



WARRINGAL CONSERVATION SOCIETY

Pre Spring Newsletter

Volume 40/five

September/October 2010

Warringal Conservation Society is a local, not-for-profit, community organisation caring for the environment in Banyule.

Formed in 1970, the Society is an active and productive steward of Banyule's environmental heritage.

Join us!!

Warringal Conservation Society is not just a local environment group: it is stimulating, fun and companionable and takes an active role in the wider community.

Single \$15,
Family \$20
Pension/student/
unemployed \$10
Life \$150

All articles for the newsletter are welcome. Letters to the Editor are to be no longer than 300 words. We may edit for legal, space or other reasons. Opinions expressed in articles are not necessarily those of the Warringal Conservation Society.

Newsletter printed courtesy of Craig Langdon, State MP.

SEPTEMBER MEETING

Freshwater Turtles

Katie Howard from the Arthur Rylah Institute will discuss freshwater turtles. Katie's passion for turtles was born from volunteer work and has led to opportunities and adventures in Australia and overseas, and her current job. This talk will highlight the great experiences that can be obtained through volunteer work, and the exotic locations that can be visited. The three species of freshwater turtles that are found throughout Victoria, their distribution, biology and current threats will also be discussed.

OCTOBER MEETING

Nocturnal Fauna

Ed McNabb will talk about nocturnal fauna. Ed has made a long term study of the Powerful Owl in the Dandenongs and has recorded many of the mystery night calls of owls, gliders and frogs in this and other areas. These recordings will be available for sale at the meeting.

**Meetings on first Thursday of the month
from 7.30 pm at the Old Shire Offices,
60 Beverley Road.**

**Enter from Buckingham Drive near the Banyule Theatre and
Greening Australia. Melways map 32:D3. All Welcome**

AT A GLANCE

September

Thursday September 2nd: General Meeting. Guest Speaker: Katie Howard - Freshwater turtles.

Sunday September 19th: Banyule Swamp Corridors of Green planting site. Indigenous shrubs, sedges and grasses. See Next page for location. Details - Don 0425730554

October

Thursday October 7th: Annual General Meeting. Guest Speaker: Ed McNabb - Nocturnal fauna.

Sunday October 10th: Beverley Rd wetland TBA/ Warringal Swamp weeding or Native Gardens. Details - Don 0425730554

News and Events:

WCS working bee calendar

September 19th

Banyule Swamp Corridors of Green planting site. Indigenous shrubs, sedges and grasses
Access from Plymouth Street, Heidelberg. Melways map 32:D3. Walk across bike path through old stockyards, cross drainage line (50 metres) and turn left (North) 50 metres to Banyule swamp. Access from Somerset Drive carpark. Walk 300 metres east (away from river) along path.

October 10th

Beverly Rd wetland TBA/ Warringal Swamp weeding or Native Gardens. (Depending on condition of sites at the time).

November 14th - End of year excursion.

December 12th - WCS organised event

Updates will be emailed to members. Contact Don Stokes for more details 0425730554

WCS annual general meeting

The society's AGM will be held on the 7th of October 2010 starting at 7.30pm in the Old Shire Offices. We are seeking to organise a Christmas Hamper raffle and contributions for the hamper are requested from members - starting October.

Spring outdoors festival

The regional program of environmental events provided by the City Councils of Banyule, Manningham and Nillumbik - available from Council Offices and Websites.

As well as the perennially popular "Breakfast with the Birds" (Banyule Flats, Sunday 24 Oct, 7.30 am), you can go spotlighting at Latrobe Wildlife Reserve, join the Darebin Froggers for a bike-ride, or star-gaze at Westerfold Park, learn about growing vegetables, or find wildflowers in Nillumbik. Please note that bookings are essential for most events.

Check the leaflet or web-sites for details. Make

sure you support our three Councils' excellent environmental programs.

"Grow me instead"

A very useful free booklet produced by the Nursery & Garden Industry, with funding from Federal and State Governments. It's a guide to the Garden Escapes which so often invade local bushland in Victoria, with suggestions for harmless plants of similar looks (native and exotic) which can be planted instead. Agapanthus, Buddleia, Cootamundra Wattle, and through the alphabet to Watsonia and Zantedeschia (alias Arum Lily) - not to mention the ornamental berry-bushes such as Cotoneaster. Other editions are presumably available interstate. This booklet should be available from local nurseries or try <www.ngiv.com.au>.

The nearly-forgotten fauna of Melbourne's northern suburbs

Wild News newsletter from the La Trobe University Wildlife Sanctuary has an interesting piece discussing the fauna that once lived in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. Eastern-Barred Bandicoots, Spot-tailed Quolls and Eastern Quolls were once common, but have succumbed to habitat loss and introduced predators. Spot-tailed Quolls may still be present in forests outside the city while Eastern-barred Bandicoots are now extremely rare in Victoria (but more common in Tasmania). You will need to go to Tasmania to see the Eastern Quoll as it is no longer found on mainland Australia. The White-footed Rabbit-rat was reportedly common in Victoria at the time of European settlement, but can only be seen stuffed at the museum. The impacts on reptiles, amphibians and birds have also been dramatic. La Trobe University Wildlife Sanctuary is installing predator proof fencing with the aim of reintroducing locally and regionally extinct species. WCS members saw how successful this approach can be when we went on a night walk at Mount Rothwell Sanctuary and saw the abundance of rare

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News and Events continued:

native animals

For the latest from the La Trobe University Wildlife Sanctuary: <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/wildlife>

Discovering the Darebin Creek by Bike

Date and time: Sunday 19 September 10am-1pm
Start and end point: Darebin Parklands Environment Centre, end of Separation St, Alphington Melways ref: 31 C9. Come and celebrate World Water Monitoring Day with a bike ride, sampling waterbugs, discovering frogs and testing the water along the Darebin Creek. Join the Darebin Froggers, Darebin Creek Management Committee and Waterwatch for 15 km of lovely vistas, interesting water quality facts and maybe a glimpse of some of the aquatic creatures that call the Darebin Creek and surrounding wetlands home. BYO bike and helmet. Families are welcome. Lunch provided at Darebin Parklands on return. Bookings essential : Banyule City Council, Megan Kemp 9457 9816, megan.kemp@banyule.vic.gov.au

Something is knocking the state's owls off their perches (The Age 13th June 2010)

WHAT'S happened to Victoria's carnivorous owls? A significant number have vanished, and the Department of Sustainability and Environment isn't sure what's going on.

It's assumed the top end of the woodland food chain is either starving to death because its food source has been killed off by the drought and fires, or it is relocating to parts unknown, but it will take years to find an answer.

The DSE has been monitoring the owl populations - including that of the powerful owl, Australia's largest owl - since 2000. Since then, detection rates in South Gippsland and the Bunyip State Park have dropped by half.

In some areas of the Bunyip State Park - half of which was lost to the Black Saturday fires - detections of the sooty owl have dropped to a third.

DSE owl specialist Ed McNab says: "We don't know what's happened to them. We can only assume that drought has played a major role. We noticed the downward trend before the fires. They're very mobile birds, but the fires would have had an impact on their prey."



Powerful and sooty owls, both officially listed as vulnerable, mainly eat sugar gliders and ringtail possums. The possums in particular are known to have little resistance to chronic hot weather, and their failure to thrive in the drought is probably the main reason why owl numbers have dropped. While owls may have escaped the Black Saturday fires, many possums would have been incinerated.

Mr McNab says the smaller carnivorous birds, such as the barking owl, are able to sustain themselves on insects. Powerful and sooty owls can also eat rabbits and birds such as magpies and kookaburras, but they need to make the change in their diet before energy loss reduces their ability to effectively hunt.

"They'll either starve or take something else," said Mr McNab.

Equally disastrous for the owls was the loss of old trees with large hollows that they require for nesting. They might have shifted elsewhere to recolonise, but this would mean taking over an already occupied territory. "And there tends to be a home-ground advantage in these battles," said Mr McNab.

The occupying bird has inside knowledge of the territory and a greater capacity to defend its patch, because its energy store will be higher. Flying great distances in search of food saps the strength from large birds and even causes them to starve.

The DSE's biodiversity team leader for West Gippsland, Dr Rolf Willig, said the top order carnivores were "an indicator species as to the well-being of the ecosystem. Theoretically, if they're happy, the rest are happy."

For five years Dr Willig has been running a playback monitoring program in South Gippsland, where recordings of owl calls are played into the dark and answering calls are recorded. The number of birds answering calls have dropped significantly this year.

"The results indicate we may be having a delayed reaction from the fires," he said. "The possums not actually killed in the fires might have been exposed afterward, and the owls picked them off, eating all the food that was left."

It will take years to find out what's happened. "And not just three or five years. We'll be out here for a long time," said Dr Willig.

Anthea Fleming notes: "In the last decade, the Yarra Valley has attracted Powerful Owls, now breeding locally. Will the planned Eastlink Freeway through our riverside parks be the final blow for the Powerful Owl?"

Ed McNab is speaking at the October WCS meeting

President's report August 2010

North East Link

As part of the campaign to protect Banyule Flats, Warringal Parklands, Bolin Bolin Billabong against the proposed north-East Freeway link, the "Connies" have created one of their cards to highlight the threat to these reserves and the wildlife within them.

Development in Warringal Parklands - Banyule Football Club - P83/2010

Members were advised at our last meeting of an application by the Banyule Football Club of proposed developments in Warringal Parklands, including a two storey scoreboard for advertising purposes, coach & interchange boxes around the oval.

Members unanimously voted to object to the proposed development, and WCS objections were communicated to Banyule Council on 1st July 2010.

Unfortunately, as yet, no reply has been received from Council regarding our objections.

Addendum: After the WCS General meeting on 5 August 2010, WCS received notification from Banyule Council officers that the matter was referred to the Banyule Council meeting on 16 August 2010 for decision. Although a WCS representative sought Council to defer its decision, Banyule Councillors approved the construction of modified Coaches & Interchange boxes for Beverley & Burkitt Rd Ovals.)

Society & Members Honoured

On a sunny Sunday afternoon on 25 July 2010, people gathered together at the Centre Ivanhoe to celebrate those nominated for the Certificate of Appreciation Awards for outstanding service and commitment to the local community.

The Certificate of Appreciation Awards are a biennial event hosted by the State Member for Ivanhoe, the Hon Craig Langdon

I am happy to report that the Warringal Conservation Society and its members received a Certificate of Appreciation and a State Flag, as recognition for being at the forefront of Conservation in the Heidelberg area, and for ongoing contribution to the local environment for the past 40 years.

The Laurence Course/Vic Marks Environmental Award was awarded to Reginald Johnson OAM for his countless years of invaluable and outstanding contributions to wildlife and conservation. His work and achievements are an inspiration to everyone in

the environmental community, and we congratulate Reg on a well deserved award.

Individual Warringal Conservation Society Members were also awarded with Certificates of Appreciation for their service and contributions to the local environment, and they included:

Dorothy Davies
Anthea Fleming
Beryl Jarman
John D'Aloia

Other members of the Society received such certificates for their valuable contributions and leadership in other groups, and they included:

Robert Bender – Friends of Wilson Reserve
John Merory – Riverlands Conservation Society
George Paras – La Trobe University Wildlife Sanctuary
Jane Crone – Save our Suburbs

Friends of the Society also received certificates of Appreciation, and they included:

Ruth Baker OAM
Robyn Roberts

Congratulations are extended to all recipients of the Certificate of Appreciation Awards, and thanks are extended to those that nominated our members for such an honour.

A final thank you to Craig Langdon. Before the certificate of Appreciation ceremonies began, Craig Langdon gave a most gracious and heartfelt welcome to all nominees and guests. Craig commented that although this awards ceremony would be the last as Member for Ivanhoe, his sincere hope was that the awards would continue with the new Member for Ivanhoe to honour the services of the many volunteers in our community. Craig expressed his great honour and privilege to have represented and served the community as the State Member for Ivanhoe for the past 14 years.

The Society thanks Craig Langdon for his efforts as our local member, and for his work in acknowledging and honouring the volunteers in Ivanhoe. We wish him all the best in his future endeavours, and hope that he will continue to serve the community in whatever capacity he chooses – I'm sure there are many groups out there that would welcome Craig's involvement!!!

John D'Aloia

July 2010 Speaker – Denise Fernando

Metal accumulating plants

Denise Fernando is a botanist interested in a very rare group of plants termed *hyperaccumulators*. They exhibit extreme behaviour by actively scavenging and accumulating soil metals in their shoots to levels far exceeding ‘normal’ lethal thresholds. She introduced the topic and showed slides of some of their natural habitats in Australia, North-eastern America, Italy and New Caledonia. Although found on every continent, many areas remain unexplored. Other significant sites occur in Cuba, Brazil, Western USA and Europe.

Hyperaccumulators mostly grow on serpentine soils high in metals and low in the essential plant macronutrients nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. By virtue of this fact these habitats support highly specialised plant communities, as well as fungi and microflora. One of the major difficulties associated with preserving such habitats is their soils are often highly metal-enriched and therefore regarded as exploitable for primary resources. The other is land clearing for development. Mining activities pose the greatest threat; for example in the Democratic Republic of Congo there is little optimism for the survival of as yet undescribed endemic species occurring exclusively on cobalt and copper rich soils.

While hyperaccumulation has obvious potential practical benefits including soil remediation and ore prospecting, it is an intrinsically fascinating phenomenon. Hyperaccumulators offer a valuable resource for expanding fundamental knowledge on topics spanning a range of disciplines; for example, plant nutrition, plant physiology, evolutionary biology, biogeochemistry, genetics, plant-soil

interactions, ecology and climate change studies, just to name a few.

One of the earliest descriptions of a hyperaccumulator dates back over 400 years to 1583, when the Franciscan botanist monk Andrea Cesalpino published an article in *De Plantis Libri*, noting the small herbaceous plant of the genus *Alyssum* growing on black stony substrates in the Upper Tiber Valley in Tuscany. This was subsequently identified as the nickel hyperaccumulator *Alyssum bertolonii* growing on nickel-rich serpentine rocks. Direct descendants of these plants still survive on that very site, which Denise visited recently.

Since Cesalpino’s article, and particularly after the 1940s when scientific tools such as plant chemical analysis came into use, hyperaccumulators have increasingly become the focus of scientific interest. Vast advances in technology, scientific techniques and transport have opened up this field of research to its current status. To date, the metals known to be hyperaccumulated are: nickel, cobalt, copper, cadmium, zinc, manganese, lead, thallium and aluminium. Usually a single metal is hyperaccumulated by any given species. A total of over 450 species (less than 0.02% of all flowering plants) are currently classified as hyperaccumulators, of which around 70% are nickel hyperaccumulators. The Brassicaceae family is quite highly represented among hyperaccumulators. Although the evolutionary basis for hyperaccumulation has not been conclusively identified, there is indication it may be at least in part a defence strategy against herbivory.



Nickel-rich serpentine habitat in the Upper Tiber Valley (Tuscany); home to the nickel hyperaccumulator *Alyssum bertolonii* (Brassicaceae). This very habitat was noted by Cesalpino in 1583 as being somewhat unusual.

August 2010 Speaker – Anthony Fernando

Always on safari

Anthony Fernando showed wildlife photos and spoke about a couple of trips that he and Denise made to Africa. One of the reasons people visit Africa is to see iconic beasts like elephants, rhinos, big cats and giraffes. Anthony had some stunning pictures of these and explained that it was difficult to take a bad photo when presented with big animals on the striking African landscape. In the time between encounters with big animals Anthony and Denise

appreciated some of the smaller but equally remarkable animals such as birds and reptiles. Taking the time to chase up some local bird guide books really enhanced the holiday. Anthony made the point that nature is all around and there is always something interesting to see if you take the time to look, even in the backyard on a Sunday.

Local plants - Wattles

Wattles (genus *Acacia*) are a familiar part of the Australian flora, with the national floral emblem being the Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*). The common name wattle comes from the use of these plants in the wattle and daub wall construction technique that employed sticks plastered with mud.

Wattles are often discussed in terms of being “short-lived, prone to insect attack, understory species etc”, but these generalisations underestimate the diversity of this extremely large group of plants. There are over 650 species of *Acacia* in Australia making it the largest genus of Australian plants. Wattles range in size from small shrubs to the big old Blackwood Wattles (*Acacia melanoxylon*) that can form a towering canopy in moist gullies.

Wattles are often pioneer species that grow rapidly after fire or other disturbance. Their seeds have a very tough outer covering and can remain dormant in the soil for decades. Heat or mechanical damage to this outer layer breaks seed dormancy allowing them to germinate at an opportune time. To propagate wattles from seed, dormancy must be broken by pouring boiling water on the seeds or scratching their surface. All wattles start life with “feathery” leaves composed of multiple leaflets. Many wattles later develop a modification of the leaf stem to form a single-bladed leaf-like structure, or in some cases spikes. Fluffy yellow flowers are a distinctive feature of wattles and usually come out in late winter or early spring, although some species flower at other times of the year.

Locally we have a number of wattles that are common in the bush and worth growing in the garden. Smaller shrubs like the Gold-dust Wattle (*Acacia acinacea*) and Woolly Wattle (*Acacia lanigera*) flower prolifically in winter. The Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*) is a small tree that grows rapidly and produces masses of flowers. The Black Wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*) and Silver Wattle (*Acacia*

dealbata) are very fast growing medium sized trees with feathery leaves. Some of the aforementioned species may be short-lived, but the Lightwood Wattle (*Acacia implexa*) and Blackwood Wattle (*Acacia melanoxylon*) are long-lived and grow into small trees under local conditions.



Clockwise from top left: Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*), spikes of Prickly Moses (*Acacia verticillata*), Woolly Wattle (*Acacia lanigera*), a native bee on a wattle flower.

There is a lot to be said for sticking to indigenous wattles in the garden because some species from outside our region have the potential to be weeds. The Cootamundra Wattle (*Acacia baileyana*; see below) and the Early Black wattle (*Acacia decurrens*) are particularly weedy species that should be avoided.



The distinctive silvery, stem-clasping leaf of the Cootamundra Wattle, a non-indigenous species that can be a weed.

James Deane

Weeds - Kapok vine

KAPOK VINE (*Araujia sericifera*) is my nominee for our nastiest weed.

The vines spread in dense tangles through bushes and trees and produce huge crops of large pods - and each pod contains masses of wind-blown plumed seeds. I had noticed them getting a hold along the east side of the dry Billabong at Banyule Flats, on Melbourne Parks land, producing a heavy crop. So when the WCS Weeding Bee was cancelled on Sunday 10 July, it seemed a good chance to attack them. In about an hour, Brian and I were able to cut a large garbage bag full, weight nearly 10 lbs, or about 3.5 kgs - quite as much as we could carry. We used secateurs and a pruning saw. We could have done with long-handled pruners, or maybe a rake or hoe. Some have climbed high up in dead wattles - judicious branch-cutting may be required to finish them off. The sap irritates the hands - I found gloves necessary. There are plenty more to cut before they split and spread their seeds. If anyone wants to help, ring me on 9499 4642.

Anthea Fleming



Nature notes - Member's observations

Koala at Banyule Flats

Sharon Marks sent recent pictures (taken by her friend Shirley) of a Koala up a tree at Banyule Flats. This sighting is significant because the trees this koala is using were planted many years ago by the Warringal Conservation Society. All the more reason to ensure that this area is not ruined by a freeway.



Phascogale in Montmorency

'Northern Waters', newsletter of Melbourne Waterwatch, reports the finding of a dead male Brush-tailed Phascogale, alias Tuan, in a bushland reserve at Montmorency. This small marsupial predator is classed as Vulnerable and had not previously been observed in the area - a significant and exciting find. This animal was probably a victim of the stresses of the winter mating season; all males die off leaving only breeding females. They are very vulnerable to cats, dogs and owls and to loss of habitat - they must have tree-hollows in old trees to nest safely. A very interesting addition to Banyule's mammal population.

Bird Observers Outing

A Bird Observers Beginners Outing on Sat 24th July at Banyule Flats was successful, recording two mammals - Kangaroo and a Flying-Fox- with 55 bird species, including five Frogmouths. Stars were a male Scarlet Honeyeater and a Little Eagle. Fantail Cuckoos and an Olive-backed Oriole were seen and heard. Few ducks were present on the Swamp, all off to visit the Inland floods, but the three surviving cygnets now have some black feathers showing, while their parents are sitting on eggs in their second nest this season. During a preliminary visit, the Swamp Wallaby was seen again.

Anthea Fleming

Nature notes continued

July

Jane Crone saw two Kookaburras fighting with a Raven at the Eyrie, Ivanhoe.

Anthea Fleming saw a Wedge-tailed eagle at the You Yangs.

James Deane saw a wombat crossing the bridge over Salt Creek at night in Warringal Parklands, and a Swamp Wallaby on the Yarra Flats track early one morning.

August

Carol James saw three Kookaburras and a Grey Butcherbird.

Jane Crone reported Ravens, Currawongs and Butcherbirds from Ivanhoe.

Robert Bender reported ten species of fungus from Wilson reserve, including a new record, the Wood Blewit (*Lepista nuda*) (below left). He also reported a Gould's Wattled bat (below right) from a poly pipe bat home installed at the Burke Rd Billabong by Stanley Barker.



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