
◆ THE CREEK ◆

Volume 8 Issue 1

February - March 2004

BALCOMBE ESTUARY REHABILITATION GROUP Inc (BERG)

Reg No. A0034645Y

Formed March 1997

Current Membership 104 families & 28 singles

ABN 50 224 628 623

Your Committee:

Keith Wilson - President
Harry Harris - Vice-President
Tony Hyde - Treasurer/Public Officer
Mary Stemp - Hon Secretary
Pam Hearn - Minutes Secretary
Liz Barraclough - Field Officer
Richard Hawkins - Past President
Andy McGuigan - Rotary Club
Angela Kirsner & Jenny Selby

BERG logo

Our address for correspondence is:

The Hon Secretary, BERG Inc.
PO Box 433, Mt Martha, 3934
Telephone 5977 1089

*BERG is a member of the Coast Action/Coastcare Program & of
Greening Australia Victoria (GAV)*

* * * * *

President's Message:

Another year, our 8th, and all is well.

There are several things I enjoy about my involvement with BERG. Whilst our area is only a tiny part of the Shire, we are achieving something as judged by community comment and feedback from those who use the area - vandals excepted.

Our management committee meets regularly and input to all issues, controversial and routine, is absolutely excellent.

*It is true to state that **working bees** are our front line, the coal face as it were, and I take this opportunity in our first 2004 newsletter to appeal to members to join us on the third Sunday each month for this vital part of our activity. You will enjoy the work in a very pleasant and social atmosphere and the morning tea is good.*

Your committee is currently looking at how we see BERG's future over the next 5, 10, 20, 50 years and if any members/readers have thoughts about that, please pass them on to us. (See address above) Your input will be most welcome and to our family members, we would especially welcome the views of children. You are our future! We have always

recognized the need to involve our schools in our work when and where possible.

*My comments in the last newsletter about the **artificial opening of the estuary** prompted some response which was very welcome and the matter has been formally taken up with Mornington Peninsula Shire Council and the Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority. We will keep you posted. **Meanwhile unauthorized individuals or groups should not take it on themselves to interfere with the entrance.***

KEITH WILSON January 25, 2004

To the editor:

Please don't dig open the Balcombe Creek Estuary sand bar.

Lots of different reasons have been given as to why the sand bar should not be artificially breached. These include: 1) when the water level drops, fish and insect spawning is degraded and algae growth (food for many creatures) is discouraged;

2) after each opening the wetlands along the creek get drained which, among other things, leads to an increased fire risk.

Tony Hyde

Getting Batty at The Briars

Saturday February 28th, 2004

Lindy Lumsden, researcher with DSE and **Victoria's leading bat expert** will present a fascinating **slide show** about these common, but little known, creatures. Lindy will set up some harp traps the night before so we will be able to get an idea of how many species are present at The Briars. Arrive at 8am to help dismantle the traps or at 9am for the slide show. This event was held two years ago at Healesville and was a real success. Don't miss it!

'The Briars' Historic Property - (meet at the visitors centre)

RSVP essential as places are limited. Telephone 9785 0111 or email Kate.Mackie@dse.vic.gov.au

What happens when you stop mowing?

It started about four years ago when I decided to weed the dandelions and flat weed from the 'lawn' on the tennis court. Though 'tennis court' is something of a misnomer. When my parents bought the land in 1950, all that remained of the place where the guests of **Grandview Guesthouse** used to play a social game was weeds, a collapsing tennis fence, some rotting wooden steps, and a winter puddle that regularly boasted tadpoles. Dad mowed the area, Melaleuca crossed the road from the reserve and established themselves at one end, tea tree at the other, and as kids, we played badminton in between.

By the late 1990s it was a waving sea of yellow weeds in summer. I spent days hand-weeding and bagging them till they'd all gone. Then – a newly aware BERG member and learning fast about indigenous plants – I realised that what was left was largely native grasses – *Danthonia* (wallaby grass) and *Microlena* (weeping grass). We left it unmown, kept up the weeding, the grasses grew, and we had a wonderful meadow of waving wallaby grass flowers and seed heads – bright green in spring, straw coloured by mid summer. Among the grasses in spring were delicate insectivorous sundews (*Drosera*), with *Microlena* and the native *Dichondra* (kidney weed) in the shady areas, and seedlings of the local *Clematis*, the native currant, and Bower spinach also appearing.

Then, last spring, a few delicate reed-like things appeared, about 30 cm high – each one a single plant. I watched them over weeks until a flower stalk burst out the side of one, and a collection of tiny green orchid flowers opened along the stalk. The whole flower head was about 3 cm long, and each flower only 5mm or so. A magnifying glass was in order! After consulting the books and asking about, **I identified it as an onion orchid, a *Microtis***. Not rare – there are plenty of them in parts of the reserve, but new to me and to my garden. The tiny seed must have come in with birds, or the wind.

ANGELA KIRSNER

Brief extract from letter from John McCubbing, Farm Dam Consultant re Interference with Ecology Balcombe Estuary:

- academia is against interference with the outlet, which clearly interferes with ecology
- the Estuary has suffered severely over the past fifty years or so because of manmade activity
-natural means is the best (and cheapest) way of controlling algae in the estuary the Shire should insist upon this method of control despite any local protest to its customer service section.
- anyone who interferes with the estuary outlet is playing God with Nature and is assuming a terrible responsibility.

* * * * *

Field Officer's Report

*Happy New Year and welcome back! Thank you to those who turned up to the January working-bee especially as it is such a busy holiday month. It was great to catch the **Prickly Lettuce** (*Lactuca saliqua*) and weed it out of the area alongside Mirang Avenue before it flowered and seeded this year.*

*We are pleased to say that our application for the 2004 **Envirofund Grant** has been successful. - \$12,975.*

*We shall be doing follow-up work on **Victoria Crescent** and enhancement planting throughout the Reserve, but our major project will involve work on the **erosion area** on the southern bank (down from Seppelt Ave.). This is quite a special and unique area of the Reserve. Have you seen the terrific number of **Hyacinth Orchids** in this area this year? I stopped counting at 125! Previously I have never seen more than 32. The site needs careful monitoring to control the infestation of weeds and preserve the ecological balance so the orchids are not threatened.*

*I look forward to seeing you at the **next working-bee on February 15th** or in any other capacity in which you would like to contribute.*

LIZ BARRACLOUGH

Hyacinth orchid (*Dipodium punctatum*) *Fleshy brown-black stem, 20cm to 1 m. with long erect raceme of few to many spreading bright pink flowers, spotted darker. Open forest, widespread. There is even one in the Bunyip! First ever!*

Mary

Fire management expert Peter Moulton gave a talk at Mt Martha House in late November to BERG members and interested locals. Peter was commissioned by Council to produce the Fire Management Plan for Balcombe Estuary Reserve, and is working with Council on plans for other reserves on the Peninsula.

His topic was **“Understanding our Fire Environment”**, and his central message was that **fires are survivable**. The Fire Management Plan is, he said, a good start, but it is only part of the answer – **community education and action are critical. This means each one of us understanding something of fire behaviour and having a fire plan.** The plan needs to take account of your own capabilities and those of others in your household. Ideally, it will also include nearby residents – for example, an elderly neighbour.

A short film of media footage highlighted some of the issues and things that can go wrong in fires – confusion, inadequate clothing (people in shorts and t-shirts), a broken hose, smoke, embers and confusion. It showed how fire in built-up areas acts differently than fire in the bush, becoming fragmented and less predictable. It also illustrated how the media can make things worse by showing only the things that go wrong rather than the many people who save their houses.

The available fuel varies with vegetation type – succulents, rainforest, dry sclerophyll forests, woodlands, grasslands all burn differently. Fine fuel on the ground is what is important – grasses, leaf litter and the like. Without this, fire cannot get started or continue. Large logs do not contribute to the immediate fire intensity.

Finally, there is the **decision whether to stay with your house or evacuate**. Late evacuation, Peter emphasised, is the worst option and the greatest cause of bushfire deaths. Good forward planning will enable you to keep up with where fires are, what the weather is doing, assess the risks, and make an informed decision based on your knowledge.

Note: Copies of the Fire Management Plan for Balcombe Estuary Reserve is available from the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council. **Contact Simon Thorning - 5986 0326.**

ANGELA

Editor's Notes:

Many thanks to the contributors to this newsletter. I enjoyed Angela's story about how she weeded the patch and ended up with an indigenous garden including the orchids.

*While the Sunday working group has continued to meet, we **Tuesday folk** are still in recess and probably will start back the end of February. If you want to join us, please ring me or watch the notice board at the entrance to the womens' toilets.*

More field notes:

***Superb Fairy-wren** or **Blue Wren**. Recently I've seen a number of family groups in the Bunyip and beside Ferrero Ovals. They are common enough but such delightful birds which are clearly appreciating our areas of dense bush for their nests opening out into places where they can feed.*

*And our many bushes of **Sweet Bursaria** are blooming at present with their delicate heads of creamy flowers. Just watch out for those prickles! Find them beside the boardwalk near Augusta Street & along Urala Road.*

Vale - Stan Wadsworth (Died 12 November 2003 after a long illness).

Stan founded the Mt. Martha branch of the Field Naturalists in 1983 and served as the Founding President for three years, with his wife Betty acting as Secretary. After an interval, he served a further term as President. He was President of the Mt. Martha Community Association and a Mornington Shire Councillor.

His War Service included being a member of the 2/6 Commandos (known as “The Purple Devils”) in New Guinea.

Stan was one of several Mt Martha residents who joined my community beach cleaning activity in 1988, said by some to be the forerunner of “Clean up Australia Day”, and we became quite close friends for a while. He ensured that members of the Field Nats were informed of BERG activities and supported what we were doing.

R.H.

DIARY DATES:

Field Activities:

Sundays - 3rd Sunday of each month - Next: February 15 & March 23

Tuesdays - recess till end of February.

If unsure of weather or 'other', contact Mary.

Starting time for all Working Bees - 9:00AM. Break at 10:30 (tea, coffee, etc. provided) Always meet at Rotunda BBQ (Mel: 144 K11)

Check our Notice Board for information

Queries: Mary - 5977 1089

Committee Meetings:

Saturday March 6th at 9:30am at Mt Martha House. All members welcome.

*****Greening Australia Training** - some excellent courses - for information, contact Mary (BERG)

*****Friends of Harrap Creek** (East Mornington) - working bees 4th Sunday of month. Next on February 22nd, 2004 Contact Mary 5977 1089

Please consider giving us a hand!

*****SPIFFA** - meets 1st Monday of month at 7:30pm at Parks Vic, Hinton St. Rosebud. **Contact: Jan 5986 6566**

Membership Application

Mr/Mrs/Ms/Dr.....
Address.....
Phone.....Fax.....
Mobile.....EMail.....

I would like to become an Individual / Family Member of the Balcombe Estuary Rehabilitation Group Inc.

I enclose cheque (payable to "BERG") / cash

Date.....Signed.....

Joining Fee \$1.00.....\$
Annual Individual Subscription \$4.00.....\$
Annual Family Subscription \$5.00.....\$
Donation.....\$ _____
Total.....\$ _____

**Please send to:
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Volume 8 Issue 2

April - May, 2004

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Jenny Selby - Waterwatch
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* * * * *

President's Message:

It is said that anything, everything, little or big, becomes an adventure when the right people share it.

Well, BERG has been sharing time and talent with Peninsula school students during these past few weeks and it has been a great experience. **One hundred year sixers from Mt. Martha Primary School** spent some hours with us at the estuary and boardwalk and it seemed like thousands of students participated with us and others during **Environment Week at The Briars!**

I'm limiting my input this issue to enable editor Mary to include excerpts from some of the 'thank you' letters written by the year six students.

We enjoy spending time with 'our' students.

KEITH WILSON March 21, 2004

* * * * *

Exerpts from letters from Mt. Martha Primary Grade 6 Students to Keith:

"Thanks for giving us that interesting talk about the native wildlife flora & fauna in the Estuary.

We really enjoyed it & learnt a lot." (Jacinta & Kirsten)

"Thankyou for giving up your time to tell us about BERG and the work that you do at the Estuary." (Emma and Georgia)

"I learnt alot about the different types of plants and animals and what we could do to prevent them from becoming extinct." (Shondra)

"I never noticed the breeding boxes before but I think it is a great idea." (Ellyse)

"We enjoyed walking along the boardwalk and trying to spot the nesting boxes that I haven't noticed before. In the future we will try and help BERG with their wonderful work that you do and try to save the native flora and fauna before they all disappear." (Stephen)

"It is a nice place in the estuary because of BERG and it's becoming better. If BERG keeps on going it will become a lot better place in Mt Martha." (Daniel and Dylan)

"We are now much more aware of the problems which face the Estuary." (Jacinta & Kirsten)

"We love walking along the boardwalk and we will do all we can to help make the Estuary a better place for the animals and plants to live." (Emma and Georgia)

"I hope to be able to come back one day to help plant some plants in the Balcombe Estuary." (Stephen)

"I looking forward to come and plant some plants at the estuary." (Daniel and Dylan)

"I think BERG is a good group and that it is a good idea to teach kids about the Balcombe Estuary. You taught us all a lot." (Ellyse)

Editor's Notes:

A hearty welcome to **Jan Oliver** to our committee. A relative newcomer to Mornington, Jan has already become Convener of the Biosphere Roundtable and BERG's schools liaison officer.

We have enclosed a **map** in this issue of The Creek indicating **BERG's management zones**. May we suggest you **save the map** for your reference throughout the year so you know what areas Liz is talking about: On page 3 is a summary of the plans for this year's projects. Liz is to be commended for all the work she has put into these plans which are necessary for our grants applications (which she also prepares) and our collaboration with Council.

We wrote to Council re the issue of the **desirability or otherwise of opening Balcombe Creek Estuary**. I am, with his permission, including **exerpts from Simon Thorning's reply** which records and summarises *"the approach the Mornington Peninsula Shire will be taking regarding the Estuary. Please note,"* writes Simon, *"it is important that individual residents do not attempt to open the estuary as this is both illegal and dangerous.*

"For the moment, if a potential circumstance arises for which opening the Estuary may be required, the relevant Shire Officers from the Natural Systems Team and Road Maintenance Team will meet to discuss the pros and cons and make a decision based on the information available."

Simon goes on to document the several bodies the Shire has contacted to discuss legal and ecological issues. He continues, *"The result of these investigations has led us to the following approach:*

- *The built assets subject to flooding will be listed and assessed;"*
- *The ecological "assets" will be listed and assessed;"*
- *In the longer term an "Estuary Management Plan" will be written to outline the scope of potential actions in relation to high water levels; producing this document will involve*

community consultation.

So, in summary, I would say that while the Shire reserves the right to open the Estuary to protect assets there is an internal process to carefully assess the need for this and a plan, in line with the approach of the CMA's (Conservation Management Authorities) to address the issue in the longer term with an Estuary Management Plan.

Thank you for your input on this issue, and thank you for the technical information supplied."

*The letter is signed **Simon Thorning, NATURAL SYSTEMS TEAM LEADER.***

MARY STEMPE, Editor

Local Bats

Bat expert **Lindy Lumsden** conducted a fascinating **Bat Workshop at The Briars in March**, and demonstrated just how important and how numerous are our local bats. Using "harp" bat traps, she caught 46 tiny bats over a short time, including five different species. Each of the tiny bats was measured, weighed, identified and sexed, before being released again.

Each night there are hundreds of bats flying about, ranging in size from thumbnail size, weighing less than a 10 cent coin, to about 10 cm. To our ears, they are largely silent. Only one bat has an echo-locator within human hearing range, though you can sometimes hear the social calls from other species.

Bats eat predominantly moths, beetles and bugs, and some species also take spiders, mosquitoes, grasshoppers and crickets. **They have been recorded catching up to 600 mosquitoes in an hour, and are as important as birds – or possibly more so – not only in controlling the insect population, but also in pollinating our local plants.**

By day, they roost in hollows or under bark, and large old trees are of great importance in providing these roosts. This includes scattered paddock trees in farmland. Each bat has four or five different roosting spots, and moves every day or two to fool predators. Most concentrate their foraging around trees, but can commute over open areas between foraging sites.

Their offspring are born at about one third of adult weight, the equivalent in human terms to giving birth to a toddler. When they move roosts, the baby goes too, and they have been captured on infrared camera flying from one roost to another with baby swinging from the mother's nipple!

Liz Barraclough

The year ahead

Once again field officer **Liz Barraclough** has met with a small group of the BERG committee, together with **Simon Thorning and Sam Hand of Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, to map out the year's work for BERG.**

The priority is to follow up work already done, to consolidate the gains we have made. To this end, we will concentrate on a few key areas. You will find a map of the reserve included with The Creek, showing the zones by name and number.

A major project for 2004 will be to tackle the large area of erosion of the creek bank, in Zone 7. A temporary fence to protect the area, and we will lay brush and plant the bank thickly. Once the plants are established and the bank secured, the fencing will be removed. **The work will be funded by an Envirofund Grant.**

Last year's Envirofund Grant funded the **work along Victoria Crescent (Zone 16) and through to the Esplanade (Zone 17)**, where large banks of weeds have been substantially replaced by indigenous plantings and regeneration. Follow-up will include ongoing weed control (blackberries are only one of a number of tenacious weeds here) and enhancement planting.

The **dedicated Tuesday Group** (new members welcome!) will continue their meticulous work in the **Bunyip** (Zone 4). Their efforts to date have produced bushland regeneration of demonstration quality.

Many weed seeds survive in the ground for years, and weed control is needed long after the seed sources have gone – not to mention the many weeds that remain. Throughout the Reserve, targeted spot spraying, hand-pulling, and cutting and painting of weeds will

continue.

Along Mirang Avenue (Zone 1) and the camp ground to the beginning of the boardwalk (Zone 2) – very much the public face of the reserve – there will be continued weed control and cleaning up, with enhancement planting of trees, understorey and grasses. Some of this will build on work already undertaken for BERG by Peninsula Bushworks, from the end of Henley Street to the edge of the estuary. There will also be some further planting in established revegetation areas around the Ferrero Ovals (Zone 5) and the Soccer Pitch (Zone 9).

In Zone 8, the Horror Show, towards Uralla Road, the weeds are lush and rampant. A major onslaught will have to wait for another year, but in the meantime, we will do some spot planting of trees and large shrubs, to give them a head start.

We continue to have **strong support from Council**, and over the past year, we have worked very productively with Transfield, currently under contract to Council. The new tender is to be let in June, and under it, contractors are to work more closely with friends' groups and even supervise, help, and attend working bees. This is a very positive development (and is already happening at Harrap Creek in East Mornington! – Ed). It will help to relieve pressure, take some of the responsibility from BERG, and ensure an ongoing program and presence in the Reserve.

Other projects such as rabbit control, interpretive signage and installation and monitoring of nesting boxes, general weed control etc. are on-going.

We welcome any comments or further input from BERG members regarding projects. Hopefully there is enough variety to fulfil particular interests and address concerns. Please let us know!

Angela Kirsner & Liz Barraclough

DIARY DATES:

Field Activities:

Sundays - 3rd Sunday of each month - Next: April 18 & May 16, 9:00AM at Rotunda

Tuesdays - each Tuesday. Contact Mary for information
If unsure of weather or 'other', contact Mary.

Starting time for all Working Bees - 9:00AM. Break at 10:30 (tea, coffee, etc. provided) Sunday group always meet at Rotunda BBQ (Mel: 144 K11)

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Committee Meetings:

Saturday April 17 & May 29 at 9:30am at Mt Martha House. All members welcome.

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Volume 8 Issue 3

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President's Message:

We have been asked several times if BERG has a view on the proposal to deepen the rip and to dredge the South Channel to enable extra large container ships to traverse Port Phillip Bay to Melbourne.

Interest has heightened since it was announced at a recent public meeting that the spoil would be dumped in an area about 3 kilometres off Mount Martha.

Yes, we are in the process of developing an attitude and it will be discussed in detail at our next management meeting on 29th May. If you would like to participate in that discussion, come along and have your say. I have prepared a discussion paper which in essence questions the need for the deepening. It questions the premise that unless we deepen, overseas ship operators will abandon calls at Melbourne.

It questions the audacity of a handful of shipowners - their companies all foreign owned - in demanding that ports world-wide go to huge expense to meet their demands. This is not just a Melbourne

matter, nor a state matter; it is very much a national and international problem. So let us have your views!

By the time you read this we will know the outcome of a programme we have helped conduct at Mount Martha Primary School. We will be on the point of presenting an appropriate prize to the winner/s. We enjoy very much our involvement with our schools.

I received a phone call today (14/5) telling me that the water in the creek below the Esplanade bridge was clearer than they had ever seen it. So much so that they could see the rubbish on the bottom which included a bike, a shopping trolley, a hoarding, etc. etc. Council was contacted immediately with a request for prompt action.

During recent weeks we have been working with Council contractor, Transfield, in a rabbit control programme. We would appreciate hearing from anyone if they spot any remaining 'bugs bunnies'.

Until next time,

Keith Wilson

**** Notice - Guest Speaker ****

Topic – What is causing the dieback of our trees, especially along the coast?

By - David Cumming an arborist with 50 years experience who has worked with trees in country and suburban areas all over the state since 1970, and in over 800 schools!

When - over morning tea at 11 o'clock on **Sunday 20th June.**

(Planting as usual first - 9 to 11am!)

Where - Rotunda BBQ area (ed. - I think!)

Everyone (members, friends etc.) is welcome to come and listen.

* * * * *

FIELD OFFICER'S REPORT:

Our April **working-bee** was a prickly baptism into weeding for a couple of new members when they joined us on the Sunday morning at Victoria Crescent. However they did a great job cutting and painting the regenerated Blackberries on a bank that we rehabilitated last year. We also removed a large area of Boneseed, Polygala and some Pittosporum.

There are still a lot of weeds extending from the Maude Street end of Victoria Crescent through the bush to the edge of the estuary, so we have organised for a group from the **Conservation for Volunteers** to come one day in July and break the back of it. If anyone feels like an extra **weeding and planting** session we are planning it for **Monday 19th July, 10am to 3pm**. (Ed. - Please contact me to confirm day as Liz wrote Sunday, not Monday in her notes!)

Over the last 3 weeks a great team of BERG members has been helping Transfield to tackle the **Rabbit** problem. They dug about 35 shallow trenches, covered them with wire cage-like structures (kindly made by Peter Hackett) and then laid out a couple of bait-free feeds of chopped carrots followed by feeds poisoned with Pindone. We are hoping that we have severely knocked the resident rabbit population in the reserve and on a few adjoining private properties. It was a pretty constant job – a hearty thanks to all those who participated.

On the 20th April a specially recruited BERG group (at least a dozen) under the direction of Sam Buckley and his off-sider Chris (from Transfield) fenced off the badly **eroded area** on the creek near the end of Seppelt Drive. Starting at 8.30 in the morning the main track was redirected, post holes dug and a ring-lock, dog-proof fence erected. The Teatree branches were laid out to protect the exposed bare areas of bank in preparation for planting. It was a massive effort and by 4.30pm we felt quite pleased with the result of our newly acquired fencing skills!

We hope to halt the erosion which affects the water quality by increasing the silt load in the creek; to control damage to the streamside vegetation and habitat and to protect threatened indigenous species eg. Hyacinth Orchids, as well improving safety for walkers.

At the **June working-bee** (planting) we will be joined by an **arborist, David Cumming** who will lead a 'walk, talk and gawk' session on the **die-back of the vegetation particularly of Banksias and Eucalypts in Mt Martha** and others areas of the peninsula. For details refer to notice on front page. We have had many concerned enquiries about this problem and so **we invite anyone interested to come along – member or not!**

The **July working-bee** will take place at the end of Augusta St and, with the help of any interested neighbouring residents, we hope to tackle the restoration of the streamside vegetation, from the pumping station to the bridge. Most weed control work will have been done prior to this and so we hope to concentrate on planting, and mulching where necessary. **This will be followed by a BBQ back at the Rotunda.**
Liz Barraclough

*The following extracts concerning the **White-tail Spider** are taken from the February SPIFFA newsletter:*

A bid to clear an evil name

*“Despite having one of the most fearsome reputations in the arachnid world, new research suggests that the **White-tail Spider** Lampona cylindrata is not so much malevolent as misunderstood, reports Amanda Dunn in the Age newspaper.*

“Australian researchers have found that, while the white-tail can deliver a nasty bite, it is unlikely to cause the necrotic ulcers or lesions that have often been attributed to it.

*“A study of 130 white-tail spider bites between 1999 and 2002 found that while they caused pain or discomfort in all cases, and redness or itchiness in some, there were **no cases of necrotic ulcers or lesions**. More than half the victims experienced pain for less than a day, and about 44% felt persistent pain.”*

However, there was less comforting news in the analysis of where the spider was discovered by those it bit.

“It favours concealing itself in bedclothes, towels and clothing, with 41 of the 130 patients in bed at the time they were bitten. Another 26 were bitten while dressing or soon after they had put on their clothes. A researcher says the spiders were not particularly aggressive and most bites occurred when people accidentally stepped on them or picked them up.”

Noisy miners – an aggressive local

We are indebted to SPIFFA for spotting a report on the Noisy Miner by Greg Roberts, in the Age newspaper.

The Noisy Miner, an attractive native bird with a beautiful song which is regularly heard around the Balcombe Reserves, is spreading fast through the suburban gardens of eastern Australia and aggressively driving out other native species. In rural woodlands, it is being pinpointed as a factor in the decline of many bird species.

Ironically, its spread has been helped by the proliferation of popular flowering Australian trees and shrubs such as grevilleas and banksias. University of Queensland zoologist Peter Woodall said, “To a Noisy Miner, a garden of grevilleas is like a big McDonald’s”.

Surveys in Queensland have shown a sharp increase, over 20 years, in the number of gardens in which the fiercely territorial miners were reported, and their frequency. At the same time, there were big drops in records of smaller native species such as Rufous Whistlers, Grey Fantails, Willie Wagtails and Silvereyes. Dr Woodall believes the results reflect similar trends in urban gardens throughout south-eastern Australia.

Miners are especially efficient at driving away other birds because they live in close-knit colonies. “It’s like a pack of wolves chasing something. When one tires, another takes over”, Dr Woodall said. He believes the solution is not to stop planting native trees, but to plant a greater variety of native vegetation. “It might be an idea to build up a thicker understorey of native shrub plants in the garden for the smaller birds instead of just planting the showy grevilleas.”

In native bushland, the Noisy Miner is known as an “**edge specialist**”, **preferring the open edges**. For this reason, said Richard Major, a research scientist with Sydney’s Australian Museum, Noisy Miners are likely to be involved in the marked decline of woodland birds in rural Victoria and NSW, such as robins and thornbills, which could be driven from patches of bushland. “The

fragmentation of native vegetation means there is more habitat for Noisy Miners”, Dr Major said.

Angela Kirsner

(Ed: Our reserves consist of many ‘edges’, along paths, the boardwalk and firetracks! They are the big problem for weeds as well.)

Cherry Ballart - An Unusual Survivor

*It is a constant source of fascination to me to learn about the unique and amazing strategies of growth and survival to be found among Australian native plants. One of these is the **Cherry Ballart** or **Native Cherry** (*Exocarpos cupressiformis*), a dense shrub or small tree (3-8 metres) which seems to have flourished during the drought conditions and may be seen in many of the bushland sections of the Reserves. It is often prominent on road cuttings.*

*What makes it unusual is that it is parasitic on the roots of other plants. This makes it virtually impossible to propagate. It also means that if the host tree is a weed, like a *Pittosperum*, the weed’s removal results in a very sick **Cherry Ballart**; also we must not use poisons within 5 metres of the **Cherry Ballart**!*

*It looks somewhat like a cypress with spreading or erect branches and pendulous **bright green** branchlets. The leaves are reduced to minute scales giving the tree a leafless look.*

The flowers are also minute and occur on short spikes. The fruit is hard green swelling to fleshy orange-red (a bit like a small cherry) from July to November.

Illustrations by Pam Hearn

BERG is grateful for donations received from the following: from 4/3/04 to 16/4/04: AJ Blashki F Rae R & N Hawkins

DIARY DATES:

Field Activities:

Sundays - 3rd Sunday of each month - Next: June 20 & July 18 - meet at 9:00AM at Rotunda

Tuesdays - each Tuesday.

If unsure of weather or want information, contact Mary.

Starting time for all Working Bees - 9:00AM. Break at 10:30 (tea, coffee, etc. provided) Sunday group always meets at Rotunda BBQ (Mel: 144 K11)

Check our Notice Board (outside women's toilets) for information **Queries: Mary - 5977 1089**

Committee Meetings:

Saturday May 29 & July 10 at 9:30am at Mt Martha House. All members welcome.

*****Greening Australia Training** - some excellent courses - for information, contact Mary (BERG)

*****Friends of Harrap Creek (East Mornington)** - working bees 4th Sunday of month. Next on May 23, June 27 & July 25 Contact Mary 5977 1089
Please consider giving us a hand!

*****SPIFFA** - meets 1st Monday of month at 7:30pm at Parks Vic, Hinton St. Rosebud. **Contact: Jan 5986 6566**

Membership Application

Mr/Mrs/Ms/Dr.....
Address.....
Phone.....Fax.....
Mobile.....EMail.....

I would like to become an Individual / Family Member of the Balcombe Estuary Rehabilitation Group Inc.

I enclose cheque (payable to "BERG") / cash

Date.....Signed.....

Joining Fee \$1.00.....\$
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Donation.....\$ _____
Total.....\$ _____

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Please send to:

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Volume 8 Issue 4

August 2004 - September 2004

BALCOMBE ESTUARY REHABILITATION GROUP Inc (BERG)

Reg No. A0034645Y

Formed March 1997

ABN 50 224 628 623

Your Committee:

Keith Wilson - President
Harry Harris - Vice-President
Tony Hyde - Treasurer/Public Officer
Mary Stemp - Hon Secretary
Pam Hearn - Minutes Secretary
Liz Barraclough - Field Officer
Richard Hawkins - Past President
Andy McGuigan - Rotary Club
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BERG logo

Our address for correspondence is:

The Hon Secretary, BERG Inc.
PO Box 433, Mt Martha, 3934
Telephone 5977 1089

*BERG is a member of the Coast Action/Coastcare Program & of
Greening Australia Victoria (GAV)*

* * * * *

President's Message:

Recently I have received several favourable comments about the boardwalk. They have come from residents and non-residents - all absolutely full of praise - some mentioning the damaged decking which, sadly, is often caused by vandals.

The boardwalk is a marvellous asset - thanks to the initiative and skill of our friends in the Mount Martha Rotary Club - and maintenance is the responsibility of the Mornington Peninsula Shire.

It is obvious that something more than piecemeal maintenance is becoming necessary and this will be pursued in our ongoing association with Council.

Deepening of Port Phillip Bay - As our name suggests, BERG's activities are limited to the area between the Bay and Nepean Highway but of course we are very interested in what the proposed deepening will do to the Estuary, etc. Questions have been addressed to the Port of Melbourne Corporation and we are awaiting answers.

Meanwhile I have personally attended meetings and prepared a paper on the subject and I would be happy to share my views with anyone interested.

KEITH WILSON July 22, 2004

Editor's Note: With respect to **Keith's paper** concerning the deepening of the channel in the Bay I would recommend that all interested parties read it. He writes from the viewpoint of his entire working life in the shipping industry, latterly in decision-making positions, and makes some very practical and important points which we don't see in the newspapers.

Mary (and friends) had a little lamb...

...but only for a little while. It was at the barbecue lunch after the July working bee, with Mary Stemp, Liz Barraclough, and our hard-working band of volunteers – a cold mid-winter day.

*The lamb was in the creek, bogged in the mud flats. A canoe rescue was carried out by the strong lads of the **Brincat family**, of Safety Beach, who were there for a picnic and whose strength was absolutely necessary to pull the poor beastie from the quicksand-like mud. After being dried down, it rested in state by a fire in the Rotunda fireplace.*

News travels fast, via the local milk bar, and it was not long before a relieved owner appeared. The lamb – a hand-reared orphan – had, it appears, meandered down Victoria Crescent, worked its way through the

Melaleuca scrub, and got itself into the creek, where it stuck fast. It is now recuperating at home, before joining its flock on the other side of the Peninsula.

And the Brincats, our gallant rescuers? – they are joining BERG!

Banksias and beetles

Why are so many of our mature indigenous trees dying? Arborist David Cuming has spent years piecing together the puzzle, and he spoke to BERG members over morning tea at the June working bee (Sunday 22nd).

There are a number of factors at work, but **the main culprit is the Longicorn beetle**. There are thousands of varieties, and we have our own hungry selection on the Peninsula. Some eat dead and rotting wood, others thrive on living timber.

The beetles David showed us ranged from about 1.5 to 3 centimetres, but it is the larvae that do the damage – fat, creamy-white grubs (daffodil yellow in acacias) with strong jaws and a large appetite. Each larva can spend up to three years inside a tree turning heartwood into frass (digested sawdust), and there can be dozens within a small area of tree trunk. They exit as adults, fly to a new destination, lay their eggs in bark, and the cycle starts again. Meanwhile, the exit holes provide an entry point for fungi, which cause a white dry rot that eats out the heart wood.

Generally, you can see lots of exit holes where there is an infestation. But not always. David described working on dying narrow-leafed peppermints at Langwarrin, with few exit holes visible. On splitting the felled trees, he found large numbers of Longicorn borer. It seems that the beetles, after completing their lifecycle, were reinfesting the same tree from beneath the bark.

Coastal banksias are overwhelmingly hit, with even young trees succumbing, and David has seen attacks in wattles and many eucalypt species, including snow gums, swamp gums, mannas, mahoganys, and sugar gums as well as the narrow-leafed peppermint. **And at the Balcombe Reserve, he found exit holes in a sheoke, something he'd not seen before.** Each species involves a different beetle, but all are of the Longicorn species.

There are other factors contributing to tree damage. **Psyllids, tiny sap-sucking winged insects that may build scale-like shelters (lerps) to protect themselves while they feed, are attacking eucalypts in various areas of the Peninsula.** The small grey-green caterpillar of a leaf-skeletoniser moth can

defoliate a whole stand of trees. Possum browsing adds to the damage. Changes in drainage and soil levels will stress mature trees, and drought has been a further stressor, making trees more vulnerable to other stresses.

In earlier times, the bird population in the thick understorey, together with the many varieties of insect-eating bats, would have helped to control these insects. Centipedes, scorpions and spiders may also have helped. David described normally noisy black cockatoos in Gippsland working away silently in the crowns of large eucalypts, locating Longicorn larvae by the sound of their jaws splitting the wood fibres.

There is no simple answer to the problem, but a partial answer is to preserve and re-establish understorey as much as possible, to provide habitat for insect predators. It's also important to keep planting and planting new trees, and David recommends removing heavily infested trees, to minimise spread. He also advanced the controversial suggestion that we may need to introduce some non-indigenous eucalypts that are resistant to Longicorn attack, such as the red box and yellow box, to establish cover and canopy. A topic that is certain to generate heated debate!

ANGELA KIRSNER

*Field notes: Working in the Bunyip each Tuesday morning is constantly presenting us with surprises, most of them pleasant like birds not seen there for a few years. The Spinebills continue to delight. Sam Hand tells me they love **Correa reflexa** of which we have a healthy abundance this year. We also saw a **New Holland Honeyeater** last week. It isn't that these birds are rare but that the area has been so uninviting to our feathered friends that it is encouraging to welcome some of them back! In clearing out thickets of tea tree I feared we had also destroyed the habitat of the **Blue Wren** but we've seen them out in full force recently.*

*We also continue to find new patches of **Greenhood Orchids**. Apparently they come up in soil that has been disturbed either by weeding or planting. This is why they tend to grow along*

asked to present a project on some aspect of the Balcombe Creek environment for judging. The school picked 12 finalists and a BERG panel of judges selected the winners. The standard was so high we found it necessary to select **two equal firsts**: one for a delightful model of a Blue Wren, the other for an original survey of the acid/alkaline values at selected spots in the creek and the results.

Another boy created a **booklet on pollution**. Some of his comments are very interesting. "A while ago I walked along the creek and found in parts of the water there was **muck and oil**. The muck and oil is very bad for the plants and animals because the fish breath in the oxygen from the water but the oil might get in their system and it could kill them also the plants drink the water and it might kill them too. **SUGESTIONS**: B.E.R.G could strain parts of the Creek where the muck is to make the water cleaner."

"Because **dogs** were introduced to Australia they are a **big threat to the wildlife** so people should keep them on the lead. But there's another problem, **Dog droppings** when people walk their dogs at the boardwalk lots they sometimes let their dog poo of the side of the boardwalk which if the water rose the dog droppings would pollute the water and make it bad for fish to live in. **SUGESTIONS**: B.E.R.G should build boxes that have little bins in them for putting the dog droppings in which have a dispenser which has paper dog droppings pick up bags so you can get more bags just in case."

(Editor: BERG agrees heartily except these are Council's responsibilities. We keep reminding them!)

Thanks

...to all those who included a donation when they renewed their BERG subscriptions. Donations are always valued, but particularly at the present time, when grants are becoming fewer and much harder to

Spring Planting Festival – September (19th) working-bee. We plan to do a BIG plant-out, a final enhancement planting, along the revegetation buffer area around the perimeter of the Ferrero Ovals. We shall be joined by a 'Conservation For Volunteers' team and I hope, lots and lots of BERG members. This will be followed by a **BBQ at the rotunda**. - **All welcome!!**

to get. Your generosity enables us to do just that bit extra.

Mary (and friends) had a little lamb...

...but only for a little while. It was at the barbecue lunch after the July working bee, with Mary Stemp, Liz Barraclough, and our hard-working band of volunteers – a cold mid-winter day.

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BERG is grateful for donations received from the following: from 27/5/2004 to 30/6/2004

(Further acknowledgements in the next newsletter)

J Oliver	A Kirsner	H Harris	K Wilson
B & G Benton	G & B Wilson	A & H Warburton	K & P James
I R Jamieson	J Wicks	G & G Jones	A & M McPhate
D & P Tredinnick	K & G Proposch	D & B Robinson	G Hehir
R & B Egan	A & I Balfé	P Donges	N & N Wilkinson
J Mitchell	J Brooks	B & F Weston	R & B Brett
H B Taylor	J & J Dade	P & R Fitzgerald	P & P Featherstone
G Littledyke	G & J Kaye	C Grayley	K Toop
J & A Neal	D Collins & D Dickson		B H Murphy

DIARY DATES:

Field Activities:

**Sundays - 3rd Sunday of each month -August 15;
***September 19 - SPRING PLANTING FESTIVAL -**

BBQ to follow ***

Meet at Rotunda BBQ (Mel: 144 K11)
Each Tuesday from 9 - 12 noon - Meet in Kindergarten car park. If unsure of weather or 'other', contact Mary.
Starting time for all Working Bees - 9:00AM. Break at 10:30 (provided) All queries: Mary - 5977 1089

Committee Meetings:

Saturday August 16 & Sept 27 at 9:30 AM at Mt Martha House. All members welcome.

AGM - Saturday October 18th

SPIFFA - meets 1st Monday in the month at 7:30pm at Parks Vic, Hinton St, Rosebud (Mel 170 C4)

Contact: Jan Dwyer, Secretary ph: 5986 6566

Friends of Harrap Creek - family days 4th Sunday of each month. Contact: Mary 5977 1089

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Volume 8 Issue 5

October 2004 - November 2004

BALCOMBE ESTUARY REHABILITATION GROUP Inc (BERG)

Reg No. A0034645Y

Formed March 1997

ABN 50 224 628 623

Your Committee:

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Harry Harris - Vice-President
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Mary Stemp - Hon Secretary
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BERG logo

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*BERG is a member of the Coast Action/Coastcare Program & of
Greening Australia Victoria (GAV)*

* * * * *

President's Message:

I am restricting my comments in this issue to enable Secretary Mary to report on her recent visit to Canberra on behalf of BERG - all expenses covered by the sponsors of the Landcare Awards.

Our AGM will be held on Saturday 23rd October; I promise it won't be boring and, as usual, we will have a very good guest speaker. After the AGM, several of us adjourn to the nearby "Beachside" for lunch and everyone is welcome to join us.

A walk through the "Bunyip" right now is especially rewarding because of the many flowering gems, most self-sown and some planted by Mary and her Tuesday stalwarts. Walk slowly and drink it all in.

What a thrill at our September field day when ten volunteers (all girls) from Community Volunteers Australia joined us and helped us plant another 1100 plants around Ferrero Reserves.

Keith Wilson September 2004

NOTICE & AGENDA

EIGHTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF BERG

to be held on **Saturday October 23, 2004**
in **Room 5, Mt. Martha Community House**

9:30 am - Registration, Tea & Coffee

10:00 am - Annual General Meeting

Agenda:

- * Welcome and apologies
- * Minutes of Sixth Annual General Meeting
- * Committee reports (copies available at meeting)
from: President, Keith Wilson,
Treasurer, Tony Hyde,
Field Manager, Liz Barraclough
- * Election of Office Bearers: President, Vice
President, Treasurer, Secretary and six ordinary
committee members. Rule 23.
- * Appointment of an Auditor

Please Note:

With respect to nominations for office bearers, nomination forms may be obtained from the Secretary, Mary Stemp (5977 1089). All nominations must be in writing, signed by 2 members, accompanied by written consent of the candidate and delivered to the Secretary by October 16 (ie - at least 7 days before the AGM)

Guest Speaker: Lindy Lumsden

Topic: BATS FOR INSECT CONTROL
(see page 3 for profile)

BERG is grateful for donations received from the following: from 27/5/04 to 19/8/04 (further acknowledgements in the next newsletter)

J Patrick	Woodleigh School	A Blashki	J & P Stoker
E Vears	N & S Shelley	R Cooper	J & L Thomas
J & J Rosenbrock	M&G Sanders-O'Connor	B Plant	D & S Hartley
M Bennett	T & K Denton	J Stevens	E Williams
M & M Collins	K & S Mee	D Curtis	R & H Turner
S & D Dawson	E & M deFries	A Whitelaw	K Donaldson
N & H Harvey	S Milton	M & J Lyon	J & P Boag
T & G Montgomery	AL Stemp	G & D Jordan	DL & RL Ray
J & I Cook	SG Strom	S Baker	T Rutledge
C Forrester	M & R Brick	F Roberts & J Dwyer	B Pullman
D & B a'Beckett	C & S Bence	I & S Henry	G Seager

BERG GOES TO CANBERRA!

BERG was the Victorian representative in the biannual Landcare Awards held in Canberra on September 1st for the **Natural Heritage Trust Coastcare Community Award**. When I heard what some of the other groups were doing, it made me realise what an honour it was for us to just be there!

We didn't win but we had some pretty impressive competition like the group from Port Vincent Primary School and Aquatic Centre (represented by a couple of young boys!) who have studied the reef, its flora & fauna and created an information centre; the Tiwi Land Council from Bathurst & Melville Islands, NT; and the winners, who not only rescue sea birds injured on fishing hooks but are successfully educating fishermen and school children from Sydney to Eden on the prevention of these accidents and the rescuing of injured birds. (Things like how to catch a hurt pelican and then remove a fish-hook from its eye!).

Incidentally, the Port Vincent group won the *Westpac Education Award!*

In the afternoon we (friend Kathy and I) met the people from our Coastal category and each representative did a 15-minute presentation on our group's activities. Later we were bussed from the hotel to Parliament House where we had drinks and then dinner in the Great Hall along with about 500 other people. During the meal we heard speeches and the announcements, by **Kevin Rudd, Environment Minister**, of the winners of the 11 categories. A bit of fun from the entertaining MC enlivened the evening. Altogether a most impressive event. Like two Cinderellas, Kathy and I caught a pumpkin that had turned into a bus and were back at the hotel before midnight!

We came back with a few ideas for BERG!

Mary Stemp

* * * *

Field Officer's Report**August Field Activity**

The erosion area on the creek near the end of Seppelt Ave and Ferrero Oval 1 was weeded, spot-planted and the seat relocated. Now you can

sit, relax and enjoy the reflections in the water, listen to the birds and watch the plants grow!

September Field Activity – Spring Planting Festival

*We had a great turn-up and we achieved a great amount! Twenty-five of us planted and watered in **1100[?] plants** in three hours! We were most fortunate and [?]delighted to have the assistance of nine young women ¹from **Conservation for Volunteers – an industry² sponsored day, 'Lending a Hand'**. They were a diverse ¹group. Two of them were locals, the rest travelled from Melbourne; one is from Seoul, Korea and another from Cologne! Mary's ¹double batch of delicious , chocolate chip slice was a great hit for ¹morning-tea. Muffins are out and choc-¹chip slice is in!! The recipe was heavily requested, though I'm sure no-one can ¹make it as well as Mary!*

After a BBQ lunch most of the BERG members retired exhausted but ^tour visitors soldiered on to guard a [?]number of the most vulnerable plants[?] from rabbits. Thanks to everyone for all[?] the great work. And yes, Pam did find ¹her fox-chasing dog. Spotted the fox too.

***Naturelinks** (our new contractor) has had a great ¹start. I feel they will take much of the load from us. Their ¹efficiency and expertise will be very much appreciated. [?]Some of you have already met Travis and Jo, one of ¹whom will always be attending our field activities.*

Over the last few weeks they have sprayed out [?]much of the Angled Onion, Forget-me-nots and the Rock ^tRose(on the Kotor Hill). They have also begun to tackle [?]the weed problem in the [?]campground.

October Field Activity

Woody weed and fire control in Taylor Reserve will be the order of the day. We have not tackled this area on the north bank before, but a number of the local residents are keen for us to help 'clean' it up. It will interesting to investigate a new area.

Liz Barraclough

BERG welcomes new members since 10/7/04:

Tony O'Connor

Judith Whittaker

AGM – Speaker, Lindy Lumsden Not to be missed!

Sometimes in the still of evening, do you hear a tiny squeak? Do you see a small dark shape flit past in the dusky light and think, ‘that little bird is out late tonight’? – Think **BATS!!**

Tiny, wee creatures, (some only the size of your thumb nail) emerge from their roosts under the bark, from hollows and cracks and crevices of old trees or even under your eaves, to begin their nightly activity of **consuming up to half their body weight in insects** – 600 mosquitoes in an hour!

Wherever there are trees there are bats. They are fascinating and **play a vital role in maintaining the ecological health of our environment.** In one night, 42 of 5 different species were trapped at the Briars for an identification exercise.

Lindy Lumsden

Lindy is a research scientist specialising in insect-eating bats, investigating their ecology and conservation.

She works at the Arthur Rylah Institute of the Dept. of Sustainability and Environment in Heidelberg and is passionate about educating people about these little-known creatures. She presents papers, lectures and speaks throughout Victoria, Australia and overseas, and travels to fascinating places to study the habits and lives of these mammals.

BERG is fortunate indeed to have Lindy as Guest Speaker at our Annual General Meeting on October 23rd.

Do you have trouble getting to the Rotunda for BERG’s Field Activities by 9am?

Does our early starting time put you off attending?

If your answer is ‘yes’ to these questions, perhaps this will encourage you to come when you are ready. **We will leave clear directions on a sign at the Rotunda area near the toilet block stating where we’re working on the day.** We do need you and will welcome you.

DIARY DATES:

Field Activities:

Sundays - 3rd Sunday of each month - October 17th at Taylor Reserve (Weedbusters); November 21st

Meet at Rotunda BBQ (Mel: 144 K11)

Each Tuesday from 9 - 12 noon - Meet in Kindergarten car park. *If unsure of weather or 'other', contact Mary.*

Starting time for Field Activities - 9:00AM. Coffee break at 10:30 (provided) All queries: Mary - 5977 1089

BYO gloves; other equipment provided.

Committee Meetings:

Saturday October 2 & November 11 at 9:30 AM at Mt Martha House. All members welcome.

AGM - Saturday October 23rd

SPIFFA - meets 1st Monday in the month at 7:30pm at Parks Vic, Hinton St, Rosebud (Mel 170 C4)

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Volume 8 Issue 6

December 2004 - January 2005

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Website:

<http://berg.alphalink.com.au/>

BERG is a member of the Coast Action/Coastcare Program & of Greening Australia Victoria (GAV)

* * * * *

President's Message:

Our 8th AGM has come and gone and the outgoing committee has been re-elected, unopposed and intact. That is good and not-so-good.

I suppose it indicates that members are happy with the job we are doing. It may indicate that no one else is interested to become involved. It may indicate that some may not be game to have a go.

Whatever the reason, let me assure everyone we would always welcome new faces so please feel free at any time to talk to me about your BERG ambitions and be assured you will always be welcome to attend our committee meetings, dates for which always appear on page 4 of our newsletter.

Recently we have enjoyed a number of sessions with years one and two students from Mount Martha Primary School. These involved talks to the students about litter and rubbish, including pest weeds and the necessity to clean up our mess and the repercussions if we don't. They were very practical and enjoyable sessions with the students pulling out the weeds and enthusiastically asking many questions. We

love working with 'our' schools and will always welcome their involvement in our work.

Mornington Peninsula is very fortunate to have living in our midst a **doyen of bird knowledge in Ian Dowling**. Ian recently took a bird watching group to Balcombe Reserve to observe the bird life for a **period of three hours**. **In that time they spotted 43 species**. What a joy! Interestingly the hours were between 10am and 1pm. I walk somewhere in our area every morning, usually between 6:30 and 8am and the most I have observed is ten. There are always doves and blackbirds but only the occasional Ibis, Spoonbill, Egret, Blue Wren, Eastern Spinebill, Yellow Robin, Grey Fantail, etc and to record 43 is exciting. Dare we think that our nearly 50,000 plantings of truly indigenous plants has contributed to this marvellous sighting. Thank you, Ian, for letting us know of this adventure.

Field Activities - yes, they are and always will be the key component of our work. **On the third Sunday of every month we gather at the Rotunda at 9am to get our working orders from Field Manager, Liz, and off we go**. So don't hold back; come and join us. We'll enjoy your company and we hope you will enjoy ours plus the morning cuppa.

(ED - If you are late, look for the sign near the entrance to the women's toilets which will tell where we are!)

Finally let me say again how much, personally, I appreciate the **work in the Bunyip** carried out every Tuesday by our stalwarts, Isobel, Gwen, Ian, Liz and Harry, led by Secretary Mary. As mentioned earlier, I walk though there every morning on my way up and down the creek and it is just a delight.

Until next issue, at the end of January.

Keith Wilson

November 24, 2004

'FOR THE LIFE OF THE BAY'

Saving our greatest Resource

Show your concern regarding the effects of

CHANNEL DEEPENING IN PORT PHILLIP BAY

Meet at the CLOSEST BAY BEACH to your home

Sat. 11th Dec. 9:30AM

Wear/bring something red

For more information visit: www.dredgebaynomore.net

FROM THE EDITOR:

BERG has a website!! The address is on page 1 of this newsletter.

It seems that in most newsletters I make a mistake. Perhaps we should have a contest to spot them! In my report on my visit to Canberra I stated that the awards were presented by Kevin Rudd. Apologies to **Warren Truss, Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Wildlife.** (I just hope I've got his position right!) Warren announced the winners and presented the awards.

My gratitude is in order here. Presentation of the newsletter involves a number of people. I want to thank the contributors: **Keith, Liz, Angela, & now Jan and Pam Hearn** for her delightful illustrations which usually enhance our pages. I am aware that these are all very busy people. Also there is **Tony Hyde** who provides some of the data. **Jeremy of Robin Cooper's office** who has been doing the printing for the past few editions and **Rosemary & Maurie Brick** who do the mail-out. I particularly appreciate the cheerfulness with which they say 'yes'.

Angela has given me a document which is a transcript of **Lindy Lumsden's talk on BATS.** It's far too large to print here aside from some extracts, but I have saved it and can send it to you via email if you so request. It's fascinating.

The photo is of some of the grade 5 & 6 boys who planted around Ferrero Ovals last week and then spread large quantities of mulch using buckets! The girls seem to have missed out on the photo shoot.

Mary Stemp

FIELD MANAGER'S REPORT

Well, we've certainly had a spring this year! Since BERG's formation, planting has never continued to the end of November – until this year!

Enhancement and spot planting – top of Rabbit Paddock, both sides of Hopeton Creek at the Kotor Hill end and below Kotor Close, below the cricket nets among the Melaleuca, top of Watson's Rd, Kotor Hill, Erosion area, Horror Patch and Bunyip. We have also provided a number of local private residents with indigenous species to enrich their gardens and to encourage the return of local native fauna particularly the small birds.

Over 4,000 plants – sorry haven't added them all up yet!

****If members (or residents near the Reserve) are interested in planting indigenous plants in their gardens or enhancing their roadside vegetation, please let us know. We are happy to assist with advice and/or plants as they fall under the community awareness and education section of our grants.**

Revegetation – planting of both sides of the cement paths that lead into the reserve at either end of

Kotor Close; Mt Martha Life Saving Club where we advised and helped coordinate the fencing before planting out either side of the clubhouse and the central area and east end of the carpark.

Weed Control – Spot-spraying and hand-weeding of Ferraro Oval buffer zone and Kotor Reveg. areas (including Rock Rose again!), old campground and carpark areas, Bunyip and Watson Rd.

Taylor Reserve – a start was made on the woody weeds in this area at the October working-bee. Over the summer a few of us intend to follow-up this area, selectively removing seedling weeds from the inner 'green' area of the reserve.

***If anyone has a spare moment or two and can bend over after that Christmas pudding and would like to join us, please don't hesitate to contact Angela or me.**

- Mattock removal of thistles from the Horror Patch and below the cricket nets.

- Whipper-snip and slashing of annual and perennial grassy weeds, Bunyip, Kotor Hill and Rabbit Paddock

A BIG WORRY – the Forget-me-nots, once only a small patch amongst the Melaleuca between the cricket nets (Ferraro Oval 1) and the boardwalk, have begun to spread! They are now on the edge of the path between the two ovals leading to the creek, at the Geoff Kaye Bridge and the boardwalk at the end of La Trobe St. As many a gardener knows, they spread very easily. Their seeds stick to anything that will transport them from one place to another - dog coats, trouser legs and probably by the water as well. I am very concerned that they will spread out of control, so if spotted on your walks please note and report their position and/or carefully remove and bag.

Hurray!! We were successful with next year's **2005 Environment grant** – approx \$11,500 with the main focus on silt management. I always heave a sigh of relief when the good news arrives, as I'm always afraid that they will think we have received our fair share of grant funds and that other groups may be more needy.

On that good note, **thanks to everyone for their support and tireless help throughout year and a very Happy Christmas and New Year to all, and if you are out enjoying the Reserve don't let the sight of the odd weed or two ruin your walk!** (Mind you, if you are having withdrawal symptoms don't hesitate to pull one or two!!!)

Cheers,

Liz Barraclough

BERG is grateful for donations received from the following: from 1/7/04 to

11/11/04

M&K Fitts

R&Y Dare

A&M Blashki

L&J Ciabotti

Pen. Pistol Club

J Thomas

J&L Douglas

K&L Maguire

D&J Cumming

R Cowley

H&M Barton

P&L Rawlings

SCHOOLS LIAISON

"We run out of weeds!"

The Years 1 and 2 of Mt Martha Primary School (about 180 children) worked so hard on the 9th & 16th of November around Watson's Road and Bunyip that they actually pulled up all the weeds that little hands could handle, leaving BERG working bee members most impressed. Unfortunately, the media did not turn up as arranged and missed inspiring moments! (ED - the children also toured the Bunyip and enjoyed seeing chocolate lilies & Daly's Dell!) Later that week, students from Years 5 and 6 at Mt Martha PS also worked very hard - they planted 400 plants in 1 1/2 hours and could have put in more. They watered and tidied up around the perimeter of Ferrero Oval and even moved a huge pile of mulch by the bucketful!

Year 9 students from Mt. Eliza Secondary College were rostered to work for their 'community service day' along Balcombe Creek on the 16th as well. We expected 20, but five did turn up with their supervising teacher to move stacks of mulch. As Liz Barraclough pointed out, they did as well as one could expect from Year 9s - though it would have been good to utilize all of the borrowed wheelbarrows!

Balcombe Creek on CD

Osborne PS now has the CD-ROM of our BERG posters for use in environment wor. They are replicas of our interpretive signs in the Rotunda area and are beautifully illustrated with photographs of vegetation and animals along the Creek, as well as details of the history and environmental changes and are invaluable as a teaching resource. Now they have been converted into a CD (Adobe-Acrobat format). School teachers (and others) can contact BERG Secretary to request the CD (at minimal cost), which allows the information to be manipulated, printed and used on classroom computers. We are hoping to develop appropriate classroom teaching units on the CD Posters and would like to hear from any teacher who wishes to be involved.

Learn about marine life!

During the second week of the January holidays, a guided 'walk and talk' field activity is being jointly run by the Mornington Peninsula Roundtable of the Biosphere and Friends of Flinders Foreshore down at Flinders - away from Mt Martha but where some of the vegetation and marine life is similar to Balcombe Reserve. Another such walk may be arranged at Balcombe Estuary if there is interest. Further details are available from Jan on 5977 0131.

Jan Oliver, Schools Liaison



INSECT-EATING BATS AND US

- extracts from Lindy Lumsden's talk at BERG's AGM

We have 21 species of small insect-eating bats in Victoria and **most of them roost in tree hollows** rather than caves. Thus tree hollows are critically important.

Some species like the **long-eared bats** will also roost under bark where it is just lifting off slightly; they love things not much bigger than their own body size, places they can squeeze into and are protected, especially in winter when they are in torpor.

Torpor is when the bat takes a rest from activity and lowers its temperature, heart rate, etc. at will.

In a study in northern Vic, Lindy found that, while the males and females go to a whole lot of different places outside the breeding season, females went to a particular cave to give birth.

Dead trees are also really important to bats. In another study she found a crack in a tree trunk about 2.5 cm wide out of which flew 36 females and their young!

When there are not enough hollows, as at BERG, they **can be supplemented by using bat boxes**. Bats regularly move roosting sites so if you check a box and find none there, it doesn't mean they are not using it. They may have a cluster of roosts within about 500 m of each other and regularly move among them. If monitoring, look for droppings.

Since bats can eat half their body weight in a night of feeding on insects, they are valuable assets to the bush and agriculture.

Most of the predation on bats these days is from cats.

Angela Kirsner

(Ed. - To be continued next newsletter)

BERG welcomes new members since 3/10/04:

Alison Coates

Barbara Bourke

DIARY DATES:

Field Activities:

Sundays - 3rd Sunday of each month except December.

Next scheduled activity is January 16, 2005

Meet at Rotunda BBQ (Mel: 144 K11) **BYO gloves**

Each **Tuesday** from 9 - 12 noon, finishing December 14 & starting back when the weather is cool enough! - Meet in Kindergarten car park. If unsure of weather or 'other', contact Mary.

Starting time for Field Activities - 9:00AM. Coffee break at 10:30 (provided) All queries: Mary - 5977 1089

Committee Meetings:

Saturday December 11 & January 22, 2005 at 9:30 AM at Mt Martha House. All members welcome.

SPIFFA - meets 1st Monday in the month at 7:30pm at Parks Vic, Hinton St, Rosebud (Mel 170 C4)

Contact: Jan Dwyer, Secretary ph: 5986 6566

Friends of Harrap Creek Inc (FOHC) - Field days 4th Sunday of each month. Contact: Mary 5977 1089

Membership Application

Mr/Mrs/Ms/Dr.....

Address.....

Phone..... Fax.....

Mobile..... EMail.....

I would like to become an Individual / Family Member of the Balcombe Estuary Rehabilitation Group Inc.

I enclose cheque (payable to "BERG") / cash

Date..... Signed.....

Joining Fee \$1.00.....\$

Annual Individual Subscription \$4.00.....\$

Annual Family Subscription \$5.00.....\$

Donation.....\$

Total.....\$

Donations of \$2.00 & over are Tax Deductible

Please send to:

Membership Secretary,

BERG,

PO Box 433,

Mt Martha, 3934.

If undelivered return to:

BERG

PO Box 433

Mt Martha Vic 3934

THE CREEK

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