



Berg
Mt Martha

Caring for the Balcombe Estuary Reserves

THE CREEK

Volume 18 No 3, June 2014

TRAVELLING NORTH!

Liz Barraclough reports

Just after our Friday working-bee before Easter on the 11th April, I received an excited phone call from Tamara Keyte: 'Liz, I'm down at the mouth of the estuary, and there are SO many eels!'

I had been telling her of tales from Mt Martha old timers (about my age!) about how there used to be schools of Short-finned Eels at Easter just inside the estuary sandbar, and at full moon, if the mouth were not open, they would slither over the sand to the sea.

I rushed down. Neither of us had a camera, just our mobile phones to capture the eels through the rather cloudy moving water.

The estuary mouth had been closed for months due to the lack of rain, but this day some 'big' boys had dug it out (not permitted) to surf the sudden release of water. The eels must have been waiting in the estuary, adapting to the more saline conditions before they headed out to sea, and the rush of water must have flushed them out. They spread along the shoreline and in an arc around the estuary mouth for at least 50 meters, a seething dark mass.

We had lots of questions. How long had they been in the estuary? Were they hugging the shore so they could still stay in the fresh water current and adapt to the salt? Would they go back into the estuary when the force of the outgoing water lessened? Would they wait until the full moon (15th April) to head out into the Bay and begin their

migration north to the Coral Sea for mating and spawning? Were both males and females there as we'd been led to believe happens? Was the same process being repeated in all estuaries up the eastern seaboard?

We need to do more research and, next year, to monitor the estuary closely. In the meantime, we'd love to hear from anyone who can enlighten us or share any Eel experiences or knowledge.

motion and their mucus-like coating. They can negotiate small waterfalls, dam walls and stormwater. In the dry they survive long periods in muddy bogs by absorbing oxygen through their skin rather than their gills. In winter, a form of hibernation enables them to tolerate the cold.

Easily caught, the Short-finned Eel was a staple food for the Wurundgeri and Boonerwung peoples, who harvested them in the once-abundant billabongs and swamps.

A remarkable odyssey

All species of eel are catadromous, with their adult phase spent in fresh water and the juvenile in salt water (like many Australian fresh-water fish).

Their lifecycle involves an epic migration. Adult eels return to the spawning grounds where their lives began and where,

following spawning, they will die. At about 14 years (for males) or up to 24 (for females) they make their way into nearby rivers and streams, and swim downstream to the ocean to begin a swim of up to 4,000 km to the South Coral Sea, off North Queensland.

The return of a new generation

Following hatching, the eel larvae are borne south on ocean currents towards the continental shelf, when their leaf-like bodies start to take the cylindrical adult form. Still transparent, they are now known as glass eels; only when they enter an estuary do colour pigments develop. At 1-3 years of age the young eels (elvers) begin their upstream migration to fresh water for their adult years. In Victoria, this happens between March and October.



A seething mass of eels making their way across the sand at the mouth of the creek Photos Liz Barraclough

SOME EEL FACTS

Source: Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne fact sheet on the Short-finned Eel

The Short-finned Eel, *Anguilla australis*, is common along Australia's eastern seaboard as well as in New Zealand and South Pacific islands. It prefers the still, shallow freshwater environments of wetlands, lagoons and farm dams, where it can tolerate the low levels of dissolved oxygen, and it feeds on yabbies, shrimp, frogs, insects, worms and shellfish.

The eels range in colour from dark brown or black to olive or golden brown, with a lighter belly. The large mouth bears numerous teeth. Some eels grow to over 1m and up to 3 kg, but up to 0.5 kg is most common.

When it's damp, eels can move overland with a sinuous, snake-like

BERG MT MARTHA'S YEAR OF THE BIRD, CONTINUED

A FLYING SUCCESS!

Judy Hubbard reports

It was great to see some 50 people at the launch of BERG Mt Martha's newest educational resource: the Birds of the Balcombe Estuary Reserves brochure, beautifully illustrated by BERG Mt Martha member Annie Dowd.

The brochure was launched on Saturday 3rd May at the Mornington Library, by David Reid OAM, a keen birder and Board member of Birdlife Australia. David told us of the joys of bird watching, his delight in seeing a royal spoonbill on the estuary, and the holistic relationship between water, trees and birds.

David pointed out that all 52 species shown in the brochure could be seen within the reserves. He commended the brochure as a great way to educate people about the birds they might find and, more importantly, that need protection.

Andrea Ebsworth, Cultural Planner, Libraries, Arts & Culture, for Mornington Peninsula Shire, who generously funded the brochure through an Arts Stream Community Grant, praised BERG Mt Martha for working collaboratively with local government and the arts.

A big thank you to BERG's Community Awareness & Education Group, led by Barbara Thraves, for organising such a great event.

Brochures are available from The Briars or can be downloaded from www.berg.org.au.

THE EXHIBITION

Paintings from the brochure were part of an exhibition in the library during April and May, which also featured superb carved bird sculptures by BERG MM member Stewart Dawson (right) and some wonderful bird photographs by BERG MM members Angela Kirsner and Pam Hearn (see next column).



Photos Angela Kirsner

The 20 photographs from the exhibition are available for sale individually (unmounted) – contact Angela Kirsner at info@berg.org.au or 9509 6116

...AND A PLACE FOR BIRD WATCHING

Our splendid bird hide is now complete and ready for bird watchers, on the estuary bank just north of the bridge.

We have many people to thank. The project was organised by John Trevillian, Geoff Kaye designed and drew up the hide, and Bruce Dawson organised and pre-cut the timber and led the building crew of Mt Martha Rotarians and BERGers.

Jenny Mann at Bunnings negotiated donation of all materials; Liz Barraclough and Jo Tetteroo sorted out permits and paperwork; and Greg Buchanan made the many brackets. The building team also included Bill Cummins, Melanie Buchanan, Colin Stokes, John Marshall, John Inchley, John Stoker and Lincoln McLean.



Above (L-R): John Trevillian, Bill Cummins, John Marshall, Geoff Kaye & (in the hole) Colin Stokes Photo Liz Barraclough; Below (L-R): John Stoker, John Marshall, Geoff Kaye and Jenny Mann try out the hide Photo John Trevillian



WETLAND BIRDS RESOURCE

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Beginners Guide to Wetland Bird Identification

provides information on over 40 wetland

birds. If you would like a copy, contact David Curtis at jendavid@iinet.net.au or 5974 4495.



AUTUMN BIRD SURVEY

Article and photos by Pam Hearn

On a clear, chilly morning four of us from Birdlife Mornington Peninsula, David Ap-Thomas, Val Ford, Susan Clark and I, set off. The Estuary was a glorious mud-flat with lots of ducks (Chestnut Teal & Pacific Black), a Great White Egret, Dusky Moorhens, Cormorants, a White-faced Heron (see photo) and a Royal



Spoonbill, plus a couple of Masked Lapwings on the far side.

Little Brown Thornbills were everywhere in the trees, and the usual Red Wattlebirds made their presence known. Our list grew – Silvereyes, Red-browed Finches, Eastern Yellow Robins, Spotted Pardalotes calling all over the place. We heard the occasional White-eared Honeyeater, Eastern Spinebill and Grey Fantail – but no Raptors (birds of prey). Overall, we saw 42 species.

Interestingly, we also saw what we think was a cluster of some four possum dreys made of blackberry cuttings. Did the possums use the prunings to make a secure nest?

We commend the new BERG bird-identification brochure. It gives some insight into the variety of birds that can be found in this lovely area.

VALE HARRY HARRIS

From John Inchley

BERG Mt Martha members were saddened to hear of the death in April of Harry Harris. Among his many contributions to the Mt Martha community, Harry served as vice-president of BERG from 2000 to 2010, providing a decade of highly valued support to the President, Keith Wilson. He was also for many years a stalwart of the Waterwatch team. A real gentleman, he was much loved for his friendship and his stories. Our sincere condolences to Peggy and family.



Harry Harris enjoying a BERG event in 2006 Photo Richard Kirsner

FIELD NEWS

Field Officer Liz Barraclough reports

Sunday working bees

In April about seven volunteers removed mainly Flaxleaf Broom and Rock Rose above the Ferrero Ovals, by Hopetoun Creek, as part of our on-ground contribution to our Melbourne Water 2014 Community Grant. Thanks to Kaye Young for a great morning tea!

In May a similar number weeded large numbers of Coast Wattle and Teatree seedlings (and a few other weeds) from the Maude St burn site. It will take quite a few more hours to complete this task, after the fire triggered a most prolific germination of these species.

Friday Morning Group

Working-bees have involved drilling & filling and cutting & painting woody weeds above the old quarry below Citation Oval, and planting indigenous species here. We have

also worked at the Maude St burn site to help Naturelinks remove woody weed seedlings and follow up our monitoring sites.

Balcombe Grammar Community Service Program

As of mid-May, we have had two sessions with two enthusiastic and hard-working groups of Year 7 students, planting to enhance the indigenous corridor that runs down the easement from the school towards Hopetoun Creek. They have done a great job planting 275 tube stock into dry and hard ground, and carting numerous heavy watering cans from the school to water them well in. The BERG Mt Martha helpers (Flo Gason, Hazel Athey, Eric Smalley and John Inchley) have been marvellous, 'mattocking' the planting holes and instructing and overseeing.

We have another two sessions, on 30th May and 13th June – any helpers would be most welcome. Call Liz on 0408 388 430

Green Army

It is hoped that the Mornington Peninsula will have two or three teams from the Green Army, a Commonwealth environmental program, to work on projects put forward by local Friends and Landcare groups. We have submitted our project ideas to the Shire's Natural Systems Team to be included.

MT MARTHA MEMORIES

David Street remembers

BERG Mt Martha couple David and Bronwyn Street have been part of Mt Martha for over 65 years. Here are David's memories of the area – Bronwyn's will be in a later newsletter. The photos are from the Street family's collection.

My parents, Ralph and Vi Street, first rented the house on Mrs Gray's heath farm at the top of the hill in Bay Road in the late 1940s. I remember the pink South African heath that later spread to become a weed round the area but seems largely to have disappeared now. Outside the back gate, where Watson Road is now, were grasslands down to the Swamp Teatree (Melaleuca). There were two rough tracks, the upper and lower

lagoon paths, which the army used to get to the beach. Watson Road stopped at about Henley Street and two fords had to be negotiated to walk to the beach this way: at Henley Street and before the Esplanade.

In 1947, along with several other executives at Shell, my father bought land on a new subdivision in Moore Street. Ours was a double block with sea views and cost £50 a block. He arranged for a pre-fabricated weatherboard house to be erected. Correspondence with the building firm warned that due to post-war 'shortages', some compromises may have to be made with materials.

The influence of the recent World War II was evident. Our blocks had been used by the army as a camp, so were devoid of trees, except one, which the builders removed. To play with a model boat, I constructed a pond at the bottom of the garden and planted a Eucalyptus sapling on a tiny island. The pond has long since gone, but the tree remains today and is about 30 metres high!

In the shallows at the bottom of Watson Road were rusting iron tank tracks that had been used for launching amphibious craft from the beach – these still appear at low tide from time to time. Up at Henley Street was a jetty for drivers of these army 'ducks' to practise manoeuvring them on and off landings.



View from the Scout hall, Watson Rd, 1959

For a boy with a passion for cars, Mount Martha was a great place to spend weekends. From the corner of Bay Road and Moore Street, I recall watching the King's Birthday car race on Monday 12 June 1950. Run by the Light Car Club of Australia, the circuit ran from Point Nepean Road, down what is now Uralla Drive, round the houses of Balcombe Army Camp, down Bay

Road, back along the Beach road (The Esplanade) and up either Craigie or Bentons roads. The Argus claimed that the races were watched by a crowd of 30,000, who could catch special buses from Mornington Railway Station. The sum of £2000 was raised from the event and donated to Mornington RSL and the Balcombe Area Kindergarten. A highlight was the performance of the recently-released MG TD.

Regular hill-climb competitions were held on a bitumen, army-built strip of road in the vicinity of what was to become Pindari Drive.



View from the Trig Point at the top of Mt Martha, 1958

My parents extended the house and retired to Mt Martha in the 1960s. Dad was elected to

Mornington Council and local politics took a dramatic turn when the Mount Martha Citizens' League started the Mt Martha severance movement. Then in her eighties, my mother, who was English, was selected to parade in the costume of Queen Victoria for Mornington's Australia Day celebrations. As a child, she actually recalled seeing Queen Victoria so she knew she was far too tall for the role, but she entered into the spirit of it all.

BERG Mt Martha welcomes new member Anne Bryant

BERG Mt Martha Working Bees	Other BERG Activities	Other Groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Monthly working bee: 3rd Sunday, between 9am & 12noon. Next are 15th June and 20th July Meet at the Rotunda (Mel: 144 K11) or call Liz Barraclough on 0408 388 430 to find the work site. ❖ Friday mornings. Call Sue Betheras on 0408 808 201. ❖ Hopetoun Creek Greenfield Reserve Call Hazel Athey on 0419 899 560. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Waterwatch testing: 4th Sunday at Augusta St Bridge. Call John Inchley, 5974 1095. ❖ BERG Committee meets monthly at Mt Martha House, 9.00am. Next are 14th June & 12th July. All members welcome. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Fairbairn Bushland Reserve Friends Group working bees, call Judith Whittaker 5974 8174 or John Stoker 5977 1397. ❖ BirdLife Mornington Peninsula bird-watching 2nd Wednesday and 3rd Sunday. Enquiries to Max Burrows 9789 0224, mornington@birdlife.org.au or www.birdlife.org.au/locations/birdlife-mornington-peninsula. ❖ SPIFFA 1st Monday, 7.30 pm, at Parks Vic, Hinton St, Rosebud. Enquiries 5988 6529, or www.spiffa.org.
<p>BERG MT MARTHA COMMITTEE</p> <p>PRESIDENT GRAHAM HUBBARD • VICE PRESIDENT POSITION NOT FILLED • SECRETARY DI LEWIS • TREASURER RICHARD KIRSNER FIELD OFFICER LIZ BARRACLOUGH • NEWSLETTER ANGELA KIRSNER • WATERWATCH COORDINATOR JOHN INCHLEY • ROTARY CLUB LIAISON GEOFF KAYE • COMMUNITY AWARENESS BARBARA THRAVES • JOHN TREVILLIAN • RICHIE BALL</p>		
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THE CREEK

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