath rough-barked eucalypts. In Spring, their delicate toothbrush-shaped flowers emerge, providing nectar to insects and birds as many surrounding plants begin to dry off.

Despite their tough appearance, Enfield Grevilleas face mounting threats. Early recovery planning suggested they were adapted to disturbance and capable of resprouting after fire. But during our recent citizen science surveys we found healthy populations in long-undisturbed areas, raising questions about earlier assumptions. We also found high numbers of dead shrubs after planned burns. Changing conditions may be pushing Enfield Grevilleas to their limit. One of the greatest threats is the introduced soil pathogen *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, which attacks plant roots with devastating consequences. The disease can be spread by roadworks, machinery, four-wheel drives, trail bikes and shoes.



↑ Enfield Grevillea | MATT TUDOR/INATURALIST

New pressures are also emerging. Severe dieback linked to Grevillea Leaf Miner infestations is affecting populations of related Holly Leaved Grevilleas (*Grevillea ilicifolia* subsp. *ilicifolia*), which may pose a problem. Climate change may further compound this, with increasing numbers of young plants dying before they flower and seed.

Enfield Grevilleas survive in a landscape long shaped by gold mining, logging and other habitat destruction. There's a certain irony that a plant so prickly and resilient in appearance can be so vulnerable.

Plants like Enfield Grevilleas remind us how unique and fragile our wildlife is. Protecting them means protecting their habitats, and recognising that some of our rarest plants are small shrubs subtly flowering beside a bush track. 🌱

Millions for an energy terminal, but no plan to protect the Bay

SHANNON HURLEY, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER, LOOKS AT THE STATE OF PLAY IN WESTERN PORT BAY POST-BUDGET AND PRE-ELECTION

In this year's Victorian Budget, the Allan Government committed \$124.5 million towards progressing the Victorian Renewable Energy Terminal (VRET) at the Port of Hastings. It's a major piece of infrastructure designed to support offshore wind development. Despite this significant investment, there's still no funding for a long-term plan to safeguard Western Port Bay.

In Bunurong Country, Western Port Bay is a Ramsar-listed wetland and UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. It's home to migratory shorebirds, dolphins, penguins, seagrass meadows and rich intertidal habitats. It's also facing growing pressure from industrial expansion, urban growth and large-scale infrastructure proposals. VRET risks becoming another example of Western Port Bay being gradually

chipped away, one project at a time, without equivalent investment in protecting and restoring it. The scale of work is significant. The dredging planned for the terminal is expected to be the largest in Western Port Bay since the port was first developed. It raises serious concerns about impacts on marine habitats, sediment movement and the long-term health of the bay. Shipping activity is projected to more than double, from around 150 to 350 visits annually.

For five years, local and statewide groups have been calling for relatively modest investment (\$2-3 million) to kickstart marine spatial planning and establish a Western Port Fund through the proposed Western Port Strategic Framework. Marine spatial planning would bring together community, industry and government to better coordinate uses of the Bay, protect wildlife and habitats, and support a genuinely sustainable blue economy. A Western Port Fund would support restoration, clean-up and community-led projects, modelled on the successful Port Phillip Bay Fund.

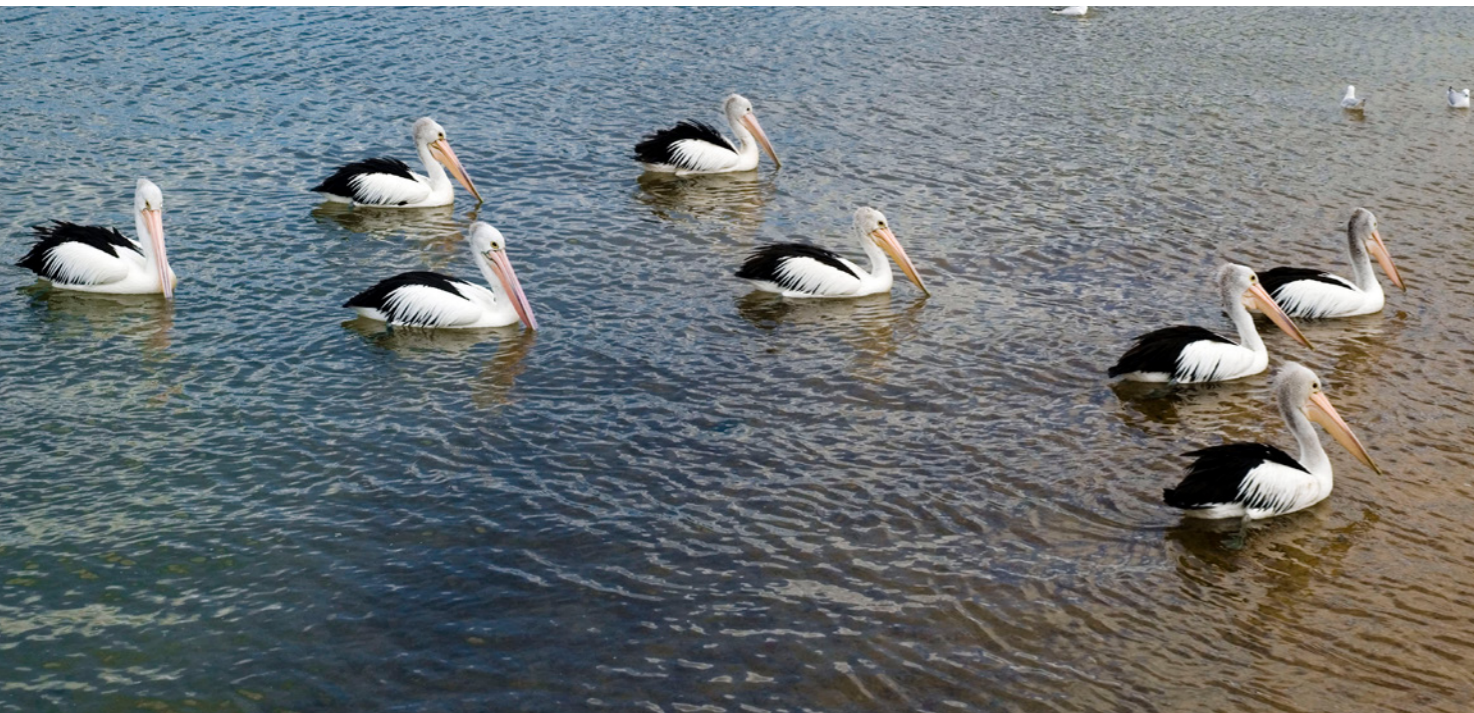
We absolutely need renewable energy. And we need to make sure building it doesn't impact the health of the

habitats and wildlife it's designed to protect.

More than \$124 million has been committed to progressing the terminal. Only a fraction of that would be needed to create proper marine planning and a dedicated protection fund.

VNPA, along with other statewide and local groups, will continue calling on the Victorian Government to fund marine spatial planning and a Western Port Fund ahead of the next state election. With hearings for the VRET set to take place early next year, we'll be feeding into that process to make sure these issues are properly considered. 🙌

Find out how you can support the campaign actforwesternportbay.au

↑ Australian Pelicans, Hastings, Western Port Bay, Bunurong Country | DAVE HARKIN

Salty Science with Rhiannwyn Lloyd-George



Spotted Wobbegong *Orectolobus maculatus*

At first glance, a Spotted Wobbegong looks less like a shark and more like a mossy rock on the seafloor – which is exactly how this master of camouflage likes it. By day, these wonderfully weird looking sharks spend most of their time motionless on sandy bottoms, rocky reefs and seagrass beds, blending so perfectly into their surroundings they almost disappear. While they seem mellow during the day, once the sun goes down, this 'living rock' comes alive.

Spotted Wobbegongs are ambush predators that are mostly active at night. These voracious predators feed on fish, crayfish, crabs and octopus and can even thrust their jaw forward to swallow prey that seem impossibly large for them!

Unlike many sharks, Spotted Wobbegongs appear to have a social side. Scientists have seen them resting together in groups and interacting with other Spotted Wobbegongs of different sexes and sizes. This behaviour suggests they may form longer-term social connections, perhaps the underwater equivalent of friendship groups.

Part of what makes them so distinctive is their shaggy beard like fringe of skin around their mouth, known as barbels. Spotted Wobbegongs use these for more than just looks; barbels help them sense movement and break up the shark's outline so they disappear into the reef. In fact, the name Wobbegong is an Aboriginal word meaning 'shaggy beard', sometimes also translated as 'living rock.'



↑ Spotted Wobbegong | ROD SLEATH/INATURALIST

Even though they seem laid-back, Spotted Wobbegongs shouldn't be underestimated. Underneath their whiskers are sharp teeth that pack a powerful bite. They're generally considered docile and prefer to avoid conflict, but if provoked or stepped on, they can defend themselves fiercely and are known for hanging on once they bite.

So next time you're exploring the great southern reef, keep an eye on the seafloor – what looks like part of the reef might just be a perfectly camouflaged Spotted Wobbegong! 🙌

Rhiannwyn Lloyd-George is a ReefWatch student placement studying a Master of Environment at the University of Melbourne



Make your support go further!

Regular gifts power our work to protect parks and wildlife across Victoria.

As a Parks Protector, your ongoing support helps make sure nature has a strong voice when it matters most.

To join the Parks Protector community, please visit vnpa.org.au/support/parks-protector or call us on 03 9341 6500.



PHOTO: MARK WEBBER

Arthurs Seat sold out by Planning Minister

JORDAN CROOK,
PARKS & NATURE
CAMPAIGNER,
UPDATES THE FIGHT
TO PROTECT ARTHURS SEAT

Despite overwhelming community objection and disgust, Planning Minister Sonya Kilkeny recently approved an application for a roller coaster-like luge in Arthurs Seat State Park.

The decision was made through Section 64(5) of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, which means there's no chance of appeal through the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. This has blindsided the local community as well as nature lovers across Victoria.

A staggering 431 submissions were made during the very short planning period. Only 13 were in favour of the development, with 418 against. Approving such a disliked development in an overwhelmingly beautiful place raises many unanswered questions about the government's plans and procedures. The use of planning rules to override public sentiment, park management plans and even the government's own policy is a troubling trend being shown by the Allan Government.



↑ Arthurs Seat State Park, Bunurong Country | JORDAN CROOK

Despite such an unwelcome decision, the Save Our Seat (SOS) group and community members have maintained momentum. SOS continue to hold events, including a community meeting on Sunday 29 March. VNPA spoke at the event, which attracted over 250 concerned locals.

SOS spokesperson Kylie Greer said, 'It's clear the Mornington Peninsula community doesn't want the luge to go ahead and they're prepared to fight tooth and nail to stop it, including standing in front of bulldozers if it comes to that.'

The community's sentiment and strong push back reflects polling done by National Parks Australia Council in 2022 that showed:

- 78% of Australians oppose development in parks and protected areas.

- 62% of Australians would be less likely to visit a national park if it had high impact commercial tours.
- Protection of nature, saving threatened wildlife, and quiet enjoyment of nature are seen as the most important purposes of national parks and other conservation areas.

The campaign against the dodgy roller coaster-like luge at Arthurs Seat State Park pushes on. Let's hope the Eagle Corporation come to their senses and send this idea where it belongs: the bin. 🌿

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



↑ Local community members making their voices heard in March | SAVE OUR SEAT



Alps at the crossroads – again

PETER JACOBS
REPORTS ON
BUILDING
MOMENTUM FOR
STRONGER ACTION IN THE
VICTORIAN ALPS

To help drive the next phase of advocacy for our alpine areas, VNPA has established a Victorian Alps Protection Working Group (VAP). Its scope covers all alpine national parks in Victoria, as well as adjoining state forests, alpine resorts and other land tenures; around 2.75 million ha in total. A small expert committee is guiding this work, bringing together experience in alpine ecology, recreation, management and education to strengthen the campaign for lasting protection.

This vast region is home to amazing wildlife, rich cultural heritage and true alpine country above the treeline – values that deserve long-term protection. The Alps are also a living cultural landscape. First Peoples' connections to Country continue despite the profound impacts of colonisation, and any vision for the future must recognise and respect these enduring relationships.

Protection of the Victorian Alps has always been hard won. Although Mount Buffalo National Park was established in 1898, logging, grazing, mining and hydroelectric development delayed broader conservation for decades. It took another 83 years before more protected areas were created, culminating in the establishment of the Alpine National Park in 1992. That history shows both how much effort has been required, and how much work still remains. VNPA has a long history of sticking up for the Alps. That includes publishing the landmark *Alps at the Crossroads* in 1974, campaigning to end cattle grazing in Alpine National Park in 2006, and speaking out on threats like

the contentious Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing upgrade. This work builds on the commitment of dedicated campaigners, including the late Phil Ingamells.

Today, the Victorian Alps still face serious threats: climate change, ongoing extractive pressures, new and expanded infrastructure, invasive species, damaging recreational impacts, inappropriate fire regimes and chronic underfunding. But there is also a real opportunity. With logging ended, we have a stronger foundation to expand and connect protected areas and secure a more resilient future for the Alps.

For more information on VAP, contact Jordan Crook jordan@vnpa.org.au. 🌿

Peter Jacobs is a retired Chief Ranger Alps and protected area consultant



↑ View from The Bluff towards Mt Clear, Alpine National Park | PHIL INGAMELLS

Glad tidings Nature news to bring a smile to your face



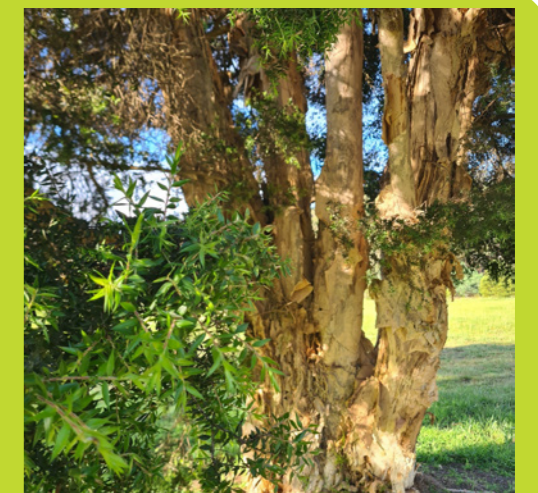
Bark saving the planet

In a scientific first, researchers at Southern Cross and Monash universities have uncovered the hidden world of the tiny organisms living in the bark of trees and how they're helping combat climate change.

These microbes 'eat', or use, gases like methane and carbon monoxide for energy and survival, helping to clean the air we breathe. Most significantly, they also remove hydrogen, which has a role in super-charging climate change.

The discovery changes how we think about trees. Bark was long assumed to be largely biologically inert in relation to climate. But these findings show it hosts active microbial communities that influence key atmospheric gases. This means trees affect the climate in more ways than we previously realised. 😊

Read more at theconversation.com/we-discovered-microbes-in-bark-eat-climate-gases-this-will-change-the-way-we-think-about-trees-269612



↑ Broad-leaved Paperbark, a hotspot for microbial life | DANNY MITCHELL/INATURALIST

Connectivity on hold in the central west



BEN GILL, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER, ON THE BUSHLAND RESERVES IN THE WAITING

Three new national parks, several conservation parks, and dozens of nature reserves from the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's (VEAC) 2019 Central West Investigation have been proclaimed. Due to come into effect in October, they'll bring long-awaited protection for habitats and wildlife. But 18 bushland reserves recommended in the Mount Cole-Pyrenees area have been left in the lurch.

They're scattered across farming country between Amphitheatre, Avoca, Lexton and Lamplough. Together, they cover around 1,081 hectares of forest and woodland. Most are small: 16 of the 18 are ten hectares or smaller. The standout exception is the Glenmona Forest

Bushland Reserve at 984 hectares, sitting north of the Pyrenees Highway. Box-Ironbark forest dominates this landscape, with other rare woodlands nestled along creeks and a few surviving massive old trees.

Beyond the forested ranges, the Mount Cole-Pyrenees area is mostly cleared agricultural land. In this cleared landscape, small reserves are island refuges. VEAC said these refuges provide vital links between the larger intact patches of forest.

Most are currently uncategorised public land with no formal protection. They're home to many habitats: Grassy Woodland, Box Ironbark Forest, Alluvial Terraces Herb-rich Woodland, Creekline Grassy Woodland, Riparian Forest, Grassy Dry Forest and Heathy Dry Forest. They're also home to many threatened plants and animals.

The unprotected forests are spread across Dja Dja Wurrung and Eastern Maar Country. The government committed to partnering with

Traditional Owners to create and look after the new reserves, including the use of Aboriginal place names. But that partnership can't happen until the new reserves are created.

The government accepted VEAC's recommendations in 2021. Five years on, legislation hasn't followed. These aren't contested landscapes; there's no competing commercial interest. We've been pushing for these forests to be protected as promised.

The 18 central west bushland reserves are still waiting. 🌿

New Minister for Environment

A CABINET RESHUFFLE IN APRIL SEES A NEW FACE TO THE NATURE PORTFOLIO

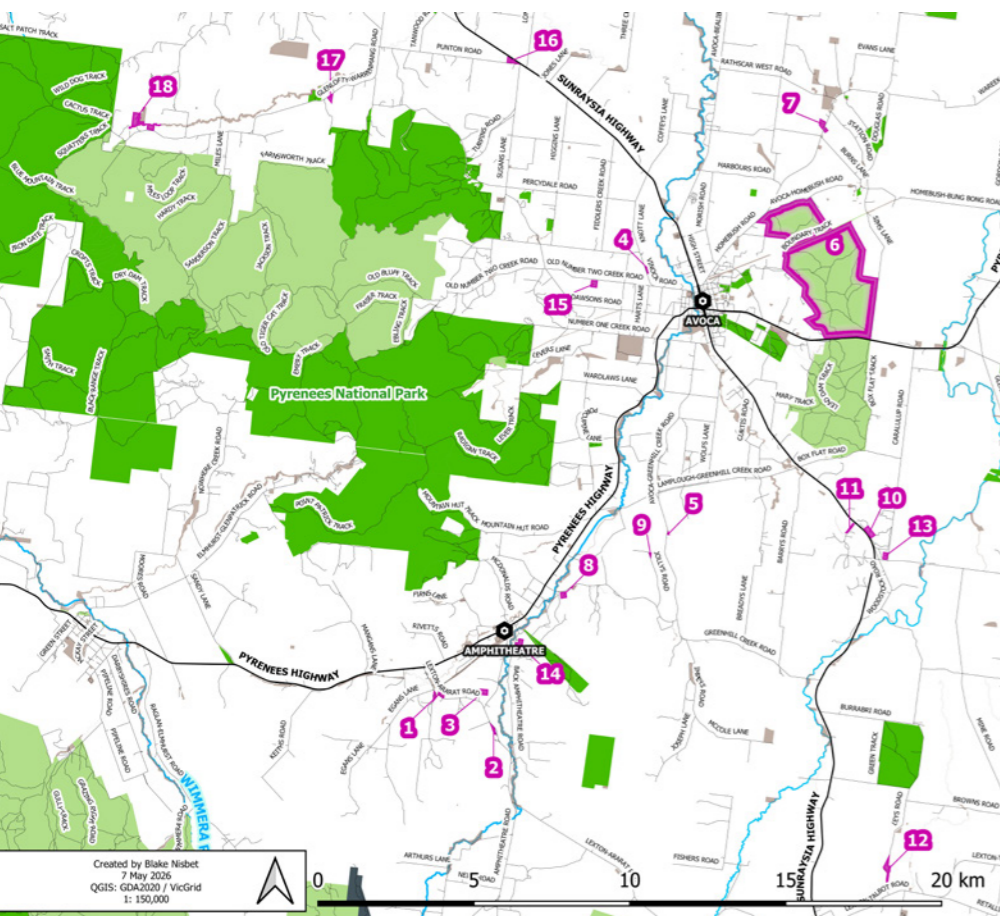
Ever Erdogan, MP for Northern Metropolitan Region recently took the helm as Victoria's new Minister for Environment.



Erdogan takes over Environment and Outdoor Recreation from Steve Dimopoulos. This removes some of the conflict in the environment portfolio between Tourism and Major Events, but there remains a conflict with Outdoor Recreation, which is largely Allan Government code for hunting and fishing.

If those two areas weren't already strange bedfellows, he's also the minister responsible for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation.

We welcome the minister to the portfolio. But we're concerned. With only five months to the state election, a reshuffle at this stage may not bode well for nature being given a high priority. 🌿



↑ Location of the 18 bushland reserves | MAP BY BLAKE NISBET



↑ ANDESIGN101/123RF

ISN'T IT OBVIOUS...?

NATURE IS LOSING PROTECTION, AND THE IMPACTS ARE ALREADY HERE SAYS **MATT RUCHEL**, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Victoria's forests, oceans and grasslands are incredible. The wildlife that depend on them deserve proper protection. Yet the safeguards meant to look after them are being eroded. At the very moment they're needed most.

The solutions are obvious. Together, we can make the obvious a reality.

Together, we've achieved lasting outcomes for nature in Victoria, turning community concern into tangible protection for the landscapes and wildlife we love. We've:

- Secured new and expanded national parks across Victoria.
- Been part of the creation of marine national parks and sanctuaries.

- Achieved stronger protection for some of Victoria's most threatened habitats.
- Influenced better nature laws, policies and planning decisions.
- Helped stop or reshape inappropriate developments in and around protected areas.

We achieved these positive outcomes for nature because we banded together. We've stopped damage before. We've shown that when communities act, nature wins. 🌿



Loopholes are letting native forest logging continue

State government promises to end logging have been broken. Loophole logging continues to destroy forests right across Victoria under different guises.

Already stressed by past logging, fires and climate change, these habitats are being pushed toward collapse. These forests can recover, if loopholes are closed.



↑ JORDAN CROOK, MEGHAN LINDSAY

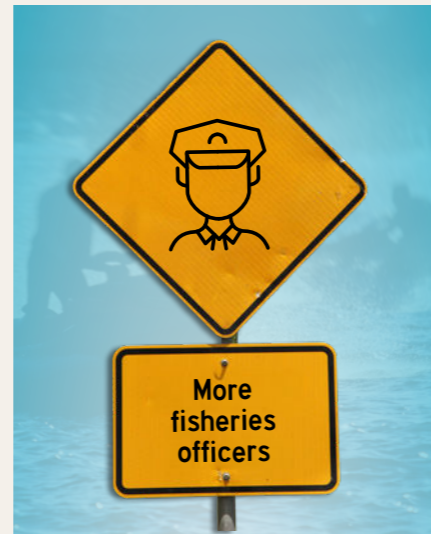


Axing independent advice will leave nature without safeguards

The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council and Marine and Coastal Council, key to protecting habitats and holding government accountable, have been axed. Independent advice has been removed. When these voices disappear, damaging decisions follow. These strong voices for nature should be restored.



↑ CAM SUTTIE



Fewer fisheries officers means less protection for marine life and habitats

Fisheries officers safeguard our marine parks, yet they've been cut by more than half in the past year. Inspections have plummeted, and non-compliance is rising, threatening coastal health.

Without enforcement, marine parks are just lines on a map. We need more officers on the water to look out for marine wildlife.



↑ NIKOLAY TCUGULIEV, ELODIE CAMPRASSE



Threatened grasslands aren't being protected

Victoria's native grasslands are among Australia's most threatened habitats, yet they continue to be destroyed while promised protections are delayed.

Lack of action is threatening unique wildlife. It's time we properly protect the last 0.5 per cent of grasslands that remain across Victoria.



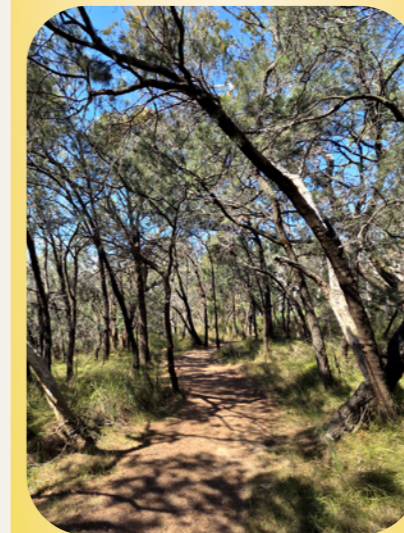
↑ JORDAN CROOK, ADRIAN MARSHALL



Victoria's parks are under growing pressure from development

Our parks should put nature first. Yet weak oversight allows developments like the Arthurs Seat luge inside protected areas.

If the project at Arthurs Seat State Park goes ahead, every park is at risk. Parks protected from development are parks that thrive for generations.



↑ PRAMOTE POLYAMATE, JORDAN CROOK



Your gift helps us advocate for stronger protections, better oversight, and real enforcement so nature can thrive.

Donate now at vnpa.org.au/isnt-it-obvious



Relics of the Ice Age lost to a planning loophole



BEN GILL, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER, LOOKS AT EVENTS AT MOUNT MACEDON IN APRIL AND WHY IT MATTERS FOR VICTORIA'S REMAINING WOODLANDS

AT MOUNT MACEDON IN APRIL AND WHY IT MATTERS FOR VICTORIA'S REMAINING WOODLANDS

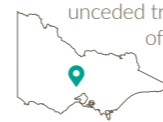
I've been to the summit of Mount Macedon many times. The Montane Grassy Woodland up there, dominated by Snow Gums (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*), is not like what you find in the alpine high country. It's something stranger and older. Lowland Ice Age relics, survivors of a population that once stretched far more widely across Australia, before the climate warmed and their range contracted.

Just 21 hectares of the community remains in central and western Victoria. Mount Macedon and one distant peak in the Grampians/Gariwerd. Snow Gums live in other places in the west, but not in a plant community like this, which makes it even more important.

In April 2026, a big patch of the remaining community was destroyed.

← Remains of Snow Gums at Mt Macedon | BEN GILL

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



How the clearing happened

Parks Victoria called it the Mount Macedon Memorial Cross View Lines Reinstatement Project. The pitch was simple: remove trees to restore views to the Memorial Cross. We respect this important, heritage listed war memorial. And the forest living around it should also be respected.

The community pushed back hard. When Parks Victoria applied to Macedon Ranges Shire Council to clear forest, they received over 60 formal objections. Councillors weighed impacts against nature protection laws and voted 6-3 against the clearing.

Parks Victoria appealed to VCAT. Then, unexpectedly, they abandoned the appeal and took a completely different path. In May 2025, they asked the Planning Minister to have the project declared a State Project. Under this pathway, standard planning rules don't apply. Council isn't consulted and the community gets no say.

Macedon Ranges Shire Council wasn't even told the application had been made. The application sat with Planning Minister Sonya Kilkenny for nearly ten months. It was approved in April 2026, under laws designed for hospitals and freeways, not the destruction of rare plant communities. Twelve days later, the chainsaws started.

What was destroyed

Three weeks before works started, Alpine Ash (*Eucalyptus delegatensis*) forests were listed as an Endangered community under federal nature laws. In what followed, Alpine Ash were cut

down and Dwarf Silver Wattles (*Acacia nanodealbata*), Vulnerable under state nature laws, were smashed.

Snow Gums at Mount Macedon have adapted over thousands of years to this mountain, this elevation, these soils. After fire, they resprout slowly from their bases, recovery that can take decades. The trees killed in April had been slowly recovering since the 1983 Ash Wednesday fires. Now they're gone. And all remaining stumps have been poisoned.

A similar clearing took place near the Macedon Tearooms in 2014 with no public offset or compliance record. In 2025, Forest Fire Management Victoria completely destroyed approximately 6.5 hectares in the park. Each clearing stacks on top of the last. For a community of just 21 hectares, that accumulation is existential.

False heritage justification

Here's where it gets even worse. Throughout the whole process – in their community fact sheets, on their website, and presumably in the application to the Planning Minister – Parks Victoria claimed the Victorian Heritage Register listing of the Memorial Cross required views toward Melbourne.

Heritage Victoria, who're responsible for that heritage listing, said the registration doesn't protect or even reference views. The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) independently reviewed the same documents and reached the same conclusion. The trees were cleared for a heritage obligation that doesn't exist.

Where things stand

When the clearing started, community members gathered. Parks Victoria officers warned them they could be arrested. Between 60 and 70 people rallied on the slopes below the trees. But after they left, late on a Friday afternoon the machines were fired up. The community found out Saturday morning through social media. All remaining tree stumps were poisoned, extinguishing any possibility of resprouting.

This destruction sets a very poor precedent. We've asked the Planning Minister to provide reasons for her decision. We've referred the clearing under federal nature laws. We've written to the new Environment Minister to ask for a binding restoration plan and a biodiversity offset. We've also written to Parks Victoria's Chief Executive demanding they correct every public document that misrepresents the heritage registration.

What happened at Mount Macedon is a test of what nature protection laws mean when a government agency decides they're inconvenient. The outcome will permeate well beyond this mountain. 🌿

Email your elected representatives to ask why this happened, and to make sure what comes next benefits nature.
vnpa.org.au/save-the-snow-gums

Victorians for Nature launch new campaign



↑ Campaign tote bag. Background: Wilsons Promontory National Park, Gunaikurnai & Bunurong Country | JASON HAM



A NEW CAMPAIGN IS CALLING TIME ON BROKEN PROMISES, REVEALS SHANNON HURLEY, NATURE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNER

Something strange is happening in Victorian politics. On paper, governments keep talking about protecting nature. They wrote the Biodiversity 2037 policy, a roadmap to stop the decline of plants, animals and fungi. But since then, meaningful action has dwindled, and in many cases, we've gone backwards. Funding is being cut. Nature protection agencies are being hollowed out. Long-promised national parks have stalled. Loopholes are allowing logging and land clearing to continue. Grasslands are being bulldozed. Fisheries officers and park rangers are disappearing. And major industrial projects push ahead without the long-term planning nature desperately needs.

Policy loopholes, funding cuts and broken promises are quietly unpicking nature protection.

A bold approach

Much of what's happening goes under the radar. That's why Victorians for Nature has banded together. It's a growing alliance of nature organisations and community groups calling for stronger nature protection.

As part of this broader effort, the alliance has launched a community mobilising campaign with a bold statement: 'Stop the F*ckery'.

Yes, the name is blunt. The directness is the point. The discomfort is exactly the mechanism we need to cut through the noise, and to reach new people. Discomfort means attention. Attention means conversations.

The name reflects a level of frustration that's been building for years. Particularly among those who've spent decades working to secure protections that are now being steadily eroded. And it will cut through to reach beyond the usual voices.

Its role is simple: to document and call out the loopholes, backflips, funding cuts and broken promises undermining nature protection in Victoria – across

forests, fish, fauna, funding and feral species.

The campaign website documents over 30 examples from across Victoria, with new issues added as they happen. It gives people a clear way to see what's happening, push back, and hold decision-makers to account. The more visible that pressure becomes before the election, the harder it is to ignore.

Stop the F*ckery is one part of the wider campaign in the lead-up to the November 2026 state election. But the campaign goes beyond any one initiative.

Victorians for Nature will seek to engage people who care about nature but may not yet realise the scale of what's unfolding. As well as those who've been working tirelessly for years and are ready to see meaningful change.

This campaign isn't just about identifying what's going wrong. It's about building the momentum to fix it.

The stakes are high

Victoria is already the most cleared state in Australia. Thousands of plants, animals, fungi and habitats are threatened with extinction. Experts continue to warn that current laws are failing to halt declines.

The end of native forest logging should've marked a turning point. It was a rare opportunity to permanently protect forests and give habitats a chance to heal. Instead, loopholes remain, allowing destructive practices to continue under different guises.

At the same time, promised new parks and reserves – including Melbourne's long-awaited grassland reserves – remain delayed while habitat continues to be destroyed.

What makes this moment particularly concerning is that the damage isn't coming from a single headline decision. It's happening incrementally. A staffing cut here. A shelved reform there. Scientific advisory bodies

abolished. A promise quietly deferred. Another project approved without broader planning for nature..

Individually, each decision can seem technical. Together, they tell a much bigger story. Victoria's nature protection system is being steadily weakened.

Commitments for nature

Ahead of the 2026 election, the alliance is calling for six clear commitments:

- End native forest logging on public and private land by closing the loopholes that have let it continue.
- Create Melbourne's grassland reserves and the remaining central west conservation reserves that have been promised and remain undelivered.
- Significantly increase funding to look after national parks.
- Expand and connect the existing parks in the Central Highlands and East Gippsland, support Emerald Link and assess eastern Victoria's forests for nomination as a UNESCO World Heritage site.
- Partner with and resource Traditional Owners to lead on the management, restoration and care of Country, lands and water, including new models of park and public land management.

This campaign isn't just about identifying what's going wrong. It's about building the momentum to fix it.

Across the state, Victorians for Nature is engaging communities in new ways. Through film screenings, local events and campaign launches in key regions, supported by a clear and accessible public campaign designed to reach far beyond the traditional audience.

The aim is simple: build a movement that's impossible to ignore.

Because our elected leaders are the ones who can fix this. They can put nature on the priority list. And they'll pay attention if enough of us let them know that. Especially with an election on the horizon. 🌿

Join the movement
victoriansfornature.au

Paving paradise to put up parking lots



NICK CLEMANN,
SENIOR BIOLOGIST,
HERPETOLOGY AT
ZOOS VICTORIA,
SAYS THREATENED PLANTS
AND ANIMALS ARE BEING
PUSHED TO THE BRINK BY
PREVENTABLE HABITAT
DESTRUCTION IN THE
VICTORIAN ALPS

Humans depend on other living beings. And those beings essential to our existence in turn rely on other beings. We're all interconnected strands in the web of life.

But biodiversity is eroding at a rate unmatched since the event that wiped out dinosaurs 66 million years ago. In any rational evolutionary timeframe, this catastrophe's pace is frightening. Although there have been five mass extinctions in the history of life, this is the first time a single species has caused such an event. And that's us.

Twenty years of research

My research on Mount Hotham provides an example of preventable destruction of nature. Late last century I began surveying reptiles and frogs in the Victorian Alps. In 2005, I established monitoring sites across this region.

Colleagues and I monitor threatened reptiles and frogs. One way we do this is studying the genetic 'health' of populations. An emerging conservation paradigm, 'genetic rescue', involves us giving isolated populations a 'shot in the arm' by introducing genetic diversity from other populations.

This approach requires looking after genetic diversity in all populations. We can't genetically augment a population if diversity in other populations is

lost before we start. In other words, the health of wildlife in one area is dependent on the health of wildlife in other areas.

Bulldozers in the bush

Several times we have arrived at our sites on Mount Hotham to witness machines destroying habitats of Critically Endangered wildlife like Alpine She-oak Skinks (*Cyclodomorphus praealtus*) and Alpine Tree Frogs (*Litoria verreauxii alpina*). Some sites have been damaged; others sit less than 40 metres from destroyed habitat.

One might presume that, to destroy habitats of threatened wildlife, the highest standards of evidence and expertise would be mandatory.

But many assessments of this destruction are conducted by ecological consultants paid by development interests. To assess properly, consultants need to seek the best information from those running monitoring programs. And – if operating competently and ethically – faithfully report and act upon that important information.

Failing to be directed by these experts means that assessments often do not truly reflect the consequences of the destruction.

Destruction facilitated by such assessments comes at an enormous cost to already threatened wildlife. The

Alpine Tree Frog | NICK CLEMANN →

← Destruction of threatened wildlife habitat and the only known area of microhabitat sharing between three *Pseudemoia* skinks (two of which are threatened), Mount Hotham Alpine Resort | NICK CLEMANN

latest destruction (still underway early this year) in Mount Hotham Alpine Resort destroyed habitat not only for two Critically Endangered animals (Alpine She-oak Skinks and Alpine Tree Frogs), but also for other threatened reptiles. This included an area of syntopy (two or more species living in the same microhabitat) between three *Pseudemoia* skinks, two of which are threatened. Such areas are critical to evolutionary relationships. The area destroyed is the only location where this relationship was known. This is a tragic loss.

The client is pleased, nature is not

These losses are preventable. In a biodiversity crisis, it's not only essential that the best expertise and information is sought about consequences of habitat destruction – it's mandated by law. State nature laws specify 'the best practicably available information relevant to biodiversity' is given 'proper consideration' for any decision or process involving threatened wildlife. That includes wildlife on or near Mount Hotham.

So why are experts and publications excluded from pre-destruction assessments? During our over 20 years in the Alps, the number of eco-consultants has increased exponentially. Consulting companies are the largest employer in the biodiversity sector. Consulting is often the first job university graduates get. Competition is fierce. Consultants know if a client isn't happy with their advice, they can switch to various competitors.

Pleasing clients is not only the way to make money, but also how consultants make sure they keep making money. Some of the most knowledgeable ecologists in Victoria are self-employed consultants. But they represent a tiny proportion of the sector. Exceedingly few commercial consultants have spent significant time studying and monitoring reptiles and frogs so most are not authoritative experts.

There are powerful motivations to keep clients happy, which necessitates destroying habitats where developments are planned. Minor concessions might be made. Initial plans slightly altered to make it seem like threatened wildlife are



being considered. Dubious 'mitigations', such as relocating some animals may be recommended. The all-but universally condemned biodiversity 'offsetting' might be applied...

But these token concessions do little to mitigate the destruction. Some, such as relocating animals, can spread pathogens, trigger aggressive and territorial behaviours, and cause a lack of essential resources at release sites.

Although profits of developments go to individuals and companies, the eventual cost of trying to recover threatened wildlife is borne by the taxpayer. Not only does this destruction affect our own existence, we'll also feel these losses in our hip pocket. Effective recovery is undermined by genetic loss. Recovery is increasingly not only expensive, it's fast becoming improbable.

Signs of hope and an urgent reminder

The federal environment department is increasingly aware of assessments that bypass the best evidence and expertise. They're concerned threatened wildlife habitat continues to be destroyed, despite the protections intended in federal nature laws.



↑ Alpine She-oak Skink | NICK CLEMANN

They continue to hold consultants to account for claims they make, and ask them to justify conclusions and recommendations. They can require literature reviews of proposed 'mitigations' and biodiversity offsetting that are hastening destruction of wildlife and habitats. And they are asking consultants to make sure they engage with, and follow, the advice of experts.

Sadly, further destruction of threatened wildlife habitat is all-but inevitable due to insatiable development. It's never been more important that decision-makers truly understand the consequences of the decisions they make. 🙏

This article adapted from the author's paper 'They paved paradise, put up a parking lot: the unfolding herpetofauna tragedy at Mount Hotham, Australia'. *Australian Zoologist* 45

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

Unwanted Visitors

with Feral Beryl*



South African Weed Orchid

South African Weed Orchid (*Disa bracteata*), aka SAWO or 'The Beast' is an invasive pest across much of southern Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia, and into Tasmania.

Who invited them?

SAWO is a tuberous species within the large *Disa* genus from Africa, Madagascar and nearby islands. Presumably, they were introduced into Australia as an ornamental. Early records date from 1944 near Albany, WA, the late 1980s around Adelaide, the early 1990s in western Victoria and 2005 in Tasmania.

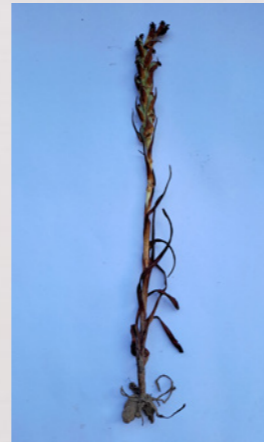
Why they're unwanted

In all areas, SAWO has spread rapidly and is capable of invading habitats at very high densities. As an unwanted guest, it seems to be very comfortable in southern Australia, with no intention of moving out. Climatic niche research has predicted further range expansion into eastern Australia and Tasmania, and potential spread to New Zealand/Aotearoa.

In Victoria, it grows readily from seed and can form large mats of tiny, independent, tuberous seedlings around mature plants. These large mats are bad news for native seedlings trying to grow. A rosette of purple-tinged leaves sprout from a dormant tuber in late Autumn to mid-Winter. The many-flowered stems develop during Spring, with most seeds dispersing (in south-western Victoria, at least) in early to mid-Summer. Each plant is capable of producing many thousands of tiny, wind-dispersed seeds, which can be readily



↑ SAWO at Wonthaggi Heathlands | MEGHAN LINDSAY



↑ SAWO with tubers | JOHN DELPRATT

spread by animal and human traffic, and by soil movement. The longevity of the soil seed bank may be several years at least, further complicating the management of well-established infestations.

Evicting overstaying guests

Individual plants can be removed by carefully digging up the tuber/s or by applying a systemic herbicide. Of course, the physical effort of removing all plants from a dense infestation is enormous, and even the careful application of a systemic herbicide will almost inevitably contact and kill nearby native plants. Not to mention leave space for further invasion.

One point of vulnerability is the annually-replaced tuber. Research is underway to find out if a contact desiccant herbicide (less likely to kill nearby native plants) will stop the invaders photosynthesising and creating new tubers.

There's a further, fascinating management complication. In a restored native grassland in south-western Victoria, SAWO grows with dense colonies of beautiful native Sun Orchids (*Thelymitra* spp.). A difficult challenge to overcome, with more research needed. 🌱



↑ SAWO at various stages | GARRY FRENCH

*This edition's Feral Beryl is John Delpratt, Honorary (Fellow), University of Melbourne and Project Officer, Woorndoo Chatsworth Landcare Group

Judy Xiao chu Chen

JUDY XIAOCHU CHEN IS A MEMBER OF VNPA COUNCIL AND CURRENTLY SERVES AS TREASURER

What drew you to support VNPA?

I was looking for an organisation whose purpose aligned closely with my values and interests. I've been incredibly impressed by VNPA's history and the role it has played in shaping and protecting the national parks we enjoy today, and I wanted to contribute to that important legacy.

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

I've worked across various facets of finance in both the private and public sectors, so I bring experience in governance, financial planning and analysis, and business partnering to help support strategic decision-making and the long-term financial sustainability of the organisation. Personally, I love spending time in nature and enjoy encouraging others to appreciate and protect Victoria's national parks and wildlife.

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

The Dandenong Ranges — not just because it's where I live, but because it's such a beautiful example of nature and wildlife in Victoria.



↙ Judy in the Dargo River, Gunaikurnai Country; and with her daughter at Olinda, Wurundjeri Country | SUPPLIED



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

Whether you're admiring the Yellow-Tailed Black Cockatoos in the Dandenong Ranges, hiking in the Alpine National Park, or camping at Wilsons Promontory, it's worth remembering the important role VNPA has played in protecting these places and the wildlife that live there.

Take the time to learn about the organisation's history and impact, share it with your family and friends, and encourage others to become members or donors to help support VNPA's important work for future generations.

What has time in nature taught you?

That it does wonders to physical health, mental health, that the bond between human and nature is innate and instinctive.

What's your favourite season to get into nature?

Every season! 🌿

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, please contact Jonathan Starks jstarks@hindmarsh.vic.gov.au



Sweet no more

 **MIA KLEIN** EXPLAINS THE RECENT RECLASSIFICATION OF SUGAR GLIDERS

For decades, Sugar Gliders were considered one widespread but singular species. In 2020, researchers from Charles Darwin University looked at the genetics and physical traits of over 300 gliders and discovered clear genetic splits and subtle visual differences. As a result, they've been split into three different species: Sugar Gliders (*Petaurus breviceps*), Savanna Gliders (*Petaurus ariel*) and Krefft's Gliders (*Petaurus notatus*).

Krefft's Gliders are the most common and are found across Victoria. They look very similar to Sugar Gliders but have a darker stripe on the top of their bodies and a fluffier tail. Savanna Gliders live in northern Australia and stand out with narrower, more pointed, squirrel-like faces and thinner fur.

Krefft's Gliders are named after Gerard Krefft, a German-Australian zoologist and former Australian Museum curator. He collected the museum specimen of the gliders and was an early voice of warning that European settlement would threaten Australia's wildlife. A warning that's come to pass. This discovery has also reshaped nature protection. What was once considered a single, secure glider is now split. True Sugar Gliders have a much smaller range than previously thought, limited to the coastal forests of south-east Queensland and into New South Wales. They face growing threats from habitat destruction, urban expansion and habitat fragmentation. Threats amplified by the devastating 2019-2020 bushfires.

Similarly, Savanna Gliders face their own set of challenges across the wooded savannas of northern Australia. Feral cats, altered fire regimes, and widespread habitat destruction continue to wreak havoc.

Online databases like the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas and iNaturalist are catching up with the name changes, with most updating past sightings in Victoria to Krefft's Gliders.

Next time you go spotlighting, see if you can spot our newly named fluffy-tailed glider searching for sweet tree sap in the canopy. 🌿

Mia Klein is a NatureWatch student placement studying science at the University of Melbourne



↑ Krefft's Glider, Woods Bushland Reserve, Bunurong Country, VIC | ROG STANDEN



↑ Sugar Glider, Katoomba, Dharug and Gundungurra Country, NSW | A BENJAMIN



↑ Savanna Glider, Kakadu National Park, Bininj Munguy Country, NT | ECONEIGHBOUR

wallan wallan: nature connection in Melbourne's north



↑ Merri Creek in the proposed wallan wallan Regional Park | MERRI CREEK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

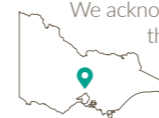
 **YASMIN KELSALL** ON THE MOVEMENT TO CREATE THE WALLAN WALLAN REGIONAL PARKLAND

The wallan wallan Regional Parkland Alliance is calling on the State Government to commit to create the wallan wallan Regional Park, with a petition to Parliament now running.

wallan wallan is the missing piece of parkland along the Merri Creek, providing important green space for new communities in Melbourne's rapidly growing north.

Creation of the parkland was raised in the 2022 Feasibility Study for the wallan wallan Regional Park, commissioned by the Andrews Government. The Alliance was founded in 2025 by Wallan Environment Group, Merri Creek Management Committee, Friends of Merri Creek and BEAM Mitchell Environment Group with the aim of seeing the government commit to this much needed parkland.

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

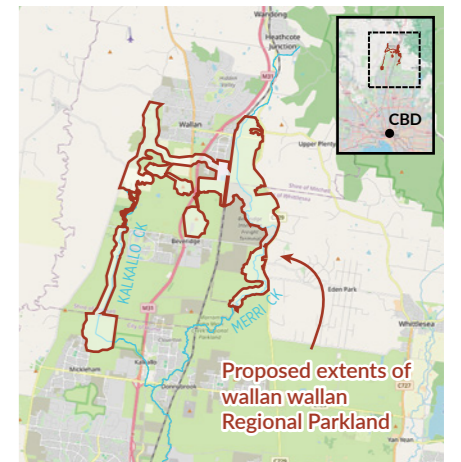


wallan wallan means circular place of water in Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and refers to the abundance of wetlands in this landscape. Coupled with stunning volcanic cones, the region makes for a truly unique parkland proposition.

Totalling 3000 hectares, it follows the edges of the northern growth corridor where development is aiming to provide housing for an extra 200,000 people and jobs for many thousands. It will include some of Victoria's biggest infrastructure projects with extensive road, rail and warehousing.

The park will provide protection for wetlands, woodlands and grasslands, and be a fantastic asset for residents, if our elected representatives can grasp the opportunity. Help them by signing the petition (closes 3 August). 🌿

Yasmin Kelsall is Environmental Planning Lead with the Merri Creek Management Committee and supports wallan wallan Regional Parkland Alliance



↑ MAP BASE: OPENSTREETMAP

Learn more about wallan wallan and sign the petition
wallanwallanrp.org.au



↑ wallan wallan Regional Parkland Alliance with local MP Ros Spence | MEL WALSH

Grow West community planting day



↑ 2025 Grow West community planting day, Monteville Lane, Ballan | MELBOURNE WATER

THE 1000 STEPS TRAIL IN DARLEY IS SET FOR A **GROW WEST** COMMUNITY PLANTING DAY

Grow West is inviting the community to join its much-loved annual planting day, bringing people across the region together to restore and protect nature west of Melbourne.

The 2026 planting day is taking place from 9:30am to 4:00pm on Sunday 19 July, at the summit of 1,000 Steps in Darley, near Bacchus Marsh in Wurundjeri Country, halfway between Melbourne and Ballarat.

Not only will planters enjoy the fun of planting, there's also spectacular views and a chance to plant and water 3,500 native seedlings on the day.

This year's planting aims to highlight the value of native plants and the long-term outcomes these plantings support, such as greater and better-connected habitat across the landscape. Additionally, the initiative aims to highlight the benefits of

restoring native plants, like greater and better-connected habitat plus benefits for wildlife, waterways and people.

For more than 23 years, the Grow West annual community planting days have supported landscape restoration, habitat connectivity and nature stewardship. The 2025 event attracted more than 200 people, underlining the strong community commitment to looking after local habitats.

'We are incredibly proud to continue this collaboration. The diversity of participants, from individuals, families to community groups, demonstrates how strongly the community values restoring habitat connectivity across this beautiful region,' said Grow West Coordinator, Lindy MacRaid.

Grow West is hosted by Melbourne Water as the Catchment Management Authority (CMA) for the Port Phillip and Western Port region. CMAs deliver land, water, and wildlife programs throughout Victoria.

The 2026 planting day will be delivered in partnership with the Moorabool Shire Council, with funding support from Community Bank Bacchus Marsh. VNPA is a partner



along with Friends of Werribee Gorge and Long Forest Mallee, Moorabool Landcare Network, Fifteen Trees, Bacchus Marsh Lions Club and Victorian Mobile Landcare Group. 'The 1,000 Steps is an iconic destination for our community and visitors, and this planting day is a fantastic way for people to give back to a

place they love,' said Mayor Cr Steve Venditti-Taylor at Moorabool Shire Council.

'By working alongside Grow West and the community, we're helping protect local biodiversity and ensure our bushland reserves remain healthy for future generations.'

Community members of all ages and abilities are encouraged to take part. Tools, plants and guidance will be provided on the day, as well as lunch and refreshments. 🌿

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

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

← Binit Binnit, a composite of Manna Gum bark, in the form of a family of Tawny Frogmouths | ALL IMAGES JOSH DYKGRAAF



JOSH DYKGRAAF EXPLORES THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ANIMALS AND THEIR HABITATS, AND THE IMPACT OF HUMANITY

I'm a photographic artist: that is, I photograph all kinds of material, cut it out and digitally recompose it into a new form. Each image is kind of a hyper-collage, requiring 40-100 hours to make, with thousands of layers in Photoshop.

My creative process is a lot like cloud watching. Like noticing that leaves often have a similar shape and form to feathers, or that at scale bushland on a hillside can look like fur. Most of my source material is found or photographed while I'm out bushwalking.

Nature is the central focus and inspiration in my work, both in appreciating and imbuing a love for

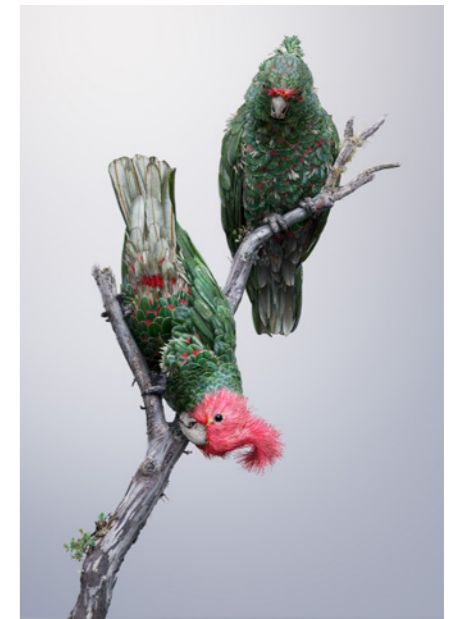
the beauty of nature, and also bringing awareness to issues and threatened wildlife I care about.

We're in the middle of a rolling extinction event for the world's wildlife. In Australia that's primarily due to habitat destruction, but also climate change and our waste practices.

I moved to the Dandenongs last year, so my focus and inspiration has been the plants and animals found nearby in Dandenong Ranges and Yarra Ranges national parks.

I hope to pass on that love of nature. If I'm able to influence my audience in how we think about the way we interact with our environment in some small way, that's a huge win. 🌿

For more info, including timelapse videos of how each piece comes together joshdykgraaf.com @joshdykgraaf



Dirandi and Yarbi, a composite of banksia leaves and bottlebrush flowers in the form of a pair of Gang-gang Cockatoos.



Drogedy, a composite of landscape photography shot in the Grampians/Gariwerd, in the form of a Wombat.



Bin Chicken, composite of rubbish found on the streets, in the form of an Australian White Ibis.

WYPERFELD NATIONAL PARK

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

WE VISIT ONE OF VICTORIA'S LARGEST AND OLDEST NATIONAL PARKS, WITH A FRIENDS GROUP CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

Wyperfeld National Park is a place of peace, contrasts, brilliant starry skies and wildlife. Victoria's third-largest national park, it protects an extensive area of mallee. It also has lake beds (mostly dry), Red Gums and wide open spaces. The park is famous for its birds, including remarkable mound-building Malleefowl (*Leipoa ocellata*).

Located on Wotjobaluk Country, the park is co-managed with the Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation.

The park protects an incredible diversity of mallee and flood plain landscapes that stretch for miles. Visitors are always surprised at the huge diversity of wildflowers in Spring and wide range of beautiful birds including Splendid Fairywrens (*Malurus splendens*) and Regent Parrots (*Polytelis anthopeplus*).

The region was aptly described by the late Geoff Durham: 'Wyperfeld is a park of contrasts... meandering ribbons of massive gnarled trees and vast areas of low shrubs, brilliant plumage of parrots and the subtle camouflage of the tireless Malleefowl, the timelessness of mallee scrub and the dynamics of a flood plain.'

Friends of Wyperfeld formed in 1976 when visitors to the park were enchanted by the waters that reached the flood plains, filling the ancient dry lakes.

The Friends of Wyperfeld continues to meet regularly at the park with organised working bees and a focus both on visitor experience (interpretive signs on walks, solar lighting on campground amenities, a park app) and caring for nature. This has included successfully applying for CMA grants to pay for Prickly Pear infestation eradication before they reached uncontrollable levels, and future grants to restore populations of Bulokes (*Allocasuarina luehmannii*).

With thanks to Friends of Wyperfeld



↑ Buloke | DAVID SANDO



↑ Splendid Fairywren | BEN ZEEMAN



↑ Sand Monitor | PHILLIP DUBBIN

↓ Mallee habitat | MEGHAN LINDSAY

Location

- Traditional lands and waters of the **Wotjobaluk**
- 450km NW of Melbourne
- 357,017 hectares

Map

History

- Temporarily reserved 1909
- Park declared 1921
- Additions in 1920s, 30s and 40s, in 1979 (43,500 ha), 1990 (223,700 ha), 1992 (33,100 ha)

↑ Emus in Wyperfeld | SAPAYOA/INATURALIST

Physiography

- Lowan Mallee bioregion
- Ecological vegetation classes (EVCs) include Duneveld Heathland, Heathy Mallee, Sandstone Ridge Shrubland, Red Swale Mallee
- 364 animals
- 827 plants
- 14 fungi

↑ Sandy Stilt-Puffball | TOM MAY

Features

- Outlet Creek dry-lakes and floodplain, covered by River Red Gum and Black Box woodlands
- Mallee eucalypts woodlands

↑ Mallee habitat | MEGHAN LINDSAY

Features

- Rolling sand plain healthlands
- Home to iconic Malleefowl
- Habitat for a large range of native for many plants, animals and fungi
- Rich Aboriginal cultural landscape

↑ Regent Parrot | INDIA IANSON

Threats

- 89 plants and 62 animals listed as **Threatened** under state nature laws
- 4 plants and 21 animals listed as **Threatened** under federal nature laws
- Introduced weed species; introduced pest animal species, particularly rabbits, goats; impacts of natural and planned fires

Friends

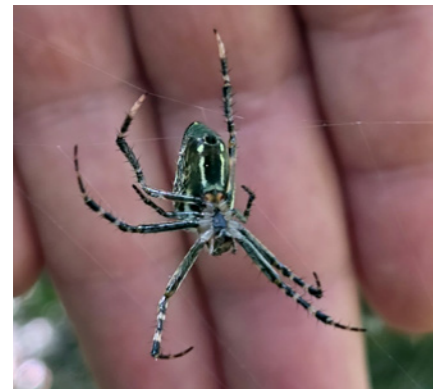
Friends of Wyperfeld
friendsofwyperfeldnp.org.au
[@friendsofwyperfeldnp](https://www.instagram.com/friendsofwyperfeldnp)
friendsofwyperfeldnp@yahoo.com.au
 Friends of Wyperfeld

The Wyperfeld App is a great source of information for park visitors



LEONGATHA H3 BUSHLAND RESERVE

↑ Leongatha H3 Bushland Reserve | ALL IMAGES JORDAN CROOK



↑ Enamelled Spider (*Plebs bradleyi*)



↑ Banksia cone



JORDAN CROOK
TAKES A STROLL IN
A TINY BUT VITAL
BUSHLAND REMNANT
IN WEST GIPPSLAND

This reserve is truly a treasure and highlights the importance of protecting even the smallest areas of habitat.

On a map the reserve is a speck in Bunurong Country along the Bass Highway between Leongatha and Inverloch, that thousands of people pass every week.

To the plants, animals and fungi that live there, it's not only home but a critical stepping stone in a cleared landscape.

When I visited it was alive with Superb Fairywrens and rosellas. Looking up into the canopy I saw a much larger presence who calls this place home, a mighty Wedge-tailed Eagle. Its giant and complex nest was sitting in the canopy of a large old Messmate, with its stringy bark covered in white wash (bird poo), bones and feathers.

On the ground there was a bunch of wildflowers and, unfortunately,



↑ Twining Glycine (*Glycine clandestina*)



↑ Prickly Currant Bush (*Coprosma quadrifida*)

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



Farewell Carl Rayner OAM: devoted conservationist, bushwalker & cherished friend

We acknowledge the passing of Carl Rayner, a much-loved member of the VNPA community for nearly five decades. We celebrate a life of enduring commitment to conservation and nature.

Carl will be remembered as a deeply valued and much-loved member of the VNPA community. Joining in 1978, Carl quickly became a central figure within VNPA, contributing his time, energy, and passion in countless meaningful ways.

Carl served as convener of the Bushwalking Group from 1983 to 1987, and later as treasurer from 1988 to 1990. He was also a VNPA Council member between 1985 and 1987. Perhaps most fondly

remembered was his role as a leader of overnight and extended bushwalks from 1978 to 1992. Generations of bushwalkers benefited from his remarkable knowledge of nature and his engaging, thoughtful commentary, which enriched every journey.

A dedicated member of Friends of Organ Pipes National Park (FOOPs), Carl's commitment to protecting nature extended far beyond formal roles. His tireless work protecting and advocating for nature was widely recognised. In 1998, he received the Best Friend Award from the VNPA Friends Network Committee for his outstanding contributions as a FOOPs member. In 2020, his impact was honoured nationally with the award



↑ Carl Rayner

of the Order of Australia Medal for service to conservation and to nature.

Carl was a very special person to VNPA and to all who had the privilege of knowing him. He is survived by his beloved wife Lynne, and children Sharon and Mark. His legacy lives on in the landscapes he helped protect and the community he helped build.

a growing thicket of invasive Blackberries. There was also the well-used burrow of a Wombat family, with their distinctive square poop perched on a nearby tree root to remind everyone whose home this is.

Although small, these reserves are critically important as refuges and stepping stones across the most cleared state in Australia.

Often roadsides and small reserves are the only remaining bush for hundreds of kilometres, hosting the last remaining patches of original habitats. In many cases, how we care for these grouse small reserves will dictate which wildlife survives and which ones don't at a local scale.

**Leongatha H3 Bushland Reserve,
Bass Highway,
Leongatha South
148 km/2 hour drive
SE of Melbourne**



↑ Wedge-tailed Eagle nest in the Leongatha H3 Bushland Reserve | JORDAN CROOK

Jane sails into retirement

After more than two decades of dedicated service across the not-for-profit sector, Jane Crouch is concluding an extraordinary career in fundraising. Her time at VNPA marks both a deeply valued contribution to our organisation and the closing of an incredibly generous professional chapter devoted to people, planet, and purpose.

Jane joined VNPA in December 2022, bringing over 20 years of fundraising experience across international development, health and nature organisations. Her career has taken her across all seven continents, through work in outdoor education, energy conservation and adventure travel. This global perspective shaped her strong belief in 'acting local' and in her role at VNPA she found deep fulfilment in supporting the protection of nature in Victoria.

At VNPA, Jane oversaw the vital work of securing the support that empowers our nature programs. She quickly became a valued and much-loved member of the team, contributing during a period that included significant wins for nature.

Recently, Jane marked the end of her full-time working life with a fitting personal milestone: a long-awaited trip to Lord Howe Island. Her VNPA colleagues farewelled her with warmth, gratitude, and a specially prepared map and checklist of Victorian parks to explore. We thank Jane for her dedication, passion, and care – and wish her many more adventures in nature. 🌿

Belinda Wogan, Fundraising Manager

Welcome to our new Fundraising Manager, Belinda Wogan

Belinda Wogan stepped into the role following Jane's retirement (see above article). Belinda will focus on all aspects of fundraising alongside Matt Small and Kristian Lang. VNPA's fundraising capability is crucial to our work to continue protecting the places and wildlife we love. Belinda has over 15 years of fundraising experience across the not-for-profit sector, working in



roles spanning supporter engagement, campaign development, and philanthropic partnerships.

Outside of work, Belinda is an avid hiker and is often found exploring the

Dandenong Ranges, tending to her vegetable garden, or spending time

in Victoria's national parks, where she enjoys observing the changing seasons. Wet-weather hiking remains a particular favourite.

Reflecting on her role, Belinda says: 'Working with our supporters is a genuine privilege. Without their support – whether through time, funding, advocacy, or expertise – we would not be in a position to be champions for nature. Our supporters form the backbone of our organisation and they create hope and better outcomes. 🌿

↓ Jane on her first post-work trip to Lord Howe Island



I have loved my time at VNPA. There's been plenty of challenges, but it's been so rewarding to be part of a great team during some marvellous wins for nature. Like the end of native forest logging in Victoria (though loopholes remain), the declaration of new national parks in the central west and observing the growing numbers of people enthusiastically joining our citizen science activities that gather vital information about threatened wildlife.

As fundraising manager, it's been an absolute honour to get to know some of our incredible supporters and learn of their connections and history with VNPA. That includes a supporter who became involved in 1953 and still champions our work, and extraordinary folk who are no longer with us, but who positively changed the course of history for nature protection in Victoria.

After 47 years of full-time work, the time has come to leave the desk and go out and enjoy some of the precious places and nature VNPA works incredibly hard to protect! My lovely workmates have even gifted me a map and checklist of parks I must visit.

I leave with massive admiration for all the team at VNPA who truly punch above their weight on support for better nature protections in Victoria. And gratitude in my heart for VNPA's wonderful supporters like you dear reader! Jane Crouch, April 2026

Vale Margaret Badminton

Margaret Badminton passed away in March 2025. Understanding and caring for nature were lifelong passions for Margaret, which aligned perfectly with the mission of VNPA, of which she was a longtime member, supporter and donor.

Margaret was born in Ripley, Derbyshire, in 1938. Like so many growing up during the war years and the recovery afterwards, she learned to survive on very little, but developed an appreciation of the fundamental tenets of humanity – art, nature and a need to connect with and support those around you.

Margaret grew up in a family that valued music and education and became a highly skilled pianist, winning local competitions. Margaret's love of nature was no doubt seeded in those early years, spending much time outside walking to school and other activities through the Derbyshire countryside. Reflecting her connection to people and desire to help, Margaret became a nurse, working at Great Ormond St Hospital. It was while travelling to this job on the tube that Margaret was seduced by an advertisement to immigrate to Australia, showing the promise of connection with beaches, bush and wide-open spaces. Along with a close friend she made the decision to move to Australia in the mid-1960s.

Upon arriving in Australia, Margaret continued working as a nurse but also started her own business as a piano teacher. She developed a strong connection with the country through orienteering and became an avid bushwalker and birder. Her connection to the Australian countryside was also woven into her music teaching by taking a part-time position at the Geelong Grammar Timbertop Campus in the bush east of Mansfield.

Her greatest joy was being able to buy a small weekender farm in Yapeen which she immediately set about replanting back to native bush, and to which she eventually retired. Added to this was the purchase of a bush block at Muckleford to protect nature, in particular Swift Parrots. Despite the challenges of the dry ground of central Victoria, her efforts paid off.



↑ Margaret in the Kyneton Botanic Gardens, 2015

In her later years, Margaret moved to Kyneton and again became a central figure in birding, bushwalking and nature conservation through many community connections and her membership of the U3A. Her favourite places were trips to the Grampians/Gariwerd, walks along the Campaspe River in the Kyneton Botanic Gardens, Hanging Rock and the Black Hill Reserve.

Friends, locals and visitors were all privileged to share her knowledge on local plants and animals, particularly birds. She was able to indulge in this passion right up until the day of her passing.

Margaret was immensely proud of her association with VNPA and the support she could provide for their work. She would be proud that her legacy will go on contributing to the important nature protection work of VNPA. 🌿

Stuart Newstead

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



Strengthening our foundations

VNPA has reached a significant milestone with the successful launch of our new database for supporters and members. Following over a year of development and hard work by the VNPA team, the system went live in March.

By centralising our contact information, this new platform allows us to:

- Tailor our communication more effectively to our members, donors, and supporters.
- Support VNPA Council in making data-driven decisions to expand our fundraising efforts.
- Ensure the continued safety and security of all data and transactions.
- Streamline administrative processes, like membership renewals.

Moving forward, we're focused on embedding the system into VNPA's daily operations.

In an environment of constrained resources and rising cost-of-living pressures, this system is a vital tool to help us remain financially sustainable for the long term.

From a governance perspective, this project was overseen by a sub-Committee of Council focused on IT projects. I'd like to specifically thank former president David Nugent for his leadership and professional insights, which were instrumental in delivering this important investment into VNPA's future.

If you're interested in contributing to VNPA's IT Steering Committee, please reach out to Marilynne. 🌿

Marilynne Crestias, VNPA President
president@vnpa.org.au

CORRECTIONS

'Bruce McGregor honoured' (*ParkWatch* #303, Mar 2026, p 36) stated Bruce and his wife Ann 'founded Friends of Merri Creek'. This should be 'co-founded' as many others were involved.

'Movement at the station' (*ParkWatch* #302, Dec 2025, p 30) stated Parks Victoria had delivered on restoration of the forts at the western end of Point Nepean. However, delivery is not expected until the end of 2026. 🌿

Survey reflects strong supporter connection

BELINDA WOGAN,
FUNDRAISING
MANAGER, REPORTS
ON OUR RECENT
SUPPORTER SURVEY

We were delighted to hear from so many supporters in our recent survey, with over 1,500 people taking the time to share their thoughts, experiences and ideas. Every response was read and considered carefully, and we're deeply grateful for the generosity and insight of our community. This feedback helps us better understand what matters most and will directly inform how we protect Victoria's parks and wildlife, shape our campaigns, and stay connected with our community. One of the clearest messages from the survey is the strong alignment

between our supporters and VNPA's vision. On average, respondents rated this alignment at 9 out of 10, reflecting a shared commitment to protecting nature across Victoria. Supporters told us that advocating for stronger nature protection is their top priority, alongside adequate funding for park management and creating new protected areas. There's also strong interest in improving how nature issues are communicated and making sure decisions affecting nature are informed by independent expertise. When asked about habitats they care most about, forests ranked highest, followed by marine habitats and alpine areas, highlighting the breadth of places VNPA supporters are passionate about protecting. We were also encouraged by the strong sense of identity expressed

by supporters, with many describing themselves as hopeful, caring, committed and passionate about nature. These values are clearly reflected in the high likelihood of supporters recommending VNPA to others, with an average score of 8 out of 10. Importantly, supporters also showed strong interest in staying engaged through a range of activities, from informative walks and talks to wildlife monitoring and bushwalking, showing a deep desire to stay connected with nature in meaningful ways. We're sincerely grateful for the time, thought and care that went into every response. Your feedback is helping guide our work and helping us focus on what matters most: protecting nature in Victoria for generations to come. 🌿

Recent submissions

VNPA campaign staff have been busy writing submissions on a variety of important topics:
Proposed Development at 103 Reid St & 18b Jonesfield Cnr, Ardeer, Jan 2026
Draft Terms of Reference for Strategic Assessment of FFMV, March 2026
Craigieburn Industrial Development, EPBC 2021/9093, March 2026

Project Diamond Industrial Development, March 2026
Birregurra-Ombersley Poultry Farm, April 2026
City of Greater Geelong Draft Plan for Nature, May 2026
Inquiry into the 2026 summer fires across Victoria, May 2026
Read these and all previous submissions on our website. 🌿



Quiz answers from p. 4

- 1. Mount Donna Buang Wingless Stonefly** (*Riekoperla darlingtoni*) was recently listed as Critically Endangered under federal nature laws after five years of advocacy from VNPA, academics and the Entomological Society of Victoria.
- 2. a) Waratah Anemone** (*Actinia tenebrosa*).



↑ Waratah Anemone | FELIX HARPER

Their namesake comes from their resemblance to the waratah flower, as their colourful bright red tentacles bear a striking likeness to the distinctive plant.

- 3. d)** Lots of people visit glow worms when they're in the Otways because they're bioluminescent, i.e. they glow in the dark!
- 4. b) Sea squirts.** Despite looking like a squishy plant, sea squirts are actually distantly related to humans. In their larval stage, they have a primitive backbone which dissolves when they transform into adults.
- 5. False.** Most sea stars have larvae that drift into the open ocean, but the Little Green Seastar (*Parvulastra exigua*) is a hermaphrodite that lays its eggs directly onto rocks, where they hatch into tiny, fully-formed sea stars.
- 6. b)** Golden Sun Moths are declining because their grassy habitat is being destroyed by development.
- 7. c)** There's roughly 1,300 species of jewel beetles in Australia. The Buprestidae

family is one of the most prominent, and represents 5–6% of all our beetles.

- 8. d) All of the above.** Sea slugs are wonderfully diverse and can be found worldwide, with specific adaptations for different habitats. With a keen eye you can spot them all along Victoria's coast.
- 9. b) Gippsland** is home to possibly the largest and undoubtedly the most famous of all earthworms, the Giant Gippsland Earthworm (*Megascolides australis*).
- 10. Filter feeding.** Sea sponges absorb microscopic particles through their pores as water moves – mostly single-celled bacteria, nanoplankton and dead organic matter.



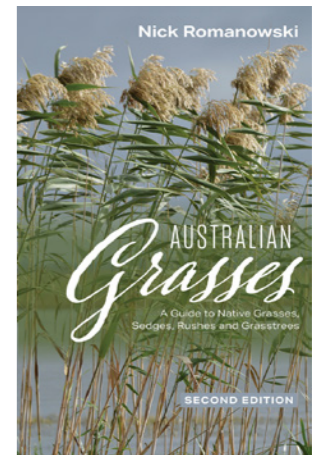
Giant Gippsland Earthworm | LORRHOB →

Grasses galore!

Australian Grasses: A guide to native grasses, sedges, rushes and grass-trees, Nick Romanowski
CSIRO Publishing, 2026, 2nd edition, 200pp, ISBN 9781486320523

What do Chocolate Lilies, sorghum cereal and Tasmania's *Richea* shrubs have in common? They're all included in Nick Romanowski's second edition of *Australian Grasses*. While sorghum is the only one of those three to belong to the Poaceae – the grass family – it shows the breadth of plants covered in this revised and expanded second edition. Romanowski's rule for inclusion is having grass-like foliage, although even here he's flexible, including Cordylines, Crinum Lilies and Palm Grass (*Curculigo*), for example. A recognised expert in the fields of zoology and aquaculture, Romanowski (who founded Australia's first specialist native wetland nursery in the 1980s)

looks at the plants from an aesthetic point of view. He also considers their role as habitat, their flammability, their use as food plants and in containers. The book starts by describing the differences between grasses, sedges and rushes, then considers landscaping with grasses, before detailing some practical aspects: growing, propagating, maintenance. But the main section is an encyclopedia of species. Plants are listed alphabetically by genus, with the most common varieties featured within that. The list of individual species is, of course, not exhaustive, but Romanowski's research covering the tropics to Tasmania is impressive, and the depth of personal knowledge included is immense. I particularly enjoyed his personal anecdotes, like home experiments with flammability of *Gahnia*, or the heights climbed to photograph a humble Bulbine Lily.



Which brings us back to sorghum: while *Sorghum bicolor*, native to Africa and Asia, is one of the world's most important cereal crops, we have 17 native species too! Romanowski says these are thought to contain about 90 per cent of the genus's genetic diversity, so the potential for their use in agriculture to increase drought tolerance or create perennial cultivars is huge. The same applies to native rice. Fascinating. 🌿

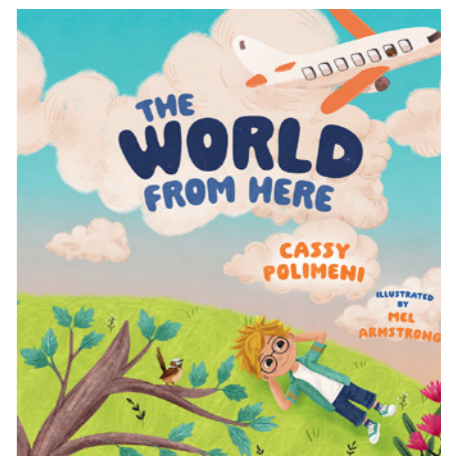
Jane Canaway, plant nerd and writer

A big place to explore

The World from Here, Cassy Polimeni. Illustrated by Mel Armstrong
CSIRO Publishing, 2026, 32pp, ISBN 9781486319855

Today, I read *The World from Here* by Cassy Polimeni. I love learning about the Earth; there are so many interesting things to learn. I liked the pictures and the different types of clouds. When we see faces or animals in the clouds, it is called pareidolia. The Earth is a big place. I live in Australia but I was born in America. The map shows that they are far away.

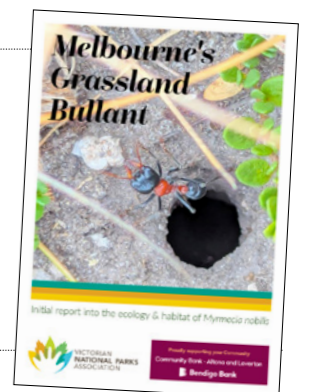
'More than 300 million years ago, all the countries of the world fit together like pieces of a giant puzzle.' Now the countries are moving apart. Storms might be scary but we shouldn't be scared. When storms stop, lots of cool wildlife come out, like frogs, mushrooms and snails. We should enjoy nature and explore! I think other 7 year olds and kids in primary school would enjoy this book. Kids who like science, the world and nature. 🌿
Leo Roberts, 7 years old



Melbourne's grassland bullant

Melbourne has its very own grassland bullant! In April, VNPA's Grassy Plains Network published a report by Dr Ian Smith on *Myrmecia nobilis*, a bullant found only in Melbourne's north. *Melbourne's Grassland Bullant: Initial report into the ecology and habitat of Myrmecia nobilis* is a preliminary

investigation into the ecology and behaviour of this apparent grassland specialist. The report aims to help find new populations, look after habitat and identify threats. 🌿
Read the report at vnpa.org.au/melbournes-grassland-bullant





Grevillea monitoring at Mt Cole & Enfield



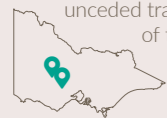
SERA BLAIR,
NATUREWATCH
COORDINATOR, ON
CITIZEN SCIENCE AT
MOUNT COLE AND ENFIELD

Two years since large fires impacted the area, we're continuing to work with local groups at Mount Cole to monitor wildlife and habitat recovery on private land and along roadside reserves.

We've checked nestboxes put up a year ago in strategic areas for a range of possums and birds. The boxes are unoccupied so far, but the plants around them are recovering well, so they'll be useful to house wildlife attracted to the area in future and help replace some of the tree hollows lost in the fire.

Nestboxes were also installed in an unburnt area of open woodland near where Brush-tailed Phascogales (*Phascogale tapoatafa*) were recorded last year. So far the boxes are unused but will be regularly monitored by locals. We've set up cameras on logs near the nestbox trees to investigate if phascogales are there, if they'll use

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



the nestboxes or if they have enough natural den options.

We're happy to report Critically Endangered Mount Cole Grevillea (*Grevillea montis-cole*) seedlings are going strong in two key recovery areas we started monitoring last year. We measured the seedlings in April, a year after we first surveyed them, taking a random sample of 40 plants to see how well they're growing after being germinated from seed by the fires.

In March 2025, the plants in our sample were an average height of 7.45 cm (ranging from 3–22 cm) and in April 2026 they had an average height of 24.56 cm (ranging from 6.5–66 cm). A nice increase thanks to a wetter year. Let's hope they continue to thrive!

Enfield State Park

NatureWatch has also been working in the Enfield State Park, 28 km SSW of Ballarat in Wadawurrung Country. We're supporting a project aimed at helping to protect Endangered Enfield Grevilleas (*Grevillea bedgoodiana*), as well as conducting surveys for threatened wildlife like Brush-tailed Phascogales and Common Dunnarts (*Sminthopsis murina*).

A large fuel reduction burn is planned for the area this Autumn, so we've been using wildlife cameras and song

↑ NatureWatch volunteer, Son Thai, observing the tree form of Enfield Grevillea | SERA BLAIR

↓ Sera with members of the Mount Cole Pyrenees Nature Group



↑ Fungi in Enfield State Park | SERA BLAIR

meters to try and quickly assess the wildlife in the area. We've also done surveys to map where grevilleas are living in the burn area.

We haven't recorded any phascogales or dunnarts yet, but we're continuing camera surveys just outside the planned burn area. 🌿



↑ Top: Installing NatureWatch cameras in Enfield State Park

Middle: Measuring Enfield Grevillea

Bottom: Measuring Mount Cole Grevillea | ALL IMAGES SERA BLAIR



Western Port wonderland

↑ Joey captured on our wildlife camera at Adam's Creek

WESTERN PORT WOODLANDS REVEALS ITS STUNNING WILDLIFE TO NATUREWATCH

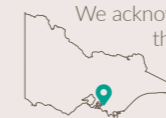
NatureWatch has recently been surveying wildlife in the northern parts of Adam's Creek Nature Conservation Reserve in the Western Port Woodlands.

It's a difficult task as it's surrounded by farmland and sand mines. But we got lucky; one of the mines allows us to use their perimeter road to access this area of largely unexplored Heathy Woodland. And we're so glad we got in there because it's absolutely stunning!

It's beautiful open woodland with incredible plants and easy walking along tracks made by kangaroos and, unfortunately, feral deer. With stands of banksias, diverse understorey and herb layer and lots of billowing Poa grasses, it's fantastic habitat for Southern Brown Bandicoots (*Isodon obesulus obesulus*).

We're partnering with Gippsland Threatened Species Group to survey local bat populations and they'll help keep the camera batteries refreshed over Winter. 🦋

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



↑ Sera Blair, NatureWatch Coordinator (centre) with students Mia and Kelly in Adam's Creek | ANN WILLIAMSON

↓ Sera showing the ropes to her son Leo who's studying wildlife conservation at Deakin University | ANN WILLIAMSON



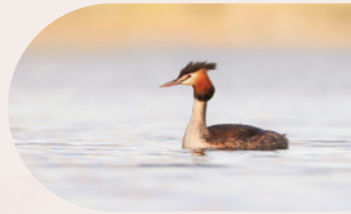


Birding for beginners

Birding is a great way to get to know the birds that live near you! Birds come in all kinds of sizes and colours and they're lots of fun to watch and listen to. Here's some facts about birds and where to find them



1 You can look for birds anywhere from your backyard to parks, forests, the beach, and even the middle of the city. Basically if you're outside, you can search for birds!



2 Wetlands, creeks, lakes and rivers are good places to start because there's water for the birds to drink.



3 Some birds nibble seeds, some slurp nectar, some munch fish and some gobble other birds. Find out what different birds eat to help you track down where they might be living!



4 How far would you travel for dinner? Many shorebirds (birds that live on the beach) fly thousands of kilometres each year between Australia, where they feed, and the Arctic, where they breed.



5 Other birds fly to other states or move between different habitats like forests and the coast as the seasons change. If you visit a spot and don't see many birds in Winter, come back in Spring or Summer to see who's returned from their long journey.



6 Places like the western shoreline of Port Phillip Bay, Bellarine Peninsula, Corner Inlet, and Western Port Bay are great places to see shorebirds.



7 The desert habitats of the Mallee are home to many colourful parrots and the big Malleefowl.



8 The wet forests of the Dandenong Ranges National Park are where you'll find lyrebirds, owls, and tiny songbirds.

IMAGES: 1. JESSIE BORRELLE, 2/4/5/6. INDRA BONE, 3/8. MEGHAN LINDSAY, 7. PETER ROWLAND

Tips for watching birds in your backyard and beyond

Stop!

When you're trying to spot birds, keep still and quiet.

Loud noises and movement might scare birds away. Find a comfy spot in your yard or at a park and wait for the birds to visit.

If a bird comes to visit your backyard or while you're out walking, stop and watch to see what it does.



Look!

If you notice movement, like a shadow above or fluttering in the trees, see if you can spot the bird it belongs to.

Binoculars can be a big help. They can take a little getting used to, but practice makes perfect. They're great for looking at birds from a distance, especially shy birds.



Listen!

Sometimes birdwatching is really more about bird listening!

If you hear a bird calling or hear something rustling in the branches, stay still and wait to see if you can spot it. If you can't spot the bird, can you hear it? What does it sound like?



Where we went in Autumn



More than 50 people joined us on the shores of San Remo in April for the 28th Melbourne Sea Slug Census. Together, the sea slugging community recorded an impressive 60 different species across the state.



NatureWatch had a busy season of fieldwork with citizen scientists venturing out to help monitor wildlife using cameras, audio recorders and spotlighting surveys around Mt Cole, Enfield State Park and the Western Port Woodlands (see report pp. 40-41).



We had some great Grassy Talks on the work to create the wallan wallan Regional Parkland in Melbourne's north, the wonderful diversity of grassland birds, and the amazing Natural Damp Grasslands of the South East Coastal Plain.



Our bushwalkers explored Cape Schanck, the You Yangs and Wombat-Lerderderg National Park. We also teamed up with VNPA campaigns staff and members of Wombat Forestcare for a Walk Talk and Gawk tour in Wombat.



New Nature Stewards learned more about local nature and the communities who care for it in courses across Ballarat, Mornington Peninsula, Knox, Inner East Melbourne (Malvern, Blackburn, Mt Waverley), and North West Melbourne (Glenroy, Broadmeadows, Sunbury).



↑ Walk Talk & Gawk in Wombat | TYLER CAMERON



What's coming up in our activities calendar

Cowies Creek, Norlane (Anakie to Thompson Rd & return)

Sunday 14 June, 1-3 pm
We'll explore the middle, urbanised section of Cowies Creek, where revegetation works began in the 1970s and continue today. We should hear Growling Grass Frogs at the Bell Park billabong and spot a variety of birds, large and small. The walk is fairly level and mostly on sealed paths, with one uneven section across the paddock.

Winter Grassy Talks

First Tuesday of the month
Fascinating topics and speakers every month.

Nature Stewards Spring

To find out more and to apply for our upcoming courses, visit vnpa.org.au/nature-stewards

Sea Slug Census
19-28 June

Grab your scarf and beanie and keep an eye out for sea slugs in your local patch anywhere along Victoria's coastline.

Community rockpool ramble
Saturday 20 June, 9-10 am and 10:30-11:30 am

Join us for two rambles under the San Remo Bridge.

Sea Slugs at the Island Whale Festival

Sunday 5 July, 9-10am
Meet us bright and early at San Remo to search for sea slugs or stop by our stall at the Island Whale Festival, Phillip Island/Millow to celebrate marine animals great and small.

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.


Subscribe to our mailing list to receive activities updates
vnpa.org.au/get-our-latest-news

Discover more at
vnpa.org.au/activities



ISN'T IT OBVIOUS..?

Ending loophole logging gives wildlife and habitats a chance to heal

Cool temperate rainforest, Yarra Ranges National Park, Wurundjeri Country  Meghan Lindsay

Citizen scientists at Mount Cole, Mt Buangor National Park, Djab Wurrung & Eastern Maar Country  Cam Suttie

Independent advice to government means better results for nature


Protecting our parks from development helps put nature first

Bushland track in Arthurs Seat State Park, Bunurong Country  Jordan Crook

Safeguarding our grasslands protects threatened wildlife and habitats

Milkmaids (*Burchardia umbellata*) thriving on a vulnerable roadside grassland near Woomindoo, Eastern Maar Country  Adrian Marshall

More fisheries officers equals better marine protection

Scuba diving in Port Phillip Bay  Elodie Camprasse

FIND OUT MORE AND
SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

[VNPA.ORG.AU/ISNT-IT-OBVIOUS](https://vnpa.org.au/isnt-it-obvious)

