

March 2007

Friends of Warrandyte State Park



Newsletter

Friends of Warrandyte State Park (FOWSP) Inc. PO Box 220 Warrandyte 3113
ABN 94170156655/ACN A0024890C

River Weeds

By Pat Coupar

Warrandyte has a number of serious weeds that grow primarily along river and creek banks. In the past a number of surveys have been carried out by canoe to map these weeds using a GPS. But river banks are a constantly changing ecosystem as water levels rise and fall.

Weeds are spread by seed, rhizomes and other vegetative material that breaks off and is carried by the water. These germinate and take root in the rich silty mud exposed when water levels are low.

Some of the weeds that are a particular problem along our stretch of the Yarra River include Yellow Flag Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*) – a large clump-forming plant with broad strappy leaves, large yellow flowers in summer followed by dangling green seed pods. Plants grow from a mat of thick rhizomes. Interestingly Yellow Flag is fairly restricted in its distribution within Victoria with the Yarra River being one of its strongholds.

The weed can be treated by chemical or mechanical means and with good follow up it is possible to control infestations quite well. This summer, work has been carried out by contractors along several stretches of the river targeting Yellow Flag Iris. Funding has come from Melbourne Water and Osborne Peninsula Landcare.

FOWSP has also played a part with a TAG activity concentrating on the Yellow Flag on the north side of the river opposite Taroona Reserve (see article by Joan MacMahon).

Melbourne Water has an ongoing commitment to the control of river weeds along the Yarra and a number of its feeder creeks. The main weeds include Willow, Blackberry, Tradescantia, Honeysuckle and Ivy, as well as some new and emerging weeds like Box Elder, Blue Water Speedwell, Parrots Feather, Vietnamese Mint and Reed Canary Grass.

The Parks Victoria section of Mullum Mullum Creek will also be targeted for Box Elder, Desert Ash and Rambling Dock in particular.

Rangers Cam Beardsell and Conrad Annal play a key role in supervision and liaising with Melbourne Water representatives.

Recently contractors have carried out follow up control of St Peter's Wort from Jumping Creek to Fitzsimons Lane. St Peter's Wort – a close relative of St John's Wort – was only discovered in the area a few years ago growing along the banks of Jumping Creek and The Yarra. It is critical to prevent further spread of this potentially serious environmental weed.

Another lesser known weed is Rice Cut-grass (*Leersia oryzoides*) that, in Victoria, is confined to The Yarra River and a swamp near Yellingbo. Unfortunately it does not look out of place on the river banks and is often overlooked.

If any member is interested in seeing the river by water, FOWSP has a couple of canoes, kept at the Rangers depot that can be borrowed.

Bush Backyard

McNaught Comet

By Pat Coupar

Photo by Ross Coupar

Did you see it? Well, after days or rather nights of cloud, the skies finally cleared. But Warrandyte wasn't really the ideal place for comet watching, especially as this one was best seen just after sunset about a hand span above the horizon.

Luckily we were off to our Mallacoota house the next day. With advice from locals on the best place from which to view the comet we headed out just after sunset to the lookout platform at Tip Beach, near the golf club. Another couple with the same idea were there before us and had located the comet in the south-western sky.

It was sensational. Even without binoculars. But with them, wow! A brilliant head and a massive flowing tail. The head of the comet, I read later, is about the size of Mount Everest and the tail about 30 kilometres long.

The comet was discovered last year by Robert McNaught at the Siding Spring Observatory in NSW.



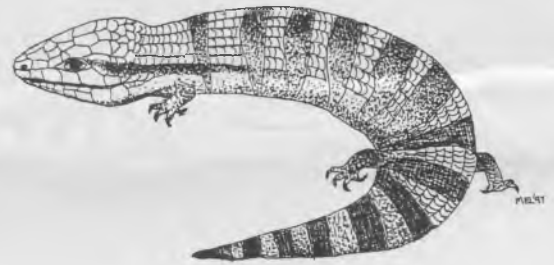
McNaught Comet at Yarra Glen

Creating a Blue-tongue Lizard Friendly Garden.

By Steven Katsineris

In many parts of Australia we are fortunate to have native wildlife sharing our suburban backyards with us. Some gardens are even the habitat of large lizards, like the lovely and inoffensive Eastern Blue-tongue Lizard

Blue-tongue Lizards are a common sight in our



outer Melbourne garden during summer, sunning themselves on the earth, rocks or on paving. These lizards (actually a skink) are very helpful to have around in the garden because they eat a lot of snails, slugs, caterpillars and insects that will otherwise be feeding on your much loved plants. They also keep ground dwelling spiders populations in check. There are some easy things you can do to create a garden that will invite Blue-tongues to take up residence in your yard.

Blue-tongues adapt well to gardens where there is ample shelter. Planting low growing shrubs will encourage them by providing the cover and protection they need to safely move about your garden. Also rocks, logs, woodpiles, bricks, horizontal pipes and leaf litter provide safe places for them to hide.

As well you should provide shallow water containers, so that Blue-tongues have water available for drinking and bathing. The bowls ought to be low and easy for them to climb in and out of. Terracotta or ceramic water dishes are best; because they don't tip over easily, but plastic bowls will also do, especially if you put a small stone or some pebbles in them.

Blue-tongue Lizards are slow moving and mainly defenceless, relying on a bluff display for protection. When threatened Blue-tongues will open their mouths wide and stick out their blue tongue. They also lift their large head, hiss and flatten their body to frighten off predators.

Blue-tongue Lizards face several threats; while young they are particularly vulnerable to predators like Kookaburras, Currawongs and other large birds.

Continued on next page

Bush Backyard continued:

But their greatest risk is from domestic and feral cats and dogs. Keeping your pets under control where Blue-tongue Lizards live will help protect them from harm. Also human activities, like mowing lawns and driving the car hurt and kill a lot of Blue-tongues. And gardeners using snail baits are a hazard, because unfortunately the Blue-tongues eat the poisoned snails and slugs and they are themselves poisoned. So avoid using snail baits near areas where Blue-tongued Lizards live. Encouraging Blue-tongues in your yard will drastically reduce your need for snail baits, as they are a very effective and environmentally friendly way of controlling these garden pests.

It is a real delight to observe such wild animals so close up and in encouraging these basically harmless lizards to live in our yards we are also contributing to the continued survival of this marvelous species in our suburbs.

More Wonderful Wildlife!

By Joan MacMahon

I'm so glad I decided to change to a local doctor. Now instead of driving to Templestowe, I can walk, in summer anyway, across the river and be at there in all of 5 minutes. So the day before Australia Day in mid afternoon I step into the river at my usual spot - just downstream of the confluence with Anderson's Creek, not expecting to see anything other than a Black Duck or if I'm lucky a White-faced Heron.

The river's so low that on our side lots of large pebbles are sitting out of about 10cm of water. I hear a splash and one of the pebbles moves! It's a platypus, about a metre away, searching for food in the gravelly bottom and on the algae covered rocks. For several minutes I am rooted to the spot, observing every movement. Then as quietly as I can I head off for my appointment.



I'm back in 20 minutes and it's still there! For the next half hour I squat on the rocks never

taking my eyes away from this 30 cm long furry thing with rubber-like extensions at both ends.

Can you believe this story gets even more amazing? After about 15 minutes she/he swam between my legs, brushing my left foot! It was hard to resist touching its fur, but I'm pleased to say I did.

I zipped up to the house for a while and came back just before 6.00pm. Still it was clambering/feeding amongst the rocks. This time I sat on an upturned bucket and watched even longer. Now I can describe the eyes, nostrils, ear depressions, pale lines running forward from nostrils to beak edge and its occasional scratching of its fur.

Around 6.30pm it disappeared amongst the plants lining the bank. What a day! Such a pity the rest of my family were away! Couldn't wait to tell them about my amazing experience.

Echidna Watching

By Sharon Mason

On Thursday February 8th I sat by a dam and watched an Echidna. The day was overcast, temperature mild. The Echidna walked towards the dam. "Maybe he is going to have a drink" I thought. The Echidna did not stop at the water's edge as I had been expecting, but waded in. It stood, part submerged and appeared to drink from the surface of the water. I could not see the parts of the Echidna below the surface of the water.

Next the Echidna put its beak and face down into the water. It looked as if it was foraging for food on the dam floor or soil beneath. It lifted its head then down its beak went again. It moved forward approximately 5 metres I the shallows and at various locations along this distance its beak and head were put under water as if searching for food.

The Echidna scratched its back and on a number of occasions pointed its beak to the sky. It walked out of the water (no 'dog-type shakes') and walked up the dam wall and put its beak into the soil then walked on.

Was the Echidna feeding underwater? Is this behaviour common? Any feedback greatly appreciated.

What's happening in your backyard this month?

Contributions can either be dropped into the editor at 143 Brackenbury St, Warrandyte or via email at ian.coupar@vcp.monash.edu.au

Close Encounters of the Feathered Kind

Lynda Rogan

With another hot weekend predicted, we decided it would be a good time for a few days camping down at Cape Conran. Like most of the State it has been extremely dry in the Marlo, Cape Conran area so we weren't expecting a lot in bloom. We were hoping to see the Blotched Hyacinth Orchid (*Dipodium variegatum*), close relative of the Rosy Hyacinth Orchid. Anything else would be a bonus.

Saturday and Sunday were hot but comfortable in the Banksia Bluff Camp Ground and it was pleasant canoeing and swimming on the Yeerung and the Bemm Rivers. At the end of the day I was ready for a cold shower in the single wooden stall provided. Water was cold enough that the shower was brief and as I turned the water off, I noted something fluttering on the wet concrete in the open space under the shower wall. I stood still to see what it might be.

First a small brown bird darted in then immediately out again. I waited and it returned having a quick drink as it fluttered through. This seemed to be the signal that all was okay.. A series of small birds darted in for a quick drink at my feet. I recognized Brown Thornbills, Scrub Wrens, a young fairy wren and then a Yellow-faced Honeyeater peeked under the wall but wasn't bold enough to enter. A larger olive brown bird fanned it's tail and lifted a ragged brown

crest and stayed to drink at my feet for several seconds before looking up and beating a quick retreat. After consulting the Pizzey and Knight, I realized this had to be a juvenile Eastern Whipbird *Psopodes olivaceus*. It must have been a very young bird as it hadn't yet developed the white cheek patch.

The Whipbird is normally quite a secretive bird and more often heard than seen. The long whip call, one of the most characteristic sounds of the Australian bush, is performed as a duet. The male makes the drawn out whip crack and the female usually follows quickly with a sharp "choo-choo".

The range of the Eastern Whipbird is from northern Queensland south to Victoria in a coastal band. In the north, its distribution has become patchy where its habitat has been cleared. The birds remain in the same area all year round. I felt very lucky to get such a close look at this youngster.

Oh, we were also lucky to find one plant only of the Blotched Hyacinth-orchid in fresh bloom, as all the rest were shrivelled or finished.

References: Boles, W.E. 1988. *The Robins & Flycatchers of Australia*. Angus and Robertson and The National Photographic Index of Australian Wildlife, Sydney.
Pizzey, G. & Knight, F. 1997. *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*. Angus and Robertson, Sydney. .. Schodde, R. & Tideman, S.c. (eds) 1990. *Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds (2nd Edition)*. Reader's Digest (Australia) Pty Ltd, Sydney.

Dust off those Notebooks

In the northern hemisphere there are many studies linking the already observed warming temperatures to changes in the environment, such as flowering and fruiting occurring earlier, changes in mating behaviour and animals breeding earlier.

So what is happening in Australia? We don't have much information, although, with the help of naturalists we have already discovered that a number of Western Australian birds have changed the timing of their migration and that plants in the greater Melbourne region have altered when they flower – but the Australian picture is sparse and *we need your help*.

However, as many of our species only occur in Australia what is happening in the northern hemisphere might not apply to our flora and fauna. This makes it critical to determine the impact of climate change on the Australian environment to enable us to better manage it into the future.

The greatest hurdle to achieving this is knowing what information has already been collected and then how to get access to it. This lead to the development of the National Ecological Meta

Database, a project run by the Bureau of Meteorology, the University of Melbourne, Macquarie University and the Australian Greenhouse Office. This database is located at <http://www.bom.gov.au/nemd/> and access is available to anyone free of charge.

We need people who have been recording information, such as breeding records, daily or weekly presence/absence, flowering dates, bird arrival dates, etc., to list information about their records on this website. The website will only collect information about your records and how to obtain access to them; the records themselves remain in your custody, giving you final say in who and for what purpose they can be used. The website can also be used to search for other organisations or individuals that may have records of interest to you.

If you want to know more about the project or have any questions please visit our website <http://www.bom.gov.au/nemd/> or contact Dr Lynda Chambers at the Bureau of Meteorology Research Centre. GPO Box 1289
Melbourne Vic 3111
(03) 9669 4784 nemd@bom.gov.au

Report on Feb TAG Activity

By Joan MacMahon

We'd originally advertised attacking Yellow Iris at the Koornong, however a couple of us had gone there to check and found very little iris left – thanks to some great work some time ago by Cathy Willis, Pat Coupar, and Peggie and Lawrie Safstrom.

So the famous stretch of river opposite Taroon Reserve (see the other article I wrote about a platypus) beckoned as it's got a massive infestation of these hardy garden escapees – ok I know some people like them 'cos the flowers are pretty but they don't last long and these plants spread so efficiently they push out all the indigenous beauties. It's not easy to dig out (You've got to make sure you get every bit of the roots) and some of the clumps are over 2 metres long.

By sheer fluke I'd found out Melb. Water is funding some iris control works in this stretch of the Yarra – the clumps on the Taroon Reserve side had been sprayed in the middle of January, and as I write (Feb 4th) are starting to look sick. Apparently the plan is to at some stage do the Nillumbik side from a dinghy – some of the bank is so steep it'd be impossible to get in by foot.

We decided to do a bit of digging out and a lot of cutting of the fruits, which were full of ripe seed ready to float downstream and start new infestations. (Spraying doesn't kill the seeds).

So ten of us (including rangers Kylie and Dave) had a lovely time, some of us walking in the shallows and others sticking to the bank. Dave even enjoyed a swim as he floated the bag containing the fruits of his hour or so's work back to the access track. Ray Kruger did a great job – actually completely getting rid of a massive clump.

Between us we worked over about an 80 metre stretch and once we'd finished with the iris turned to cutting back the all enveloping Japanese Honeysuckle and pulling some of the Penny Royal (a member of the mint family which just loves growing on muddy Yarra banks.)

Well pleased with our labours we retired back to my place (a minute away!) for a very pleasant morning tea cum lunch (thank you Josh!)

When planning any weed removal works it's sensible to check whether there'll be good plants available to take up the newly vacated spots. With Josh's help I've compiled a list of indigenous plants growing in that section of the Yarra. They are, roughly from smallest to tallest: Swamp Stonecrop, Swamp Club-rush Austral Brooklime, Lesser Joy-weed, Spotted Knotweed, Slender Knotweed, Stinging Nettle – it does too!, Water Plantain, Australian Gypsywort, Tall Sedge and River Club-rush.

The section Ray cleared has a healthy population of the gypsywort, the stinging nettle and the club-rush so I'll try to remember to report back on what does best.



P.S. IF anyone would like to visit the site I'd be happy to point out the plants and the spot where I had my 'platypus experience'. I've also recently learned to recognize freshwater mussels and clams and will happily show anyone. Phone me on 98443213.

Wildlife Rescue

By Julie Pryor

The Koalas have been having a bad time over the summer. We have lost 15 from this area since October 21st. The 15 deaths have been due to a variety of reasons, from dog attack to hit by cars and old age.

During January I took in 6 koalas from the bush fire area in Warrnambool. We were given 3 males & 3 females. Only one female had obvious burns on her hand, these burns were not causing her too much trouble and she is ready to go back home as soon as she can be transported. The 3 males have already returned. They came in with smoke inhalation and dehydration problems and no burns. Ten days after they came in, one of the males developed a burn on his arm; this healed and was not a problem. The other 2 females were not so lucky and we lost both of them and one joey which one had in her pouch. The joey was very small and it had bruising on its body.

The burns these koalas had were under the fur and were not visible at first. They were all Vet. checked as they were captured in Warrnambool. When they came to us we could not see any major problems and only one female seemed unwell.

Dr Derek Fairley, Kerri Fairley and a friend were with me when we met up with the Koalas in Warrandyte. Derek attended to the Koalas twice a day for the first week, then daily from there.

Feeding these Koalas has been made a lot easier thanks to Parks Victoria and all the trees at Stane Brae. Thanks also to Adrianna Simmons, her husband, Fernando, and Kerri and Derek Fairley whom have all spent time collecting Gum for these hungry animals.

The Koala still to go back to Warrnambool has a very tiny joey in her pouch, she will return soon. D.S.E. will organize to pick up Koalas from Healesville Sanctuary on the same trip. Healesville took in many of the burnt Koalas.

People in Plants

By Shelagh Morton

Billardiera scandens (Apple Berry)

Jacques-Julien Houtou de la Billardiere, (1755-1834), is a long flowery name to bestow on a pretty climber. La Billardiere was the botanist and medical doctor on the Bruny D'Entrecasteaux expedition ("La Recherche" and L'Esperance" 1791-1796) sent by the National Assembly of France to search for the lost ships of La Perouse and to actively increase the knowledge of science and natural history. He collected over 4000 plants many not previously known, in King George Sound, near Esperance and Tasmania.

We know him in our area by the varieties of *Billardiera scandens* and also the dense tussock, *Poa labillardierei* we plant so much. He named the floral emblem of Tasmania (*Eucalyptus globulus*) and of Victoria (*Epacris impressa*).

He wrote accounts of the voyage that included generous observations on the Aborigine, and published definitive works on the vegetation of the southern lands. His *Novae Hollandiae plantarum specimen* (1804-1806) is regarded as the first general flora of Australia.



Labillardiere's name is commemorated in palms, mosses, lichens, mushrooms and algae; not to mention a peninsula, a cape, animals and skins. The genus *Labillardiera* was named in his honour by Sir James Edward Smith, the first president of the Linnean Society in London. His

collection is now in the museum in Florence. I read that he was an independent, active, versatile and devoted naturalist as well as a committed republican.

From his *Relation du voyage a la recherche de La Perouse* I have found a moving quote when he was on one of his botanizing expeditions to Mt La Perouse, Recherche Bay 1793: "...solitary in the midst of these silent woods, the majesty of which was half disclosed to me by the feeble gleam of the stars, I felt myself penetrated with a sentiment of admiration of the grandeur of nature, which it is beyond my power to express."

News from the Committee

Rangers Report:

- All park staff have been on continuous deployment with the ongoing bushfires and as a result no significant progress on park projects has been made.
- Rabbit program is underway
- Several houses have been acquired for the park and one has already been demolished.
- The Nursery water supply is not secure with the ongoing drought. Contingency plans are being put in place.
- An afternoon tea is being held for volunteers as part of National Volunteer week. Parks Vic will recognise volunteer groups that have more than 25 years of service. FOWSP is 25 years old this year. Andy Nixon will coordinate. The tea will be held on Friday 18th May, 15:00 to 17:30 at the Mt. Dandenong Observatory.

Other Business:.

- Joan MacMahon has been elected on to the committee and has offered to be FOWSP contact person.
- Martyn Hiley has offered to take the minutes on an ongoing basis.
- Peter Curry has offered to take responsibility for the market trailer

Committee meetings are held at 7.30pm in the meeting room at the Rangers Office, Pound Bend Rd, Warrandyte on the first Tuesday of the month. Except for April when the meeting is on Wednesday April 11th. All committee meetings are open to any member who wishes to come along.

Market Volunteers

A big thank you to the following people who volunteered their time on the FOWSP trailer at the February Warrandyte market: Ray Kruger, Sue Shepherd, Cath Andrew, Mark and Margaret Hassell, Wolfgang and Marie Krause. The trailer was delivered by Peter Curry and returned by Wolfgang Krause.

Anyone who would like to be rostered on to help with the trailer, even for just one hour, can contact Marie Krause on 9712 0498. New members especially welcome - no previous experience necessary.

"I SPY"

By B.G



Snakes Seen

Lynda Rogan, while in the Portland area, late January saw amongst other things – tiger snakes.

Jan Smids had a brown snake on her property – an about the same time, four wedge-tail eagles flew overhead (Fourth Hill area).

Keith Jardine also saw a snake on his allotment recently.

House "Hoovered"

As I Spy drove down Pound Bend Road to the WSP depot I thought I had become disorientated! Why? The house which had been on the right hand side of the depot entry gate had been quickly demolished and removed and the land smoothed into a pleasing undulating contour.

Rangers Realigning

David Moore, ranger, is leaving us after eighteen months service. David is heading to Western Australia for a holiday. Jodie Godfrey, ranger, is now engaged to Cameron Davis, who is with the DSE (Toolangi). Congratulations. Michael Dickman and Lauren Dodd, temporary summer rangers are with us til April 15th this year.

Musical Member

Brian James, as well as being seen helping at the nursery will also be seen in May in 'High Society' – a musical at the Karralika Theatre.

Louise at La Trobe

Louise Romanin visited the FOWSP activity at the depot recently. Louise is starting a Bio-scientific course at La Trobe University this month. Her main interest is Botany.

Unvisited Venue

The Jumping Creek area was to be the venue for (Maroondah) Australian Plants Society garden visit led by FOWSP member, Bev Hanson, on February 18th this year. However, due to 38^o Celsius temperature, the walk was postponed.

Primary Plants

Some water plants are being cultivated at the nursery for use by Templestowe Heights Primary School.

Significant Sight

Seen in the North Ringwood shopping centre, sipping coffee, was our newest FOWSP committee member – Joan MacMahon. And what was Joan reading? A tome on 'Sites of botanical significance in the City of Manningham'. Joan works with the Manningham bush crew.

Going Gorgon

With all the talk of 'the costly (carbons) geo-sequestration option' the process is as yet unproven on a commercial scale. The Australian Government will supply \$60,000,000 for a "demonstration project involving liquefying the carbon dioxide so it can be piped to the injection site 2.5kms underground into a geological structure". This will occur at Barrow Island off the north coast of Western Australia for "the as yet undeveloped Gorgon gas field which is why the Gorgon operator, Chevron, is examining the costly geo-sequestration option".

"There will be long-term monitoring of the stored carbon dioxide to ensure its safety". Senator Campbell say the project must still clear all relevant State and Commonwealth environmental approvals".

Source:ECOS 134. Dec/Jan 2007, page 6
Several questions spring to mind!

Waterwatch

By Stuart Pougher

I'm a FOWSP member, but find it hard to get involved due to work and study commitments, but I'm keen to start doing water testing on a regular basis.

I recently spoke to Josh about coordinating testing one weekend a month for those of us who can't get along to the Thursday group; which he thought was a great idea.

Anyone interested in doing water testing one Sunday a month can contact me on 98445458 or 0438047267. At this point in time I'm thinking mid-morning on the 3rd Sunday of the month, but it will depend when other interested parties are available.

The next Waterwatch training day is on Saturday 17th March 2007 at Edendale Farm in Eltham from 9.30am to 4.30pm. Bring lunch, sturdy footwear and wet weather gear. To find out more contact: Trish Grant (Waterwatch coordinator) 0408177917 or trish.grant@dpi.vic.gov.au

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Kangaroo Apple
(*Solanum* spp.)

These native shrubs are common in Warrandyte, particularly on disturbed ground. They are spread by birds that eat the orange-red egg-shaped fruit. Plants grow rapidly and have the tendency to become woody and less attractive as they get older.

Kangaroo Apples belong to the Solanaceae family. Other members of this family include tomatoes, potatoes and nightshades all of which are poisonous at some stage of their development.

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