Warringal Conservation Society

HIGH SUMMER NEWSLETTER Volume 54/1 JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2023

Warringal Conservation Society is a local community organisation caring for the environment in Banyule.

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

Keep up to date on WCS activities by visiting our FaceBook page or website www.warringal.org.au

Join us!

WCS has a lot to offer: plantings, activities and monthly meetings with guest speakers from a wide range of disciplines and interests. There is membership information in this newsletter or go to the web page.

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we gather, and pay our respect to Elders past, present and future. We recognise their continued connection to the land and waters of this beautiful place, and acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded.

Articles and photographs for the newsletter are welcome. Note we may edit for space or legal reasons. Opinions expressed in guest material are not necessarily those of the Society.

Newsletter printed courtesy of Kate Thwaites MP, Member for Jagajaja.

FEBRUARY MEETING

MARGARET DE KAM: Friends of Darebin Creek

Our first speaker for 2023 is Margaret de Kam, President of Friends of Darebin Creek. Margaret will tell us about the work that they do and the significance of the connections they make, the stories that emerge of people's creativity in doing the work, and the variety of skills that are needed to be part of an environment group.

MARCH MEETING

SONIA SANCHEZ: Project Officer, BirdLife Australia

Sonia Sánchez is the Beach-nesting Birds Project Officer for BirdLife Australia. She is presently working on a new project that seeks to encourage hikers to record incidental sightings of Hooded Plovers and Eastern Ground Parrot along remote stretches of the Victorian coast. Sonia is a marine ecologist with particular interests in seabird and shorebird conservation.

AT A GLANCE

FEBRUARY

Thursday 2: General meeting from 7.30pm.

Saturday 18: Night walk at Banyule Billabong. Details TBC

MARCH:

Thursday 2: General meeting from 7.30pm.

Sunday 5: Clean Up Australia Day. Location TBC

Meetings are the first Thursday of the month from 7.30pm

Please note that monthly meetings are face-to-face 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**

Photo: H Smith

Loving the magnificence of our Bursaria spinulosa - a golden meal for 1000s of pollinators

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Members

The Warringal Conservation Society has a strong collaborative working relationship with the environmental team at the Banyule City Council. We work closely with the Banyule Bush crew during our planting activities. So it was with some sadness that we farewelled Bush crew member, Senior Ranger Kylie D'Amico. After 12 years with Banyule she is taking up a fantastic opportunity to work with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation as their Narrap OHS Officer and Team Leader. She will be missed by all who have worked along side her at working bees and plantings, benefiting from her knowledge and skill on a wide range of all things environmental.

In other news - I am pleased to report that WCS has received support for a Powerful Owl monitoring project from the Banyule Council through their Environmental Grants scheme. Members will be updated on this project as it progresses in 2023.

James Deane

DECEMBER MEETING RAFFLE

Thanks to all who took part with ticket sales raising over $100.

Congratulations to Maureen McInerney, who won the hamper. *Plants of the Western Plains 2nd Edition* went to Rob Granter and James Deane scored Graham Patterson's excellent *Coastal guide to nature and history 2*.

MESSAGE FROM THE TREASURER

Best wishes for the coming year!! Let's hope El Niño is kind to us and that the environment thrives.

Twelve years ago the previous treasurer was rather desperate to retire, and since I could add up takings and manage my own financial affairs I offered my services. I have learnt a huge amount and have felt a great connection to the members.

Now it is time for me to hang up my boots, and I shall retire from the treasurer position at the October AGM this year. It would be ideal if someone would come forward sooner rather than later, so that I can explain some financial events as the year progresses. Please give this your generous thoughts and get in touch.

Daphne Hards

HAVE SOMETHING YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE?

Send your stories/ photos to wcs.editor@gmail.com
Copy deadline for March/April issue is 11 February

FAREWELL KYLIE

WCS sends our best wishes for her future adventures and we hope to see her at the Flats again soon.

Photo: A Fleming

BIODIVERSITY ADVISORY GROUP

In 2023, Council will be updating its Biodiversity Plan. They are looking for community members to be part of a Biodiversity Community Working Group to get feedback on the current Biodiversity Plan and help shape the community facing actions.

Expressions of interest for the Community Working Group is open until 15 February 2023.

To apply go to
https://shaping.banyule.vic.gov.au/BiodiversityCWG

THE WCS TEAM AND HOW TO CONTACT US

Warringal Conservations Society Inc
PO Box 64 Rosanna 3084
Email: warringal3084@gmail.com
Web: www.warringal.org.au
FB: www.facebook.com/WarringalConservationSociety

President: James Deane. Telephone: 8060 8983

Secretary: John Hargreaves

Treasurer: Daphne Hards. Telephone: 9497 4831

Committee: Anthea Fleming, Doug McNaughton, Rob Granter, Michelle Giovas, Heather Smith.

Planting Coordinator: Rob Granter

Newsletter: Editor: Heather Smith 0423 191 977
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BLUETONGUE LIZARDS

A large female Blotched Bluetongue moves between my backyard and my neighbour's place. She leads a very quiet life, and I seldom see her. I have seen her eating a small snail and an earthworm, and doing her best to eat fallen mulberries on the ground. She is recognizable because she has lost a small part of her tail. I have left patches of long grass and litter where she can shelter, and I have not used sprays or snail-killer for fifty years. On very hot days, I have seen her make considerable efforts to climb over loose bricks and flowerpots to reach water, so I try to keep a shallow dish full under cover where she can safely approach.

From time to time I have found her young ones in the garden. In spring and summer she can look very large indeed when she is carrying unborn young. She prepares for the birth by lying on the hot surface of the path or the courtyard, in full sun – clearly recharging her batteries. As the young are about five inches long when born, it must be quite an effort. The young receive no maternal care and must fend for themselves.

The afternoon of 4th December was very hot. I ran some heated water out of my stainless-steel hose before watering some plants. At once a male Bluetongue appeared – he had been hiding nearby. Whether the sound or the smell of the water attracted him, I don't know, but he at once began to lick the spilt

Photo: A Fleming

water off the pavement. I hastily re-filled the lizard bowl which had dried out. Later, in the evening, I found him and the female starting to mate on the hot bricks of the walkway, and took a photo. The male seems to have no way to stay in position except by biting the female behind her fore-leg. The process seemed to take them a couple of hours. On the only other occasion when I have seen this, it was also in the evening, on a sun-heated path.

I am told that the females are territorial, but males just wander about. I doubt if there is any lasting pair-bond, as there is with Stumpy-tail Lizards and Land Mullets.

Anthea Fleming

MYSTERY BIRD, SOLVED...

Over the Christmas break, a friend sent me this photo of a bird that he could not identify. Well, neither could I, nor could several other bird-aware friends that I asked. I think it was the black and yellow lores (the area between eye and bill) that had us stumped.

In the end, our amazing Anthea nailed it; juvenile Common Starling, *Sturnus vulgaris*. Anthea identified the species on the basis of the shape of its head and its body posture, observing that; “on the ground it toddles, unlike the Blackbird's hopping action.” Furthermore; “its adult iridescent plumage will come in patchily, making it even more confusing.” This well illustrates the different colouring of body parts in juvenile birds of many species when compared to mature adults. Body parts that change colour with development can include; skin on legs and feet, bill, eye and plumage.

John Hargreaves

Photo supplied to J Hargreaves

SHAPING BANYULE - URBAN FOREST STRATEGY

Have your say on the latest draft until 23 March 2023. Go to: https://shaping.banyule.vic.gov.au/UrbanForest

It is so hard to look at this 89 page draft document and not feel like you are drowning in waffle. However, we have more time to try to influence it. Community consultation has been extended and now includes face to face engagement with two community forums planned for February and March - dates/times to be confirmed.

DAREBIN GRASSLANDS OUTING - 14 JANUARY

After our very successful Spring visit, we were keen to see it again in summer. Once again we were very impressed with the Bush Crew's management. Lightwood Wattles were in flower. The original indigenous people would have been delighted with the splendid crop of seed on the Kangaroo Grass, a major food grain. A small patch had been cut to provide seed for future plantings. Clustered Everlastings showed well among the grass, but most of the spring flowers had now seeded and died down. Other native grasses included Wallaby Grasses, Silky Grass, Windmill Grass and a fine patch of Blown Grass, with a tangled mass of white heads like a small cloud. Blue Devil was now in flower, and both Lemon and Milky Beautyheads were in bud. Along Darebin Creek, the basalt cliffs provided shelter for re-planted Silver Banksias, and there were masses of flower on the Sweet Bursaria. We are very lucky to have this beautiful Reserve. Though some areas remain infested with weed grasses and thistles, the management programme is extremely promising.

Anthea Fleming

Above right: Clustered Everlasting among Kangaroo Grass.
Left: Blue Devil flowers. Photos: A Fleming

DUCK SHOOTING 2023 - URGENT LETTERS REQUIRED NOW

Native duck species are in serious decline according to the most recent Eastern Australian Waterbird Survey which is Australia's long-term data set on the health and biodiversity of our river and wetland environments. Three major indices for waterbirds – total abundance, number of species breeding, and wetland area index – continued to show significant declines over time.

Please write letters to support the Labor MPs who publicly stated their opposition to duck shooting (*The Age, 2/9/22*), and call for duck shooting to be banned in Victoria as it has been in other progressive States.

The inevitable cruelty involved in duck shooting will always be a huge issue, together with the fact that despite all the rain and floods, waterbird numbers are in serious decline).

These articles, recently published in the Gippsland Times (*Bleak-picture-for-native-ducks*) and the Herald Sun (*Calls for Victoria to follow New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia in banning duck shooting*), are worth referring to, as well as the CADS 2022 duck season report at www.duck.org.au/2022-duck-rescue-season/

Celia Smith

Photo: Newcastle Herald

PLEASE EMAIL:

- **Sonya Kilkenny, Minister for Outdoor Recreation**
sonya.kilkenny@parliament.vic.gov.au
- **Gayle Tierney, Minister for Agriculture**
gayle.tierney@parliament.vic.gov.au

And CC in:

- **Ingrid Stitt, Minister for the Environment**
ingrid.stitt@parliament.vic.gov.au
- **Lily d' Ambrosio, Minister for Climate Action**
lily.dambrosio@parliament.vic.gov.au
- **The Hon Daniel Andrews** – Premier of Victoria.
daniel.andrews@parliament.vic.gov.au

DECEMBER WAS MEMBERS NIGHT!

The December meeting is traditionally a relaxed gathering, hearing from members on a project or activity they are involved with. This time we were delighted to hear from Doug McNaughton, Rob Granter and John Hargreaves.

Doug spoke about Scotia Wildlife Sanctuary in NSW. Acquired in 2002 by the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, the property covers nearly 65,000Ha. It contains one of the largest fox and cat-free areas on mainland Australia, and is home to some threatened mammals such as Bilbies, Numbats, and Bridled Nailtail Wallabies. There is a high level of scientific activity at Scotia, with almost 7,000 live trap nights and over 4,000 transect surveys annually.

Initially going to the Sanctuary to repair and rebuild some of the original buildings, Doug was lucky to be invited to join the scientific team on their research work on the Numbat population. The Perth Zoo runs the Numbat breeding program and while Doug was there, flew 28 animals in by air to be released.

Doug enjoyed the experience immensely, learning a lot about Numbats and what they needed to survive in the wild. They live exclusively on termites. Females stay to one area while the males roam their territories (25-50 hectares in size), generally mating with multiple females. Pregnancy is two weeks long and usually four young are born each time. They stay attached to the mothers nipple until about 9 months old. They mature around ten months and leave the mother to find a territory of their own.

Rob spoke about his experience of **walking/climbing the Mount Anne circuit in the South West National Park** near Hobart in Tasmania in April 22.

Classified as Grade 5, it is for very experienced bushwalkers with specialised skills, including navigation and emergency first aid. Tracks are likely to be very rough, very steep and unmarked, and the weather is subject to extreme, unexpected changes.

On Lightening Ridge, heading towards The Notch, Lake Spanner to the right in the background. Photo: Natureloverswalks blog.

On the edge of Lake Pedder, at 1423m Mount Anne is the tallest mountain in the Southwest, and walkers are rewarded with stunning views of the park.

Rob had some wonderful photos to show of the scenery. Sections of the circuit are exposed, extremely difficult, usually requires some pack hauling and has been the site of several rescues and fatalities. His description of getting across The Notch was particularly hair raising and dramatic.

It was an adrenalin-filled adventure for which Rob had trained extensively in preparation for. He said he would definitely do it again but he would train even harder beforehand.

John spoke about his snorkeling activities, doing fish surveys in the Belfast Coastal Reserve which runs between Warrambool and Port Fairy. It is predominantly basalt reefs, covered in soft corals. He also spoke about Project Banjo Action Group which aims to putt an end to the senseless slaughter of the rays including fiddler rays, smooth rays and other unwanted catch by anglers throughout Port Phillip Bay. **More information on his talk follows on page 6**

WCS ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP /RENEWAL JULY 2022 - JUNE 2023

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

Email: _____

Telephone: _____ Mobile: _____

Special areas of interest: *This helps us when arranging speakers and events.*

_____

Subscription types:

☐ Single $20 ☐ Concession $15 (seniors/students etc)

☐ Family $25 ☐ Life subscription $200

There are three ways to renew:

1. Renew online at:
www.warringal.org.au/about-us/membership

2. Pay by direct debit:
Acc name: Warringal Conservation Society
BSB: 633 108 Acc no: 143918613
(Be sure to identify yourself as the depositor.)

3. By mail: Fill in this form and mail with your cheque or money order to:
PO Box 64 Rosanna 3084 Victoria.

Any queries email: warringal3084@gmail.com

☐ I would like to receive my newsletter by email.

☐ Yes - put me on the Plantings notification list.

RED WATTLEBIRDS NESTING Spring 2022

When a pair of Red Wattlebirds began a nest just by my back door, I immediately turned to my major reference, *The Handbook of Australian and New Zealand Birds*, HAZANS, vol.5 (OUR, 2000) in search of details on how long the process would take. As so often happens with widespread, common birds, there was very little on record. So I started keeping rough notes for myself.

The nest site chosen was on the south side of a Hardenbergia vine which grows up a pillar, 1.65 m from the house, on the outer side of a roofed walk-way beside the north side of the house. This was sheltered from weather and from observation from the adjacent courtyard. It was easily observed from inside the house. The birds seemed to be still immature. They lacked the strongly defined streaked plumage and red wattles of adult birds. The patch of yellow colour on their bellies was not large or brightly-contoured. They seemed to be acquiring new tail-feathers – one, which I assumed to be the female, had one or two tail feathers missing.

About 5th October: I noticed a RWB perched in one of the lower loops of creeper, just under 2m. from the ground – sitting with beak and tail pointing upwards, as if in a nest. She was apparently trying the chosen site for size. Soon after she began breaking fine twigs from a Lemon Verbena bush nearby and weaving them in. During a heavy rain-storm, 12th-13h Oct., she seemed to lose interest but was soon back again, doing some construction in morning, then off to feed. The male patrolled the courtyard and chased off Noisy Miners, Little Ravens, Common Mynahs, and Blackbirds – this was a real reign of terror.

By **10th October**, a deep, cup-shaped nest had been constructed, and the female was bringing soft grasses and feathers to line it. Approach was always from house-side of nest, under walk-way. She never seemed to be disturbed by human activities inside the house, nor by my hanging washing in the walkway. Attention with a camera disturbed her, so I tried taking pictures through the glass – without success..

16th + 17th October: definitely sitting, but not full-time.

24th October: perhaps feeding young, or turning eggs – pausing beak-down before settling to brood. Mate furiously attacked Little Raven.

29th to 31st October: both parents now very busy feeding young and removing droppings. Female slipped in to brood at times. The adults themselves never left any droppings near the nest.

3th November: Young birds now poking yellow beaks up above nest-rim for feeds. Thin squeaky calls. A

Red Wattlebird chick - last day in nest. Photo: A Fleming

couple of times a third adult (much more heavily streaked plumage, distinct wattles) came to the nest and seemed also to feed the young. The parents' plumage was definitely developing more adult markings; one had very small red wattles. New tail feathers were growing in.

5th November: The two young now stretch up heads as soon as an adult lands beside nest.

8th November: Afternoon. Both adults involved with fearful brawl with Ravens in garden just outside courtyard.

9th November: 9.00 am - Adult bird seen clinging to outer north face of nest. I found that a dead chick was tangled there in the creeper – mostly bald, with wing feathers just coming through. I removed the dead chick. I presume that a Little Raven had attempted to steal a chick but dropped it, when attacked by parents. The adults were very subdued for a day or two, but continued to feed the survivor.

14th November: The chick was standing on the edge of nest much of the time, but during cold windy showers, which shook the nest, it retreated inside again. Giving 'zerp' fledgling calls. By afternoon it seemed much better co-ordinated – it stood up and flapped its wings a lot. It now had fluffy plumage all over, with wing feathers growing well, though still short. On the 17th, I took its photo from the doorway.

18th November: the big day – the chick, now fully feathered, fledged - it left the nest and reached the lowest branch of the lemon tree – a distance of about 3 m. This was between 10.00 am and noon. Later it moved higher up the tree, and later still fluttered off , escorted by its parents – both now in adult plumage, though their tail feathers were still rather ragged and uneven.

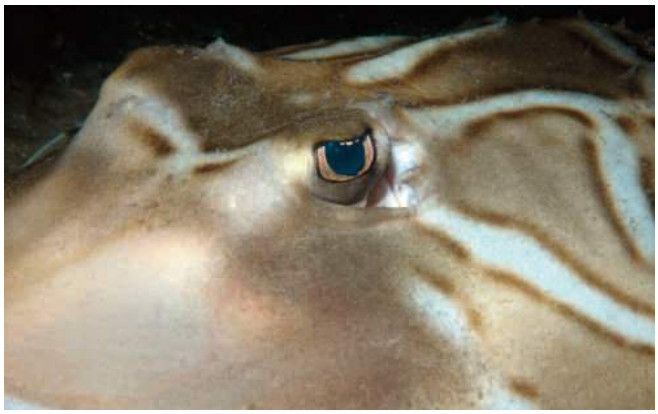
Anthea Fleming

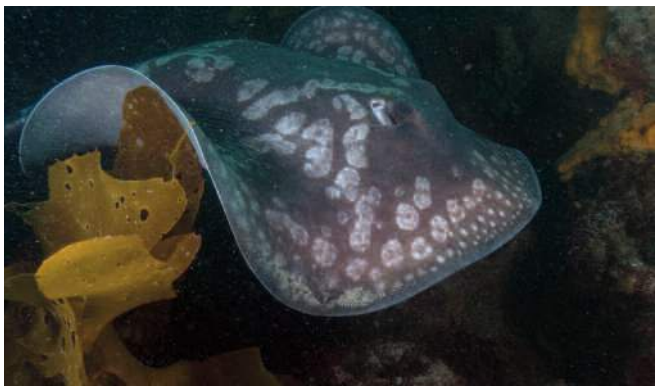
FAUNA REPORT

JOHN'S FISHY BUSINESS

Victorian inshore reefs are home to a dazzling variety of fish, invertebrates and algae, many having forms and colours that could be mistaken for coral reef species from the tropical north. A particularly interesting stretch of coast to snorkel is Rutledges Cutting to Port Fairy along the south-west coast. Formed by the southern end of a 65km lava flow from Mt Rouse some 300,000 years ago, all kinds of fish species live among the nooks and crannies of black basalt boulders, burst lava blisters, inshore skerries and protected embayments; conger eels, several species of colourful wrasses and leatherjackets, Port Jackson Sharks and Variegated Catsharks, numerous species of ray, Nudibranchs, Cuttlefish and Octopuses. It's an alien world and wilderness that goes largely unnoticed under our very noses. Take the plunge and try snorkeling if you haven't already experienced our underwater wonders.

John Hargreaves





Photos: Red Velvetfish by J Hargreaves. All others courtesy Museum Victoria

Above: Fiddle Ray. Top right: Red Velvetfish. Middle: Ornate Cowfish. Bottom: Spotted Stingaree.

NATURE NOTES

OCTOBER 2022

Anthea Fleming reported on Red Wattlebirds (see page 6) chiefly depending on remains of flower on a Protea and a large red-flowered Grevillea. She saw an Eastern Rosella in the Boulevard.

The *Eucalyptus studleyensis* at Banyule Billabong continues to look depressed with much insect damage to leaves; possibly the tree is suffering from a fungus whose fruiting head can be seen at its southeast side. She also showed slides of local wildflowers from Gresswell Forest and Cherry Street.

John Hargreaves also showed wildflower pictures taken at Smith's Gully, including the very restricted Wine-lip Spider Orchid. He also reported the first confirmed sighting, since 1998, of three newly-arrived migrant Orange-bellied Parrots from South Gippsland.

On a walk to the plenty Footbridge, **Dianne Williamson** saw a male King Parrot and a mating pair of Common Bronzewings.

John D'Aloia reported a family of Ringtailed Possums on a damaged drey, and a Barn Owl on the garage roof.

George Paras reported that Gang Gang Cockatoos have been frequenting the Macleod area, where they were feeding in a Red Box, leaving much litter of fallen twigs and leaves on the road. They also feed in Sugar Gums and Red Gums.

NOVEMBER 2022

Dianne Williamson has been hearing the calls of an Eastern Koel for 3 weeks. James Deane has also observed a pair on Viewbank Hill.

Jane Crone has had three green King Parrots in her Lipstick Maple (named for autumn colour).

Daphne Hards has had Little Wattlebirds in her garden for two weeks.

Robert Bender reported that two thirds of Chelsworth Park is still under water. A large flock of Silver gulls has moved in and between 30 and 4 Little Corellas.

NATURE NOTES

Doug Macnaughton had a young Red Wattlebird leave the nest at his place.

Anthea Fleming showed some slides of Cherry Street wildflowers and a Kookaburra from the Darebin St Grasslands – where one was seen with a baby Bluetongue in its beak. Saw Little Ravens and Common Mynahs savagely attacked by her nesting Wattlebirds.

The highlight was **George Paras**' account of his Sugar Glider family, resident in two nest-boxes in his garden. They prefer the more exposed box in cold weather, and move to the shaded box in the Ironbark when it's hot. They provide great entertainment when they emerge in the evening and scamper in the trees before departing to feed, probably at Latrobe Wildlife Reserve. Zoologists have recently divided Sugar Gliders into three different species – the original in NSW and further north, an Inland Glider (very rare) and Krefft's Glider in Victoria.

DECEMBER 2022

Daphne Hards saw a young Tawny Frogmouth in her garden - noticeable by its heavy breathing.

Gianna and Robert Deane had seen a young Tawny Frogmouth, Crimson Rosellas and Crane Flies. A Black Banded Rail near the confluence of Banyule Creek with the Swamp. Also Boobook Owls heard on Viewbank Hill.

John Hargreaves saw (in the hills) a Southern Boobook and a Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike.

Helen Boak observed a butcher bird and a Bluetongue Lizard.

Joan saw a Crested Pigeon and a pair of galahs.

Alicia Curry observed Eastern Rosellas and Musk Lorikeets.

Anita, Heather and Jane all reported hearing Eastern Koels calling.

JANUARY 2023

6 Jan: Lyn Easton and James Deane at Murundaka (upstream from of Banyule Flats), disturbed a fox and found a nest and two young Mistletoe Birds on the ground. Young were moved to nearby bushes where their parents attended to them.

13 Jan: James Deane and Gianna Romano saw a young Wedge-tailed Eagle perched on a dead tree up on Viewbank hill.

Collated by Anthea Fleming, Heather Smith and James Deane

Photos: J Deane

Young Mistletoe bird

Wedge-tailed Eagle

Photo: A Fleming

Red Wattlebird fledgling - out of nest

If not delivered return to: PO Box 64 Rosanna 3084

Warringal Conservation Society