



Berg
Mt Martha

21 years of Caring for the Balcombe Estuary Reserves

THE CREEK

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BERGer Hansi Wegner using the camera set-up he has developed for monitoring nest boxes. See article page 3. Photo Jacqui Salter

AGM SHOWCASES ANOTHER GREAT YEAR

BERG Mt Martha held its AGM on Saturday, October 27. The existing Committee was re-elected unopposed, and is delighted to welcome one new member, Bruce Ferres, our Estuary Watch Coordinator. You can find the full annual report at www.berg.org.au/bergmm/wp-content/uploads/Annual-report-2018.pdf

The president reports

President Graham Hubbard reported on another very successful year. With 460 members, 110 active volunteers, 16 business partners, donations of \$22,000, total income of \$165,000 and a widened vision to include coverage of the natural environment surrounding the Reserves, BERG MM is enthusiastic, expansive and very active.

Highlights for the year included completion of Stage 1 of the North Bank Reserves restoration, a

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Celebration!

**WE HOPE YOU ARE COMING TO BERG MM'S
21st Birthday Party!**

SUNDAY 9TH DECEMBER

MT MARTHA HOUSE, 6.00 TO 9.00 PM

**Yummy food, great company AND
Live BERG MM Jazz!**



(and plenty of seats and tables - you don't have to stand all evening)

All BERG Mt Martha members invited

RSVP ASAP via Try Booking www.trybooking.com/book/event?eid=436674&
(no need to print tickets)

BYO bottle to contribute to the Birthday Bar

commitment of \$150,000 from the Shire to address sedimentation of the estuary, our third Family Day, Terry Denton becoming our Patron, and the successful campaign to have Mt Martha village free of single-use plastic-bags.

Will McClintock, a Year 6 student at Peninsula Grammar, sent a video in which he told us how he had convinced his school to select BERG MM as its environmental recipient for funds raised at the school's Market Day. We received \$4,200 from Will's efforts! Thanks so much Will.

Graham also announced that Angela Kirsner and Richard Kirsner were being made Life Members for their outstanding work across several areas over many years.

Our achievements in the field

Field Officer Liz Barraclough's report is always a highlight and this year was no exception, as she summed up the year in words and photos.

Our 17 grants for on-ground work over the 2017-8 year have totalled

some \$158,000, while the Shire has contributed \$162,000 in bushland management (including three Melbourne 'Water Corridors of Green' grants), plus \$30,000 in fire management, \$12,000 in working bee support, \$600 of nursery stock, and their support of the Green Army. They make a very substantial contribution to our work.



Weed control in bulk! – along the foreshore. Photo Liz Barraclough

Weed control seems always to be at the top of the 'to do' list, but composting heaps of Tradescantia on site under black plastic and using the resulting compost to plant into directly was a new departure.

Thanks to the Mount Martha Community Bank for sponsorship of *The Creek* for 2018.



Monitoring all our restoration, to determine what works and what doesn't, is critical to better management in the future. For example, in the area newly protected by rabbit-proof fencing, we are trialling and comparing different approaches side by side.



Above: Liz pointed out that we're out in all weathers! Suzanne Ryan, Ian Croker & Angela Kirsner on a very wet Sunday.

Below: A workshop with Gidja Walker (R) teaching Cate Clarke & Suzanne Ryan
Photos Liz Barraclough



The year's work has also covered updating the interpretative signage in the Campground, and various workshops, training and education.

Our outreach into the community has included Weedbusters, our busy schools program, and Clean Up Australia Day, as well as our campaign against single-use plastics and raising pollution awareness through litter audits involving schools and the broader community.



A focus on habitat

A central concern has been to do all we can to preserve and restore the habitat our reserves provide. If we don't, we will lose more of our indigenous fauna. Liz's photos of a Kookaburra raising its family in a hollow in a large dead Eucalypt outside her own house (see above) is testament to this.

Below: Seen at the AGM Including new Committee Member Bruce Ferres (centre with Di Lewis)
Photos Angela Kirsner and Liz Barraclough



VALE TONY HYDE

BERG Mt Martha is much saddened by the death, in October, of our founding Treasurer Dr Tony Hyde.



BERG President Keith Wilson (R) presents Tony Hyde with a 'thank-you' bottle of wine at a dinner at the Barracloughs' place, Christmas 2005. Photo Richard Kirsner

Tony was at the meeting called in 1997 by Richard Hawkins, at which BERG was formed, and when Richard was looking for a treasurer, he nominated Tony.

A GP, Tony had been the administrator of his large Melbourne general practice, and with this background, he kept BERG's finances in impeccable order. He handled BERG memberships, and as our meticulous Public Officer, kept a tight rein on BERG's activities if the Committee was tempted to stray beyond the organisation's defined role as guardian of the reserves! And always with a dry humour and twinkle in his eye. He stepped down as Treasurer and from the Committee at the 2005 Annual General Meeting, after eight years.

Interviewed by Mary Stemp for the BERG history, *Up the Creek*, Tony summed up his reasons for becoming treasurer in his usual crisp manner: he liked administrative work and he wanted to be of service to the community.

Our thoughts are with his wife, Stella, and family.

BETTER ON-LINE ACCESS

The new BERG MM online membership system will soon enable you to renew membership online. You will receive a letter and email with your login details and instructions on how to use the new system.

(If you prefer the old, off-line system, that's fine – we'll still cater for you.)

NEST BOX MONITORING

By Anthony Fennell (*Naturelinks*)

On Tuesday 30th October a keen group of BERGers joined the Shire's Bushland Management Team for a sneak peek inside the man-made nest boxes installed throughout the Balcombe Estuary Reserves.

Why nest boxes?

The simple answer: to create habitat for 'hollow-dependent' fauna, from Sugar Gliders to Antechinus to tiny Microbats and Possums and Parrots — homes to shelter from weather and predators, and to bear young.

Are there not enough natural habitat hollows for these animals already?

In Australia, particularly in the long settled, developed and ecologically fragmented South-East (and perhaps more acutely around more urban areas), good quality hollow-bearing trees are a scarce commodity.

It takes about 100 years for even small hollows to form in *Eucalyptus* species (by fungal decay, invertebrate activity and so on).

Hollow-dependent fauna may be spatially isolated from the hollow-bearing trees we still have, and some species may also be out-competed by more dominant species (indigenous

or invasive) for occupancy. Some hollows may, for a range of reasons, be unsuitable for use or be too far from food and water sources.

Nest box programs seek to address these concerns in many places across Victoria. The Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning together with the Arthur Rylah Institute of Environmental Research have this year begun to collate data on nest boxes across the State, to ascertain how many there are, where, their purpose, how effective they are, and more, including monitoring and maintenance regimes.

The data from BERG MM's monitoring, along with data from the last few seasons of nest box monitoring across the Peninsula, will help to build a picture of nest box occupancy across the Peninsula. This, in turn, will generate more questions and help to refine and improve our nest box program.

How do we monitor?

BERG Hansi Wegner brought along the camera he has developed for the purpose, on an extendable pole, with a video monitoring screen you can hang round your neck, and — unlike some commercial models — it's wireless, with no dangling cords. With the lens inside the entrance hole of the nest box (3-4m up a tree), we turn on the camera's in-built light, switch on the video feed, and see what is inside. It is relatively non-invasive and minimises contact and stress to fauna.

The Balcombe Estuary Reserves have some 58 nest boxes of varying types. We look for signs of occupancy, including external chew marks (eg from fauna widening the entrance), internal signs such as scats and nesting material (leaf litter), and other considerations; for example, is maintenance required?

What did we find in nest boxes?

Lots of inhabitants! — roosts of Microbat species and families of Sugar Gliders. It is difficult to be sure of the numbers in each box, or which Microbat species are present, as the tiny bats cluster together, obscuring key identifying features, while Sugar Gliders cuddle around one another and bury themselves in leafy nest. Some Microbat boxes had two or three individuals, but one appeared to have six or more. With Sugar Gliders, there appeared to be two or three.



A 'cuddle' of Sugar Gliders in a nest box!

Photo Hansi Wegner

Residential 'hot spots'

Interestingly, there appear to be 'hot spot' areas of occupancy. One of these was the old Campground, a place that has in past seasons been popular with Microbats.

Is the productive 'ecotone' of the estuary mouth a potent source of invertebrate prey? Is the attraction the invertebrates drawn to the lighting around the Esplanade? Are exotic tree species, including Spotted and Mahogany Gums, a keen source of nectar and sugary psyllid lerps?

These speculations are difficult to affirm, but long-term data may help to provide answers. The data is also likely to generate lots more questions, and citizen science experiments to explore them. This can only improve our understanding of hollow-dependent-fauna and their needs.

Thanks to all the volunteers for assisting on the day and to BERG for helping ensure Balcombe Estuary, Creek and Reserves remains a superb environmental asset for a diverse array of indigenous flora and fauna to call home — and a place for all visitors to enjoy. Special thanks to Hansi Wegner for extra assistance and great photos of our faunal friends.



Hansi Wegner with his nest box camera, watched by (L-R) Jake MacKenzie (Naturelinks), BERGers Neil & Claire Swan and their family, and Jacqui Salter Photo Anthony Fennell

THE PERILS OF PLASTIC

Sue Brabender photographed this pair of Dusky Moorhens in early October from a fishing platform west of Latrobe Drive.

The one on the right, she points out has a small black plastic ring around the top of its beak. It's a little difficult to see in the photograph, but look for the black line between the yellow facial shield and the red beak.

Sue noted that the bird, fortunately, looked healthy: 'the ring is not obstructing its airway and must be allowing beak to open enough for the bird to feed.'

Interestingly, bird books usually show Dusky Moorhens with a red facial shield, whereas this bird has a yellow one. Sue was told that the yellow is non-breeding plumage.

And an echidna

Sue also reported that she saw an echidna on a walk through the reserves in early November, and recorded it on the EchidnaCSI app.

ESTUARYWATCH

Bruce Ferres reports

EstuaryWatch readings were taken on 23rd September and 28th October.

September saw the estuary mouth closed and the water level high until the day before our observations. That day, people were seen digging a channel through the berm, and the break-through that resulted nearly emptied the estuary overnight. We recorded the lowest water levels for this year.

Artificial opening of the estuary mouth is discouraged, but the nearby sign explaining this is often ignored.

Estuaries should be left to follow their own natural rhythms in response to environmental influences. Typically it is the top, fresher surface water that flows out to sea once the mouth is opened. Most estuarine organisms require water having greater than 5 mg/L dissolved oxygen (DO). This concentration is typically found in the surface water layer due to physical exchange with the atmosphere and photosynthetic activity. If all this surface water is lost



from the estuary, leaving only the lower, more saline and poorly oxygenated or anoxic levels, this can kill off many estuarine organisms.

The higher than usual acidic readings from August were not maintained during September. pH readings were near normal, and the cause(s) of last month's more acidic results remain a mystery.

September's drone imagery is particularly interesting because the lower water level in the estuary allowed a more revealing view of the sedimentation patterns.

The estuary mouth was soon closed again, and remained closed till mid-October. For the rest of the month, it was then intermittently open and closed. With the low October rainfall, levels in the estuary were so low that we could take only one reading at both the Jetty and Oval test sites.

All October readings were within the range recorded over several years, although it was interesting to note that the median water temperature at all three test sites was 18 degrees, unusually warm for this time of year, and reflecting the drier, warmer conditions so far this Spring.

The low water levels may also have been responsible for the Hydrogen Sulphide smell we noticed at the Augusta Bridge site. This 'rotten egg gas' is usually associated with microbial breakdown of organic

matter. In this case, it was probably coming from the breakdown of exposed plant matter rather than within the estuarine water, which recorded satisfactory dissolved oxygen results. However, this needs to be monitored and has been noted for further observation next month.

Our thanks to George Murley for his drone images, Helen Carroll who uploads our data to the Melbourne Water EstuaryWatch portal, and Estuary Watchers David Street, Jan Jones and Barry Wilson.

THANKS TO OUR BUSINESS PARTNERS

- Mt Martha Veterinary Clinic
- Warlimont & Nutt Pty Ltd
- Bendigo Bank Mt Martha
- Mt Martha Village Clinic
- Mornington Peninsula Gardening
- Danckert Real Estate
- Mt Martha Chiropractic & Sports Injury Clinic
- Volpino
- Terry Bateman Pharmacy
- Bonaccorde
- Bunnings Mornington
- Complete Step
- South Sea Shacks
- Complete Colour
- Rotary Club of Mt Martha
- Akarba party hire.

FIELD NEWS

Field Officer Liz Barraclough reports

Sunday working-bee

In October we moved mountains of mulch, spreading it around plantings above the western Ferrero Oval, west of Hopetoun Creek (the lower Rabbit Paddock). We also repaired the heavy fencing guards and replanted in the same area.

November was devoted to removing the sea of Forget-me-nots that threatens each year to swamp the boardwalk area below the ovals. We pulled and bagged as much as possible, to reduce the seed bank for next year. And as most of us weeded, Di Lewis and Jackie Hartnell sorted, tidied and cleaned one of our storage sheds in Campground.

Tuesday group

In October, seven Tuesday BERGers swept through the Latrobe St end of The Bunyip below the bowling green to remove weed grasses, Smilax (Bridal Creeper), Teatree seedlings, and any other weeds they could find.

In November, they too tackled Forget-me-not weeding, but this time, at end of Latrobe Drive. And they removed the Polygala regenerating in the narrow strip between the first burn site and the boardwalk track.

Friday group

Weeding again! First, we worked downstream of Uralla Bridge, with some mulching along the track to deter the weeds as well. Then we filled a stack of bags with weeds (largely exuberant grasses!) at the Bird Hide. We then put in some plants below Maude Street.



The Friday Group learning about survey methods & plant ID from Vyv Stryder. Photo Liz Barraclough

Back on the south bank again, the Friday Group and any others interested did a survey and plant ID workshop with Vyv Stryder (Naturelinks), both to train us and to record the plants in the large Grant area that extends from between Mt Martha Preschool and the tennis courts down to the walking track, and from the western edge of the Bunyip along to the Henley Ave drainage line.

Coastal group

The October and November working bees were given over to checking, weeding and, if necessary, re-guarding all the plantings through from Coolangatta Rd to Watson Rd, to prepare them well for summer.

And in-between times

Suzanne Ryan and I have been planting furiously along the coast (Suzanne) and along Hopetoun Ck and the new grant area (me), to get as many of our plants as possible in the ground before summer arrives. Their survival will be touch and go anyway, if we don't get good, on-going rain over at least the next month. The deluge round Cup Day was most welcome!

Foreshore Advisory Meeting

On 27th September the Shire held a briefing, attended by councillors and representatives of various Foreshore Advisory Groups, to discuss the role and future of these groups. Suzanne and I were there along with a couple of others representing the Mt Martha FAG. Mt Eliza also had about four representatives, but some of the groups only had one or two, and a number were unrepresented.

All agreed the Shire's Foreshore Forum held on 8th September was valuable in networking, exchanging ideas, and getting feedback. We agreed that similar events should be held once or twice a year in different venues around the coast. But while the Forum was useful in addressing broader coastal issues and



*Above: Graham Hubbard (L) had his weekend visitor Phil Giltinin hard at work mulching with the Friday Group. Photos Liz Barraclough
Below: The impressive results of the Friday Group's weeding around the bird hide. Photo Angela Kirsner*



concerns, it cannot deal effectively with smaller local concerns.

The meeting left us unclear, despite lots of discussion, how FAGs might continue to function. It seemed that the Shire expects that each group will hold regular meetings and send representative to the larger annual or biannual Forum. A number of questions, however, remained unanswered: Who is to convene the local meetings? How are local FAG members to be appointed? Would their local issues be heard and addressed?

These issues raised were taken on notice and the Shire is to respond.

BERG Mt Martha welcomes new members

Connie Honaker & Hugh Beard,
Denise & Richard Kasper

THE NURDLE PICKERS

Peter Dedrick reports

No, they are not a new and exotic water bird, but BERGers on hands and knees in the sand collecting tiny pieces of plastic!

BERG MM is one of a number of organisations that work with the EcoCentre St Kilda to monitor microplastics (<5mm), known as nurdles, within Port Phillip Bay. Nurdles fall through the normal beach cleaning process – but they readily enter the food chain (and our fish and chips).

The monthly survey involves checking metre-square ‘quadrats’ along ‘transects’ from the top of the beach to high tide mark, at three points on Mt Martha South Beach.

We collect everything we find – plastic nurdles, glass, cigarette butts and the rest – and report the results to the EcoCentre.

Mt Martha beach is fairly clean compared with some other Bay beaches. Nevertheless, on the November survey we found over 350 plastic nurdles.



The nurdle pickers at work in November on two marked quadrats Photo Narelle Debebnam

Like to help? Email Peter & Fran Dedrick at fdedrick@bigpond.net.au

BERG MM Working Bees	Other BERG MM Activities	Other Groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Sunday working bee: monthly, 2nd Sunday, between 9am & 12 noon (not Dec). 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 Liz Barraclough 0408 388 430 or David Street 0418 342 298 for summer dates. 	<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, but not Dec or Jan; next meeting 9th February. All members welcome. Strategic Planning meeting 19th January 9am-4pm. 	<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
<p>BERG MT MARTHA PATRON: TERRY DENTON</p> <p>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 • ESTUARY WATCH BRUCE FERRES • COMMUNITY AWARENESS BARBARA THRAVES • PHILANTHROPY BRONWYN STREET • NEWSLETTER ANGELA KIRSNER</p>		
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THE CREEK

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