



# The Creek

Volume 25 No 6, December 2021

Caring for our local environment

## WELCOME TO OUR NEW COMMITTEE

The BERG Mt Martha committee for the next 12 months was elected unopposed at our AGM on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> November, via Zoom, with a healthy attendance of 45.

**President:** Peter McMahon

**Treasurer:** Julie Zammit

**Secretary:** Dianne Lewis

**Vice President:** currently vacant, but an announcement coming soon.

**Committee members:**

Francesco Amendola,

Liz Barraclough, Bruce Ferres,

Angela Kirsner, Sue Milton,

Marion Orchison.

The meeting was preceded by brief talks on the year's activities by President Peter McMahon, Field Officer Liz Barraclough, Coastal Coordinator Suzanne Ryan, Estuary-Watch Coordinator Bruce Ferres, and Jenny Spiridis, from Mt Martha Primary, on our schools program.

**If you didn't get to the meeting, catch up on the presentations and AGM reports on our [website](#)**

### A special welcome to our two new committee members

**Franc Amendola** is an integral part of our EstuaryWatch team, and fast acquiring impressive credentials as an environmental researcher – see article on page 6.

**Marion Orchison**, a Friday group regular, has a wealth of experience designing and delivering adult learning programs across a range of organisations and governments, including the UN. She also makes delicious bread and other goodies!

*Marion with her delicious home-baked bread at the farewell lunch for Tamara, held in the Campground laundry (see page 7 for more on this)*



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## ANOTHER GRANT SUCCESS

BERG Mt Martha has been awarded \$16,479.20 by the Port Phillip & Westernport Catchment Management Authority (PPWCMA) for weed control around Hopetoun Creek and the Rabbit Paddock (below Balcombe Creek Close), plus more training videos, and a workshop on creating wildlife habitat.

Congratulations Liz, again!

**Thank you!**  
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## KOALA!

By Angela Kirsner

There's been a koala about in Mt Martha at least since early October (we assume it's the same one each time!). First reports were on 5<sup>th</sup> October, when he was in a Black Wattle by the boardwalk near Augusta St. Over the next couple of weeks, he was seen on the boardwalk itself, on the beach, and he spent a day in a large Manna Gum in Ailsa Avenue, opposite the reserves. Nothing more till 18<sup>th</sup> November, when he was in a Sheoke in Mirang Avenue.

Two days later Liz Barraclough stopped in her car at North Beach carpark to see what the fuss was about. Our koala had been chased into a carport on the Esplanade and, to escape an inquisitive crowd, rushed up a small tree. It was *too* small. So he took off across the busy road and was up a small Banksia when Liz arrived.

Two people balancing precariously on ladders were trying to grab him in a blanket. He was not keen, but finally they got him into a washing basket.

Koala rescuer Jenny Bryant was called. She checked him out, declared him a healthy middle-aged male, and took him to Mt Martha Park, where there are other koalas. He outsmarted her attempts to tag him, heading up a Manna Gum, where he settled into a fork and began nibbling on leaves.

### Koalas in Mt Martha

Michelle Thomas, of Animalia Wildlife Shelter, has helped or

rescued hundreds of koalas on the Peninsula, and she has been mapping koala sightings and reports for years.

She says there are probably at least 50 koalas in the greater Mt Martha area, which includes The Briars and Mt Martha Park, but also suburban streets and gardens. Michelle has had calls recently, for example, from Strahans Road, Dava Drive, and streets backing onto Bentons Square.

### On the move

This is the time of year when koalas move about, sometimes long distances. From August onwards, the males are searching for a mate, bellowing and perfuming the air with their pheromones. The females move about too, often to avoid the pursuit.

Where possible they travel through trees, but with so many mature trees still being removed, they must go to the ground, where they are at risk from dogs, cows, foxes and cars.

### Dinner please

Koalas can be fussy eaters but they generally eat most of the gum-trees that live in an area to some degree, and if necessary they will also eat various other species.

They often feed on the same tree or trees night after night. It's thought they have a generational knowledge of local trees, picked up probably in the pouch. So they will head for trees they have known, even if all that's there now is a cleared block or a new housing development.

### Keeping cool

Heatwaves can be dangerous. A koala's body temperature is around 35.4°, and prolonged temperatures in

the 40s can be fatal. They shelter in leafy trees, sprawled over low-hanging branches, where the tree's lower internal temperature helps to cool them. On the Peninsula they often shelter in pines, which can be 5-10° cooler than outside.

Finding water can be a challenge in such weather. The leaves they eat contain less moisture and there is no rain or even dew on them. The only option is to come down to the ground to find water, again exposing them to dogs, foxes and cars.

### Mature trees are vital

There is a pressing need to preserve and retain as many large, mature trees as possible, particularly but not only Eucalypts.

And we need to plant lots more, now and into the future. It takes at least ten years for a Eucalypt to grow large enough to support a koala.

Corridors of trees are particularly important so that koalas can move about safely, without having to come to ground.

### What trees to plant?

Coastal Manna Gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis* subsp. *pyroriana*) is a favourite food and habitat tree. Other eucalypts of value to local koalas are:

- Swamp Gum (*E. ovata*),
- Narrow-leaved Peppermint (*E. radiata*)
- Messmate Stringybark (*E. obliqua*),
- Silver-leaved Stringybark (*E. cephalocarpa*)
- Snow gum (*E. pauciflora*).



Left top: On Mt Martha beach (photo from [www.facebook.com/artburseatfarm/photos/a.550352289192744/736797793881525/?type=3&theater](https://www.facebook.com/artburseatfarm/photos/a.550352289192744/736797793881525/?type=3&theater)); Left lower: on boardwalk (photo Margaret Knight). Left to right: in Manna Gum in Ailsa Ave (photo Angela Kirsner); in driveway on Esplanade (Photo Lily Rush); and an undignified departure! (photo Liz Barraclough)

## BIRDS OF OUR RESERVES

By Lynn Murdoch, BERGer, Friday Grouper, and avid birdwatcher

Walk through the Balcombe Estuary reserves and you may be unaware that the area is home to a range of colourful, cheeky, secretive, migratory and resident bird species of a variety of sizes, habits and environmental requirements. Maybe you see a flash of yellow or blue, or suddenly hear melodious singing from a nearby tree.

To spy an avian resident here is to understand that BERG Mt Martha's long-term work and advocacy has succeeded in preserving a small oasis in Mt Martha. There may be little glamour in pulling weeds or doing monthly water quality sampling, but each small contribution helps in maintaining these reserves and their varied fauna and flora.

### Do you know?

Hands up who knows four birds that live in the reserves. Can you name six, eight or more? How many birds make their home here? Have you listened to the calls in spring?

How many habitats are here? Which birds live in each? Which arrive here from elsewhere in Australia or the Pacific to breed over spring and summer?

My walk on a recent October morning from Augusta St bridge towards The Briars took forty minutes. During that time I heard and/or saw about 25 bird species. Unusually, I had the track to myself. Our corner of paradise has been discovered but so far the birds remain numerous.

A very secretive bird, under threat like so many, is the Bassian Thrush. The size of a Blackbird, it freezes when it feels threatened. Then, while



quietly looking for it, I heard a Sacred Kingfisher; not one, but two, calling backwards and forwards. I hurried towards them. As often happens, by the time I made it to their vicinity they had stopped calling and most likely flown on. These birds migrate here from northern Australia, some from as far as Indonesia and New Guinea. They are tree kingfishers, nest in hollows and are a glorious aqua blue and cream in colour.

Year round one can see the brilliant yellow-breasted male Golden Whistler and the dull grey female, birds that sing magnificently to maintain territory. Come spring a more strident cousin, the Rufous Whistler, joins the Golden. This pint-sized arrival flies south from northern Australia. The Fan-tailed Cuckoo is another migratory bird that returns to the reserves in late winter to spring. Listen for its mournful descending trill.

On most walks through the year you will hear and likely see a Grey Fantail. These character-filled birds flutter and flit around close to passers by, singing their high pitched trill, catching insects. Their nest is a tiny egg-cup size with a trailing tail.

The larger Willy Wagtail may be along the creek towards The Briars,

beyond the Nepean Highway. It has a similar but slightly bigger nest. Nowadays we see Willy Wagtails much less often as woodland birds decline across the country, particularly near urban areas.

One 'holy grail' bird is occasionally seen locally: the Rufous Fantail. A cousin of the Grey Fantail, this little treasure also migrates south from Cape York, islands of the Torres Strait and the Trans-fly Region of southern New Guinea. Look for a flash of bright orange-rufous on a small musical bird as it flashes its fanned tail along the creek.

Any time in the reserves, it is possible to spot Superb Fairy Wren, Kookaburra, Eastern Yellow Robin, Grey Shrike Thrush, Red Browed Finch, White Browed Scrub Wren, Spotted and Striated Pardalotes, Brown Thornbill, Yellow Faced Honeyeater and Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo, to name just a few. And this does not include the water and wetland birds that inhabit the Estuary and creek.

So next time you walk in the reserves, go quietly, listen and look. You don't need binoculars; birds are often so close in these environs. Keep your dog on the lead, tell others to do the same and let them know why. Not only birds but echidnas, bush rats, snakes and other creatures all live here.

Listen, look, weed, plant trees and enjoy.

For more bird information check out *Birdlife Australia* online at [birdlife.org.au](http://birdlife.org.au) and [birdsinbackyards.org.au](http://birdsinbackyards.org.au)

Cornell Library, USA, auspices the free *Merlin* bird app for those who keen to increase knowledge. You can download the *Australian* chapter, which contains a simple bird identification component.

Above: New Holland Honeyeater.  
Below, left to right: Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Golden Whistler, Rufous Whistler, Sacred Kingfisher.

Photos Lynn Murdoch



## ORCHIDS – A GOLDILOCKS YEAR!

By Angela Kirsner

It's been a wonderful year for orchids everywhere. In our reserves, Greenhoods have abounded and more recently there have been probably hundreds of blue Sun Orchids (*Thelymitra* sp) among the Tea Tree below Seppelt Avenue. This is far more than we normally see, though their flowers have been very shy about opening. Local ecologist Gidja Walker tells me that some may self-pollinate and never open, while others open only briefly, and close immediately an insect obliges.

### An unfamiliar orchid

Among the Sun Orchids, a smaller but not insignificant patch of Bronze Caladenias (*Caladenia transitoria*) appeared in October.

It is, the books tell me, widespread from sub-coastal to foothills in low-



Bronze Caladenia orchid Photo Angela Kirsner



Sun Orchids (*Thelymitra* sp) below Seppelt Avenue. Left: in flower (Photo Margaret Knight). Right: Some of the dozens or hundreds of orchids that came up but were very shy to open! (Photo Angela Kirsner)

heath to woodland habitats. It may vary in height and number of flowers per stem, and in colour from maroon to pale green.

Bronze Caladenia appears on our 2002 flora survey as *C iridescens* (its previous name), but none of us has noticed them since. Eagle-eyed Tamara Keyte tells us she's not seen them before in this spot, though she was not a BERGer in 2002.

So where have they, and the masses of Sun Orchids, been all these years? How long can orchids survive as tubers without coming up to flower and reproduce?

### The dormancy puzzle

The small amount of published research I've seen isn't very helpful. One study suggests that for Caladenias, dormancy of more than three years is rare, and monitoring for orchids not seen for longer than this is a waste of time. Not so, it seems, in our reserves!

Often, said Tamara, 'they lie dormant awaiting perfect conditions. I guess this year is a goldilocks year! They can survive for years under a building, then it's destroyed and they emerge. There is a reason a lot of us in conservation affectionately call them awkward!'.

Rudie Kuitert, with his vast knowledge of Victoria's native orchids, writes that for small Caladenias, 'Regular rainfall is important, and flowering is aborted

in dry periods. Their tubers can survive underground and seeds remain dormant for many years. When conditions are favourable and their associating *Mycorrhizal* fungi have recovered, the flowers can return to their normal numbers.'

Researchers at Arthur Rylah Institute suggest that dormancy is often to avoid climatic extremes such as drought, while researchers in the USA suggest that extended dormancy probably accounts for the unexpected appearance or resurgence of orchid populations, or apparent movement within them.

Local ecologist Gidja Walker recounts that she once had to rescue a patch of Leafy Greenhoods that had 200 leaf rosettes above ground. She'd expected maybe about 500 tubers underground, but found 1876 tubers greater than 2mm – a vast store of dormant life.

### References

- Kuitert, Rudie H, *Orchids of Western Port and surround*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Aquatic Photographics, November 2013.  
 ——— *Victoria's Small Caladenias*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Aquatic Photographics, 2019.

### BERG Mt Martha welcomes new members

Terry Moar & family, John Hancorne & family, Judith Foreman, Nicholas Hastings

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## CHAINSAW HOLLOWES – A FOLLOW-UP

By Angela Kirsner

We reported in the last newsletter on the promising research underway into the creation of artificial chainsaw hollows (CHs) in mature Eucalypts, for hollow-dependent mammals and birds.

The research team has published a further study looking at the use of these hollows by Krefft's Gliders (*Petaurus notatus*, one of three species recently identified within what we've long known as Sugar Gliders. All Victorian 'Sugar Gliders' are now Krefft's Gliders).

For over two years, using pole cameras, the researchers monitored occupancy of 48 CHs installed in live Eucalypts across a number of Melbourne reserves, and visited 40

of them over about three months. They recorded 13 native hollow-dependent species (five mammals, eight birds) using the CHs, and during 14 pole-camera inspections, Krefft's Glider occupied 60% of the hollows at least once, with 4% used as maternal dens during breeding. Four exotic species were also recorded visiting and/or occupying the CHs.

### What makes an attractive hollow?

Orientation and volume seem to be important. Krefft's Gliders were more likely to occupy larger CHs, and those facing north and west (possibly related to microclimate). The size of the tree didn't matter, but the location did: Gliders were more likely to occupy CHs further from reserve edges, and where there were more Black Wattles (*Acacia mearnsii*, an important food resource) and low vegetation cover.

The research provides further evidence of the usefulness of CHs in providing supplementary shelters for Krefft's Gliders. The researchers emphasise, however, the importance of retaining mature trees with natural hollows.

The group's research into chainsaw hollows continues. We are delighted that Anthony Fennell, of Naturelinks, funded by the Shire, will now be monitoring the group's CHs in The Briars, as part of our regular local nesting box monitoring. So we will be able to play a small part in this ongoing research.

### Reference

Best K, Haslem A, Maisey AC, Semmens K, Griffiths SR. Occupancy of chainsaw-carved hollows by an Australian arboreal mammal is influenced by cavity attributes and surrounding habitat. *Forest Ecology and Management* 503 (2022) 119747.

<https://authors.elsevier.com/a/1dtxg1L%7EGWQxRy>

## SUE'S FIELD NOTES

Article & photos Sue Brabender

On the 20<sup>th</sup> November I went to my favourite Bunyip Track to look for pollinators during Pollinator Week. I spent ten minutes watching three different plant species, and saw pollinators ranging from wasps (below), beetles, butterflies, pintails and pollinating flies to European Honey Bees, but no native bees.



Movement on the track caught my eye – a very big rabbit hopping towards me! It stopped, we stared at one another for a few seconds, then it turned, hopped away, and dashed off the track.



Later I heard movement in the undergrowth. After a few minutes I caught glimpses of a lovely Swamp Rat among the grasses.



And in early November, I too heard a Sacred Kingfisher along the creek. There is so much to see! Slow down, look and listen – you may be surprised!

## ARE THERE TRACE METALS IN OUR CREEK?

By Angela Kirsner

Franc Amendola, long-standing EstuaryWatcher and new BERG MM committee member, has just completed a significant research project on Balcombe Creek.

He systematically sampled and tested the creek's sediment and water to determine whether trace metals are present; and if so, are they at levels above the trigger values specified in national water quality guidelines?

The project is the final part of his Honours Science degree at RMIT.

### Where might metals come from?

Trace metals may find their way into waterways from industrial activity or simply day-to-day urban life.

As Balcombe Creek meanders some twenty kilometres to the bay, it passes five suburbs, an industrial zone, a landfill zone, a racecourse and a drinking water storage facility.

### Are base metals a concern?

Sediments have a unique way of locking in contaminants so they don't really pose a problem unless the mud is disturbed – for example, by storms or dredging. However, the little critters that live in the mud may ingest the contaminants, which will then spread up the food chain.

Franc's research provides a baseline for monitoring levels into the future, and for action to remediate or prevent any problems.

### The findings

Franc analysed samples from eight points along the creek's length from the back of Mt Eliza to the estuary mouth.

In the sediment samples he found traces of Arsenic, Cadmium, Chromium, Copper, Iron, Nickel, Lead and Zinc, all at levels above guideline trigger levels.

In the analysed water samples, he found no guideline breaches.



Franc sampling creek water and sediments to be analysed in the laboratory using spectrometry Photo Bruce Ferris

### What next?

Franc hopes, next, to research the use of plants (maybe reeds, *Phragmites* sp) to extract contaminants from sediments. The ideal plant will be one that grows rapidly and can be cut and buried in EPA-registered and sealed landfill sites. Another project on his wish-list is testing for herbicides and pesticides in our waterways.

## COASTAL NEWS

Suzanne Ryan reports

Over the past few weeks we have ramped up our activity on the coast to every Wednesday until Christmas. We have been targeting an area just north of Balcombe headland above the track to the beach, cutting and dabbing very old and sizeable Boneseed and smaller old Polygalas (the larger Polygalas were removed earlier in the year by the PPWCMA team). We have managed to remove about 90% of our target weeds before seed drop.

Our aim was to remove these woody weeds from the higher elevations to stop seeds drifting down towards areas below that we have cleared previously.

We'll take a break from on-ground work until 19th January, and catch up on planning and grant reports. In 2022 we plan to seed-bomb cleared areas and remove further woody weeds in a staged process.

**FIELD NEWS**

*Field Officer Liz Barraclough reports*

We're back working in the field! The Friday groupers started on 5<sup>th</sup> November, tackling yet more Forget-me-nots below Ferrero Ovals. We've also worked between Watson Road tennis courts and kinder, where the BMX jumps had been bulldozed and fallen Teatree dumped on the remaining vegetation. We moved the fallen trees to the bare bulldozed area, removed their brushy heads to reduce fire risk, and pulled stacks of invasive weed grasses, notably Briza and Sweet Vernal, the latter a phytotoxic weed that inhibits growth of other plants. It is of particular concern around orchids. (The strong smell of the roots would inhibit anything!) It's great to see dozens of small Teatree seedlings appearing here.

**Beaded Glasswort**

One November Friday Anthony Fennell, who manages the Westernport wetlands for Naturelinks, gave us a workshop on identifying, surveying, monitoring and mapping estuarine vegetation, particularly Beaded Glasswort *Sarcocornia quinqueflora*. A session focussing on mapping Beaded Glasswort is in the pipeline. There are small patches of this plant around the estuary, often hidden among other vegetation. We want to explore whether its presence and prevalence indicate estuary health or particular conditions.

Also known as Samphire, Beaded Glasswort is an edge plant, a native succulent that grows anywhere that salty water tends to be, like salt marshes, brackish water, coastlines,



and rocky areas. It can grow to 30cm or more, but often forms mats only a few centimetres high. Stems are made up of cup-shaped segments, with tiny flowers in whorl-like rings.



The plant was once used for glass-making because its ashes are rich in sodium carbonate, which is needed for melting sand into glass.

**A Friday celebration!**

On our final November Friday, after weeding around the campground and tidying the storage shed, we at last managed a celebratory farewell lunch for Tamara Keyte. A fine BERG spread, as always!

**...and Sundays**

At our first Sunday working bee for many months, eleven of us removed masses of Polygala, from tiny seedlings to sturdy, flowering bushes, from the top end of the Rabbit Paddock (below Village Close). We left great piles to be chipped by Naturelinks. Very satisfying!

This extensive area of Polygala is a telling example of weed regeneration in an area we'd neglected to follow

up. It was weeded down to the smallest seedlings some five years ago, but we have since neglected it. A good lesson for us all.

**Naturelinks**

Meanwhile Naturelinks continues work under our grants and Shire funding. They tackled grassy weeds, Tradescantia and Arums below La Trobe Drive, downstream of August St bridge, and between tennis courts and kinder on the Watson Rd. Here they also removed a smothering and fruiting passionfruit. They've also removed patches of Angled Onion (which is prolific this year), Bridal Creeper and a few Blackberry plants.



*Photos: Top & centre, Beaded Glasswort. Above, Barb Thraves & Liz Barraclough removing Polygala at the Sunday working bee; & the Polygala-free site afterwards. Below: farewell lunch for Tamara after Friday Group. On the right, Tamara is with Eric Smalley & her partner Matt. Photos: Polygala-free site by Liz Barraclough; all others, Angela Kirsner*



**[Field News continued]**

**Thanks, weeding walkers!**

COVID has seen a number of BERGers transformed into weeding walkers. They've done lots of follow-up weeding of Forget-me-nots and more, and some have even armed themselves with equipment for cutting and painting woody weeds – Boneseed, Gorse and Flaxleaf Broom in the Maude Street and Victoria Crescent area.

**More BERG videos**

The training videos we made earlier in the year are already proving their value with our working bee participants, and we have been making more. The latest ones cover the weeds Vinca Major, Forget-me-not, Angled Onion and Pittosporum.

Liz Barraclough and Suzanne Ryan have starred. But both are delighted that Tamara Keyte has agreed to do more in the future. And both are sure our wonderful

videographer, the patient and tolerant Eddie Fraker, will be hugely relieved! The videos are funded by the PPWCMA, Environment Victoria (Biodiversity On-Ground Action grant), Coastcare and the Shire.



Eddie Fraker filming reluctant star Suzanne Ryan in the coastal reserve Photo Angela Kirsner

Come along to our Bushland Activities	Other BERG MM Activities	Other Groups
<p><b>ALL COVID-DEPENDENT:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ <b>2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the month:</b> between 9am &amp; noon. Details emailed a few days ahead, or call Liz Barraclough 0408 388 430.</li> <li>❖ <b>Coast Group:</b> fortnightly on Wednesdays, between 9am &amp; noon. Call Suzanne Ryan 0418 387 604 for details. Location emailed a few days ahead.</li> <li>❖ <b>Friday Group:</b> weekly between 9.30am &amp; noon. Call Liz Barraclough 0408 388 430.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ <b>Waterwatch &amp; EstuaryWatch testing:</b> monthly, 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday. <b>WW</b>, meet 9.15am at Augusta St bridge; call Sue Milton 0407 350 175. <b>EW</b>, meet 9.00am at the Rotunda; call Bruce Ferres 0435 389 804.</li> <li>❖ <b>BERG Mt Martha Committee</b> meets monthly at Mt Martha House (or via Zoom), 9.00am, usually the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ <b>BirdLife Mornington Peninsula</b> bird-watching normally 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday. Enquiries to Max Burrows 0429 947 893, mornington@birdlife.org.au or www.birdlife.org.au/locations/birdlife-mornington-peninsula.</li> <li>❖ <b>SPIFFA</b> 1<sup>st</sup> Monday, 7.30 pm, at Seawinds Community Hub, 11A Allambi Ave, Rosebud West. See www.spiffa.org.</li> <li>❖ <b>Sunshine Reserve</b> working bee 9.30am, last Sunday of month. Call Pia Spreen, 0437 299 847.</li> </ul>
<p align="center"><b>BERG MT MARTHA PATRON:</b> TERRY DENTON</p> <p><b>COMMITTEE:</b> PRESIDENT PETER McMAHON • SECRETARY DIANNE LEWIS • TREASURER &amp; BUSINESS PARTNERS COORDINATOR JULIE ZAMMIT • FIELD OFFICER LIZ BARRACLOUGH • COAST GROUP SUZANNE RYAN • ESTUARYWATCH BRUCE FERRES • WATERWATCH SUE MILTON • NEWSLETTER ANGELA KIRSNER • FRANC AMENDOLA • MARION ORCHISON</p>		
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