



Berg
Mt Martha

Caring for the Balcombe Estuary Reserves

THE CREEK

Volume 18 No 4, August 2014

RETURN OF THE SWANS

Angela Kirsner reports

When we were planning the new BERG Mt Martha bird brochure, we decided it was so long since we'd seen swans on the estuary that we would not include them.

With an exquisite sense of timing, two swans waited till the brochure was launched. Word spread rapidly on June 14th that a pair was sailing serenely around the estuary, trawling for food. They remained all weekend and, I'm told, through the following week. I saw them again the next Saturday, but gone by Sunday.

What brought them back?

Swans used to be a feature of Mt Martha. Each evening when I was a child (1950s) a line of them would fly into Balcombe Creek. When did this stop? I certainly don't recall.

Over the past decade or two they have been rare visitors. Liz Barraclough recalls occasional sightings in BERG's early days. I was told by a couple who cross the bridge each day to the shops that they had seen swans occasionally over recent years. In February 2000, Pam Hearn wrote in *The Creek* 'Black Swans have been seen feeding and flying in the vicinity of the creek;' and in January 2003 she recorded seeing 'some swans' on the Estuary.

It has been suggested that sedimentation of the estuary has

killed the seagrass beds that swans used to graze. Quite possibly, but it is guesswork; we have no survey of the estuary's aquatic vegetation. John Inchley noticed that a storm that opened the creek just before the swans' visit left the water very clear, with aquatic plants visible. He felt that a lot of mud had washed out. At the same time, Steve Yorke, Coordinator at The Briars, points out that sea grass responds to salinity levels: it vanishes with lots of fresh-water run-off, and returns when salinity rises again.

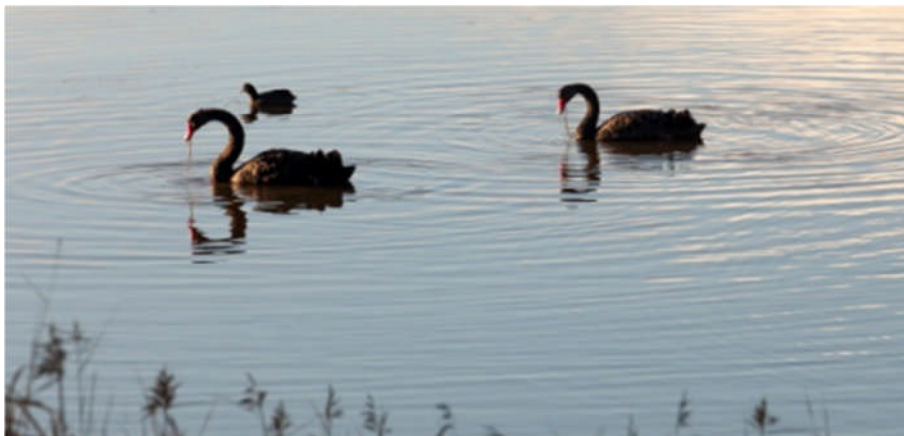
Swans feed on algae and weeds, plunging their long necks into water up to 1m deep to forage. Our swans trawled the length and breadth of the estuary and my photo (below) shows them with long strands of weed or sea-grass in their beaks. When they first appeared the estuary was fairly shallow, but by the following Saturday the mud flats were flooded and the swans were still feeding.

What else was at work?

The weekend the swans appeared, there were many other water birds on the estuary, more than usual – lots of cormorants (Little Pied and Little Black), ducks (Pacific Black and Chestnut Teal) and coots, an egret or two, a spoonbill...

Larry Wakefield (Birdlife Australia) suggests that the coming and going of Black Swans will be linked to their

continued next page



Balcombe Estuary Reserves Group Mt Martha Inc. No A0034645Y ABN 50 224 628 623

DIARY DATE

**WANT TO LEARN ABOUT
OUR NATIVE BEES?
ATTRACT THEM TO YOUR
GARDEN?**



Australian Blue-banded Bee - photo courtesy Ken Walker

Join BERG Mt Martha,
Saturday 30th August,
10–12am, Mt Martha House Room 5

for an engaging talk
(with stunning images) by

Dr Ken Walker

Senior Curator of Entomology &
Arachnology, Museum Victoria

Cost: Free!

RSVP (for catering) by
Friday 22nd August

info@berg.org.au or 0447 160 288

Australia has over 1,700 species of native bees – a unique bee fauna.

Learn how they are categorised (some by the length of their tongue), or where they carry pollen (some native bees carry pollen in their stomach). Discover their interesting nesting habits, as varied as the bees themselves. Hear about the Varroa mite – Australia is the only continent without these parasites that can wipe out honeybee colonies.

And find out how to attract native bees to your garden and observe them in the wild!

BERG Mt Martha
welcomes new members

Maureen & Neil Cullen,
Wayne Preston, Peter Sisson,
Christo Viljoen

overall population on the Peninsula and the state of their foraging grounds. There is a good population feeding in Westernport, but seagrass on the Port Phillip side used to be more extensive around Rosebud and Rye. Swans are now few in number; a few decades ago there may have been more, and thus more visits to shelter in the Balcombe Estuary.

They do, however, appear at The Briars, albeit erratically, says Steve Yorke – never more than a pair, seen for maybe a few weeks each year.

More on Black Swans

The Australian Museum website (<http://australianmuseum.net.au/black-swan/>) tells us that Black Swans prefer larger salt, brackish or fresh waterways and permanent wetlands. They need at least 40m of clear water to take off. Outside the breeding season they travel long distances, flying at night and resting during the day with other swans. They pair for life and raise one brood per season (June-September in the south). The nest is an untidy heap of reeds and grasses, on a small island or floating in deeper water, where they lay up to ten eggs. The cygnets, covered in grey down, can swim and feed themselves as soon as they hatch.

AND FROM 1947...

Swan Upsets Electricity Supply at Mornington

The Standard "The Peninsula News-Pictorial," Thursday 9th January; accessed at <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/73594888>

The work of a black swan which collided with the electric light lines at Mt Martha last Thursday night was responsible for all lights going out in the Mornington township, including Mt Martha. The impact caused two fuses at the Tanti Avenue sub-station to be blown. As a result householders, cafes and places of entertainment were without light for 35 minutes. The Mornington Theatre had no alternative but to close its doors. Candles and kerosene lamps were used in houses until the light was restored by the S.E.C.

The swan was on its way to sea from Balcombe's [*sic*] Creek when it struck the lower lines and fell dead a few feet away. It had received 22,000 volts.

S.A.G.

Graham Hubbard reports

June saw the first formal meeting of BERG Mt Martha's Sedimentation Action Group –inevitably shortened to 'SAG'. SAG's aim is to control, reduce and monitor inflows of sediment to the Balcombe Estuary, to improve and ensure its health into the future.

At the meeting were six BERGers, plus Jess Wingad from the Shire and Naomi Dart from Melbourne Water. At least two more BERGers have expressed interest in helping with the project.

Jess outlined the Shire's plans – formed largely due to our pressure – first, to install a sediment basin at the bottom of La Trobe St by the end of this year. They then plan another sediment-control structure for the Henley Ave stormwater catchment, working in with plans for the Watson Rd tennis court extension.

Sealing the roads in the Augusta St catchment is also a priority. Unmade roads are major contributors to sediment in the estuary and, while we wish there were another solution, research shows that sealing roads dramatically reduces sediment flow. Some sealed surfaces are more aesthetically in tune with gravel roads than others, and BERG Mt Martha hopes to work with the Shire towards some of these more pleasing options, to respect Mt Martha's character.

Research program

SAG and the Shire are working with Melbourne Water and the Centre for Aquatic Pollution Identification and Management (<http://capim.com.au>), based at The University of Melbourne, to develop a three-year program to research, monitor and develop effective management of sediment entering the estuary, the creek and the catchment. We are exploring various funding sources to support this.

Sedimentation of the estuary has been of concern to BERG Mt Martha since its very first meeting in 1997. We are delighted finally to have established a group to address the problem systematically and scientifically.

ADVANCE NOTICE CHRISTMAS GIVING CARDS

These popular BERG Mt Martha cards will be available again this year.

Just like the famous Oxfam goats, chooks & coloured pencil donation cards, you decide how much to spend on each gift card.

Keep BERG Mt M cards in mind when planning Christmas gifts.

More information soon!

NOTICE OF MEETING AND CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

2014 BERG MT MARTHA ANNUAL GENERAL

MEETING

SATURDAY 25TH OCTOBER

at Mt Martha House

9.30 am registration for the meeting at 10.00 am

Guest speaker, at 11.00, is

Owen Gooding

**CFA Vegetation Management
Team Leader**

Owen will tell us of the most recent & best research on how fire behaves in bushland and urban areas, and he will talk about garden design that minimises fire risk without denuding the ground of plants.

Meeting Agenda

- Welcome and apologies
- Minutes of 2013 AGM
- Committee reports:
 - President, Graham Hubbard
 - Treasurer, Richard Kirsner
 - Field Officer, Liz Barraclough
- Election: President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary, & up to 10 ordinary committee members.
- Appointment of Auditor

Nominations for office bearers & committee

For nomination forms call 0447 160 208 or go to www.berg.org.au, under 'Resources'. Nominations in writing, signed by two BERG members & accompanied by the candidate's written consent, must be with the Secretary by Saturday 18th October.

FIELD NEWS

Field Officer Liz Barraclough reports Sunday working bees

The foreshore was the worksite for both June and July. In June, eleven of us, including a number of most welcome new faces, planted over 200 shrubs and trees between Bay Road and the South Beach car park. Our aim is two-fold: to enhance middle-storey vegetation for the small-bird population, and to ensure the Coast Banksias' dominance in the protected areas.

In July, we had a mammoth turnout of sixteen. This time we planted 176 plants from the Bridge northwards to the beach track at the bottom of Coolangatta Rd. With these large numbers, we were also able to weed out lots of the prolifically regenerating Polygala before they seed (Naturelinks will tackling the rest very soon).



BERG's Honorary Auditor Sue Milton cut a fine figure at the June working bee!
Photo Angela Kirsner

Grants

We have another \$6,830 from **Coastcare** to fund this work along the foreshore, in addition to the \$11,404 we received from them last year. The area forms part of an important habitat corridor, from the foreshore along Balcombe Creek and its extensive catchment. The grants help us to ensure ongoing control of emerging weeds, which is essential while the young indigenous plants are establishing.

Join us in August!

At the Sunday Working Bee we will mulch and plant along Hopetoun Creek below Balcombe Kinder. Come along and support this joint effort with the kindergarten!



This is one reason to come to working bees! Morning tea by July's cook, Roo Rawlins
Photo Angela Kirsner

Friday Morning Group

The Friday Group has done a huge amount of work preparing the ground for planting at the August Sunday working bee (see above). We have removed Angled Onion and grassy weeds round indigenous plantings, and cleaned up to enable access for planting. We have cut and painted Blackberries and Pittosporum along the creek's east bank and in and around the patch of *Melaleuca nesophilla*, removed Blackberries along the naturestrip near the Kinder where they dangerously overhung the path, and drilled and filled larger Pittosporums on the west bank. Naturelinks will selectively spray the Kikuyu grass in this area so that indigenous *Gabmia radula*, *Goodenia ovata* and others can regenerate. And if they do not, we will plant some.

Training

Naturelinks ran a training and refresher session in weed burning to qualify six BERGers for permits to use the burner: Sue Betheras, Liz Barraclough, David Street, John Stirling, Tamara Keyte and Eric Smalley. Permits last 12 months only, so this is an annual process.

TRAINING WORKSHOPS – ARE YOU INTERESTED?

Two workshops run by Gidja Walker are planned for the next 6 months:

- Ecology and Future Management of the Bunyip.
- Estuarine and Related Coastal Ecology.

Contact Liz if you'd like to take part – 0408 388 430 or info@berg.org.au

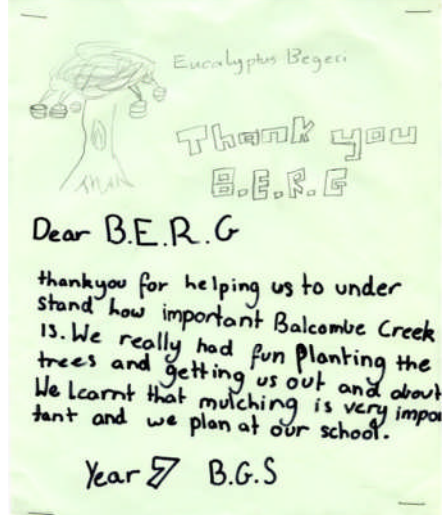
SERVICE STATIONS UPSTREAM

BERG Mt Martha is appalled to learn – by seeing the excavations – that there are twin service stations being built, flanking Peninsula Link, close to the banks of Balcombe Creek, on Green Wedge land at Baxter. We discover that there was only limited publicity about the development. It was rejected by the Shire and VCAT, but approved by the State Planning Minister.

Any upstream development threatens the health of the creek and catchment. We are seeking to discover what offsets are planned and to be involved, together with other conservation groups in the catchment, in any restoration work the offsets might involve.

We will keep you posted.

BALCOMBE GRAMMAR ENJOYED THEIR TIME WITH US!



**CAN YOU HELP?
... WITH A BBQ**

BERG Mt Martha will be holding a fund-raising BBQ at Bunnings Mornington on Saturday 20th September. If you can spare 2 hours to help please contact us at info@berg.org.au or 0447 160 288.

...WITH CHAIN-SAWING

BERG Mt Martha owns a chainsaw, but needs someone with a chainsaw licence to operate it – not for major tree work, but simply tidying up fallen branches and the like. Would you be willing to train? BERG MtM would cover any expenses. Call Liz on 0498 388 430 or email info@berg.org.au



A grand turnout at the June working bee – Standing L-R: Bree Iredale (Naturelinks), Philip Gray, Ian Croker, John Inchley, Christo Viljoen, Jenny Selby, Graham Hubbard; in front: Liz Barraclough, Sue Milton. Photo (and 11th worker!) Angela Kirsner

BERG Mt Martha Working Bees	Other BERG Activities	Other Groups
<p>❖ Monthly working bee: 3rd Sunday, between 9am & 12noon. Next are 17th August and 21st September. Meet at the Rotunda (Mel: 144 K11) or call Liz Barraclough on 0408 388 430 to find the work site.</p> <p>❖ Friday mornings. Call Sue Betheras on 0408 808 201.</p> <p>❖ Hopetoun Creek Greenfield Reserve Call Hazel Athey on 0419 899 560</p>	<p>❖ Waterwatch testing: 4th Sunday at Augusta St Bridge. Call John Inchley, 5974 1095.</p> <p>❖ BERG Committee meets monthly at Mt Martha House, 9.00am. Next are 9th August and 13th September. All members welcome.</p>	<p>❖ Fairbairn Bushland Reserve Friends Group working bees, call Judith Whittaker 5974 8174.</p> <p>❖ 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.</p> <p>❖ SPIFFA 1st Monday, 7.30 pm, at Parks Vic, Hinton St, Rosebud. Enquiries 5988 6529, or www.spiffa.org.</p>
<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 THRIVES • JOHN TREVILLIAN</p>		
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THE CREEK

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