

February 1999

# Friends of Warrandyte State Park



## Newsletter

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

### New Directions

By Pat Coupar

Once again it has been a quiet start to the year for FOWSP with fairly low-key activities taking place during the holiday period.

This year will see a few changes for the group. Firstly, a fresh look to the committee with four new members. Positions will be decided at the first meeting for the year in early February, but the committee-style management that has worked well over the past few years will continue.

Some of the regular Thursday propagators will have already met Teri O'Brien our new nursery manager. As we indicated in our newsletters towards the end of last year, we were looking for someone to fill this position on a voluntary basis. This was not forthcoming and so we applied to Parks Victoria, under their community grants scheme, for funding to pay for a nursery manager for twelve months. In the interim, FOWSP committee agreed to advertise the position and pay the successful applicant out of our own funds for six months. Unfortunately we have just been informed that our grant application has been unsuccessful. This means that we will probably have to look elsewhere for funding if we are to continue with a paid nursery manager.

The nursery is a central focus for the Friends as well as being an important element in the Park's revegetation program - to buy plants in from elsewhere would be inordinately expensive. Two ongoing ventures that take place on Thursdays in the vicinity of the nursery are the 'coup', originally an area of 'arbor day' plantings by local schools and now maintained regularly by FOWSP members and 'frogland'. This once weed

infested wasteland, over the years, has been fenced, weeded and planted with local rare plants and is now a show piece for visiting 'Friends', other environment groups and Park Managers.

The Sunday program will continue with ranger-led activities on the last Sunday of alternate months. This year to add variety and to give members - especially those who cannot make it on Thursdays - an opportunity to be actively involved in some form of Park management, a 'working bee' type activity will precede a walk followed by a barbecue lunch or tea provided by FOWSP. The program has already been carefully chosen by the Flora Management Team (see dates) to enhance the ongoing management works.

The committee, as always, is looking for feedback from members. If you have any suggestions just drop a line to our post office box (220), speak to someone at the monthly market stall or ring a member of the committee. We look forward to hearing from you.



# A Walk Through the Chase

By Joan Broadberry

On Sunday 15th November David Cameron, with three of his children, led twenty Fowspians on a fascinating walk through the little-known Warrandyte Chase. A sultry morning threatened rain as we gathered near the Stony Creek Bridge, and were led to an access point into the 18 hectare steep reserve. From time to time, as we stopped to catch our breath, David explained its history, botany and ecology. The area is part of the Nillumbik Shire. This is an aboriginal name meaning 'thin', referring to an area of poor soils and low productivity, in contrast to richer areas such as river flats.

The preservation of the Chase is the result of an intensely fought campaign started in 1990 by David's son Marcel, then aged 16. It centred around a nesting pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles. Being the last nesting site within the metropolitan area made the Chase very special. Amid huge media coverage, a complex rearrangement of subdivisions and boundaries resulted in the Chase remaining in public ownership. Unfortunately a second campaign was unsuccessful in saving the 10 hectare block next door, which is the site of what is known as the 'Prey Tree'. This huge dead gum projects high above the canopy and is critical to the lifestyle of the eagles. They use it as a lookout, mate in it and bring prey there to kill and eat, and the young fledge and learn to fly from it. Unfortunately the largest limb has fallen from the 'Prey Tree' and it is apparently much less used. The original Wedge-tailed Eagle's nest in the Chase has also fallen down. We visited its remains on the walk, but the birds now have another nest on private land further back in the hinterland.

David pointed out that the gully to the left of the road showed the two typical signs of human presence. First, blackberries, spread by road making equipment, foxes and birds. Unusually, one or two

gullies of the Chase are still free of this scourge. Second, large numbers of bellbirds. The aggressive bellbirds clear out other native birds, and although bellbirds eat lerps, total bird numbers are down and the lerp population builds up. Thus over the years, the eucalypts become defoliated. Jumping Creek Reserve is a good example of this. Before development, bellbirds could move on and leave the bush to recover.

The general vegetation type is dry sclerophyll forest. Swamp Gums (*Eucalyptus ovata*) grow in the gullies, and we marvelled at the huge 'intermediate' leaves of the young saplings. Cherry Ballart (*Exocarpus cupressiformis*) was in fruit. Red Box (*Eucalyptus polyanthemus*) was flowering. Its distinctive grey, rounded leaves are clearly seen in the painting by McCubbin, 'The Lost Child'. Narrow-leaf Peppermint (*E. radiata*) has fine, brighter green, weeping foliage. Other trees identified were Red Stringybark (*E. macrorhyncha*) and a few patches of Candlebark (*E. rubida*).

We climbed a north facing slope which looked dry, but David told us this was the best environment for native orchids. The much smaller four hectare Professor's Hill, the subject of my article on orchids (October 1998 newsletter), lies about one kilometre to the south and is linked to the Chase by a road easement.

On the ridge line we came to an area of good quality understory. Beneath the Silver-top Wallaby grass tussocks (*Chionochloa pallida*), David showed us an almost perfect covering of moss (*Thuidium* sp.). This vital ecological component keeps the soil intact, protects it from weeds and helps seed germination. It is easily damaged by too frequent burning and especially by the scratching of blackbirds. Many rocks were also covered with a mat of moss.

A November walk always features native grasses in flower. To my mind this was one of the many highlights of the morning. These included Spear Grass (*Stipa* sp.), Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda triandra*), Plume Grass (*Dichelachne* sp.) and the beautiful Wallaby Grass with its striking red anthers. Unfortunately, the introduced shell grass (*Briza maxima*) was also evident.

In the late 1980's two fires burnt parts of the reserve. Too frequent, low intensity fires have

**Continued on next page**

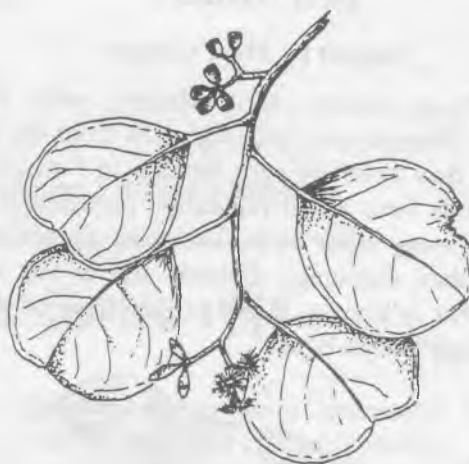


## A Walk Through the Chase contd.

altered the natural balance of vegetation, germinating large quantities of Dogwood (*Cassinia* sp.) and Golden Bush-pea (*Pultenaea gunnii*) seed. The natural fire regime is fewer, hotter fires burning a wider area. Appropriate fire management is now very difficult. For example, access into the Chase Reserve or Professor's Hill by fire trucks would cause great damage.

Down from the ridge we walked into a blackberry-free, silt-filled, U-shaped valley, carrying a different plant community. This included Burgan (*Kunzea ericoides*) in flower, Weeping Grass (*Microlaena stipoides*), Cut-leaf Daisy (*Brachyscome multifida*), Violets (*Viola hederacea*), Prickly Currant-bush (*Coprosma quadrifida*) and Maidenhair Fern (*Adiantum aethiopicum*). David pointed out how the repair of old access tracks with long strips of coir matting had promoted revegetation. Under the original Wedge-tailed Eagle nesting tree we rested, and a quick meeting of the Professor's Hill Committee of Management took place. On our walk back out of the valley we passed a colony of a dozen or more spikes of the saprophytic Hyacinth Orchid (*Dipodium roseum*), and then, on a high point of the ridge, the 'Prey Tree' itself. This area of good views is known by locals as 'Bedstead Hill'. In the 1962 bushfires an elderly couple living on the hill tragically died in their water tank while trying to

shelter from the fire. One of the few remains of their home is a twisted bedstead.



Finally, I would like to pay tribute to the hard work done by Marcel Cameron in caring for the reserve. Although relatively protected by its inaccessibility, there are problems with woody weeds, trail bikes and erosion. Marcel has also put great effort into monitoring the Wedge-tailed Eagles.

Many more plants were identified and other lessons in ecology given by David, but space does not permit. My thanks to David Cameron and to Lee Speedy, whose property overlooks the 'Prey Tree', for organising the walk. For myself, I voted it 'the walk of the year'.

## Library Update

By Ray Clarke

After a break of some years, we have renewed our subscription to ECOS, the quarterly review of the CSIRO.

The easily-read articles deal with fascinating subjects, mainly environmental, and they bring to our attention the many highly qualified men and women who are constantly beavering away at problems that, directly or indirectly, concern us all.

The July/September 1998 issue, for instance, deals with dry land salinity (a much more complex problem than one just requiring the planting of a few trees), the new conscience of sugar growers towards the damage they are causing to The Great Barrier Reef, the misleading effects of bright oil rig lights on breeding turtles, the habits of sea lions, fungus and frog decline, and half a dozen other problems.

In reading ECOS we learn of the patience, persistence, and often, the brilliance of research being carried out.

We are storing ECOS in the left hand lower cupboard of the library. Take a couple of copies to read at odd moments, but please return them within three weeks.

## Welcome

FOWSP would like to extend a warm welcome to new members Chris and Steve Munro, Jude Johns, Bronwyn Hatton and Linda Keith.

## Wanted

Old newspapers to suppress weeds in the 'coupe'. If you have any please leave them in the 'folly'.

# Green Wedge Seminar

## Bell Miners

Report by Mike Coupar

Those cheeky Bell Miners, with their characteristic 'pinging' calls from the Red Box trees, are very familiar to Fowspians. The birds have a bad reputation particularly for scaring away other birds, and some people even claim they encourage dieback. But is this true, and what is known of the private lives of these seemingly public birds?



Dr Mike Clarke of La Trobe University brought to the audience his enthusiasm and extensive knowledge gained from 15 years researching these infamous birds. He and his collaborators have helped to establish that Bell Miners have a complex social behaviour that would put some of us to shame. For instance, young birds help to rear the chicks of several breeding pairs at a time; a duty carried out mainly by males. This service seems to be appreciated by the females, because they invariably accept a male helper if they become widowed. Breeders, helpers and young live in colonies close to creeks and rivers. The home range of the breeding pairs overlap to some extent, while the helpers are given more freedom to come and go as they chose. The social behaviour of Bell Miners contributes to their success at combating the trials of life, in their case predation of chicks by Currawongs and Kookaburras. But their aggressive nature is an obvious deterrent to many animals that threaten the colony. Many species of birds and even Ringtail Possums are not tolerated.

Mike Clarke was able to confirm that Bell Miners do indeed encourage dieback in eucalypts, but whether this process is solely due to their habit of 'farming' psyllids, he could not say at present. He promised the audience that would be the subject of his further research.

## Koala Watch 1998

A koala count was held in November last year. Julie Pryor who helped co-ordinate the event has supplied the following results. Julie extends her thanks to all who helped with the count. She has had several calls since the count and would like to encourage people to keep her informed on any further koala sightings. Her phone number is 9722 1117 or 0417587798 (mobile).

Location	Number of Koalas
Warrandyte State Park	34
Mullum Creek, Mitcham	1
Yarran Dheran, Mitcham	1
Mullum Creek, Donvale	3
Mt Dandenong Tourist Rd, Tremont	1
Craiglea Crt, East Doncaster	1
Deep Ck Dve, East Doncaster	1
Tyssen Crt, East Doncaster	1
Dellas Ave, Templestowe	1
Anderson Ck Rd, Doncaster	1
Evelyn Rd, North Ringwood	1
Oban Rd, North Ringwood	2
Glenvale Rd, North Ringwood	2
Jumping Ck Rd, Wonga Park	2
Yarra Brae Close, Wonga Park	1

Total 53



# Sunday Family Program for 1999

The dates for the activities are as follows:

February 28th	Paddle and Pull (see ad. this newsletter)
April 25th	Burgan Trials at Black Flat
June 27th	Planting in Pound Bend tunnel fence
August 29th	Planting at the Koornong
October 31st	Briza Pull

All activities will be followed by a walk (apart from Feb) and a barbecue.

## Green Wedge Seminar Series 1999

### Thursday 4th February

Barry Traill from the Trust For Nature will speak on the Sugar Glider and Conservation Covenants. Barry will give us an insight into the distribution, habitat, breeding and diet of the **Sugar Glider** (*Petaurus breviceps*).

### Thursday 4th March

Graeme Coulson from Melbourne University will speak on macropods. Throughout the seminar titled 'Macropods In Paradise' you will hear about the behaviour, breeding, social organisation and diet of these amazing creatures.

### Thursday 1st April

Roger Martin from Melbourne University will speak on the **Koala** (*Phascolarctos cinereus*). Roger has been conducting research into the reproduction and behaviour of the Koala for several years. Come along and hear about what may be install for the koala population in Warrandyte.

There is a change of venue from last year. The seminars will now be held at Currawong Bush Park (conference room), Reynolds Rd, Doncaster East 3109. Melways ref. 34 H6

**Starting Time:** 7.30 pm

**Cost:** Free

Tea, coffee and biscuits provided.

**The Deadline for March 1999 Newsletter is  
February 28th**

## FOWSP Committee 1999

Mike Coupar	9903 9567	Contact person	Lee Speedy	9437 0894
Ron Taylor	9844 4285	Contact person	Geoff Speedy	9437 0894
Flora Anderson	9722 1776	Public Officer	<u>Wildlife Rescue</u>	
Jan Giles	9844 1226		Julie Pryor	9722 1117
Anthony Owen	9844 1344	Treasurer/Membership Sec.	<u>Market</u>	
Cathy Willis	9844 1841	Secretary	Betty Oke	9844 3763
Kathy Papalia	9844 2771		<u>Park Office</u>	9844 2659



# FOWSP THURSDAY PROGRAM

We meet for propagation and other nursery activities every Thursday morning at 10.00am at the Warrandyte State Park depot, Pound Bend Road, Warrandyte (Melway 23 C10), unless otherwise stated below. When there is no scheduled afternoon activity we often go on a spontaneously organised walk. Propagation takes place from 10.00am to 12 midday followed by lunch. No prior experience necessary - there is always someone available to show you the ropes.

*This activities list will be pinned on the noticeboard in the Folly.*

## **FEBRUARY 11TH NO NURSERY**

Working in the 'coup' with Elizabeth and Betty.  
*Meet at the depot, Pound Bend Rd, Warrandyte at 10.00 am. (Melways ref. map 23 C10)*

## **FEBRUARY 18TH NURSERY**

Propagation morning. 10.00 am onwards.

## **FEBRUARY 25TH NURSERY**

### **SPECIAL**

Propagation of aquatic species. 10.00 am onwards.

*Meet at the depot, Pound Bend Rd, Warrandyte at 10.00 am. (Melways ref. map 23 C10)*

## **MARCH 4TH NURSERY**

Propagation morning. 10.00 am onwards.

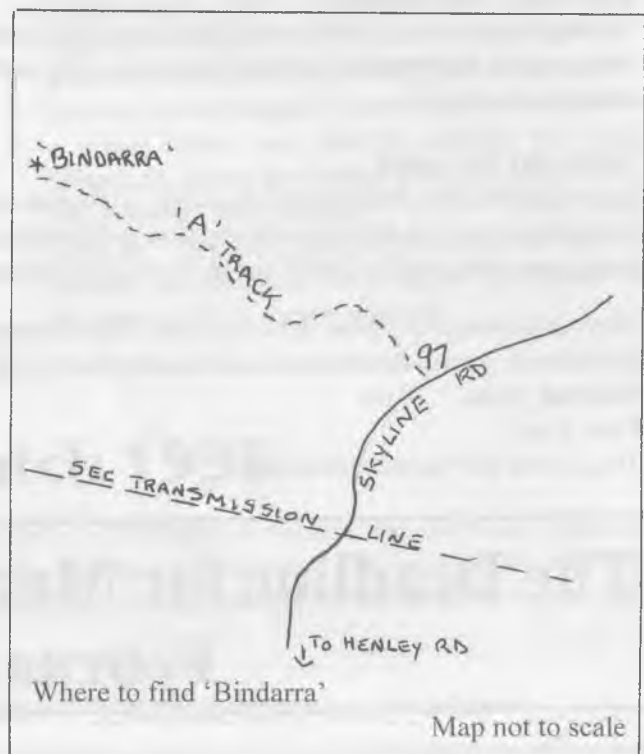
### **Followed by AFTERNOON ACTIVITY**

**'Bare ground to natives'** with Teri O'Brien.

A visit to 'Bindarra' where Teri will show us around his Patch. *Leave from the depot, Pound Bend Rd, Warrandyte at 1.00 pm. (Melways ref. map 23 C10) OR meet on site at no 97 'A' track (off Skyline Rd), Christmas Hills (Melways ref. map 273 A10).*

## **MARCH 11TH NURSERY**

Propagation morning. 10.00 am onwards.



**The March committee meeting will be held  
at 7.30pm on Tuesday March 9th 1999**

## Ben talks to Teri

I threw away Teri's 12 page curriculum vitae and talked to him as he worked in the potting up, pricking out area.

Teri started with a degree in Agricultural Science at Melbourne University and since then has had a long and varied involvement in the botanical field (as well as two doctorates).

During the interview Teri showed those present how to 'bottom water' fine seed, whilst discussing with a Ranger what plants were needed for the Park.

Teri loves cricket, likes all fine and performing arts (wrote a play whilst at St Monica's at Moonee Ponds) and is an Essendon follower. He runs his own waste water garden (ten foot Jerusalem Artichokes) and produces native plants for the Bend of Isles.

He claims to be "exactly" six foot tall, a big Irishman born in South Melbourne. Blue eyes (occasionally steely grey) and reddish-grey hair (not showing in his beard). He fiddles with the flute and didgeridoo, sings baritone and loves Beethoven's Eroica overture. He has spent time living with indigenous communities.

Most admired person(s) - the late Ralph Wetmore, Emeritus Professor at Harvard University and his Ph.D supervisor, Professor Kenneth Thimann.

Most influential person - Crosbie Morisson.

Favourite native plants - Desert Cherry (*Exocarpos sparteus*), Common Wallaby Grass (*Danthonia caespitosa*).

Weakness - no comment.

Teri can be viewed at the Park depot nursery between 9.45 am and 12 noon on Thursdays "without fail".

Welcome Teri.



### *Actors Equity*

Did you see Ranger David Van Bockel rescue and relocate a koala in the 'Templestowe' council area - all on commercial TV news too?

### *Monthly Market Managers*

Kathy Papalia (new committee member), Jessica Nixon, Neil Doran and 'coffee desperate' Cass Roadknight were all helping at our market stall last December.

Vivien Honeyborne was also there promoting 'Discover Warrandyte'.

Jessica Nixon B.Sc (Hons) in Geography is looking for a job!

### *Folly Cleaned Out*

Margaret Gotlib and Ray Clarke led an onslaught on the 'folly'; windows were cleaned, cupboards sorted and cleared; tea, coffee and sugar organised into one area; food utensils cleaned; benches wiped; tea towels taken away and washed; the refrigerator cleaned and the floor swept. Even the Ringtail Possum came out to see what the stir was.

Meanwhile other 'Friends' working in the nursery were brought individually prepared drinks by Flora.

### *At the Same Time*

Elizabeth and Betty were consulting with Teri about future planting and maintenance methods for the 'coupe'. Meanwhile Margaret Woiwood and Stacey Wigmore, and JR and Pat were nefariously involved in a similar vital task. While Olive Waiters cleared and sorted the tea-trees.

### *Risen Rosella*

Mid-January, Pat Hodson brought in to the depot a juvenile Eastern Rosella which she had found semi-conscious in Galatlys Lane, uncertain if it were injured or if it would live. However, when she placed it under a tree at the depot it took off alive and well.

### *Olive's Omission*

Olive W sowed one complete lot of acacias without heat-treating first. Boiling water was poured over the sown seeds and it worked a treat! Perhaps even better than the old method.

### *Boy Born*

A new Philip - Owen baby boy arrived for Ant and Linda on January 14th. Congratulations.

### *Baby Boom*

Which Ranger and his wife are expecting twins in April?



## Lawn Hill

By Peggy Safstrom

Some 60 kilometres west of Mount Isa, we turned north towards Burketown with a sigh of relief - onto an earth road again. Although earth roads have their challenges - the deep sand patches, the bulldust holes, the reefs of jagged rock, the gibber stones - still, we find on them a greater sense of affinity than with a neat strip of black bitumen. And of course there is that special sense of adventure, of being on your own - not alone, but on your own - in a harsh environment where quick decisions have to be made, and must be right!

After a couple of hours we made a left turn where it said the magic words 'Lawn Hill'. But after about 60 kilometres came to a series of creek crossings. Such beauty! Huge melaleucas with trails of delicate leaves drooping their tresses into sparkling water rushing over rocks. And PALMS! Palms, right out here in this dry grass plains country. But we couldn't manage the crossings - the water too deep, far too fast, and our Subaru too low, so we chickened out, just couldn't face the thought of being swept down the creek. So we just waded in this sparkling, musical creek, wet our faces and hair, took some photos, and turned back to the Burketown road again, driving up another 65 kilometres to the next turn in to Lawn Hill.

Another 100 kilometres of dry, dusty rough road took us into the National Park. It greeted us like an oasis to a desert traveller. Such greenery. Such coolness. We registered with the Ranger, drew the Subaru in on a site under a huge acacia, on 'mown lawn', stretched ourselves out on it, and fell fast asleep.

Opened in 1985, Lawn Hill is one of the most beautiful Parks we have visited in Australia. In use by Aborigines for 30,000 years, there are rock

painting and shell middens in the 12,000 hectare Park. We walked along their marked tracks above the gorges, with spectacular views across wide green waterways lined with palms, lush pandannas, white cedars and stark white gums greeting our gaze at every turn. In our canoe we glided quietly past fairy martin mud nests hanging under rock ledges, with the birds darting in and out feeding young as martins would have been doing for centuries, according to the remains of mud nests. Plenty of access for swimming, and deep, cool water abounding with fish whenever it got too hot for comfort, was a great bonus, and one of the sheer delights of the Park.

The camping area is a broad stretch of lawn, studded with gums and acacias. The short couch grass was in seed, and dozens of the loveliest little finches, red and grey, busily fed on the seed. Parrots, white cockatoos, bower birds and honey eaters were in abundance. The air was full of bird song from daylight to dusk, a constant twittering, calling, warning or crooning going on, delighting us.

Though near the end of August, not a cloud appeared, day or night. I'd know if it appeared at night, as we slept under the stars, and it was much too magical to sleep for more than a whiff at a time!

We would rise early and, with our breakfast in our back packs, go for a canoe ride or a walk to catch the sunrise either from a waterlily studded backwater, or from a high point above a beautiful gorge. During the day, we would rest under the shade of the trees watching the birds' antics and delighting in the cacophony, taking frequent swims to cool down when we were woken from a doze by a cluster of acacia seeds nipped off by a parrot dropping on our heads. At some stage we would have a light lunch, then tea about four o'clock, when it was cool enough to set off again exploring and photographing until dusk.

When the sun is rising or setting, the iron in the rocks turns from a black-red to an orange-red. The gracefully arched spinnifex seed heads glint a radiant silver and the trunks of the ghost gums are stark white - a photographer's heaven!

As we readily agree, when we view the many slides we took, even if only an hundredth part of the wonder, beauty and magic of Lawn Hill which we experienced in those five days remain with us, it will still, we are sure, remain our favourite place.



# Sunday Family Activity

## Paddle and Pull



Yellow Flag (*\*Iris pseudacorus*) is a major problem along the banks of the Yarra River, but it can be controlled with our help. The plant can be removed by hand or spade and contractors will be there to assist with the heavy work.

Canoes will be available on the day for a paddle on the river. The activity will be followed by a bbq provided by FOWSP in the delightful setting of 'Mullens Orchard'. Tools will be provided, but bring your own if you wish. Be prepared to get wet!

**Date & Time:** Sunday February 28th 1.00 pm - 4.00 pm

**Place:** Meet at Black Flat (Melways ref. map 23 J10)

**Drive through the gate at Tills Drive entrance and follow the signs to the river.**

**For more information contact David Van Bockel at the Park (9844 2659)**

## Nursery News

**O**ur new nursery manager, Teri O'Brien held a introductory discussion on December 31st at the depot with ten Thursday Fowspian helpers.

He spoke initially about genus and species distribution in the Park, rare and endangered plants and the meaning of local provenance.

Teri envisaged a completed listing of all plants in the nursery and, using the computer, keeping

an accurate record of plants and numbers. If plants are taken, helpers should record which, how many, and for what purpose/place. Initially the movement of plants is to be recorded on the blackboard in the potting up area. This will enable Teri to "make things happen" in terms of plant supply as needed.

Bill Roxburgh will handle seed sorting and cleaning as before.

Teri's phone number is 0417 113 749

## FOWSP Membership Form

Name .....

Address .....

.....

Tel. no. ....

Single \$15

Family \$20

Concession \$10

All FOWSP membership fees for 1999 are now due. Please fill in the above and return this form with your subscription to the Secretary, P.O Box 220, Warrandyte 3113.

Membership entitles you to one free plant a month from the market stall, 11 newsletters per year and the opportunity to take part in a wide range of activities including slide nights and excursions throughout the year.



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