

PARK WATCH



MARCH 2012 No 248 \$7.00

People caring for nature

THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE VICTORIAN NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION

Saving the sea

INSIDE

- Marine conservation
- VNPA 60th anniversary
 - Control burning
 - Cattle grazing
- Darebin Parklands
 - Tributes
- ... and more



Inside



VNPA 60th anniversary: Tidal River lodges in 1953.

See p. 12. PHOTO COURTESY DSE



Control burning threatens biodiversity. Does it save houses?

See p. 14. PHOTO: GEOFF CARY



Strathbogie Ranges CMN members, part of the Central Victorian Biolink project, discover the Ranges' geology.

See p. 16. PHOTO: JANET HAGEN



Discover Chiltern-Mt Pilot NP.

See p. 26. PHOTO: GEOFF DURHAM



Remember Lake Mokoan? It's now the Winton Wetlands. See p. 28. PHOTO: SCOTT HARTVIGSEN

Julia, aged 8, likes planting at Darebin Parklands.

See p. 32. PHOTO: DPA



VNPA pioneer Ena Stewart, then aged 88, enjoys a Tiger Moth flight in 2004. See tribute p. 34.



PARKWATCH

People caring for nature

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VNPA'S VISION

We share a vision of Victoria as a place with a diverse, secure and healthy natural environment cared for and appreciated by all.

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GETTING INVOLVED IN VNPA

Everyone can help in the conservation of Victoria's wild and beautiful places. Here are some ideas.

You can:

- make a donation (see enclosed form)
- become a member (see enclosed form)
- volunteer. You'll be welcome in the office, on a campaign or in a park
- join the Regular Giving program
- leave a bequest to VNPA in your will.

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You're always welcome to contact the editor to discuss ideas for articles. Phone the VNPA or email michaelh@vnpa.org.au Articles may be submitted by email, on disk or as hard copy. Include your contact details and brief biographical information. Photos, maps and drawings are needed too. Digital photos should be 300dpi and around 8cm by 12cm.

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LAYOUT markmaking

FRONT COVER Troy Muir of Polperro Dolphin Swims photographed leaping dolphins near Point Nepean, Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park. Inset photos from top: Yellow Zoanthis, Beware Reef; Sea Spider *Stylopallene longicauda*; Don Love surveying marine life at Beware Reef. Photos courtesy Friends of Beware Reef. See p. 6.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

A new look for the VNPA's 60th anniversary



WELCOME TO THE FIRST edition of *Park Watch* for 2012, our 60th anniversary year!

I joined the VNPA 28 years ago, so I've been a member for almost half of the Association's lifetime. I certainly didn't imagine I would be President, much less President in such an important year.

A glance at a map of Victoria's current national parks testifies to 60 productive years, and we can fairly claim that we are an integral part of today's Victoria.

If you've read the letter from Matt Ruchel and me that is included with this *Park Watch*, you'll know that the first of our 60th activities is to modernise our image with a new logo.

This is the last edition of *Park Watch* to carry our 'possum' (really 'Feathertail Glider') logo.

The decision to replace this logo was not made lightly, but all our research showed that it had limited appeal and sent a confusing message about who we are.

I see the new logo in a number of ways. The hand surrounded by leaf-like shapes makes me feel I am 'putting my hand up' for nature and have a hand in nature. The leaves remind me of what I love about Vic-

toria, its various landscapes, seascapes, seasons and plants.

When I read our new positioning line *Be Part of Nature*, I knew we had got it right. For the past 60 years we have been part of Victoria's natural heritage, and we will always continue to be. It's a statement of fact and a call to action in one.

As Matt and I mention in our letter, we are focusing this year on building on what we already do. We aim to ensure that 60 years hence, the then President has the honour of saying, 'Happy 120th birthday, VNPA!'

Turning to other matters, in this issue of *Park Watch* we look at aspects of our wonderful marine world, including that most friendly but paradoxical of fish, the blue groper. These large fish are protected at present under a temporary 12-month no-catch ban, and we are urging the state government to make that protection permanent.

If you haven't yet seen our Explore Underwater Victoria website, please take a look. It's a fantastic resource for exploring our wonderful marine world—while staying dry! Visit www.exploreunderwater.vic.org.au or find it

via the link on www.vnpa.org.au. I'm sure your friends and family—particularly children and grandchildren—will love it.

—Fred Gerardson



1953-85



1985-2012



**VICTORIAN
NATIONAL PARKS
ASSOCIATION**
Be part of nature

2012

Alpine grazing from the cow's mouth

*Natural history
writer and editor
David Meagher put
his thoughts into
verse.*

*On a summer day on an alpine hill
I slumbered dreamily until
a midday shadow crossed my eyes,
and opening them, to my surprise
I found a beast with tongue absurd
about to close upon a herb.*

*Being polite I gave a bow
and asked this most unwelcome cow,
"Do you intend, because it's easier,
to chew upon that bright *Celmisia**,
now in its prime, about to seed,
and swallow it like any weed?"*

What the cow said

*To reinforce the point I said,
"I understand why you've been led
to summer pastures full of food,
but surely you must know it's rude
to pluck this rare and threatened bloom
and send the species to its doom?"*

*The cow paused its downward bending,
and withdrew the pink offending
tongue. And, perhaps, it ruminated
and—for a fleeting moment—hesitated.
But only briefly, then with a swish
it ate the plant, and sighed "Delish!"*

David Meagher

*An alpine daisy

'National' parks are national in name only

This is an edited version of a recent article by VNPA Executive Director Matt Ruchel on the ABC website.

STOP PRESS

Alpine grazing farce continues

The State Government has launched a Federal Court challenge to the Commonwealth's alpine grazing ban. We believe the challenge will fail. The State's application to the Federal Government to conduct the grazing trial in the park was inept at best. The VNPA's response to that application is on our website.

— Phil Ingamells



IT IS A PECULIAR TWIST OF LOGIC THAT WE ELEVATE a handful of Australian actors to be called national treasures, yet our national parks struggle to make even B-grade celebrity status.

In truth, our national parks are 'national' in name only. Largely the creation of state governments, these treasures enjoy very little national oversight or protection.

Federal environment minister Tony Burke's recent decision to stop cattle grazing in Victoria's Alpine National Park illustrates the critical need to place our national parks under federal oversight.

When the Baillieu Government made the decision to introduce cattle into a national park, it walked away from its responsibilities to manage the state's natural environment.

At a state level, the decision was widely viewed to be politically motivated. At a national level, it highlighted the fundamental flaws in our national legislation to protect these critical areas.

In the last 12 months, the Baillieu Government has also exposed a number of threatened species to logging by changing the Code of Practice for Timber Production. In effect, changes to the code allow areas identified for logging to be exempted from threatened species laws.

In the 1990s the states and the Commonwealth agreed that states would have responsibility for threatened species management in areas targeted for logging under regional forest agreements. Hence national environmental laws do not apply in logging areas, placing our threatened species at the mercy of state-owned logging interests.

Since 1993 Australia has been a party to the global Convention on Biological Diversity. Under the Australian constitution, the federal government is responsible for delivering on international

The top of Mt Jim in Victoria's Alpine National Park. Australia's national parks need protection at a national level. PHOTO: JENNY NORVICK

obligations for nature protection, with states largely responsible for land management.

Recently, Minister Burke proposed a regulation that damaging activities such as cattle grazing, mining and land clearing in national parks would be referred to the federal government for review and approval. This would be an important step in making national parks national, and restore greater integrity to our magnificent network of national parks.

Taking it a step further, the VNPA and other environment groups are discussing the desirability of national parks becoming truly national by making their management a 'trigger' under the federal *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999*.

Some state governments, including Victoria's, have responded negatively to this perceived attack on their rights. But can it really be claimed as a 'right' if a government abrogates its responsibility to care for key area under its jurisdiction?

The federal environment minister stepped into Victoria's cattle debate because of the potential impact of grazing on the threatened Alpine Tree-frog. Alpine sphagnum bogs and fens are also listed under national environmental law. But the fact that the grazing 'trial' was in a national park was not in itself a trigger for federal involvement.

National parks are the most efficient and effective way of conserving nature, particularly threatened species. Now is the time to recognise the importance of national parks to the nation as a whole by protecting them at a national level.

Friends of Beware Reef monitor marine life

Don Love
was one of the
founders of the
Friends group
and is also a
member of the
Reef Life Survey
group of far east
Gippsland. He
and his friend
Alan Wilkins
have surveyed
virtually the
whole Victorian
coast in the past
year. They try to
go diving weekly,
whether the
water's passably
warm or freezing
cold!

Green Moray Eel.

PHOTO: DON LOVE

BEWARE REEF IS A GRANITE PINNACLE rising 30 metres from the sea floor, but with barely two metres showing above sea level. It lies 5km south-east of Cape Conran in East Gippsland.

Our small Friends group of half a dozen 'regulars' was formed five years ago as a result of the reef becoming a marine sanctuary, although some Friends have been diving there since the 1960s and so know a lot about its biodiversity.

Beware Reef is a very diverse place, home to over 80 species of fish, 48 of sponges, 27 seaweeds, four mammals and 165 other invertebrates.

For the past four years our group has been monitoring the underwater life of the 220ha Beware Reef Marine Sanctuary on behalf of Reef Life Survey (RLS), and to date over 100 surveys have been completed within the Sanctuary and at nearby locations outside it for comparison.

RLS was set up by researchers at the University of Tasmania, and its network of trained divers collect high-quality biodiversity information throughout Australia and internationally.

A highlight of the surveying year was at Beware Reef in autumn 2011, where in one just survey we recorded over 40 fish species—an almost unheard-of number for Victorian waters, highlighting the special qualities of this small sanctuary.

Long-spined Urchin

Surveys show that some areas of the reef have been significantly affected by the native Long-spined Urchin *Centrostephanus rodgersii*. As their numbers increase they form 'barrens', which can denude areas of the reef of up to 75 per cent of

their biomass, leaving bare rock and a few of the hardier shell species.

Black-lipped Abalone, a similar grazing species, can be out-competed by the Long-spined Urchin, and this has an economic impact on the wider community.

This increase in urchin numbers, which has been recorded from the NSW coast south to Tasmania, is thought to be associated with climate change. Rising water temperatures have led to better breeding success, to which the declining numbers of key predators such as Southern Rock Lobster (*Jasus edwardsii*) and Eastern Blue Groper (*Achoerodus viridis*) have also contributed.

As a result, our group has made it a focus to monitor the extent of the urchins and their associated barrens over the reef.

Community education and surveys

The Friends are heavily involved in education, as we feel that the general public has little idea of what lies under the water, let alone why marine national parks and sanctuaries have been established. We have produced three educational posters, and have been involved with Parks Victoria in the design of interpretive signs along the East Gippsland coast.

Members of our group have made many presentations to community and other interest groups on the marine life of East Gippsland. Each year we are involved in the 'Summer by the Sea' program, developed and run by Coastcare Victoria, to show visitors what lives along and offshore from our pristine coast.

The Friends have conducted other surveys in a wide variety of environments. These surveys have been invaluable in the early detection and observation of introduced marine pests such as the Northern Pacific Seastar *Asterias amurensis* and Seven-armed Seastar *Astrolobe scabra*, and in monitoring other processes like algal blooms that can threaten the marine environment.

Friends of Beware Reef are involved in marine species monitoring at many locations, regularly carrying out surveys in Cape Howe and Point Hicks marine national parks, and the Pope's Eye, South Channel Fort, Point Nepean and Point Lonsdale sections of Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park. We make regular trips in between our other diving schedules to ensure that there is a continuous flow of data from these locations.

Benefits of marine national parks

After almost four years of surveying, one significant observation is that of all the marine national parks and sanctuaries established almost a decade ago, the one that has benefited most by being off-





(Above) Beware Reef is only a couple of metres above sea level. PHOTO: DON LOVE

(Right) Don Love surveying marine life at South Pinnacle. PHOTO: ALAN WILKINS

limits to fishermen and others is Point Lonsdale, now part of Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park.

From the 1960s to the 90s, this area was heavily targeted by fishermen (both professional and amateur), shell collecting for bait on the rock platforms, and spear fishing by divers, all of which took a heavy toll of the marine life of this area. It is very pleasing to note that fish species there have significantly increased in both size and numbers.

An even more pleasing indicator is the ever-increasing numbers of young immature crayfish now being observed, which bodes well for the future.

Community-based marine monitoring programs are in their infancy, but their role in the on-going management of marine national parks and sanctuaries, as well as areas outside these protected zones, is becoming more valuable, as costs and OHS restrictions make it harder for government agencies to carry out this important task. Reef Life Survey and other key programs such as the VNPA's Reef Watch program and Parks Victoria's Sea Search all help to overcome this shortfall in monitoring by contributing valuable biodiversity data.

As active participants in both these methods of data gathering, our group is well aware of how important our efforts have become. The Friends have forged strong relationships with staff of Parks Victoria, Coastcare Victoria, Museum Victoria, the University of Tasmania, Fisheries inspectors, abalone divers and the East Gippsland CMA, all of whom have the common aim of enhancing the wellbeing of Victoria's marine environment.

Probably the last but most important link that needs to be developed is with the recreational fishermen who use this coastline. Some in this group still have an *'it's our right'* mentality in the pursuit of their hobby. Sadly, we far too often observe some of these fishermen flagrantly disregarding fishing laws, dumping offal and rubbish, and even vandalising signs and infrastructure along our coast.

It's about time these 'fishermen' realised that if the fishery is to remain healthy and vigorous for generations to come, they also need to become responsible as well!



Gippsland Lakes Community Awareness evening, 17 April 2012

Sports and Convention Centre, Lakes Entrance

Hear concerns about the ecology of the lakes; 15 dolphins out of the lakes' population of 50 have been lost in the last five years, with seven deaths in 2007 from mercury poisoning.

More information: Ross Scott, rossscot@bigpond.net.au or phone 5156 7898. Or contact Simon at the VNPA office.

**Wavy Marshwort
(*Nymphoides crenata*)
on Hut Lake, Barmah
NP. A good place for
cattle grazing?**



Needed – a conservation vision for Victoria

*VNPA Red Gum and River Rescue Project Coordinator Nick Roberts
says that a government environmental policy vacuum is leading
to antiquated land management practices which are at odds with
current environmental best practice.*

AFTER THE CONSERVATION POLICY DEBACLE over cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park, you'd think it would be a case of 'once bitten, twice shy' for Ted Baillieu.

But the political masterminds who dreamt up the plan to give free grazing in a national park to a handful of cattlemen are working behind the scenes to repeat the embarrassment in the River Red Gum national parks in northern Victoria.

The Barmah Cattlemen's Association, a small group of privileged landholders who used to receive very cheap agistment for their cattle, are lobbying local National Party MPs for a grazing trial at Barmah.

Local National Party MP Paul Weller supports cattle grazing in Barmah National Park. Following the 2010 state election, Mr Weller unilaterally (and much to the surprise of his colleagues) announced in local media that the Baillieu Government would reintroduce cattle into the park.

Thankfully, this was categorically ruled out, not just by Environment Minister Ryan Smith but by National Party leader Peter Ryan and by Premier Baillieu himself.

Meanwhile, however, Mr Weller has continued to broadcast in local media outlets his 'aspiration' for a return of cattle to Barmah NP.

Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

Barmah is the jewel in the crown of the red gum national parks estate. Together with the Millewa Forest (across the Murray in NSW) this is the largest red gum forest on the planet and one of the largest wetlands in the Murray Darling Basin.

It is an internationally recognised wetland under the Ramsar treaty, and is Victoria's first national park managed cooperatively with Aboriginal Traditional Owners, in this case the Yorta Yorta.

It also contains native plants and animals found nowhere else in Victoria.



The fence separates a grazed from an ungrazed area. Cattle damage at Two-mile Gully leading into Goose Swamp at Barmah.

PHOTOS: NICK ROBERTS

A four-year independent investigation by the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) concluded that cattle grazing impacted on a range of threatened plant species as well as on the Ramsar wetlands themselves. Botanist Dr Doug Frood, who studied the Barmah wetlands for many years, concluded in a 2006 report that cattle were contributing to ecological damage in the wetlands.

DSE, Parks Victoria and the local Catchment Management Authority have all recognised the ecological impacts of stock grazing in red gum wetlands, so much so that the state government offers incentives to landholders to exclude stock completely from similar, but dwindling, vegetation communities and wetlands on private property.

The Federal Government's Murray-Darling Basin Plan aims to spend over \$10 billion of taxpayers' money on putting environmental water into the Barmah forest and other wetlands to improve their condition. The National Party, conversely, apparently supports watering public wetlands to feed cows.

So why all the fuss by the cattlemen again? Well, the National Party has never supported new national parks; it has a policy to scrap VEAC, and supports logging, grazing, hunting and other activities in Victoria's protected areas.

The Liberal Party, on the other hand, has a proud and strong conservation history in Victoria. It established the Land Conservation Council (VEAC's predecessor), created the National Parks Act, introduced a permit system for firewood collection on public land (recently scrapped), and established numerous national parks that protect Victoria's habitats and biodiversity, and are enjoyed

by millions of visitors each year.

The problem really stems from a lack of any cohesive environmental policies from the Baillieu Government either before or since the 2010 election, and a government department (DSE) that is increasingly going along with feral community elements due to a government policy vacuum.

The upshot of this lack of responsible leadership is DSE's engagement with minority groups whose antiquated land management practices are at odds with current environmental best practice.

So what's the solution?

The VNPA does not believe that Ted Baillieu would want to repeat the Alpine grazing debacle that he created. That a repeat of the flawed alpine cattle grazing trial is even being considered should set alarm bells ringing.

And we certainly do not think that the growing 'anti-conservation' agenda emanating from elements of government is in Victoria's interest.

National parks, and the State Government itself, should be for all Victoria and all Victorians, not just the vested interests of a few commercial stakeholders.

Likewise, environmental policies must be governed by science, not by commercial considerations.

What the Baillieu Government lacks is a clear vision that details how it will restore Victoria's fragmented landscape, increase protection for its rare and threatened plants and animals, and give Victorians confidence that their parks are in safe hands.

Only then will this Liberal Coalition government do justice to our world-class system of protected areas, and to the legacy of its Liberal predecessors.

Murray-Darling Basin Authority plan — reminder

Please send in a submission on the draft plan by **16 April 2012!**

The plan proposes just 2750GL of water annually for the environment, rather than the 4000+GL needed to maintain healthy rivers and wetlands.

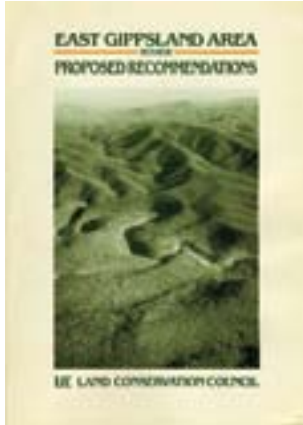
Email submissions@mdba.gov.au, fax (02) 6279 0558 or post to Proposed Basin Plan, MDBA, GPO Box 3001, Canberra City, ACT 2601. For ideas on what to say, see www.mdbp.vnpa.org.au

Please also donate to the VNPA to help us spread the word, and contact environment minister Tony Burke with your views. Email Tony.Burke.MP@aph.gov.au, phone (02) 6277 7640, or write c/o House of Representatives, Parliament House, Canberra, ACT 2600.

'As if for a thousand years'

40 years of the LCC celebrated

Deirdre Slattery is a former VNPA Councillor and a current member of the Education and Events Committee. She lives in Castlemaine and is involved in the 'Connecting Country' landscape restoration program, researching family, local and alpine history, and teaching at La Trobe University Bendigo.



People eagerly awaited the appearance of LCC reports and recommendations in the 1970s and 80s.

WHO WAS THE MOST RADICAL AND CREATIVE Conservation Minister in Victorian history?

Bill Borthwick would have to rate very highly. As minister under Liberal Premiers Bolte and Hamer, he was effectively creator of the Land Conservation Council, the 40th anniversary of which was celebrated last year.

The LCC and its successors the Environment Conservation Council and the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) have crucially influenced land use practice in Victoria since the 1970s.

Introducing the Land Conservation Bill to Parliament in 1970, Mr Borthwick spelt out a far-reaching moral and practical process for determining land use.

He firmly argued that the time for opportunistic land use was gone. This trend had dominated community attitudes and behaviour since colonial times, and contradicted his understanding that, in the long term, a community depends physically and culturally on the quality of its land use.

"In the past, many mistakes were made because decisions were considered to be simply a matter of saying what the land *would* be used for, rather than finding out what it *could* be used for and then finally deciding what it *should* be used for," he said [my italics].

Mr Borthwick asked the LCC in its deliberations to act 'as if for a thousand years'—surely a dramatic requirement in a political system pressured to act for immediate electoral popularity, and one not easy to fulfil.

Borthwick's vision 40 years on

The practical provisions of the LCC Act became familiar to many Victorians through long use.

The first was setting up a scientific and technical framework as a basis for deliberation about land use. Hence early LCC announcements of an initial study for each region specified that *factual information* was sought from community members.

The studies that followed were ground-breaking documents. These reports showed us places we thought we knew well as residents or visitors, but about whose ecological attributes and value we were often ignorant.

The LCC studies and investigations also gave

a strong impetus to building detailed knowledge of Victoria. The surveys conducted for the LCC by scientists based at the Museum, the Herbarium and the Arthur Rylah Institute were an enormous boost to the State's flora and fauna databases.

The second successful provision was for the informed involvement of citizens. This began with the inclusion of two citizens on the Council itself. Making the studies available free or at little cost was another important commitment to consultation.

The sound information base in the Reports underpinned discussion and education in formal consultation processes, which became more influential as the LCC developed an approach that ensured as far as possible that debate was not founded on ignorance, emotion and rumour.

The LCC's consultation processes also enabled growth of four-way interactions between scientific and bureaucratic agencies, community groups and political parties: interactions that have kept public land use more or less in step with changing values.

Through these two provisions, Mr Borthwick intended to establish a process so watertight—with such scientific and public credibility—that it would take a brave government to ignore it.

And since the 1970s, governments have generally accepted the recommendations of the LCC and its successors, although not always without resistance or delay.

The VNPA and the LCC

The VNPA has played an important part in the successful history of the LCC and its successors, and continues to argue the case for *should* in land use, especially the value of nature conservation as a use for public land.

My back issues of the *VNPA Journal* (*Park Watch* after 1978) show what an exciting time the 1970s were for both organisations. Having supported the establishment of an independent body, the VNPA was highly committed to participation in its processes, though with virtually no paid staff to support intense activity.

As the LCC worked through its Reviews for each of 17 Study Areas in Victoria, the VNPA Council organised subcommittees of volunteer experts to offer information, make submissions and comment on draft and final recommendations.



Grampians National Park, declared in 1984. It was established following Land Conservation Council recommendations.

PHOTO: DAVID NEILSON

By the 1980s, VNPA office manager Eileen McKee was complaining in *Park Watch* that the government would hasten them all to early graves, such as the pace set by the LCC!

Through the 1970s and 80s, the use of public land for timber extraction was the burning issue, reaching a crescendo with enormous pressures on East Gippsland forests to supply the voracious pulp market.

There was limited public understanding that land had values other than resource extraction. “What use are national parks?” was a common question. Through its close involvement and tightly reasoned arguments, the VNPA can be seen as defining and building public acceptance of nature conservation as a land use.

As *Park Watch* shows, the VNPA lost many battles, but by and large it won the war. VNPA members will probably have heard that Borthwick’s and Hamer’s aim was to increase the amount of land held in nature conservation reserves from less than 2 per cent to 5 per cent of the state. It is now more than 15 per cent.

But incremental success also had costs. The 1977 and 1982-83 Alpine Studies, resulting in four separate national parks, lack of contiguity and concessions to forestry, were a severe disappointment after years of argument for a single park. The resulting delay in achieving this goal allowed the alpine resorts to become established.

We are familiar with the real estate speculation boom that has followed, changing parts of the alpine area in ways that would surely horrify early VNPA visionaries.

VEAC today

The VNPA and other interested citizens are committed to the LCC’s successor VEAC as offering a tried and trusted context in which to consider the changing face of land use.

VEAC has shown resilience in walking a tightrope between the independence that was Borthwick’s intention and the constraint inevitably exercised by government policy or specific direction. It has also

been shaped by changes to its enabling legislation, and hence to its scope, structure and function.

But perhaps a more recent pressure has come from a tendency by governments to see the job as done. The Brumby Labor government in its latter days toyed with the idea of amalgamating the functions of VEAC with those of the Victorian Catchment Council and the Coastal Council. A case of ‘If it works, restructure it’, perhaps?

And, despite positive election promises, the current Coalition government seems either to have no vision for VEAC, or to be intent on reducing its practical impact. Witness the recent decision to reject the major recommendation of the Remnant Vegetation Study (*Nature’s Voice* 11), and to limit the scope of the proposed Marine and Coastal Investigation (*Park Watch* 247).

However, the current Yellingbo investigation, although it covers only a small area, is a commendable response to local involvement, and its emphasis on biodiversity and on the need to see all categories of public land as part of a connected landscape could develop methodologies with wider application.

The VNPA is calling for further VEAC studies on Central Victoria (the goldfields), south-west Victoria and South Gippsland, as well as further bioregional and comprehensive marine studies.

Will the State Government respond with a worthwhile agenda for this much-respected organisation and its processes?



As if for a Thousand Years

Daniele Clode’s book *As if for a thousand years* (2006) is a valuable history of the LCC and ECC up to the time that VEAC was established. Copies are available from VEAC – phone 9637 9902 or call at the VEAC office at 8 Nicholson St, East Melbourne.

The VNPA celebrates 60 years of history

Associate Professor Don Garden taught Environmental History at the University of Melbourne for many years. He is President of the Federation of Australian Historical Societies and a Council member of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria. A VNPA member, he is now writing a history of the Association.

IN RECENT MONTHS I HAVE BEEN DOING SOME historical work for the VNPA in which members may be interested.

Last year, at Matt Ruchel's request, I wrote what is effectively a 12,000 word outline environmental history of Victoria entitled 'Phases of Ecological Impact of the European Occupation of Victoria'. It traces the interaction between Europeans and the environment in Victoria, essentially shaped around a sequence of phases in Victorian history, which were mainly the product of changing industries and economic activities that impacted upon the natural environment.

In essence, the phases were:

- 1800—1830s: Whaling and sealing, and fisheries in general
- 1834—1851: Pastoral settlement
- 1851—1870: Gold era
- 1870—1901: Selection Acts, agriculture and Marvellous Melbourne
- 1901—1945: Closer settlement, irrigation, forestry
- 1945—1990: Prosperity, people, technology and environmentalism
- 1990—Present: Climate change, drought, water and fire

This document, or parts of it, will be used in future VNPA publications.

This year I have commenced work on a 60th anniversary history of the VNPA. It is still very much in its early stages and at present I am concentrating on the first decade or so of the organisation—how it came to be founded, its early concerns and campaigns, and how it developed with changing times.

The VNPA was formed in 1952, evolving out of a previous 'Conference' that had been set up by a number of Victorian organisations concerned with aspects of the natural environment, such as the Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria, the Melbourne Bushwalkers and the Bird Observers' Club.

The purpose of the Conference was to work for a National Parks Authority and the establishment of a better system of administration of Victoria's then few and poorly protected national parks and other reservations.

Little progress was made, so in November 1952 the Conference morphed into a more permanent structure which was called the Victorian National Parks Association.

When, finally, in 1956 the Bolte Government



VNPA's 500th excursion heads to the Prom

On Saturday 17 March the VNPA's 500th bus excursion will travel to Wilsons Prom for the day. Participants will enjoy short walks and see how the park is recovering from last year's incredible flood.

By coincidence, the VNPA's very first excursion, over the Queen's Birthday weekend in June 1954, was also to the Prom. VNPA News Letter no. 5 of July 1954 reported that "some sixty-five members gathered at Tidal River and enjoyed the comfort of the excellent lodges provided for visitors to Wilson's Promontory National Park. During the day walks were arranged and led ... varying in difficulty from easy strolls to strenuous mountain climbs. On Sunday morning the mountains were covered with cloud, but by afternoon it cleared to reveal some lovely scenery lit by the low afternoon sun."

"In the evening members gathered in the campers' lounge, where papers were presented on the history of the Promontory, its geology, botany and bird life, the speakers being Messrs. Ros Garnet, R. Hemmy, J. W. Burston and C. Bryant."

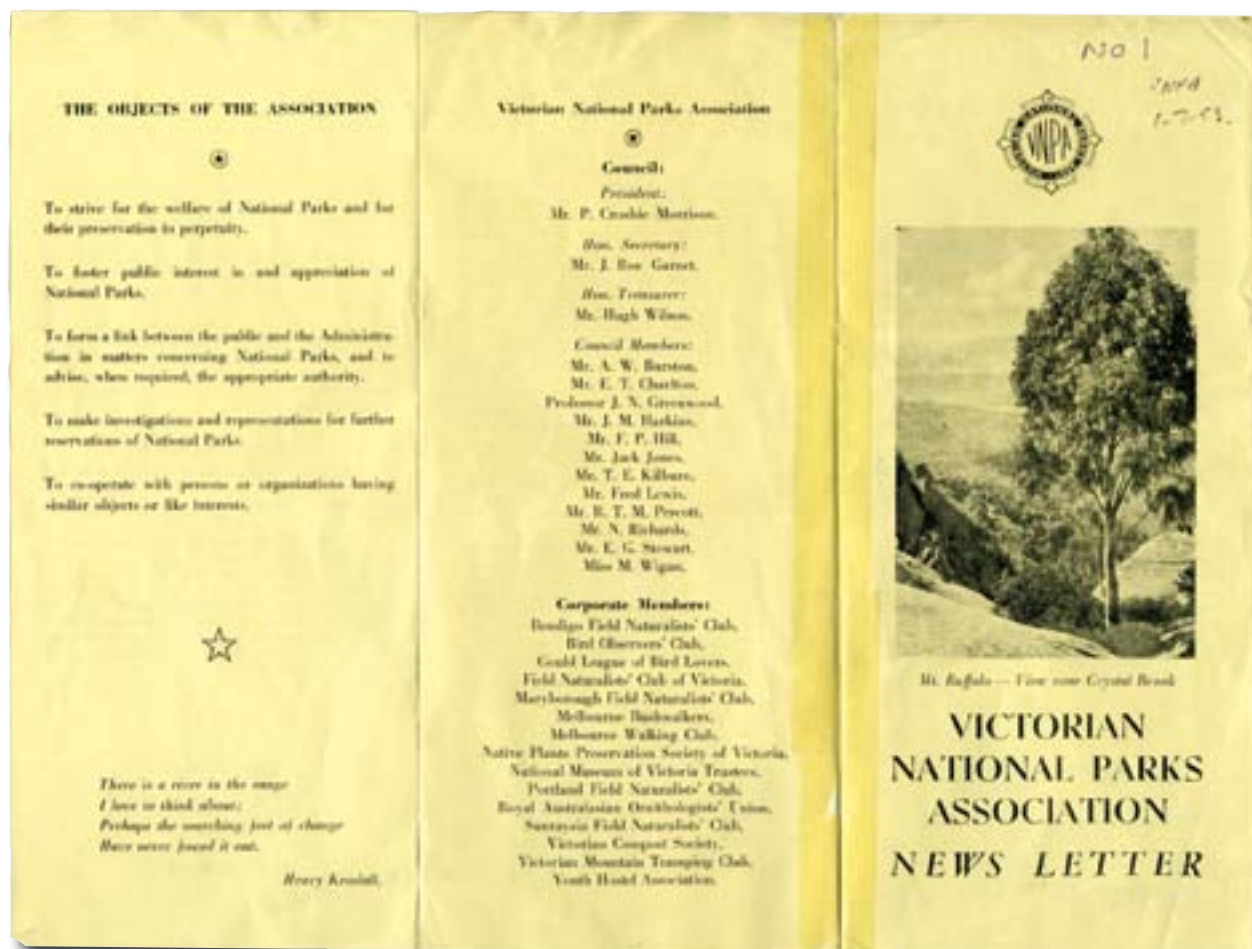
VNPA Secretary Ros Garnet wrote a full account of the excursion in *The Victorian Naturalist* which we plan to reprint in June *Park Watch*.

(Above) Road up Mt Oberon, Wilsons Promontory NP, 1953, showing recovery of vegetation after the 1951 wildfire.

PHOTO: COURTESY HISTORIC PLACES, DSE

passed legislation to establish a National Parks Authority, it appears some people felt the battle had been won. However, it had not, and the VNPA continued its numerous battles and campaigns both to defend what had been achieved and to extend Victoria's system of reservations.

It is a battle that has still not been won—and probably never will be—as the 60th anniversary of the VNPA approaches.



The VNPA's very first 'News Letter', published in July 1953.

Victoria's national parks in 1952

Year – Year of first reservation

National and other parks at the time the VNPA was formed (1952). By 2011 Victoria had 45 national parks, 25 state parks, 26 other parks (e.g. coastal parks) and reserves, three wilderness parks, 13 marine national parks and 11 marine sanctuaries.

Name of park	Year	Notes
Fern Tree Gully NP	1882	Now part of Dandenong Ranges NP.
Tower Hill NP	1892	Became State Game Reserve in 1961.
Wisons Promontory NP	1898	Enlarged since original reservation.
Mt Buffalo NP	1898	Enlarged since original reservation.
Bulga NP	1904	Now combined with Tarra Valley as Tarra-Bulga NP
Werribee Gorge Reserve	1908	Became State Park in 1978.
Tarra Valley NP	1909	
Wyperfeld NP	1909	Greatly enlarged since original reservation.
Mallacoota Inlet NP	1909	Now part of Croajingolong NP.
Wingan Inlet NP	1909	Now part of Croajingolong NP.
Lind NP	1925	In East Gippsland.
Alfred NP	1925	In East Gippsland
Sperm Whale Head NP	1927	Now part of The Lakes NP.
Kinglake NP	1928	Enlarged since original reservation.
Dandenong Police Paddocks	1930	Now Churchill NP.

One particular aspect that is fascinating me is the networks of professional people, mainly but not entirely men, who formed and shaped the early conservation movements in Victoria.

Two men stand out, both in the VNPA and other organisations, for their immense contribution. They were Philip Crosbie Morrison, the first President, and J. Ros. Garnet, the first Honorary Secretary.

I am particularly looking forward to finding out more about Ros Garnet who, as far as I can discover, has not had much written about him despite his importance for the conservation movement in Victoria.

In the meantime, if anyone in the VNPA has any material that might be helpful in putting together the history, including reminiscences, please contact me via the VNPA office.

Burn target criticism growing fast

Phil Ingamells, *VNPA Park Protection Project*, looks at the controversial question of control burning targets for Victoria.

VICTORIA'S 2009 BUSHFIRES ROYAL COMMISSION was possibly the most thorough inquiry ever conducted in the state. Yet one of its most important recommendations has come under increasingly strong criticism on several fronts.

After 155 days of hearings, 26 regional community consultations, 1200 initial submissions and a series of expert panel hearings, the Commission was not short of information.

But the Commission's Recommendation 56 asked that *"The State fund and commit to implementing a long-term program of prescribed burning based on an annual rolling target of five per cent minimum of public land"*.

A number of problems with this recommendation were identified immediately.

First, the level of planned burning would be unprecedented. The Commission's proposed annual target has been reached only once since planned burns were first recorded in Victoria in 1934.

Secondly, the 5 per cent burn target (something like 390,000 ha per year) did not take into account the area that might have been burnt in bushfires in any year, it made no reference to bush on private land, and the target was a 'rolling' one, with any deficit to be added to next year's target.

In other words, if controlled burning fell short of the target by 50,000 ha in two successive years (highly likely), and a 500,000 ha bushfire happened the next summer (quite possible in any severe fire weather year), then the department would face the absurd prospect of trying to burn 390,000 + 100,000 hectares of public land, nearly half a million hectares in addition to the half million already burnt by wildfire.

When the Commission handed down its final report, this recommendation surprised many, as such a simplistic target had not been recommended by the Commission's own expert panel. The panel had largely agreed that it was safe and useful to burn 5 per cent of the foothill forests annually (primarily the stringybark eucalypt forests), but that even then the impacts on fauna would need to be monitored.

The panel was not prepared to put a single figure on a statewide target. Indeed, the one panel member the Commission brought all the way from the USA (Jerry Williams, former Director Fire and Aviation management of the United States Forest

Service) strongly advised against it. His experience showed him that a single statewide target would encourage the burning of the 'low-hanging fruit', those places where you could burn large areas safely and cheaply, and discourage burning those smaller areas close to townships which were most important for bushfire safety.

Now, just a couple of years after adoption of the increased statewide target, evidence suggests Williams was right.

The Age's investigative reporter, Melissa Fyfe, points out in a recent article that Victoria's current fuel reduction figures show a clear preference for burning remote areas, while many important strategic burns around townships, which require more resources but contribute little to the annual target, were being ignored.

Meanwhile, a new study into the Black Saturday fires by some of the nation's most eminent fire ecologists and fire behaviour scientists showed that control burning in remoter areas was not the most effective way to save lives and property in such extreme conditions. The paper, lead-authored by the ANU's Philip Gibbons, says that *"...a shift in emphasis away from broad-scale fuel reduction to intensive fuel treatments close to property will more effectively mitigate impacts from wildfires on peri-urban communities"*.

And increasingly, biologists and ecologists are saying that the level of planned burning DSE is currently aiming at, and in many cases the season and manner in which it is conducted, will have long-term detrimental effects on our natural areas.

For this reason the VNPA, together with the Royal Society of Victoria, held a two-day Fire and Biodiversity Symposium in October last year, attended by leading ecologists, Parks Victoria, DSE and CFA staff, regional councils and other interested parties. Peer-reviewed papers and a summary of presentations and discussions from the symposium will soon be publicly available. However, it was generally made clear by participants that the 5 per cent annual target was of considerable concern, particularly in areas like the Mallee, and the box-ironbark region of central Victoria.

Most recently, on Radio National's Background Briefing program, Rachel Carbonell interviewed a number of fire ecologists and fire behaviour specialists.

Significantly, the ecologists who are currently doing the most comprehensive research into the effects of fire on biodiversity in Victoria (Professors Andrew Bennett and Michael Clarke) were the people expressing real concern. They say that

Support the Fire Challenge Appeal!

We still need to raise \$40,000 to take full advantage of the Poola Foundation's generous offer to match donations from our supporters. With this funding, VNPA will work towards developing education materials to engage communities and landholders about fire, produce a report on our recent Fire and Biodiversity Symposium, and work to achieve ecologically sensible fuel reduction burning programs in Victoria.

Please help us reach our target of \$40,000! Contact Lara Hookham on 9341 6401, email larah@vnpa.org.au or donate online at www.firechallenge.vnpa.org.au. All donations over \$2 are tax deductible.



burning 390,000 ha/year can lead to local extinctions, and that it is far from the most effective way to spend bushfire mitigation funds.

The VNPA spoke strongly at the Royal Commission for a more complex set of local targets which could guarantee burning programs that significantly contributed to local safety, and also accounted for local biodiversity issues. That recommendation was not taken up by the Commission, but the Commissioners did take up another of the VNPA's recommendations—that the effectiveness of the government's burning program and its impacts on biodiversity should be subject to long-term monitoring, and that these results should be publicly available.

The government has, thankfully, honoured the recommendations for monitoring. Real funding

has been allocated to fire monitoring programs, many of which are taking place in conjunction with our universities.

But the government has so far made no commitment to altering the 390,000 ha burn target if the monitoring results suggest it is counter-productive. Indeed, Deputy Premier Peter Ryan says he has absolutely no intention of altering the target at any time. That doesn't make much sense at all.

We believe the single statewide burn target will increasingly be seen to be flawed, and most probably prove to be unattainable.

If we are going to look after our biodiversity, and also live with fire, we will have to do some fast learning. Hopefully, we can put enlightened fire management into practice before too much damage is done.

Even common species like the Hairpin Banksia can become locally extinct if faced with frequent fire. While banksias recover well from occasional fire, they do not readily store seed in the soil.

The photograph was taken by VNPA staff member Jenny Barnett, who died with her husband John at Steels Creek in the Black Saturday fire just over three years ago.

Further information

Links to many of the articles and programs mentioned here can be found on the VNPA's website at www.fire.vnpa.org.au. The website will be updated with more information in coming weeks, including a summary of the findings of the *Fire and Biodiversity* symposium.

A number of books contributing to the fire debate have appeared in recent times.

Two books looking at Indigenous burning have somewhat different outlooks. Ron Hateley's *The Victorian Bush: Its Original and Natural*

Condition suggests that claims of the extent of Indigenous burning in Victoria have been exaggerated, while Bill Gammage's book *The Biggest Estate on Earth* makes the case that burning was widespread across the continent.

The June edition of *Park Watch* will include a comparison of these books. In the meantime a review of Bill Gammage's book by environmental historian Hilary Howes will be published soon in *Historical Records of Australian Science* — see www.publish.csiro.au.

Two books recently published by

CSIRO also give contradictory messages for planned burning.

Burning Issues, by Mark Adams and Peter Attiwill, is rather scathing of the influence of conservation groups, including the VNPA, and promotes a considerable increase in planned burning.

Flammable Australia, by Ross Bradstock, Malcolm Gill, Dick Williams et al, gives in our opinion a more informed and evidence-based assessment of the issues.

June *Park Watch* will also have a comparative review of these books.

Lessons learnt from the ground up

Low-rainfall biodiversity and mixed species hardwood plantations established on saltland at Kamarooka (north of Bendigo) by the Northern United Forestry Group.

PHOTO: PHIL DYSON



Victoria Naturally Alliance coordinator Karen Alexander focuses here on the Central Victorian Biolinks project.

THINGS ARE CHANGING IN RURAL VICTORIA. Years of experience of Landcare, Friends groups, networks, alliances and individuals tackling environmental issues means there's a lot of expertise out there.

The Victoria Naturally Alliance, the VNPA and TWS are working to support local groups and networks that are part of the Central Victorian Biolinks project, which stretches from Grampians-Gariwerd National Park to the Alps.

Project Officer Sophie Bickford is working with a local Advisory Group to scope the project and to liaise with the multitude of players in the region. And hearing from some of these 'on ground' people was the first activity for the project: a 'lessons learnt' workshop.

Supported by the Bendigo City Council, which paid for the venue, 30 participants from across the region heard from people working on projects across Central Victoria (see below), from the Wettenhall Foundation (www.nwf.org.au) which supports several networks, and from the larger projects Habitat 141 in western Victoria and the Communities in Landscape project in central NSW.

Participants heard a multitude of 'take home' lessons and noted the ones that were useful for them from each of the presentations. Meanwhile the Advisory Group was keen to hear how not to reinvent the wheel in developing a 'regional context' for these very exciting on-ground landscape projects.

Key lessons learnt included the following.

- A clear, shared vision and a simple strategic plan are important starting points.
- There are many ways to roll out a landscape scale project successfully.
- Aligning interests of all players will drive the agenda for all.
- The 80:20 rule! Work on the 80% you agree on rather than resolving the 20% you don't.
- Take the time necessary to know what is



Wedderburn CMN members getting ready to deal with Wheel Cactus plants invading bushland.

PHOTO: WENDY MURPHY

happening out there and to keep people on board.

- Build local capacity, support stakeholders, build partnerships.
- Projects need to be of an appropriate scale—the tyrannies of distance are real.
- Project coordinators with strong connections and high credibility in the local community, plus existing relationships with agency staff, are considered vital.
- Get runs on the board, earn some credibility and funding will follow.
- There are different audiences and they have different needs that must be listened to and worked with, even if they're seen to be trivial issues. This builds respect and credibility.
- Governance arrangements, whatever they are, need broad community representation.
- Agency and organisational partners are vital for success.
- Resources, especially money, coming roughly equally from key stakeholders is the ideal, so that no one player can dominate.
- Projects must be informed by good science/s—while noting that social aspects are as important as ecological ones.



Central Victorian Biolinks: marking rabbit burrows prior to fumigating and ripping.

PHOTO COURTESY PROJECT PLATYPUS

- No dictating from above! While the science can inform the regional and local context, how it works on the ground is up to the local groups and networks.
- Flexibility, and being open to opportunities as they arise, are both important

If there was one key message from the workshop it was that there is a wealth of knowledge and experience out there on what works. The Advisory Group for the Central Victorian Biolinks project is determined to support and build on this in a way that is useful to those doing the hard work on the ground, and to expand the work to meet the challenges ahead.

Project members

Connecting Country

www.connectingcountry.org.au

This community-operated organisation works across the Mount Alexander Shire (centred on Castlemaine) and surrounds. It obtains funding to improve local skills and restore landscapes for a healthy, resilient and productive natural environment.

Project Platypus

www.projectplatypus.org.au

Project Platypus works mainly with commercial farmers, encouraging them to plant and protect for biodiversity.

Formed in 1994, it engages with farmers and the community to improve land water resources in the Upper Wimmera region (north of Stawell), and acts as an umbrella group for local Landcare groups in the upper Wimmera catchment.

Strathbogie Ranges Conservation Management Network (CMN)

www.strathbogiecmn.com/

One of the key projects of this CMN is building a mosaic of varied high-quality habitats across the Strathbogies, which lie east of the Hume Highway between Seymour and Benalla.

Northern Victorian Biolinks group (north of Bendigo to the Murray)

www.nufg.org.au.org.au

A report to both Bendigo City and Campaspe Shire identified this biolink as key to enhancing biodiversity in the region. One of its achievements is working with farmers; using the carbon farming tool, it has delivered over 2000 ha of bio-diverse plantings.

Wedderburn CMN

www.wedderburncmnnews.blogspot.com.au/

This is a network of people including interested individuals and public and private land managers who have come together to work with the community and promote profitable, productive and sustainable human enterprises while conserving and enhancing biodiversity.

Other important landscape projects in the region

- **Kara Kara CMN:**
www.northcentral.landcarevic.net.au/bngn/events/
- **Ballarat Environment Network:**
www.corangamite.landcarevic.net.au/ballarat-env-network/
- **Regent Honeyeater project:**
www.regenthoneyeater.org.au
- **Grey-crowned babbler project:**
www.trustfornature.org.au/conservation/

Other large landscape projects

- **Communities in the Landscape** (central NSW): www.cil.landcarensww.org.au/
- **Habitat 141** (western Vic, SE SA, SW NSW): www.habitat141.org.au
- **Gondwana Link** (SW WA): www.gondwanalink.org.au
- **Great Eastern Ranges** (the Great Dividing Range, currently focusing on NSW): www.greateasternranges.org.au/

More information

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phone 0422 227471.
The Hub,
233 Barker Street,
Castlemaine, Vic. 3450.
www.centralvicbiolinks.org.au

Future Fisheries Strategy

There are moves by the Department of Primary Industries to make major changes in the way Victoria's wild harvest fisheries are managed. But this is premature. Before embarking on any reforms we need a broader overarching planning, protection and management strategy for Victoria's coastal waters. Fisheries management would form part this strategy. See www.vnpa.org.au for the VNPA's submission.



(Right) Monitoring is a vital part of marine conservation.

PHOTO: GRAHAM EDGAR

VNPA marine campaigns to make a big splash in 2012

VNPA marine and coastal project officer Simon Branigan outlines recent achievements and coming issues and activities.



Sea Spider
Anoplodactylus evansi,
a little-known part of
marine biodiversity.

PHOTO: FRIENDS OF BEWARE
REEF

THIS YEAR MARKS TEN YEARS SINCE VICTORIA'S current network of marine national parks and sanctuaries was established. Achieving this result was a massive achievement by VNPA and all the community members and groups involved in the campaign, which stretched over many years.

As well as participating in anniversary celebrations later in the year, the VNPA's marine and coasts campaign, including our Reef Watch program, continues to break new ground ten years on.

We were recently major contributors to an exhibition at the National Wool Museum in Geelong at which images of Port Phillip Bay's underwater wonders were presented to new and appreciative audiences.

This year, VEAC's investigation into the outcomes of the existing marine protected areas will get into its stride. The VNPA will continue to engage in this process and also push hard for the terms of reference to be expanded to include an assessment of the health of Victoria's entire marine environment—not just around 10 per cent of it.

Coastal development pressures continue to rise, with the proposed port expansion at Hastings (Westernport) threatening to wreck one of Victoria's natural jewels.

The State Government has been making grand announcements about turning this bay into a new

international container port, but no details of current development plans have been forthcoming. Nor has there been any apparent regard for the significant environmental, social and recreational values of Westernport Bay.

Eight years on, Reef Watch is still leading the way in connecting the diving and general communities in marine monitoring and conservation activities, as the recent Great Victorian Fish Count showed.

Program coordinator Wendy Roberts outlines the exciting new Blue Devil project in this *Park Watch*, and Ann Strunks tells the fascinating story of the Blue Groper. Reef Watch contributes significantly to current protection measures for both species.

Also check out Don Love's article (p. 6-7) about the inspiring Friends of Beware Reef group, and his expert take on the crucial values of our marine national parks. In addition, Kimberley Miller discusses her invasive species research and how her work will help in effectively managing and mitigating these growing threats.

So 2012 is going to be another huge year on the marine and coastal conservation front. Stay tuned for updates, and please contact me if you would like a marine action pack or are interested in joining the team as a marine defender. Email sim-onb@vnpa.org.au or phone 9341 6508.

The detail is in the devil ... monitoring the Blue Devil

Wendy Roberts, *the VNPA's ReefWatch coordinator, who is based at Museum Victoria, reports on a new marine monitoring project.*

REEF WATCH VICTORIA IS EMBARKING on a new project to monitor populations of Southern Blue Devil fish, *Paraplesiops meleagris*.

A favourite with divers, the entrancing Blue Devil is rarely seen in large numbers, as adults spend their time alone or in pairs hovering under rocky caves or crevices.

Although Southern Blue Devils are widely distributed from Western Australia through South Australia to Port Phillip Bay, little information is available on their biology, population size or relative abundance.

What we do know is that they are generalist carnivores, slow-moving and strongly territorial, making them ideal candidates for divers to observe and monitor.

Marine biologist Dr Simon Bryars has researched the Blue Devil in SA with the assistance of volunteer divers, and has discovered unique individual markings on the side of their heads that don't change as the fish ages. Using these markings it's possible to count individual fish at reefs using photographic identification.

Surveys trialled in SA concluded that photo identification can be used to accurately estimate Blue Devil population sizes at different reefs, providing baseline information against which future changes can be measured.

It is also possible to monitor the presence of individual fish over many years, as they are thought to live for up to 60 years.

Reef Watch is hoping that the information gathered will assist in the future management of areas in which these fascinating fish are found.

If you would like to be involved in our Blue Devil Project, please contact me on 8341 7446 or wrobert@museum.vic.gov.au



Southern Blue Devil fish showing unique head spots (arrowed) that enable individual fish to be identified. PHOTO ABOVE, JOHN GASKELL; BELOW, ANDREW NEWTON





Searching for the (bad) stars

Kimberley Millers, *PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne,*
reports on her research on monitoring and managing the invasive Northern Pacific Seastar.



**Kimberley Millers
with Northern Pacific
Seastar.**

FOR YEARS TO COME, VICTORIA'S MARINE ecosystems will suffer from the damaging impacts of the introduced Northern Pacific Seastar *Asterias amurensis*.

Indeed, marine communities across the state are in an ecological and management dilemma in living with 'feral' species. Eradication efforts often fail, especially in complex marine systems. Preventative and containment actions are alternative management strategies available in slowing the spread of damaging species.

The distribution of *Asterias amurensis* in Victoria spans the entire Port Phillip Bay region, and in recent years it has also been reported in Anderson Inlet (2003) and Western Port (2011).

This five-armed seastar can grow upwards of 35-40cm in diameter. Featuring distinctive yellow-purple colouration and tapering upturned arms, it can occur in the lower intertidal and subtidal zones down to 220 metres.

An accomplished predator, it has the potential

to feed on native shellfish (oysters, scallops and mussels) with ease. Its impact on other native species such as crustaceans, echinoderms and fish is significant, but more detailed studies are needed.

Northern Pacific Seastars could potentially spread over the entire southern Australian coast, impacting negatively on native species, aquaculture and fisheries.

Like many marine creatures, *Asterias amurensis* has behavioural and physical characteristics that prevent it from being easily detected during monitoring surveys. In an effort to find out what influences its detection, I have been undertaking trials with volunteers to understand more about the monitoring and management of this species.

Developing ways of becoming more efficient in monitoring and allocating resources to the management of *Asterias amurensis* is fundamental in protecting our marine environment.

The project has had great support from over 75 volunteers from varied backgrounds, including the



VNPA's Reef Watch and Parks Victoria's Marine Care groups. Volunteers have been carrying out surveys that include searching for new outbreaks, monitoring current populations and participating in experimental detection surveys.

Searching for a target species can be influenced by many factors, such as observer experience, environmental conditions and species characteristics. Being able to factor this information into a management decision is vital in saving valuable resources.

Evidence is starting to show that during visual surveys, observers with only moderate experience can find *Asterias amurensis* between 53 per cent and 74 per cent of the time—meaning that the species is not detected and removed 100 per cent of the time, resulting in individuals going unnoticed and populations expanding.

We know much less about how decisions are made on the amount of time and effort spent in looking for this species at a particular site. The project has identified key responses about how we think about monitoring during searching surveys. Very rarely do we consider how good people may be at finding *Asterias amurensis* when management responses are being planned and implemented.

Information from removal programs across the

state is being evaluated in order to develop more targeted and optimal management strategies.

Beyond the doom and gloom, we can take many positives away from this study. By gathering this knowledge we can make better-informed decisions about management and select the best possible actions currently available.

Victoria's marine system is a unique and precious heritage, and scientific research plays a vital role in managing the pest species that threaten it.



(Above left and below left) Northern Pacific Seastars; the VNPA's Simon Branigan helps test people's recognition of the invasive species.

PHOTOS: KIMBERLEY MILLERS

(Above) Velvet Star, one of many native marine species that could suffer from invasive species like the Northern Pacific Seastar.

PHOTO COURTESY FRIENDS OF BEWARE REEF

Bastion Point at Mallacoota is back in the headlines – the Department of Transport has released a hybrid design for a new breakwater and boat ramp. See www.savebastionpoint.org

'The friendliest fish in the sea'

IT'S SLOW-MOVING, SLOW-GROWING, GENDER-swapping, friendly, and has rock star lips. You probably read about it in our recent marine appeal letter.

But how it's to be protected, and from whom, is now a point of contention.

Blue gropers, which come in a Western and an Eastern form, were once more abundant in Victorian waters. But according to Fisheries Victoria, anecdotal reports suggest that by the 1970s they had been heavily fished out by recreational spear and commercial fishermen.

However, blue gropers now appear to be regaining a foothold in Victorian waters, juvenile sightings suggesting that numbers are on the mend. Following a 'vulnerable' listing on the IUCN Red List, Fisheries Victoria imposed a precautionary 12-month ban on fishing blue gropers, a move welcomed by the VNPA.

As large predators, blue gropers can help to stabilise marine habitats and may assist in reducing the spread of invasive species such as sea urchins.

We also know that the establishment of marine sanctuaries in NSW has allowed gropers to reach maturity and grow to over 1m long—drawing tourists from everywhere.

There are, of course, responsible recreational fishermen who deeply respect the environment and are selective with their catches. For many of these fishermen the no-catch ban is both logical and welcome.

But if the groper is to have a chance of reaching a venerable old age (up to 70 years) in Victoria, it needs permanent protection.

That these big, beautiful and ecologically important fish became so rare in Victorian waters is proof that the business-as-usual approach to managing our marine world doesn't work.

If SCUBA divers and other marine tourists in Victoria are to enjoy close-up experiences with gropers like their NSW counterparts, we need to start thinking as a whole. And there is a whole lot more we need to do in extending the hand of friendship to the Blue Groper.

— Ann Strunks



What you should know about Blue Groper

- They can grow up to a metre in length and are known as the friendliest fish in the sea
- Their numbers appear to be rebuilding in Victoria after heavy fishing in the 1960s and 70s
- They have been spotted at the Barwon Bluff Marine Sanctuary, where they are protected along with all marine life
- They are protected in all Victorian waters only until April 2012.

PHOTO: SARAH SPEIGHT

Protecting the magnificent Blue Groper

Since the establishment of marine national parks and sanctuaries in Victoria, our Reef Watch divers have begun to see blue gropers returning to places like the Barwon Bluff Marine Sanctuary.

The VNPA Reef Watch program directly helped to achieve the temporary protection of blue gropers in 2011.

But protecting blue gropers is now a race against time. In the next 12 months it's crucial to conduct a thorough population and distribution assessment, with input from all stakeholders, to inform longer-term protection.

Please donate to help us in their long-term protection! See www.vnpa.org.au or phone 9347 5188 to donate today.

- Thankyou to David Bryant of SeaPics for supporting the marine appeal and our marine and coasts campaign.

VicForests – off to the courts again

Jill Redwood of Environment East Gippsland updates us on the ongoing campaign to protect Victoria's native forests and their wildlife.

VICFORESTS IS BECOMING A FAMILIAR defendant in the Victorian Supreme Court.

In late 2010 the court found it guilty of intending to illegally log an old-growth forest near East Gippsland's Brown Mountain in that supports protected rare wildlife.

Now they are again in the same court defending their actions that threaten to destroy Victoria's faunal emblem, the endangered Leadbeater's Possum, in the Sylvia Creek forest near Toolangi.

On 30 March the Orbost Magistrate's Court is hearing a criminal case against illegal rainforest logging by VicForests. In April, they will again be back in the Supreme Court to answer another case of illegal logging—this time in a protected National Site of Significance for Rainforest.

In December 2011, VicForests sent logging contractors into a very controversial stand of forests - a protected buffer for the Cobb Hill stand of cool temperate rainforest on the Errinundra plateau in East Gippsland. Despite letters to VicForests and its minister, Peter Walsh, the logging did not stop.

The law states that areas designated as Sites of Significance for Rainforests at a national level will be fully protected. DSE and VicForests now claim the maps that have been around for years (and show that the area is to be protected) were wrong; the area they want to clearfell isn't really in a protected buffer.

Despite a court order, VicForests is still refusing to pay Environment East Gippsland's legal costs from the Brown Mountain court win back in September 2010. Yet we have been forced down the costly track of once again suing VicForests.

In December, we applied to the Supreme Court for an urgent injunction to stop the bulldozers in the Rainforest Site of Significance. Thanks to the generosity of our supporters and our superhuman legal team, we were able to lodge the court papers in record time and pay all the associated costs.



East Gippsland's and Victoria's future: thriving old-growth forests storing carbon and protecting biodiversity – or logging?

PHOTOS: (ABOVE) JUDITH DELAND; (BELOW) JOHN RENOWDEN



VicForests undertook not to log the area until the injunction could be heard.

The application for an injunction was heard in late January. VicForests was hoping to obtain another adjournment. His Honour Justice Jack Forrest thought this was wasting the Court's time.

Not only was VicForests refused an adjournment, His Honour suggested they speed up the process and go straight to trial, bypassing the injunction phase. So rather than a timeline that would have seen a spring trial, we will have VicForests in the Supreme Court in April.

We liked the idea. VicForests didn't. It opposed it—and lost.

It is inconceivable that in this day and age, in a developed, supposedly democratically-run country, a small local environment group has to constantly find the funds to take a government agency to court for breaking its own government's laws.

The rest of the world knows the value of primary forests and rainforest, but the Baillieu Government doesn't.

For more information see www.eastgippsland.net.au or phone 5154 0145.

Forests Forever East Gippsland camp, 6-9 April

Book in to this year's Forests Forever Easter Camp! Enjoy guided walks in rainforest and old growth areas, a forest photography workshop, evening botanical activities, legal updates; learn, explore, tour, survey and be inspired!

For information and bookings, contact Carmen or Jill on (03) 5154 0102, email carmen@eastgippsland.net.au or visit www.eastgippsland.net.au.

See also Facebook: 'Forests Forever Ecology Camp 2012'

Port Campbell's Southern Brown Bandicoot nursery at risk

Marion Manifold, *Secretary of the Port Campbell Community Group Inc*, outlines a local threat to this endangered species. For more information, contact Marion at mmanifold@ansonie.com.au



SOUTHERN BROWN BANDICOOTS, *ISOODON obesulus*, which are listed as endangered under the EPBC Act 1999, inhabit the spectacular cliffs on Port Campbell's headland, adjoining the township.

Photographs taken over the last 18 months have proved that the site is a healthy bandicoot breeding colony, comprising at least four mothers with pouch young, babies ranging from 9cm long to mid-size juveniles, and mature adult males.

The photos show that a vacant block of land, now subdivided into two allotments and proposed for development, is a bandicoot nursery.

The federal Environment Department seems to think the land is of limited habitat value due to its small size and the presence of some weeds and fences on three sides. But the land has deep sandy soil and a northerly orientation protecting it from southerly winds, and the fences help protect the bandicoots from larger predators.

Corangamite Shire Council issued a permit for a dwelling, ignoring DSE's recommendations including measures to protect the bandicoots, and geotechnical investigations—the site is only 40 metres from a large sea cavern. VCAT passed the dwelling permit with some limited conditions, but unfortunately did not exclude pets from the site.

The bandicoot nursery's survival appears precarious.

Forcing the nursery to relocate is likely to disrupt or destroy a healthy breeding site, and has the potential to mix gene pools and create conflict with other species.

An ecological report notes that the scale of impact is 'national' because "every bandicoot colony that is destroyed or taken from its habitat is

Southern Brown Bandicoot with pouch young, Port Campbell.

PHOTO: MARION MANIFOLD

What you can do

Communicate your concerns to:

- Hon. Tony Burke, Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population & Communities: Tony.Burke.MP@aph.gov.au
- Hon. Ryan Smith, Minister for the Environment & Climate Change: ryan.smith@parliament.vic.gov.au

one step closer to extinction for the species".

The proposed dwelling is set back only 1.2m from adjoining densely vegetated Crown land, and if conditions are not stringently enforced, the clearing of this Crown land as a firebreak could be requested under fire legislation. The dwelling will also overlook the headland's public walking trail.

The vegetation is Coastal Heathland Scrub and Coastal Tussock, rated as of 'very high' ecological significance as less than half of Victoria's original extent of this vegetation class remains.

A particularly significant plant species found here is the EPBC-listed Metallic Sun Orchid, *Thelymitra epipactoides*.

Other significant fauna species recorded breeding at the site are the Swamp Antechinus, Buff-banded Rail, and FFG-listed Rufous Bristlebird.

The headland's public land is of 'national significance' as part of the Commonwealth Government's *Great Ocean Road and Environs* for its natural, cultural and aesthetic values.

The headland has a National Trust 'state significance' listing.

This one small area has highly significant features: spectacular views along the coast and to the hinterland, sea caverns and limestone cliffs, Aboriginal archaeological sites, remnants of the town's 1880s maritime heritage fronting the huge Southern Ocean swells, and of course the bandicoots and the overall biodiversity, currently at risk.

We can only hope that the relevant authorities ensure protection and conservation of an area that has such high natural and cultural significance. Or is there anyone who would like to purchase land for bandicoot conservation?



(Left) Bird watchers at Boar Gully, Brisbane Ranges NP; (above) Anakie Gorge, Brisbane Ranges NP, still recovering from the 2006 fires.

PHOTOS: COLIN COOK

Letter from Colin Cook, Friends of Brisbane Ranges

Dear Editor,

IT WAS WONDERFUL TO HEAR THAT THE WILDLIFE at the Prom has come through a range of natural setbacks with a healthy tick ('Good news! The Prom's wildlife is OK!', *Park Watch* December 2011). I was very interested in the quote from Park Victoria's Chief Ranger Roger Fenwick, who stated that "The information from this survey will help us in making the best decisions about future recovery work at the Prom. It will also fine tune the direction of our environmental management."

It would be heartening to think that the same statement could be made about all the other parks in Victoria which have experienced similar, or worse, impacts due to bushfires, storms and floods.

The Bushfires Royal Commission recommended that "*DSE significantly upgrade its program of long-term data collection to monitor and model the effects of its prescribed burning programs and of bushfires on biodiversity in Victoria.*" Where are the major scientific surveys for the Grampians, the Big Desert, the Brisbane Ranges, Kinglake and all the other parks affected by recent fires and floods? Where is the initiative to gather the basic ecological survey data that is needed to properly manage our parks?

It will take a well-planned and sustained effort to achieve the level of monitoring and data collection required to meet the management needs of all of our parks. One thing that will be needed is the involvement of all people who care about our parks, from government scientists to non-government organisations such as VNPA, Friends groups,

walking groups, field naturalist clubs and members of the public.

It will not happen if it is just left to government agencies, as they do not have the resources necessary to undertake such a task. They are also subject to the fickle winds of political expediency and cost-cutting measures.

To quote the eminent field biologist George Schaller: "*...it is painfully clear that good science and good laws do not necessarily result in good conservation. Communities must be directly involved as full partners in conservation by contributing their knowledge, insights and skills.*"

I look forward to reading in a future *Park Watch* about large-scale surveys planned for many other parks, this time with the involvement of local communities and other interested public groups.

VNPA response

Thank you, Colin, for your letter. The VNPA shares your concerns, and the need for community involvement in wildlife surveys and data collection.

The VNPA's NatureWatch and Reef Watch programs are aimed at helping to fill the knowledge gaps that Colin identifies, and at involving the community in monitoring, but of course there is much more to be done.

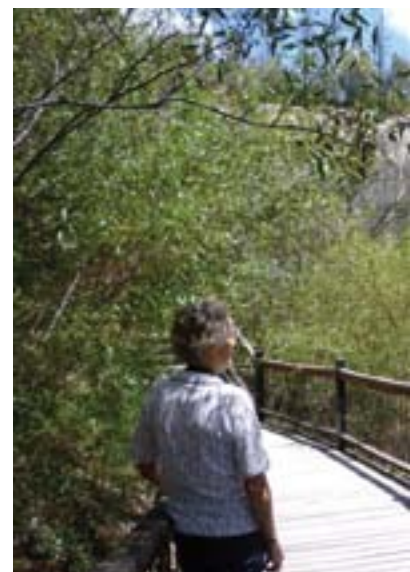
In June *Park Watch* we hope to report on the Museum of Victoria's recent 'Bush Blitz' at Condah, which resulted in many exciting discoveries.

Resilience Forum

Building resilient ecosystems in Victoria: what is our vision and how can we achieve it?

Thursday 12 April 2012
Deakin University, Burwood Campus

Registration essential:
RSVP Heather Andrews (heather.andrews@deakin.edu.au) by 5 April. More information: andrew.bennett@deakin.edu.au or dale.nimmo@deakin.edu.au



(Above right) Black-trunked Mugga Ironbarks and Golden Everlastings contrast strikingly in the Chiltern section of the park.

(Above middle) Friends convenor Eileen Collins looks towards the Yeddonda Aboriginal art site near Mt Pilot.

Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park

Geoff Durham takes us to a park in north-east Victoria that is famous for birdlife, wildflowers, history and more!

THE BASIS FOR UNDERSTANDING AND appreciating a park—any park—is its geology and history.

As its name implies, Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park, situated between Wangaratta and Wodonga, is really two parks, each with a different geology and history and with differing biological communities.

Every day, thousands of vehicles speed along the Hume Freeway. A few south-bound travellers pull into a well-appointed rest area near Chiltern, and from here some take a stroll on a 900 m 'Take a Break Walk' circuit track in the park. But this is only a fragment of what is on offer.

This Chiltern section of the park is on either side of the freeway and of the unspoiled Chiltern township. The name 'Chiltern' is thought to derive from the Chiltern Hills in England, from where some of the area's early gold seekers came.

Originally Chiltern State Forest, Chiltern Regional (State) Park (4,250 ha) was created in 1980 as a result of 1977 Land Conservation Council recommendations. It became Chiltern Box-Ironbark National Park (4,320 ha) in 1997.

The Mt Pilot (Pilot Range) section is a few kilometres south of the Chiltern section on either side of the Chiltern-Beechworth road. LCC 1977 recommendations led to the creation of Mt Pilot Multipurpose Park (14,123 ha) out of reserved forest.

In 2002 the two parks, with the addition of Woolshed Falls and other areas, became the present Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park (21,560 ha), following the recommendations of the Environment Conservation Council's Box-Ironbark Forests and Woodlands Final Report.

It is a park with intrusions, inliers and outliers,

and a high area-to-boundary ratio. Bartley's Block, an important fauna habitat, was an inlier purchased by the Victorian Conservation Trust.

The two sections are connected by a narrow bio-link along Black Dog Creek which is not part of the park.

Over 200 bird species have been recorded. Mammals include Tuans (Brush-tailed Phascogales), Squirrel, Sugar and Feathertail Gliders, and wombats in the Mt Pilot section.

Chiltern section

This section is mainly Ordovician sedimentary rocks with a history of alluvial and quartz reef mining. The landscape is low hills of box-ironbark with soft grey-green foliage. The feature tree is Mugga Ironbark (*Eucalyptus sideroxylon*) with deeply furrowed black bark. The usually sparse middle storey consists of Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*), Varnish Wattle (*A. verniciflua*) and White Cypress-pine (*Callitris glaucophylla*). The poor soils support a species-rich ground cover with many orchids.

The park is renowned nationally if not worldwide among the birding fraternity, with rare and endangered species such as the Regent Honeyeater, Swift Parrot and Turquoise Parrot. Its birding values are enhanced by three red gum outliers in the flood plain—Chiltern Valley No. 1 and 2 Dams, and Barambogie Dam.

I first visited Chiltern State Park in May 1984 on the formation of its Friends Group, instigated by Tony Marsh of the Albury Environment Centre and sponsored by the VNPA. As a member of the National Parks Advisory Council I made several visits in the 1980s, particularly in relation to mining



issues, and spent the Easter of 1995 backpacking in the park.

I was there again in November last year and was amazed at the spectacular carpets of Golden Everlasting.

Evidence of mining is everywhere with disturbed ground, shafts, mullock heaps and dams. The large stone quarry has closed, although a proposed new site on Skeleton Hill adjoining the park is causing local concern.

There are three interpreted walks: a short one at the Magenta Mine site, the 7km Tuan Track Walk from the Tuan campsite, and the 8.5km White Box Walk from Honeyeater picnic area.

Mt Pilot section

The Mt Pilot Range is largely Devonian granite with a rugged landscape very different from the Chiltern section. It is a transitional zone between the plains and the Alps. A short path leads from a car park to the top of Mt Pilot (545 metres) and a fire lookout tower on a vast granite slab.

The area is of significance to Aboriginal people. One accessible site, Yeddonda, has faded red ochre images of indeterminate age. A steepish stepped path takes you through a massive granite outcrop with caves and a long over-hang draped with garlands of *Hardenbergia violacea*.

Following a 7000 ha fire in 2003, the vegetation is recovering with dense regeneration of eucalypts, especially Red Stringybark, Black Cypress-pine, and Silver Wattle. Unburnt open forest in the east, where there are impressive stands of Brittle Gum (*E. mannifera*), are in marked contrast with the burnt areas.

What to do

The area deserves more than a fleeting visit. There is access from bitumen roads and a maze of good gravel vehicle tracks for two-wheel driving, walking, trail bikes, cycling and horse riding.

There is plenty of accommodation in Beechworth and Chiltern. Camping in the Chiltern section is limited to the Tuan campground, which has no facilities and is especially suitable for self-con-

tained caravans and campervans.

Dispersed camping is permitted in the prospecting zone of the Mt Pilot section along Reedy Creek. Regrettably, dispersed walk-in camping is not permitted. There is no drinking water.

As stated in the Management Plan, the park promotes two principal visitor sites with the only toilets in the park: Honeyeater picnic area in the Chiltern section, and Woolshed Falls in the Mt Pilot section. There is a 6.0km walking track from the Falls to Beechworth township.

There is provision for climbing, abseiling, prospecting and gem hunting, and 48 apiary sites. The tradition of no dogs in a national park is maintained.

Adjoining the park in the south-east is Beechworth Historic Park, and in the south-west Eldorado Historic Reserve, both managed by PV.

Beechworth HP consists of ten separate blocks near the lively Beechworth township. Attractions include the Gorge Scenic Drive and the restored Powder Magazine. Eldorado features a massive 1,383 ton floating gold dredge which operated from 1936 to 1954—well worth a visit.

Rangers and Friends

Chiltern-Mt Pilot NP is fortunate in having two long-serving rangers with an intimate knowledge of the park, Ranger-in-Charge Brian Pritchard and John McDonald, and a very supportive Friends Group. Its convener is Eileen Collins, the smiling face on the cover of December 2011 *Park Watch*.

The recipient of a 2011 Best Friend Award for her outstanding contribution, Eileen says: "This is a park of great diversity with plenty to offer in all seasons. I feel privileged that my journey through life has brought me here. To be part of a Friends group with so much enthusiasm and dedication is very satisfying."

From the Parks Victoria website you can download a Visitor Guide and the 2008 Management Plan, which contains a great deal of interesting background material and is the source of much of the information in this article. The Friends of Chiltern website is www.friendsofchiltern.org.au

(Above left) Woolshed Falls. A walking track links the falls and Beechworth township.

PHOTOS: GEOFF DURHAM

The Winton Wetlands return!



Brooke Ross,
*communications
consultant for the
Winton Wetlands
Committee of
Management,
reports on
an exciting
restoration
project in north-
east Victoria.
The VNPA's
Nick Roberts is
a member of the
Committee of
Management.*

AFTER YEARS OF DROUGHT, THE WINTON Wetlands (formerly Lake Mokoan) are full of water, and birds and people are flocking to the 3000ha of wetlands set in the 8750ha Winton Wetlands Reserve just north of Benalla in north-east Victoria.

Among recent visitors were members of Bird Observation and Conservation Australia. Most had never been to the wetlands before and were very surprised by the variety of birdlife, with over 90 species recorded on the day.

They were also quick to see the huge expanse of the wetlands as a great place for observing birds of prey. The visitors saw two Wedge-tailed Eagles performing a spectacular diving display flight over the Chesney Hills, as well as a Peregrine Falcon, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Swamp Harriers and kites.

Following years of debate and discussion, Lake Mokoan was decommissioned as a water storage in 2010, and management responsibility for the wetlands passed to the Winton Wetlands Committee of Management.

Restoration, management and future development of the Winton Wetlands are guided by the Lake Mokoan Future Land Use Strategy (FLUS), developed in consultation with the local community by a Steering Committee.

Following extensive consultation, the Strategy was completed in September 2006 and succeeded in securing \$20 million in funding for implementation.

The vision is for the restoration of Winton Wetlands to be a project of scientific, cultural and environmental significance, with a focus on education, research, tourism, recreation and community development, known for its local, regional and national support.

Restoring the Winton Wetlands

Until the late 1960s, the Winton wetlands consisted of 3000 ha of interconnected swamps surrounded by farmland and areas of remnant grassy woodland. There were three main open water wet-

lands, Winton, Sergeant's and Green Swamps, surrounded by a number of smaller swamps.

In 1971, with the construction of a 7.5km long embankment, the wetlands were inundated to create Lake Mokoan, an off-river water storage designed to supply water to the Murray and Goulburn-Broken irrigation areas.

The decision to decommission the lake and return it to wetland was made in 2004 by the previous Victorian Government as part of the *Our Water Our Future* White Paper.

Lake Mokoan was highly inefficient, losing 50,000 megalitres (ML) of water, or 20,000 Olympic swimming pools, annually—enough water to supply a city of more than 200,000 people. Returning it to its natural state will help save 44,000ML of water to improve the health of the Broken, Goulburn, Snowy and Murray Rivers.

The 365,000ML lake was decommissioned in July 2010, and the maximum water level has been returned to that of the former Winton Wetlands—about 27,000ML.

This is the first time that the restoration of a former off-stream water storage to a wetland has been attempted at this scale.

The nine-member Committee of Management was established in May 2009 to manage, improve and maintain the Winton Wetlands Reserve, implement the FLUS and maximise the regional economic and tourism benefits from the restoration project.

Flora and fauna

The former wetlands probably contained three wetland vegetation communities and up to six grassy woodland communities that are now considered endangered or vulnerable in the Victorian Riverina bioregion. The vegetation of the larger swamps indicates a regular flooding regime and a system which formed a drought refuge for waterbirds and other fauna.

The wetlands have a wide variety of fauna, reflecting the diversity of habitat found in the area. The extensive areas of large dead trees are



(From far left)
Bird watchers survey
the wetlands.

PHOTO: WINTON WETLANDS COM

Wetlands panorama.

PHOTO: SCOTT HARTVIGSEN

**You can explore Winton
Wetlands by canoe.**

**Aboriginal scar tree at
the wetlands.**

PHOTOS: WINTON WETLANDS
COM

valuable habitat for most of the common waterbirds as well as a number of threatened and significant species, while the dryland areas offer suitable habitat for woodland birds, reptiles and mammals.

Cultural heritage

Winton Wetlands is an area of cultural heritage significance to the local and regional Aboriginal community. Based on recent archaeological assessments, the area was a place that supplied an abundance of food, water and shelter for a large number of people.

Further survey work is being undertaken in conjunction with local Aboriginal communities to identify sensitive and significant areas and values as part of the future management of the wetlands.

Europeans settled the Winton Wetlands area in the mid to late 19th century. Before the creation of Lake Mokoan, more than 40 families lived in the area. Again based on recent archaeological assessments, there is still considerable evidence of former farm houses, schools and a butter factory.

Planning for the future

The Committee has recently completed a Restoration and Monitoring Strategic Plan to guide restoration and management of the Winton Wetlands and the 5000+ha of surrounding grassy woodland and former farmland.

The plan was developed in consultation with the recently established Scientific and Technical Advisory Group chaired by Professor Max Finlayson, Director of the Institute of Land, Water and Community at Charles Sturt University.

It will guide improvements to ecological function, including protecting existing biodiversity values and restoring habitat.

The Committee has also embarked on the development of a Master Plan with the appointment of a consortium led by nationally renowned landscape architects Taylor Cullity Lethlean.

The FLUS proposed the establishment of a tourism, recreation, education and research node as part of Winton Wetlands as a focal point for locals, visitors and tourists, complemented by outdoor visitor facilities and interpretative material and a major access point to walking tracks.

The Master Plan will form the basis for the overall future development of tourism, recreation, community, education and research facilities at the wetlands, with detailed implementation plans and financial analysis of proposals and a business model for its implementation.

The development of the Master Plan will enable the community to be involved and offer ideas on the future of the Wetlands.

These two plans will guide the future work of the Committee in realising the vision of the FLUS and restoring the Winton Wetlands.

Future proposals include boardwalks, cycle paths, bird hides and observation platforms, as well as a Discovery Centre, education and research facilities, ecotourism accommodation, Indigenous cultural tourism and community facilities.

For now, you can enjoy walking, bike riding, canoeing and bird watching. Access in the wetlands is restricted to walkers and bike riders—no cars or 4WDs. For more information see www.wintonwetlands.org.au

Discovering Warrandyte and Longridge

VNPA Caring for Nature Day 2011

CFND Committee Convenor Reg Elder reports on this enjoyable annual event, the 12th that he has played a major role in organising. The VNPA greatly appreciates Reg's hard work and commitment!



**Yarra Riverkeeper
Ian Penrose holds the
crowd enthralled.**

PHOTO: EMILY CLOUGH

WE CHOSE THE WARRANDYTE AREA AS THE location for Caring for Nature Day 2011 (Sunday 20 November) to focus on the Yarra River and the parks that help preserve the area's beautiful bush and river environment, and protect water quality.

As Pound Bend and other local picnic areas are well used and often crowded, we settled on Longridge, a little-known park with a camping area that adjoins Warrandyte State Park. After some negotiations with Parks Victoria staff, the wheels were set in motion for the picnic.

Longridge Park, accessed by a long and steep gravel road, is on a large bend in the Yarra just east of Warrandyte, with a high escarpment on the opposite (northern) bank. The site of an historic farm dating back 150 years, it was acquired by the state government (via the MMBW) in 1977.

Farming continued until 1993, but since then there has been a program of revegetation and improvement of park facilities.

The day's program, including walks, bird watching, guest speakers and some revegetation work, took full advantage of the beautiful riparian forest along the river flats and the Red Gum and Yellow Box escarpment woodland ... as well as the delightful mild sunny day.

A small group of members, working with

Friends of Warrandyte, removed old plastic tree-guards from trees planted some years ago. These guards were not only unsightly but were strangling some of the trees.

VNPA Executive Director Matt Ruchel welcomed members and friends, and introduced Penny Algar, who spoke of the key role of her late father Bill Algar (1925-2011) in the establishment of Warrandyte State Park.

After lunch, Yarra Riverkeeper Ian Penrose got us to take our chairs down next to the fast-flowing river for his presentation. Ian heads the Yarra Riverkeepers Association, and his knowledge of and enthusiasm for the river ensured that his outstanding presentation was a highlight of the day.

Together with Nick Roberts' talk on our northern river systems, it helped many members to understand more fully the importance of protecting our waterways.

I would like to thank all the people who contributed to making CFND 2011 an enjoyable and memorable day. They include:

- Amy Dwyer, Shanti Fowler, Nick Roberts, Matt Ruchel and other VNPA staff
- Parks Victoria staff at Warrandyte Park: Ranger in Charge Conrad Annal, Business Support Officer Kay Williams, and other rangers
- Penny Algar and other Algar family members
- Ken Crook, who led two walks identifying the location of historic sites
- Jenny Rolland and Euan Moore, for helping us seeking out the elusive birds of the area
- Ian Penrose, Yarra Riverkeeper, for a memorable presentation
- the Friends of Warrandyte State Park
- others who helped, and all those who attended, for making this a great day in such a peaceful location so close to Melbourne.

As 2012 is the VNPA's 60th anniversary, this year's Caring for Nature Day will be a special one. The Association's Education and Events Committee is looking at a range of events and activities, of which CFND will be one, although the location and program are still to be decided.

This is your chance to contribute ideas or suggestions for the day, which will be most welcome! Please contact me via the VNPA office, or direct on 9439 9527 or cpr.rge@bigpond.net.au

Plant pests threaten our natives

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL FLORAL EMBLEM THE Golden Wattle could fall victim to newly evolving plant pests from overseas, after the Australian Government failed to deal with the recent invasion of Myrtle Rust.

"South African foresters are warning that new diseases attacking Australian wattles grown in plantations in Africa and Asia will reach our shores," said Invasive Species Council CEO John DeJose.

"But the Australian Government is yet to develop contingency plans for these and other looming threats to our natural environment.

"These new pathogens have evolved the ability to infect several wattle species, just as Myrtle Rust 'learnt' how to exploit the weaknesses of our eucalypt species."

Australia's biosecurity system has no contingency plans to deal with these new pests and diseases, despite the ecological importance of wattles (our biggest genus of vascular plants, with more than 1000 species).

Myrtle Rust arrived in Victoria in January 2012, having taken less than two years to colonise most of Australia's east coast. It may prove

to be one of the most calamitous environmental pests of the century.

Attacking Australia's dominant plant family (the Myrtaceae, of which there are more than 2500 species), it will damage our landscapes and may endanger many species of flora and fauna.

Australia's wattles are nitrogen-fixers, a primary source of scarce nitrogen in our ancient soils. No one knows how severely exotic pathogens might disrupt this essential ecosystem service.

"If we don't manage our biosecurity better, our children and grandchildren might inherit an environment so poor it can only support a poor society," Mr DeJose said.

— from *Invasive Species Council*. For more information, see www.invasives.org.au or email isc@invasives.org.au.



Myrtle Rust fungus (yellow spots) on Agonis (Willow Myrtle) leaf.

PHOTO: DR ANGUS CARNEGIE © I&I NSW

Hattah works to restore water flows

MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL WORKS AT HATTAH-Kulkyne National Park, funded through the Living Murray program, will help restore a more natural pattern of flows to the iconic lake system.

They will deliver environmental water efficiently to maximise ecological outcomes, and maintain the lakes' beautiful environment for people's enjoyment.

River regulation has affected the frequency and extent of natural flooding at Hattah Lakes. The works will restore a more natural water regime, using both natural floods and managed watering events. Water for the lakes will come from environmental water allocations.

Works include the construction of a pump station, four regulators and three stop banks. The pump station will be at Messengers Bend, where Chalka Creek meets the Murray River.

The Mallee Catchment Management Authority (CMA) is coordinating the delivery of the Living Murray program in the Mallee, on behalf of DSE and the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, and is working in partnership with Parks Victoria.

Construction is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

Access to Hattah-Kulkyne NP will be affected during construction, with a number of roads



closed for public safety, including the River Track. But visitors will still be able to access the lakes, and most campgrounds and walking tracks.

Regular updates will be available on the CMA website www.malleecma.vic.gov.au, Parks Victoria's website www.parks.vic.gov.au, and the Hattah Lakes Twitter page @HattahLakes.

— from a Mallee CMA press release

Environmental water is restoring the Hattah Lakes ecosystem.

PHOTO: MALLEE CMA

Darebin Parklands

escaping the claws of the machine

In 2006 the Darebin Parklands Association won a UN Association of Australia World Environment Day Award for its work in saving and protecting the parklands.

The Association runs a Junior Ranger club and holds ten community events a year.

Association President Ingrid Svendsen tells the story.

DAREBIN PARKLANDS HAS CAVES, RAPIDS, cliffs, ancient rock formations and wildlife including echidnas, endangered Grey-headed Flying Foxes, 70 species of birds, native fish and frogs and even the occasional kangaroo.

Nothing unusual there, well-travelled *Park Watch* readers might think. But this park is just 10km from the CBD. And it has been painstakingly created from a former quarry and tip.

The remarkable transformation of the Darebin Parklands site from a wasteland—a weed-infested horse paddock on the Ivanhoe side of the creek, and a garbage-strewn municipal tip on the Alphington side—is told in the new book *Darebin Parklands: Escaping the Claws of the Machine* by Dr Sarah Mirams.

On the eve of its 40th birthday, the Darebin Parklands Association has decided to tell the story of the Parklands. Our aim is to raise awareness about them and to inspire and enthuse.

Even long-time users often assume that Darebin parklands is a picturesque natural bushland, fortuitously left intact amid the city bustle.

In fact, the fortuitous thing about the parklands is the spirit and tenacity with which local people fought to save it from freeway or industrial development. The concrete-entombed inner-city stretches of Moonee Ponds Creek point to what might have been.

Visionary

Darebin Parklands was saved, then created, by a visionary band of local residents, fired over decades by 'a new vision of what a new city suburban green area may be'.

Save for a few towering remnant red gums, and the fruit trees that are legacies of the site's agricultural past, virtually everything in the parklands has been planted by volunteers, member of the Association and its forerunner group.

Volunteers weeded, cleared rubbish, planted and organised 'bucket brigades' to cart water down the steep slopes and keep saplings alive.



(Above and above right) Then and now: Darebin tip site in early 1970s, and the same scene at the Darebin Parklands today.



Kids and parents discovering Darebin waterbugs.

PHOTOS: COURTESY DAREBIN PARKLANDS ASSOCIATION

They built a timber lookout tower, a ranger's hut, seats and, incredibly, a bridge.

The story of the Sidney Clifton Bridge, designed by the association's treasurer, tells of the can-do spirit of the park's founders.

In 1976, just three years after the group was formed, it decided that an alternative to splashing through the creek was needed; a practical and symbolic structure to link both sides of the parklands.

Sidney assembled the bridge formwork in his living room and assembled a band of enthusiastic amateur bridge builders. The concrete truck was delayed but the undeterred volunteers toiled on by lantern light into the night. Recently, the bridge



was added to the City of Darebin's heritage register.

'No' was not a word in the lexicon of the park founders. In the 1970s, the group persuaded then Premier Sir Rupert Hamer to contribute matching funding with local government to purchase the site. It was the equivalent of a million dollars, an astronomical amount for a site whose potential was only visible through heavily tinted rose-coloured glasses.

The fight begins

The fight for the parklands began on an ordinary day in May 1973, when Ivanhoe residents Sue



Course and Anthea Fleming investigated a commotion in the loved but overgrown open space at the bottom of their street.

They were horrified to find MMBW bulldozers ripping up the creek, 'clearing the drain'. The hollow logs the kids crawled through were gone, as were the sandy beaches on the creek, the billabong and the habitat-providing remnant vegetation.

Workmen bulldozed the trees into a pile and set them alight.

Even as the smoke from the pyre hung over the neighbourhood, outraged residents mobilised. Sue and Anthea marshalled parents at the school gate and through neighbourhood networks.

Within days protest meetings, television news coverage, petitions and deputations were organised, an achievement that seems all the more remarkable today for being undertaken without the benefit of social media, when getting names on petitions and people at rallies meant painstakingly going door to door.

The other interesting feature about the campaign to save the parklands is just how civil it was. These were middle-class professionals: no chanting slogans or waving placards for them!

Parkland heroes

The Premier toured the site and was served afternoon tea on china and white tablecloths by the

creek and plied with mulberry ice cream Sue made from fruit from the parklands' remnant orchards.

The book reveals how Sue placed supporters strategically around the parklands during the Premier's visit, to reinforce the impression of a well-loved and used place. One can imagine the picnickers and amateur artists with their sketchbooks exclaiming: "Mr Premier, what a surprise to see you here today!"

The parklands are a small but significant part of the legacy of the visionary Hamer, the father of the Garden State and the leader who bequeathed us a Green Wedges policy and new national parks.

They are also the legacy of legendary park ranger Peter Wiltshire, who has spent 26 years there. He recounts how, on his first day of work in the early 1980s, he was assigned the chain-gang-like job of shifting rocks on the uncapped tip site. He thought the place was a dump, and wondered what he had done to deserve such hard punishment.

Then he walked to the escarpment, looked out over the floodplain and saw the boulder-strewn creek arcing under Silurian cliffs to form a natural amphitheatre. He was charmed, and has stayed charmed to this day.

Today Ranger Pete oversees an education program that caters to 5000 students from around Melbourne each year. He supports the

work of the Association, helping us to run our popular Junior Ranger Club and activities like bonfire night, and providing crucial technical and logistical support for our revegetation work.

In publishing this book we pay tribute to all of those whose efforts over decades have given us the place we love today—'Mother of the Parklands' Sue Course, Sir Rupert Hamer and Pete Wiltshire prominent among them.

It's been a huge undertaking but we are glad to share a story that shows how people working together can change the world—starting in their own backyard.

For more information see www.dpa.org.au or www.facebook.com/darebinpark

Special book offer



The VNPA has copies of the attractive and comprehensive book *Darebin Parklands* available at the special VNPA member price of **\$34.95** (RRP \$39.95). Postage and packaging is an extra \$5.00, or you can call in at the VNPA office to pick up a copy. Highly recommended!

Tribute

Ena Bernice Stewart (née Semmens) 1916-2011

ENA STEWART, POSSIBLY THE LONGEST-STANDING member of the VNPA, died in Baxter on the Mornington Peninsula on 29 April 2011. She was almost 95.

Ena grew up in Melbourne and Mildura and trained as a pharmacist. She became a keen bushwalker and was introduced to skiing (which she always pronounced in the European way as 'sheeing'). Through these activities she met Eric Stewart, also an active bushwalker, skier and field naturalist.

Eric was the Victorian Railways' 'Snowline Representative' from 1935 to 1940. Based in Harriettville, he guided parties of skiers on horseback up the Bon Accord Spur to the Hotham Chalet.

Ena joined the Australian Women's Land Army during the war, while Eric returned to his trade as a fitter and turner (a 'reserved occupation', much to his disgust, as it meant he could not join the armed forces).

Ena and Eric married in April 1950 and continued bushwalking and skiing together, as well as with their respective clubs the Melbourne Women's Walking Club and the Victorian Mountain Tramping Club (the 'Men's Club').

When Eric retired in the early 1960s, they moved to Syndal and built their own home as owner-builders. They became bushwalking mentors to my twin brother Keith and me (children of Ena's cousin Effie Seddon, who lived nearby), offering walking gear and maps and the benefit of their enormous experience—and in due course recruiting me to the VNPA!

Eric was a foundation member of VNPA in 1952, and Ena always considered herself one as well (although the Association's records show that she joined in 1957). Eric served as an office-bearer or a member of Council for many years and both were involved in the preparation of the original proposal for a Victorian Alpine National Park in 1957.

The contribution for which they are mainly remembered, however, was to the Excursions Committee, which Eric convened from 1959 to January 1976. J. Ros Garnet, in an obituary for Eric published in *Park Watch* no. 131 in 1982, describes the evolution of the Committee as follows:

The Excursions Committee was one of the V.N.P.A.'s very successful committees. At first it was limited to two members [Eric and Rege Mann] ... When Eric became the Association's Hon. Assistant Treasurer [in 1968] the workload had become enough to warrant one more on the Committee. This was achieved very easily and effectively by co-opting Eric's wife Ena, who had already been doing a good

This inspiring account of a remarkable woman who made a major contribution to the VNPA's early years was prepared by Helen Martin, Ena Stewart's cousin and herself a VNPA member since 1972.

deal of the committee's work in an unofficial capacity.

The excursions task was enormous: in 1973-74, for example, the Committee organised seven one-day excursions, attended by over 500 members, and an eight-day trip to Wilsons Promontory involving 100 members. The program for the following year included the first VNPA bushwalking/camping trip, a visit to Mt Baw Baw led by Sandra Bardwell.

The Stewarts sent out all the excursion notifications from their home (in stamped self-addressed envelopes supplied by members), and the Committee—with some volunteers for individual trips—made all the arrangements for travel, contacted the relevant land management agencies, took members' bookings, and oversaw the excursions themselves.

When the original Committee resigned in January 1976, as a result of Eric Stewart's ill-health, the new Convenor Eric Quinlan wrote:

... the Committee has become very conscious of the immense amount of work which must have been done by Mr & Mrs Stewart over the years



Ena Semmens (Stewart) skiing at Mt Hotham, late 1930s or early 40s.



(Top) 'Bourke Street', Mt Buller, late 30s or early 40s.

(Above) The new Hotham Chalet, 1940s.

and would like, accordingly, to pay tribute to their work and bring to the notice of all members the immense debt of gratitude we owe to these indefatigable workers.

Eric Quinlan also noted that the new Committee had arranged for Eileen McKee, who had recently taken over the VNPA office, to carry out some of the functions that had previously been done by the three committee members.

In 1973, at the VNPA's 21st Annual General Meeting, Ena and Eric Stewart were both awarded Honorary Life Memberships. They were in distinguished company, for the other Honorary Life Memberships presented at that meeting were to J. Ros Garnet, Jean Blackburn, Rege Mann and Eric Quinlan. When the Stewarts stood down from the Excursions Committee in 1976, the VNPA organised an afternoon tea at 'Rippon Lea' to recognise their work, and over 100 members attended.

After Eric's death in 1982, Ena continued her interest in walking, travel and nature study—including VNPA excursions and annual picnics—and took up gemmology and jewellery making. She travelled widely in Australia, on bush camping safaris on which she was usually the oldest but certainly

(Below) Hotham Heights Hotel, 1940. L-R: Jean, Enid, Alice, Ena, Gwen, Eileen, Peter (foreground).

(Bottom) Sunrise Wildlife Float Trip, Snake River, Wyoming, USA 1991. Ena second from left.

(Below right) Ena in Central Australia, mid-1980s.

PHOTOS COURTESY HELEN AND BRIAN MARTIN



not the slowest member, and on gem club trips.

In 1989 she moved from Syndal to a retirement unit in Baxter Village. She later visited North America on a national parks tour and gave a vivid account of flying in a helicopter in Hawaii, watching a red river of molten lava flowing down the mountainside from an erupting volcano. When Qantas resumed flights over Antarctica, Ena took her grand-niece on one of the first.

Ena suffered from osteoporosis, which restricted her mobility and curtailed her wanderings, until a legacy enabled her to move from her usual spartan style of travel to the joys of business class. She then did a boat trip up the Kimberley coast, visited New Zealand, went hot-air ballooning in Alice Springs, flew as a passenger in a Tiger Moth and enjoyed a long holiday in England.

In 2002, she attended the 50th Anniversary Dinner for VNPA and was very chuffed to find herself the only 'foundation member' present.

During a stay in hospital after a back operation, Ena contracted an incurable infection that caused her much pain and discomfort in her later years. She moved first to the hostel section of Baxter Village, and finally into the nursing home, where she died in late April 2011—a few weeks short of her 95th birthday—after a series of strokes.

She is survived by two nieces, two nephews and their families. Her close friends and successive travelling companions, Peter Trainor and Bill Biddle, both predeceased her.

In her will, Ena left a legacy to VNPA, along with several other conservation bodies and charities.



Bequests to the VNPA

When you help secure the future of the VNPA, you're helping to secure the future of our natural world.

Your gift of a bequest to the VNPA will have a lasting and generous impact felt for years to come. Please remember us in your will.

Please contact Lara Hookham on 9341 6501 for assistance in leaving a bequest to the VNPA.

Tribute

Des Quinn 1941-2011: naturalist and guide



Des Quinn on a Friends of French Island outing, January 1995.

PHOTO: MEREDITH SHERLOCK



DES QUINN, LONG-TIME VNPA MEMBER, DIED suddenly last September at the age of 70.

Growing up in Melbourne, Des developed a passion for natural history from the age of seven. In 1962 he joined the Bird Observers Club and contributed a large number of articles and reports to the *Bird Observer* and *Australian Bird Watcher*.

Des was best known to VNPA members through his work on French Island, where he carried out extensive bird surveys from 1964. He became co-founder of Friends of French Island in 1984 and received a Best Friend award from the Friends Network in 1998.

I first met Des when I joined the group in 1989. I quickly discovered that he had a profound and practical knowledge of all the bird species. Furthermore, he had a great feeling for the bush—in its wholeness, its intricate web of connections and its mystery.

Des conveyed this subtly through his explanations in the field and in his descriptive writing. He did not use a computer but had a rapid, neat printed style of handwriting. People found his descriptions very appealing when published. They contained precise scientific detail, but underlying this he managed to convey a deeper sense of joyful wonder.

By the mid-90s Des and I decided we would like to publish a book presenting the records that he and others had accumulated for the wetlands, high-tide roosts and Sea-Eagle breeding sites. We published *Birds of French Island Wetlands* in 1999.

In 2000 Des went to live in the Blue Mountains, undertaking extensive bird studies in four adjacent areas of the national park: the Blue Gum Forest, and the Grose, Carmarthen and Govett Gorges. He had a special love for the Blue Gum Forest; to reach it he had to walk down a steep track deep into the Grose valley.

Des was not living in a house but slept in his car (a van) outside the national park, at a spot where 'the Scarlet Robin and Chestnut-rumped Heathwren fill the early daylight hours with their delightful songs.'

In spite of this hermit life, he made a number of friends in the district and he gave helpful advice to the park management and government authorities. In July last year he was involved with Lithgow Council in the Management Plan for Hassan's Walls Reserve.

He wrote: 'I've got 10 years of records for this area, in fact for the whole district, so I don't want the council to miss out on anything important for their plan... I'll also mark those species so that the council knows exactly what their threatened status is: rare, critically-endangered, etc...'

Des Quinn was a very nurturing person. He was devoted to his wife Margy, who was blind, and provided care for her parents after her premature death.

Des's friends will never forget him. I greatly enjoyed every one of the trips I went on with him—true journeys of discovery that always deepened my understanding of nature.

— Geoff Lacey

Congratulations on Order of Australia Medal awards!

Barry Clugston

VNPA MEMBER BARRY CLUGSTON OF Stawell received an OAM on Australia Day this year for services to the community of regional Victoria through a range of water industry and environmental organisations.

Early in his career, Barry was a ranger at Wyperfeld National Park and other parks.

He has been a member of the Country Fire Authority since 1959, serving with the Stawell Rural Fire Brigade since 1981.

After moving to Stawell and taking up a farm, where he now produces wattle seed among other crops, he became a founding member of the Wimmera Catchment and Land Protection Board and a founding member of Project Platypus and Upper Wimmera Landcare.

He has presented a wildlife program on ABC local radio to western Victorian audiences for the past 15 years.

Barry has been Chairman of Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water Corporation for 11 years, the period when pipelines replaced open channels in the Wimmera-Mallee Stock and Domestic water system, with enormous savings of water.

Since 2009 he has been a council member of the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC).

VNPA Councillors, staff and members send their congratulations to Barry and wish him all the best in the future.



Rob Youl

ROB YOUL'S 2012 OAM AWARD RECOGNISES his long and fruitful service to conservation in Victoria through the Landcare movement. He is well known to many VNPA members, particularly those who attend the Project Hindmarsh and Grow West tree-planting projects.

With his forester background, Rob has worked since 1981 in farm forestry, revegetation, urban ecology and community action with Victorian conservation departments, Greening Australia, the VNPA, Conservation Volunteers Australia, and Landcare Australia Limited.

He was Victorian Projects Officer for LAL 1996-2007, assisting groups and networks to source corporate funds for programs including Computershare's eTree, various Wimmera revegetation enterprises, and Grow West. From 2007 to 2009 he helped run LAL's carbon sequestration program CarbonSMART.

Rob has written widely on Landcare and nature conservation. He has just edited a book on the history of forestry education in Victoria, and published another—*The Victorian Bush*, by forest ecologist the late Ron Hateley.

As an owner of bushland around St Arnaud he belongs to Kara Kara Conservation Management Group, and also chairs Australian Landcare International, campaigns for 'biosinks' (biolinks that pay a carbon income) and works with Friends of Westgate Park.

A tireless worker and visionary, Rob has influenced governments, business and environmental groups. He is also an inspirational friend to many people. We look forward to continuing our friendship!

— John Stirling



Applications open for 2012-13 Community Action Grants

The Australian Government is seeking applications from local community groups to help them conserve and protect their local environment.

As part of the Australian Government's 'Caring for our Country' initiative, Community Action Grants recognise the contribution that community groups make to the priority areas of:

- coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats
- sustainable farm practices
- biodiversity and natural icons.

As in previous rounds, local community, farming and Indigenous groups can apply for a grant of

between \$5,000 and \$20,000 to fund projects that encourage active participation and build the skills and knowledge of the community. Successful applicants must finish their project by 30 June 2013.

To date, Community Action Grants have funded more than 1,250 projects to a value of \$23.5 million and have been delivered by more than 920 community groups across Australia.

For more information on eligibility, and to submit an application, visit www.nrm.gov.au or phone 1800 552 008. Applications close on **Tuesday 27 March 2012**.

Bushwalking and activities news

For a full list of upcoming walks and activities see the printed BWAG Program for Jan-June 2012, or check the monthly email updates for changes and additions.

Note that there are Under 35s Social Nights on **Thurs. 29 March** and **Thurs. 26 April**. For details check VNPAU35.social@gmail.com and the U35 e-group. RSVP essential.

There are general Social Nights on **Wed. 11 April**, when Euan Moore will talk about the natural history of Bali, Flores and other Indonesian islands, and **Wed. 9 May**. Phone 9347 5188 or email vnpa@vnpa.org.au

VNPA bus excursions

Saturday 17 March: the VNPA's 500th coach excursion! Travel to **Wilsons Promontory** in the steps of the very first VNPA excursion (June 1954).

Leader: Glenn King.

Saturday 21 April: coach trip to **Cape Schanck** and **Flinders** with walks there and at Arthurs Seat and Seawinds. **Leader:** Jacquie Rennie.

Saturday 19 May: coach trip to the **You Yangs** and **Serendip Sanctuary**, via Truganina Coastal Park (Altona). Enjoy You Yangs Regional Park following its closure due to floods, and celebrate Serendip's escape from a housing development.

Bookings and enquiries: **Larysa Kucan 9347 3733**, or **Jan Lacey 9329 8187**.

Boneseeding special event, Arthurs Seat, Saturday 14 April

As a 'thank you' to all past and present Arthurs Seat boneseeders, Parks Victoria is putting on a special boneseeding day with two hours of easy weeding at a new site, followed by a BBQ lunch. Details to be advised on booking. Contact Marg Hattersley on 9578 2554 or marghat@bigpond.com. All welcome!

VNPA member and climate change activist Tim Forcey reflects on how technology is affecting bushwalking.

All my friends have GPSs ...

*All my friends have GPSs,
And now there are no signs of stresses
Which way to go along the track
With a GPS tucked in their pack.*

*In dark of night or rain or fog,
When the trail's obscured by a giant log,
No worries mate, she'll be right,
As we find our way by satellite!*

*Oh how we'd struggle to find a rout(e),
Into our minds would creep the doubt,
The bickering, the fear, the mess;
Those days are gone – thanks to GPS.*

*But can I ask – what's technology wrought,
If it no longer takes a thought,
Bushman's skill or topographic nous
To ensure safe return to your cosy house?*

*And may I ask – where is the thrill?
Of finding out that pesky hill,
You thought should lie off to the west,
Is in the east! Who would have guessed?*

*IPHONE, EPIRB, emergency beacon,
Perhaps we have begun to weaken.
And when I earn my eternal rest,
Will they choose my spot with a GPS?*

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Scientists in Schools, including its sub-program Mathematicians in Schools, is an Australian Government initiative

Community education and engagement

The VNPA Education and Events Committee has engaged consultants Colin Hocking and Brian Sharpley to review the model of community education set out in last year's *Community Education and Engagement Strategy*, and develop a training program for staff and volunteers to enable them to integrate education and engagement practices with VNPA activities and events.

For more information about this project, or a copy of the Strategy, contact the VNPA office.

— Ann Buik, Convenor, Education and Events Committee.



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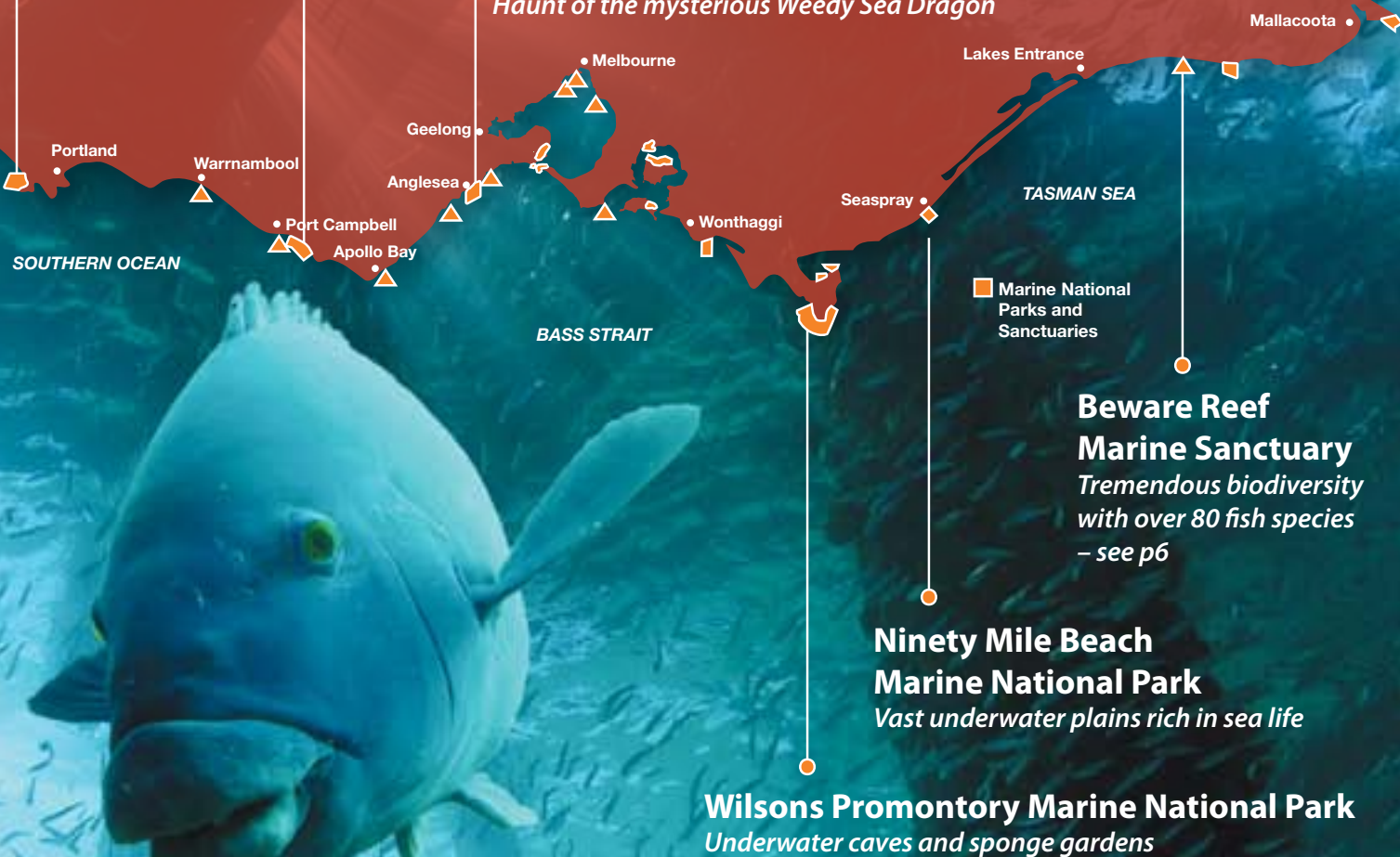
Nursery grounds for Southern Right Whales

Twelve Apostles Marine National Park

Rugged cliffs and spectacular rock stacks

Point Addis Marine National Park

Haunt of the mysterious Weedy Sea Dragon



Marine National
Parks and
Sanctuaries

**Beware Reef
Marine Sanctuary**
*Tremendous biodiversity
with over 80 fish species
– see p6*

**Ninety Mile Beach
Marine National Park**
Vast underwater plains rich in sea life

Wilsons Promontory Marine National Park
Underwater caves and sponge gardens

Composite image: Eastern Blue Groper, Sarah Speight;
Baitfish at Rye Pier, David Bryant

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The magnificent marine life found in Port Phillip Bay is some of the most unique and colourful you will see anywhere in the world.

For almost 22 years I have been scuba diving in the bay capturing images for film, magazine and exhibitions. I am still amazed at the reaction my work elicits.

People are astounded that Victorian waters are such a marine wonderland.

I love the colours of our sponges, golden kelp forests and limestone walls adorned with brilliant anemones along with magnificent corals (yes coral!) and the startling fish that make their home in this beautiful environment.

We're now fortunate to be welcoming back the Blue Groper, the friendliest fish in the sea.

I've been a member of the VNPA for several years. The work the organisation is doing to promote better management of our marine environment means a lot to me as a marine photographer, and as a Victorian. Our waters are our playground, our food source and our heritage.

Please join me in supporting the VNPA's current marine appeal to protect our seas. Phone 03 9347 5188 or visit marineappeal.vnpa.org.au.

Thank you!

David Bryant, Director of SeaPics

