

December 2003

Friends of Warrandyte State Park



Newsletter

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

FMT to be Reinstated

By Pat Coupar

While we have little or no chance of getting a ParkCare Officer back again, we have at least managed to get the Flora Management Team (FMT) reinstated.

The FMT was an initiative inspired by former Ranger-in-Charge Matt LeDuc who sadly died earlier this year. The team used to meet regularly to discuss various vegetation management issues (see 'Worth Repeating' this newsletter) relating to pest plants, revegetation and species enrichment planting.

Not since Ranger Cam Beardsell left earlier this year, have we had any coordinated flora activities between FOWSP and rangers. Of particular note, Cam instigated the rare species program and organised and helped FOWSP with the 'hands on' work on planting days.

To quote a certain ex-prime minister, life was not meant to be easy and it certainly hasn't been an easy year for the staff of Warrandyte State Park. The last six months have been particularly difficult with the well-publicised cuts to the environmental budget, rumours of the depot moving, and the ongoing issue of gates on mines. Some Park staff have had to renew their skills in weed control and other works previously carried out by contractors. The problem has been exacerbated by the fact that during the last six months two rangers have been overseas, some staff have been attending bushfires around the State, while others have been away on sick leave.

Until recently, when he attended the AGM, most of the committee had not met the Chief Ranger of the region, David Sewell. Perhaps we have been a little slack in not inviting him out to meet us, but such has been the communication breakdown with between rangers and 'Friends'. David Sewell came

to the committee meeting to confront the issues reported in our local papers that have caused so much negative publicity for Parks Victoria in recent months. Discussions were protracted and sometimes heated.

In answer to our request for a ParkCare, or some such educational officer, there was a definite - no. The reason, apart from the stock answer - no money - was that ParkCare Officers were part of a past era and were no longer required as rangers carry out the same job. We were told there will never (that word was later qualified) be more money or more staff for Warrandyte. With statements like that, we could venture to say there will never be the positive publicity Parks Victoria so desperately seek.

We, the 'Friends' were encouraged by David Sewell not to be a 'lobby group'. The Chief Ranger seemed to have difficulty understanding that FOWSP are part of the Friends Network which is affiliated to, and under the umbrella of, the Victorian National Parks Association.

The committee simply ran out of time to discuss other serious issues which would affect our group, such as the moving of the Rangers depot. No doubt we will hear more of this next year.

It was very clear that there is the definite need for a more open and honest communication between Parks Victoria and FOWSP. Over the last six months we have not been kept informed of events that will effect not only our group, but the whole Warrandyte community.

The 'Friends' used to pride itself on the close working relationship we had with Parks staff. Hopefully with the bringing back of the FMT, next year we can regain that special association that we have lost.

Koala News and Echidna Advice

From Julie Pryor

The koala count for 2003 for Suburbia was quite good, but a little disappointing for Warrandyte with only one Koala being spotted. It was seen in Bradleys Lane.



Other sightings were in Templestowe 3, Wonga Park 4, North Ringwood 2, Park Orchards 3, Eltham 1, Mitcham 1, Mill Grove 1, Christmas Hills 3, St Andrews 6, Upway 1, Olinda 4 and Benalla 1.

For the count we had 3 joeys, two of which I am raising, the other one was in Olinda. The two joeys I have are a female and a male. The female, Dally, came from Daylesford on July 30th 2003. Dally weighed 400 grams – a motorist, stopping to check the pouch of a dead Koala on the side of the road, found her. Today Dally weighs just over two kilograms. Unfortunately Dally does not like gum leaves! She is being convinced that they are the best food for her.

The male, Campbell or Cam, came from Portland on September 30th 2003. Cam weighed about 700 grams, his mother was also hit by a car and killed. As he was a little bigger than Dally we think he would have been on his mother's back as he had slight facial injuries and a very sore mouth. It was difficult to feed him at first, but he soon came good and now he enjoys his food. Today he weighs two and a quarter kilograms.

The Echidnas are on the move at present. I am receiving many calls from people wanting them removed from their garden. We leave these animals where they are as this is their breeding season and a female Echidna will leave her young in a burrow for up to four days, while she goes looking for food. If we move them out of their area the young are at risk of starvation if mother cannot find her way back to the burrow.

If you find an Echidna in your yard alert your neighbours it is in the area and ask them to keep any dogs and cats inside until the animal has had time to pass through the area. Dogs and cats like to sniff and paw at Echidnas so if your pet gets too close make sure the Echidna is not hurt, then check your pets nose and feet as these areas seem to get spiked.



Alcoa Frog Watch Garden of the Year 2003

The Frog-friendly Garden of the Year competition is on again. If you have built a frog pond or habitat you can enter - and win a great prize.

To enter simply send a picture (or 2 or 3) of your frog habitat along with your own personal views on your pond building experience (max. 250 words). You may wish to describe how you built your habitat, problems you encountered and how you overcame them, why you chose particular species of plants, and list any species of frogs that are now enjoying your pond. Your

'garden' may be either urban or rural - from a small courtyard to a sprawling wetland.

The prize (apart from the prestige) is having the Alcoa Frog Watch travelling frog education show at your disposal for one day. The education team (and a bunch of delightful frogs) will visit a school of your choice to entertain and educate the students. The winning garden will also be posted on the frogs.org.au website.

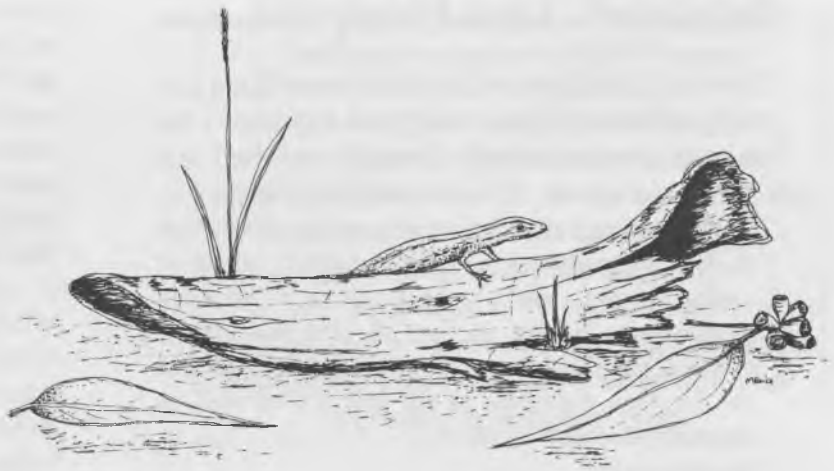
Entries close on December 26th 2003 and the winners will be notified on January 12th 2004. Send your entries to: gardenoftheyear@frogs.org.au, enquiries to the same address.

Recipe for a Wildlife Garden

- A tall, mature tree, native to your area
- A patch of natural mulch for beetles and worms
- A clump of dense shrubs where birds can shelter
- Nectar plants for honeyeaters
- A cat-safe bird bath
- A frog-friendly pond with unpolluted water
- A warm, sheltered corner for lizards
- Daisies for butterflies.



- Set aside a corner, protected from cats, dogs and children
- Plant a flowering nectar tree, *Eucalyptus* or *Callistemon*, preferably native to your area
- Add a *Leptospermum* for seed-eaters and an *Eriostemon* for insects
- Close together, add three low, long-flowering *Grevillea* for nectar
- Around their feet, plant dwarf *Correa*, *Banksia* or low growing daisy-flowers and generously mulch the area with finely chopped bark and twigs
- Hang a shallow birdbath from a branch or fix to a post, under or close to sheltering shrubs, and preferably not in full sunshine
- Place one large, flat stone to catch the sun



For further information about creating **Gardens for Wildlife**, please phone 1300 305 342

email. boca@ozemail.com.au

fax 9894 4048 or write to BOCA, PO Box 185, Nunawading 3131

Even traditional gardens with a stretch of lawn surrounded by flowering shrubs and annuals can provide habitat for wildlife. Please contact BOCA if you would like a list of proven bird-attracting plants from our Garden Birds Survey

A list of local plants can be found in the following publications: '**Native Splendour**' published by Manningham City Council and '**Gardener's Guide to Indigenous Planting**' published by FOWSP and available at the market trailer, the Warrandyte Post Office and other local outlets.



Worth Repeating

Flora Management Team: Warrandyte SP

By Pat Coupar and David Van Bockel

The idea to form a Flora Management Team (FMT) was first proposed in 1994 by park staff. It was decided to keep the team small - just four members: two staff members and two members of the Friends of Warrandyte State Park (FOWSP).

Aims and objectives

The prime objective of the FMT is to achieve ecological management of the flora of WSP taking into consideration the WSP Management Plan (1990), CNR policies and budgets available. A significant factor in the FMT achieving its objectives is the high level of expertise that exists among FOWSP members and park staff.

FMT meetings are a forum for discussion and decision making. They provide an opportunity for exchange of information between park staff and the Friends group. For instance, the Friends may hear about aspects of the works program relevant to flora management, such as current weed or rabbit control, tree planting and any proposed development works; in turn the Friends inform the rangers about research projects being carried out by their members at the nursery as well as ongoing propagation work.

Results so far

One of the initial decisions made by the FMT was that top priority must be the protection of threatened species, whereas revegetation of areas where weed control has been established was a lower priority, and revegetation of former agricultural sites was lower again.

Management strategies for a number of threatened species are already showing results. At least two species *Olearia myrsinoides* (Silky Daisy-bush) and *Leuchrysum albicans* (Hoary Sunray)-have been saved from local extinction by propagation and replanting into sites that are secure from weeds and rabbits.

Other examples of successful flora management include the identification, through flora surveys, of 'hot spots'; these are sites in the

park where a high number of regionally significant species occur (often orchids) in a relatively small area. As a consequence a number of rabbit exclusion fences have been erected at these locations. Intensive handweeding has been carried out and records kept of results. The exclusion of rabbits and reduction of weed competition has resulted in slow, but nevertheless dramatic increase in the growth of plants inside the fences, compared to that outside. As well, there has been a good number of seedlings germinate inside the fences that now have the potential to grow unhindered; notably *Acacia* spp. (Wattles), *Eucalyptus* spp. (Eucalypts), *Cassinia* spp. (Cassinias) and *Bursaria spinosa* (Sweet Bursaria).

An exciting bonus has been the appearance of orchids not previously recorded at the site. One of these is *Caladenia lindleyana* (Lindley's Spider Orchid), which is considered to be 'rare' in Victoria. In one of the most successful 'hot spot' fences, 20 different species of orchid have been recorded in a fence about 30 metres by 30 metres. These fence sites have also provided a 'safe' location for replanting some of the 150 locally threatened species that occur in the park.

The future

In addition to the various reserves within the WSP, park staff now have the extra responsibility of the revegetation and flora management of other reserves outside the park, but under National Parks Service control. Staff reductions and budget cuts make flora management more challenging for the FMT,

The success of the FMT depends on a close working relationship between park staff and FOWSP, involving sharing of information and mutual support. It is an example of how public participation in the management of public land at the community level has benefited Warrandyte State Park. It has also provided an opportunity for Friends to apply their local knowledge while gaining experience in flora management and obtaining satisfaction for their efforts.

This article first appeared in Park Watch, the Journal of the Victorian National Parks Association, December 1995



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.

The nursery is open for plant sales (by donation) every Thursday 10.00am to 12md and the first Sunday of each month 2.00pm to 400pm.



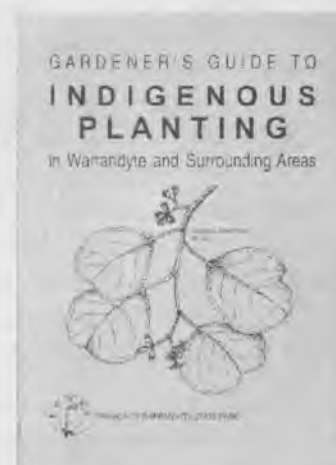
Important Notice

Please note the nursery is only open for plant sales during the above times. Some members and non-members have been turning up for plants (and advice) outside these hours without prior arrangement. If you find it impossible to come during official opening times please contact the nursery manager first.

FOWSP's new brochure



FOWSP's Planting Guide



FOWSP Committee 2003

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Pat Coupar 9844 1650 Newsletter Editor
Ray Clarke 9841 8507 Treasurer
Sue Shepherd 9844 3754 Assistant Treasurer
Peter Curry 9844 0958 Secretary
Lee Speedy 9437 0894 Membership Secretary
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Karen Reynolds 9712 0797
Joan MacMahon 9844 3213
Michelle Hanslow 0402251577

Wildlife Rescue

Julie Pryor 9722 1117

Market

Marie Krause 9712 0498

Park Office 9844 2659

Nursery Manager 0408800026

**There will be NO newsletter in
January. The February
newsletter will be a
special colour edition
celebrating our 21st
Birthday**



*A Happy Christmas and a very Happy
New Year to all our
members*



Platypus Conservancy

By Geoff Williams, Director of the
Platypus Conservancy

Manningham Environmental Seminar
Report by Michelle Hanslow

Platypus are only found in Australia, from Cooktown down the east coast to Tasmania. Some have been introduced into South Australia. The platypus in Tasmania have been found to have some genetic differences with the mainland populations, they are also larger. Platypus are not confined to clear streams, as many people assume, but are also found in billabongs, man-made lakes and farm dams. They have even been found in the Mullum Mullum Creek, despite its pollution.

Despite the infrequency of sightings and its decline in local areas, the platypus is regarded as 'common'. As a result, its legal status cannot be used as leverage to apply pressure on government or businesses to improve agricultural and market garden practices.

Platypus are nocturnal. They have poor eyesight and hearing and sense the underwater environment by using pressure and chemical and electro receptors. While platypus can stay underwater for up to 14 minutes, they need to wedge themselves under rocks and snags to remain submerged. Their fur keeps them warm with two layers, including an incredibly dense underlayer with longer guard hairs.

Contrary to popular belief, platypus are not generally aquatic animals - they spend more time out of the water, in underground burrows. They do however, have webbed feet to help them swim, and long claws with which to dig, and when they do so the webbing can be folded out of the way. The bill is not hard like a ducks, instead it is soft and leathery. Adults have a grinding plate to process food, whilst juveniles have teeth.

The male platypus produces venom on spurs, found on the inside of the hind ankles. This venom is very painful to humans as it contains four different pain-causing agents previously unknown to medical science! The males use this defence when they fight each other during the mating season.

Platypus have been around for an incredibly long time. They have been called 'living fossils' as their ancestors are said to have appeared 110 million years ago. Fossil records found in Patagonia date back to Gondwana time. Despite having been around for so long, science still has a long way to go before really understanding them - there are many ecological and biological facts

unknown. Platypus are hard to study as their burrows are relatively inaccessible, they do not leave scats behind and they are generally not easy to observe, being either underwater or underground for most of the time.

Over the last few years the Australian Platypus Conservancy (APC) has tried to redress this issue and has been actively surveying platypus.

The main issues for platypus survival are: water quality, riverbank and creek structure, exotic trees, and people issues - namely litter. Water quality problems are related mostly to heavy metals, not so much sewage, e-coli.

Riverbank structure affects platypus in a number of ways: erosion of banks, sediment build up and exotic trees, particularly willows which are problematic as their roots form such tight mats making burrowing difficult. In addition, they drop lots of leaves all at once, which again causes problems for sustaining populations of invertebrates.

People issues are a major concern, not only by reducing their habitat, but also for the injuries that are inflicted on the platypus through litter in the waterways. One in ten platypus in urban areas has something wrapped around them - plastic rings, elastic bands, 6-pack holders etc.

In 1995, Mullum Mullum Creek was the first urban creek surveyed by the APC. In the first few years most platypus were found in the lower 4km of the creek, below Warrandyte Road, and the assumption was that although they were using the creek, they were dependant on the Yarra River to supply sufficient food and habitat for survival. Since 1999 they have been seen further upstream.

Platypus have been found in the first 4kms of the Andersons Creek from the Yarra. A lot of work has been done on this creek system and the APC are hoping that numbers will increase as a result.

Drought has adversely affected platypus numbers, as creeks have shrunk, competition increases and there is increased susceptibility to predation by foxes in the shallow water.

To find a platypus look for strong circular ripples, with bubbles in the centre and a v-shaped bow and wake that forms as they swim along. If you see a platypus, contact the APC with information on where and when for their records.



Worth Repeating

Daily grind wears down koalas' sex lives

By Penny Fannin

The older a male koala gets, the more time he spends feeding and the less time he has for social activities such as mating, Monash University researchers have found.

PhD researcher Mr Murray Logan, from the School of Biological Sciences, says this drop in amorous behaviour is a reflection on the state of male koalas' teeth. Koala teeth wear down as a result of their grinding eucalyptus leaves - their primary source of food. Biologists use a koala's tooth wear as an indicator of its age.

"We wanted to know, as the koalas' teeth wore down, how their feeding was affected" Mr Logan said. "We looked at how long they spent feeding and whether they ate more or chewed more with each mouthful."

In collaboration with Professor Gordon Sanson, head of Monash's School of Biological Sciences, Mr Logan found that the more worn a male koala's teeth were, the longer it needed to spend feeding each day.

The research has been published in the *Australian Journal of Zoology*.

"Koalas sleep or rest 20 hours a day. Those with more worn-down teeth have to spend twice as long feeding - four to five hours rather than 2.5 hours - to extract enough energy from their food," Mr Logan said. "So there's not much time for them to do anything else if they're to get their rest as well."

Mr Logan studied six male koalas, all with the same weight and body condition, on Raymond Island off the Victorian coast. The only apparent difference between the animals was their degree of tooth wear. Two koalas had a low degree, two

had a medium degree and two had a high degree of wear.

Mr Logan fitted radio collars with microphones to each koala, which allowed him to follow each animal as it moved from tree to tree, observing it from a distance and recording how much time it spent bellowing - one of the ways male koalas exert their social dominance and advertise their position to receptive females.

"The more bellowing a male does, the more dominant he is and the more likely he is to mate," Mr Logan said.

He found that koalas with low and high-tooth wear spent only two to three minutes 24 hours bellowing, whereas with medium-tooth wear minutes. Koalas with low-tooth wear have not reached sexual maturity.

"Koalas with more worn teeth were spending more time feeding and less time being social. These



koalas also moved less so had smaller home ranges, and they spent less time on the the main social behaviours such as scent marking and bellowing," Mr Logan said.

"In that sense, their teeth defined their reproductive life span."

Source: *Monash News* 2003

Postscript

Following on from last month's newsletter, urging our members to write letters to ministers, we suggest that you send copies to the following person:

Professor Lyndsay Neilson, Secretary Department of Sustainability and Environment,
Level 7, 8 Nicholson Street,
East Melbourne VIC 3002.

Changing Scenes

By Alwynne Buntine

A stroll beside the river, along a walking track,
From the Bend of Islands to Black Flat and back.
The terrain along the river never ceases to amaze,
The ever changing land structure each time you shift your gaze.

Sometimes you're on the cliff tops, far from the water's edge,
Then before you know it you're walking through the sedge
That grows along the waterline and up the flattened bank,
You have to clamber through the mud and you curse where your
foot just sank.

Thankful for your walk boots that kept the water out,
You quickly look around to relieve your mind of doubt.
Surely you've lost the path, it cannot go this way,
Then you see straight ahead and in the mud you stay.

Soon it rises gently, you leave the mud behind,
The walk on soft leaf litter, as along the track you wind.
Through the gentle Burgan, with its mossy floor,
Where in the right season, fungi's found and more.

As you cross the car park and find the track again,
You're walking through the trees, but it isn't quite the same.
The forest here is different, there's even a fern or two,
And as you walk across a creek, the river's hidden from view.

There's a calmness in the forest, that makes you want to pause,
To stop, listen to the bird sounds and try to find the cause
Of a tiny, tiny cheeping you can hear above your head,
That'll cease if you keep walking, so you stand quite still instead.

Hoping you might find the owner of the call,
Or just some indication that there's anything there at all.
You stand and watch bemusedly when you find the one you seek,
A minute little Thornbill with an insect in its beak.

Now the path is steeper to the cliffs you climb once more,
Leaving behind the shelter and the forest floor.
You walk a little further to emerge from amongst the trees,
Into a grassy clearing where you feel a gentle breeze
Touch you on the face and finger through your hair,
As you find yourself a seat to sit and drink in the morning air.

Again the scene has changed as you look to the river below,
Where it flows across some rocks and bubbles as it goes.
Shortly you rise and stretch as you bend to pick up your pack,
Then returning to the path you commence your journey back.





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Cool-temperate Water-skink

(Eulamprus tympanum)



It's name means "eardrum good-beautiful". I guess that is a good example of why common names are not always the literal translation of the Latin or Greek. Mind you Cool-temperate Water-skink is just as much as a mouthful!

This shiny golden flecked, blackish-brown skink is common in Warrandyte. It can often be seen sunning itself on rocks close to the river. It feeds on insects, spiders, snails, tadpoles and even small frogs. Look out for them on warm days this summer.

FOWSP Membership Form

Name

Address

.....

Tel. no.

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

Send to: FOWSP PO Box 220, Warrandyte 3113

Special Membership Offer

Receive a discount if you renew your membership for three years

Single: \$40.00

Family: \$50.00

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