



Berg
Mt Martha

Caring for the Balcombe Estuary Reserves

THE CREEK

Volume 19 No 3, June 2015

BUSH CUBBIES

Photos by Karen Charlton & Liz Barraclough

Mt Martha Preschool held a wildly successful Bush Cubby session on Sunday 3rd May in the Balcombe Estuary Reserves just by the preschool. Over 60 parents, kids, neighbours and cousins joined in, building dens, shelters, cubbies and fairy rings from tea tree, pine needles and other foraged materials. There were snacks to be eaten in the new cubbies, then BERG Mt Martha's Jenny Selby took everyone to explore the Bunyip Walk that runs between the preschool and the Boardwalk.

The session was organised by BERGER and preschool mum Zoe Boehnke together with Lorraine Lamb and Jenny from BERG MM. Although all it took was some sunshine, some carefully coloured

flyers from Zoe and one band-aid. The rest was pure play.

And the 'BERG in Action' sign was modified for the day (see photo)!

And the next day...

Liz Barraclough went down to look at the cubbies with three of her grandchildren who, she said, 'were so excited by the cubbies'. While they were there a number of families arrived to look at their cubbies from the day before, bubbling over with the fun they'd had. They had also really enjoyed the walk with Jenny through the Bunyip and the awareness they had gained.



Zoe is also one of the moving forces behind **Little BERGers**, the nature playgroup each Wednesday morning at the Estuary, about 11.00 till 1.00. Families with babies to preschoolers welcome! Contact Zoe on 0401 842 439 or Nane on 0412 986 183.

EAGLES ON OUR PATCH

From Mornington Peninsula BirdLife Vol 4 No 2, June 2015

The sound of screeching seagulls is nothing new over the shops at Mt Martha. The birds are masters of the air and making the trip across the road from beach to scavenging on the footpath is just a wingbeat away.

But on a Sunday afternoon in early January a glance upwards would have shown shoppers that the screeching of the gulls had nothing to do with squabbles over food. Not too far above the shops glided a Wedge-tailed Eagle, its characteristic silhouette raising alarm among the birds underneath.

Sightings of Australia's largest bird of prey are becoming more common on the Mornington Peninsula, although they may have always been there unseen, hunting above paddocks now dissected by Peninsula Link (which also provides a larder of roadkill).

'Just as we drove onto the beginning of Peninsula Link on our way to Dromana today, I was amazed to see a young Wedge-tailed Eagle fly up from next to the road,' BirdLife Mornington Peninsula member Gillian Barnett has reported earlier this month. 'It swept in a semi-circle and alighted in a eucalypt nearby. Lucky I wasn't the one driving so I could have a good look. I calculated we were inland from Seaford or, if anything, closer to town than that. Perhaps it is looking for a territory of its own?'

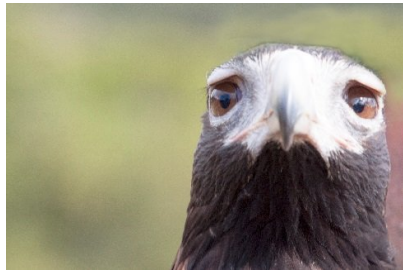
Another BirdLife member, Mike Carter, reported a pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles near the Eastern Treatment Plant, Bangholme, on 25 January.

The birds are also a common sight from the leash-free area at



Citation Oval, Mt Martha, as they ride the thermals above properties between Nepean Highway and the Moorooduc Highway.

BirdLife president Max Burrows said the eagles had large territories and had previously been known to nest at Main Ridge, Red Hill and Arthurs Seat. 'I have seen them fly over my place at Langwarrin. I don't think they have much competition on the peninsula, but they would be limited [in numbers] by the availability of prey.' Mr Burrows said Wedge-tails preferred live prey, mainly rabbits, to carrion.



Above: Up close Photo Angela Kirsner.

Below: Eagles at The Briars. Photo Liz Barraclough



Sue Brabender, information ranger at The Briars Park, said a pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles has a nest on private property near The Briars. 'They have one large juvenile so we are still seeing all three or just two of them regularly across The Briars.' Ms Brabender said the trio had also been seen with a fourth 'ring-in' and she recently photographed an eagle being harassed by magpies as it sat in the top of a dead tree near the old quarry half way along the entry driveway to the visitors centre. 'Of course it was not concerned,' she said. 'I have also watched them disappear across Nepean Highway and hope people's small pets are safely concealed.'

Keith Platt, *Southern Peninsula News*
24 February 2015

ROOT OUT THIS WEED BEFORE IT GETS GOING

By Bernie Schedwin from the Main Creek Catchment Landcare Group, this article and picture appeared in the Mornington Peninsula Landcare Network News, March 2015

Sticky Bartsia, *Parentucellia viscosa*, a native of western and southern Europe, has not yet hit the Mornington Peninsula in plague proportions, but is starting to make its presence felt and is active in South Gippsland. Early action may help to prevent it become a major pest here.

Also known as Yellow Bartsia and Tarweed, it is a broad-leaved, erect herb, usually annual, with bright green, serrated, hairy leaves on a stiff hairy stem. In fact this plant is seriously hairy, with soft glandular hairs mixed with larger stiff simple hairs all over the stem, leaves, flower perianth and calyx, all contributing to its sticky character. The flowers are bright yellow, irregular and subsessile (i.e. coming directly out of the stem).



Parentucellia viscosa Photo: C. Hortin

Photo: florabase.dpaw.wa.gov.au/browse/profile/7090

The plants are easily spotted in a paddock grazed by cattle because the cattle leave it behind. The flowers, which appear in spring and through summer, are in dense clusters around the top of the stem. Seed capsules are non-fleshy, about 8-12mm long by 4-5mm, with many small seeds. It can grow to 70cm tall but is more often about 20-35cm. It appears among medium and low trees and on grasslands in almost any soil and where ground has been disturbed. It is spread by wind, water, machinery and by adhering to clothing or fur.

Control: Pounce on individual plants as you spot them and dispose of them thoroughly (not compost). They pull up easily. Try spot spraying with glyphosate 0.5% before flowering (i.e. June, July, maybe August and September).

BUZZ POLLINATORS OR WHY WE DON'T WANT BUMBLE BEES

In his talk on native bees to BERG MM last August, Ken Walker, of Museum Victoria, briefly mentioned bumble bees. This article by Angela Kirsner draws on what he said, the Aussie Bee website, aussiebee.com.au/bumblebeeharm.html, and an ABC interview, at abc.net.au/local/stories/2012/09/18/3592865.htm

Bumble bees are currently not in mainland Australia, but they have spread into almost every corner of Tasmania since they were introduced, illegally but probably deliberately, in 1992.

Tomato growers have lobbied hard for bumble bees to be introduced to mainland Australia because they are 'buzz pollinators'.



Some flowers, notably tomatoes, release their pollen most effectively only with buzz pollination. The pollen of such flowers is *inside* the anther, which is typically tubular. A buzz pollinator clamps its body around the cone of the flower and rapidly vibrates its flight muscles, causing the pollen fly out.

Currently commercial tomatoes are grown in glasshouses and growers use a vibrating instrument to pollinate the flowers manually – a costly exercise.

Sleepers awake

There are strong arguments against introducing bumble bees. Most compelling is the number of introduced plants already in Australia that thrive only with buzz pollination. These are currently 'sleeping weeds', relatively benign, but with bumblebees they could become invasive, widespread and destructive. They include foxgloves, thistles, white horehound, buffalo burr and impatiens, as well as many agricultural weeds in the genus *Solanum*, some of which are poisonous to livestock and potentially, children. *Rhododendron ponticum*, one of Britain's worst weeds but not previously a problem here, is already spreading on Tasmania's west coast.

Competing for nectar

There is also evidence from Tasmania that the larger, more robust bumble bees are muscling in on the territory of smaller native bees, with native bees visiting fewer flowers where there are more bumble bees. The bumble bee also has the habit of biting through flowers to get nectar, bypassing contact with pollen and so not pollinating the flowers.

Because bumble bees can fly and forage at lower temperatures than either the introduced honey bee or Australia's many native bees, they can forage much earlier in the morning, a problem for other species when nectar and pollen are in short supply.

Bumble bees would also be in competition with birds such as honeyeaters and parrots for nectar and pollen resources. Of special concern is the endangered Swift Parrot, *Lathamus discolor*, which depends largely on *Encalyptus globulus* and *E. ovata* for food while breeding. In Tasmania these flowers have been found to be virtually devoid of nectar when the introduced European honeybees and bumble bees were active. Early mornings and cold days have provided a window for Swift Parrots, but the introduction of bumble bees is closing this window.

What about agriculture?

Ironically, Tasmania's bumble bees are useless to horticulture. Descended from just a small number of fertilised queens, they are so inbred that their commercial use is not practical.

There are, however, a small number of Australian native bee species that are buzz pollinators. These include the very handsome blue banded bees and the carpenter bees, both of which both show potential as specialist pollinators for use in greenhouses, though the research needed to make this happen seems currently a low funding priority (see aussiebee.com.au/blue-banded-bee-update-2012.html).

Right: Becky & Emily Van Orsouw & Brooke Fell helped with planting at the May working bee, while John Inchley (far right) secured sturdy guards around some of the plantings.

Photos Angela Kirsner

FIELD NEWS

Field Officer Liz Barraclough reports

Sunday working bees

Our focus for April and May has been the bottom area of the Rabbit Paddock, by Hopetoun Creek, to establish, increase and link the vegetation and habitat corridor from Hopetoun Creek to Balcombe Creek. In April, a splendid fifteen volunteers spread mulch and began the planting.

For the May working-bee, the weather was perfect! Naturelinks had kindly spread the mulch, leaving us free to continue last month's planting. We put in another 200 indigenous trees, shrubs and groundcovers, then spot-planted a number of tree species, guarding them with heavier wire and posts. These trees will provide an over-storey in the larger western area, which will be more open grassy woodland.

Friday morning group

The group has continued its weeding in the old Quarry area and around Uralla Bridge. We also followed up the last Green Army's site, raking and cleaning up the remaining Tradescantia.

We spent two working-bees at Propagation Workshops at the Briars Nursery, where Kate Skvor taught us how to sow seeds into cells and trays and, at the 2nd workshop, how to prick them out into tubes. She also taught us how to take cuttings and plant them into tubes (see photo next page). All the plant material was collected from the reserves. Once established, the new plants will be planted in the old Quarry and the riparian zones of Balcombe and Hopetoun Creeks.

**Green Army**

With the help of the Green Army, we have achieved so much more over the past six months than we could otherwise have done. Recently, the second Green Army (Round 1) team:

- removed masses of woody weeds on Citation Hill, contributing to the planned works under our Communities for Nature grant
- continued the Tradescantia weeding begun by BERG MM and Naturelinks on the creek's north bank downstream of Uralla Bridge, leaving a huge pile to rot under black plastic
- finished mulching on both sides of Hopetoun Creek below the Balcombe Preschool.

In August we will have a team for three weeks as part of the Landcare Network's successful Round 2 application. Then, later in the year, we will have another week from the Mornington Peninsula Shire's Green Army team, which is working on the Coastal Reserves Program,

Site assessments

A group of us had two site meetings in late April and early May to discuss management of our grant and work sites for the next twelve months. Those involved were John Inchley, Sue Betheras and me from BERG MM, Sally McLeod and Vyv Stryder from Naturelinks, and Matt Stahmer from the Shire. We looked at work to be done, priorities, costs and time-lines. Among the works we discussed were the next Green Army project site – the Tradescantia on the north bank tongue of land between the Uralla and Augusta St bridges; control of Bridal Creeper and Blackberry seedlings in the Old Quarry; and



slashing of old blackberry canes; and proposed rabbit control.


BERG MM's grant projects are to be incorporated into the Shire's new Bushland Management System, which is to be used by all contractors for the Shire's bushland reserves. The new system should boost cooperation and coordination, and provide more efficient monitoring, recording, and follow-up programming.

Below: Kate Skvor (back) supervises John Stirling, Sue Betheras and Jenny Selby at the propagation workshop at The Briars Nursery. Photo Liz Barraclough



CAN YOU HELP?
BALCOMBE GRAMMAR ACTIVE COMMUNITIES PROGRAM
 BERG Mt Martha is again working with Balcombe Grammar Year 6s in the reserve, over 5 Fridays, fortnightly from July 17th, 11.45-1.00, and 1.45-3.00. Help at any of these sessions would be VERY welcome! Contact Jenny Selby on 0432 719 288, 5974 2402, or jenselby22@gmail.com.

BERG Mt Martha welcomes new members Tara Dempsey, Jo & Andrew Lovelock, Jeanna & Ken Liscombe

BERG MM Working Bees	Other BERG MM Activities	Other Groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Monthly working bee: 3rd Sunday, between 9am & 12noon. Next are 21st June and 19th July. Meet at the Rotunda (Mel: 144 K11) or call Liz Barraclough on 0408 388 430 to find the work site. ❖ Tuesday working bee: 2nd Tuesday, between 9.00 & 12 noon, meet at the end of Latrobe Dve. Call Jenny Selby 0432 719 288. ❖ Friday working bee, weekly between 9.30 and 12 noon. Call Sue Betheras on 0408 808 201. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Waterwatch testing: 4th Sunday at Augusta St Bridge. Call John Inchley, 5974 1095. ❖ BERG Mt Martha Committee meets monthly at Mt Martha House, 9.00am on the second Saturday. Next are 13th June and 11th July. All members welcome. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Fairbairn Bushland Reserve Friends Group working bees, 10am to 2pm on these Sundays: 21st June, 19th July, 16th August, 20th Sept. Meet at the noticeboard near the playground. 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. ❖ Sunshine Reserve working bee 9.30am, last Thursday of month. Call Pia Spreen, 5974 1096
<p>BERG MT MARTHA COMMITTEE PRESIDENT GRAHAM HUBBARD • VICE PRESIDENT JOHN INCHLEY • SECRETARY DI LEWIS • TREASURER RICHARD KIRSNER FIELD OFFICER LIZ BARRACLOUGH • NEWSLETTER ANGELA KIRSNER • ROTARY CLUB LIAISON GEOFF KAYE COMMUNITY AWARENESS BARBARA THRIVES • SCHOOLS LIAISON JENNY SELBY • JOHN TREVILLIAN • BRONWYN STREET</p>		
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