



The Creek

Volume 28 No 1, Autumn 2024

Caring for our local environment

WARM CONGRATULATIONS

...to two Mornington Peninsula heroes who were awarded a Medal of the Order Of Australia in the Australia Day honours, both 'For service to conservation and the environment'.

GIDJA WALKER OAM

Local ecologist, environmental educator and general treasure, **Gidja Walker** has done so much to advocate for, preserve, and educate all age groups about the Peninsula's natural environment. For over 30 years she has been teaching, training and campaigning for the protection of land and country on the Peninsula. She has trained rangers, shire staff and contractors, worked with students from primary through to tertiary, and has been invaluable to Land Care and friends groups.

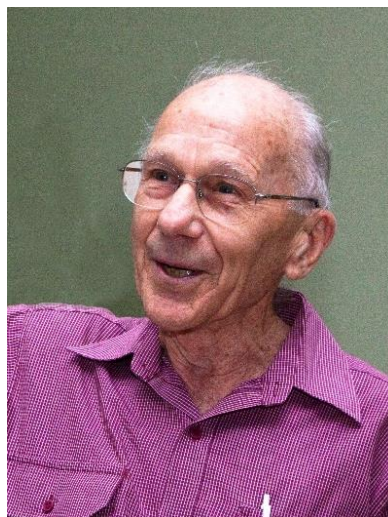
Gidja is a long-standing friend of BERG Mt Martha, involved in our flora surveys since the late 1990s, and in many of our educational and community events. And she is always available to provide us with expert opinions and advice.



Gidja leading a BERG kids' discovery walk in 2016 Photo Liz Barraclough

LEON COSTERMANS OAM

Esteemed botanist, author, teacher, conservation leader and much more, Frankston-based **Leon Costermans** has devoted his long life to sharing his vast knowledge of the botanical and geological aspects of south-eastern Australia. He has been a tireless environmental volunteer, teacher, and leader of field studies and surveys. His book *Native Trees and Shrubs of South-eastern Australia* is a seminal classic, and his deep interest in geomorphology is documented in his more recent publication, *Stories beneath our feet: Exploring the Geology and Landscapes of Victoria and Surrounds*. Those of you who were at the BERG 2011 AGM will remember his inspiring talk on this topic.



Leon Costermans at the BERG 2011 AGM

VIDEO STARS!

'Join us!' is essentially the message in a brief new video that you will find soon on BERG Mt Martha's website and Facebook page.

South East Water has made and donated the video in thanks for BERG's agreement to be part of a *their* video to support their National Finalist nomination for the Australian Water Awards. The nomination recognises their innovative Environmental Sensitivity Map, and BERG's Peter McMahon was part of their submission video, talking about why the Map is important.



Peter McMahon in the frame for SE Water at the estuary Photo Angela Kirsner

The BERG Mt Martha video

Our video opens with President Eric Smalley introducing BERG, then three more BERGers tell why they joined and volunteer for BERG: Kathy Smalley, who took on the job of Secretary in 2022; Friday Grouper

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Thank you!
Mt Martha Community Bank
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Mount Martha
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Starring for BERG: Peter McMabon, Kathy Smalley, Jeanette Miller, Sean Callendar, Eric Smalley. Photo Angela Kirsner

Jeanette Miller, and Sean Callendar, the IT guru who manages our website. Filming took place at the Estuary on 12th February.

What is the Environmental Sensitivity Map?

Paige-Elise Galloway, Community Manager with SE Water, describes their new map as 'a tool to identify environmental sensitivities within the SE Water service area [and so] proactively protect the environment'.

It came about after SE Water responded to a sewer spill into a creek that, they learnt at the last minute, is a breeding site for the endangered Dwarf Galaxias fish. So to protect the fish, they flushed the spill with non-chlorinated water.

Ideally, they want to know of such issues in advance to manage environmental issues when a spill happens. So they have developed a map of the sensitivity of waterways, terrestrial and marine environments in their service area.

ESTUARYWATCH

Bruce Ferres reports

EstuaryWatch monitoring and testing has been on hold since the BERG store-room break in and theft of our water monitoring equipment late last year.

Waiting on new equipment

With changes in Melbourne Water's EstuaryWatch personnel, processing our request for replacement equipment was delayed, but after discussions in early December with new EstuaryWatch coordinator Jane Petch, Melbourne Water has generously agreed to provide us with new

equipment: a Pro 2030 multimeter, sampling bottle, turbidity tube and EstuaryWatch manual. This too is taking time as the multimeter is coming from overseas.

The estuary mouth

We can still, of course, continue with our observations and reporting on the estuary mouth. In early January it was open, and the stormwater pouring into the bay after the heavy summer rains was highly discoloured with sediments and tannin, degrading water quality at Mt Martha South Beach. More recently the mouth has been mostly closed, and the beach water quality has been much improved.

Sediment load

Without being able to measure the sediment in the estuary over summer, it looks as though it has increased with all the summer rain and runoff. When the basin next empties, I will check the sediment pin, and maybe reposition it.

Using our data to detect change

With over a decade of EstuaryWatch monitoring behind us, the data we have accumulated should be enough to build a profile of expected conditions in the estuary each season. For example, if we are aware of the mean Dissolved Oxygen level in summer, we can easily identify any out-of-the-normal event. And if we are aware of the expected or average water temperature in the estuary each season, we have a basis for identifying trends associated with global warming.

I have asked Jane Petch (Estuary-Watch Coordinator) if all our collected data could be analysed in

this way by Melbourne Water. It could maybe be a project for a tertiary student, or work experience for a temporary employee or junior staff. Jane is making enquiries.

Building a new team

I hope to step back from Estuary-Watch this year, and am heartened to learn that several BERGers are interested in becoming more involved. In particular, Colin Wilkinson, who has assisted me for several years, will continue, and Geoff Pritchard is joining the team as soon as we are able to resume normal activities. Helen Carroll will continue to transfer our collected data and images to the Melbourne Water EstuaryWatch portal.

If you are interested in joining the team, contact me on 0435 389 804.

FLAG RAISING

Rotary Mt Martha invited local community groups to a flag-raising ceremony on Australia Day, at Mt Martha Village, where BERG Committee member Terry Moar was invited to raise the flag. BERG was also represented by Committee members Geoff Pritchard, Peter McMahan and Kathy Smalley, as well as other members.

The crowd was addressed by Senator James Paterson, our Federal Member Zoe McKenzie MP, State Member Chris Crewther MP, Mayor Simon Brooks, and Rotary President Anne Shaw.

It was a great opportunity to be networking with other Mt Martha community groups.



Terry Moar at the flag pole

Photo Kathy Smalley

SNORKELLING OFF MT MARTHA AND MORNINGTON



Sue Brabender has had an amazing summer of snorkelling & photography. All but two of these photos are from the Mt Martha & Mornington coastline; the two to the right of this box are from Blairgowrie (your editor couldn't resist them!).

Row 1: Zebrafish, Seahorse sp, Old Wives.

Row 2: Sponge & blue Stony Coral, Banjo Ray, Haekel's Jellyfish.

Row 3: Encrusting soft coral, Shorttail Ceratosoma, Verco's Nudibranch.

Row 4: Spotted Pipefish.

Row 5: Senator Wrasse, Garfish, Ascidian.

Row 6: Tasmanian Blenny, Blue sponge, and can you spot the tiny Flounder?

LOCAL SIGHTINGS ANGELA KIRSNER REPORTS

GHOST FUNGUS

Most of the information in this article comes from Alison Pouliot, who talked about these fungi in her workshops for BERG last year.

It was January when Helen Smalley snapped these handsome fungi (right) among the Melaleucas by the boardwalk. Had she passed them in the dark, she may have noticed a soft green glow, for they are the bioluminescent Ghost Fungus.

Ghost fungi have been widely recorded across Australia, especially in the forests of the south-eastern seaboard. While Helen found single specimens, these large funnel-shaped mushrooms (the reproductive part of the fungus) often overlap in large clusters around the base of a tree, often a Eucalypt. They are mostly white to cream coloured with various shades of brown, yellow, green, grey, purple and black, usually around the centre of the cap. Underneath, the lamellae (radiating plates containing the spores) are white to cream and extend down the stipe (stem).

They obtain nutrients as both a weak parasite of some tree species and as a saprobe, breaking down organic matter such as wood.

Don't eat them!

While looking much like oyster mushrooms (and once classified in the same genus, *Plurotis*), Ghost Mushrooms contain a powerful emetic that causes nausea and vomiting.

Are they unseasonal in January?

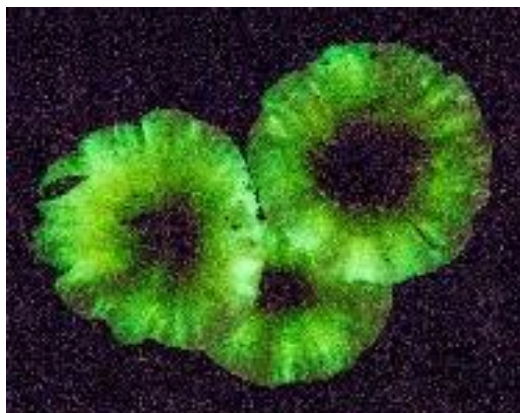
'I'm not sure that there's any such thing as unseasonal any more', Alison replied to my emailed query. 'While they more commonly appear in autumn, they are recorded at all times of the year, and rain is the likely trigger. There are loads of them around at the moment.'

And they glow!

Ghost Fungi contain luciferin, a substance that, in the presence of oxygen, is oxidised by the enzyme



luciferase to release energy as subtle greenish light. You will see it only in real darkness. Allow your eyes time to adjust and don't use a torch. The photo below was taken in my garden a few years ago on a dark night, and needed a very long exposure.



Why do they glow?

We don't know. Maybe to attract insect vectors, but studies on Kangaroo Island found that bioluminescent fungi attract no more than insects others. It is probably an incidental byproduct of metabolism. Though a young friend of Alison's looked astonished at that suggestion; it's to help guide wombats at night he declared!

The magical glowing has given rise to rich and colourful folk histories and mythologies. A drover's diary from Western Australia records that Aboriginal people would not camp where Ghost Fungi grew because they believed them to be spirit ancestors. Other early records tell that the Kombumerri people of south-eastern Queensland associated luminous fungi with evil spirits



and supernatural activities of Dream-time ancestors. West Australian Aboriginal people referred to the fungus as *Chinga*, meaning spirit.

Further afield, some in Micronesia destroyed them as an evil omen while others used them in body decoration, especially for intimidating enemies. In California, miners believed them to mark the spot where a miner had died.

A tourist attraction!

In what is probably the first example of mycotourism in Australia, the track through pine plantations near Mount Gambier is now known as Ghost Mushroom Lane, and 70,000 people have come through to see the glowing mushrooms.

WHITE-LIPPED SNAKE

Our 2019 Fauna Survey recorded two species of snake in the Balcombe Estuary Reserves: Lowland Copperhead and White-lipped Snake. Both, the survey noted, appeared to be 'at low-medium population densities'.

We hear few reports of snakes. So it was all the more pleasing when on a warm sunny afternoon in January, Jen Kirsner saw a White-lipped Snake slip rapidly into undergrowth along the easement by the reserves linking the Esplanade bridge and Victoria Crescent.

Small snakes, up to 50cm, White-lipped Snakes range in colour from white through brown or olive to black, but are characterised by a white stripe along the lip.

LOCAL SIGHTINGS CONTINUED

They are found through south-eastern Australia including Tasmania, in heaths, sclerophyll forests and woodlands. A shy species, they tend to hide when people approach.

They are nevertheless active hunters, feeding mainly on small skinks but occasionally frogs. They can forage in winter on fine days as their small size allows them to heat up quickly.

White-lipped Snakes have small fangs and small venom glands. They are unlikely to cause serious injury to healthy adults, but some people may be sensitive to the venom. If bitten, apply first aid and get to a doctor just in case.



White-lipped Snake

Photo by Ian R. McCann, Museums Victoria
collections.museums.victoria.com.au/species/8789

BUFF-BANDED RAIL

In early January, a message rolled in from BERGer Colin Fryer reporting unusual birds in the Fryers' garden, by the corner of Maude and Helena streets – an adult with two smaller youngsters. The only photo Colin managed, sadly, was of wing feathers from one of the birds that had been killed by maybe a fox or cat. But the feathers strongly suggest the birds were Buff-banded Rails.

Buff-banded Rails generally like damp areas: beaches, reef flats, sandbanks, mangroves and the like. Maybe, Colin suggested, they were attracted by the ephemeral pond in the Fryers' garden formed by heavy rain run-off over the Christmas-New Year week.

Rails are elusive birds, though they are occasionally seen dashing rapidly between clumps of grass, rushes or other overgrown vegetation. Indeed, shortly before Colin's report, I'd seen what must have been one of his birds dashing across Maude St, in front of my car, into the Fryers' property. An unlikely sighting!



Above: a Buff-banded Rail © Leo, Source: Flickr,
www.flickr.com/photos/49828152@N00/4034337308/

Below: Colin Fryer's photo of the feathers



And a past sighting

While looking up our record of Leon Costermans' talk, I noticed in the same issue of *The Creek*, December 2011, the following paragraph from Pam Hearn:

On Monday, 7th November, [we] noticed a strange bird bobbing through the long grass in our backyard, which backs onto the Norfolk-Hopetoun Reserve.... There turned out to be a family – two adults and three or four young ones... a colleague from Peninsula Bird Observers identified them as Buff-banded Rails, a shy waterbird that is prized by birdwatchers....

It's not something you would expect to see on a suburban block.... With the warm, damp weather and amazing vegetation growth, there have been many unusual bird sightings this year.

IMPERIAL JEZEBEL

What a name! Imperial Jezebel butterflies (*Delias harpalycce*) are not rare, but are nevertheless gorgeous. This specimen was fluttering on a path in my garden opposite the reserves. It seemed to be having trouble getting off the ground, but when I offered my hand as a lift, it climbed aboard and was off in a flash!

Its caterpillars, I read, are black with sparse white hairs and spots. They feed and breed on Mistletoes, often near the top of tall trees, where they grow to 4 cm, and spin a silken web where they remain together and pupate in a group. The adults, the butterflies, lay clusters of about 100 tiny, yellow, bottle-shaped eggs on the upper surface of a foodplant leaf.

The species occurs in south-eastern of Australia. The butterflies are one of the first to emerge in spring and fly throughout the year.

Below: The Imperial Jezebel showing upper and lower surfaces of the wings Photos Angela Kirsner



ECHIDNA

It's always good to have evidence of echidnas in the reserves. This one was sauntering over the road near Augusta St Bridge in late December.



Photo Alison Rowlands

THANKS TO OUR BUSINESS PARTNERS

FEATURING MORNINGTON PENINSULA GARDENING PROUD TO BE A BERG BUSINESS PARTNER

- Chris Street, owner and manager, is a local born and bred:
'Some of my earliest memories are of rafts & cubbies along the estuary – I hope generations to come can have such memories.'
- His parents too were long-standing locals & BERGers:
'My late father David Street helped with WaterWatch & countless working bees, and my mother Bronnyn Street was Philanthropy Officer for several years.'



For a free quote contact Chris Street on 0415 446 324.
Mention that you heard of us through BERG to receive a discount!.

- Mornington Peninsula Gardening services private and business clients from Flinders to Mornington. Our team regularly maintains local retirement villages too.
- And as of 2024, we have a 2-tonne Wood Chipper and tight access truck, so we can process quantities of branches, large and small.

- Bells Gourmet Meats
- Bendigo Bank Mount Martha
- Boomerang Bags Mount Martha
- Bunnings Mornington
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- Ritchies IGA
- Rotary Club of Mount Martha
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BUNNINGS TO THE RESCUE

Suzanne Ryan, Coast Coordinator

Last October BERG had a break-in at its tool store in a facility provided by the Shire. Among items stolen were various manual working-bee tools, which I secured through a Coastal grant only a couple of years ago. As we had originally bought these tools at Bunnings, we approached them again to ask if they could assist in their replacement. To Bunnings' credit, they agreed to replace every tool. Thanks Bunnings!



*Suzanne with the replacement tools
Photo Jennifer Mann*

HARRY POTTER AT THE BRIARS

From Eric Smalley, BERG President

Few locals would be unaware of the community uproar about the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council's decision, announced late last year, to allow staging of the *Harry Potter: A Forbidden Forest Experience* within The Briars Wildlife Sanctuary.

On hearing of the event, your BERG Committee emailed each Councillor regarding our serious concern about the location, and we kept members informed via eNews and our Facebook page.

We are delighted that Council, responded to community concern and voted on 13th February to relocate the event to The Briars Community Forest (AKA Dog Park), a woodland patch without the environmental sensitivity of the Sanctuary. Its paths are now being re-gravelled for safety and accessibility, a move that will have long-term benefits.

We salute the 'Save Briars Sanctuary' campaign, which rallied extraordinary levels of community and organisational support to achieve this result.

When a community of good people rallies together you can achieve wonders more magical than a wizard!

SMALLEYS TACKLE GRAFFITI!



Family team Kathy Smalley, BERG Secretary, and brother Eric, President, removing the latest crop of graffiti from the signs at the old campground Photo Ross Hudson

FIELD NEWS

Field Officer Liz Barraclough reports

After our normal January break, our working bees got moving again in February.

The Friday Group has spent the month planting and installing signs to rehabilitate the rest of the bushland and creek banks damaged by fisher-folk. So far the signs and plantings seem to have been respected.



Salt Marsh plants in Melaleuca scrub between Victoria Crescent & Esplanade. Left: Sea Celery, Right: Angled Lobelia Photos Angela Kirsner



Planting out the fishing tracks – from this (above) to this (below) Photos Liz Barraclough



At our first Sunday working bee for the year, in February, a good-sized crew tackled the English Ivy that is taking off in the Melaleuca scrub along the easement between Victoria Crescent and the bridge. We also removed lots of Banana Passionfruit plants

Tangled among the weed grasses, it was great to see two small salt marsh species thriving – Sea Celery and Angled Lobelia (above), both clearly more tenacious than their delicate size and structure would suggest.

Naturelinks works on

Funded by our grants and the Shire, Naturelinks crews have done major weeding in the old Campground (where it is very satisfying to see the revegetation areas thriving and finally starting to out-compete the weeds) and in the Swamp Scrub along Mirang Avenue. Have you seen the gorgeous pink, indigenous Large Bindweed *Calystegia sepium* subsp. *roseate* (right) that has been flowering with particular exuberance along here this summer, beside the path from the bridge to the shops?



Large Bindweed Calystegia sepium subsp. Roseate Photo Angela Kirsner

In the bushland between Victoria Cres and the Esplanade Naturelinks tackled more scrambling and woody weeds including Moth Vine, English Ivy, Blackberry, Wonga Vine, Jasmine, a small Crassula infestation,

and encroaching Kikuyu. It's a significant challenge controlling the 'garden escapes' here, with weed species flourishing in the adjoining gardens. More weeding in the Bunyip, (Sallow Wattle, Polygala) plus some thinning of regenerating Tea Tree. Along Henley Ave they removed and bagged Spider Plants and fruiting Banana Passionfruit, and more. And under our Port Phillip & Westernport Catchment Management Authority Grant, they have continued work on Citation hill to tackle Wonga Vine, Pittosporum and Blackberry.

Continued next page

Banana Passionfruit (*Passiflora tarminiana*) is a rampant climber from South America, with showy flowers and edible (but insipid) fruit. It has been widely used as a rootstock for Black Passionfruit, but far outlives the grafted plant, resprouting widely from spreading roots, and its seeds are also spread by birds, foxes and possibly native mammals. It is a rapidly spreading environmental weed of south-eastern rainforest areas, smothering understorey vegetation and often climbing high into the canopy.

Photo by Forest & Kim Starr, CC BY 3.0 us, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/index.php?curid=71888414>



Five years of BeachPatrol

It's five years since a group from Mt Martha Lifesaving Club and Yacht Club, led by Amy Westnedge and Cathy Mitchell, formed the Mt Martha BeachPatrol group, one of over 40 volunteer groups working under Victoria's BeachPatrol initiative that meet every

month to pick up plastic litter from local beaches. To celebrate the five-year anniversary, some BERGers joined the Mt Martha group's January clean-up.

BERG Mt Martha welcomes new members
 Stephen Wolf & family, Peter Vince & family, Sam Richards

The Beach Patrollers motorised & on foot Photos Liz Barraclough



Move to Quarterly
 Over the 19 years I have been editor of *The Creek* it has grown in size and scope, and taken over more of your editor's life! As of this year, publication will move to quarterly rather than every two months.
 Angela Kirsner, Editor

Come along to our Bushland Activities	Join us at WaterWatch & EstuaryWatch	Other Local Groups
<p>❖ 2nd Sunday of the month: between 9.30am & noon. Details emailed a few days ahead, or call Eric Smalley 0403 863 616.</p> <p>❖ Coast Group: fortnightly on Wednesdays, between 9.30am & noon. Call Suzanne Ryan 0418 387 604. Details emailed a few days ahead.</p> <p>❖ Friday Group: weekly between 9.30am & noon. Call Liz Barraclough 0408 388 430. Details emailed a few days ahead.</p>	<p>First Sunday of each month:</p> <p>❖ WaterWatch testing: meet 9.15am at Uralla Rd bridge. Enquiries to Franc Amendola 0433 626 007 or Sue Milton 0407 350 175.</p> <p>❖ EstuaryWatch testing: meet 9.00am at the Rotunda. Enquiries to Bruce Ferres 0435 389 804.</p>	<p>❖ BirdLife Mornington Peninsula bird-watching 2nd Wednesday and 3rd Sunday. Enquiries to Max Burrows mornington@birdlife.org.au or 0429 947 893, or visit www.birdlife.org.au/locations/birdlifemornington-peninsula.</p> <p>❖ Sunshine Reserve working bee 9.30am, last Sunday of month. Call Pia Spreen 0437 299 847.</p>

BERG MT MARTHA PATRON: TERRY DENTON
COMMITTEE: • PRESIDENT ERIC SMALLEY • VICE PRESIDENT (POSITION VACANT) • SECRETARY KATHY SMALLEY
 • TREASURER SUE MILTON • FIELD OFFICER LIZ BARRACLOUGH • NEWSLETTER ANGELA KIRSNER • MEMBERSHIP CHERYL WILKINSON
 • PETER MCMAHON • MARION ORCHISON • IAN HORTON • TERRY MOAR • GEOFF PRITCHARD

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