

November 1999

Friends of Warrandyte State Park



Newsletter

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

New Finds for Warrandyte

By Pat Coupar

Over the last few months some exciting new flora records for Warrandyte State Park have been discovered. Many have been found by botanist Cam Beardsell who has been carrying out a vegetation community survey in Warrandyte State Park over the last twelve months.

Along with some members of FOWSP, Cam has also recorded new distribution records for many of the Park's rare and localised species. This has involved a number of hectic field trips to various reserves to take advantage of optimum weather conditions. One group of plants, little studied elsewhere, are the tiny annuals. The life cycles of these ephemeral plants are dependant on spring rains and may only be of several weeks duration.

Two of the new discoveries are of particular interest because of their rarity and significance, not just locally, but in the Greater Melbourne area and even statewide. The Dwarf Skullcap (*Scutellaria humilis*) is a small perennial herb only known from Plenty Gorge (about ten plants) and Merri Creek (one plant). Before these discoveries were made by Cam Beardsell, the species had not been seen in the Greater Melbourne region for 20 years. Now a handful of plants have been found at Jumping Creek and also at Pound Bend. The Dwarf Skullcap belongs to the mint family and grows well from cuttings and root division. It should be easy to propagate at the nursery with the ultimate aim of establishing viable populations at the two sites in Warrandyte State Park where it is currently endangered.



The second highly significant species is not so easy to conserve. Ladies Tresses (*Spiranthes sinensis*) is an orchid said by the Flora of Melbourne to be "Very restricted in the Melbourne area and possibly already extinct". Not so. In Warrandyte it survives, but only just. Five small plants, growing on a raised mud bank precariously perched about a metre above the river, were found earlier this year. They have twice been underwater as river levels have risen following good rainfall. Although these orchids are adapted to inundation, careful monitoring is required to ensure they do not become covered with debris from the river. It is looking hopeful that two of the plants might flower this summer.

One of the side effects of all these discoveries and distribution records is the necessity of keeping the Flora of Warrandyte up to date. New species must be photographed and written up and all updated information included in the book which has been nearing completion for some time.

With the flush of spring flowering now tapering off it is anticipated that most of the work in the study area will soon be finished. A latest count of the actual number of indigenous species recorded for the Park has not been done for a while, but it must be getting close to the magic 500 - an astonishing number for a Park the size of Warrandyte. There is no doubt that new information on the distribution of species within the Park will continue and maybe more new species will be found. Others, despite our efforts to conserve them, may disappear. But that is the challenge and excitement of studying flora in Warrandyte's ever changing environment.

Death of a River Guide

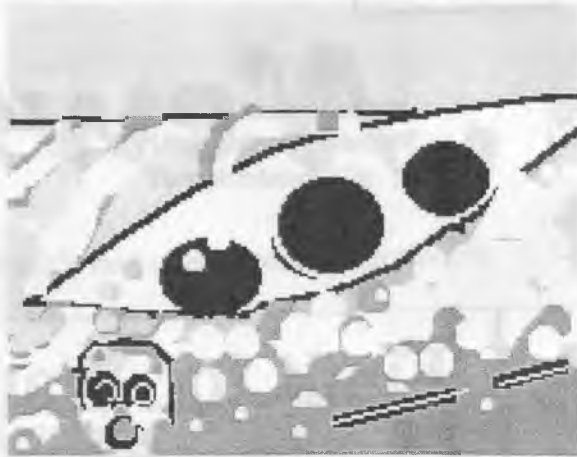
By Ranger Glen Jameson

Looking out of the window early Thursday morning to see the Yarra River swirling wildly over the rapids below my home, raised an alarm inside my tiny mind. Swollen by the recent rains, the river covered the rocks on the rapid for one of the few times during this dry year.

Immediately I thought of the promise I had made to the 'Friends' of the boat trip across the River to the revegetation site on Norman's Reserve. It brought to my over active imagination, all sorts of disaster scenarios set in the percolating, foaming brown body of water.

Would I ring in sick? Would I tell the 'Friends' that I didn't have a coxswain licence? Would I run away and hide behind the woodshed or come in late and tell them I had forgotten?

No we would do the sensible thing and drive around the long way. Which we did, and once we walked down the steep track through the neighbours property to the site, the disappointment of the group could be no more



apparent as the truth fell upon us. The waters in this particular stretch of the river were calm and placid, lake-like in fact. I knew there and then I should have rung in sick.

Undaunted and showing no emotional disdain,

The Friends of Warrandyte State Park propagation group turned their creative hands to planting 160 riparian plants. Helped by three students from the Rudolph Steiner School, they breezed through the work. In fact they called

unmercifully for more plants, more plants they cried.

Suffering divine punishment, I had to make that terrible hike up the steep slope repeatedly to get more plants and more guards. Muscles convulsing, lungs burning, each strenuous step a reminder not to make promises of adventure and romantically secret planting destinations and not carry them out.

Astronomy Night in February

FOWSP will be presenting a Wonga Park astronomy night on Friday, February 11th 2000 from 8.30pm. Phil Mahon, a member of the Astronomical Society of Victoria, will provide a night of star gazing, wonder and celestial information. He will include an 8" Newtonian telescope for viewing such delights as Saturn, Jupiter, the Orion nebula and of course the moon! Whilst this night has been carefully chosen for the likelihood of good 'seeing', it will be postponed until the following night if it rains, is overcast or has patchy cloud cover. Keep your eyes open for the exact location details, in December's newsletter!

*"A murky milky way
means a dull damp day"*

If the stars appear to be watery or murky it could be that a front is approaching with fine cirroform clouds making it more difficult to see the stars.

The Western Weather Lore

(written at the turn of the Century)

When rings are seen around the moon
When kookas laugh mid afternoon
When storm birds call, be sure that soon
They'll be some rain.

When stars are blazing clear and high,
When Pink and grey the dado'd sky,
When fogs the breath before the eye,
There'll be a frost.

When magpies' carols lilt and run,
When mare's tails veil the morning sun
When spiders' webs are overspun,
There'll be a wind.

When whirl-winds rise and fall again.
When heat haze - shimmers on the plain,
When south winds ride the weather vane,
There'll be a drought.

Author Unknown.

Around the State

Rotamah Island Bird Observatory

By Elizabeth Seviar

From Warrandyte to Rotamah Island, on the Gippsland Lakes, is a four hour drive. Three Friends of Warrandyte State Park - Betty Mifsud, Ray Clarke and I found ourselves on this serene and peaceful island soon after lunch. We had left Warrandyte at 8.30 am and this meant that we had time for tea and biscuits at a wayside stop and lunch at the Lochsport jetty car park.

On the way we drove through green farmland, pine plantations, heathland and then a sandy beach forest at the edge of Lake Reeve. Ray rang for the boat to collect us. The wardens at the Lake Rotamah Lodge and Island are Craig and Elizabeth. Craig ferried us across in his launch and we walked across the grass to the lodge.

Two members of Birds' Australia were also staying at the lodge. Together, the five of us went for a walk across the island to the Ninety Mile Beach on the Southern Ocean. We saw large flocks of birds sitting on the water off shore and were almost mesmerized at the sight of gannets diving very fast into the water, one after the other.

On Saturday we went on two long investigative walks led by the well-known naturalist, Malcolm Calder, looking at large and small plants. The most delicate plants, exquisite in their detailed structure were the greenhood orchids. We saw four kinds - Blunt Greenhood (*Pterostylis curta*), Nodding Greenhood (*P. nutans*), Dwarf Greenhood (*P. nana*) and Maroonhood (*P. pedunculata*). Malcolm began the demonstration by likening a flowering clematis to the 'corner shop' of the plant world. This plant and all plants use colour, scent, shape and accessibility to attract various insect, birds and animals to pollinate and reproduce the flowers and distribute its seeds.

We looked at the two kinds of river gums on the island: *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* and *Eucalyptus tereticaulis*, and the three kinds of banksia there - *Banksia integrifolia* and *Banksia marginata* both of which have silver backs to their leaves and *Banksia serrata* which has toothed leaves. The four hour walk passed in a slither of time.

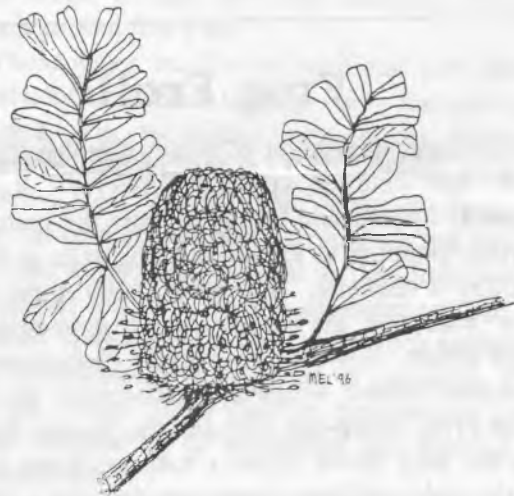
After lunch, Malcolm talked to us in the seminar room about the general structure of plants. Then, when our delicious lunch of soup and homemade bread was well absorbed, we walked again. During the day we looked at the plants in the water courses and on the salt marshes. We also heard and saw a number of birds including Grey Fantails, Fantail Cuckoos and Horsfield Cuckoos.

A delight near the lodge was the sight of a striped emu chick walking along behind his dad. There were also Eastern Grey Kangaroos feeding on the grass nearby.

On Sunday we had the morning to spend on the island so we walked to the beach, finding more greenhoods, caladenia orchids, Running Postman and two species of the White Daisy Bush (*Olearia* sp.). Malcolm spoke to us about the sand dune ecology.

From the mainland we heard a Pallid Cuckoo calling. All possible (or probable) cuckoos were thus heard. As well, the wonderful sea birds are very numerous. Pelicans and Shearwaters are easy to see but perhaps the climax of the bird observing was the sight of a sea eagle sitting high in a eucalypt tree.

We were warm and comfortable in the lodge each night and fed delicious and nourishing meals by Elizabeth and Craig. The two days were delightful. After lunch, Craig ferried us back across the lake to Ray's waiting car and we were back in Warrandyte by 5.30 pm.



Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*)

FOWSP Annual General Meeting

The following are some agenda items for the upcoming AGM from the FOWSP committee:

- Discuss festivals. Which festivals should FOWSP attend each year? Including: Warrandyte (float), Eltham and Westerfolds.
- How to organise volunteers so that the committee members aren't overloaded?
- Discuss problems determining paid-up members vs. newsletter recipients.
- VNPA often ask for special purpose donations. Committee would like to vote for one larger sum each year, to be determined at AGM.

FOWSP needs YOU as a committee member !

F.O.W.S.P. is an organisation with over 150 memberships, over 200 newsletter recipients. It is held in high regard in the community because of its history of hands-on conservation, opposition to inappropriate development, and its size, being one of the largest "Friends" groups. The FOWSP nursery contributes thousands plants to the Warrandyte environment each year.

The management of FOWSP is undertaken by a cooperative committee (i.e: no president or executive), which meets on the second Tuesday each month. These meetings are casual, commencing at 7.30pm and are usually finished by 9.30 pm.

At the committee meetings, correspondence is reviewed, activities are planned and funds distribution is approved.

Benefits of serving on the FOWSP committee include: having a say in FOWSP's direction; having early knowledge of changes to WSP, the Warrandyte township and other local issues, and being automatically consulted regarding development proposals in Warrandyte. You will also create and consolidate friendships and be invited to many conservation activities.

The current FOWSP committee positions will be declared open at the AGM, on Sunday 28th November at 3.30pm, at the Pound Bend Folly. The outgoing committee recommends that you nominate for any of the positions. Even if you've only been interested in FOWSP for a short time, being a committee member will rapidly introduce you to many of Warrandyte's well-known characters!

Committee positions: For the next year, Ant Owen has agreed to re-nominate as treasurer, but would like an assistant. The suggestion is to split the secretary's position into Grants, Correspondence, Minutes, Membership and social. The editor, Pat Coupar, will also re-nominate. Alastair Traill will continue his magnificent work in organising the Green Wedge Seminar series and Flora will remain as public officer.

Possible new positions will include: Market Stall Representative to liaise with Betty Oke and report to committee, Nursery Representative to liaise with Josh Revell and Publicity Representative to publicise FOWSP in new ways.

Frog Frolic

On the dark, dark night of Friday October 22nd, a Frog walk was held at Glynn's Reserve. Ranger Glen Jameson walked and talked us past the many ponds at Glynn's, stopping to imitate the frog calls in the hope of eliciting a response. The rather chilly night caused the "star" attraction, the Peron's Tree frog (maniacal cackle) to be absent. However, a constant chorus was heard of Common Eastern Froglets, (crick-crick), the Whistling Grass Frog, (weep-eeep-eeep) and the Spotted Marsh Frog, (toc toc toc). Some Glynn's road residents came along for the night, and their sharp eyes detected a striped grass frog with beautiful green and brown colourings. (Well, beautiful for a frog, anyway, you wouldn't want your kitchen in it!)

Other night denizens included a smallish owl, a mob of eastern grey kangaroos, and a largish snake sleeping under an old pile of timber. We walked and walked, and were glad to be back at the cars after about 1 1/2 hours.

Answers to last months crossword

Across

1. Burgan
4. Poa
6. Platypus
7. Fire
8. Warrandyte
11. Ringtail
12. Lily
13. Mt Lofty
15. Waxlip
16. Sunray

Down

1. Brushy
2. Golden Wattle
3. Riparian
4. Parrots
5. Ant
9. David
10. Orchids
14. Tuan

Fauna News:

Brush tailed Phascogale (*Phascogale tapoatafa*)

By Ranger David Farrar (Frankie)

Recently, while studying Biodiversity and Ecology, I was wondering about the immense pressures that affect many species worldwide and of our local Warrandyte State Park Brush-tailed Phascogales.

The Phascogale is small, nocturnal, arboreal, carnivorous marsupial belonging to the Family Dasyuridae. It is a uniform deep grey on the head, back and flanks, pale cream underneath with large naked ears and teeth like a dog. The conspicuous, intensely black 'bottlebrush' tail can be up to 230mm long.

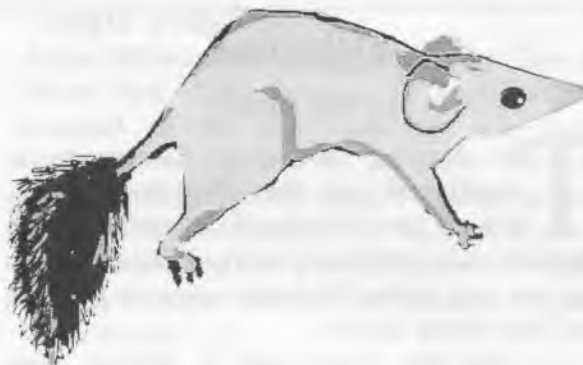
Phascogales are found in a variety of treed habitats where the annual rainfall is between 500mm and 2000mm (Cuttle 1983), but generally they prefer open dry foothill forests with little ground cover. Female Phascogales forage over a home ranges of 30-60 hectares that do not overlap, while males cover areas greater than 100 hectares.

The Phascogale is primarily an arboreal marsupial foraging for large insects, spiders, and centipedes, on the trunks and branches of rough-barked trees and fallen logs. Nests may be in hollows in dead or live trees, under flaking bark, or in tree stumps, in up to 30 different sites each year (Soderquist pers. Comm.).

The current status of Brush-tailed Phascogale in Victoria is Rare and Threatened and the Phascogale has been listed as a Threatened taxon in Schedule 2 of the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1998. The reason for this status is the fragmentation of remnant habitat, loss of hollows and inappropriate fire regimes affecting habitat quality. These are thought to be contributing factors in their decline, as is predation by the introduced Red Fox (*Canis vulpes*) and Cat (*Felis catus*).

The Phascogales in Warrandyte State Park certainly have a number of pressures on them due to the Park's segmentation on the urban interface and introduced pest plants and pest animals.

Cats are a direct threat to the species and I am currently investigating ways of introducing an education program to the Warrandyte area on the importance of the Brush-tailed Phascogale. For 'Friends' group members who haven't observed a



Phascogale before I have some film footage. In addition a Phascogale that was killed by a cat will be mounted and used for educational programs in local schools.

It amazes me that many people in Melbourne are not aware of Brush-tailed Phascogales and I find my self explaining to people how majestic they are and try and spark their interest as the animals have a strong public appeal. I think I will carry many photos in my wallet of Phascogales so I can hand them to interested member of the public to see if their eyes light up! The more I learn about them the more fascinating they become.

What people need to understand is that if important habitat is not protected for the Brush-tailed Phascogale the species could fall into a state of decline which could lead to extinction if we are not careful. I am currently establishing a network of nest boxes throughout the Warrandyte State Park to link up with reserves towards Kinglake National Park.

Phascogales readily use artificial nest boxes especially in habitat lacking many natural tree-hollows. Up to eighty nest boxes will be established throughout the Park with the primary objective of gaining an understanding of distribution and abundance throughout the park. It will take a few years to build up data information on animal numbers so that management can be directed to 'hot spot' sites - those which appear as high abundance habitat zones or corridors. Fox and cat control could then be implemented with closer monitoring of vegetation and burning in sensitive areas.

Hopefully the Brush-tailed Phascogale, with its strong public appeal, will do well in Warrandyte State Park and surrounds and "will be around for ever and a day"!

Interstate

Milijidee

By Ray Clarke

The Kadjina Aboriginal Community is established on the Milijidee pastoral station, now abandoned. It stands close to the south end of the Saint George Range, which is the last gap of the Kimberley mountains before the Great Sandy Desert.

My son Nigel and I, driving from Broome, left Highway One between Derby and Fitzroy Crossing and drove due south for 120 kilometres on primitive tracks, crossing the Fitzroy River on a ford and skirting the Saint George Range to reach the Community where we were welcomed by Sue, the school teacher at her recently built and well fitted house.

The school is a feature of daily life and 26 spruce and healthy students at the morning show-and-tell sang me two of their songs with great enthusiasm. The school building surrounds a central pillar and the roof and walls are in bright colours. They have four computers, television, a photo copier and ample art and book spaces and teaching aids. The children love their school and I saw them there at five in the afternoon, playing games, painting and reading. Teaching is mainly in



English, but also in Walmajarri, which is spoken in the homes. The housing is very different from that often depicted. The houses are well built with wide verandahs, each has a solar panel, reticulated water from an excellent bore and electricity from the communal generator. Each has its own septic sewerage. The mail plane calls weekly and the Flying Doctor comes when required.

The community is alcohol free and is governed by the elders.

While there we explored the rugged and heavily eroded sandstone range. Returning by a track south of the Fitzroy River and camping on the way, we arrived at Fitzroy Crossing having driven over 400 kilometres since leaving the highway and, except for the Community people, we had not sighted a single person or vehicle.

Three days is insufficient time to achieve an informed assessment of what is going on in the region for aborigines, but the success of Milijidee seems to be achieved by the excellence of the two teachers, the elders, and the efforts of an aboriginal company which is engaged in building well-designed settlements throughout that part of the Kimberley. Fitzroy Crossing is apparently progressing under the same influence.

A number of questions including health and future prospects remained unanswered, but there did appear to be reason for optimism.

Consider the Environment

Try to buy organic produce. It's better for you and better for the environment because it does not use chemical pesticides.

Important

Public Meeting

To discuss environmentally friendly transport for the outer eastern suburbs

At Knox Function Rooms
Knox Council Offices
511 Burwood Highway
Wantirna South

On Thursday 11th November at 7.30 pm

Calico shopping bags

By Lee Speedy

In the last year I've been "test-driving" some homemade calico shopping bags. These ones are so good, I just had to give them a plug! "Pamela's Fabulous Envirobags" are designed to substitute for the plastic 'singlet-style' bags that the checkout girls prefer. They're strong, washable, very heavily sewn, make great Xmas pressies and are only \$6 each. If you buy four bags (\$24), Pam Harrison will only charge \$4 for postage and handling. (Purchase 20 bags and the postage is free). I now use Envirobags so regularly, I sometimes run short of plastic! Phone Pam on 5629 2968, email her at pfe@nex.net.au or simply send a cheque to Pamela's Fabulous Envirobags, Tynong P.O., Tynong VIC 3813.



"I SPY"

By B.G

Junior Jottings

On Thursday 23rd September there were 'juniors' helping in the potting up area - Caitlin Pheasant, Patrick Pheasant and Stacey Wigmore-Babic. Later Zoe Murphy and her three children and others walked around inspecting the 'coup' at the depot.

September Supporters

Helpers on our market stall were: Neal Tessier, Anthony Owen, Elsa Arden, Rob Habeen, Kerry Fairly, Lee Speedy and Richard Barnes.

Delightful Days

Thursday 30th September involved a day visit to the Gurdies Flora Reserve. While on Thursday 21st October there was a short walk along the Pound Bend firebreak where our morning helpers spotted a patch of over 200 Tiger Orchids (*Diuris sulphurea*). Nearby an Echidna lay quietly nuzzling into the base of a eucalypt.

Away in an 'A (Frame)'

Olive Walters was seen recently helping at the nursery after returning from the 'Centre' and north-east coast of Australia where she and husband Andy had been travelling in their A-frame camper.

Bill's Back

Good to see Bill Roxburgh back sorting seed - he was out of sorts for a few weeks.

Roving 'Runner' Returns

Andy Nixon, Ranger-in-Charge, is back at the Park after a trip north with his family - been on leave. He was seen recently jogging up the newly repaired bitumen road at the depot.

"Angie Away"

Angie Stefantos has sent us a postcard from the Desert Park, Alice Springs. "I have just been accepted as the new temporary zoo keeper here..... The job will be anywhere from one month to three months long. I will be working mainly in the bird section. By the way, if you go to the Melbourne Zoo and see the pair of Hooded Robins, I caught them and put them on the plane to Melbourne"

Social Set

Matt and Cecilia Le Duc were seen socialising with 'local friends' at the 'Grand' recently. Matt is now 2. I. C. at Uluru.

More Milkweed?

"The number of Monarch butterflies is declining steeply in North America because farmers are destroying the milkweed plant which is the sole diet of the butterfly's caterpillar. Now agricultural researchers in the U.S.A have found uses for milkweed which could save the butterfly and the ozone layer into the bargain".

(*New Scientist*, 16th October 1999, page 4)

Ministerial Matters

The Hon. Sherryl Garbutt is now the Minister for Environment and Conservation (including water issues). She is also Minister for Womans Affairs.

Dam Drain

A new scoria drain has been completed along the bottom road at the depot in order to collect surface water for filling the fire dam next to the 'Folly' building.

Operation Over

Betty Oke (our magnificent market roster organiser) is recovering after an operation very recently. We all wish her a speedy recovery.

Weedy Intersection

A letter from John Bennie, Director City Development, Manningham Council confirms that after consultation with Roger Lord from Melbourne Water, weed removal and treatment will take place in the vicinity of a natural drain that feeds Andersons Creek at the south western end of the Warrantdyte - Harris Gully Intersection.



Interstate

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only

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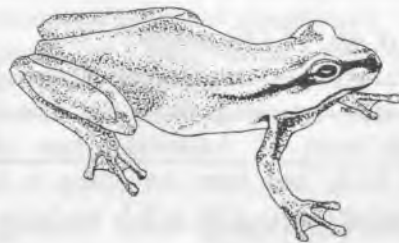
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Southern Brown Tree Frog (Litoria ewingii)

Also known as the Ewings Tree Frog. A very common species around Warrandyte found in flooded grassland, roadside ditches, swamps, around dams or garden ponds. Males call, mostly at night, from vegetation either at the water's edge or sometimes floating. The call is a series of high pitched pulsing notes. Similar species - the Whistling Frog (Litoria verreaux).



FOWSP Membership Form

Name

Address

.....

Tel. no.

- Family \$20
- Single \$15
- Concession \$10