

July 1998

# Friends of Warrandyte State Park



## Newsletter

Friends of Warrandyte State Park (FOWSP) Inc. P O Box 220 Warrandyte 3113

### Lofty Plans for the Mount

By Pat Coupar

A draft concept plan for Mount Lofty will soon be available for public comment. This is an important document for it will decide the future of Warrandyte State Park's long-awaited, latest addition. The incorporation of Mount Lofty into the Park was officially announced in March last year, this was followed by a memorable 'Celebration at the Mount', reported in our September newsletter.

In January this year a group of community representatives, including FOWSP members, were invited to comment on the proposed plan for Mount Lofty, outlined by Phil Pegler from Parks Victoria's Planning and Development Division. Since then archeological and botanical surveys have been carried out and a concept plan has been drawn up.

The plan sets out to provide the basis for revegetation and the development of visitor facilities and services over the next three years. Its key principles are to enhance the biodiversity of the area by: restoration of wetland environments; restoration of degraded ecosystems; re-establishment of woodland communities and the protection of good quality vegetation from disturbance and weed invasion.

Management strategies will include weed control and planting of indigenous vegetation. A minor consternation here is the inclusion of Burgan - an aggressive post-fire and disturbance coloniser that is way out of balance in the Warrandyte environment - for use in high density planting. Most of the plants suggested for low and high density planting would be easy to propagate at the nursery. However, some, including Wild Cherry, Cranberry Heath, Honeypots, Rock Fern, Maidenhair and Saw-sedge are difficult, if not impossible, to grow.

The plan acknowledges that rabbits are a major threat to the long-term survival of the vegetation

communities of Mount Lofty, and of the need to establish a fence to exclude rabbits from the whole site.

Other key principles of the plan are to maintain scenic viewing opportunities over the Yarra Valley floodplain and through the Warrandyte Gorge from selected trails and summit locations; to provide screening of unattractive views of urban development and to ensure key views along the river are free from 'human interference'. The logistics of achieving all three objectives without compromise could be interesting!

As for recreation facilities - necessary components of State Parks - visitor usage will be fairly low key. The main entry to Mount Lofty is to be from Wittons Reserve via a footbridge over Brushy Creek. Car parking, toilets and picnic areas are to be provided by the City of Manningham at Wittons Reserve while limited car parking will be available at Lower Homestead Road. Canoeists will be catered for with improved river access at Lower Homestead Road, portage areas and pre-arranged club access during competitive events to a designated area near Bob's Rocks. Minor facilities with picnic tables and seats, but no BBQ's will be provided at three sites. There will be no public vehicle access to these sites.

There is no mention in the plan for horse trails, dogs on leads or bike tracks. We can only assume they will be excluded from this area of the Park.

After its turbulent history, and long time in limbo, Mount Lofty is finally getting some much-needed attention. In fact its profile has been so raised that it is the only Reserve in the Park to boast its own management plan. If you would like more information or would like to comment on the draft plan talk to Ranger-in-Charge, Andrew Nixon at the Park on 9844 2569.

# Shepherds Bush

## a Suburban Oasis

By Cathy Willis

**I**t was on a magnificent "Indian summer" June morning that we ventured south into Glen Waverley to explore Shepherds Bush.

I knew next to nothing about this Park except that the Dandenong Creek runs through it. My Melways told me that it is part of a very extensive "green" area, including nearby Jell's Park, Norton's Park, Napier Park, some golf courses and more parks and reserves stretching up and down the creek. Dandenong Creek itself is incredibly long, winding its way through Melbourne's extensive eastern and southern suburbs from The Basin to Banghorne where it joins the Patterson River.

I must admit my heart sank as we left High St Road, and entered a weedscape on the old floodplains of the sad sludgy brown litter-choked creek. How could we, the residents of Melbourne, have undervalued this waterway so comprehensively to let it come to this? However Anthony Owen had suggested this walk so I knew there must be hidden values somewhere ahead. Sure enough, as the morning progressed we were to find plenty.

Boardwalks led us over the Fog Grass - choked ephemeral wetlands and then into the dense shade of ancient paperbark thickets, with an understorey of Tree Violets and Hemp Bush. Unfortunately the groundstorey consists almost entirely of Wandering Jew, Creeping Buttercup and Angled Onion. Some patches had obviously been sprayed here. We weren't sure if it was simply an attempt to keep the boardwalk from being swamped by the creepers or was part of a longer term plan. Here and there amongst the weeds Slender Knotweed (not a weed!) seemed to be holding its own - offering hope as a line of defence against the invaders.

On a slope above the boggy ground we came upon a stand of Yarra Gum beside the track. This



area is one of the few remaining strongholds of this species. Interestingly, so is Spadoni's Reserve in Lilydale, which also has magnificent old paperbarks with an understorey of Tree Violets.

Encouraging signs of less weedy patches followed, little areas on slopes supporting Maidenhair Fern and native grasses. Substantial plantings of trees and shrubs have been undertaken in some of the more open areas. In one of these some cheeky Red-browed Firetails danced ahead - leading us along the track.

Then came the jewel in this Park's crown - the conservation zone. Quite suddenly we were in a lovely remnant of wet forest, the track meandering through dense Saw-sedges under towering Manna Gums. And the billabongs! Perhaps I was dazzled because we have nothing like this in Warrandyte, but this part of Shepherd's Bush was like arriving at an oasis in the desert. There is nothing so pleasing to the eye as the gently merging forms and shades of such places. If I had the talent I would be tempted to return with a sketch pad to try to capture the atmosphere.

This is a great place to take the kids for a bike ride. There are miles of tracks and picnic facilities at Jell's Park. Much of the track edges don't bear too close a look, but plan a break to stop and soak up the conservation zone. It will be well worth it.

**August 20th 'Weed Identification Walk'**  
at Scotchman's Hill. See Thursday program for details.

Wandering Jew (*Tradescantia albiflora*)





## Rangers Report

By Andy Nixon

**T**he 'Rabbit Busters' program continues. A fifth community rabbit action group has been established. The PINDONE rabbit baiting program has been completed achieving a 90% plus reduction of rabbits at Pound Bend and the Stane Brae exclusion zones. Consultation has been conducted with residents on a Park boundary about the erection of a rabbit exclusion fence - this remains as a possible contentious issue as some residents have extended their 'living zones' into the Park.

The annual willow control works, in co-operation with Melbourne Water, has continued with Melbourne Water undertaking a major operation in removal of the problem species along the meander of the Yarra known as 'The Island' (part of WSP). This has been a significant contribution to the Park's pest plant control program.

A consultant (Botanicus Australia P/L) has undertaken a review of WSP Flora Management Systems. A number of constructive recommendations have been made about setting new standards and procedures for data recording and monitoring programs.

WSP staff have completed obligations to the Conservation and Environment section (a Head Office strategic planning division) re the 'State of the Parks' report - (3 staff involved). This head

office section is gathering natural resource data around the State on reserves over 500 hectares and then developing policy initiatives on management and monitoring requirements for these resources.

Two brochure updates have been undertaken - 'Birds of WSP' and 'Rockclimbing code for WSP'. Contractors have placed new Parks Victoria entrance signs to all major reserves in the park.

The draft concept plan for Mt. Lofty is now complete (see front page article). It is to be presented at a public consultative sometime in late June). This will be in cooperation with the City of Manningham when they also present their draft management plan for the Wittons Reserve.

Capital works improvements at Pound Bend and Jumping Creek Reserves are now complete and include picnic table, BBQ and toilet block refurbishment; carpark improvements; signposting; and the removal of the old residence at the entry to Pound Bend. Removal of a substantial amount of exotic vegetation has also occurred.

Risk management signage for dangerous mineshafts and swimming and other water activities are now in place. The risk management works re. mine safety, are now complete for the interiors of Victory and Geraghty's historic mines at Whipstick Gully and Fourth Hill. Some exterior works to shaft covers are yet to be concluded.

Warrandyte again contributed fire crew and permanent staff to fuel reduction burning activities - elsewhere in the region during May.

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## *National Parks of East Gippsland*

**A slide show spectacular brought to you by Mike and Pat Coupar**

**When: Friday July 31st 6.00pm onwards**

**Where: The Folly, Pound Bend depot.**  
(Melways map 23 C10).

Come with us on a journey of one of Victoria's most pristine places. Visit unspoilt, deserted beaches, crystal clear rivers and old growth forest. See some of the unique flora and fauna of the region. Discover secluded camp sites.

The tour will include visits to Croajingalong, Snowy River, Errinundra, and Cooracambra National Parks.

The evening will begin with a BBQ at 6.00pm, bring your own meat and drinks and a plate to share. This will be followed by the slide show at approximately 7.15pm, Bring your own chairs.

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# Green Wedge Seminar

## The Helmeted Honeyeater

Report by Mike Coupar

Ian Smales has been helping to save the Helmeted Honeyeater from the verge of extinction for about 20 years. In 1990 he was appointed as a 'threatened species biologist' by the Department of Natural Resources & Environment (DNRE). Who better to tell us about this very special bird?

Ian told a small, but enthusiastic, audience that the Helmeted Honeyeater was described way back in 1867 by the eminent naturalist John Gould. He even showed us a picture of the original type specimens still held in Edinburgh, Scotland. Since those times the Helmeted Honeyeater has been shown to be a race of the Yellow Tufted Honeyeater. Prior to 1960 its distribution stretched from around the Yarra Ranges down towards Wilson's Promontory in 10 localised sites. Now there is only one site left - at the Yellingbo State Nature Reserve - where the bird survives precariously. There is no need to labour the point as to the reason for its decline, but it's enough to say that the usual factors of habitat destruction and wildfires have been the major and all too common factors. Additionally, the Helmeted Honeyeater is particularly susceptible to decline because it requires a now uncommon habitat of Manna Gum *Eucalyptus viminalis* growing with Mountain Swamp Gum *E. camphora* forest plus associated understory.

Knowledge of the bird's natural history was required in order to devise methods for its conservation. With this in mind banding started in 1984 and continued until 2 years ago. The project amassed information about the home ranges, the population density and population age structure. Particularly relevant findings were that the birds live as breeding pairs and each pair defends its own territory in order to secure adequate food for themselves (mainly eucalypt nectar and lerps) and their chicks (invertebrates such as spiders and moths).

As happens all too frequently, fragmentation of habitat leads to imbalances in the natural mix of plant and animal communities. In the case of the Helmeted Honeyeater it was shown that their decline was being accelerated by Bell Miners moving into their habitat now fragmented into a

relatively narrow strip running alongside the Cockatoo Creek. As Warrandyte residents are all too aware, Bell Miners live in dense communities (circa 20 individuals per hectare - probably the highest living density of any bird species) and aggressively displace other birds. Ian explained that Bell Miners are able to take over fragmented strips of bush easily, because they only need to defend the front line of their advances. The sides do not need defending because the cleared land is totally unsuitable habitat for competitors such as Helmeted Honeyeaters. This finding came at a time when the total population of Helmeted Honeyeaters was at the precariously low number of 16 pairs, so a recovery plan was devised centred on reducing the numbers of invading Bell Miners. This turned out to be a time consuming and laborious task of mist-netting and relocating. Subsequent to the 'removal' of the Bell Miners the Helmeted Honeyeater population recovered to 28 pairs.

Many people were involved in the rescue, including some local landowners, the Friends group and the DNRE, now considered to be a threatened species in its own right! However, a long-term solution to the Bell Miner problem is yet to be devised. Hence, a captive breeding program has been established to boost the wild population and to act as an insurance to a catastrophe, such as a bush fire occurring at Yellingbo.

Yet again it was an enriching experience to hear an expert biologist talk about their important work. Ian illustrated his talk with an assortment of high quality slides covering maps, graphs and, of course, the magnificent birds themselves.



## “Special SPY”

A group of Fowspians visited the Candlebark Nursery in April this year. The nursery is located at the Village School, 9-13 Holloway Road, Croydon North. Debbie McGrath, the nursery manager, is a physical and mental livewire. She works 22 hours per week paid and many more hours unpaid. Her assistant, Claire, who is paid for six hours per week also works extra. In addition, regular volunteer helpers put in an estimated total of 400 to 600 hours per month on Wednesdays and Sundays. Helpers are drawn from a diverse range of sources including schools and community service orders.

The actively supportive committee of eight people, which includes two 21 year olds, is elected at an Annual General Meeting. The income of the group is through sales to councils, Melbourne Water, large and small land holders and the general public.

The nursery occupies an area about the size of two house blocks on the village school site. The site is approximately 10 acres and incorporates part of the Brushy Creek Reserve. Apparently there is a symbiotic relationship with the school - in return for the free use of their land, the Candlebark group maintain the garden beds and clean out the ponds.

According to Debbie:

- People work is most important, you have to listen to what people (helpers) want, not just tell them.

- The first year was hard to set up, the second was more profitable, the third not so much profit, but consolidation.
- Plants are just as important as people.
- My favourite plant is the Golden Wattle.



- We also sponsor a Landcare project at Kilmore.

The nursery produces 80,000 to 100,000 indigenous plants each year. They use a long, large, plastic ‘Nissan Hut’ type of hot house with four different segments for different plant needs. In the shade house all boxes of seedlings are sitting on wooden pallets supported by upside down boxes to protect them from millipedes, excessive damp and the occasional rabbit. This method also provides ventilation.

The nursery produces a newsletter every three months which is supported by advertisements. If you are interested in purchasing indigenous plants or would like to have a look around the nursery you can get in touch with Debbie on 9720 6141.

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## Weather Update

At last there is some good news from the weather bureau “The rapid decline of the El Niño in May means that it should no longer affect Australian rainfall this year”, said Mary Voice, head of the National Climate Centre. After over a year of strongly negative values, the Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) rose dramatically to a value of zero in May. Also, ocean temperatures in the central to eastern Pacific were close to normal by the end of the month.

Average to above average falls in winter cropping (farming terminology we presume!)

areas have often occurred following similar situations in the past. In fact, above average rains have fallen over eastern Queensland and New South Wales in the past two months. “However, some of the driest areas of south-eastern Australia are still in urgent need of rain”, said Ms Voice.

There are other encouraging signs for winter rainfall. In particular, warmer than normal ocean temperatures off Australia’s north-west coast favour north-west cloudband development.

In summary, while El Niño’s influence may linger for a couple of months more in some parts of the world, Australia’s winter rainfall should be unaffected.

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## Worth Reading

There were too many articles to choose from this month to feature a single 'Worth Repeating'. So we have taken an extract from one titled '**The State budget - is the 'E' (for environment) in DNRE on the way to being 'E' for extinct?**' written by Esther Abram and featured in *Environment Victoria News*.

"The Victorian budget has reaffirmed what we all fear to be true - that this Government is committed to the environment in rhetoric alone. Recurrent funds have been cut, costs have been shifted from State to Commonwealth, and frivolous new capital works programs have been announced as environmental.

About their only connection with the environment is that they are outside.

### *DNRE problems*

Even before losing these 300 staff, DNRE is having significant difficulties fulfilling its charter.

Basic protection of species under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act has been neglected due to lack of resources.

Endangered species are waiting on action statements.

In regional areas, it is often the case that the local Field Naturalist group has a greater understanding of biodiversity values than the local DNRE office.

As the policy function of DNRE is reduced, so does the capacity of the department to act as an impartial entity protecting environmental values.

There are many environmental issues we haven't even begun to address and no doubt these will remain in the "too expensive" basket with even less funds available."

Other articles of concern are '**State Budget slashes threaten environment**' by Amanda Martin which appeared in the *June VNPA newsletter* and '**Money, Money, Money**' also by Amanda Martin from VNPA's journal *Park Watch*, June 1998. Also in the same edition of *Park Watch* is an article by Geoff Durham titled '**The corruption of Rangers**'.

These newsletters and journals can be borrowed from FOWSP. They may be found in the blue box in the Folly.

## Wednesday Opportunity

If you should be free for a few hours on the morning of the **first Wednesday of the month**, you might like to give **Friends of the Koornong** a hand.

The Koornong is a lovely nature reserve bordering the Yarra in North Warrandyte (Melway 23 J7). Opposite the northern part of Jumping Creek Reserve, it is not far from Blue Tongue Bend and Pigeon Bank Creek. It's the largest block of our park on the northern side of the river and has been greatly enhanced over the last four or five years by the persistent efforts of Friends of the Koornong.

So, if you feel like helping with some further bush restoration, come along, you'll be made to feel **very welcome**.

**Details: 9-11am, followed by morning tea.** Phone Cathy Willis on 9844 1841 for the exact activity location. Next few meeting are August 5th and September 2nd.

## Thank You

Many thanks to Fowspian Katherine Byrne who has been folding and posting our newsletter for many months. Katherine has relinquished the job for now and hopes to spend more time helping at our Warrandyte market monthly stall.



Photograph by Joan MacMahon



## Library Update

### new books

*Listen Our Land is Crying* by Mary E. White

*A comprehensive study of Australia's environment problems and solutions.* Profusely illustrated with photos, maps and charts.

*Management of Endangered Species* by Simon C. Cropper, with many photos and maps, general comments and specific descriptions, ecology, biology and conservation opportunities.

*Weeds of Southern Australia* by R.C.H. Shepherd published by The Weed Science Society of Victoria  
*Direct Seeding of Trees and Shrubs* by Greg Dalton (a revegetation research scientist).

*A Census of Victorian Bryophytes* by Cropper, Tonkinson and Scott published by Dept. of Conservation and Environment.

*Ecology and Control of Coast Wattle in Native Forest Areas - Strategies for Control* published by University of South Australia.

*A Study of Three Billabongs - Yarra Valley Parklands* by Melbourne Parks and Waterways -re Bolin Bolin, Banyule and Annulus.

## Contributions Please

Everyone likes reading them, but no one, it seems likes writing them. "My Favourite Place" is a popular segment, however, we need some contributions. Perhaps we made it too specific by asking for your favourite place in Warrandyte, so you can tell us about your favourite place anywhere, in or out, of Australia. All articles will be gladly received - long or short. So think about putting pen to paper soon.



## Announcement Spring Camp

Keep the weekend of October 17th and 18th free and come and join our Spring camp at The Brisbane Ranges National Park. Details to follow in future newsletters

## Local Biodiversity Renewal Forum

**When:** 18th-19th July

**Where:** Laanecoorie Haven, Strathewen

Don Hatton is coordinating a forum on local biodiversity gene pool depletion. There will be opportunities for informal discussions and site inspections.

If you are interested and would like more information, contact Don on 9714 8613

## Soup Roster

The Thursday lunchtime soup roster has begun. Regulars are requested to put their name on the list which is pinned up on the Folly noticeboard.





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