

## LET'S DOUBLE OUR MEMBERSHIP! ENROL A FRIEND!

*From Graham Hubbard,  
BERG MM President*

**ONE THOUSAND MEMBERS** of BERG Mt Martha within four years – that's our aim – to double our current membership of 500.

With double the members, we will have

- Double the numbers committed to preserving our precious Balcombe Estuary Reserves and caring for our local environment.
- Double the numbers educated in the importance of environment.
- More clout with the Shire and other organisations.
- Double the numbers to share the load of BERG MM's valuable work.

### Enrol a friend!

If each of us brings in one friend, each family brings in one family – we're there! We double our numbers!

Each of you must have a friend or neighbour who'd like to, or could or should join BERG MM. What about the people next door? How about asking them to join, telling them of the value of joining?

### Joining is easy!

- Join online via the website. Take your friend to the website and help them sign up – [www.berg.org.au](http://www.berg.org.au).
- Email [info@berg.org.au](mailto:info@berg.org.au) and ask for a membership form.

Doubling our membership would be a fantastic achievement. Can you help to make it happen?

## 'OUR WASTE FUTURE' FORUM

The Shire held its second Waste Forum at Mornington Community Theatre on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> May.

BERG MM was there with a display in the foyer highlighting the waste issues in our reserves, our creek, and our beach. We were one of a number of displays by groups that included Boomerang Bags, the Dolphin Research Institute, the Mornington Repair Café (a group of 'fixers' who prevent so many broken gadgets and gizmos going into landfill), and Precious Plastics Monash University, a fabulous group of students who are finding 'innovative solutions and products to encourage, educate and grow the recycling community'. Here, they were demonstrating their plastics munching machine and some of the objects made from the resulting chopped-up plastics.

In the theatre, an audience of over 400 people heard what's happening in the waste industry and how Council is working to address and improve current waste issues.

ABC War on Waste presenter Craig Reucassel joined the mayor Cr David Gill and Metropolitan Waste and Resource Recovery Group CEO Rob Millard as guest panellists for the Q&A session about the future of waste on the Peninsula and the world. Mandy Robertson (Dolphin Research Institute)

joined the panel to discuss the impacts of marine waste.

Craig spoke of the need for a 'circular economy' where recycling is the norm. Currently much that is recyclable does not get recycled. And the first step is to minimise the waste we produce.

Mayor Gill emphasised the need for action from State and Federal governments to support local action: local government can't do it alone.

One suggestion: If you find branded fast-food litter, photograph it and post on Facebook. Fast-food giants will act if their reputation is threatened.

### Review of Shire Waste Strategy

The Forum was part of a wider review by the Shire of their Waste Strategy, and BERG MM was one of a number of local groups invited to provide input at a meeting ahead of the Forum, on 24<sup>th</sup> April.

Liz Barraclough gave one of a dozen or so five-minute presentations at the meeting, after canvassing ideas from a number of BERGers, local traders, and the Yacht Club and Life Saving Club.



*Liz Barraclough & Sue Milton delivering BERG MM's plastics message at our stall at the 'Our Waste Future' forum* Photo Angela Kirsner

## ESTUARYWATCH

*Bruce Ferres & Jan Jones report*

It was not until late May, at our regular fourth-Sunday-of-the-month EstuaryWatch observations that we found that the huge berm had been building since January was finally shrinking.

But in April, even at high tide there were over 33 metres of sand from estuary to bay water. The mouth had been closed since our February readings apart from occasional waves washing over the berm.

This barrier must have posed a challenge for the short-finned eels, which around Easter move out of the creek into the bay to begin their long migration north. We've had no reports of sightings this year.

The windy and (blessedly!) wet weather for our April readings was not an issue for twenty or so Crested Terns gathered on the berm. We were unsure if they were sheltering from the elements or hoping to be the first to spot eels on the move!

The high salinity and oxygen levels and high water temperatures recorded in March had subsided in April and readings were much closer to the acceptable range for these important indicators of estuarine health. The hydrogen sulphide (rotten egg) smell remained, however, at Augusta St bridge, from rotting vegetation in the lower layers.

### Do colour and clarity matter?

The estuary water looked much clearer than it has been for some time, and our readings confirmed this. But does the colour of the estuary water tell us anything about its quality? Not really. It is the clarity that matters. The brownish colour seen in many waterways is from tannins leached from leaves and lignin residues from bark and wood. Swamp Paperbarks and Tea Trees are high in tannins and lignin, so brown water is to be expected in Balcombe Estuary.

Nevertheless, the water clarity, or put the opposite way, its turbidity *does* matter because it is an indicator of suspended solids. These are important for two reasons: they can reduce light penetration, and the

solids themselves may be contaminants (natural or introduced).

The turbidity standard for healthy estuaries is <10 units (measured in a turbidity cylinder). In April all out surface water testing and most bottom water testing of the Estuary met the standard.

### May

By the fourth Sunday in May, the berm had

shrunk to 11.8m wide and 20cm high, and the creek level was very close to sea level. The estuary mouth was closed, but had been open at high tide the previous night, and a roiling sea with 20 knot north-westerly winds saw it open again soon after our testing.

At the rotunda jetty we saw the impact of the night's rain in a 0.5m deep fresh water layer above 1m of highly saline water. A similar salt wedge was at both other test sites.

At all sites, the water temperature was higher than twelve months ago, turbidity much less, and salinity and dissolved oxygen higher. All of these factors can be attributed to very low rainfall and high air temperatures.

### EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT SEAGRASS!

*By Angela Kirsner*

On Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> May, I'm told, guys with shovels dug a channel through the berm (despite the notices) until the mass of water surged through emptying the estuary.

When I saw it three days later at low tide, the estuary was alive with birds trawling the shallows: five Egrets, many Cormorants, Coots, and Ducks, a White-faced Heron and more (not to mention six Pelicans in formation far overhead).

And the mud flats were smothered in vivid green seagrass! We've seen little seagrass in the estuary for many years, and long-time residents don't remember it like this – a rich green meadow above and beneath the shallow water.



*April Left: Measuring the clarity of a water sample. Right: High seas were a challenge in measuring berm height! Franc Amendola was up to it in waist-high waders. A young BERGER with good balance is a boon to the somewhat older EstuaryWatchers! Photos Bruce Ferres*



*Egrets with cormorants and gulls revelling in the sea-grassed mud flats Photo Angela Kirsner*

How and why is it there, emerging each low tide? We will try to find some answers by the next newsletter – watch this space!

### Artificial opening of the estuary

*This paragraph by Bruce Ferres was printed in the December newsletter*

Estuaries should be left to follow their natural [opening & closing] rhythms in response to environmental influences. Typically it is the fresher surface water that flows out to sea once the mouth is opened. Most estuarine organisms need water with >5mg/L dissolved oxygen, a concentration typically found in the surface layer due to exchange with the atmosphere and photosynthesis. If this surface water is lost, leaving only the lower, more saline and poorly oxygenated levels, it can kill off many estuarine organisms.



*Above left: The huge berm at the April 28<sup>th</sup> EstuaryWatch reading. Right: The smaller berm in May allowed waves to wash in at high tide Photos Bruce Ferrer. Below left: the berm cut through, photographed 2<sup>nd</sup> June. Below right: Sea grass coating the estuary mud flats after the berm breach. Photos Angela Kirsner*



## TIME TO BRING HOME THE SOUTHERN BROWN BANDICOOT

*By Eve Kelly, Secretary, Australian Wildlife Protection Council*

The nocturnal and solitary Southern Brown Bandicoot, 'near endangered' in Victoria and endangered in NSW, is virtually extinct in southern parts of the Mornington Peninsula. Along with habitat loss and fragmentation, introduced foxes and cats are the main culprits.

Without eradicating feral species, we have no hope of saving the Southern Brown Bandicoot. Given that numbers will very likely continue to decline across the state, we need to protect the species by establishing 'insurance populations'. When and if feral predators and rabbits are under control, we can then release Southern Brown Bandicoots back onto the lands they once inhabited.

The Briars Wildlife Sanctuary provides the perfect situation and habitat to grow such a population. Not only were SBBs once abundant in The Briars area, but the reserve is enclosed by a predator-proof fence.

There has long been talk of re-introducing bandicoots into The Briars. As far back as 1992 local

ecologist Hans Brunner and colleagues surveyed the property and recommended that once rabbits and foxes were controlled, 'suitable species to re-introduce might include the Southern Brown Bandicoot and Brown Antechinus'. Antechinus have made their way back into the Sanctuary; we would like the SBB make a similar come back.

I interviewed Hans Brunner in February about the proposal. He became interested in SBBs 45 years ago when he was researching the use of baits for introduced feral species at the Keith Turnbull Research Institute. When some SBBs were also inadvertently poisoned, Hans



*A Southern Brown Bandicoot at the Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne. Photo John Chapman*

became aware of this elusive animal and has passionately advocated for it ever since.

SBBs were, Hans says, once abundant on the Mornington Peninsula. But he sees little apparent concern about their local extinction. He attributes this to lack of funding and government funding priorities.

Hans regards The Briars sanctuary as offering the best chance of preventing the extinction of the SBB. Action is urgent: if we wait any longer to establish protected populations it may be too late.

When we spoke to rangers at The Briars some months ago, they were encouraged by the progress in reducing rabbit numbers – an essential step in the survival of the bandicoots.

The Mornington Peninsula Shire Council manages The Briars Park and Wildlife Sanctuary. We at the Australian Wildlife Protection Council agree with Hans: we hope they consider re-introducing this locally extinct species as soon as possible. If it is a matter of resources, surely we can find the money somewhere to get this project off the ground after all these years.

**FIELD NEWS**

*Field Officer Liz Barraclough reports*

**Sunday working-bees**

While we've made an enormous difference to the woody weed population in the reserves over BERG MM's two decades, weeds by definition are persistent and tenacious. We need to keep at them!

In April, we tackled the healthy population of Winter Cherry and Tobacco Plant on the north side of creek below the Pistol Club. Eight BERGers plus our Naturelinks supervisor Tess cut and painted these unwanted invaders.

With rain and cooler weather, we are now planting. In May we put in over 150 indigenous trees, grasses and sedges in our grant site between the Watson Road tennis courts and kindergarten – watched over by a family of five Kookaburras!



*Four of the five Kookaburras that watched over the May Sunday working bee beside the Watson Rd Preschool* Photo Angela Kirner

The Tuesday group also worked here, planting masses of Poas and preparing the area the other side of the tennis courts for over-storey planting.

Among the April weeds, far from any fairway or open space, we found a shiny white golf ball. Brought here by a fox, said Tess, of Naturelinks. They mistake them for eggs!

**Friday morning group**

Weeding again! The group removed Atriplex, Thistles, Blackberries, Panic Veldt Grass and more along Hopetoun Creek below the kindergarten. They tackled Blackberry and woody weeds along Maude St, and regenerating Polygala and Flaxleaf Broom seedlings, Vinca, Agapanthus, Ivy and Passionfruit Vine along the sewerage easement between Victoria

Crescent and the Esplanade bridge.

**Tuesday group**

This dedicated small group has become a little smaller and more select than we'd prefer! We would love some more helpers!

In April, just two BERGers plus Pia from Naturelinks continued their weeding around the plantings on Ferrero Hill, where they plan to plant more soon. And in May, they worked at the Watson Road grant site, as described in the previous column.

**Coastal activities**

Here too, planting has started. At the April working bee, eight BERGers planted between the South Beach BBQ and the

watering plants, and – much to their delight – themselves!

Planting continued in May. Six BERGers were joined by two Rotarians to plant, guard and stake 183 tubestock along the slope of the Dominion Road path.

With a new Coastcare strategy



*The Coastal Group plus Rotarians planting along the Dominion Rd beach path in May* Photo Tamara Keyte

under development, Suzanne Ryan represented BERG MM at the Coastcare Strategy Regional Workshop on 30<sup>th</sup> April, to provide our views and input.

**Signage upgrade**

You will soon see new plank signs marking the two main entrances to our reserves, at the Mirang Ave car park, and the car park on the corner of Uralla Rd and Nepean Highway.

This is the first step towards new signage throughout the reserves, in a joint undertaking with the Shire. We have agreed on what signs we want and where, the Shire is updating the map to be used, and we are working on the content and design of the interpretive signs.

Dominion Road pathway, removing Polygala and other weed seedlings as they went.

Three small children who joined the group were given the task of



*Not only is the new Bunurong poster now up on the wall of the campground toilet block (right-hand end), but when it was photographed, someone was reading it and commenting on the interesting content!* Photo Angela Kirner

The new Bunurong poster is now in place alongside the other three posters on the wall of the campground toilet block. Thanks to Martin Thraves for erecting it. That leave only the old History poster (now removed) yet to be updated. We're working on it!

#### Mt Martha Primary School

On 6<sup>th</sup> May, I spent a morning in the reserves with the preps from Mt Martha Primary. The three classes of some 22 children each rotated through three activities: bush art, bush play, and a 'walk talk & gawk' with me chatting about Mt Martha's indigenous plants and how they were used by both the local fauna and the Bunurong people.

The school is planning an indigenous garden in its grounds, and I handed over about 70 tubestock from BERG MM for the garden.

#### Australian Plants Society

On 24<sup>th</sup> April I spoke to a meeting of the APS (Mornington Peninsula), telling them about BERG MM. BERGers and keen native gardeners Roo and John Rawlins had organised the day, which we followed up a month later with a guided walk through the Reserves.

#### Feral pests

Rabbit numbers in the reserves have burgeoned of late, and we are seeing far too much of their destructive nibbling and excavating.

We have also had a number of feral cat sightings reported, and neighbours of the reserves suspect cats may be responsible for a recent lack of Blue-tongue Lizards in their area.

From early June the Shire's contractor Peninsula Feral Management will be treating warrens and laying cat traps.

**Please let us know** if you see a cat in the reserves – and where. This will help the Shire to target their control.

**BERG Mt Martha welcomes new members** Carol Kelly & family, Mark & Carolin Savage, Claire Swan & family

## BUZZ POLLINATION

From Cate Clarke

About eight percent of the world's flowering plants – over 20,000 species – hold their pollen in a tight tube that honey bees can't get to. These flowers require 'buzz pollination'. Wind does it sometimes, but the right flying insects are much more efficient. Grasping the pollen-bearing tube with their mouths, they contract their flight muscles hundreds of times a second without moving their wings. The resulting strong vibration releases the pollen, which lands on the flower's female parts or on the insect, to be carried to another flower.

Many Australian plants require buzz pollination, including *Solanum*, *Hibbertia* and *Dianella* species. So do lots of edible plants, including eggplant, tomatoes, potatoes, chillies, blueberries, cranberries and kiwifruit.

#### Meet the buzz pollinators

Honey bees can't buzz pollinate. Bumble bees can, but in Tasmania, where they've been introduced, they pose a number of serious environmental threats including weed dispersal and competition for available nectar\*. Australian glasshouse tomatoes are often pollinated by hand-operated mechanical vibrators – an expensive option.

But some Australian native bees – Blue Banded Bees, Carpenter Bees, Teddy Bear Bees – are excellent buzz pollinators, and breeding them in quantity numbers might be the answer to glasshouse growers' problems.



Blue-banded Bee Photo Cate Clarke

Encourage native bees by growing native plants and leaving some wild sections in your garden where they can breed and feed (many nest in the ground).

\*See [www.aussiebee.com.au/bumblebecharm.html](http://www.aussiebee.com.au/bumblebecharm.html)

## OUR OWN ENVIRONMENTAL WARRIOR



This is Lochlan Smith, aged 10 years, in his canoe on Balcombe Estuary. Lochlan spent two hours in April collecting rubbish on the Estuary and he plans to repeat the exercise each month. His aim? – to help save the wildlife.

Thanks Lochlan! And thanks to BERG Melissa, his mother, for the story and photo.

## THANKS AS ALWAYS TO OUR WONDERFUL BUSINESS PARTNERS

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- Mount Martha Yacht Club
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- Mount Martha Village Clinic
- Rotary Club of Mount Martha
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## SCENTED GROUNDSEL

By Angela Kirsner

You'll find a few bushes of the indigenous Scented Groundsel (*Senecio odoratus*) in the Balcombe Estuary Reserves, but it is also a plant I treasure in my Mt Martha garden. Each spring, its brilliant yellow heads of flowers line our gravel driveway.

Native to South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria, it is a sprawling shrub a metre or so high, with long, bluish-grey, slightly scented leaves that have slightly toothed margins.

Its small, tubular yellow flowers occur in cheerful clusters that may number dozens.

It thrives in our dry, sandy soil, with no watering. Each winter I prune it almost to the ground, and the

seemingly dead short sticks reward me with a flush of new growth. It can be propagated from cuttings (taken in autumn).



BERG MM Working Bees	Other BERG MM Activities	Other Groups
<p>❖ <b>Sunday working bee:</b> monthly, usually 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday, bet 9am &amp; noon (but June is 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday because of public holiday weekend). Details emailed a few days ahead, or call Liz Barraclough 0408 388 430.</p> <p>❖ <b>Tuesday working bee:</b> monthly, 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday between 9am &amp; 12 noon, meet at end of Latrobe Dve. Call Jenny Selby 0432 719 288.</p> <p>❖ <b>Coast Group:</b> monthly, 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday, between 9am &amp; noon, location emailed a few days ahead or call Suzanne Ryan 0418 387 604.</p> <p>❖ <b>Friday working bee:</b> weekly between 9.30am &amp; noon. Call Liz Barraclough 0408 388 430 or David Street 0418 342 298.</p>	<p>❖ <b>Waterwatch &amp; Estuary Watch testing:</b> monthly, 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday. WW, meet 9.15am at Augusta St bridge: call Sue Milton 0407 350 175. EW meet 9.00am at the Rotunda; call Bruce Ferres 0435 389 804.</p> <p>❖ <b>BERG Mt Martha Committee</b> meets monthly at Mt Martha House, 9.00am, usually the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday, next meetings <b>15<sup>th</sup> June, 13<sup>th</sup> July.</b> All members welcome.</p>	<p>❖ <b>BirdLife Mornington Peninsula</b> bird-watching 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday. Enquiries to Max Burrows 9789 0224, <a href="mailto:mornington@birdlife.org.au">mornington@birdlife.org.au</a> or <a href="http://www.birdlife.org.au/locations/birdlif-e-mornington-peninsula">www.birdlife.org.au/locations/birdlif-e-mornington-peninsula</a>.</p> <p>❖ <b>SPIFFA</b> 1<sup>st</sup> Monday, 7.30 pm, at Seawinds Community Hub, 11A Allambi Ave, Rosebud West. Enquiries 5988 6529, or <a href="http://www.spiffa.org">www.spiffa.org</a>.</p> <p>❖ <b>Sunshine Reserve</b> working bee 9.30am, last Sunday of month. Call Pia Spreen, 5974 1096</p>
<p><b>BERG MT MARTHA PATRON: TERRY DENTON</b></p> <p><b>COMMITTEE: PRESIDENT</b> GRAHAM HUBBARD • <b>VICE PRESIDENT</b> PETER MCMAHON • <b>SECRETARY</b> DIANNE LEWIS • <b>TREASURER</b> JULIE ZAMMIT            • <b>FIELD OFFICER</b> LIZ BARRACLOUGH • <b>COAST GROUP</b> SUZANNE RYAN • <b>WATERWATCH</b> SUE MILTON • <b>ESTUARY WATCH</b> BRUCE FERRES            • <b>COMMUNITY AWARENESS</b> BARBARA THRIVES • <b>PHILANTHROPY</b> BRONWYN STREET • <b>NEWSLETTER</b> ANGELA KIRSNER</p>		
<p><b>Balcombe Estuary Reserves Group Mt Martha Inc.</b> No. A0034645Y ABN 50 224 628 623  <b>Mail:</b> PO Box 433 Mt Martha 3934 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:info@berg.org.au">info@berg.org.au</a> <b>Mob:</b> 0447 160 288 <b>Web:</b> <a href="http://www.berg.org.au">www.berg.org.au</a></p>		

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