

THREATENED SALTMARSH ON BALCOMBE ESTUARY

A study commissioned by the Shire's Natural Systems Team has identified three small areas on the Balcombe Estuary as threatened 'Subtropical and Temperate Coastal Saltmarsh'.

The aim of the study, *Threatened Wetland Vegetation Communities on the Mornington Peninsula*, was to identify and map a range of threatened wetland vegetation communities listed under the Federal Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 and/or the Victorian Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988, across public and private land on the Mornington Peninsula.

'It's great to see another important biodiversity value recognised in Balcombe Estuary', said Jo Tetteroo of the Natural Systems Team. 'Our Bushland Management Team is currently reviewing the report, and will be taking these values into consideration in the planning of works in relevant reserves.'

Jo acknowledged the support of local ecologist Gidja Walker, who contributed valuable local knowledge at the initial project workshop.

The sites, totally about 0.3 hectares, are on the estuary between Victoria Crescent and Henley Avenue. The vegetation is described as 'primarily Wet Saltmarsh Herbland dominated by Beaded Glasswort *Salicornia quinqueflora* subsp. *quinqueflora* and Austral Seablite *Suaeda australis*, and Estuarine Wetland dominated by Sea Rush *Juncus kraussii* subsp. *Australiensis*'.



The patches of Subtropical and Temperate Coastal Saltmarsh are shown in blue

Coastal Saltmarsh is by far the most abundant of the threatened wetland communities the study identified, comprising some 367 ha. Other than the small area on Balcombe Estuary, this is all along the western shore of Western Port Bay, between Somerville at the northern extent of the Shire, and Balnarring Beach to the south. The Saltmarsh areas are generally in very good condition, with few to no weeds. They face a large number of potential threats, but the overwhelming one is rising sea-level.

Two small patches of Seasonal Herbaceous Wetlands were identified at Point Leo and Somerville, 0.34 ha in total. And patches of Natural Damp Grasslands and Plains Grassland (South Gippsland) Communities, totalling 12.6 ha, were identified, in four locations: Tootgarook Swamp, Boneo; Raws Reserve, and Point Leo Foreshore Reserve Campground, Point Leo; 30 and 41 Woodlands Grove, Safety Beach; and Mornington Railway Line. The condition of these communities is generally poor.

FIELD NEWS

Field Officer Liz Barraclough reports

Sadly all BERG MM working bees are on hold due to COVID19. But we got in some excellent work before the shut-down.

At February's Sunday working bee, we had the help of two Scouts and their leader, Paul Bucknell, from 1st Mornington Scouts. Indeed, there was a grand total of about 15 workers to weed and move mulch along the west side of Hopetoun Creek, above the Ferrero Ovals in the Rabbit Paddock. The plantings here are thriving, and great drifts of Kangaroo Grass were flowering along the path into the area.



Above: Scouts Michaela (left) and Katie (right) working with Graham Hubbard & Marion Orchison. Below: We believe in starting them young! Photos Angela Kirner



March was a different matter. In my absence, Suzanne Ryan organised a 'social distancing', though thoroughly sociable, weeding group to remove Rock Rose from the bracken area between the Ferrero ovals and Hilton Court. Everyone brought their own gloves and equipment.

With Sue Betheras at the helm (again in my absence), the **Friday Group** spent three weeks removing *Atriplex prostrata* ('Orache') along the boardwalk below the Ferrero Ovals. Easy, productive work which has made a big difference by removing this weed before it seeds, as well as removing competition for light and nutrients for the existing indigenous ground flora.



The Friday group's removal of Atriplex prostrata beside the boardwalk, before (above) and after (below) Photos Liz Barracough



In February a wild storm forced the Coastal Group's first-ever cancellation. In March they worked above North Beach between the car park and Coolangatta Rd, removing large woody Polygala and lots of small weedy seedlings. They checked and removed guards from recent seasons' plantings (which are thriving), and started this season's plantings.

Twilight market

BERG was there again at the February twilight market at Mt Martha House, and it seemed a better, busier atmosphere than the previous two. And we've improved our display to highlight BERG MM more effectively. We did get one new paid up member and interest from a number of others.

Signage upgrade

Angela Kirsner and I have been working with the Shire's Natural Systems Team to upgrade the signage, both directional and interpretive, throughout the reserves. This is something we *can* continue through lockdown! With luck, by the time we are all together out there again, the new signs will be agreed and made, maybe even installed. Watch this space.

Managing our Bushland through COVID 19

While working bees and all other BERG MM events are on hold, both the Shire and our granting bodies have been wonderfully supportive and cooperative in making sure our reserves do not suffer and bushland management work continues.

First, our annual planning meeting with the Shire and Naturelinks, while delayed, will take place soon via teleconferencing. Together we will plan and set priorities for on-ground work for the year. This will involve Suzanne Ryan (Coastal group), Sue Betheras (Friday Group), Bruce Ferres (EstuaryWatch), Peter McMahon (President) and me from BERG MM; Simon Thorning, Hannah Brown and Jeremy Little (Bushland Fire Management) from the Shire's Natural Systems Team; and from Naturelinks, Tamara Keyte, Sally McLeod and Danielle Suffern.

Naturelinks, the Shire's bushland management contractor, can continue to work, certainly as things are at present. The Shire Nursery, while closed to the public, is providing us with plants, and the Shire has redirected significant funding from things such as volunteer events and supervision, to cover extra work by Naturelinks – particularly planting.

Meanwhile our various granting bodies have been very flexible in providing extensions or variations to enable the work they are funding to be completed under the current difficult circumstances.

Feral animal control

This is something else that can continue. We are hoping to tackle cat and rabbit control in May and June, and are currently organising funding and contractors to carry it out.

ESTUARYWATCH

Bruce Ferres reports

Both EstuaryWatch and Waterwatch programs are suspended until further notice because of COVID 19. However, this took effect after our March readings.

As reported in the February edition of *The Creek*, it was only the day after our 16th January EstuaryWatch measurements, and after months of having a stable and significant berm in place, that a group of youths armed with shovels dug a channel through the sandy barrier which then burst, allowing estuarine waters to surge out into the bay.

While this was very disappointing, the reaction of the community was heartening. Members of both Lifesaving and Yacht Clubs asked the teenagers to stop, many took photos of the offenders and others reported the matter to the relevant MPSC officers. Further publicity was generated by posts to the BERG Facebook page and an article in the Mornington News. Hopefully both helped to raise community awareness around the need to allow nature to take its course.

By the time of our March readings the estuary had been enclosed behind a smallish berm for most of the month with occasional wash-overs of sea water when tides and winds were favourable

Sewage contamination?

Of concern was the pungent smell coming from the estuary basin on Sunday 16th and Monday 17th February. Carried by a strong south easterly breeze, it was noticed by swimmers off Mt Martha and

visitors to the estuary reserve downstream of Henley Ave. We reported it to South East Water, Melbourne Water and the EPA.

South East Water have now confirmed that there was no sewage spill into the estuary. Ascher Derwent, Sewer Operations Manager, explained that 'the significant rain event on the 14th February may have caused surcharge in the sewer system due to stormwater infiltration. As the level in system rises above normal, gases may be vented and, with the right wind conditions, this can cause odour issues'.

We have now established a direct link to South East Water Sewer Operations and have been asked to report any similar problem as soon as it arises.

Sedimentation

We are still waiting to hear from Melbourne Water on matching funding to complement the Shire's commitment of \$150,000 for a sediment catching pit at the Henley Avenue outfall. George Murley's drone images once again make clear the urgency of the problem (see below).

Missing measurements

Unfortunately we are still waiting for our multi-meter to be fixed by Melbourne Water, so we are missing a range of essential measurements of the estuary's health for February and March.

Painkalac Creek Estuary

During a recent stay at Airey's Inlet, I explored at the Painkalac Creek Estuary, which is monitored by an

active EstuaryWatch group. This estuary is nowhere near as dynamic as our Balcombe Creek Estuary and has been known to remain closed for a year or more. Currently a very extensive berm is in place and the estuary is in a very stable condition. The estuarine waters were very clear and significant seagrass growth could be seen near several jetties.



Seagrass beds in Painkalac Creek Estuary, Airey's Inlet, March 2020

Photo Bruce Ferris

Wouldn't it be marvellous if we could restore the Balcombe Estuary to the point where seagrass was able to re-establish?

THE PESTICIDE DETECTIVES

The BERG MM EstuaryWatch team is partnering with researchers at RMIT University in The Pesticide Detectives program, a national Citizen Science project studying pesticide residues in Australian waterways.

As part of the study, we took samples of sediment near the rotunda jetty on 16th February. They have been sent off for analysis, and we will report on the results as soon as they become available.



Jan Jones collecting sediment samples to be tested for pesticides

Photo Bruce Ferris

The Pesticide Detectives project combines the scientific expertise of RMIT University's Aquatic Environmental Stress Research Group (AQUEST) scientists and Citizen Science volunteers in collecting sediment samples from waterways across Australia.

Australia's waterways have intrinsic ecological, economic and social value, and information on the quality of our water resources is of critical interest to local, state and federal agencies, as water quality is integrally linked to the long-term availability of clean water. Of primary concern is the ever-increasing use of chemicals in everyday life, and the risks they pose to the health and beneficial uses of waterways.

Pesticides are increasingly being detected in waterways across Australia and worldwide. There are thousands in use in and around houses, shops, offices, storerooms, sheds gardens, farms, pastoral stations and many other places. Pesticides are designed to be toxic to the pests they target (insect, weed or other) and used properly, they can protect your plants, home, or animals. But if label instructions are not followed correctly, not only may the pests not be controlled, but plants may be injured, human health may be impaired, and pesticides may pollute our aquatic environments.



Drone photo of the Henley Ave stormwater outlet

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FEATURING SEA SIDE SHACKS

Case Varkevisser has lived in Mt Martha since he was one. And he's messed about with boatsheds almost as long. Over summer, his painter & decorator father would let him paint the odd boatshed.

Decades later, Case drifted from the optical industry into property maintenance - and boatsheds! He's been running *Sea Side Shacks* for over 25 years.



Case and his team:

- **Rebuild and maintain boatsheds** from Mt Eliza to Portsea.
- **Are a dab hand at maintenance jobs round the house** - particularly while our beaches are closed!

Case is a frequent hands-on helper for BERG MM.

'I share the passion that BERG MM has for the Mt Martha environment and really enjoy the times that I am able to help out.'

Call Case on 0408 741 516

AN AVENUE OF BIRDS

When sculptor David Doyle set up at a Mornington market a few years ago, someone gave him a copy of our 'Birds of the Balcombe Estuary Reserves' brochure.

It inspired him, he said, 'to look afresh at birds, and how I, as a

human, interact with them, how we co-inhabit this world, yet know relatively little about each other'.

One result was a series of fifteen free-standing bird panels, with three birds on each, plasma-cut in rusted steel. Eight sold at exhibition; the

towards the boardwalk.

Installed by the Shire's contractor, they are set in sturdy concrete blocks that should seriously deter removal! A little soil and some judicious planting should see these 'feet' settle comfortably into the landscape.



remaining seven, David generously offered to BERG MM at cost price. And to cover the cost, we had the wonderful donation from the Peninsula Grammar Market Day last year, directed to BERG Mt Martha by year 6 student William McClintock

The sculptures, installed in January, now lead walkers from the Old Campground



Photos Liz Barraclough

CLEAN UP!

CLEAN UP AUSTRALIA DAY

Liz Barraclough reports



Once again, BERG MM organised the local Clean Up Australia Day effort, on Sunday 1st March. We had a very satisfying 49 register and set off with their collecting bags.

Together we filled nine 20-25kg bags with general rubbish and 3½ bags with recyclables. We also collected planks and pieces of wood, a deck chair and an esky. But no dumped electrical goods this year.

This was a good deal less rubbish than in recent years. Maybe the monthly Beach Patrols have had a real impact, maybe more local walkers are picking up rubbish, while the regular Shire cleaners pick up large items, which are now reported more efficiently through Snap, Solve & Save. Maybe people are more aware and less inclined to litter.

And we even gained one new paid-up BERG MM member and \$10 in donations!

Thanks to our helpers: Jackie Hartnell, Martin & Barb Thraves,

rubbish along Balcombe Creek by water. We carried our kayaks across the berm at the creek mouth and the adventure began. A few of the group had not paddled along the creek before and they were surprised how far we could travel. They enjoyed the serenity.

Lots of fishing line was heavily entangled in the over-hanging trees near the platforms on the south bank. Fishing line is difficult to see and even more difficult to remove, and it presents a danger to birds, bats and possums. Treena Whitford and Andrew Jones performed acrobatic feats as they stood in their kayak to gain better leverage on the fishing line. Having other paddlers alongside to balance your boat helped and we'd fortunately brought along some boat-hooks and heavy gloves – see photo below!



The north bank produced much larger surprises. A timber pallet was balanced in tree branches; Jonny Brownbill moved it to a fence line away from the creek, after scaling the tree to reach it. Peter Campbell slogged ashore to extricate the heavy timber base of a picnic table tangled in undergrowth. We floated it across the creek and carried it out near the jetty. We gathered plastic bags, bottles, jars and other rubbish but the pleasing conclusion was that there was much less rubbish than in previous years.

Cate Clarke, Val Richards, Barbara Thraves, David Barraclough, Jan Jones and the aforementioned four all agreed that they will repeat the creek clean-up regularly. It was a fun

morning with much laughter despite picking up other people's rubbish. Suzanne Ryan and Ian Gould undertook the much-less-pleasant task of rubbish removal from the area around the rotunda(see below).

...And another paddler

On Friday 27th March, BERGER Melissa Smith was out again kayaking on the creek with her son Lochlan – remember our junior waste warrior from last year? They paddled up to the platforms below Citation Oval, and picked up some plastic waste, but found there was not a lot. Maybe we are littering less, maybe it was the result of the earlier kayakers' efforts.

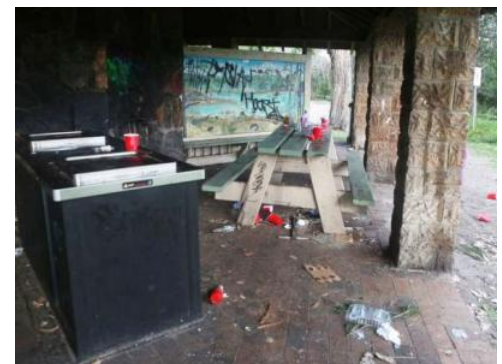
They report, however, that they saw large numbers of small fish – big groups of them all the way along.

Loch and Melissa look forward to being able to get out again once life returns to some form of normal.

GRAFFITI & MESS

Suzanne Ryan reports

Graffiti and rubbish at the old camp ground are a chronic problem. The photo below was taken on 29th February, the day of the kayak clean up. A BERGER reported the graffiti to the Shire via the Snap Send Solve app, and cleaned up rubbish with help from the Yacht Club kayakers cleaning up the creek.



During February, all our posters on the old toilet block and in the Camp Laundry were graffitied at one time or another. The Bird Hide is another regular target. Not to mention seats on fishing platforms, and signs through the reserves

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Suzanne Ryan and Andrew Jones.

Bags collected ready to fill Photo Liz Barraclough

UP THE CREEK WITH A RUBBISH BAG

Jan Jones reports

On Saturday 29th February nine kayakers from Mount Martha Yacht Club decided to remove

Cont from previous page

We're grateful to the Shire for their prompt response in removing graffiti.

To report graffiti

Let the Shire know via the **Snap Send Solve** app on your smartphone (or other device) – simply snap a photo of the problem and it goes directly to the Shire. Find out more at: www.mornpen.vic.gov.au/Your-Property/Rubbish-Recycling/Snap-Send-Solve

Problems can also, of course, be reported via the Shire's website, www.mornpen.vic.gov.au/Contact-Us/Report-A-Problem

ZERO WASTE STRATEGY

Mornington Peninsula Shire Council is asking for feedback and suggestions on its *Draft Beyond Zero Waste Strategy*. The ambitious target is to send zero waste directly to landfill by 2030, feeding it back instead into the local economy as a resource, through reuse, recycling or recovery. The *Beyond Zero Waste Strategy* contains actions across the next ten years to support a circular economy, and meet the Shire's annual greenhouse gas emissions reductions target.

You can read the Strategy at: www.mornpen.vic.gov.au/About-Us/Have-your-say/Have-Your-Say-Beyond-Zero-Waste-Strategy-Review. Feedback can be submitted until **11:59pm, Sunday 19th April**.

KINGFISHER!

In early March, veteran bird watcher David Plant, who was visiting our reserves, saw a brilliant blue flash as he sat quietly at one of the dead-end fishing platforms on the boardwalk – an Azure Kingfisher! 'Unmistakable', he said; 'they are very small, and fly like a jet – a little jewel'.

And below, in the creek, David noticed a small fish with a couple of dark bars on it – probably a Bridled Goby.

BERG Mt Martha welcomes new member David Richardson

BERG MM Working Bees	<u>Other BERG MM Activities</u>	Other Groups
❖ All working bees are cancelled until further notice, due to the COVID 19 pandemic. This includes the monthly Sunday working bee (2 nd Sunday) and Coast Group (3 rd Wednesday) and the weekly Friday working bee .	❖ Waterwatch & EstuaryWatch testing are cancelled until further notice ❖ BERG Mt Martha Committee meeting are temporarily suspended but will likely soon resume via teleconference.	❖ BirdLife Mornington Peninsula: see mornington@birdlife.org.au or www.birdlife.org.au/locations/birdlife-mornington-peninsula . ❖ SPIFFA: see www.spiffa.org . ❖ Sunshine Reserve working bees cancelled until further notice.
<p>BERG MT MARTHA PATRON: TERRY DENTON</p> <p>COMMITTEE: PRESIDENT PETER McMAHON • VICE PRESIDENT & ESTUARYWATCH BRUCE FERRES • SECRETARY DIANNE LEWIS • TREASURER & BUSINESS PARTNERS COORDINATOR JULIE ZAMMIT • FIELD OFFICER LIZ BARRACLOUGH • COAST GROUP SUZANNE RYAN • WATERWATCH SUE MILTON • MARKETING GRAHAM HUBBARD • NEWSLETTER ANGELA KIRSNER</p>		
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THE CREEK

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