



Berg
Mt Martha

Caring for the Balcombe Estuary Reserves

THE CREEK

Volume 21 No 6, December 2017

SPIFFA 2017 HABITAT MANAGEMENT COURSE

Suzanne Ryan reports

What an experience! BERGers Cate Clarke, Deb McMahon and I have just finished this wonderful course and its 13 evening lectures and nine field trips.

We began in freezing August weather, rugged up in beanies, scarves, gloves, fleeces and rain gear, and ended in sweltering November

30 degree heat. Always bush-proofed in heavy trousers and sturdy boots!

We started on pitch black Wednesday nights at the Briars, serenaded by frogs trying to out-compete our lectures. We grappled with plant ID, soils & climate, invertebrates – the spineless wonders, weed strategies, fire management and much more.

Our teachers were environmental legends. Leon Costermans, Gidja Walker, Darcy Duggan and Randall Robinson guided us from the top of Arthurs Seat down to Cape Shank and Port Nepean. They tramped us through remnant bush reserve and beautiful fern gullies, opening our eyes to theory in action. We searched for invertebrates with Ian Faithfull and fell in love with Brian Bainbridge's Head Banging Bee, Banded Bee, Sweet Bursaria Fairy Moths and Lizard Lounges.

We learnt the 3R's and key principles of habitat management. What to do with Bush Heroes and

Bush Bullies. That not all tall grasses are weeds! About Green Guard Dreaming. That Choughs love toast! Bugs suck, Beetles chew. A list of acronyms and terminology to make our head spin: FBRs, LOBs and BAVs.

We have accumulated a wealth of knowledge. Thanks to BERG Mt Martha for the opportunity to attend this fantastic course.



Above: The inimitable Darcy Duggan with students. Below: Gidja Walker (left) teaching in Moonah woodland, with Suzanne Ryan in the foreground. Photos Cate Clarke



THANKS JOHN!

John Inchley, long-standing member of the BERG Mt Martha committee and President from 2009 to 2013, retired from the committee at BERG MM's Annual General Meeting on 28th October. John is also stepping down as Waterwatch Coordinator, a role to be taken over by Sue Milton, but he will remain involved in testing. BERG MM owes him a large debt of gratitude for his great contribution.

The rest of the Committee (see back page) was re-elected unopposed.



John Inchley demonstrated Estuary Watch techniques to new Watchers at the November Estuary Watch session. Photo Richard Kirsner

AROUND THE RESERVES

Angela Kirsner reports

Grass trees in flower

X*xanthorrhoea minor* ssp. *Lutea*, the Small Grass-tree, grows in heath woodland and open forest – including in our reserves, where it is in flower now. Unlike other forms of *Xanthorrhoea*, it does not develop an above-ground trunk, but has a branched subterranean trunk that can produce a multi-crowned habit with leafy clumps at the top of each trunk. Like other members of the genus, it is slow growing.

It flowers in spring, but not necessarily every year. The small cream flowers are clustered on a spike a metre or more high. Their nectar attracts honey-eating birds and was used by aborigines to produce a sweet drink.



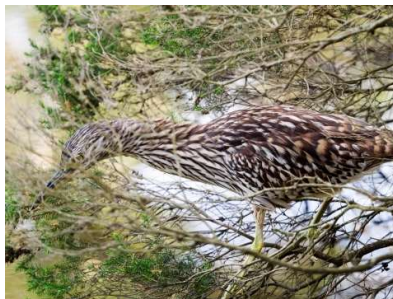
In early November, these Xanthorrhoea flower spikes in the Reserves' woodland had buds only on them. Two weeks later they were a mass of spikey cream flowers. Photos Angela Kirsner

Fishing for breakfast

This young Nankeen Night Heron, in its juvenile plumage, strode purposefully out from the Melaleucas where the Hopetoun Creek drain flows into Balcombe Creek.



I whipped out the camera, but it was in no hurry. For ages it stayed gazing intently into the water, clearly looking for prey – they eat a wide variety of insects, crustaceans, fish and amphibians. It moved from the bank into a Melaleuca overhanging the water, and occasionally stretched its neck when something below looked promising. It was still there when I eventually left.



Bird expert friends suggest it is at least a year old. As the young mature, the black cap of the adult develops first, and a small black patch behind this one's bill suggests this is starting to happen.

I'm told there are a number of Nankeen Night Herons at The Briars at present, but this one was on its own.

Echidna by the boardwalk

It was Cup Day when I walked our visiting English friend John through the reserves. Not far from Uralla Bridge was an echidna beside the board walk, its head tucked down, pretending it wasn't there. John started sketching it. As we waited quietly, it stole a glimpse of the world, and another and another, diving back down again at the

faintest noise, until eventually it lumbered away, disappearing beneath some fallen branches.



Photo Angela Kirsner

COMMON KOEL SIGHTED

A note from Briars Ranger Sue Brabender reports a Common Koel seen in Mt Martha garden in the Bay Road area in early November by a local resident – a most unusual sighting.



Photo Heiner Ottensmeyer

This bird is male, with its glossy black plumage tinged blue and green, and striking red eye. The female, by contrast, has glossed brown upperparts spotted white, a black crown, and buff-cream underparts with fine black bars.

The Koel is one of the cuckoo family and, like its relatives, is a 'brood parasite'. It lays just one egg in the nest of another bird, often a Red Wattlebird, Friarbird, or Magpie-lark, and the hatchling ejects other eggs and chicks from the nest. Then, after it leaves the nest, it cheeps incessantly from its tree roost while its much smaller foster parents search for the food it is demanding. It will grow to nearly twice their size.

Common Koels winter in New Guinea and probably further north. From about early October to March they are found in northern and eastern Australia, south to about Nowra, NSW, with occasional birds found further south.

FIELD NEWS

Field Officer Liz Barraclough reports Maude St site

Work continues apace here under funding from Melbourne Water, the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust and the Port Phillip and Western Port Catchment Management Authority. Naturelinks has continued its woody and scrambler weeding, plus Forget-me-not control and selective spraying of grassy weeds.

Working bees have also been involved. The October Sunday workers hand-weeded patches of Angled Onion and *Briza* (Quaking Grass), tackled the remaining *Pittosporum*, *Polygala* and *Boneseed*, and planted shrubs and *Dianella*.

The Friday Morning Group has guarded recent plantings, and weeded more of the generously germinating woody weeds – notably *Polygala*. This will be ongoing!

And to let passers-by know what we're doing, we have installed a Bushland Restoration sign and planted understorey plants around it.



Chris Street of Mornington Peninsula Gardening installed the new sign. Photo David Street

Hopetoun Creek

The November Sunday working bee weeded among the new plantings below Balcombe Preschool, beside Melbourne Water's recent erosion control works on the creek. We removed masses of weed grasses and scramblers (including the pretty but invasive *Nasturtium*) before they seeded. Armed with saws and strong arms, a few stalwarts also cleared some large branches from creek.

In and around the Bunyip

The small but dedicated Tuesday group weeded and planted in October and November, removing grassy and woody weeds (notably

Briza and *Polygala*) near the Preschool and along the Watson Road nature strip. And they planted some forty ground covers, scramblers and shrubs, including *Running Postman* and *Love Creeper*.

And in the area between the Mt Martha Preschool and the tennis courts – our new grant site – I planted 50 plus plants, *Dianella*, *Lomandra*, Hedge Wattle, *Clematis microphylla*, Manna Gums, and Sweet Bursaria.

More Friday weeding

The Friday Group also tackled weeds above the old Quarry, by the track from Citation Oval, removing *Boneseed*, *Polygala* and Italian Buckthorn.

We pulled lots of Forget-me-nots along both sides of Balcombe Creek between the Geoff Kaye and Uralla bridges, and more at the Jaw, where we also planted over 200 Poas, shrubs and trees. We had previously hand-weeded here around earlier plantings so Naturelinks could safely spray the grassy weeds.

And we planted and guarded *Juncus kraussii* (Sea Rush) along the Creek below Ferrero Ovals to control erosion from fishing and dogs. Outside working bees, a few of us have also planted grasses, sedges and shrubs and erected signs to tackle

the erosion in exposed areas at various points along the Creek.

And at the Bird Hide

I planted over 100 extra grasses, sedges and shrubs after Naturelinks had sprayed the grassy weeds.

New tables

We are delighted that the Shire has installed new tables at the Estuary made of recycled plastic – not only good environmentally, but highly resistant to vandalism.



Photo Liz Barraclough

The Shire is also looking at the possibility of a drinking fountain and dog bowl to replace the one at the rotunda.

Grants workshop

In September Suzanne Ryan, Martin Thraves and I attended a workshop on negotiating SmartyGrants, the software system widely used to manage grants. The workshop, at the Rosebud Shire Offices, was run by Hannah Brown and Matt Stahmer, Shire Conservation Officers.



Left: Erosion control planting where Hopetoun Creek enters Balcombe Creek. The small light-coloured dot above the water at the right is a Nankeen Night Heron walking into the photo – see page 2 for more! Right: One of the new signs to address erosion of the banks. Photos Angela Kirchner

WORK ON THE FORESHORE

Suzanne Ryan reports

At the Coast Group's October working bee, five BERGers weeded around indigenous grasses north of the North Beach car park. And in November, we did a 'Woody Weed Walk' – essentially a weed-pulling Conga from the Dominion Road track to South Beach carpark.

Under our Coastcare Grant, Naturelinks has been spot-spraying Flax-leaf Broom and Polygala saplings, as well as Bridal Creeper, Rambling Dock and Madeira Vine, Gladiolus, Watsonia and Blackberry.

Planning our grant planting

We have been working with Hannah, of the Shire's Natural Systems Team, finalise our what's to be planted around the estuary under our Port Phillip Bay Fund grant, and to review the fencing requirements covered by the grant.

Protecting our plants!

By the time you read this newsletter, signs to persuade kids (and adults!) to love and cherish our plantings should be installed, courtesy of Case Varkevisser. You will find the new signs (shown below) near new plantings around South Beach, the Yacht Club and the Lifesaving Club.

Sunshine Foundation grant planting

With Cath John's help, some 50 Coast Banksias and Drooping Sheokes have been planted on the steep slopes above the far end of South Beach.

Coastal survey workshop

Eight BERGers braved terrible weather in September to attend a workshop with ecologist Gidja Walker. The focus was Mt Martha's coastal ecology and how to carry out a systematic survey of the foreshore area.

The workshop was preparation for an ecological survey of the Mt Martha foreshore, to be undertaken soon to inform our foreshore restoration work and provide a basis for measuring our progress.



Cate Clarke and Suzanne Ryan with Gidja Walker at the Coastal Workshop
Photo Liz Barraclough

'War On Waste' forum

BERG MM was a very visible presence at the Shire's War on Waste Forum, held in Dromana on 29th October, where our display stand attracted considerable interest.

The well attended forum provided a great networking opportunity. Presentations from the Shire included Niall McDonagh and Councillor Hugh Fraser on their

'waste' trip to China, and Jessica Wingad on the Shire's waste education program.

Display stands included Boomerang Bags, several Beach Patrol Groups, Compost & Worm Farming, the Dolphin Research Institute, and Shire stands on Eco Living and Recycling.



BERGers Julie Zammit, Barb Thraves and Sue Milton with another Forum participant at BERG MM's stand at the War on Waste Forum, Photo Liz Barraclough

\$IZZLING \$AUSAGES

John Trevillian reports

Slicing 15kg of onions is not a glamorous task but Julie, Jenny and Claudia did a great job in preparation for our Bunnings sausage sizzle on October 22nd. Jenny also brought together 17 accomplished BERG MM barbecue chefs who worked in two-hour shifts throughout the day.

Our initial order of 50kg of sausages was exhausted by 2pm and we had to re-stock again and yet again. We sold about 900 sausages – some 62kg – plus 40 loaves of bread, five dozen cans of drink and many litres of various sauces. And we raised some \$1470 for BERG MM.

Thanks to all who with helped with this most successful day.



Bev Fryer and David Curtis at work at the sausage sizzle. Photo John Trevillian

Baby Banksias and friends trying to grow

Please don't walk, run, crawl, skip, prance, dance, hide or play in our back yard until we're much bigger. We're so small at the moment that you'll squash us. Ouch!

So let us get growing. We'll let you know as soon as it's OK to come in and visit us again.

If you are interested in finding out more about us contact our friends at info@berg.com.au

Coastal Foreshore Revegetation Project

Please leave me alone until I've grown. Don't jump on me or squash me. Ouch!

I'll let you know when it's OK to come and visit me

There are other things you could do to help me grow!

If you are interested contact info@berg.com.au

WATERWATCH & ESTUARY WATCH WITH CHISOLM STUDENTS

Waterwatch' gained an extra layer of meaning in very damp weather of November 26th!

Five students from Chisolm Institute were there as part of a unit on 'Developing a water monitoring plan' in their Conservation and Land Management course.

Jock MacMillan, with backup from Jenny Selby and David Street, showed the students how to collect and test water samples and record the results. During the testing at The Briars, three of the young resident emus came to see what was happening! Next came the more detailed chemical testing of the samples, done, as always, on the (dry!) verandah of the Information Centre.

Estuary Watch

At the same time, Estuary Watch testing was underway under John Inchley's guidance helped by Bruce Ferres, Sue Milton and Jan Jones. Measurements are taken at two places: the jetty in the picnic ground, and Augusta Street bridge.

Top right: Chisolm student Richard measures the pH of the creek water sample held by Jock MacMillan, near Uralla Bridge, watched by fellow student Charlie.

Photo Angela Kirsner

*Bottom right: To measure the Estuary depth, you need to clean the gauge!
L-R: Chisolm supervisor Sherry Vogrig with BERGers John Inchley (with broom!), Bruce Ferres, Sue Milton, Jan Jones*

Photo Richard Kirsner



IS RAKALI IN BALCOMBE CREEK?

Angela Kirsner reports

Rakali – the Australian Water Rat – is the subject of a recent posting on the Facebook page of the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning Port Phillip. Sue Brabender, Ranger at The Briars, left a comment noting recent possible sightings at The Briars, and DWELP responded:

'Our wildlife officers have said they definitely live at The Briars, and while they can't verify that they are in Balcombe Creek, they would not be surprised if they were found there, due to the great job the community group does there.'

It's great that DWELP recognises the hard work done by BERG Mt Martha! And it would be wonderful to add Rakali to our fauna list. Keep your eye out for it, just breaking the surface as it swims, looking a little like a Platypus but with a distinct white tip to the tail.

DWELP points out that Rakali are very elusive, so while they may be present in a water body, they are not

often seen, but sunset is the time they are most active. Sue Brabender tells us that The Briars 1988 fauna list certainly included the Eastern Water Rat.

An amphibious lifestyle

Rakali lives in burrows in creek and river banks or lake banks, or it shelters in hollow logs near water (fresh or brackish). Its webbed hind feet and waterproof coat fit it well for an aquatic life. Its body is up to 37 cm long, and its white-tipped tail almost as long again.

Its scientific name, *Hydromys chrysogaster*, translates as 'golden-bellied water mouse'.

These little carnivores eat mostly aquatic prey, including fish, frogs, turtles, crayfish, crabs, large aquatic insects, mussels and clams. They will also eat carrion and scavenge for human food scraps, and reports suggest they will travel hundreds of metres over dry land to find delicacies such as pet food left out regularly on a back porch.

An appetite for Cane Toads

'What's more', DWELP tells us, 'they're helping Australia's ecosystems with their rare ability to kill and eat the introduced cane toad in Australia's northern states. They flip toads over and bite them, avoiding the poisonous back-of-neck glands.'

Are they threatened?

DWELP's reports that Rakali are not listed as threatened, but they are highly territorial, so not super common. It's thought that numbers are on the decline, so it's important that sightings are logged to present the most accurate data possible.

During the 1930s depression, when the import of furred skins was banned, the Water-rat was seen as a perfect substitute and the price of a pelt increased from four shillings in 1931 to 10 shillings in 1941. Rakali was heavily hunted during this time until protective legislation was introduced. Now, however, they are now fully protected by law as native wildlife.

BERG Mt Martha welcomes new members


Kelvin Zhan, Gordon Shaw, Gregg Nicholls & family,
Des Dineen & family, Geoff & Gail Pritchard,
Maxwell Cox & family, Andrew Wheeler & family,
Gary Robertson, Terry Deans & family,
D McCormack & family

Do You Know D McCORMACK?

...who has paid a BERG MM family subscription to our bank, but provided no other details. If you know the family, please ask them to get in touch!



This Grey Fantail on its nest tucked into a branch of a Sweet Bursaria was photographed last year in the Old Quarry by Sue Betheras. Grey Fantail nests are made of fine grass bound with large amounts of spider web, and the bottom is drawn out into a long stem like a wine-glass.

BERG MM Working Bees	Other BERG MM Activities	Other Groups
<p>❖ Sunday working bee: monthly, 2nd Sunday, between 9am & 12noon (<i>not December</i>). Details emailed a few days ahead, or call Liz Barraclough 0408 388 430.</p> <p>❖ Tuesday working bee: monthly, 2nd Tuesday between 9am & 12noon (<i>not January</i>). Meet at end of Latrobe Dve. Call Jenny Selby 0432 719 288.</p> <p>❖ Coast Group: monthly, 3rd Wednesday, between 8am & 11am, meet in car park by the Yacht Club. Call Suzanne Ryan 0418 387 604.</p> <p>❖ Friday working bee: weekly between 9.30am & 12 noon (<i>last for the year, 15 December; restarting February</i>). Call Sue Betheras 0408 808 201.</p>	<p>❖ Waterwatch & Estuary Watch testing: monthly, 4th Sunday 9.15am. Call Sue Milton 0407 350 175.</p> <p>❖ BERG Mt Martha Committee meets monthly at Mt Martha House, 9.00am, usually the 2nd Saturday. No meeting December or January – next is 10th March. Strategic planning meeting 19th & 20th January, 9am-4pm, Mt Martha House.</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>❖ Sunshine Reserve working bee 9.30am, last Thursday of month. Call Pia Spreen, 5974 1096</p>
<p>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 SUE MILTON • FORESHORE GROUP SUZANNE RYAN</p>		
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