



Berg
Mt Martha

21 years of Caring for the Balcombe Estuary Reserves

THE CREEK

Volume 22 No 2, April 2018

TRAVELLING NORTH!

By Angela Kirsner

Our Short-finned Eels are on the move. We've long known that there are eels in the creek, and that the mature adults head out to sea around Easter on the start of their long journey north to breed. But we've rarely seen them.

Stranded

Two weeks before Easter, after many weeks without rain, the creek near Uralla Road was reduced to a series of large puddles – and one of them was teeming with stranded eels.

Liz spoke to the Shire's Natural Systems Team, who planned to add water to the puddle, but concerned locals got there first and moved about 50 eels to safer water downstream. It was quite a feat – the eels slithered through nets a quarter of their body size! Crisis averted.

The same people reported they had seen about 40 eels the previous night at the estuary mouth.

At the ready

At 8.20pm on 25th March, in wild weather, Suzanne Ryan and Jenny Selby saw a single eel cross the sandbar from creek to bay. Lots more followed. A SW wind was driving waves over the sand into the estuary and, said Suzanne, 'with each ebb of water to the sea, off went the eels over the sand. By the time we left, water was continually coming into the estuary.' All the waiting eels had crossed within 20 minutes.

In Jenny's words: 'We watched as the tide gradually trickled in over the sandbar encouraging the first of the eels to begin slashing their way through the shallow water to the sea. As the water level increased, the shallows were full of eels heading off to begin their journey.'

The next two nights, eels were milling again but not trying to cross

the sandbar, even at high tide, as the wind was not strong enough to push the incoming tide over it.

Next morning, Andrew Davis and Jenny Selby saw several eels trying unsuccessfully to wriggle across the bar, which was wet from incoming waves. Later the same day, someone had dug a trench across the wide sandbar, and it was filled with water about half way across. Suzanne reported she could see no eels – but did lots go out when the trench had been opened? This interruption to the eels' natural movement is unlikely to be good for them.

By Easter (at the time of writing), the trench had partly re-filled, but kids were again trying to dig it out.



Above: A puddle teeming with stranded eels near Uralla Bridge Photo Angela Kirsner.

Below: Eels milling near the sandbar at night
Photo Suzanne Ryan. A single eel in the shallows near the bridge in daylight Photo Andrew Davis.



So many questions

As Liz points out, there are so many unanswered questions. How much should we interfere? Were the stranded eels still migrating downstream from the puddle across the dry creek bed during the night? Suzanne reported eels of many sizes; do all these go? When do they decide to go and what is the trigger?

BALCOMBE CREEK UNDER THREAT?

The health and ecology of Balcombe Creek may be in jeopardy under a plan to dump large quantities of saline groundwater in the creek from Peninsula Quarries (Vic) – the renamed Somerville Quarry.

Bayport, the quarry owners, have approval from Southern Regional Water to dig below the water table to access crushed rock and aggregates, pumping out 90 million litres of groundwater per year in the process. SRW gave no consideration to what would happen to that water, which is saline at 1500 ppm and unsuitable for human consumption.

Bayport is applying to the EPA for a licence to discharge the water via the existing drainage system into Balcombe Creek. Under the approval process, the application must be publicly advertised and written objections considered. As of 29th March, no formal application had been lodged but we are told this will happen soon.

Background

Somerville pottery was established in 1902 at the end of what became Pottery Road, Somerville, to make bricks and earthenware using clay from the site. After closure in the late 1980s the quarry lay derelict for years, but a new extractive industries licence made it more valuable. In 1995 Bayport Industries Pty Ltd acquired the site.

Low-density housing has sprung up around the quarry over recent years on subdivisions approved by the Shire. Then in 2014, Bayport began clearing vegetation and started a new open-cut quarry in the old clay pit, mining rock rubble and

Continued next page

structural land fill. Peak production saw some two hundred 50-tonne trucks-plus-trailers a day through the residential area.

Implications for Balcombe Creek

BERG MM is very concerned about possible implications for the health of Balcombe Creek. We need to know much more about the composition of the groundwater to be dumped, its effect on creek flow, how much the added water will be diluted by existing creek water, the effect of the salinity on the creek's flora and fauna, and more. Has there been an environmental impact study, or is one planned?

We are actively pursuing these questions, and will keep you informed. If you have any expertise in the area, we'd much appreciate your input: call Liz on 0408 388 430.

If you are concerned

...about the expansion of the open cut quarry and discharge of saline water into the Balcombe Creek, check the EPA website or contact the Tyabb & District Ratepayers Group, who will notify you when the formal application is made public: tyabb_and_district_ratepayers@yahoo.com.au

David Chalke, of the Peninsula Quarries Community Engagement Group, is also keeping BERG MM informed of developments.

DRONE MONITORING

BERG MM is indebted to George Murley, who is taking regular aerial shots of Balcombe Creek from his drone as part of our monthly Estuary Watch program.

His first images, stills of the estuary and a video from the mouth to Augusta St, show just how much this aerial monitoring will contribute.

George is the podiatrist at **South Coast Foot Clinic**, Mt Martha.



An image of the estuary taken by George Murley from his drone, at about 90 metres

BERG MT MARTHA: THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

Graham Hubbard reports

Our strategic plan 2018-2022 has now been finalised. I want to report to you some of the key initiatives we see happening during this period.

First, we have changed our vision slightly:

BERG Mt Martha Vision

To preserve the Balcombe Estuary and surrounding natural environment through community engagement, passionate volunteerism and best practice habitat management.

A wider brief

This widens our brief to cover the natural environment of the Creek and Mt Martha, not just the estuary reserves. Further, we're putting more emphasis on community engagement as being critical to our future. Implicit in these changes is a desire to be an environmental watchdog for Mt Martha, to be involved in environmental issues (such as a plastic-bag free Village) that previously we felt were outside our remit.

We see it as important also to engage better with community environmental issues, using our knowledge, expertise and contacts, to make a difference for the whole community.

Some key actions

Key initiatives in the plan include:

- Work with the Shire to gain an Environmental Significance Overlay over the whole Reserves
- Become an environmental watchdog for Mt Martha
- A 'Save Our Estuary' campaign to halt the silt build-up
- A circuit walking track linking the north bank reserves with those on the south
- Educational garden reserves to explain better what we do and why
- A proactive schools program that engages students, their parents and the schools
- A signage strategy to explain our work better

- Better ways to engage with organisations and businesses in Mt Martha and have them support us
- Update and upgrade our communication mechanisms to focus on electronic communication channels and mechanisms for all our work.

Through these and other initiatives, we seek to double our membership and our non-grant income, increasing our ability to preserve our wonderful natural environment and be respected and recognised in the Mt Martha community.

These ambitious aims are to be pursued over five years. Your Committee is enthusiastic, motivated and determined to succeed, with your help and that of your friends who, we hope, you will convince to become members!

**BERG MM invites you
to hear**

Andrew Skeoch

*Naturalist, researcher,
nature sound recordist,
speaking on*

What can we Learn from Listening to Nature?

Andrew has travelled remote Asia, India, Africa, the Americas, recording the sounds of our natural environment. How have animal calls evolved? What can we learn from nature's soundscapes?

Hear nature anew, a new perspective on our place in the world.

WHEN: Saturday 5 May 10.30 AM

WHERE: Mt Martha House, Rm 64

**RSVP essential: info@berg.org.au or
call 0447 160 288 (no SMS please)**

NEST BOX MONITORING

Who lives in the nest boxes in the reserves? To find out, to peek in through the camera, and to help with our monitoring, meet at the Rotunda, in the old Campground **Tuesday 10th of April at 9.00 am**

FAMILY DAY AT THE ESTUARY

THE FORECAST for Sunday 25th March was feral – rain and winds. But against the odds, the crowds rolled in for over two wonderful hours of clear skies and fabulous art and craft for kids, inspired by the natural environment.

Face painters put colourful bush critters on lots of faces – kids and adults. Baluk Arts had kids (and their mums, dads, grannies and aunts) making gorgeous critters from straw and wool. Kids found waterbugs with our Waterwatchers, bird-

watched on the estuary, made magical mini-books with Anni Dowd and landscapes with Tony O'Connor, built mandalas and bracelets and zany creatures from flowers and pods and bark.

They potted plants with Jenny from Bunnings, explored sea creatures with Mandy from the Dolphin Research Institute, and listened to the wonderful tales of the Connie, a relic of Melbourne's old trams. And more...

And there was excellent coffee and

a plethora of barbequed sausages!

At the helm was the amazing Barb Thraves, who, with the Community Awareness Group's support, and not a little help from husband Martin, had brought it all together and had everything at her fingertips.

Thanks to Bendigo Bank and Bonaccorde for their support.

The day came to an abrupt and early end at about 12.30 when a huge wind threatened to blow us all away. But it was, nevertheless, a first rate BERG Mt Martha day!



Clockwise from top left: making bush critters, Barb Thraves at the helm, making mandalas, Di Lewis gaining a creature on her cheek, Tony O'Connor and his bush landscapes, making mini-books with Anni Dowd, Baluk Arts critters, Jenny from Bunnings handing out plants, a magical book created, the Connie with his audience, and centre, Andy Davis, Colin Fryer and the sausages Photos: Verity Mapp, Richard Kirsner, Angela Kirsner, Martin Thraves

BERG MM OFFICE

BERG MM now has its own office at Mt Martha House, to store our paper records and house our new and much-needed colour laser printer and BERG MM computer. Many thanks to Peter McMahon for the IT purchase and set up.

THANKS! TO NEW LOCAL TRADER SUPPORTERS
Danckert Real Estate
South Coast Foot Clinic (via George Murley's drone monitoring)

AND THANKS to Pam Hearn, who has retired after providing BERG MM's rainfall records for many years. And to BERGer Jay Nemec, who is taking over the role.

A FAIRY PENGUIN

A last chance to kayak in the bay in clear aqua water on a beautiful warm Autumn afternoon. And I was joined by a fairy penguin! It broke the water in just front of my kayak and glided under it.

What a treat after thirty years on the water.
Barbara Thraves

RE-JIGGING WATER FLOWS AT DEVILBEND

Angela Kirsner reports

Last September, an article in the *Western Port News* reported that 'After a break of 61 years, water is again flowing into Devilbend Reservoir along its original creek watercourse.'

What does this mean for Balcombe Creek, given that Devilbend Creek is one of its major tributaries?

The article went on: 'Up to 17 million litres a day will enter the reservoir during peak flow times, thanks to a Parks Victoria water diversion project completed [in 2016]. The flows will raise levels in the reservoir and ensure its sustainability over summer months.'

This seasonal flow 'will boost [the reservoir's] general health and biodiversity and create better habitats for bird and fish...' The reservoir has over 150 bird species, including the rare Blue-billed Duck and the White-bellied Sea Eagle. The inflow also will benefit the native Dwarf Galaxias recently rediscovered in the catch drain.

Over winter months, the article reported, the diversion project will take some flow from the catch drain and divert it via the original creek bed into the reservoir. 'The system is designed to ensure sustainable flows continue along Devilbend Creek while maintaining the aquatic health and habitat of Devilbend Natural Features Reserve.' (see mpnews.com.au/2017/09/26/devilbends-flow-from-its-original-source/)

To learn more, Liz Barraclough and I arranged to meet Parks Vic Ranger Sam Pollard.

Some background

Devilbend Reservoir was opened in 1965 to provide a local water storage for the Peninsula, fed by a pipeline from Cardinia Reservoir. A 'catch drain' – essentially a water channel – around its perimeter stopped potentially polluted creek water and pasture run-off from entering the reservoir.

The reservoir became redundant when, in the late 1990s, a new water supply pipeline was constructed

from Cardinia to Pearcedale, and in 2000-2001, Melbourne Water removed Devilbend and its smaller neighbour, Bittern Reservoir, from the water supply network. In 2006 the area became a Natural Features Reserve managed by Parks Victoria.

Dropping water level

With water no longer flowing into Devilbend from Cardinia, the water level has slowly dropped. Hence the new diversion structure – to move some water from the catch drain into Devilbend Reservoir via the original creek bed.



Above: The catch drain and the diversion structure. Below: The pipe flowing into the Devilbend Creek bed below the catch drain



The diversion structure is located where the catch drain interrupts the creek's path upstream of the reservoir. When water in the drain reaches a certain level, some flows into a pipe, where a solar-powered flow meter and valve can send a portion of it into the old creek bed below the catch drain, and thence into the reservoir.

Downstream of the reservoir

Below the reservoir, Devilbend Creek, an ephemeral creek that runs for only a few weeks in winter, has always been fed by the catch drain (plus the downstream catchment).

To maintain this situation and protect downstream health and ecology, Melbourne Water allows only a portion of catch drain water flow to be diverted, only during 3

months of the year (July to September), and only when the drain is running over a set capacity. In years of low rainfall, no water may be diverted to the reservoir.

Implications for Balcombe Creek?

The effect on Balcombe Creek will be minimal. Devilbend Creek will go on flowing much as it's done before.

Dwarf Galaxias

To protect the small, threatened native fish, Dwarf Galaxia, recently re-discovered in the catch drain, Melbourne Water has established four refuge ponds and Parks Vic is adding another. Should the drain dry out, these 'ponds' – depressions about a metre deep in the catch drain bed – will always provide water refuges for the Galaxias.

ENVIRONMENT WEEK

Sue Milton reports

Five BERG MM Waterwatchers spent three days at The Briars presenting the Wetlands Health program for Mornington Peninsula Schools' Environment Week (18-22 March). Each morning John Inchley donned his wading suit to get buckets of water bugs from the creek, then David Street, Jan Jones, Debbie McMahon and I told groups of eager primary children about the link between the water bugs and a healthy creek. With squeals of delight, the children then scoured dishes of water for the bugs, and scooped them into ice-cube trays to examine and identify them.

Most bugs survived and we poured them back in the creek at the end of the day as we waved off the last kids.

And each day BERGer Jenny Selby and her team provided presenters and helpers with a delicious lunch.



BERGer Debbie McMahon, backed up by Marg Mackie and Sue Milton, tells Hastings Primary School children about water bugs

Photo provided by Shane Barden

FIELD NEWS

Field Officer Liz Barraclough reports

Working bees

The February Sunday working bee tackled the BERG MM sheds in the Old Campground, cleaning, clearing, organising and checking; and we weeded the garden beds and the bird hide. And in March, four of us braved blustery weather to remove heaps of *Atriplex prostrata* on Hopetoun Creek below the preschool, and repair protective fencing.



Liz, Suzanne Ryan & Ian Croker mending protective fencing above Hopetoun Creek at the March Sunday working bee Photo Angela Kirsner

The weekly Friday Group spent three mornings weeding *Tradescantia* and Winter Cherry near the Uralla Rd pipe and boardwalk, and checking north bank plantings.

And the monthly Tuesday Group, in February, after a follow-up scour of the Bunyip for woody weeds, pulled down Banana Passion Fruit vines in Latrobe Drive near Barossa Court, ready for further treatment by Naturelinks. In March they tackled the Rock Rose below Hilton Crt.

Coastal group

Suzanne Ryan's stalwarts worked from South Beach car park to Bay Road, weeding and re-guarding plants.

But that's not all! Suzanne organised two extra working bees to restrain fencing between the Life Saving and Yacht clubs. She enlisted some beach box owners to deliver Family Day and membership forms to South Beach box owners, and one offered a team of helpers to weed a foreshore site. And as part of 'Clean Green Mt Martha', she has been investigating the most appropriate waste bins for coastal areas.

Waterwatching with photography

Melbourne Water ran a free workshop on photo-point monitoring for Waterwatchers and Estuary Watchers. Sue Milton, Suzanne Ryan, Jan Jones and I were there, to learn from ecology photographer Alison Pouliot, who taught us the tricks and tips needed for effective photo-point monitoring. Alison's website makes for interesting browsing – see alisonpouliot.com/.

CLEAN UP AUSTRALIA DAY – 3RD MARCH

Despite the ill-timed Esplanade closure for a Triathlon, we had a fantastic turnout – 82 people (54 adults, 28 kids), arriving on foot, by bike, by pram... Our saturation promotion had done its job, via the Lifesaving, Yacht & Rotary clubs, schools and social media. We even had two young couples come from Melbourne because they liked the site location!



Thanks to Bonaccorde for the great banner, organised and hung beside the pedestrian crossing by Martin Thraves (in photo) & Barb Thraves (the photographer).

Lots of thanks to the BERGers who helped with set-up, registration, sorting and clean up.

As well as 28 bags of general rubbish (plastic bags & bits, paper, food wrappers rope, gloves, cigarette butts & lighters, condoms etc), we collected 233 plastic drink bottles, 305 glass bottles (mostly alcohol), 13 thongs, a bag of large polystyrene pieces, 332 aluminium cans, and a TV, ceramic pipe, umbrella, bike helmet, jump starter, two plastic drums, and many balls.

There were another five sites along our stretch of Esplanade, from Fossil Beach to The Pillars. As usual, the Birdrock site had a great turnout (35), including a good number of BERGers.



Above: Jenny Selby signs on a couple who came all the way from Melbourne to our Clean Up Australia Day. Below: The rubbish collected and sorted Photos Liz Barracough



CLEAN & GREEN AT MT MARTHA VILLAGE

Coinciding with Clean Up Australia Day (3rd March) BERG MM organised a 'Clean and Green Mt Martha' stall, along with Boomerang Bags, outside the IGA. We gave away 50 Boomerang Bags, got lots of positive feedback on our 'plastic bag free' message, and got passing kids involved in the litter message, showing them rubbish other school kids had collected.

Most Mt Martha traders are very supportive of our Clean Green/ Plastic Bag Free campaign, and have put up our personalised posters. And we are delighted to have the IGA on board, with all IGAs to be single-use plastic bag free from 30th June.

Becca Smith, from Mt Martha House Community Centre, is providing Boomerang Bags with a sewing bee venue, morning-tea, and publicity, and the White Vase (florist) will display and distribute the bags.

A Facebook page is already attracting interest to be involved in making them. Contact Robyn Ruhl if you are interested: 0414 825 863, robyn@avitrdesigns.com or via the Boomerang Bags Facebook page.

BERG Mt Martha welcomes lots of new members!

Frank & Rhonda Walker; Jean & Philip Wiegard; Cheryl & Tony Hoban; Grant & Bec Gibbs; Anthony Holt & Lainey Vo; Anne Blight & Philton; Carla & Tony Spring; Sally & Gordon Glenn; Michael a'Beckett & Jennifer Jenkins; Elizabeth & Richard van Cuylenburg; Tim & Jan O'Brien; Glenda & Richard Navdi; Nick & Penni Drysdale; Robert & Barbara Lowsby; Chris & Renn Sordello

NEW CAMPGROUND POSTERS

Three new BERG MM posters now grace the wall of the Campground toilet block: *The Riches of the Balcombe Estuary Reserves*, *Caring for the Reserves*, and *Threats to the Estuary & Reserves*. The posters are the work of Anni Dowd, Liz Barraclough and Angela Kirsner, with Hayley Robinson of Progress Signs.

We're indebted to Case Varkevisser (of boatshed maintenance firm 'Seaside Shacks') for hanging them, with the help of Richard Kirsner (who made the frames), Liz, and Martin Thraves.

A brand new Frogs poster will soon hang in the old Camp Laundry, with art work by Anni Dowd. And we are working on revisions to the old history and Boonwurrung posters.



Richard Kirsner, Case Varkerisser & Liz Barraclough with the newly hung posters

Photo: Angela Kirsner

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 8am & 11am, 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 & Estuary Watch testing: monthly, 4th Sunday 9.15am, starting at Augusta St Bridge. Call Sue Milton 0407 350 175. ❖ BERG Mt Martha Committee meets monthly at Mt Martha House, 9.00am, usually the 2nd Saturday. Next meetings 14th April & 12th 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 9.30am, last Sunday of month. Call Pia Spreen, 5974 1096

BERG MT MARTHA COMMITTEE

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

• FIELD OFFICER LIZ BARRACLOUGH • COAST GROUP SUZANNE RYAN • WATERWATCH SUE MILTON

• COMMUNITY AWARENESS BARBARA THRAVES • PHILANTHROPY BRONWYN STREET • NEWSLETTER ANGELA KIRNSNER

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