

October 2002

Friends of Warrandyte State Park



Newsletter

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

Diverse Day in Warrandyte

By Pat Coupar

September was Biodiversity Month and September 22nd was Biodiversity Day. The Field Naturalists Club of Victoria (FNCV) chose Warrandyte as their venue to celebrate the day.

The program commenced at the community centre with the Green Singers, an accapella choir, singing 'green songs'.

Throughout the afternoon there was a series of guided walks in the Park led by naturalists and Warrandyte State Park rangers. Three walks commenced at Sandy Bay picnic area in Jumping Creek Reserve. One was Cecily Falkingham's walk to Blue-Tongue-Bend looking at the flora and fauna of the area.

Botanist and WSP ranger Cam Beardsell led his group along the river track where he described the history and formation of the Yarra River and its geology. Cam also talked about the different vegetation communities along the way.

Entomologist, Alan Yen, took his walkers away from the river along the management track. In his introduction Alan demonstrated various techniques of collecting invertebrates from the soil, leaf litter and foliage – a beating stick and ground sheet for foliage-dwelling species and sieves for ground-dwelling invertebrates.

Meanwhile at the Warrandyte Historical Society building in the main street, local historian Ted Rotherham spoke on the History of Warrandyte.

Whipstick Gully was the location for Noel Schleiger's introduction to the Geology and Geomorphology of Warrandyte. Perhaps it was his promise of a visit to the mines and study of

quartz reefs that resulted in this particular walk attracting most attention.

However, I was able to poach a couple of his walkers for my own walk about to commence near the top of Fourth Hill. His group had just puffed and panted up the very steep hill from Whipstick Gully and I offered a relatively hill-free walk looking at the wildflowers!!

It is not a great year for wildflowers. Just too dry. But there was enough to wet the appetite for another year. Plus one highlight – Brown Beaks orchids in full flower. With careful management these orchids have been brought back from the brink of extinction in Warrandyte and this only known occurrence in the Park of between 60 and 70 plants now ranks as the largest population of this orchid in the region.

A delicious barbeque at the Friends 'Folly' followed the walks. Food was supplied for the walk leaders by Maria Belvedere who did a magnificent job in co-ordinating the whole day.

The last event of the day was a spotlight walk from Pound Bend led by ranger Glen Jameson.. Not only were possums spotted but three resting kookaburras as well.

The FNCV is a diverse club offering something for everyone interested in the natural environment. Sub-groups include: fauna survey, Marine, Botany, Geology and Microscopy.

If you are interested in joining and would like more information contact FNCV office Ph/Fax 9877 9860 or Email: fncv@vicnet.net.au

Tip Toeing Through the Orchids

By Pat Anderson

On Thursday, 19th September, instead of the usual nursery propagation session, Fowspians had the unusual experience of planting rare species at Boomers Reserve. I was going to describe this as a questionable treat, because the weather was foul. However, in view of the recent dry conditions, the rain was invaluable for the plants, if not for the Fowspians.

I can already hear you asking, where in Warrandyte is Boomers Reserve? The answer is that it is not in Warrandyte, but is on Crown Land between Panton Hill and Smiths Gully, occupying the corner between the Main Rd and Bluehouse Road.

The Reserve is exceptionally rich in floral diversity, comprising 50 species of orchid alone, and has been studied closely by Cam Beardsell for some 30 years - which is probably why he can identify an orchid from just a centimetre or two of newly emerged leaf and can take people directly to specific plants!

The area was mined for gold in the 1850's, mainly in two long tunnels, and most of its Ironbark trees were removed at the same time for the same purpose. Only a few original Ironbarks remain, most of the existing, newer specimens being found on the mullock heaps.

Over the last few years, Cam has discovered some very rare, endangered species on these mullock heaps, and from these, new plants have been propagated at the nursery. The long-term aim for Boomers Reserve is to encourage the regeneration of the Box-Ironbark forest and its associated species, and Thursday's aim was to plant out 78 of these rare plants on the mullock heaps.

These species were:

- *Correa reflexa* subsp. *speciosa*
- *Grevillea alpina* - a red-flowering species that appears to be a disjunct population of the variety that grows in the Whipstick area near Bendigo;
- *Grevillea rosmarinifolia* subsp. *rosmarinifolia*
- *Hibbertia "porcata"* a large flowering species that occurs under the Ironbarks - very precious and it has not yet been given an official species name.



Grevillea alpina

Cam dug the holes with a crowbar. As the mullock heaps were very stony, we had to collect soil where we could, without damaging other vegetation, and pack this into the holes before planting these precious specimens. The plants were then watered in.

As usual the plants needed guards as rabbits are a problem here. Luckily, Parks Victoria has provided funds for a rabbit-proof fence which will be erected within a few weeks around a selected area of the Reserve.

After stage one of the planting, we were shown around the reserve with its many flowers, including its signature species, *Brachyscome uliginosa* (Swamp Daisy), and the very rare *Pterostylis plumosa*, shortly to be re-classified under a new genus *Plumatochilus* sp. (Boomers Reserve supports the largest known population of this soon to be described species). Then it was across the track to a heathy woodland area, with many rare plants normally associated with the Grampians area. These include the Tongue Orchids, Horned Orchids, Brown Beaks and Flying Duck orchids.

Unfortunately, none of these were in flower for us to see, but we did enjoy the blue flowers of the *Dampiera stricta* (specific to this area), *Daviesia ulicifolia*, Rosy Baeckea, Southern Varnish Wattle and *Hakea ulicina*, not to mention the abundance of Love Creeper, Beard Heath and Creamy Candles.

This reserve is a real treat. In spite of the reduction of flowering orchids after a number of years of drought and the ravages of rabbits it should be well worth another visit in a few more weeks. And in a few years, with the area protected by the fence, it should be even better.

Thank you to all those Fowspians who braved the weather - and especially to those who stayed after lunch - and thank you to Cam for sharing his expertise and introducing us to this special place.

Editors Note: I visited the site a couple of weeks later. Having had an additional water, followed by some welcome rain, all the plants looked healthy and were establishing well

'Burgan, Bellbirds and Eucalypt Dieback'

A Land for Wildlife Field Day

Report by Pat Coupar

Part Five – 'Eucalypt Dieback'

While there was no speaker directly allocated to talk on this issue, it was touched on by all speakers.

There was a heated discussion with one member of the audience who wanted answers as to why eucalypts growing in a seeming natural system in the area of Long Gully and Broad Acres Road were suffering from severe dieback. Unfortunately there was no easy answer, no single simple reason. No definitive cause. More likely the trees have become stressed by a combination of a regime of fire, drought, Bell Miners farming lerps.

One thing that wasn't discussed on the day was the occasional outbreaks that occur some years by certain insects, often in epidemic proportions, that cause immense damage to eucalypts.

For instance, last year many of the Swamp Gums and some Manna Gums, particularly near the roundabout close to the Fire Station on Harris Gully Rd, and at Mullum Creek in Donvale and Currawong Bush Park, suffered severe defoliation. In some of these cases the perpetrator was actually identified the caterpillar of the Autumn Gum Moth. While some of the trees are making a recovery, others unfortunately died.



Other insects that have been known to cause defoliation of eucalypts include the caterpillars of Cup Moths and Gum Leaf Skeletoniser

Moths and phasmids (stick insects).

One known cause of dieback is Phytophthora – the Cinnamon Fungus, but this is thought unlikely to be the major cause in Warrandyte although its presence can complicate the issue.

As discussed by ornithologist Richard Loyn, there is a definite association of Bell Miner colonies with eucalypt dieback. This was reported in Part One of 'Burgan, Bellbirds and Eucalypt Dieback'.

Botanist David Cameron made some interesting comments on the reasons for eucalypt dieback in Warrandyte. He actually proposed that the density of eucalypts is too great for the carrying capacity of the land. It is simply not sustainable in its present condition of mostly regrowth following a past history of clearing.

Drought also plays its part, affecting trees at the lower levels which are less adapted to the conditions than those up the slopes and in the poorer soils. In addition, the pattern of three hot wild fires in the 1960's followed by none has also upset the natural balance.

Next Month: Part Six – The Summary

The Green Singers

By Lee Speedy

Last month, the Field Naturalist Club of Victoria ('the Field Nats.') held Biodiversity Day in conjunction with Parks Victoria and FOWSP. There were several expert-led walks within Warrandyte State Park, each one well worth attending. The highlight for me though was the official launch of Biodiversity Day, held in the foyer of the Warrandyte Community Centre.

The Green Singers, a conductor-led community choir based in the northern suburbs, managed to combine formality with topical casualness. It was a joy to hear them sing 6 or 7 songs, all on 'green' themes. They sang beautifully about habitat, pollution, compost and the more familiar 'Big Yellow Taxi'. The acappella group seamlessly combined serious issues and formal singing, with other more humorous songs and a casual passionate air. If you get a chance to see them at an environmental venue, don't miss them ~ they're the ones in the green t-shirts!

Mines Update

By Geoff Speedy

We are still waiting access to the summaries of mines safety reports which Parks Victoria have agreed to release. As the 10-year WSP Management plan must be completed by December, we understand that the Management plan takes priority over the mines issue, given that the mines will stay open in the interim.

FOWSP Signs Competition

A suggestion has been made to the committee for FOWSP to produce our own signs for members to display on their property – rather like the Land for Wildlife signs.

Before we go any further with a design concept we would like expressions of interest from members. It is anticipated that the signs will be slightly smaller than A4 and either made of metal or plastic.

FOWSP will pay for the setting up and artwork of the signs, but members will have to purchase their own sign for around \$20 to \$30

We would like to include on the sign a few words that sum up our group. For example: **“Friends of Warrandyte State Park caring for the local environment”**.

We are asking for members to submit their ideas for a ‘slogan’ in less than six words (excluding Friends of Warrandyte State Park). The prize for the winner will be a free sign.

Please send your suggestions to FOWSP, PO Box 220, Warrandyte 3113.

Moving On

Dr Gretna Weste, a loved and respected FOWSP member is moving on. Gretna has sold her Park Orchards house and next year will live in Melbourne close to the University where she will be working on Cinnamon Fungus, her area of expertise for more than 30 years. Her next move will be to Tasmania to be near her daughter and family.

Gretna has always been passionate about the natural environment and most weekends she leads walk for various groups including the ‘Walk Talk and Gawk’ trips for VNPA.

We will remember Gretna especially for the all the groundwork she did for our book Discover Warrandyte, carrying out many seasonal botanical surveys to the various reserves of the Park.

We thank Gretna for her time and knowledge and wish her good health and happy days.

TuanFro

If you feel a bit chilly on these equinoctial nights, spare a thought for the baby Tuans. When the babies are too big for the mother to forage successfully carrying them round (6-8 young), they are left in the nest for many hours at a time. Although the nest is a ball of bark, hair & feathers, the baby Tuan’s core temperatures may drop as much as 20 deg. C before the mother

returns. This is astounding in a mammal, and points to the importance of not letting rare species become extinct species.

One day, the mechanism of coping with these low core temperatures could lead to improved human medical techniques, by slowing the metabolism, and also in the recovery of severely hypothermic patients.

Report on the September Green Wedge Seminar

By Julie Bishop

There was a full house to hear Patrick Horan (from the Butterfly House at Melbourne Zoo) speak about gardening for butterflies.

If you are interested in butterfly conservation then you’ll probably take delight in attracting them to your garden. For this to be successful you need to provide two groups of plants.

- 1) The first must be brightly coloured and ‘nectiferous’ (!). These will attract the butterflies to feed.
- 2) Plants suitable as hosts (ie food plants) for their caterpillars. Without these the butterflies won’t lay their eggs and stay for the long term.

Patrick provided a great set of notes. If you’d like a copy please contact Joan. Some of his rules for success include;

- 1) Don’t use any insecticides
- 2) Choose plants such that flowering is continuous from spring to autumn
- 3) Choose plants that produce large masses of flowers as groups of flowers are easier to find than single blooms.
- 4) Choose shallow-throated flowers as butterflies can’t reach into deep-throated flowers
- 5) Leave parts of the garden untended – butterflies don’t like tidy gardens.

Worth Repeating

Things that go bump in the night
may be rarer than you think

WILD LIFE

By Bary Dowling

I lifted the lid of the nest box and peered in. Damn! More Sugar Gliders. Their snug but open nest was made entirely of Red Box leaves. One stared at me from huge black eyes that seemed utterly trusting, although the dark stripe on its forehead suggested worry. The other two slept on, deeply cuddled into each other. What a shame. I had been hoping to see a Phascogale.

I was at Warrandyte State Park, checking nest boxes with ranger David Farrar and three students from Deakin University. I wish them well in their studies and salute the Friends of Warrandyte State Park who work indefatigably to conserve. They make clever nest boxes suited to small arboreal mammals, boxes often quickly occupied, usually by Sugar Gliders.

Phascogale is a pretty name for a pretty creature. Our local, the Brush-tailed Phascogale, or Tuan, is a rat-sized, sharp-snouted, nocturnal hunter with a bottlebrush tail, which, if it were bigger, you could use as a dunny brush. The Tuan is not a glider, but can leap two metres between trees, run along the underside of branches, and spiral up or down trunks with equal ease, being able to rotate its hind feet 180 degrees.

It hunts large insects and forages in eucalyptus flowers for nectar, so may be a pollinator. When alarmed, it taps its forefeet repeatedly against bark - a bush night-noise few of us would recognise.

Trading as *Phascogale tapoatafa*, it is sparsely distributed in dry, sclerophyll forest.

Farrar feels that it is secure in Warrandyte State Park. He has picked up eight road kills in recent years, a lot for a mammal that spends most of its time aloft. Speed kills. Some accidents are unavoidable, but if we travel at a speed that allows us to slow down for reptile, bird or mammal, most would be avoided. Farrar is also going after cats and foxes.

What is heartening at Warrandyte is the readiness with which nest boxes are being used by Tuans, which suggests that numbers may be limited by lack of hollows and that nest boxes



may lead to increase, despite heavy competition from Sugar Gliders.

We found two Tuan nests and very different they were from those of Sugar Gliders. Inside the nest box was a sphere made of stringybark bark and moss. I had to probe to see if there was anyone at home. They have multiple nests - an individual may use more than 20.

Both nests were on stringybarks and we could see where bark had been stripped for material. Isn't it lovely, to think of all this going on at Warrandyte? And elsewhere.

The Tuan's status in Victoria is "rare and threatened", due to clearing, fragmentation of habitat, cats and foxes, and, perhaps above all, the cutting down for firewood of old trees with hollows.

We have heard all this before concerning other mammals, hollow-nesting birds, bats and invertebrates, and it will not stop unless felling ceases. Let us get behind the push to protect forests, particularly box ironbark.

But - seek and ye shall find - a Phascogale Co-ordinating Group set up by the Department of Natural Resources and the Environment reports Tuans from widely scattered areas in Victoria: they are alive and well in the Central Goldfields; the Field Naturalists Club found "surprisingly large numbers" in Rushworth Forest (also "up to 10 Sugar Gliders in a single nest box"); they are at Reef Hills, Hepburn, Christmas Hills and, when I rang the Kinglake ranger, he had just returned from inspecting a nest behind someone's kitchen sink.

If you have one in your ceiling, be glad and patient. They disperse by December, having an annual life cycle in which, as with *Antechinus*, the males shag themselves to death.

In winter, some loafers do not emerge till after midnight. Let us, this night, as we go to sleep, think of these little marsupials leaving warm nests to sniff the air for nectar and search for arthropods. Let us be pleased and wriggle our toes, even though we may never see a Tuan.

Source: *The Age* 19/9/02

Interesting Snippets

1) A satin bowerbird in Warrandyte?? Don't be ridiculous! Well I didn't see it, but it's true. We live at the end of Bradleys Lane. It was August 24th, I wasn't home at the time eldest son Daniel happened to walk past the open chook shed. Our chooks were out, happily wandering around the yard, scratching and pecking anything resembling food. Inside, to Daniel's delight, was a medium-sized bird, stocky, green and brown above, with much paler underparts scalloped in dark brown.

Rush to check the field-guides. They showed it was either a female or a young male Satin Bowerbird. (It takes seven years for the full splendour of the male's plumage to develop - glossy blue-black with violet highlights). Meanwhile the bird had found the door and flew over the back fence into the Park.

You'd expect to see them in the taller, wetter forests further east, say around Healseville. Local expert birder Don Saunders surmised that the increase in vineyards to our north might be encouraging them to venture closer to Melbourne. Has anyone else seen a bowerbird?

2) Strange business this. For the first nine years we lived here we occasionally heard but never saw any frogmouths. Now, for the second year in a row, we've had them nesting high up (~ 15 metres) in a large Yellow Box (*Eucalyptus melliodora*) in our front yard. You could get a sore neck if you looked up too long.

The flimsy messy nest of sticks must be glued to the branch - how else does it stay attached?

We first noticed the mother sitting in early September and just over a month later the fluffy white chick has emerged. They are a comical looking pair! According to a friend who knows

much more than we do about 'animals of the night' we should keep watch around dusk as that's when the male will fly in with some baby food. *Joan MacMahon*

3) What are those strange golfball-like objects emerging from my neighbour's garden? (We live in Yarra St., opposite the Old Dairy).

It's Thursday morning, so armed with a sample I head down to our nursery for a show and tell session. Lots of suggestions including alien eggs (!), truffles etc.

Then a bright idea strikes and we check fungi guru Bruce Fuhrer's book "A Guide to Australian Fungi" and discover they are stinkhorns.

Julie Bishop

4) Mid September on the Gippsland Lakes. Black Swans in their hundreds line the shore. We saw three sets of cygnets (one triplets, two sets of twins), grey, fluffy and very cute. They were still tiny and we presumed they were the first to hatch of this year's breeding season.

The backwaters and swamp around the lakes provide perfect breeding habitat for the swans. They build nests from sticks, rushes and other plant material and then line them with down.

Meanwhile Pelican numbers in the area seem to have steadily declined in recent years. Is this because they only breed on inland lakes in flood years, which we haven't had for a very long time? Or is there a more sinister reason?

The ongoing degradation of the lakes system and catchment must be putting pressure on numerous local species. Perhaps someone with more knowledge about birds could comment in next month's snippets. *Cathy Willis*

From the Nursery Manager

Thanks

Congratulations and thank you to everyone who has helped out in the nursery in the last year. You produced 18000 plants for the Biolink revegetation project (these have been planted by the Green Corps group, the majority at Stane Brae). You also exceeded the estimate for the community. This was lucky because the demand for local indigenous plants was far greater than last year. I hope you all enjoyed the Thursday propagation mornings and the Ranger lead activities.

Orders

It is seed sowing time again and preparations are underway for next autumn's planting season. Though we do hold various species throughout the year, the bulk of plants go to Park revegetation and other revegetation projects. If you are planning a large scale planting, have a grant from either Manningham or Nillumbik, and don't want to be disappointed when you come to the nursery, plan now, decide soon and place your order by the end of October. Orders can be faxed to the Nursery Manager, Warrandyte State Park, 98443343. Alternatively send them to PO Box 220 Warrandyte.



By B.G

Local Labels

2000 plant labels have been purchased with the FOWSP logo. Printed labels are: Parks Victoria depot, Pound Bend Rd, Warrandyte. Ph 9844 2659, Melway 23 C10.

Tube Tale

Katherane and Peter Watts returned more than 50 empty tubes, the result of a planting in Melbourne Hill Rd and Leber St.

Friends, Friends Everywhere

- Oliver Amici who has just built locally has become a FOWSP member. Welcome.
- Howard Geldard and Madelaine Hince turned up to help “decided to do something more active than just read the newsletter”. Good on them.
- Amy Symons and Shriyaa Gauton were ‘coaching’ 11 year old Stacey Louise on how to prick out *Carex impressa*. Amy was doing her first work placement in her Natural Resources Management course at Swinburne.
- Cecelia and Ethan Le Duc (and cousin Bradley) turned up to help. Cecelia and Matt are currently at Portland.
- And, Steve Asirvadem (from Sri Lanka) was introduced to our activity by Melanie Birtchnell.
- Bruce McQuade was seen as a busy tall ‘shadowy’ helper. Bruce used to be head gardener at Government House, Victoria.

Anonymous Arthropods

“A quarter of a million species of arthropods (insects, spiders and other joint-legged species) are thought to inhabit Australia, but only 60,000 of them have been formally described and named”
Source: *Ecos*, July-Sept 2002

Budget Boys

Peter Rennick, Environmental Planner, was seen ‘doing budgets’ with Andy Nixon in the deserted lunch room at the Depot.

Seed Sieves

Bill Roxburgh returned to the fold hoping to sort seeds, but the sieves were not to be seen – Josh arranged rapid speedy delivery.

Julie’s Jelly

Julie Bishop (at home) found a white puff ball with clear jelly in it. Julie finally identified it as one of the Phalloid (stinkhorns) – known to the initiated as *Clathrus siberius*. We all knew it was not the Warrandyte marzipan truffle.

Shriyaa’s Sights Are Set

Shriyaa has been helping out as part of her work experience for a Natural Resource Management course at Lilydale/Healseville Tafe.

She wants to help “save the world – native animals and plants and their habitats.” Also does voluntary work at Healseville Sanctuary.

Rabbit-of-the-River

“(Carp) are possibly the first scapegoat to have fins and scales.blamed for everything from river erosion to spreading disease, to declines in native fish numbers. Is this really the case?”

Read the surprising and fascinating article on pages 8-12, *Ecos*, July-Sept 2002 which can be found in the ‘blue box’ in the Folly.

Full of Fun

A firkin is half of a kilderkin (See Oxford dictionary).

Technical Talk

A bemused expression appeared on the face of one Ranger when asked about (a) Mountain Bikes and (b) what is chlorine bunkering?

Noticing a Noticeboard

Andy- ute	Cam – bush support office
Glen – office	Brian – annual leave
Frankie – sick	Colin – secondment
Marg – leave etc. etc.	

Burning Bush?

Unofficial sources say the “Fire crews may be called up pretty soon”.

Off the Shoulder

How did Josh injure his right shoulder – looking at an orchid?



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Fan-tailed Cuckoo
(Cuculus pyrrhophanus)

A slate grey bird with fawn underparts and a long grey and white barred tail. The Fan-tailed Cuckoo can be identified by its distinctive call – a mournful descending trill. The call of its close relative, the Pallid Cuckoo, is a hoarse ascending whistle.

Cuckoos lay their eggs in the nest of small birds like thornbills and wrens.

FOWSP Membership Form

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.....

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

Send to: FOWSP PO Box 220, Warrandyte 3113

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Receive a discount if you renew your membership for three years

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