

ZOOM INTO THE BERG MM AGM

SATURDAY 17 OCTOBER 10:30AM

Join us, help to ensure we have a quorum at this 'different' AGM, and hear about:

- What we've achieved, despite COVID, both in the field and behind the scenes
- Priority projects, in progress & planned
- Action on the recommendations in our recent Flora & Fauna surveys
- How we have been spending our funds, from grants, donations and membership.

For reports & audited financial statements, go to the 'What's On' section of BERG MM website, www.berg.org.au/whats-on/

To attend via Zoom, please register your attendance via Try Booking www.trybooking.com/BLFTY - you will then receive the link for the meeting.

A Proxy Voting Form for the committee election, for those unable to attend on-line, is also at the 'What's On' section of BERG MM website, www.berg.org.au/whats-on/

SUE'S BIRDS AND BEASTS

Sue Brabender reports

With Spring upon us there are many woodland birds to be seen along the creek. I snapped the Spotted Pardalote (below left) along the Bunyip Walk in early September. Moving through the eucalypt foliage, it was finding a meal of lerps and other insects. Walk quietly along this narrow sandy track and listen for the call of this tiny, delightful species. Stop and look for their movement to 'get your eye in'. Might they have a nesting tunnel in the embankment above?

The young Red Wattlebird (below right) was picking the ripe fruits off a Cherry Ballart, again along the Bunyip Walk. And yes, it did catch this one! The Red Wattlebird feeds on nectar, which it obtains by probing flowers with its thin curved bill. It also eats some insects, taken from foliage or caught in mid-air. Berries and the honeydew produced by some insects add to the bird's diet.

Take care on the Bunyip Walk, as young cyclists dash along the track –family groups too.

I still hope to see (and photograph) the elusive Rakali (our native Water Rat) in Balcombe Creek – one day, fingers crossed! I saw one at Mornington Pier earlier in the year, and a friend saw a pair there. And last year, at a session at the foreshore and breakwater at Royal Brighton Yacht Club, we saw several Rakali. They live in the rock wall, feeding at night and generally sleeping during the day, though they are sometimes seen in daytime as well. Such lovely creatures. I have also seen a short video of a Rakali filmed in the shallows at Mt Eliza early last year. They are definitely about!



BATS

By Angela Kirsner

Liz Barraclough and I are currently upgrading BERG MM's bat and eel posters at the Old Campground. This article draws on material we have pulled together on bats, much of it from a talk given by bat guru Dr Lindy Lumsden at the BERG AGM in 2004 (yes, I still have the notes!).

Shine a torch into the sky on a swarm night and chances are you will light up little bats – ‘microbats’ – flitting overhead as they catch their dinner of insects.

The Mornington Peninsula is home to a number of these little insectivorous bats. Mal Legg found five species in his 2019 survey of our reserves and there may well be more, he said, as a species may be common one month and absent the next. Those he identified were White-striped Free-tail Bat, Gould's Wattled Bat, Lesser Long-eared Bat, Large Forest Bat and Little Forest Bat. They are little guys. The Little Forest Bat, the smallest (and one of our most common), fits in a matchbox and weighs only 4 gm.

Hands that fly

Bats are the only mammals capable of true flight. Their wings are essentially modified hands, with thin membranes linking their very long fingers and extending to ankle and tail. Just two layers of skin with blood vessels and tendons, the

membranes are very strong, and can heal rapidly.

In most species, the membrane extends to the tip of the tail, but in the group known as free tail bats the tail bone remains free.

Wing shapes also vary. Those of the Lesser Long-eared Bat are broad, short and very manoeuvrable, so it can flutter in vegetation to pick off insects. By contrast, the long narrow wings of the White Striped Free-tail Bat are built for speed and distance; it flies high above the canopy, catching insects in open spaces.

Navigating the night sky

Creatures of the night, microbats hunt their prey using an echo-location; they emit ultrasonic pulses of sound and use the echoes to ‘see’ obstacles to avoid and insects to catch.

Their echo-location calls are mostly well outside our hearing range. Bats may be shouting in the night sky, but you hear nothing!



Only one species calls within our hearing range: the White-striped Free-tail Bat. Its call is like two coins clunking together every second. On warmer nights, you may hear it moving across the sky, ‘choonk choonk choonk’; then the call speeds up when it locates an insect, and stops abruptly if the insect is caught.

Bats have good eyesight, which they probably use for big picture things, with echo-location for detail – trees versus twigs, for example.

Bats eat a lot!

These insect-munchers, with their very sharp little teeth, eat up to half their body weight in insects in a night. A feed goes through their system in a couple of hours, so they will eat well just after dusk, hang upside down for a couple of hours, then go out on the hunt again.

They are very important in keeping insect numbers in check. In rural areas where there are isolated trees scattered in paddocks, there are often a lot of insects because sheep have been camping underneath. Not many birds will go to single paddock





area to give birth, but choose very specific trees – like big old trees with a narrow crack on the trunk. Gould's Wattled Bat likes big old trees, live rather than dead, roosting in their dead spouts. Others prefer dead trees.

Bats regularly move roost sites. They may have a cluster of roosts within about 500 m of each other, and move between them, every day or two.

Images: Facing page, bottom left, Gould's Wattled Bat exiting a nest box. All other images, Lesser Long-eared Bat.

Thanks to **Nathan Litjens** for permission to use these brilliant photos, all taken in the Balcombe Estuary Reserves or The Briars. Nathan, who spent his childhood in Mt Martha, now runs a wide-ranging ecological consultancy in Queensland, www.kaluta.com.au. You can see (and buy) more of his stunning wildlife photos at kaluta.zenfolio.com.

trees, but bats roost in and feed extensively around them.

Different species feed on different things. The Little Forest Bat, for example, is a generalist, feeding on beetles, moths and mosquitoes – it is particularly important in culling mosquitoes. The Lesser Long-eared Bat is more specialist; about half its diet is moths, though it also eats a lot of crickets and grasshoppers.

Winding down for winter

Over winter food is scarce, so these little bats switch off. Hanging upside down in their roosts, they go into torpor, a mild form of hibernation. When they are awake and alert, their ears are up, eyes open, and body temperature about 40 degrees. In torpor, it can drop to 10 degrees. Their ears (some of them decidedly long) concertina down. Heart rate drops: when flying, it is up to 1000 beats per minute; alert but still, maybe 400; but in torpor, it can be as low as 10 per minute. And breathing can slow to one breath per hour.

Amazing mums!

Breeding all has to happen over the warmer months. The bats mate in autumn, when the males are at their peak, and the female stores the sperm until she ovulates in spring. Gestation is a long three months. Many species have a single young, which is born at up to a third of the mother's weight. Some (eg Lesser Long-eared Bats, Gould's Wattled Bats) have twins, weighing up to 35% of mum's body weight.

She leaves her young in the roost while she goes out to feed, returning to suckle every couple of hours. By 4-6 weeks they look like adults, but have lots to learn about flying. Mum will often fly with them and, if they crash land, she'll pick them up, take them up to a higher point, and set them off again. She can carry 70-80% of her body weight in the air, with her young latched onto her fur or nipple (ouch!).

They are long-lived animals. There are records of a Bent-wing Bat living up to 22 years. When she was first caught and banded she had just given birth; when caught 22 years later, she had again just given birth. The average is probably closer to 7-8 years, but this is still a long time for a very small animal.

Living arrangements

Most of Victoria's 21 bat species roost in tree hollows. Some – Long-eared Bats for example – will also roost under lifting bark, or even an old fence post. They love cracks they can just squeeze into. Tree hollows are critically important, as are dead trees. Or you may find one roosting in the back shed or under a verandah.

Most of the tree-hole roosters stay in their local



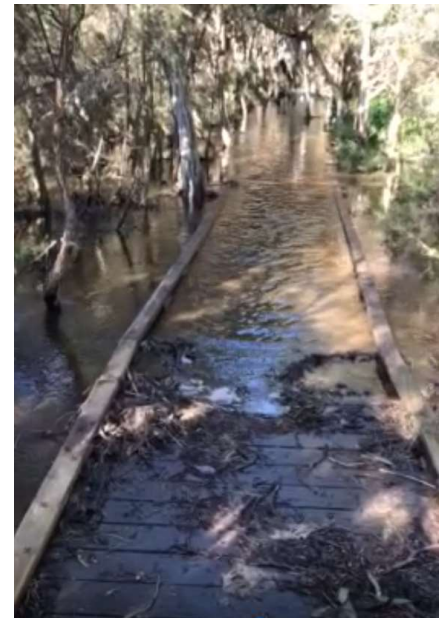
FLOOD!

It was truly wet on 11-12th September, with a massive 52mm of rain over about 36 hours in Mt Martha, according to Sue Betheras' rain gauge (Sue provides rainfall data

for our Waterwatch program).

Jan Jones took a damp stroll the next morning (Sunday 13th), and sent in the left-hand snap, taken on her phone below Uralla Drive.

Amanda Blackman sent Liz a couple of brief videos of the surging waters; the other two photos are screen shots from those videos.



A WALK TO THE BRIARS IN LOCKDOWN

From Jackie Hartnell

On Monday 14th September I celebrated the slight relaxation of lockdown restrictions by walking from Latrobe Drive to The Briars mostly along the boardwalk. I enjoyed the Wetlands and Woodland walks, then returned home, varying the track, to end up via the ovals and 'rabbit paddock' at the lane into Village Close.

It was such a joy – and I don't mean the freedom of 2 hours – the fresh air, beautiful environment, the estuary running faster than I've ever seen it after the heavy rains, and the sounds.

My peace was occasionally interrupted by other walkers as we exchanged rueful masked greetings, but mainly by the sound of frogs and birds. There were two points along the boardwalk where frogs croaked gently and melodically in the estuary and the surrounding floods. In The Briars Wetlands they croaked at full volume in three-part harmony.

But the birds! I heard, though could not see, whistlers, honeyeaters, ducks and a couple I didn't recognise. And I was spoilt with Rainbow Lorikeets, Eastern Rosellas aplenty, two Crimson Rosellas, Eastern Yellow Robins, Grey Fantails and wrens. And I'm sure I missed others.

The joy of walking alone, and in silence.

INTO THE SUNSET

From Angela Kirsner

On 27th September, as we drove over the bridge, there was a Pelican sitting sedately on the beach beside the estuary. It had gone of course by the time I returned with a camera. But Liz snapped it as it sailed into the sunset.



ESTUARYWATCH

Bruce Ferres reports

Still no on-ground EstuaryWatch activities allowed.

But some good news. One of our regular EstuaryWatchers, Franc Amendola, has decided to continue with full time studies next year and will be making the Balcombe Estuary one of the targets of his research around metal pollution in waterways. This will further add to our understanding of the estuary's water profile and the local ecological impact of urbanisation.

On August 20th, the Estuary mouth moved far north, creating one of the longest northerly sand spits seen in recent years.



MOVING AHEAD WITH A NEW GRANT

BERG Mt Martha has received a 2020 Coastcare Victoria Community grant of \$29,677 for a project entitled 'Moving Forward – Building BERG Mt Martha's Capacity to Grow'.

It's an exciting project, running over two years. In many of the activities, we will be guided by highly recommended coach and facilitator, Barbara Jakob, who specialises in change management and network development, and has already worked very successfully with a number of environmental groups. Barbara will help us to review everything we do, to move beyond our assumptions and see us as others see us – and so, better meet community needs and expectations.

Succession planning and mentoring the next wave of volunteer leaders is a vital part. The project will also help us to grow, diversify and enthuse our volunteer base. We will look for new ways to work as effectively as possible with other organisations concerned with protecting our coast, asking, essentially, 'What can BERG MM do for you and how can we achieve it together?' – an approach we hope will make best use of limited resources, and expose us all to new ideas and a wider audience. And we have some new, collaborative citizen science programs planned.

With 23 years of very effective work behind us, this project gives us the opportunity to dust down the ways we are doing things, think outside the square, and make sure we are addressing the changing needs of our environment and community, not our own needs. In short, to make sure we have another great 20 years and more ahead of us!

Congratulations to Suzanne Ryan for putting together and gaining funding for this innovative project! Thanks also to Coastcare Victoria for funding the project.

BIKES AND BUSHLAND

Liz Barraclough reports

Bikes on the boardwalk

All the 'please dismount before entering the boardwalk' signs placed by Shire were rapidly pulled down. Riding traffic has become uncontrolled and dangerous, the boardwalk a bike thoroughfare, with a massive increase in cyclists, exacerbated by COVID. Another difficult problem to solve!

BMX trails

The Shire is now flattening any BMX track work they find in reserves and other areas where such tracks are not approved. BERG MM continues to advocate for the need for kids to have alternative areas to make their tracks, where they will not cause environmental damage.

Concern about proposed bike trails

BERG MM, along with other groups and individuals, is concerned about a proposed bike trail through sensitive grassland and rare orchid colonies along the old Moorooduc to Mornington railway line.

This proposed trail is part of a network of bike trails being considered by the Shire. Consultation with the community and relevant group, and expert input are vital to identify and protect such valued and vulnerable sites.

KARAMU

A VERY INVASIVE WEED ON THE PENINSULA

This article draws on an article by Adie Smith in the August 2020 Mornington Peninsula Landcare Network Newsletter

Karamu (*Coprosma robusta*). is a major weed spreading in many areas of the Peninsula. An evergreen shrub or small tree hailing from New Zealand, Karamu is very invasive, its seeds spread by birds and animals. Although cattle control it in paddocks, it has been found in a number of places across the Peninsula's hinterland. If not removed, it forms dense thickets that kill all the local plants in the area, including mature eucalypts. One female Karamu, left unchecked, has the potential to wipe out all of

Greens Bush in a few decades.

Its present population is, however, still at a level where eradication is a realistic goal. The Main Creek Catchment Landcare Group has applied for Karamu to be declared a Threatening Process under the Victorian Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act (2020), to help gain resources for this eradication effort.

Small plants can be hand-pulled and left, larger plants need to be cut or frilled or drilled, and immediately painted with Glyphosate or similar. If they have seeds, burn them. Seeds last some time in the soil, so regular seedling checks are needed for some years.



A thicket of Karamu

For an initial ID, download iNaturalist to your iPhone, click on the app, take a picture, then ask it for an ID. The excellent AI engine will get you close. Click 'save' to log your observation so others can check it for accuracy and also get an idea on Karamu's presence across the Peninsula.

[Watch this video for more information](#) (thanks to Main Creek Catchment Landcare Group).

BERG Mt Martha welcomes new members
Bruce Ranken, and Peta Donaldson & family

FIELD NEWS

Field Officer Liz Barraclough reports

On the ground

Working bees have, of course, been totally cancelled under Lockdown Level 4. Shall we get one in before Christmas? Surely, at least a few Christmas breakups! And all those morning teas we have missed!

Nevertheless, I (and other isolated BERGers) have indulged in some targeted spot-planting and spontaneous weed control, to add variety and satisfaction to our daily hour (now two hours) of walking.

I have fitted into my exercise sessions the removal of various woody weeds – Boneseed, Flaxleaf Broom, Polygala, Pittosporum and Gorse. Mop up activity! And I know of various BERGers who pull weeds as they pass – can't stop themselves!

All our pre-ordered plants are now in the ground and it's just a matter of hoping for on-going, regular rain, so they can survive.

2021 plant orders

Each year at the start of spring, we submit our indigenous plant orders to The Briars Nursery. This year, after consultation with Naturelinks, we have ordered 1050 indigenous tubestock. Of these, 600 are provided by the Shire, who offer 200 per working bee group each year – and we have our three regular working bee groups.

New signs on the way!

At last, the new map entrance signs



Remember morning teas? A feast on the beach (above), a plate of truffle sandwiches (below). We wait in hope!

have been installed by the Shire at the main entrances to the reserves (see photo). The design is a joint effort between BERG MM and the Natural Systems Team.

Work on the new interpretative signs along the boardwalk and paths, and new directional signs, has been considerably slowed by COVID-19, but we still hope they will all be in by summer.

More Flora and Fauna Surveys

With the Estuary Reserves 10-year follow-up flora and fauna surveys completed last year, the first coastal flora survey almost finalised, and the first coastal fauna survey now started, the Committee has approved flora and fauna surveys of our Hopetoun Creek Zone. This extends from Hopetoun Avenue down to Balcombe Creek (except for the private properties below Uralla Road). The survey will begin soon (COVID-permitting) and will give us a comprehensive view of all the reserves we care for.

Feral Animal control

The Shire has allocated funds for ongoing feral animal control over the current financial year, concentrating primarily on the rabbits. We have done an initial scoping and marking of warrens, so that the Natural Systems Team and contractor Paul

Bertuch can target their inspections and control in a Spring program.

Nesting Box Program

This has continued through lockdown, with Paul Bertuch, of EcoAgri, working in the reserves and up Hopetoun Creek to repair a number of Sugar Glider and Micro Bat boxes, and installing some new ones. He was pleased to find some of the existing boxes inhabited, some by Sugar Gliders and one by Gould's Wattle Bats. He has also mapped the sites so they can be regularly monitored and maintained.





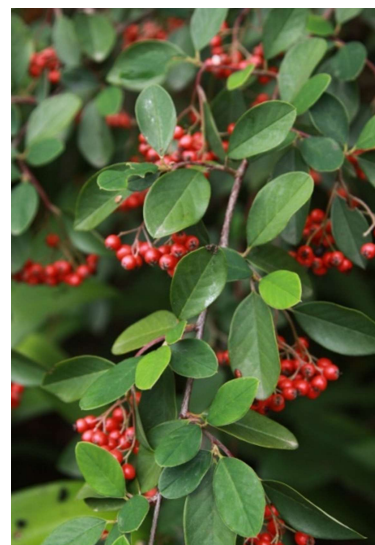
Have you pulled a weed during Lockdown?

Here are some of our most problematic weeds. Clockwise from top left: Polygala, Forget-me-nots, Angled Onion, Cotoneaster, Sweet Pittosporum, Boneseed (below), Mirror Bush, Flax-leaf Broom



Angled Onion can be pulled from damp soil with its bulb, if you take it gently. At the very least remove the flowers before they seed. For all the rest, pull seedlings before they get to flower and seed if at all possible. All except Forget-me-nots grow into large bushes; and Pittosporums get to be substantial trees.

They are all so pretty – and so invasive and destructive of indigenous bushland habitat and species diversity!



VALE BARRY MORRIS

BERG MM is saddened to hear of the death of Barry Morris. Veteran journalist, jazz writer and sub-editor with Sydney's *The Daily Telegraph*, Barry and Jill moved to Mt Martha in 2015 to be close to family, and Barry rapidly put his hand up to become BERG MM's link with the media. As our journalist *par excellence*, his BERG MM stories appeared regularly in the local media, and he was a wonderful advocate for us. And he wore (or doffed) another hat as a jazz singer! He sang at Soup Plus in Sydney, and a number of BERGers were at his "Thanks Frank (Sinatra)" gig in Frankston in 2017. We shall miss him. Our thoughts are with his wife Jill and family.

Barry & Jill at BERG MM's end of year celebration, 2018



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BERG MM Working Bees	Other BERG MM Activities	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), fortnightly Coast Group (alternate Wednesdays) and weekly Friday working bee .	❖ Waterwatch & EstuaryWatch testing are cancelled until further notice ❖ BERG Mt Martha Committee meetings continue via teleconferencing, 2 nd Saturday of each month.	All activities subject to COVID-19 restrictions: ❖ 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.

BERG MT MARTHA PATRON: TERRY DENTON

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

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