



The Creek

Volume 29 No 1, Autumn 2025

Caring for our local environment

FUNGA OBSCURA: PHOTO JOURNEYS AMONG FUNGI BY ALISON POULIOT

Natural historian, environmental photographer, author, honorary fellow at ANU and a font of knowledge on fungi, Alison presented two memorable workshops for BERG MM in 2023. BERGer Jeanette Miller reviews her latest book, just released

Referencing the camera obscura of times past, *Funga Obscura* is an ingeniously apt title for Alison Pouliot's latest book.

Through the dual lenses of science and art; combining her deep knowledge and love of fungi with the skilled eye of a sensitive photographer, Alison brings these extraordinary, weird and wonderful life forms out of obscurity and on to the page.

Though scaffolded with informative and thought-provoking text, it is the captivating, dramatic photographic images that are the hero of this book. More coffee table book than field guide, the text nevertheless takes us on a journey of discovery, gleaned from years of fungal foraging and research across both northern and southern hemispheres.

The evocative images were all taken *in situ* in

natural light, so that we can almost feel the quiet stillness and smell the damp muskiness of their surroundings. They are an invitation



to slow down: to be drawn down to the forest floor and to take time to look more closely ...to pause and ponder...

to be astounded at the intriguing beauty of diverse form and function, and to wonder about fungal relationships within the web of life...and our relationships with them, now and into the future.

And so Alison's newly published work is many things: a gallery of exquisite photographic artworks; a celebration of the diversity, eccentricity, beauty and resilience of fungi; a meditation on relationships between all living things, and an invitation to wonder about our own place in the natural world.

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WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH THE BRIARS BOARDWALK?

Eric Smalley reports

The boardwalk along Balcombe Creek in The Briars has been closed since November 2022, when it was damaged in a storm.



Rotary Mt Martha in conjunction with the Mt Martha Community Grapevine organized a public meeting at Mt Martha Lifesaving Club on 26th February to discuss the three options put forward by the Mornington Peninsula Shire on its reconstruction. I was among the 26 attendees, with four other BERGers.

We heard first of the history of the building of the boardwalk through the Reserves, a shared venture by Mt Martha Rotary and the Shire, and how the project garnered community support and has become a highly valued community asset.

Three options

Local Briars ward Councillor and Mayor, Anthony Marsh, outlined the

continued next page

BERG Mt Martha works on the land of the Bunurong Peoples, its Traditional Owners and custodians for many thousands of years. We acknowledge their deep connection to Country, and we pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

Thank you!
Mt Martha Community Bank
Sponsors of *The Creek* 2024



three options and fielded questions on the advantages and disadvantages of each. Each option involves a substantial increase in the width of the boardwalk to 2.5 metres, which will also much increase the cost of reconstruction.

Option One is to rebuild the boardwalk in the current location. Options Two and Three involve a combination of boardwalk and newly created paths away from the creek, cheaper but providing a less immersive experience.

A fourth option?

After much discussion, the meeting mooted a fourth option: to rebuild the boardwalk in its original location at the existing width, thus reducing costs. And in pursuing a further reduction in costs, instead of the Shire having the work done by a private contractor, look for ways to involve community groups in the project, in the spirit of the building of the boardwalk through the Reserves in the 1980s. Of course, the boardwalk would need to be strengthened to withstand future flooding. Mt Martha Rotary Club also pointed out that part of the existing boardwalk, although damaged, could be re-used.

It was unanimously agreed that this fourth option be put to Council when initial discussions are earmarked to be held at a forthcoming Council meeting.

Support from the 2024 survey

It was interesting to learn that of the over 640 respondents to the Shire’s survey back in November 2024, 55% supported the option that the Boardwalk be rebuilt in its original location.

The Shire’s three options are set out in more detail at shape.mornpen.vic.gov.au/balcombe-creek-boardwalk-restoration. (Note: the consultation period is now closed.)

CRUSH THAT CONTAINER!
From Roo Rawlins
 I’m a slow learner but others too may not know that fruit juice/milk bottles etc have a message on the back requesting that we crush the bottle and replace the lid before putting it in the recycling bin.

THANKS FOR THE CLEAN UP!

OVER 70 awesome volunteers of all ages signed on outside the Mt Martha IGA for Clean Up Australia Day on Sunday 2nd March. BERG Mt Martha again joined forces with the Sunshine Reserves group, who led the collaboration this year, and we welcomed a new group to our team, Friends of Hearn Creek. There were lots of new faces, families and kids, Rotary Mount Martha, and local businesses all keen to take part and do their bit for our local environment

Our fabulous volunteers collected 40 bags of dumped rubbish plus a heap of larger debris from Mt Martha’s streets and reserves.

Special thanks to the crew from Candour Funerals, who signed up as a BERG Business Partner. To quote Angie Flye of the Sunshine Reserve group, ‘It really is a testament as to what can be achieved when the community comes together.’



Above: On the registration desk, Liz & Marion (BERG), Colin (Mt Martha Rotary) & Angie (Sunshine Reserves Group).

Below left: Finlay (a BERG grandson) & his mate Connor; Right, the rubbish pile



GIVE VICTORIA’S DUCKS A SAFE FUTURE
BERG Mt Martha strongly supports Birdlife Australia’s campaign to end recreational native bird hunting.

Despite the 2023 Select Committee recommending a ban on further native duck and quail hunting in Victoria, with a record number of submissions overwhelmingly opposed to ongoing hunting, the Victorian Government continues to allow the practice and worse, is opening a number of previously closed sensitive wetlands to hunting in 2025. To top it off, an earlier start to the hunting season puts threatened shorebirds at risk before their epic migrations.

Add your voice by signing the Birdlife Australia petition and help ensure the Victorian Government bans recreational hunting.

THANKS TO OUR BUSINESS PARTNERS



FEATURING VOLPINO PIZZA & WINE BAR

David Weill is a local and a regular walker through the Reserves.

And Volpino, his business, has long supported BERG Mt Martha.

Give Volpino your support and let them know you are from BERG!



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WATER QUALITY IN CREEK AND BAY

From Geoff Pritchard

EstuaryWatch

Ian Horton and I are maintaining monthly EstuaryWatch testing at the two sites (picnic ground jetty and Augusta St bridge), sending the results and photos of the berm to Melbourne Water. Amazingly, the berm appears to have been closed for about four months! It survived at least one desultory effort to dig it through, and we've not had rains to place any pressure on it.

Monash University Project

For over eight months now we have been collecting samples for the Monash University 'Healthy Bay' project to identify sources of various contaminants, particularly nitrogen, from stormwater into Port Phillip. Ian and I have completed 17 sample sets (two per month) from the picnic ground jetty, one of 15 volunteer groups doing this around the Bay.

Jaime Wallis is another, collecting samples at Hearn Creek outlet on Mt Martha South Beach. You will find a more detailed write-up of the project in [The Creek Spring 2024](#).

RMIT and Microcontaminants

We are also playing a small part in a large project by RMIT University entitled 'Exploring Unseen Threats: Contaminant trends and impacts in Port Phillip Bay'.

With scarce information available on contaminants and their impacts on estuarine and bay health, the project aims to assess water quality and toxicology that may pose a risk to marine life. It will monitor for some 40,000 contaminants, along with biological impact assessments,



to provide a robust evidence base for ongoing management.

The program is being conducted across 19 estuaries entering the Bay, and in nearshore areas of the Bay. It involves 'passive samplers', devices that can measure micropollutants over time and can be tailored to target different pollutants. Passive sampling can detect low concentrations of micropollutants and intermittent pollution events, and can be deployed before an anticipated storm or spill.

Our role is to help put out and bring in these month-long sampling devices, three times a year over three years. Balcombe Estuary was one of the sites for an early trial sampler, deployed in December and recovered on 22nd January.

Mt Martha LSC is testing too

The Mt Martha Life Saving Club has also introduced toxicology testing to provide on-the-spot information on water quality safety affecting their activities.

SEEN IN AND NEAR THE RESERVES

Dainty Swallowtail



Photos Lyn Murdoch (above),
Angela Kirsner (below)



These striking butterflies belong to the Papilionidae family (Swallow-tails). Also known as Dingy Swallowtail or Small Citrus Butterfly, they relish citrus species, native and exotic. You may find the handsome caterpillars on your lemon tree. Interestingly, their geographic range has expanded south over the past century with widespread planting of citrus trees.

The butterfly, a restless flyer, lays its eggs on the new growth of citrus, which is manna to its ravenous black and orange caterpillars. When disturbed, they can arch up and extend an orange forked gland called an *osmeterium* and squirt a fluid with an odour of rotting citrus.

Echidna forays

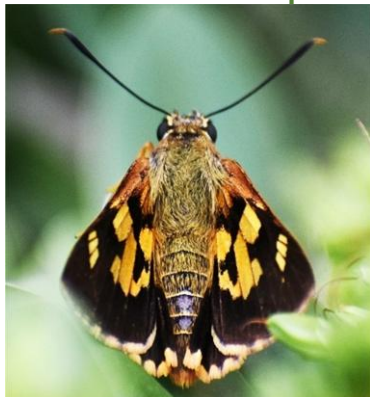


Lyn Murdoch reported (and photographed) a visitor to her garden, near Citation oval, in late January. She put down a bowl of water, the echidna it went straight to it, had a drink, then it was on its way (above left and centre). Then in mid-February Claire Swan spotted an echidna across the creek, by Latrobe Drive. It was, she said, huge and very relaxed (see Claire's photo, above right).

Was it the same one or another? We simply don't know how many are in our territory. We see solitary echidnas now and then, but the home ranges of individuals overlap, and they are known to be good swimmers.

And did you know that each Echidna spine is formed from a single hair?

Splendid Ochre Butterfly



Photos Lyn Murdoch

You might see a Splendid Ochre Butterfly *Trapezites symmopus* (also known as Symmopus Skipper) flying rapidly near the ground in sunny periods, or resting in trees in the late afternoon. Considered vulnerable, it is found mainly along eastern Australia. It has a wingspan of about 5cm. The handsome caterpillars are smooth and pale brown with a large dark head sporting an inverted 'Y' mark. They feed at night on Spiny-headed Mat-rush *Lomandra longifolia* and other *Lomandra* species, and rest by day in curled-leaf shelters, where they pupate.

Feather-horned Beetles

On a late afternoon walk along the boardwalk, Lynn Murdoch happened on a swarming of Featherhorn Beetles – 'irresistible photographic subjects', she emailed. Their over-size, fan-like antennae are much larger in the males, who use them to detect available females, probably via a pheromone.

The beetles are in the *Rhipiceridae* family, Cedar Beetles, also known as Cicada Parasite Beetles. In North America, larval *Rhipiceridae* are ectoparasites on cicadas (living *on* rather than *in* the host's body), and it is thought that the larvae of our Feather-horned Beetles are probably also parasitic on larval cicadas.

It seems that the adults emerge *en masse*, complete their mating and vanish again all within ten days or so.

For more on these beetles and a delightful video clip of their behaviour (and more fascinating insect blogging), go to the website of Karen Retra, a talented citizen scientist in the Albury-Wodonga area – karenretra.com/home/rhipicera



Photos Lyn Murdoch



Blue banded Bee

This supremely handsome bee *Amegilla cingulata*, with its blue bands (five on males, four on females) and large green eyes, was among the exotic creatures that caught the eye of Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander on Captain Cook's 1770 voyage. They collected one and took it back to London's Natural History Museum.



Blue-banded Bees are one of a few native bee species that are **buzz pollinators**. Some flowers hide their pollen inside small capsules and most bees (including the introduced honeybee) can't get to it. But Blue-banded Bees grab onto the flower and vigorously vibrate their flight muscles, buzzing loudly, and the pollen flies out. In addition to various native species that require buzz pollination, it is vital for a number of food crops including tomatoes, kiwi fruit, blueberries and eggplants. Blue-banded Bees are thus invaluable to Australian farmers.

They seem to be attracted to blue or purple flowers such as Lavender or Salvia (as in Lyn Murdoch's photos), and to blue objects, including clothing, but they also visit flowers of other colours. They are not aggressive, but you may get a mild sting if you grab or step on one.

The nesting neighbourhood

The female builds a solitary nest burrow in soft sandstone or clay soil, though mudbrick or old mortar may do equally well! The burrows are often near others like neighbouring houses in a village. With her jaws she digs a tunnel some 8mm wide with many side branches, backing out with the debris. Each branch ends in an oval cell lined with a waterproof secretion and stocked with a liquid mixture of pollen and nectar. She deposits an egg in this and seals it with an earthen cap. When the series of cells is finished, she closes the nest with layers of soil and goes in search of a new nest site. As the cold weather begins, all the adults die, but immature bees remain dormant inside the nest until spring.

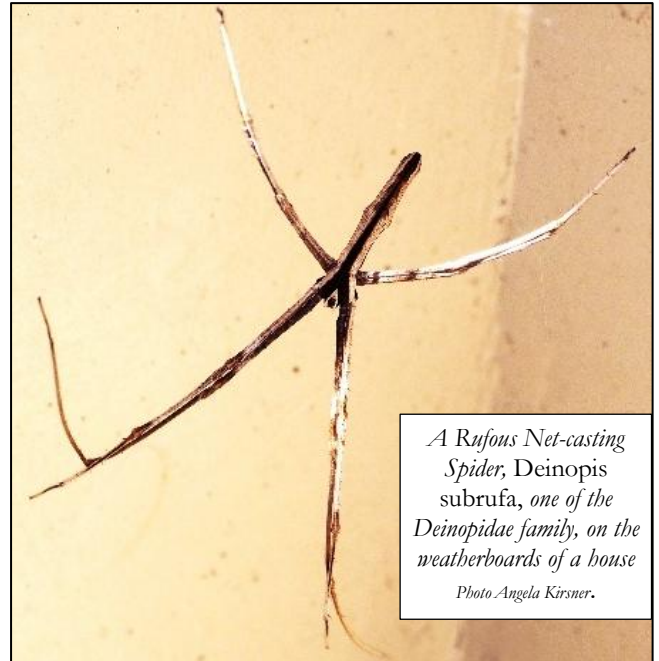


A Blue Banded Bee extending its long tongue ready to sip from the next flower.

Male Blue-banded Bees often gather in groups at night and latch on with their jaw to the edge of a leaf or grass stem for the night, curling their legs under their bodies. As newcomers approach, those already settled wag their tails up and down and madly wave their hind legs in unison until the newcomer gives up and finds a spot further down.

Rufous Net-casting Spider

Net-casting spiders (Deinopidae) are a unique lot. The name tells it all. By night the spider builds a rectangular, postage-stamp-sized stretchy net of entangling silk threads. On a pathway used by passing prey, it drops some white faecal 'targets'. Then it waits, head down, hanging from a silk trapeze, holding its net. When an insect walks across a 'target', the spider plunges the net down to envelop and entangle its prey – it might be a beetle, cockroach, ant, cricket, or another spider. The spider will also lunge at aerial prey – moths for example – as they fly past.



These slender, long-legged spiders hide by day, stick-like, among foliage, their long body and long, thin front and back legs held together on each side. Females are about 25mm long, males 10-15mm.

Two of their eight eyes are enormous. They face forwards like a pair of searchlights, providing outstanding low-light vision (better than an owl or cat) as well as the spiders' other common name, 'Ogre-faced Spiders'. The retinal membrane that powers this extraordinary vision is, amazingly, destroyed at dawn and renewed each night.

Life history cycle

Net-casting spiders mature in summer, with mating and egg-laying taking place into autumn. The male attaches a mating thread to the female's net support lines and jerks it to entice her onto it for mating. She produces up to four 9-10mm egg sacs, covered with a tough, closely woven layer of salmon-brown silk flecked with black, each suspended among low foliage by a short silk stalk and further disguised with leaf debris.

The dark brown spiderlings emerge in spring and look like a cloud of little anchors with their narrow bodies and extended front legs, hanging in silk lines above the egg sac. In a few weeks they start building their own tiny nets.

You will find great videos of a spider catching prey with its net [here \(BBC Earth\)](#) and [here \(Cornell University\)](#)

FIELD NEWS

Field Officer Liz Barraclough reports

After the summer break, the Friday group was back at work in February weeding Rock Rose in the Rabbit Paddock and above Ferrero Ovals. Lots removed, but we need to go back for the rest of these tenacious and plentiful weeds.

Another four Friday mornings were spent removing hosts of small Fat Hen (*Atriplex prostrata*) plants along the boardwalk below the ovals, before they seeded. Geoff Pritchard and Naturelinks supervisor Pia Spreen also did battle with a rampant patch of smothering Kikuyu grass. It's good to see all the small salt marsh plants thriving when these weedy blankets are renewed, together with lots of small regenerating Swamp Paperbarks. (see photos below)

At the year's first Sunday working, in February, we removed great entanglements of Cape Ivy and Rambling Dock smothering the Swamp Paperbarks at the bottom of La Trobe Drive, plus a heap of rubbish which we assume was largely from abandoned bush cubbies. Thanks to Eric Smalley, who now organises the Sunday working bees, and Indra Kurzeme, our Sunday Naturelinks supervisor.

And Naturelinks keeps weeding

Working under our Landcare grant

AT SCHOOL IN THE BUSH

From Helen Smalley

At February's last Friday working bee, Liz, Sue, Jennifer, Verona and I were busy removing *Atriplex* near the boardwalk when we began chatting with a mum and her young daughter who was curious about what we were doing. It turned out that the girl is home-schooled and her lesson for that day was to explore the Estuary and the Reserves. They had already read all about the eel migration at the picnic ground and were now making their way along the boardwalk listening to the Yellow Robin trail, which they thought was fantastic. The little girl was hoping to see a snake, so Liz obliged with her recent photograph of the copperhead. The thoughtful youngster told us that 'nature was lucky to have us helping her.' It topped off a great morning.



Copperhead Snake by the boardwalk in January Photo Liz Barraclough

climbers and scramblers: Bridal Creeper, English Ivy, Bluebell Creeper, and lots of Rambling Dock and Cape Ivy. And there are always some incidental woody weeds: Gorse, Pittosporum, Polygala, Sallow Wattle, and Boneseed.

Thistles and snakes

The Scotch Thistles seem to know that January is a slack weeding time. To thwart them, Terry Moar

and Shire funding, Naturelinks teams have tackled a heap of weed species in various sites, including below Latrobe Drive., lower Hopetoun Creek, and the lower Citation area.

The lower-growing weeds included: Tradescantia, Panic Veldt Grass (*Erbarta erecta*), Fat Hen (*Atriplex*), Self-heal (*Prunella vulgaris*) and Drain Sedge (*Cyperus eragrostis*). There were a number of invasive

and I devoted a January morning to removing them and, most satisfyingly, of those we found throughout the reserves, we got to all but one before seeding.

After weeding on the grassy bank below Uralla Rd, we were alerted to a very large Copperhead Snake by the boardwalk. Disconcerting, but it rapidly slithered away into the bush

Saltmarsh plants by the boardwalk below the ovals, freed by Friday group weeding: Fleshy Cotula, Leptinella longipes (left), and among it, a single Creeping Brookweed Samolus repens flower (centre), with lots of regenerating Swamp Paperbark Melaleuca ericifolia (right)



We've had a couple more snake sightings, one below Latrobe Street, and one behind Citation Oval. It's good to have confirmation of snakes in the reserves. They are an integral part of our ecosystem.

Blackberries

Our current Victorian Landcare Grant is funding an onslaught on Blackberries in the reserves. Naturelinks has been on a roving mission to find and spray them, from the Pistol Club to Uralla Road on the north bank, and south of the creek from Uralla Road to the ovals.

We would love to see the *very* heavy infestations off the Nepean Hwy near the creek bridge vanquished, but they are not within our area of responsibility.

Rabbits!

You may well have noticed the increasing numbers of confident rabbits in and around the reserves – ‘some real chonkers’, in the words of one BERger! And they are a real challenge to our plantings.

In February I attended a rabbit control workshop with Rod Bridley, of Timberscope, an ethical feral animal control organization based on the Peninsula. It was organized by Mornington Peninsula Landcare Network, with funding from Agriculture Victoria.

Rod outlined the options:

- Shooting: possible only on private property.
- Fumigation: must be done in daytime to avoid harming species such as snakes and lizards, which shelter in warrens at night. It



Birthdays morning tea for Helen Smalley, February Sunday working bee, L-R: Peter Vince, Indra Kurzeme, Angela Kirsner, Liz Barraclough, Lynette Dell, Helen Smalley, (Ian Croker (half hidden), Annette Vince, aces unclear), Eric Smalley Photo Barbara Thraves

requires a smoker (an adapted leaf blower), and all entries to a warren must be found and blocked. Almost impossible in our reserves, as warrens can be difficult to locate among the Teatree and are also often inaccessible.

- Warren ripping: destructive in bushland!
- Ferrets: again, too difficult among undergrowth.
- Calicivirus: but rabbits are now immune to it. We wait in hope for a new one!
- Pindone baiting using premium or rolled oats: the preferred method where possible, but not in our reserves because of the high risk of off-target damage, notably dogs. Bandicoots are also vulnerable (but we have none). Possums are not interested in oat bait, and most other animals and birds are not affected by it.

The takeaway message, however, is that the options in our reserves are depressingly limited.

The Shire's Natural Systems team has secured funding for 15 days of pest animal control in the reserves over the next three years (five days per year), through the Shire's Melbourne Water Grants. We wait with interest to see what methods they will be able to use.

SOUTH BEACHERS CELEBRATE & DONATE

Richard Sellars-Jones organized this annual event on 17th January with Frank Walker to raise funds and the profile of BERG Mt Martha and its work on the Mt Martha coast, especially the slopes and cliffs at the southern end of the beach. Both Richard and his son have weeded and planted in these areas.

He invited Liz to attend and address the South Beachers, and he asked the crowd for donations to BERG. As a result, a splendid \$910 has been donated! Thanks Richard and South Beachers!



*Left: South Beachers gather to celebrate & support BERG Mt Martha
Right: Richard Sellars Jones planting on the South Beach foreshore*



BERG Mt Martha welcomes new members

Carolyn & Brett Crittenden, Antony de Jong & family, Sue Helme & family, Janice Janetzki, Doug Pearce & family, Lutz Preusche & family, Warwick Wynne & family

CORRECTION

Last edition, we put out a plea for paper, plastic or fabric shopping bags for the Mornington Community Support Centre, but gave the wrong street number. The address is **320 Main Street**.


TENDING BERG'S NOTICEBOARD

Keep an eye on BERG's noticeboard in the old campground at the estuary. Long-time BERGers David and Karin Chalmers have taken on the task of keeping it up to date.

The noticeboard features great photos and keeps the community informed on environmental weeds and BERG information.

David is also a regular with the Wednesday BERG Coastal activity group.



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 Sue Milton 0407 350 175.</p> <p>❖ EstuaryWatch testing: meet 9.00am at the Rotunda. Enquiries to Geoff Pritchard 0438 638 600.</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/birdlif-e-mornington-peninsula.</p> <p>❖ Sunshine Reserve working bee 9.30am, last Sunday of month. Call Pia Spreen 0437 299 847.</p>
<p align="center">BERG MT MARTHA PATRON: TERRY DENTON</p> <p align="center">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</p>		
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