Warringal Conservation Society

Autumn 2026 Volume 57/2 **MARCH/APRIL /MAY**

Since 1970 Warringal Conservation Society has been an active and effective steward of Banyule's environmental heritage.

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung as traditional custodians of the land on which we live and meet, and pay respect to past, present and future elders.

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

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

General meetings are now bi-monthly.

See you all in February, April, June, August, October and December.

Meetings are the first Thursday from 7.30pm at the Old Shire Offices, 60 Beverley Rd, Heidelberg. Enter from Beverley Road.

NEW AND RENEWING!

The Society is pleased to welcome new members Beverley Hannah, Wayne Cook and Claudia Trasancos. Thank you for your support. We look forward to meeting you in person at a meeting, working bee or activity soon.

Note that membership fees for 2026/27 are due in July 2025. You can renew online at the WCS webpage

WCS ON FACEBOOK

facebook.com/WarringalConservationSociety

WCS ON INSTAGRAM

@warringalconservationsociety

APRIL GENERAL MEETING

DAMIEN HARRISON: BANYULE BIODIVERSITY

Damien Harrison, Environment Coordinator at Banyule City Council, will share an update on the Council's Biodiversity Strategy 2025–2035. Damien will discuss key themes & long-term goals of the strategy. These include plans to establish 250,000 indigenous plants by 2035, actions to protect and enhance local biodiversity, practical ways the community can get involved and a meaningful Caring for Country perspective

Thursday 2nd April 7:30pm at the Old Shire Offices, Heidelberg. ***All welcome***

COMING UP

APRIL

Thursday 2nd: General Meeting from 7.30pm at the Old Shire Offices –Banyule Biodiversity.

Sunday 19th: Planting - Banyule Swamp

MAY

Sunday May 24th: Planting – Back/south paddock

THE WCS TEAM AND HOW TO CONTACT US

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President: James Deane

Treasurer: Leonie Pope

Secretary + Newsletter: Vacant

Planting Coordinator: Rob Granter

Committee: Anthea Fleming, Michelle Giovas, Doug McNaughton, George Paras, Judith Venebles

ACTIVITY REPORT – NIGHT WALK

On Saturday March 14th WCS ran a night walk at Banyule Flats. This walk was open to the public and there were approximately forty attendees (adults and children). Conditions were still and warm, perfect for humans and animals. After discussing Banyule Flats and wildlife, we had our first sighting for the night - the two resident Tawny Frogmouths that live next to the Sommerset Drive carpark. It was not properly dark, so they were still pretending to be pieces of wood or bark. We walked out to the flats and stopped to look at a couple of sleepy Ring-tail Possums occupying a nestbox (*middle right*). We then waited near a nest box that is well-used by gliders. It was becoming dark and the plan was to wait quietly and see some Krefft's Gliders (previously called Sugar Gliders) leaving for the night. It took some time and patience as we waited for the noise of the kookaburras and the crowd to dissipate. Fortunately while waiting we were entertained by a wombat that strolled past. At about 8.15pm a small striped head with pointy ears emerged from the entrance hole of the nest box. After establishing that it was safe, the glider climbed out, ascended a tall branch and launched into the darkness. Another glider emerged and did the same. As we left a third glider exited the box. The group moved on and was split into two, ably led by James Deane and George Paras. We saw more Ring-tail Possums, a Brush-tail Possum another Krefft's Glider and a Tawny Frogmouth (*bottom right*). It was a very successful night walk! Thanks to everyone who attended for being patient while we waited for gliders.

Leonie Pope and James Deane

ACTIVITY REPORT – CLEAN UP AUSTRALIA DAY

WCS members were involved in Clean Up Australia Day at Banyule Flats on Sunday March 1st. We worked alongside a large contingent of Scouts and other community-minded members of the public. Rob, Judith, Finn, Robert and I headed down to the Windmill where we rapidly collected several bags of plastic bottles and a car tyre from the riverbank. The event was supported by Warwick from the Bush Management team at Banyule Council.

James Deane

2026 PLANTING CALENDAR

As the weather begins to cool our planting activities will commence. Plantings are from 10am to 12 on Sunday. See WCS facebook for more details and updates (www.facebook.com/WarringalConservationSociety/)

April 19th - Planting: Banyule Swamp viewing area – Kangaroo grass and Sedges

May 24th - Planting - Back/South paddock

June 21st - Planting - Swamp South, adjacent to Habitat Link, near Alan Noy ephemeral wetland

July 26th - National Tree Day Planting - Middle Paddock (Between Alan Noy wetland and the Banyule Billabong)

August 23rd Maintenance/Hand weeding – at a previous planting site to be announced

September 20th Maintenance/Hand weeding - at a previous planting site to be announced

October 25th - Maintenance/Hand weeding – at previous planting site to be announced

WCS AT THE BANYULE ECOFEST

The Warringal Conservation Society shared a booth with Friends of Banyule and the Montmorency Community Group at the Banyule Eco festival on Sunday 15th March. There were great environmentally focused displays from community groups and the council: vegetable growing, native plant, beekeeping, wildlife, bike maintenance, waste reduction, and food. We spoke to many people who know and love Banyule Flats and were pleased to take a copy of our Banyule Flats map. They were excited to hear that we had seen Gliders, Wombats, Tawny Frog Mouths and Possums on our walk the previous night. We also gathered many signatures for the petition supporting an underground wildlife crossing at Lower Plenty Road (see below).

LOWER PLENTY ROAD WILDLIFE CROSSING PETITION

A new wildlife crossing under Lower Plenty Road between Borlase Reserve and Banyule Flats was part of the North East Link project design signed off by the Minister for Planning in February 2023. The North East Link Project organisation have since reneged on an underground wildlife crossing at Yallambie and propose a rope bridge for climbing species, ignoring kangaroos, wombats and echidnas and the possibility of platypus and turtle travel. Please use the embedded link below or QR code to the right to sign this petition requesting the reinstatement of an underground wildlife crossing. Closes 1st June 2026

FEBRUARY SPEAKER REPORT – BRETT MIFSUD – BIG TREES

Brett Mifsud is a renowned big tree hunter who has spent decades on the trail of the tallest eucalypts in Victoria and Tasmania. Brett's journey began in 1990 with a black and white photo in the Guinness book of records showing a giant eucalypt in Tasmania's Styx Valley. More research led him to reports and photos of massive trees from the 1800s. Brett wondered whether there were still any giant trees left, and if so, how big are they, how long do they live?

Initial searches confirmed that giant trees were no longer common. Clearing and bush fires had taken their toll in both Victoria and Tasmania. There were some large trees in Victoria's protected water catchment areas and regrowth trees from the 1939 bushfires were getting very tall. However, forests containing giant trees no longer covered large areas of the landscape.

While native forest logging in Victoria ended as of January 2024, there was limited protection for tall trees prior to this. Trees predating 1900 and or greater than 85m or with a girth of 12.5m (diameter 4m) were spared, but there were not many trees that met these stringent criteria. Similarly stringent criteria are in place in Tasmania trees, with trees greater than 85m tall, having more than 280 cubic meters of trunk wood volume or girth over 12.5m (Diameter 4m) afforded protection where operationally possible. As a result, really tall and high-volume trees are rare and have a limited distribution in Victoria and Tasmania.

The continued survival of tall trees is precarious with a warmer dryer climate increasing the frequency of bushfire. Twelve trees over 90m tall have been recorded in Victoria since accurate measurements started in about 2000. Five of these trees were killed in the 2009 bushfires. In Tasmania 23 trees over 90m tall have been recorder since 2000. Of these trees: one has fallen, one was killed in the 2019 bushfires, five have lost their tops and are no longer over 90m tall, eight have dead tops with living leaves well below 90m. Of those with living leaves at the top, at least three have severe structural issues and are not likely to be tall much longer (rot, splitting of main stem). The tallest living tree in Tasmania was Centurion at 100m tall – however damage from the 2019 bushfires has meant its highest leader has fallen – so it is now 96m tall.

Going back to Brett's big tree questions from 1990:
Are there any giants left? Yes!
If there are some still about, where are they? Tasmania (mostly!)
How tall are they? to 100m tall, 'regrowth' to 93m
How big are they? 23m girth, 460m^3 in wood volume
How long do they live? Well over 500 years, possibly 600+
How long will it take for trees to get as big and or tall as those depicted in these old photos and stories? The tallest Victorian regrowth could be 100m tall in less than 30 years. Maybe the largest Tasmanian trees rival those from Victoria in the 1800s?

Brett's talk was an inspiring tale of passion and citizen science. For more about Brett's work and big trees see his websites: https://victoriasgianttrees.weebly.com/ and https://tasmaniasgianttrees.weebly.com/

James Deane

DUCK SEASON 2026

The Coalition Against Duck Shooting (CADS), led by Laurie Levy, has pushed to permanently ban recreational duck shooting in Victoria for 40 years. Unfortunately, Premier Jacinta Allen has allowed duck shooting to continue with a full three-month season and nine birds per day for each hunter.

Duck shooters can take the following "game birds" each day of the season in 2026:

- Pacific black duck (totem of Dja Dja Wurrung people)
- Mountain duck (Australian shelduck)
- Grey teal
- Chestnut teal
- Pink-eared duck (often left dead in the field as they are the smallest duck)
- Hardhead (relisted as a "game bird")

Protected (shooting prohibited) species of duck are:

- Blue-winged shoveler
- Freckled duck (Australia's rarest duck)
- Musk duck
- Blue-billed duck

On Wednesday the 18th of March CADS came to Kerang in northern Victoria. The Game Management Authority (GMA) were waiting to fine rescuers and issue banning notices for the rest of the season. Anyone fined is looking at between $1,000 to $5,000 for going to the aid of wounded waterbirds,

I was with CADS from Wednesday to Saturday at Lake Leaghur there were 30 shooters' camps. There were shots fired before legal shooting time on Wednesday morning. However, due to the density of shooters at Lake Leaghur which is only 1 km long and 700 metres across, it was too dangerous for rescuers to enter the water and look for wounded and dead birds.

A wildlife rescuer had his net and wildlife licence also seized by the GMA. Rescuers did not enter the water until just after 11 am (as legally required) on the Wednesday. Many injured birds were observed but most could not be captured due to the previously noted confiscation of a net. A wood duck was brought in but died under sedation due to injuries from shotgun pellets.

On Saturday the 21st of March CADS went back to Lake Leaghur to attend to wounded birds hiding in the reeds. The GMA were in full force (*right*) and the police were present, I have never seen this number of vehicles and GMA staff at a wetland.

This was the quietest opening season ever. Duck numbers were well down before the season was declared across Victoria. To date, no rescuer has been issued with a banning notice, fined, or escorted off the wetlands by the GMA. Illegal behaviour by duck shooters included leaving unburied non-biodegradable wipes on wetlands, unburied human faeces, and an unextinguished campfire at Lake Leaghur (*right*). Lake Leaghur was cleaned up by duck rescuers.

If you are one of the majority of Victorians who would like to see an end to duck shooting, CADS urges you to write to the Minister of Sport and Recreation and other relevant politicians, write letters to The Age, the Herald Sun, The Weekly Times (Victoria's rural paper), the Gannawarra Times (my local paper), and any other newspapers or media.

Kate Bossence, Kerang
(Dedicated to the memory of long-time CADS and Warringal Conservation Society member Celia Smith, a champion for native waterbirds who sadly passed away last July from breast cancer)

NATURE NOTES FEBRUARY 2026

We must mention a very dry January, with catastrophic bushfires, which started on 9th January. There was major damage throughout Victoria and a number of country towns burnt out, including Ruffey, Longford and Harcourt. Later heavy rain, with some local flooding, was very welcome.

George Paras visited Birrarrung Park, Templestowe, and saw lots of small birds, including 2 Satin Fly catchers and 3 Brown Thornbills.

Daphne Hards saw a Collared Sparrowhawk in a neighbour's garden.

Robert Bender photographed a Long-necked Turtle in Wilson Reserve, and a Jumping Spider. The Wetland in Warringal Park is improved after a year's weeding. Eastern Koels have been about in Ivanhoe and one was seen in Wilson Reserve. One Yellow-tailed Cockatoo may have been a refugee from the bushfires. The Bailey Billabong's west end completely dried out - the mud was dry enough to walk on - a good opportunity to dig out much Yellow Iris which was taking over. Alas, it sprouted again after the rain. A Striped Marsh-Frog was found there. A group of Muttonwood seedlings were found 100 metres from the original colony, at the east end of the Horseshoe Billabong. Robert also found a Desert Ash and masses of Ivy at Yarra Flats, after decades of neglect. Last winter he pulled out thousands of Winter Cherry plants, but now they have all re-grown. I wonder if children still call them Jaffa Plant?

Dianne Williamson saw Pelicans on the Swamp, sometimes as many as four at a time. I saw two of them myself. At the time, Banyule Swamp had a wide border of dried mud. Lynn Easton and I were not pleased to see a bird photographer walking round on the mud, with the result that the 4 Latham's Snipe feeding in the shallows all flew back into the reedbed. Bird photography is becoming very popular, but no photo is worth disturbing the birds. Particularly Snipe which were feeding very hard, fattening up for their long flight back to Northern Japan.

My own observations included a gravid Blotched Bluetongue, basking on woodchip mulch close to the house, and a very high-speed Buff-banded Rail at Banyule Flats, and a Yellow-billed Spoonbill. Some lucky photographers (not me!) published pictures of Lewin's Rail taken this summer at Banyule Flats.

Anthea Fleming

If not delivered return to: PO Box 64 Rosanna 3084

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