

February 2000

Friends of Warrandyte State Park



Newsletter

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

Timed to Succeed

By Pat Coupar

There was a deluge. In the two days after Christmas Warrandyte recorded one of the highest readings of rainfall in the State. Over a 48 hour period my rain gauge showed an massive 140 millimetres (over five inches in the 'old' scale), more than double the average monthly rainfall for December. While actual amounts varied, even locally, most of the falls in the north eastern suburbs of Melbourne were substantial.

It was a welcome respite from the heat and drought. The rain was consistent and soaking, and the bush responded accordingly. Plants that were wilting took on a new lease of life; ground covers like kidney weed and violets uncurled their shrivelled leaves and grasses greened. The most dramatic and long-lasting response came from the eucalypts - they positively flourished, sprouting bundles of fresh new leaves and swelling flower buds.

While the rain extended the flowering and seeding of some plants, for many it came too late, they had already set and dropped seed long before the summer wet. However, certain species were prolific in their seeding, most notable was Lightwood Wattle (*Acacia implexa*), this species produced a bounty of dangling clumps of curly brown seeds. I cannot remember even having seen the trees so laden.

Lightwood Wattle is a great plant for local gardens, growing well in the dry (and not so dry) Warrandyte soils. In the



past we have never been able to grow great numbers of this wattle at the nursery due to the lack of seed, but this year will be different so get your orders in now!

Daisies have always proved somewhat temperamental plants to grow. Now, thanks to two of our members having attended a plant propagation seminar late last year, we think we have cracked the propagation code. It's all a matter of timing and temperature. Such was the success with the germination of Button Everlasting (*Helichrysum scorpioides*), we now have several boxes of this attractive yellow daisy growing on at the nursery.

The Button Daisy is just one of a diverse range of indigenous plants Fowspians have been propagating at the nursery. Some plants are grown to order, others for community purposes. These include trees, shrubs, wildflowers, grasses and sedges - plus at least nine species of local ferns.

At this time of year most terrestrial orchids are dormant - a perfect time for division of tubers, which is exactly what occurred one Thursday in January. And it was with great delight that we discovered one of our rarest orchid species - a helmet orchid had multiplied.

The nursery, along with the monthly market stall, remains one of FOWSP's major focuses. It is a pleasure, as well as an education in local indigenous plants, just to walk through the nursery which at the present time is bursting at the seams. A number of planting days are being planned for the year. These will be organised and run by the rangers. Look out for dates in forthcoming newsletters.

Worth Repeating

Invasion of the Killer Weeds

Victorian taxpayers are paying farmers to plant environmental weeds

with Rodney Waterman
Native Vegetation Campaigner

What would you think if the government were paying people to introduce cane toads or plant blackberries in this day and age?

Yet this is pretty much what the Victorian Government has been doing in name of the environment.

The Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DNRE) is actually spending taxpayers funds earmarked for helping the environment to pay farmers to plant two foreign pasture grasses, Phalaris (Canary Grass) and Dactylis (Cocksfoot).

At the same time, other branches of government are spending more 'environment' dollars controlling both as weeds!

DNRE's aim is to have unwilling farmers plant a million hectares of these two grasses.

Why? For salinity control, says DNRE. But like the cane toad and blackberries, the so-called cure is worse than the problem. DNRE's theory is that since Phalaris and Dactylis use more water than some other pasture grasses, they will lower water tables and hence reduce soil salinity, benefiting both farmers and the environment.

The theory falls down in practice because:

- **Salinity:** the evidence clearly shows that trees are overwhelmingly the best way to lower water tables. Not only that, but native species can be established relatively easily and thrive once in place.
- **Environmental weeds:** both Phalaris and Dactylis are the worst kind of environmental weeds aggressively invading natural bush and grasslands and forming a dense sward that chokes native flora and fauna. The Grey-crowned Babbler, one of Victoria's most endangered birds, is just one of the victims lying in their path.
- **Crop weed:** Once established, Phalaris and Dactylis both aggressively invade and displace other pastures and crops. Phalaris is one of the ten most damaging weeds of crops such as wheat.

- **Fertiliser use:** the establishment of these two grasses, like all foreign pasture grasses, inevitably demands increased fertiliser use. This is good for agribusiness but disastrous for water quality, adjoining bush and cash-strapped farmers.
- **Fire hazard:** the Country Fire Authority reported that Phalaris burns hotter and later in the season than native grasses, seriously threatening human lives.
- **Management mayhem:** these pastures are extremely costly to establish and demand intensive on-farm management - they often fail to get established at all under grazing - but readily overwhelm precious roadsides and stream sides. Once established, both must be constantly and evenly grazed. Phalaris is a particular problem, if it is not held back by constant grazing it quickly clumps and becomes tall, thick and rank like mini bamboo - unpalatable for both cattle and sheep.
- **Tree loss:** dense swards of Phalaris blanket the ground, adding to the already severe tree decline problem in rural Victoria by preventing seedling establishment.
- **Soil erosion:** land is susceptible to severe erosion when it is ploughed to sow new pastures.
- **Road hazard:** Phalaris can even be a danger on the roads! It invades roadside remnants and with its need for water, is particularly partial to roadside ditches. It grows to two-and-half metres tall, blocking visibility.

The government's pastures program costs taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars annually. The public environmental purse pays farmers \$100 per hectare to plant Phalaris and Dactylis.

The farmers are wary of planting these grasses. They know they require significant management inputs - particularly Phalaris. It can cost a fortune to control.

There is overwhelming evidence that trees are the most effective and efficient way to control salinity.

In addition, the most cost effective trees are those that are already there - our precious existing native bushland.

Paradoxically and tragically, permission is still being given to clear around 2,500 hectares of native bush in Victoria every year.

Source: *Environment Victoria news Issue 166 Dec. 1999*



Phalaris (Canary Grass)

Book Review

By Pat Coupar

Aquatic and Wetland Plants A field guide for non-tropical Australia

By Nick Romanowski

UNSW Press

This little book - only 120 pages long, is an excellent guide to the aquatic plants of the temperate zones of Australia. No specialised knowledge of botany is required to identify most of the species.

Around 340 species are described under genus and in order of family. The field characteristics are given in clear, easy to understand text. Most species are accompanied by a colour photograph, either of the plant growing in its natural habitat, or a sample of the plant laid on a white surface sometimes with a five, ten or twenty cent coin placed along side for comparison of size. One criticism I have here is that the caption is not placed underneath the photograph but up the side so the book needs to be turned ninety degrees to read it. In addition the size of the print is tiny and difficult to read.



Scattered, somewhat sparsely, throughout the book are black and white line drawings of features that distinguish similar species, for example the fruits of Water Ribbons (*Triglochin* spp.).

The inclusion, in the text, of detailed comparisons of leaves (submerged and emergent), flowers, fruit, habitat and range of two closely related milfoils (*Myriophyllum* spp.) is also useful.

While the book concentrates mainly on native species, it does include a number of exotics, the status of which is only made clear by sifting through the text. Such was the case on page 62, where Jointed Rush (**Juncus articulatus*) - a major weed of wet areas - is described. The reference to this species being introduced is mentioned only briefly in the preceding paragraph. Absent is the asterisk in front of the scientific name which, at a glance, denotes an introduced species. The reason given for this is that "it would give a misleading impression of the state of our knowledge". I am not sure I agree. In fact, I think more emphasis could be given to those species like Parrots Feather and Alligator Weed that are known to be serious environmental weeds.

While the book does have its faults, not the least the price - at \$29.95 certainly not cheap for a book of its size - it is, however, a worthy addition to any library. The material is up to date and contains most, if not all, of the aquatic plants found in Warrandyte. It has not, as yet, been acquired for the FOWSP library, but if anyone is interested in seeing the book they can give me a call.

Did You Know.....

Where the name RANGER originated? Rangers began back in 1872 with the appointment of men from the United States military 'Ranger' units to the newly created Yellowstone National Park. The ranger units were a type of commando brigade made up of men who could handle tough conditions. These units originated many decades earlier during the American War of Independence. Much of the success of this revolution was attributed to the grit, ingenuity, and toughness of the backwoodsmen (a.k.a. Daniel Boone types). They knew the land and how to survive and live off it - and the ways of the Indians.

It is believed that it was the French, who in part fought with and assisted the revolutionaries, that gave these backwoodsmen

the name "range'e", meaning 'row of trees' or 'line of trees', and/or "ranger", meaning to keep back. This was derived to describe these men from the back of, or row of, hills. Today, units of rangers still form part of the modern American Army.

According to one certain officer of the law, the oldest profession is that of the park ranger. At least this is what one Okalahoma judge claimed. He equated the job with the cherubic guard placed at the biblical Garden of Eden to protect it from the only two people in the world. (From *Parks & Recreation*, USA Nov 1994). Perhaps this also means that the first person ever guilty of an offence against a Park regulation was a woman - when Eve offered Adam the forbidden fruit!

Source: Warrandyte State Park newsletter, Dec. 1999

Willow Control Works Yarra River - Warrandyte.



Melbourne Water will be working through the year to revitalise the Yarra River at Warrandyte by removing willows and replanting the river banks with native species indigenous to the area. Work will be undertaken over a one kilometre reach of the river, incorporating the reach of river between the inlet and outlet of the Pound Bend Tunnel.

Project benefits

While the willow is seen by many to have scenic values, there are many environmental reasons why these Basket willows need to be replaced.

- Willows eventually grow out into the channel obstructing the flow, which results in erosion of the creek bank. This can be seen at various locations along the Yarra River. Removing willows from the channel will also reduce the impact of localised flooding.
- The autumn willow leaf drop disrupts the natural ecosystem of the waterway, which relies on leaf litter falling year round. The extensive shade cast by willows also makes it difficult for indigenous species to grow along the river leading to weed invasion.

Replanting of native plants will begin in Autumn 2000 following initial willow removal and will focus on replanting of Manna Gums and associated understorey shrubs to replace the willow trees.

An assessment of the willow trees in this section of stream has been undertaken by Melbourne Water to ensure that willow removal



does not significantly compromise the environmental values of the waterway. Selected trees will be retained if found to be important habitat trees.

How the project will be undertaken

The willows are initially poisoned to minimise any threat of the small stem sections of the trees spreading when they are removed. Later stumps are poisoned to stop any regrowth of willow. Branches of the willows may need to be burnt to safely remove the trees. This will be carried out in consultation with the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA), Nillumbik Shire Council, Manningham City Council and the Country Fire Authority (CFA).

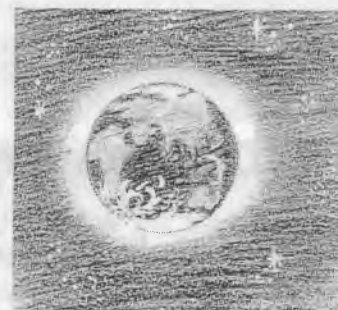
Astronomy Night

Date & Time: Friday February 11th from 8.30pm

Place: Mount Lofty, Lower Homestead Rd, Wonga Park (Melways ref. 279 B5). Follow the 'wombat' signs

Phil Mahon from the Astronomical Society of Victoria will provide a night of star gazing. If it is raining or overcast the activity will be postponed until the following night.

For more information contact Lee Speedy on 9437 0894



Wurundjeri Plant Names

Kurwan

Sweet Bursaria *Bursaria spinosa*

Weather Update

The eastern tropical Pacific Ocean continued to cool during December causing a further intensification of the Pacific La Niña pattern. Most computer models show this La Niña pattern is close to maturity and should begin to weaken during the next three months. In the past, this pattern has often, but not always, been associated with above average rainfall in eastern and northern Australia.

The National Climate Centre's latest outlook shows that for much of central and northern Queensland there is a 60% to 75% chance that rainfall will be above average during the coming season (February-April). In the central west of W.A. there is about a 60% to 65% chance of above average rainfall, but in remaining areas the probabilities are mostly close to 50%.

The December Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) was +13, the same as that recorded in November. Rainfall has been above average across much of the country for the past six months - a situation that is consistent with a strengthening Pacific La Niña pattern.

The SOI gives an indication of the stage of El Niño or La Niña events in the Pacific Ocean. The accuracy of the SOI in determining the three-month outlook for rain around Australia is highest between mid-winter and mid-summer in eastern and northern Australia. A strongly positive SOI (above +10) is characteristic of La Niña, which is often associated with above average rainfall over parts of tropical and eastern Australia, and an earlier than normal start to the northern monsoon season.

This Information was obtained from the Bureau of Meteorology

A report from Manningham Council revealed the following rainfall figures from Boxing Day to December 29th: Doncaster 130mm; Warrandyte 119mm; Lower Plenty 90mm; Ringwood 84mm; Kangaroo Ground 78mm. It was reported that 95% of Manningham's rain fell over a three to six hour period. It said the deluge represented an average recurrence interval of one-in-50 years storm.



Articles Needed

The editor is desperate for some articles to have in hand for the next newsletter. There has been a drought of material coming in over the holiday period.

So please put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard and send in your contributions. Poems, drawings, cartoons, jokes, questions, opinions.

The following categories are a guide to some of the subjects you might like to comment on.

- My favourite place
- Book review
- Flora and fauna sightings
- The weather
- Worth repeating
- Dates for the diary

Consider the Environment

Know your fish. That orange roughy you're eating could well be 150 years old. Find out where your fish are caught and if the methods used are ecologically sustainable. If your fish vendor doesn't know ask them to find out.

Eltham Copper Butterfly Update

Last year the Friends of Eltham Copper Butterfly received a grant from Parks Victoria under their Centennial Grant Program for the revegetation of an area of Pauline Toner Reserve known as the 'Pine area'. The Sweet Bursaria (*Bursaria spinosa*) plants - the foodplant for the caterpillars of this rare butterfly - are currently being grown at the Warrandyte State Park nursery.

The Shire of Nillumbik is assisting the 'Friends' with the development of an information kit for the local residents. The kit will provide residents with information about the Eltham Copper Butterfly, the Friends group and tips on how to protect the butterfly. Over 150 residents will be targeted. The information will be delivered in March this year.

If you would like more information on the 'Friend of Eltham Copper Butterfly' don't hesitate to ring Anna on 9411 5151 (pager).

Biological Control for Bridal Creeper Has Arrived

By Emma Wills, Research Officer - Keith Turnbull Research Institute

Bridal Creeper is native to South Africa and was introduced to Australia during the 1870s as an ornamental garden plant and was widely used in the florist trade by the early 1900s. It is now found in all southern states in a wide range of habitats ranging from coastal vegetation to mallee shrubland.

The first biological control agent for Bridal Creeper, the Bridal Creeper Leafhopper, was released at Seaford Foreshore Reserve and Kananook Creek Reserve in August last year. More releases are scheduled to occur on the Mornington Peninsula with the help of council environmental officers and park rangers.

Bridal Creeper is a highly invasive climber that forms a dense canopy, which smothers other vegetation. The plant produces massive root systems that allow it to survive over summer when its foliage dies back. Birds feed on the fruits the plant produces in spring which assists the weed to spread.

The Bridal Creeper Leafhopper is a small insect growing up to 2.5 mm in length. It feeds only on Bridal Creeper and damages the plant by sucking out the contents of the leaf cells. Dense infestations of the leafhopper lead to defoliation and reduced flowering, seed production and tuber development. Female leafhoppers live for 6 - 8 weeks and lay an average of 180 eggs. Eggs hatch in just over 2 weeks, the young nymphs begin feeding immediately. As there are several generations per year, populations should develop quickly.

Biological control cannot eradicate a weed but can reduce the spread and density of infestations. In some cases control is achieved to a level where the weed is no longer of threat and

no other control method is necessary. More commonly, other methods are still required to achieve the desired level of control. The introduction of the leafhopper is a technique that should be used in conjunction with other control measures in an integrated management program.

Source: Coastline, Newsletter of Coast Action/Coastcare Summer 1999/2000



Warrandyte Festival 1993

Volunteers Needed for The Warrandyte Festival

March 25th & 26th

The Warrandyte Festival gives us the perfect opportunity to promote our organisation and to inform the local community and others from further afield about the natural values of Warrandyte.

One of the aims of our group is to assist the rangers in the care and protection of the State Park. We also have an important role in providing information on local plants, rabbits, weeds and various aspects of bushland management. A variety of pamphlets are available and we have several posters, but we can always do with more.

Help is needed to photocopy pamphlets, make new posters etc. If you would like to help in the planning or setting up of our display, or if you can give an hour or two of your time over the weekend to be 'on duty' at the stall please ring Betty Oke on 9844 3763.



Chip on the Hip

Bill Roxburgh, our seed sorter, has chipped his hip after a trip in the lounge room. He'll be away for several weeks. Mend well Bill.

Glenelg Getaway

Tuesday 18th January, five staff from the Park travelled down to Glenelg National Park to assist with the bush fire situation.

Friends Faithful

Even during the holiday season steady work by a consistent group of Friends has continued at the Park nursery with pricking out and plant propagation.

Always Algae

Algal growth removal is an ongoing task in 'Don's Bath' at the nursery where the Friends are successfully propagating a range of aquatic plants.

December Do-ers

Helpers at the market stall were Jan Giles, Trudy Brentnall and Marion Kiewiet. Owen Humphries helped set up. Also noted were Tim Ferguson,

Joan MacMahon and Liz Heaton. Drew Gordon was also present with his dog Grommet.

Economic Eclectic(s)

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) has blocked a US rule ordering fishermen to equip shrimp nets with a device that allows endangered sea turtles to escape. The WTO found the ruling discriminated against foreign importers who lacked nets. *Source: The Age November 25th 1999*

Feathered Friends

Seen advertised "Art Workshop, Bird Painting Techniques, 10.30 am at Bass Valley Community Centre. Led by Nicholas Day. Saturday 12th February 2000, enquiries ring 03 5678 8483"

I wonder how many coats of paint will each bird receive?

Station Situation

At the FOWSP Annual General Meeting last November Jeff Adair (community support facilitator with the CFA) - accompanied by his very patient and well behaved daughter Georgina - explained the CFA's situation in relation to the Fire Station in Harris Gully Road and its current unsatisfactory status.

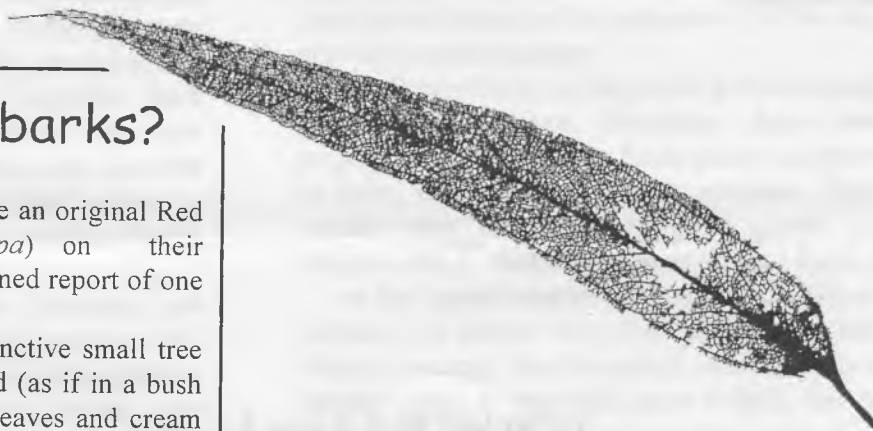
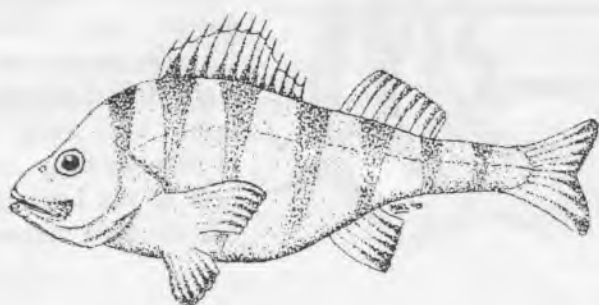
Update: Jeff said that committee members have made some suggestions re the original plan. These have been taken up. Further information ring Jeff Adair 9844 4940

Any Old Ironbarks?

Does any think they might have an original Red Ironbark (*Eucalyptus tricarpa*) on their property? There is an unconfirmed report of one existing in North Warrandyte.

Red Ironbark is a distinctive small tree with deeply fissured, blackened (as if in a bush fire) bark, narrow grey-green leaves and cream or pale pink flowers.

Ironbarks have frequently been used by councils for street plantings.



Wanted

Does anyone have any old baths lying around that they don't want. Baths are ideal for propagation and display of aquatic plants. We have use of a trailer and would be able to collect. If you can help please ring the nursery manager on 0408800026



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Koala (Phascolarctos cinereus)

Derivation: *phaskolos*, pouch; *arktos*, bear (Greek)
cinereus, ash-coloured (Latin)

A total of 28 koalas were counted by Park staff and volunteers at Pound Bend Reserve during Warrandyte's annual koala count late last year. Nineteen of these were female which augers well for the future of koalas in the Warrandyte area. Two juveniles were spotted clinging to their mother's back proving that breeding is continuing successfully.



FOWSP Membership Form

Name

Address

.....

Tel. no.

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