



Berg
Mt Martha

Caring for the Balcombe Estuary Reserves

THE CREEK

Volume 21 No 2, April 2017

WHO'S LAUGHING?

By Angela Kirsner

This article is drawn from 'Kooaaa! It's a Kookaburra!', an interview with Dr Sarah Legge, lead ecologist at the Australian Wildlife Conservancy. (<http://www.abc.net.au/science/articles/2009/10/14/2712935.htm>)

Our garden seems to have had more than its usual share of kookaburras this summer – three, four or five of them, calling each other, or perched along a branch.

Members of the kingfisher family, kookaburras are native to Australia and Papua New Guinea. Australia has two of the four species: the Blue-winged Kookaburra, in the north, and the Laughing Kookaburra along the east coast from Cape York to the Eyre Peninsula (and introduced to Perth, Tasmania, and Flinders and Kangaroo Islands).

Kookaburras mate for life and live in close family groups. Where food is plentiful, there may be a family every 40 hectares, but in leaner areas a group can need up to 2000 hectares. Ranges may be smaller in urban areas because clearing exposes leaf litter, where the birds find their food, and gardens provide lots of habitat for potential dinner – but they are limited by the availability of tree hollows, needed for breeding.

Their diet is varied: lizards, snakes, insects, worms, snails, frogs, rodents, even the occasional small bird. Not agile flyers, they rarely catch prey on the wing, but sit dead still, watching for movement in the leaf litter. They strike, take their prey up to the tree, to bash, kill and soften it, then throw back their head and swallow. Bones

and hair are regurgitated later in pellet form.

Survival of the fittest

Older siblings stay with their parents for up to three years, altruistically helping to look after the eggs and chicks. But these happy families have a darker start to life as, in a battle for resources, the new chicks fight to the death while their mother watches on.

It's all a matter of resources. The mother lays three eggs, but often there isn't enough food to raise three chicks. So if all three hatch, it is best that one is disposed of promptly – usually in the first three days.

The parents leave the chicks to sort it out, though the mother controls the time between hatchings – anything from 24 to 72 hours. It's a delicate power balance: the first hatchling is male, the second female, but females grow faster; and the third egg is usually the smallest.

If the battle for life is taking too long, the mother takes drastic

steps: she will brood the chicks, then step back and watch them fight until they are torpid with cold, then she will start the process all over again. It is a sure, if grim, way of sorting out the strongest!

Having the older siblings help with the chicks has lots of advantages. The adolescents learn how to parent, and so they will be able to continue the gene line; the chicks get great care; and with less stress, the parents live longer and produce more clutches of eggs.

Again, things aren't quite equal. Daughters tend to arrive

at the nest with food and make a big fuss over what they have found – then quietly eat it themselves! They are bigger and less agile than the males, so it is probably harder for them to find food.

What are they saying?

The morning call is probably territorial, 'we're still here, don't mess with us!' Both the year-round **laugh** and the **chuckle** also declare territorial ownership; and the **chuckle** is also used to find family members. The birds join in at different times, making the song rise and fall.

The **chuck** is used in breeding, and the **squawk** is a plea for food or signals submission. The **croon** or **soft squawk** are for courtship and to calm the breeding female. The **cackle** signals aggression and an imminent attack, while the **kooaa** is used year round as a warning to the group.



Waiting outside a nesting box in the Reserves, with a lizard for the hatchlings. Photo Angela Kirsner

STALWARTS RECOGNISED



We are delighted that Di Lewis and John Inchley, both fantastic workers for BERG MM, feature in the Shire's *Faces of Volunteering* booklet - available in hard copy, or see http://volmornpen.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/FaceOfVol_Booklet_WebVersion.pdf

RAMPANT ROCK-ROSE

By Angela Kirsner

Based largely on the 2005 article "Wild" *Cistus* L. (CISTACEAE) in Victoria—future problem weeds or benign escapees from cultivation?" by Ian Clarke, of the National Herbarium of Victoria (Muelleria 21:77–86). (https://www.rbg.vic.gov.au/documents/Muelleria_21_p77-86_Clarke_Cistus.pdf)

A pretty white Rock-rose, *Cistus inflatus*, is a tenacious weed in parts of our reserves. It is the focus of a concerted attack by BERG MM this year (see Field News).

The *Cistus* genus – Rock-roses – is one of eight genera in the Cistaceae family. There are some 20 *Cistus* species, most low shrubs with showy flowers from the Mediterranean region, plus many hybrids and named cultivars.

Perhaps the best known is *C. ladanifer* L, with white petals blotched darker at the base. Along with several other species, it is the source of ladanum (or labdanum), a mix of ethereal oils and resins used in perfumes, cosmetics and, at one time, medicine.

Our weed, *C. inflatus*, is a native of Portugal, western Spain and western France. It is probably the most aggressive weed of the four Rock-roses known to have escaped from cultivation in Victoria.



Cistus inflatus flower and seed pods
Photo Liz Barraclough

A hardy lot

Cistus species inhabit dry scrub or open woodland, which they rapidly colonise after fire. Each plant flowers generously, and is un-fussy about its pollinators – bees, flies, beetles and ants all visit the flowers. Each flower produces many hard-coated seeds that resist both water loss and water uptake, and so remain viable for a long time.

It does seem, however, that the seeds do not spread far from the

parent plant, though gravity may help them spread downhill.

Cistus in Victoria

The first Herbarium record of a 'self-perpetuating' (ie weed) population of *C. inflatus* is from 1975, from near Glenthompson in the Western District. Planted around 1960 in a roadside plantation of Acacia, the Rock-rose had spread thickly and some had jumped the fence. It has also been reported in Hadspen, Tasmania, and the Mt Lofty Ranges in South Australia.

In Dromana

On the Mornington Peninsula, *C. inflatus* was first noted in the mid 1990s in bushland below 'Seawinds' on Arthurs Seat. Probably an escape from the Seawinds garden, it was spreading down the slope and starting to invade grassy woodland.

In January 1997 wildfire showed just how resilient this species is, when a vast carpet of seedlings appeared post-fire. Concerted hand-weeding and annual spraying thinned the population but did not defeat it. It also appeared and spread slowly around parts of nearby LaTrobe Pde. While it seems to prefer open areas, it was surviving among Boneseed and Kikuyu Grass.

Rock-roses in our Reserves

C. inflatus was first collected for the Herbarium from Mt Martha in 1999, from Ferrero Reserve (end of Seppelt Ave). There were thousands of plants. By 2003, despite sporadic efforts to eradicate it, it still swept in a wide crescent across the open slope above the ovals. By January 2004, the large plants had been removed, but small ones remained in quantity, and a few were growing more than 300m away from the main population. They had also crossed Seppelt Avenue.

Liz remembers removing a few plants below the ovals. The weed is no longer there, but it is still across Kotor Hill above the ovals, below Hilton Court, and sporadically up to the top of the Rabbit Paddock below



February's Sunday working bee cutting, dabbing and bagging *Cistus inflatus* from the Kotor Hillside Photo Liz Barraclough

Village Close. It favours the edges, along paths and fire tracks, rather than deep into bushland.

To date, it is not present north of the creek, but I remember white Rock-roses, long-vanished, on the neglected Victoria Crescent block my parents bought in 1950.

A warning

Rock-roses have been cultivated in Victoria for over a century, and nurseries stock various species. But four species have escaped cultivation here and at least one (*C. inflatus*) has invaded indigenous vegetation. Furthermore, at least eight *Cistus* species are naturalised or weedy in other countries including coastal California and New Zealand.

Cistus in gardens are thus a weed risk that increases the closer one is to indigenous vegetation. Some species in nurseries are sterile, but where Rock-roses set seed, gardeners need to take extreme care that they do not become yet another garden escape.

TUESDAY GROUP

From Jenny Selby

Rock-rose below Hilton Crt was the target in both February and March, with five of us in February and just two in March, plus Pia Spreen (Naturelinks). This complemented the work by the Sunday February working bee. The seed had dropped, but Naturelinks will spray the carpet of seedlings as they emerge.

The March crew also removed African Daisy at the bottom of Latrobe Drive. While easy to pull, it too has seeded so we will need follow up again November.

FIELD NEWS

Field Officer Liz Barraclough reports

Sunday working-bees

February saw us removing Rock Rose (*Cistus inflatus*) and some Flax-leaf Broom from the Kotor hillside at the end of Seppelt Ave and down towards lower reaches of Hopetoun Creek. Naturelinks sprayed the emerging seedlings a week later.

It is vital that we get on top of this rampant weed before it spreads further. So far, it is only present south of the creek in this area, the fire control area below Hilton Crt, and patches in the Rabbit Paddock.

In March we removed Polygala, Boneseed and Pittosporum at the far south end of the beach, following up the Green Army's work in late February. We will plant here in May.

COASTAL GROUP

From Suzanne Ryan

In February we were joined by five hard workers from ADP Australia & New Zealand. This company gives its employees a day each year for community work, and has asked for a timetable of our working bees so other employees can attend.

With this enthusiastic crew, we cut a swathe through the Polygala from Dominion Road to the Yacht Club, then planted Spinifex along the foreshore and Sheoaks around South Beach BBQ area.

Friday group

Again, the focus has been weeding round Uralla Bridge, the stormwater pipe and the Quarry – Tradescantia Thistles, Blackberry, sedges, grasses.

We did a sweep above the Quarry to remove 2000+ weed seedlings, mostly Boneseed, some Pittosporum and Sallow Wattle. Imagine the result had these been left to mature.

For this hard-working team, a bench for morning-tea is a long-held dream. Thanks to David Street for finding the timber and organising it.



John Stirling and Graeme Martin digging, with David Street supervising installation of the Quarry seat! Photo Sue Betheras

Grants and projects

Along Maude St, Naturelinks' work under the Sally Oatley Memorial Fund grant is complete (woody weeding, spraying scramblers and weed grasses), and work is starting on the adjacent parallel strip under our Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority grant of \$16,208.

With the Shire's MOU funding of \$3,300 we will remove fallen Teatree in the Hyacinth Orchid area, control Forget-me-nots below the Ovals, do follow-up weeding and remove smaller Mahogany Gums at the top of the Rabbit Paddock, and spray Rock-rose seedlings.

Melbourne Water has generously

given us an extra \$250 in its 2017 grant to run a BBQ for volunteers – watch this space for details!

Green Army

Before this Commonwealth project winds up in June, we have three weeks of Green Army work assigned to us. Our first group worked over four days from late February to repair fencing along a beach access path at South Beach carpark, and make a start on woody weeding around the beach exit of the southern-most cliff path.

Clean Up Australia Day

It was BERG MM's turn to co-ordinate Clean Up Australia Day. Forty people filled 44 bags with rubbish, plus a couch, a cabinet, a double mattress, a roll of rubber sheeting, and a bean bag! Mt Martha Yacht Club members helped along the beach while Commodore Rob Debenham was on the registration desk, and Mt Martha Rotarians cleaned up 50 metres along the estuary.

Most of the rubbish in the Estuary washes in from the Bay, further evidence of marine pollution.



Liz's friend Foonie Lai came from Melbourne specially to help – an hour collecting rubbish (when she found the hat she's wearing!) and 3 hours on registration. Photo Liz Barraclough

Again the Birdrock Ave group was out in force, 35 of them, to scour the northern beach and roadsides.

Sea Shepherd took on the South Beach, meticulously collecting even the smallest particles of rubbish, such as plastic micro-beads (see photo). This is dangerous material; broken down from larger rubbish, it is ingested by and poisons marine life.



Morning teas again! Left: Helen Luxton turned on a spread for the March Sunday working bee. Photo Angela Kirsner Right: David Street brought along a picnic table to Friday Group to celebrate the new bench in the Quarry. L-R Liz Barraclough, Graeme Martin, Di Dyson, David Street, John Stirling. Photo Sue Betheras

BERG Mt Martha welcomes new members
Rosie & Lyle House, Pauline & Robert Leitch,
Jayne & Richard Turner

THANKS! TO TRADER DONORS

Mt Martha Post Office, Chisholm & Gammon,
Mt Martha Village Clinic, Warlimont & Nutt,
Peninsula Travel

JUNIOR EXPLORERS AT SUNSHINE RESERVE

What? Sunshine Reserve's new Ballern Ballern Junior Explorers, for kids 5-12, will monitor nesting boxes, plus a walk'n'talk & craft activity

When? April 6th 10am-12noon

Where? Sunshine Reserve

Bookings: Sally, 5974 1626

GOLDEN PICK AWARD FOR FRIDAY GROUP LEADER SUE BETHERAS!

About 18 months ago, Sue lost her favourite working-bee tool in scrub near Uralla foot bridge – a light-weight mattock with a pick on the other end. Late last year to her delight, fellow Friday-grouper Graeme Martin found it again, albeit rusty with the handle starting to rot.

Over summer Sue took some tools to Martin Thraves for maintenance, and told him the mattock story. When the tools came back, Martin had painted it gold with a beautifully bound handle. Sue is reluctant to get it dirty! *(Photo Liz Barraclough)*



BERG MM Working Bees	Other BERG MM Activities	Other Groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Sunday working bee: monthly, 2nd Sunday, between 9am & 12noon. Details emailed a few days ahead, or call Liz Barraclough 0408 388 430. ❖ Tuesday working bee: monthly, 2nd Tuesday between 9am & 12 noon, meet at end of Latrobe Dve. Call Jenny Selby 0432 719 288. ❖ Coast Group: monthly, 3rd Wednesday, between 9am & 12 noon, meet in car park by the Yacht Club. Call Suzanne Ryan 0418 387 604. ❖ Friday working bee: weekly between 9.30am & 12 noon. Call Sue Betheras 0408 808 201. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Waterwatch testing: monthly, 4th Sunday 9.15am, starting at Augusta St Bridge. Call John Inchley 5974 1095. ❖ BERG Mt Martha Committee meets monthly at Mt Martha House, 9.00am, usually the 2nd Saturday. Next meetings 8th April & 13th May. All members welcome. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ 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 9–11 am, last Thursday. Call 0437 299 847 ❖ Fairbairn Reserve working bee 9–11 am, third Sunday. Call 0437 299 847

BERG MT MARTHA COMMITTEE

PRESIDENT GRAHAM HUBBARD • VICE PRESIDENT PETER MCMAHON • SECRETARY DIANNE LEWIS • TREASURER JULIE ZAMMIT

• FIELD OFFICER LIZ BARRACLOUGH • NEWSLETTER ANGELA KIRSNER • COMMUNITY AWARENESS BARBARA THRIVES

• PHILANTHROPY BRONWYN STREET • WATERWATCH JOHN INCHLEY • FORESHORE GROUP SUZANNE RYAN • ASSISTANT TREASURER SUE MILTON

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

Mail: PO Box 433 Mt Martha 3934 Email: info@berg.org.au Mob: 0447 160 288 Web: www.berg.org.au



THE CREEK

Print Post Approved pp100003761

If undelivered, please return to:

BERG Mt Martha, PO Box 433

Mount Martha 3934

**SURFACE
MAIL**

**POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA**

THE CREEK is proudly printed & supported by

