
THE CREEK

Newsletter of BERG, the



No A0034645Y
ABN 50 224 628 623

Volume 10 Issue 1

February 2006

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

So we enter 2006, a year which no doubt will produce some challenges, some positives and negatives, the former by way of grants, the good things we achieve and community support; the latter in the form of vandalism. What an achievement if that energy could be harnessed for good works.

This summer has again raised a number of issues regarding the state of the estuary, including the unsightly silt, opening of the entrance, and walkway access. I have wondered what it was like before white man sub-divided, developed, cut roads and footpaths and left them unsealed. Was the creek open to the sea and subject to regular tidal influence? Was annual rainfall in those days different to now? What would happen to the catchment area and everything upstream? Should the great naturalist and author Graham Pizzey's suggestion to dredge the estuary, cleaning out decades of silt build-up and using it to create an island as a safe haven for bird life, still be considered?

Well, we hope that our application for \$49,804 for a Community Water Grant will be successful and will begin the process of answering some of these questions. Field Officer Liz Barraclough provides more details about this in her report on page 2.

Mount Martha has had its traditional holiday influx of tourists. I am aware that there was interference with the sandbar at the creek entrance and that some of our members were on the receiving end of abuse when explaining why the creek should not be artificially opened to the sea. On one occasion a contractor's heavy machine opened the entrance under Shire Council Guidelines. We were told that the boardwalk was under threat of inundation and that triggered the action. In the light of the experience in Portland, where artificial opening of the river mouth led to tens of thousands of fish dying (see report in the October 2005 edition of *The Creek*), we will seek more information on these guidelines.

Another project worth a look is the raising of the walkway under the Esplanade bridge to make it accessible at all times. I am aware of discussion at the Mount Martha Community Association about a pedestrian crossing, or maybe a pedestrian bridge over the Esplanade.

I wish all our members a happy and healthy 2006. Do not hesitate to talk to us about your ideas; you are always welcome to attend our meetings and, of course, we'd love to see you at our working bees.

Keith Wilson, President

Christmas Visitors



Three young Tawny Frogmouths spent Christmas day sitting in a tree in our Victoria Crescent garden,

snuggled up together like something straight from May Gibbs. And on the branch below, a parent kept guard.

As we approached, they all went into 'dead stump' mode, watching us carefully through an eyelid slit. But if we stayed still awhile, they relaxed and resumed the fluffy-feathers, eyes-wide-open mode. At dusk they were gone on their nocturnal hunt for insects, worms, slugs and snails, frogs or small reptiles.

Then two weeks later, they were back for a day – in the same tree – but this time, sadly, only two young and the adult. This is the first time I've seen Frogmouths in the vicinity, though my father recorded them in the 1980s and they are on BERG's species list.



Angela Kirsner

BERG Committee

President Keith Wilson
Vice President Harry Harris
Secretary Mary Stemp
Minutes Sec. Pam Hearn

Treasurer Richard Kirsner
Field Officer Liz Barraclough
Rotary Club Liaison Andy McGuigan
Newsletter Angela Kirsner

Waterwatch Jenny Selby
Schools Liaison Jan Oliver
Kotor Friends Margaret Caldwell
Greenfields Friends Hazel Athey

Address for correspondence: Hon Secretary, BERG Inc, PO Box 433, Mt Martha 3934.

Phone: 5974 3996

Website: <http://berg.org.au>

BERG is a member of Coast Action/Coastcare Program and Greening Australia Victoria

FIELD NEWS

Field Officer Liz Barraclough reports:

BERG winds down over the summer holiday period, and this year in particular the heat has made hard field work unattractive.

Working bees

The January working bee was a small and select group, but we completed the work planned nevertheless. Working at the campground, carpark and along the Mirang Avenue drainage line, we weeded the remaining Cabbage Thistle (Angela's weed vigilance on her walks to and from the shops had kept the beach side of Mirang under control), most of the Dandelions, a few Blackberries, Cotoneasters and other thistles. Keith also did a great job removing the charcoal graffiti from the rotunda walls and cleaning out the fire places and the laundry.

February will see us back in full swing, and at the working bee on Sunday 19th we will install the sign posts for the educational nature walk through the campground area and probably have another blitz on the weeds in the area.

The Tuesday Group needs more people. This small weekly working bee has done wonders in transforming and maintaining the Bunyip area. Any extra hands – regular or occasional – would be very welcome. Ring Mary Stemp on 5974 3996 for more information.

A study of the estuary

The threat to our estuary's natural ecology is of great concern, with the continuing reduction of saltmarsh and depth of the creek channel, the increasing siltation smothering the seagrass and eelgrass beds that provide essential nursery areas for fish species and help maintain water quality, and the reduction in waterbird numbers and species.

We have applied for a substantial Community Water Grant to learn

more about the estuary's natural processes, and we have approached the department of Ecology and Environment, Faculty of Science, Deakin University to assist us with part of this project. Our aim is to understand the geomorphology of the estuary and creek, past and present.

This will entail core sampling of the floor of the estuary and creek to identify changes in sedimentation rate, source and pattern. A botanist and specialist in salt tolerant flora will also advise us on species selection and appropriate planting techniques. The university has offered to involve and supervise undergraduate and post-graduate students in any related activities and research.

Dr Helen Arundel, also from Deakin, is to publish this year her recent research into estuaries along the Australian coast, investigating their opening and closing patterns, their effects on the ecology, and the effects of man's interference etc. We look forward to this report and the relevance of her findings to our estuary.

Kotor Hill Group

This group of residents has undertaken to be custodians of the area between Seppelt Ave, Ferraro Ovals and Hopeton Creek, and have been is weeding, mulching and planting the top of Kotor Hill.

Margaret Caldwell reports:

We have been watching our plants grow since our first meeting and working bee in July and, though we have lost some with the heat, the majority are doing well. The reaction of local residents to what we are doing has been very possible, though vandalism of guards and stakes is a constant problem.

There have been two recent echidna sightings on the Kotor Hill and we will endeavour to find out more about our "resident" echidna, its habitat and how we can ensure its occupancy of our area.

The next working bee for the Kotor Hill Group will be in March.

Have you seen an Echidna?

There have been a number of recent echidna sightings within and near the reserve, on both the north and south banks – Kotor Hill and Victoria Crescent being the most recent. We'd love to know more about our echidna population. Are we seeing the only two in the area, or are there lots? What is the extent of their territory?

Please report any sightings to BERG – where, when, what they are doing and the like. And keep an eye out for signs of echidnas:

• Feeding:

conical holes in soft earth, up to 20 cm deep with the mark of the snout at the end; damage to ants' nests; rotting timber torn apart by strong claws; overturned litter

• **Tracks:** (see photo and diagram) front feet turned inwards and marks of strong digging claws; hind toes directed backwards; tracks show the print of all claws as feet move forwards

• **Scats:** (see photo) long cylinders up to 2 cm in diameter, often broken up, dry insect particles visible on the surface, variable colour, strong earthy smell



when fresh, found in piles on rocks or near feeding sites

Echidnas shelter in hollow logs,

old burrows, thick vegetation or forest litter. If disturbed, they will rapidly dig down leaving only a few quills visible. They usually breed in winter, in burrows about a metre long that terminate in a nursery chamber.



Black Wattles from Black Earth

Jo Thyer is our hard-working contact with Naturelinks, Council's environmental contractor for our Reserve, and is involved in monitoring and managing the control burn site. She describes what's been happening there.

The indigenous flora at the Balcombe Estuary burn site has responded incredibly well to the controlled burn which took place in 2005. Species diversity has increased dramatically post fire, with over 60 indigenous species recorded on the site so far.

The most obvious of these is Black Wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*), which came up in large numbers after the fire and now covers about two thirds of the site. The seedlings have grown rapidly over summer and many are now over 5 feet tall. Fireweeds (*Senecio* spp.) also recruited well, as did other shrubby species including Kangaroo Apple (*Solanum laciniatum*), Common Cassinia (*Cassinia aculeata*), Twiggy Daisy Bush (*Olearia ramulosa* var. *ramulosa*) and Boobiallas (*Myoporum* spp.).

Most of the diversity, however, is in the ground flora layer. In spring the site looked amazing. It was covered in herbaceous ground covers such as Sundews (*Drosera* spp.), Blue Bottle Daisy (*Lagenifera*

stipitata), Running Postman (*Kennedia prostrata*) and Kidney Weed (*Dichondra repens*). Four species of orchids and five species of lilies were also recorded – including some of the most enormous Chocolate Lilies (*Artropodium strictum*) I have ever seen! Grasses also recruited in large numbers and around 10 species now occur on the site. Weeping Grass (*Microlaena stipoides*) is the most common of these, with three strikingly different forms observed.

Unfortunately, weeds love a burn just as much as indigenous plants – and a whole range of weeds (over 40 species and growing) have been popping up through out the site. Panic Veldt Grass (*Erbartah erecta*) has been the most prolific ground flora species, recruiting almost continually since the burn occurred. Two woody weed species, Sallow Wattle (*Acacia longifolia* var. *longifolia*) and Mahogany Gum (*Eucalyptus botryoides*), have dominated the upper storey recruitment.

Naturelinks, with the help of some enthusiastic BERG volunteers, have been working on the site in a bid to keep these weeds in check. The main focus of our work so far has been on those weeds that can establish themselves and set seed quickly. At the top of the list is Panic Veldt Grass, closely followed by *Gladiolus*

spp., annual grasses and weedy ground covers. Once these are in check, our focus will shift to the removal of woody weed seedlings before they become too large.

A Reserve at Devil Bend

Minister for Environment, John Thwaites announced on 19th January that most of the Melbourne Water land around Devil Bend Reservoir will be conserved in a reserve under ParksVic supervision, and utilizing community groups and local expertise within the Mornington Peninsula Biosphere to assist in management. This success follows a long-running campaign by many Mornington Peninsula residents.

It is excellent news for the health of Balcombe Creek, as Devil Bend Creek, which is dammed to form the Reservoir, is one of our creek's major tributaries. The two come together within The Briars.

The State Government will sell off the 40 hectare block north of Graydens Road to provide funds to start the management of the rest of the area. Much of the new reserve is leased for agistment and details of how leases are to be dealt with have yet to be announced. Melbourne Water will maintain the dam wall.

Reporting Estuary Openings

There are heavy fines for members of the public who open the Estuary to the sea when it is closed by a sandbar. As well as being dangerous (at least one child has been rescued after being swept away by the current), it interrupts the ecological processes within the estuary's swamplands. Council reserves the right to open the estuary to protect assets, subject to a careful assessment.

If you see the estuary being opened by a member of the public, you can ring Council on 1300 850 600 and ask for a Local Laws Officer. They will attend if available. The Mornington police (phone 5975 2733) will also respond if available.

Clean Up Australia Day Sunday 5th March

Every year hundreds of thousands of Australians help clean up their environment on Clean Up Australia Day. This year, BERG will be coordinating action around the estuary and shops, and through the Reserve.

Meet from 9.30 am in the car park at the corner of Watson's Rd and the Esplanade. BERG will provide bags and gloves, or BYO. And don't forget the hats and sunscreen!

Any Spare Tip Vouchers?

Do you have any spare green waste tip vouchers? BERG would be grateful for any you are not using - we, like everyone else, pay to dump our many trailer loads of weeds at the tip.

Diary Dates

BERG Working Bees

All welcome!

Meet at the Rotunda BBQ (Mel: 144 K11) on:

❖ **3rd Sunday** of every month, from 9.00 to 12.00.

Coffee and BERG-baked delicacies at 10.30. If you're running late, phone Liz's mobile (0408 388 430) to find where we are working. Next working bees

SUNDAY 19TH FEBRUARY and SUNDAY 19TH MARCH.

❖ **Tuesdays** from 9.30 to 12.00. Coffee break at 10.30.

Bring gloves – other equipment provided.

All queries to Mary Stemp on 5974 3996.

Waterwatch testing: Tuesday February 21st 2006

(every 3 months, third Tuesday of the month)

Meetings

BERG Committee meets every 6 weeks at Mt Martha House, Saturdays 9.30. Next meetings on Saturday 25th February and Saturday 8th April.

All members welcome.

SPIFFA (Southern Peninsula Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association) meets 1st Monday of the month, 7.30 pm, at Parks Vic, Hinton Street, Rosebud (Mel 170 C4). Contact Jan Dwyer, 5986 6566.

Friends of Harrap Creek field days 4th Sunday of the month, 9.30. Contact Mary Stemp on 5974 3996.

Friends of Fairbairn Park working bees – contact John Stoker 5974 472

Membership Application

I wish to become a family/individual member of BERG and enclose cash/a cheque payable to BERG for:

Joining fee \$1	\$
Individual subscription (per year) \$4	\$
Family subscription (per year) \$5	\$
Donation (tax deductible over \$2)	\$
Total	\$

Please send to:
Membership Secretary
BERG, PO Box 433
Mount Martha 3934

Name

Address.....

.....

Phone..... Fax

Mobile..... Email

THE CREEK
Print Post Approved pp339493/00001
If undelivered, please return to:
BERG, PO Box 433
Mount Martha 3934

**SURFACE
MAIL**

**POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA**

THE CREEK

Newsletter of BERG, the



No A0034645Y
ABN 50 224 628 623

Volume 10 Issue 2

April 2006

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

A PERUSAL of my last gas and electricity bills claimed that in our home we contributed 1.8548 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions, which sounded and looked very bad, so much so that I inquired about changing to a cleaner supply source.

I learned a lot during that inquiry. For example, Australia produces more damaging greenhouse gases per person than any other developed country.

Our supplier provides us with the choice of utilizing electricity sourced from hydro, solar or wind, all free of greenhouse gas emissions. The upshot is that for about one dollar a week, we have switched to "greenhouse gas and greenhouse electricity", thus hopefully there will be 1.8548 tonnes less of greenhouse gas per quarter in the atmosphere – nearly 8 tonnes a year.

Our next bills will be interesting.

CLEAN UP Australia Day (5 March) was successful, with twenty "gatherers" plus about twelve from Southern Peninsula Vintage and Historic Care Club. We cleaned-up along the foreshore and roadsides, beach, estuary, campground, Ferraro Ovals and Old Soccer Pitch, and a few people scoured as far up as Forest Drive. And we collected 50 to 60 bags of rubbish – more than filling a large skip provided by Council. This was

significantly less than in previous years. Dare we hope that people have seen the light and are doing the right thing with their rubbish?



BERG "stalwarts" helping to clean up our bit of Australia

ON THE subject of the estuary entrance opening, Council has advised us as follows:

"We are happy to hear any reports from BERG, including who is trying to open the estuary. We can then decide if we need to contact the individual/s involved. Public safety factors need to be taken into account.

"In regard to the Shire opening the estuary, we will open the estuary to protect infrastructure assets after due consideration of ecological factors such as Galaxias spawning, bream hatchings, development of seagrasses etc. We are at the very early stages of trying to understand these factors. Hopefully we will be successful with our current grant application to water fund to

assist this [see *Field News for an update on this – Ed*]. We liaise with Rod Barber of the Fisheries Department, within the State Department of Sustainability and Environment.

"The lower reach of Balcombe Creek opens into a broad shallow channel. The lagoon becomes a tidal lagoon which is connected to Port Phillip Bay by a sandy broad expanse of mudflat at low tide, drained by shallow channels. The estuary retains significant geomorphological values. It is an example of an estuary that is frequently closed by spit growth. The site should not be dredged, filled or otherwise reclaimed and should be maintained as a 'working' model of the estuarine depositional environment."

While working in the area near the rotunda recently, I saw schools of bream enjoying themselves. Wonderful!

FINALLY a word for those stalwarts we don't see as frequently as we used to because of indifferent health. You know who you are, we have not forgotten you, and we gratefully value your contribution to BERG, albeit now in other capacities.

Until next issue

Keith Wilson, President

BERG welcomes new members:

Bev and Colin Fryer
Tonja Raymond

BERG Committee

President Keith Wilson
Vice President Harry Harris
Secretary Mary Stemp
Minutes Sec. Pam Hearn

Treasurer Richard Kirsner
Field Officer Liz Barraclough
Rotary Club Liaison Andy McGuigan
Newsletter Angela Kirsner

Waterwatch Jenny Selby
Schools Liaison Jan Oliver
Kotor Friends Margaret Caldwell
Greenfields Friends Hazel Athey

Address for correspondence: Hon Secretary, BERG Inc, PO Box 433, Mt Martha 3934.

Phone: 5974 3996

Website: <http://berg.org.au>

BERG is a member of Coast Action/Coastcare Program and Greening Australia Victoria

We've got rats!

We are lucky to have a big block of land near the boardwalk and not far from the creek so we enjoy our friendly birds, our resident Blue Tongue Lizards and the occasional Echidna and Koala. We became intrigued, though, by the arrival of a small rat, first seen digging around our water bowls and then feeding openly in the middle of the day on the prolific black wattle seeds on the front gravel path.

Mysterious heaps of dirt began erupting from the gardens and small 'freeways' were constructed to link them together. The rockery at the back door developed a myriad of tunnels and we discovered how much the rats like eating parsley roots when my nice border wilted and died. We first thought they might be the Bush Rat but Malcolm Legg from the Fauna Survey identifies them as the common Swamp Rat, *Rattus lutreolus*. They are about 160 mm long and their tail is shorter than their body. We are not near the water but he says they were only called Swamp Rats because they were originally found near a swamp.

Their activities have eased off a little – thank goodness, but it makes gardening really interesting when a small furry blur flashes past and we never know which bush will reveal another freshly constructed rat suburb. At the moment we're quite happy to have our furry tenants.

Rosie Brick



The Swamp Rat's tail is somewhat shorter than its body, clearly distinguishing it from its undesirable imported cousin, Rattus rattus

Some Swamp Rat facts

The Swamp Rat is one of Australia's native rodents. Its body is around 14-18cm long, with a tail of 9-10cm. It has large, rounded ears, a short, blunt snout and thick, soft and shiny dark grey to brown fur, paler on the underside. Its tail is almost hairless and both tail and hind feet are black. It is found throughout coastal areas of south-eastern Australia from Tasmania to South Australia to Queensland.



John Gould published this illustration of the Swamp Rat in 1863 in his 'Mammals of Australia' Vol. III

Swamp rats enjoy variety of habitats, ranging from wet and dry sclerophyll forests to buttongrass moorlands and coastal heath. Their diet is largely vegetarian – grasses and sedges with a sprinkling of fruits, seeds, and fungi and the occasional insect.

Their presence is given away by their diggings – quite extensive shallow burrows, often with conspicuous soil heaps outside. They are gregarious animals and live in small colonies. They also construct extensive systems of runways through dense vegetation by neatly biting off (and eating) sedges and grass stems.

Breeding begins in spring and runs to autumn. More than one litter of 3-5 young may be raised per season, in nests built in hollows or in dense tussock grass. Females from the first litter of the season may give birth themselves during the same breeding season.

Dog walkers – please remember to keep your dogs on leads in the Reserve. It's little beasts such as Swamp Rats and Blue Tongue Lizards that are at risk from dogs off leads. Plus the damage energetic dogs can do to the many small and fragile ground storey plants and seedlings.

Editor's note: For many years, on our land opposite the north bank of the reserve, we have had networks of burrows among the Melaleucas. And although we've never actually seen the occupants, they have been identified as Swamp Rat burrows.

The burrows were among a huge crop of (clearly tasty!) weed grasses, and when I spread mulch thickly to smother the weeds, our Rats took umbrage and migrated across the road to the reserve, where their digging continues to be something of a threat to small new BERG plantings! They are, nevertheless, welcome residents.

They appear to be fond of grasslands – native or exotic, they are not fussy. And vegetables. In addition to parsley, it seems that carrots and potatoes are to their taste, and even – reportedly – dogfood.

On the positive side for gardeners, Swamp Rats are said to be fond of the compost heap, where their constant diggings preclude any need to turn the heap.



Well wrapped! Swamp rats have long incisors and, if handled, will bite fiercely to protect themselves.

AND today's useful Swamp Rat-fact: Mainland females have five pairs of teats while Tasmanian females have only four!

Congratulations!

to Pam Hearn
(BERG Committee member and newsletter artist) and Andris Niedra, who were married on Saturday 25th March



FIELD NEWS

Field Officer **Liz Barraclough** reports

WORKING bees for February and March saw us attacking the invasive Cape Ivy scrambling over the Swamp Melaleuca at the end of Wattle Ave. Some years ago we thought we had removed all signs of this weed but we were not vigilant with our follow-up and all the small bits of stem and rootlets we had missed came back to haunt us with renewed vigour. Cape Ivy is in two other sites in the Reserve – in roadside vegetation near the pumping station at the end of Augusta St, and on the southern side of the fire track from the end of La Trobe St to Ferraro Oval no.2.

Grants

Congratulations to Sunshine Reserve and Community Fireguard Group on their successful application for a Community Water Grant, Round 1. Unfortunately BERG did not fare as well. We submitted a rather ambitious and costly application with perhaps not enough emphasis on community water saving. On request, the assessment team will let us know where we went wrong so we can rectify our application to submit for the next round in June. Our focus again will be understanding the ecology and geomorphology of the estuary.

Cape Ivy (*Delairea odorata*), native to South Africa, was introduced to Australia as a garden plant. A dense perennial, it creeps and climbs to smother and strangle indigenous vegetation. Its ivy-shaped leaves are fleshy, green, shiny, bright clusters of unpleasantly scented, daisy-like flowers from July to September. Wind and water catch the crown of hairs on its tiny seeds and spread them. But it can also root from any stem node that touches the soil. It particularly loves moist areas.



The best way to control Cape Ivy is to remove it by hand, carefully tracing stems and runners back to their source and removing the main roots – then bagging and dumping the lot on the tip. Immediately paint with a suitable herbicide any cut stump that is to be left in the soil. Regular monitoring and follow-up weeding are essential, as any remaining stem pieces can regrow.

In the meantime, we hope to start work with the School of Ecology and the Environment, Deakin University, on determining the effects of silt deposition in the estuary.

We have just sent off our final report on work carried out under our Round 7 Envirofund Grant, and are now in the process of

applying for a Round 8 (2006/07) Grant.

We have also applied for a GVEHO (Grant to Voluntary Environment and Heritage Organizations), for administrative support, and we should know in the next few months of our success or otherwise.

Meeting and Planning

In February, we held our annual BERG Planning Meeting. Simon Thorning (MPSC) and Jo Thyer (Naturelinks) met with a small group from BERG to run through the year's activities, projects and grants.

Some of us also attended a meeting in Mornington to explain Melbourne Water's recent takeover of the Shire's waterways. We hope that one outcome may more funds and practical works for the betterment of our creeks and waterways.

Jeff Jugovic spoke on 'Indigenous Gardening' at the February meeting of the Field Naturalists in Blackburn, and of his experiences revegetating and regenerating his Mt Eliza garden. I was particularly interested in its relevance to a booklet we plan to compile, together with Laura from the Shire Nursery and Russell from Mornington Peninsula Youth Enterprises, on landscaping using indigenous plants – including management and maintenance. Watch this space!

Recipes for the Workers!

Those who come to BERG working bees know the excellence of the morning teas – usually baked in a spare moment by Liz. People have been asking for recipes! So here is the first of an occasional series.

Picnic Fruit Slice

125 gms butter (melted) ¾ raw sugar
1 egg (whisk slightly) 1 tsp vanilla
1½ cups SR flour

Stewed or tinned fruit (eg apple & rhubarb, pear & peach), well drained – 'as much as you like, about a cup'

Mix together everything other than the fruit. Press half the mixture into a lamington tin (5x11 inches/13x28 cm). Spread fruit over, then crumble or spread the rest of the mixture over the fruit. Bake at 350°F/180°C for 30-45 mins. Or use a round 8-inch tin and serve it as a pudding, with cream or yogurt. Double the quantity for a crowd!

Echidnas

Thanks to those members who reported Echidnas. Sightings include:

- on the track from Victoria Cres to the Bridge, in mid December
- on the track beside the Soccer Pitch, near the corner of Uralla Rd and the Highway, mid December
- two or three sightings on Kotor Hill.

Please continue to let us know of any sightings of Echidnas and other wild life.

Diary Dates

BERG Working Bees

All welcome!

Meet at the Rotunda BBQ (Mel: 144 K11) on:

❖3rd Sunday of every month, from 9.00 to 12.00.

Coffee and BERG-baked delicacies at 10.30. If you're running late, phone Liz's mobile (0408 388 430) to find where we are working. Next working bees

SUNDAY 9TH APRIL (one week early because of Easter) and SUNDAY 21 MAY.

❖Tuesdays from 9.30 to 12.00. Coffee break at 10.30.

Bring gloves – other equipment provided.

All queries to Mary Stemp on 5974 3996.

Waterwatch testing: Tuesday May 16th 2006 (every 3 months, third Tuesday of the month)

Meetings

BERG Committee meets every 6 weeks at Mt Martha House, Saturdays 9.30. Next meetings on Saturday 8th April and Saturday 27th May.

All members welcome.

SPIFFA (Southern Peninsula Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association) meets 1st Monday of the month, 7.30 pm, at Parks Vic, Hinton Street, Rosebud (Mel 170 C4). Contact Jan Dwyer, 5986 6566.

Friends of Harrap Creek field days 4th Sunday of the month, 9.30. Contact Mary Stemp on 5974 3996.

Fairbairn Bushland Reserve Friends Group working bees Sunday 9th April, Sunday 11th June, 10.00 am. Contact John Stoker 5974 472.

Membership Application

I wish to become a family/individual member of BERG and enclose cash/a cheque payable to BERG for:

Joining fee \$1	\$
Individual subscription (per year) \$4	\$
Family subscription (per year) \$5	\$
Donation (tax deductible over \$2)	\$
Total	\$

Please send to:

Membership Secretary
BERG, PO Box 433
Mount Martha 3934

Name

Address.....

Phone..... Fax

Mobile..... Email

THE CREEK
Print Post Approved pp339493/00001
If undelivered, please return to:
BERG, PO Box 433
Mount Martha 3934

SURFACE
MAIL

POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA

THE CREEK

Newsletter of BERG, the

Balcombe Estuary Rehabilitation Group Inc.
No A0034645Y
ABN 50 224 628 623

Volume 10 Issue 3

June 2006

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Since our last newsletter we have heard that at last something major is going to be done to improve the overall condition of the Murray Darling river system. Whilst far removed from our tiny Balcombe Creek, it is interesting to reflect on just how many people, towns cities, and farms depend for their very existence on this much maligned waterway. Let's hope that the words quickly turn to action.

Increasingly BERG is asked to support individuals and or groups who are objecting to or supporting various community activities. Recent instances have included the proposed Dunns Rd/Craigie Rd development, sub divisions, applications for liquor licences, channel deepening, the future of Devilbend Reservoir, and a proposed new private school. It is flattering that our views and support are sought. Such requests demand that we consider every aspect of every case, weighing up all pros and cons and, if appropriate, expressing our thoughts fairly and clearly.

Let me say – again – that the work at our working bees (third Sunday each month) is the very heart of BERG. Thank you to those regular toilers who are there every month and a warm welcome to those who are thinking of joining us or who get there when possible. It is always pleasing to receive complimentary comments from the

many people who use the area, and now and again we are able to recruit some of those to our cause. So keep turning up – the air is good, the morning tea is better than good, and the results of our labour are there for all to see and enjoy.

Until next issue

Keith Wilson, President



Keith and helpers at work on the new Nature Trail through the campground – see Field News, page 3

OLIVE TREES A GROWING CONCERN

'A horticultural time bomb' is how two leading environmental scientists have described the olive in Australia (*The Sunday Age*, 2 April 2006).

In the latest edition of their book *Practical Conservation Biology*, Australian National University ecologist David Lindenmayer and Mark Burgman, an environmental risk analyst at the University of Melbourne, warn against the olive

industry's unregulated growth. They call for olive orchards to be netted, at a cost that would be far less than the \$10,000 to \$15,000 a hectare cost of weed control.

Introduced to South Australia in 1836, olive trees spread unchecked through the Adelaide hills after the state's olive industry collapsed in the late 1800s and orchards were abandoned. In Victoria, olives have naturalised in various locations including the Grampians.

These bushland invaders are extremely tough plants, able to withstand cold, heat, drought, winds and poor soils. And they are very long-lived. In the Mediterranean region there are many over 1500 years old. When broken or cut at the base, they re-shoot. Birds and foxes distribute the seeds, and a huge seed bank accumulates, so they keep coming back after they have been cleared.

On the Mornington Peninsula, where olive trees are increasingly common in gardens and orchards, the Shire's Weed Management Strategy classes them as 'a serious threat to one or more vegetation formations'. The Strategy, prepared in 2003 by the Keith Turnbull Research Institute, is at <http://www.mornpen.vic.gov.au>, under 'Our Natural Environment'.

We have not yet found olives in our reserve, but we need to be vigilant and alert to the potential threat they pose.

President Keith Wilson
Vice President Harry Harris
Secretary Mary Stemp
Minutes Sec. Pam Hearn

BERG Committee
Treasurer Richard Kirsner
Field Officer Liz Barraclough
Rotary Club Liaison Andy McGuigan
Newsletter Angela Kirsner

Waterwatch Jenny Selby
Schools Liaison Jan Oliver
Kotor Friends Margaret Caldwell
Greenfields Friends Hazel Athey

Address for correspondence: Hon Secretary, BERG Inc, PO Box 433, Mt Martha 3934.

Phone: 5974 3996

Website: <http://berg.org.au>

BERG is a member of Coast Action/Coastcare Program and Greening Australia Victoria

FRIENDS UP-STREAM

Century Drive adjoins the west side of Balcombe Creek and runs from Benton's Rd almost through to Craigie Rd. The **Century Drive Habitat Link Group** started in 2004 with assistance from Liz Barraclough and a small grant from the Shire.

With the help of local residents, we have landscaped the 10 metre wide nature strips with islands of indigenous plants, tree stumps, big red rocks and a picnic table.

This year we aim to create a 1.5 kilometre nature trail along the 60-70 metre wide strip that forms the Creek Reserve – to allow local families and kids to enjoy this beautiful environment. This would include upgrading the fence that protects the Creek habitat. To



protect the adjoining landowners, we have applied, under BERG, for a \$2000 Melbourne Community Water grant for plants to form a bush screen along the path.

We hope that eventually, with the support of South East Water and the Shire, our nature trail will be linked through the Water Treatment Plant Reserve and the Briars to the Boardwalk, to enable families from Mornington East to walk from

Benton's Rd all the way to the beach.

Lately we've received a big boost of enthusiasm from our local primary school, Benton's Junior College, who are super keen to be actively involved and have already helped us to plant some trees.

Tony O'Connor,
Group Co-ordinator,
Ph: 5977 2810, Mobile: 0404 951 500

You can help!

BERG's August working bee will be helping the Century Drive Group in a large Shire-sponsored planting session at their retarding basin. BBQ lunch provided.

Sunday August 20th, 9.00am

Meet outside 9 Century Dve (next door to the Retarding Basin)

VITAL LINKS

Adapted from "Using Indigenous Plants to Conserve Indigenous Fauna", by botanist/ecologist John Reid, presented to the 3rd Biennial Seminar hosted by the Karwarra Australian Plant Garden, 1996. Full article available at: <http://farrer.riv.csu.edu.au/ASGAP/ASPOL17/mar00-1.html>

If individual bushland sites are to remain viable in the longer term, habitat corridors linking patches of remnant and planted vegetation (like the Century Drive project) are vitally important.

Corridors of vegetation along streams, roads, railway lines, easements etc. provide valuable habitat, especially in urban and rural areas where remnant vegetation is extremely fragmented. They enable animals and plants (via seeds) to move between patches of habitat that would otherwise be isolated.

Both anecdotal and research evidence suggests that migratory bird species continue to visit remnant sites that are connected by habitat corridors but decline in isolated sites. It is highly likely that other animals such as mammals and insects also use corridors to move from one remnant site to another. Habitat links between sites also

enable animals and plants to recolonise sites depleted during catastrophes such as fires and droughts.

Any progress towards the pre-European condition of vegetation will increase its value to indigenous fauna, and every contribution by gardeners and landscapers towards using indigenous plants to create fauna habitat is valuable. It is like gradually putting pieces back into a disturbed jigsaw puzzle. From an indigenous ecosystem perspective, the closer we get the better.

The habitat approach to garden planting uses local bush remnants, where available, to guide species choice, and will be most effective if it is integrated with surviving remnant vegetation or linked to similar plantings on nearby sites. Cooperative arrangements between adjoining private properties to protect and plant with local species would provide the kind of coverage that will make a real difference.

To try to replicate natural processes in gardens is to accept some natural features that would usually be frowned upon by gardeners, such as foliage and sap feeding by insects, parasitism of trees and shrubs by mistletoes and dodder laurels, and rotting logs and sticks on the ground.

If you are aiming to provide habitat for indigenous fauna, it helps to be aware of some of the indigenous plant-animal relationships. Here are some examples relating to refuges and nesting sites:

♦ *Fallen branches, sticks and leaf litter* are used by various lizards, some frogs, many insects, soil hoppers and slaters, and Dusky Antechinus (nests in hollow logs)

♦ *Tussocks (grasses and sedges)* are used by caterpillars of many butterflies, frogs (spawning sites), Swamp Rat, and as nest sites for birds including Superb Fairy-wren, Brown Thornbill, Buff-rumped Thornbill, Whitebrowed Scrubwren, Painted Button Quail.

♦ *Prickly plants and dense low cover* are used by many birds including, scrubwrens, thornbills, Red-browed Firetail.

♦ *Under loose bark on trees* are found various insects, Huntsman spiders, some frogs, and bats.

♦ *Tree hollows* are used by birds including Laughing Kookaburra, Sacred Kingfisher, Striated Pardalote, parrots, cockatoos, owls, some ducks; and Mammals including Brown Antechinus, possums, gliders and bats.

FIELD NEWS

from Field Officer Liz Barraclough

A nature walk through the campground

THE CAMPGROUND area was the focus of the April and May working bees. In April we weeded and pruned in the carpark and around the Southeast Water building, in preparation for its splendid painting (more about this in next issue).

In May, we concentrated on BERG's new Nature Walk. Our small crew of men dug holes, mixed cement, and installed about thirty wooden posts naming indigenous plants throughout the campground. The rest of us weeded (Cape Ivy in particular), planted and moved plants to fit in with the design of the nature walk.

Another twenty or so posts will go in over time as we supplement plantings to show a good example of each species.

Notes on each of the labelled plants are being prepared and will be available on our web site and in hard copy. They will explain the characteristics of each plant, its past uses by the Aborigines and early white settlers, and how the plant can be used, managed and maintained in a garden setting. We also plan an activity sheet to be used by schools and interested groups.

The signs, with their rubberised, computer-generated lettering sealed with polyurethane, were designed by Kylie Robertson. Kylie's special interest is working with schools, encouraging their awareness and involvement in the environment. Previously with Naturelinks, she and her husband Travis have formed a new business 'Seeds Bushland Restoration and Environmental Education'.



And Liz produced this for morning tea at the May working bee:

Cullen's Magimix Orange Cake – moist and easy!

Chop: 1 whole orange, skin and all, to a pulp in the blender. Choose a sweet, juicy orange.

Add: 3 eggs
2 cups sifted self-raising flour
8 ozs/250gms softened butter or margarine
1 cup sugar

Mix/blend for approx 20 secs.
Grease and line the base of a round cake tin. Put in the mixture, cook approx 1 hour at 310°F / 150°C.
Dust top with icing sugar before serving.

Managing the Catchment

Over the past year or so, the Shire has worked towards bringing together all groups with an interest in or responsibility for the Balcombe Creek catchment. The aim is to coordinate management of the whole catchment, in line with the Balcombe Creek Waterway Management Plan which has guided the Shire's management of the area since 2002.

On April 4th, a meeting brought together, for the first time, representatives from the Shire, Melbourne Water, South East Water, the Port Phillip and Western Port Catchment Management Authority, BERG, Rotary, the Mount Eliza Association for Environmental Care (MEAFEC), and the Railway Preservation Group. It is planned to repeat the exercise on an occasional basis and, if possible, to have EPA and VicRoads also attend.

The meeting discussed the ongoing management of the creek, grants, planting days and the like. Follow up will include smaller on-site meetings to address particular issues.

Waiting on grants

We are waiting to hear about three grant applications:

Under an *Envirofund Round 8* grant, we plan to rehabilitate the south bank from Augusta St bridge to Uralla bridge (below Balcombe Close and Uralla Rd). This will

involve removing woody weeds (notably Privet, Solanum pseudocapsicum, Boneseed, Wandering Jew) and planting where necessary to increase diversity and natural habitat.

Under the *Melbourne Water Community Grants, River Health Incentives Program*, we have applied for \$200 towards production of our newsletter and \$1500 for supplementary planting by the Greenfield Way Group along their section of Hopeton Creek (a major tributary of Balcombe Creek). The task, as always, will involve weeding. We hope help raise further local interest and involvement.

In December, we applied for a *GVEHO grant* towards our administrative costs. It is still with the minister!



NOTE: Special Planting Days

The Mornington Peninsula Shire has asked for BERG's assistance to help others protect Balcombe Creek further up-stream – a fair request as the health of our section of the creek depends on the good health of its upper reaches. Two special planting days are planned:

◆ Sunday July 23rd

Where? Serpentine Wetland Reserve, cnr Bentons and Benton Grange Rds, Mel 146 7/8 A/B

When? Any time between 9am to 3pm ***BBQ lunch provided**

Why? To plant out the prepared and mulched area at the end of the wetland and link it with the riparian vegetation along the creek.

◆ Sunday July 30th

National Tree Planting Day

Where? Mt Eliza Regional Park, Lakeside area off Two Bays Rd nr Moorooduc Hwy, Mel 105 K8

When? Any time between 9am to 3pm ***BBQ lunch provided**

Why? To plant lots of indigenous plants along and above the creek

BERG welcomes new members:

Barbara Thraves
Graham & Judy Hubbard

Diary Dates

BERG Working Bees

All welcome!

Meet at the Rotunda BBQ (Mel: 144 K11) on:

❖ **3rd Sunday** of every month, from 9.00 to 12.00.

Coffee and BERG-baked delicacies at 10.30. If you're running late, phone Liz's mobile (0408 388 430) to find where we are working. Next working bees

SUNDAY 18TH JUNE and **SUNDAY 16TH AUGUST**.

❖ **Tuesdays** from 9.30 to 12.00. Coffee break at 10.30.

Bring gloves – other equipment provided.

All queries to Mary Stemp on 5974 3996.

Waterwatch testing: Tuesday February 21st 2006 (every 3 months, third Tuesday of the month)

Meetings

BERG Committee meets every 6 weeks at Mt Martha House, Saturdays 9.30. Next meeting Saturday 8th July. All members welcome.

SPIFFA (Southern Peninsula Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association) meets 1st Monday of the month, 7.30 pm, at Parks Vic, Hinton Street, Rosebud (Mel 170 C4). Contact Jan Dwyer, 5986 6566.

Friends of Harrap Creek field days 4th Sunday of the month, 9.30. Contact Mary Stemp on 5974 3996.

Fairbairn Bushland Reserve Friends Group working bees, 2nd Sunday of the month, every two months (even months) – contact John Stoker 5974 472

Membership Application

I wish to become a family/individual member of BERG and enclose cash/a cheque payable to BERG for:

Joining fee \$1	\$
Individual subscription (per year) \$4	\$
Family subscription (per year) \$5	\$
Donation (tax deductible over \$2)	\$
Total	\$

Please send to:

Membership Secretary
BERG, PO Box 433
Mount Martha 3934

Name

Address.....

Phone..... Fax

Mobile..... Email

THE CREEK
Print Post Approved pp339493/00001
If undelivered, please return to:
BERG, PO Box 433
Mount Martha 3934

**SURFACE
MAIL**

**POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA**

THE CREEK

Newsletter of BERG, the

*B*alcombe Estuary Rehabilitation Group Inc.
No A0034645Y
ABN 50 224 628 623

Volume 10 Issue 4

August 2006

Burning in the Bunyip!

Mary Stemp reports

IF YOU were to visit the Bunyip on a windless winter Tuesday morning when the ground is wet from a night shower or dew, you might find me waving a flaming wand over weeds with a roar that frightens the dogs and most of the people.

We are usually steaming Panic veldt grass (*Erbarta*), a fast-growing, shallow-rooted weed which grows and seeds year round.

Annual grasses like Quaking

grass also succumb to our steamer. Any burning tends to be incidental, of dry dead leaves and other ground litter – which is why I always wear heavy boots and have Isobel on stand-by with a shovel and water-pump.

“Why do we ‘burn?’” you may ask. The infestation of weedy grasses in general and *Erbarta* in particular is way beyond our capacity for hand-weeding. Burning also reduces the need to use chemical sprays for weed-control. And the deeper-rooted indigenous plants should survive any accidental singeing; some may even relish it. We often wonder if our burning actually stimulates the

growth of seeds long-buried in the ground in a similar way to the hot burn by Council.

“Does Council know you are using that thing?” one rather disapproving lady asked us. In fact, all our work for BERG is done with Council knowledge and support.

“Are you allowed?” the lady persisted. I personally have a permit to use the weed burner ‘for conservation purposes’ and must observe stringent conditions concerning air temperature, wind strength and the

wetness of the underbrush as well as carrying a shovel, water (we’ve had our best success with a weed-spray container with hose and pump) and a mobile phone.

“Could you use it in the large home garden/property?” The steamer, which runs off a gas bottle, is expensive and takes some getting used to. I don’t recommend it.

And I never burn on my own. Isobel acts as my safety officer. She tamps out spot fires with a shovel and sprays water on logs before they have time to burst into flame. Recently she said, “I’m not afraid of this thing any more! At least, not as much as I used to be!”



Mary and Isobel at work

PRESIDENT’S COLUMN

SOME time ago, I told you about changing over to “greenpower”, to contribute to reduced greenhouse gas emissions. Well, my last account tells me we saved 1.39 tonnes of gas emissions, at a cost to us of just \$1 per week.

At our last meeting, membership officer Angela presented an update of memberships and your most generous donations. We very much value your support. Your money goes towards our tools, newsletter, administration and the like.

Equally important is your help at our working bees. We welcome new friends at these most convivial occasions! The number of satisfied visitors to the area is testimony to our work..

We are delighted to welcome to our committee Tony O’Connor who, with a few friends, has been doing marvellous things at Century Drive, further up the creek..

BERG thanks Esso Australia

We are most grateful to Esso Australia for a generous grant to BERG that will enable us to install a series of bat roosting boxes for our tiny local bats. We spotted these boxes on a recent ABC New Inventors and the inventors, Stacey and Alan Franks from Queensland, have had great success with them. More later.

Till next time,

Keith Wilson, President

BERG Committee

President Keith Wilson
Vice President Harry Harris
Secretary Mary Stemp
Minutes Sec. Pam Hearn

Treasurer Richard Kirsner
Field Officer Liz Barraclough
Rotary Club Liaison Andy McGuigan
Newsletter Angela Kirsner

Waterwatch Jenny Selby
Schools Liaison Jan Oliver
Kotor Friends Margaret Caldwell
Greenfields Friends Hazel Athey

Address for correspondence: Hon Secretary, BERG Inc, PO Box 433, Mt Martha 3934.

Phone: 5974 3996

Website: <http://berg.org.au>

BERG is a member of Coast Action/Coastcare Program and Greening Australia Victoria

Snowgums that Left the Snow

The magazine 'Wild Life' was launched in 1938, edited by the well-known naturalist Crosbie Morrison. Around 1950 it became 'Wild Life and Outdoors' and this article, by Jean Galbraith, appeared in the September 1952 issue, a year or two before publication ceased.

RECENT reservation of a bushland sanctuary on Mt. Martha, by the Mornington (Vic.) Shire Council, has sent the thoughts of tree-lovers on far journeys.

As a rule, the eucalypts of Victoria (like those of other parts of Australia) know their places, and the mere sight of many species is enough to tell a botanist something of the soil, altitude, and other circumstances of the land where he sees them.

Thus, passing through strange country, he sees silver-leaf stringybark,

"Poor soil," he says to himself, absently.

He notes the heavy sickle leaves of apple box, and thinks immediately, "Agricultural land."

Then swamp gum (the Victorian one, *Eucalyptus ovata*); "Poor drainage," runs his thought.

Or he sees the smooth olive-green stems of *Eucalyptus regnans*, and he tells himself, "We've been climbing."

But one eucalypt plays tricks with him. It is one of the most characteristic of all, the snow gum of the mountain tops.

No climber will ever forget it – low spreading limbs, gnarled by winters of storm and snow, gleaming like a many-shaded pearl, heavy blue-green leaves, bunches of stout fruits with a bloom like grapes. Show any mountaineer a snowgum and his heart leaps. He is back in the years of his glory, the mountain ridges spread out below him, the mountain grasses at his feet, the mountain wild-flowers in bloom and round him, kindly, with spreading limbs, the snowgums.



Out of their context – snowgums on Mt. Martha, forming an odd natural "pocket" in a region where snow never falls.

No other trees are so characteristic of the heights as these; yet these, of all trees, will play games with him, appearing in ones and twos and unexpected groves in the lowlands, where no one would expect them.

"Snowgums! Down here!" says his incredulous mind; but there is no mistaking them. They are taller, less gnarled than on the inhospitable tops, but snowgums undoubtedly.

Perhaps the high places, the hard climbs, and the great rewards, are no longer for him now. Never mind. These snowgums bring him the echo of the old thrill. Perhaps they are not playing tricks after all – not mocking him, but rather friends come down to talk of the old days and the great climbs.

And he sits and thinks of the things they know,

He and the forest alone together ...

All the things they have seen,

All the things they have heard ...

There are one or two on the roadside at Morwell – how long will they survive? There used to be some at Longford; are they there still? A few still grow at Providence Ponds, and land there is to be reserved; a few on Australian Paper Manufacturers' land at Tyers, where the company is preserving them; a group on the Nepean

Highway at Mordialloc, where future development may threaten them.

But whatever befalls the other group near Melbourne, those who can no longer climb to the heights and solitudes of the snow may see snowgums at Mt. Martha – thanks to the foresight of the Mornington Shire Council. Mountain lovers especially, but all lovers of nature, all who love trees, must think of the Mornington Council with gratitude.

Near the top of the hill is the site of the sanctuary. There are some other trees there – species one would expect to find – but the snowgums give the place its distinction. It is unspoiled by picnickers; it has not been invaded by weeds. The little flowers still grow there; not the alpine flowers which are company for the snowgums in the Alps, but the little people of the open bushland. A rare form of the spotted sun-orchid blooms there, opening mauve flowers on blue days. Sweet hounds-tongue lifts racemes of white flowerets with a fragrance that reaches up to you, sweet and strong.

Dianella, the "little Diana" of the woods, has blue berries following its scattered blue-and-gold flowers; *Glycine* festoons the bushes like a tiny Wisteria with inch-long racemes, and you may find the apple-berry with yellow-green bells and berries like fat little green sausages. Here, too, are blue pincushions, and grassland lilies, yellow autumn-lilies and white honey-scented milkmaids.

These, and the snowgums, wide spreading, heavy of leaf, make this bushland sanctuary a place to be thankful for. We, who know the wild-flowers, know how fast they are disappearing, and how incalculable already are the losses. Let us be thankful for what has been preserved. These snowgums at least are safe; all honor to the councillors of Mornington, and to those who are saving the trees at Providence Ponds and at Tyers in the Latrobe Valley. Would there were more like them!

FIELD NEWS

Field Officer Liz Barraclough reports

NUMBERS were down for the June and July Sunday working-bees, maybe because of the weather. The half dozen who were there simply had to eat far too much morning-tea and resume work at a much slower pace! Despite the low numbers, in June we followed up woody weeding along the boardwalk between La Trobe St and the cricket nets and planted about 50 indigenous shrubs; and in July, planted out another 200 plants in the campground area, from the carpark to the old toilet block.

At our **August working bee** we will be helping the Century Drive Group with more planting. Meet at the usual place and we will then proceed to Century Drive. BBQ lunch provided.

Successful Grants

- ◆ We have received three separate *Melbourne Water Grants*: \$200 for the newsletter, \$1500 for revegetation by Hazel Athey's Greenfield Way Group, and \$2000 for planting by Tony O'Connor's Century Drive Group. We understand that Melbourne Water will now support weeding (so often excluded from grants), so we shall apply for this under their September round of grants.
- ◆ \$1800 under *Grants to Voluntary Environmental and Heritage Groups (GEVHO)* will fund office materials, administration and training (see below), and free up your donations for other things.
- ◆ Round 2 of the *Australian Government Community Water Grant* will be opening in July. we shall again apply and hope to be more successful this time round.

Envirokits

At last we have all the information collated for the Envirokits and they are ready to go! We shall distribute them to the immediate neighbours of the Reserve but they are available to anyone who is interested. Please contact us if you would like one.

Bees in nesting boxes

Our friendly bee-lady, Bron A'Beckett, took away one swarm from the camp ground area, and will remove the second when she returns from holiday. We hope they prefer her hospitality to ours, and that our nesting boxes can provide a home for whom they are intended!

Students at work

Mt Eliza Secondary College students will again be coming to help us mulch, plant, clean up rubbish and weed, as part of their social service program. We welcome any members interested in joining us between 9.30 am – 2.30pm on Wednesday 30th Aug, 6th Sept, 22nd Nov, 29th Nov and 6th Dec.

Greening Australia Training Day

Gidja Walker will be running what promises to be a fascinating day on Coastal Restoration (estuaries, EVCs, swamp scrub, Banksia woodlands etc), and using Chinamans Creek, Rosebud and Balcombe Creek as examples. The day will start at Rosebud and a bus will be available for transport to Mt Martha. If BERG members would like to attend, register directly with Greening Australia (Rebecca Passlow 9450 5321 or rpasslow@gavic.org.au) or let me know and I can make a group booking. It normally costs \$60 but our GVEHO grant allows us to pay for some training days for members. Therefore it will be free!

If you hear of a course or training that might be relevant and you would like to attend, don't hesitate to contact us to help with funding.

AGM ADVANCE NOTICE

**Saturday 21 October,
9.30 am**

Mount Martha Community House

with **Jeff Weir,**

Executive Director of the Dolphin Research Institute, marine biologist and award-winning underwater photographer.

Kotor Friends

Margaret Caldwell reports

IF YOU have walked down Kotor Hill recently you will have noticed lots of new planting and mulching.

This is the work of the Kotor Hill Friends, a subgroup of BERG formed in mid 2005 by neighbours wishing to re-establish and revegetate the area below Kotor Close, adjoining Seppelt Avenue and above the Ferrero ovals.



Kotor Friends and dog at work

The Kotor Close subdivision is land originally owned by the Zwar family and sold in early 2000. All but one of the blocks have been built on. The walkway through Kotor Close to the Hill and ovals is much used by the community to access the Boardwalk.

The group started in June 2005 with a meeting between neighbours, BERG members, and Simon Thorning, Shire Conservation Officer. Simon drew up a revegetation plan, and input was discussed and welcomed by adjoining property owners. Our first working bee was in July 2005, and we are holding about four a year. It is wonderful to see families with their children weeding, mulching and planting.

Stage 1 was the planting of five metre wide mulched bed with mixed indigenous understory species with scattered Manna Gums. Under Liz Barraclough's expert tutelage, we are learning lots about weeding and the best indigenous plants for our conditions.

There are constant comments about the success of our project – not only environmentally, but also in the growth of our neighbourhood community.

Diary Dates

BERG Working Bees

All welcome!

Meet at the Rotunda BBQ (Mel: 144 K11) on:

❖ **3rd Sunday** of every month, from 9.00 to 12.00.

Coffee and BERG-baked delicacies at 10.30. If you're running late, phone Liz's mobile (0408 388 430) to find where we are working. Next working bees

SUNDAY 20TH AUGUST and **SUNDAY 17TH SEPTEMBER**.

❖ **Tuesdays** from 9.30 to 12.00. Coffee break at 10.30.

Bring gloves – other equipment provided.

All queries to Mary Stemp on 5974 3996.

Waterwatch testing: Tuesday 22st August 2006 (every 3 months, third Tuesday of the month)

Meetings

BERG Committee meets every 6 weeks at Mt Martha House, Saturdays 9.30. Next meetings on Saturday 19th August and Saturday 30th September.

All members welcome.

SPIFFA (Southern Peninsula Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association) meets 1st Monday of the month, 7.30 pm, at Parks Vic, Hinton Street, Rosebud (Mel 170 C4). Contact Jan Dwyer, 5986 6566.

Friends of Harrap Creek field days 4th Sunday of the month, 9.30. Contact Mary Stemp on 5974 3996.

Fairbairn Bushland Reserve Friends Group working bees, 2nd Sunday of the month, every two months (even months) – contact John Stoker 5974 472

Membership Application

I wish to become a family/individual member of BERG and enclose cash/a cheque payable to BERG for:

Joining fee \$1	\$
Individual subscription (per year) \$4	\$
Family subscription (per year) \$5	\$
Donation (tax deductible over \$2)	\$
Total	\$

Please send to:

Membership Secretary
BERG, PO Box 433
Mount Martha 3934

Name

Address.....

Phone..... Fax

Mobile..... Email

THE CREEK
Print Post Approved pp339493/00001
If undelivered, please return to:
BERG, PO Box 433
Mount Martha 3934

**SURFACE
MAIL**

**POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA**

THE CREEK

Newsletter of BERG, the



No A0034645Y
ABN 50 224 628 623

Volume 10 Issue 5

October 2006

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Some weeks ago the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council ran a series of public meetings entitled "Your Community – Your Future". One of the speakers, Council's Sustainable Energy Fund Officer, Rolf Freeman, presented the following facts.

Victoria is currently Australia's worst, per capita, greenhouse polluter. The vast majority of our electricity is generated from brown coal, and this accounts for more than half of the State's greenhouse gas emissions.

The CSIRO projects that:

- ❖ Victoria's alpine areas may have 18-60% less snow cover by 2020;
- ❖ with a 2° temperature rise, flows in the Murray Darling Basin may decrease by 12-25%, and Melbourne's water supply may decrease by 7-35%.

One third of Victoria's energy is used in the home, accounting for 36% of the State's greenhouse emissions from energy. With little effort, we can all help to lessen the problem and, at the same time, save ourselves dollars. For example

- ❖ Reduce your power usage by about 10% by turning appliances off at the power point.
- ❖ In winter, keep heat in by closing doors, windows and curtains. Lower your heater thermostat by 1°, put on a jumper, and save up to 15%.

The Tenth BERG Annual General Meeting

will be held on

Saturday 21 October

at Mt Martha Community House.
Registration, tea and coffee at 9.30,
Meeting starts at 10.00 am,
followed by

Guest Speaker Jeff Weir,

Executive Director of the Dolphin Research Institute, marine biologist and award-winning underwater photographer.

Agenda

- Welcome and apologies
- Minutes of Ninth AGM
- Committee reports:
President: Keith Wilson
Treasurer: Richard Kirsner
Field Officer: Liz Barraclough
- Election: President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary, and 6 ordinary committee members.
- Appointment of Auditor

Nominations for Office Bearers and Committee:

Forms may be obtained from Mary Stemp, phone 5974 3996. All nominations must be in writing, signed by at least 2 members, accompanied by the written consent of the candidate, and delivered to the Secretary by 14 October 2006.

- ❖ Refrigerators use the most electricity of any household appliance, with an annual average cost of \$140. Save money by setting temperature 3° to 5°, the freezer -18° to -15°; make sure

door seals fight tightly, and there is good air circulation around sides and back of the unit.

❖ Average annual household cost for lighting is about \$100. Turn off lights when they are not needed, replace standard globes with energy-efficient ones, and use the lowest wattage globes needed.

And consider changing to Green Power by talking to your gas or electricity supplier.

Bat boxes – thanks to Esso

As mentioned in the August issue of *The Creek*, we have received a generous grant from Esso Australia which has funded sixteen roosting boxes for our tiny, indigenous, insect-eating bats. The boxes are now in place in the estuary area between the rotunda and the start of the boardwalk. Mary Stemp is working on some signage that will graphically tell the story of these marvellous creatures. Our thanks again to Esso Australia for this very tangible support of our work.

Autobiography of an old salt

BERG's founding president Richard Hawkins now lives in Benalla, but as ever, is not allowing that further step into retirement to slow him down. Word is that Richard's autobiography, *The Old Tin Trunk*, has hit the bookshops – it is available at Farrells in Mornington. Well done Richard!

Keith Wilson, President

BERG Committee

President Keith Wilson
Vice President Harry Harris
Secretary Mary Stemp
Minutes Sec. Pam Hearn

Treasurer Richard Kirsner
Field Officer Liz Barraclough
Rotary Club Liaison Andy McGuigan
Newsletter Angela Kirsner
Waterwatch Jenny Selby

Schools Liaison Jan Oliver
Kotor Friends Margaret Caldwell
Greenfields Friends Hazel Athey
Century Drive Group Tony O'Connor

Address for correspondence: Hon Secretary, BERG Inc, PO Box 433, Mt Martha 3934.

Phone: 5974 3996

Website: <http://berg.org.au>

BERG is a member of Coast Action/Coastcare Program and Greening Australia Victoria

BLACK WATTLES



IF you have looked lately at the BERG's 'burn patch' – the acre or so that was subject to a controlled burn in March

2005 – you will have seen a veritable thicket of Black Wattle, *Acacia mearnsii*. This fast-growing tree is a 'pioneer' species, one of the first to return after fire or other disturbance, where it helps to bind the erosion-prone soil and provides shelter to slower growing plants.

Black wattles occur naturally in a wide range of climates and habitats, including grasslands, riparian zones, urban areas and watercourses from near Sydney to Tasmania, and from sea level to up to – occasionally – about 1000 m. Typically it reaches about 6-10 m but may grow to 20 m.

From top to toe, the tree is important in the ecological cycle. As a legume, it has root nodules of rhizobia bacteria that fix nitrogen from the air and return it to the soil, where it is then available for up-take by other woodland plants. The roots also have a symbiotic relationship with mycorrhizal fungi, which attach to them and produce 'truffles' that are relished by marsupials such as betongs, bandicoots and potoroos. Digging for the fungi creates micro-sites on the soil surface for difficult-to-germinate species, while spores from the fungi are spread in the marsupials' droppings.

Ghost Swift Moths pupate in the root area and can often be recognised by the presence of a parasitic fungus, one of the cordyceps species, at the base of the tree. The larvae (like Witchety Grubs) that survive the fungus bore into the trunk, and Yellow-tail Black Cockatoos shred the bark and rip off small branches to find this tasty food.

The cracks and crevices in the bark are inhabited by tiny bats, insects, spiders and other invertebrates,

which provide food for Treecreepers or bark-gleaners such as Thornbills. Possums, bats, parrots, owls and Sugar Gliders roost and nest in crevices, and the Sugar Gliders bleed the tree for its sap – look out for their scratches on the trunks of these trees.

Glands in the leaf axials produce protein-rich nectar, much appreciated in winter by insects, birds and marsupials which, in return, predate on scarab beetles and pasture pests that cause die-back. The abundant pollen in the sweetly scented, creamy-yellow flowers, which appear in November, attract a range of birds, including Wattle Birds, Yellow Throated Honeyeaters and the New Holland Honey Eaters.

Ants are attracted by oil in the seed stalk, and they harvest the seeds and store them underground in their nests – perfectly placed for germination. Some of the seeds, however, provide a liquid meal to an insect that pierces the seed coat with its proboscis and sucks out the embryo.

Aborigines ground the seeds to a flour rich in polysaccharides and protein, which they made into flat bread. They collected the sap to eat, or dissolved it in water with a bit of sweet wattle nectar and a few formic ants for a lemony drink. Or mixed with wood ash or burnt mussel shells, it formed a 'cement' that was used to plug holes in utensils and canoes. The bark, soaked and heated a wooden waddie, yielded antiseptics for treating cuts and aching joints; or infused in hot water, a remedy for indigestion. Or it could be turned into lengths of coarse string for baskets and to bind the heads onto spear shafts. The branches were used in building lean-tos or half-dome huts, which were covered with bark sheaths or coarse foliage.

For the early colonists, Black Wattle bark was an important source of tannins, which were used for tanning and, more recently, plywood and particle board adhesives and antiseptics. The timber supplied the framework for



'wattle and daub' huts, as well as being used for furniture and craft work. Its white ash helped to whiten sheets and remove dark stains, or as a basis for soap, when mixed with water and animal fat and scented with herbal extracts or lavender oil.

As a source of high quality tannin, paper pulp and fast-growing timber, the Black Wattle has been exported to countries in Africa, South America and Europe, where it is frequently a plantation tree. But there is a down side – outside its native habitat, it is an invasive plant that has become a major environmental weed in some areas, notably South Africa. Indeed, with its similar climate, South Africa has many Australian environmental weeds, just as we have many from South Africa – Boneseed and Polygala are two prominent examples on the Mornington Peninsula.

Locally, however, we treasure the generous, versatile and useful Black Wattle.

Line drawing by Marion Simmons, from <http://www.worldwidewattle.com/speciesgallery/mearnsii.php?id=17958>

Recipes for the Workers!

Another of Liz's working bee morning tea recipes:

Easy Muffins

Mix in magimix/blender:

2 cups SR flour

1 cup soft brown sugar

3ozs/90gms butter

Stir in:

1 cup milk

1 cup blueberries or any fruit eg apple and cinnamon

Grease muffin tins, spoon in mixture and at 350° F/180° C for about 20 – 30mins.

Makes approximately 18

FIELD NEWS

Boy, is it dry! Not the best conditions for planting, but we have ordered a couple of thousand plants plus, so there are few other options. In a normal year, our plant survival rate is around 95% – water them in well once, and if they planted in the right place at the right time (late winter to early spring) they'll be OK. I'm not so confident this year. Nature seems intent on blowing away the few drops of rain we have had!

Working bees

Nevertheless, we've had some great planting days.

At the August working-bee, the usual BERG crew joined a large and enthusiastic group (including lots of children) from the **Century Drive Habitat Link Group** (a subgroup of BERG) to plant over 1000 plants. It was part of an Envirofund grant ('Linking Remnants along Balcombe Creek') to revegetate the area around the retention basin off Century Drive. Thanks to Tony O'Connor for all the local organisation and to Simon Thorning for the planning, plants and BBQ, which amply rewarded all the hungry participants.

The September working-bee with the **Greenfield Way / Hopeton Creek Group** was equally successful, with a number of neighbouring families joining in to plant over 250 plants along the

riparian strip. The woody weeds, especially the Pittosporum, are being selectively and gradually removed, so as not to cause sudden major disturbance, open the area to an influx of new weed species and upset the dense habitat for indigenous wildlife in the area.

Again we owe the great turn-up and enjoyment of this morning to the enthusiastic and determined efforts of Hazel Athey.

And many of the impressive list of new members in this newsletter are from the Century Drive or Greenfields Way groups.

Over the last few months, led by Margaret Caldwell, the **Kotor Hill Group** has also been quietly busy, enriching and adding to their planting on the hillside, down the pathways and along their section of Hopeton Creek. Weeds have been sprayed and so far 300–400 plants have gone in.

Mary's **Bunyip Group** can still be seen every Tuesday morning burning, spraying, hand weeding and planting. 'The Bunyip Trio' (Mary, Isobel and Gwen) are responsible for the terrific example of diversity in this area.

Grants update

On Sunday 6th August three government **Envirofund** officers (one all the way from Canberra) visited to assess and inspect a number of our recipient envirofund sites. I walked them, at a reasonable pace, for two hours through the reserve and though a little tired at the end of it, they seemed pretty happy and impressed with our work.

We have just applied for Round 2 of the **Community Water Grant** to study the siltation and ecology of the estuary and to do appropriate plantings of wetland species (eg Seagrass) and associated riparian vegetation. A major aim is to filter and improve the quality of the water from the Henley St stormwater outlet. There would be input from the Shire, Melbourne Water and Deakin University. We hope to hear by the New Year.

Weedbuster Week

The theme for Weedbuster Week (7th–15th Oct) 2006 in Victoria is: *Fighting the Weed Menace: Communities Combating Weeds.*

BERG activities are:

- ❖ woody weed removal at our usual working-bee on the 3rd Sunday of the month (15th Oct)
- ❖ a weed information stand on Saturday 14th October, together with the Sunshine Reserve Conservation & Fireguard Group, outside the Mt Martha supermarket. We will display buckets of our best and fairest weeds with experts to explain their menace and methods for their control.

Rescheduled due to rain

Yes, it does rain sometimes! Rain forced the postponement of the Greening Australia Training Day with Gidja Walker. The new date is Tuesday 14th November, when Gidja will be running a Coastal EVC Restoration field day at the estuaries of Chinaman's Creek (Rosebud) and Balcombe Creek. The day will start at 10 am at Balcombe Estuary and a bus will be available for transport to Chinamans Creek. Register directly with Greening Aust (Rebecca Passlow, rpasslow@gavic.org.au or 9450 5321) or let me know and I can send off a group booking. It normally costs \$60 but our GVEHO grant allows us to pay for some training days for members. So it will be free!

Liz Barraclough, Field Officer

BERG congratulates

Gill Gordon, the driving force behind the Sunshine Reserve Conservation and Fireguard Group. Gill, also a BERG member, won the Victorian section of the **Keep Australia Beautiful Dame Phyllis Frost Outstanding Achievement Award 2006** for her outstanding work on the Sunshine Reserve.

And profound apologies from the Editor, who simply forgot to include this splendid news in the August newsletter!

BERG welcomes new members:

Margaret Paton
Sue Hall
Elly & Elliot Arnup
Jean & Zona Severn
Cate & Stuart McElroy
Sharon & Bram Koning
Wayne & Jenny Jenkins
Scott & Deborah Wilson
Merv & Jill George
Ann Johnston
Geoff, Nicole, Charlotte & Emily Lawyer
The Lewis family
Kevin Bourke

Diary Dates

BERG Working Bees

All welcome!

Meet at the Rotunda BBQ (Mel: 144 K11) on:

❖ **3rd Sunday** of every month, from 9.00 to 12.00.

Coffee and BERG-baked delicacies at 10.30. If you're running late, phone Liz's mobile (0408 388 430) to find where we are working. Next working bees

SUNDAY 15TH OCTOBER and **SUNDAY 19TH NOVEMBER**.

❖ **Tuesdays** from 9.30 to 12.00. Coffee break at 10.30.

Bring gloves – other equipment provided.

All queries to Mary Stemp on 5974 3996.

Waterwatch testing: Tuesday 21st November 2006 (every 3 months, third Tuesday of the month)

❖ **BERG Committee** meets every 6 weeks at Mt Martha House, Saturdays 9.30. Next meetings on Saturday 11th November and Saturday 16th December. All members welcome.

❖ **SPIFFA** (Southern Peninsula Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association) meets 1st Monday of the month, 7.30 pm, at Parks Vic, Hinton Street, Rosebud (Mel 170 C4). Contact Jan Dwyer on 5986 6566.

❖ **Friends of Harrap Creek** field days 4th Sunday of the month, 9.30. Contact Mary Stemp on 5974 3996.

❖ **Fairbairn Bushland Reserve Friends Group** working bees: 10 am, Sunday October 8th, November 12th 2006, March 11th, June 10th 2007 – meet at top of Margeurita Ave. Contact John Stoker on 5974 4726.

Membership Application

I wish to become a family/individual member of BERG and enclose cash/a cheque payable to BERG for:

Please send to:
Membership Secretary
BERG, PO Box 433
Mount Martha 3934

Joining fee \$1	\$
Individual subscription (per year) \$4	\$
Family subscription (per year) \$5	\$
Donation (tax deductible over \$2)	\$
Total	\$

Name

Address.....

Phone..... Fax

Mobile..... Email

THE CREEK
Print Post Approved pp339493/00001
If undelivered, please return to:
BERG, PO Box 433
Mount Martha 3934

**SURFACE
MAIL**

**POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA**

THE CREEK

Newsletter of BERG, the



No A0034645Y
ABN 50 224 628 623

Volume 10 Issue 6

December 2006

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Extracts from the President's report to the recent BERG AGM:

We now have nearly 300 members supporting us in many ways. Thank you all, and know that your contribution helps in buying equipment and publicity material, and with the newsletter – complementing and extending the money we get from grants.

Thanks also to the instrumentalities that have

provided us with grants over the past year: Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, Environfund – Natural Heritage Trust, Melbourne Water, and Esso Australia Pty Ltd.

One supporter who has contributed greatly since BERG started is our auditor, Jim Thomas, whose unseen work continues to keep us on financial track.

A very pleasing development is the establishment of auxiliary groups along the creek: Kotor Hill, Greenfield Way, and further

upstream, Century Drive. The ultimate would be to have groups working over the entire length of the creek. The Harrap Creek, Fairbairn Reserve, and Sunshine Reserve groups also continue their excellent work.

Finally, to my hard-working committee, your dedication and excellence in all we do assures our success.

And to all, a very merry Christmas and a safe and happy New Year.

Keith Wilson, President

VICTORIA'S MARINE TREASURES

Guest speaker at BERG's AGM was Jeff Weir, Executive Director of the Dolphin Research Institute, at Hastings. This article is based on his talk.

We have, in Port Phillip Bay and along Victoria's coast line, a series of marine ecosystems that are of global significance. The large majority of species here are found nowhere else in the world. This is because, for millennia, ocean currents from the north have bypassed the continent's southern coastline.

Take our dolphins. Port Phillip Bay is home to about 80 to 100



bottle-nosed dolphins, which are genetically isolated and possibly a separate species.

In the shallows near the old Quarantine Station they herd fish up against the sandbank or just enjoy scratching their tummies. Further out, they may bang on the water to surround a shoal of fish then take turns to zoom through and eat. They bow-ride the big ferries – Jeff told of one bow rider who caught a squid and as he shook and flicked it about, people on the front of the ferry were sprayed with squid ink!

Each year between six and twelve wrinkled calves are born – the “foetal folds” in their skin take about eight weeks to smooth out. They stay close by the mother, travelling in her slip stream. Leaping is something they have to learn – you may see them practising, trying hard to stay the right way up!



The Dolphin Research Institute has been studying the population in southern Port Phillip since the early 1990s. It's one of the longest running studies of its type in the world, and is currently being expanded to cover Western Port and the Gippsland Lakes. To build up a picture of the dolphins' behaviour, the researchers painstakingly analyse thousands of photos, identifying each dolphin by its unique fin shape. Computers have not yet bettered the human eye in doing this, though a project with Monash University aims to change this.

BERG Committee

President Keith Wilson
Vice President Harry Harris
Secretary Mary Stemp
Minutes Sec. Pam Hearn

Treasurer Richard Kirsner
Field Officer Liz Barraclough
Rotary Club Liaison Andy McGuigan
Newsletter Angela Kirsner

Schools Liaison Jenny Selby
Century Dve Friends Tony O'Connor
Kotor Friends Margaret Caldwell
Greenfields Friends Hazel Athey

Address for correspondence: Hon Secretary, BERG Inc, PO Box 433, Mt Martha 3934.

Phone: 5974 3996

Website: <http://berg.org.au>

BERG is a member of Coast Action/Coastcare Program and Greening Australia Victoria

Humans, particularly ecotourism, are the main threat to the Port Phillip dolphins (other human impacts include pollution, introduced species, coastal development, overfishing and aquaculture). The Institute, however, has worked with the State Government and industry representatives since the early 1990s and Victoria now has one of the best systems in the world to regulate dolphin tourism and ensure it is sustainable for both dolphins and tourists.

But the dolphins are only one aspect of the Port Phillip's riches. The Bay is home, for example, to the awesome Blue Devilfish, which lives in underwater caves off Portsea; a brilliant blue and yellow sea slug called Verco's Nudibranch; Feather Duster Tube Worms; and Victoria's underwater faunal emblem, the Weedy Sea Dragon. Bright orange colonies of Bryozoans – tiny, box-like creatures with tentacles – suck plankton and oxygen from the water, and brilliant yellow Zoanthids line sea caves at the Heads. Delicate Sea Spiders about the size of a five cent piece feed on amongst the rich life on rocks and piers – and Monash University scientists are regularly finding entirely new species of these spiders. Killer whales have recently been seen off Dromana and, amazingly, a young hump-backed whale was seen feeding off Mornington in October.

Beyond, in Western Port are some of the most southerly stands of

mangroves. Seal populations, decimated by hunting at the end of the 1800s, have built up again and there are about 35,000 off Seal Rocks. And Victoria is also one of very few places in the world where blue whales – the biggest creature that has ever lived on the planet – can be seen as they come to feed



Blue devil fish

each summer. You can see them from Cape Otway, 30 to 50 km out to sea, and occasionally from Cape Schanck. They feed on the edge of the continental shelf, on zooplankton in the nutrient-rich water that up wells from about 3 km down.

Yet surveys by the Institute show that over 90% of Melburnians value Queensland's marine life over our own. This is a hurdle to gaining funding and resources for marine conservation in southern areas – even for dolphins.

The Institute set up the “i sea i care” Ambassador Project to address this perception issue. Established first in schools, the program is now being rolled out to business and community groups. The goal is to put Victoria's living marine treasures on the community's radar for the whole year, and to build the perception that what lives around our southern coasts is too precious to lose.

Through “i see i care”, the Institute has to date worked with young ambassadors in around 60 schools. Workshops, regular newsletter inserts and a range of other resources support these young ambassadors in bringing the “i see i care” message to their community. Ambassadors from 22 schools spent a day on the Australian Maritime College's FTV Bluefin fisheries research and training vessel in southern Port Phillip –

and saw killer whales feeding inside the Heads, something Jeff had never seen before!

In its research, the Institute focuses largely on dolphins. As the top of the food chain, they are a sensitive indicator of the health of the whole marine ecosystem, and the Institute's education and community involvement programs embrace the entire marine ecosystem. They are particularly concerned with catchment management and human impacts on land.

Wirake, the 19 metre inflatable whale, has been a great hit in schools in the Institute's “A Whale out of Water” program.

Currently, the Institute's education programs and publicity are reaching 40,000 people a month. The goal is over 200 schools and hundreds of thousands of people.

Importantly, Victoria now has a system of 13 marine national parks

and the 11 marine sanctuaries, about half of these within about 90 minutes drive of Melbourne. The system is unique in the world in that it is the first integrated series of parks, based on preserving and conserving the many different ecosystems around our coastline.

Jeff drew attention, however, to the concerning fall in levels of concern over the environment, particularly among young people. Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show that, from the early 90s to 2004, the percentage of 18 to 24-year-olds showing concern about the environment dropped from 80% to 57%. The considerable progress in the last 20 years has depended on those of us who grew up in the 60s and the 70s and are now in positions of influence. Maintaining this level of activity and interest is one of the greatest challenges now facing us.

To learn more about the Dolphin Research Institute, visit its excellent website at www.dolphinresearch.org.au.



Zoanthid



Pycnogonid – Sea Spider

FIELD NEWS

From the Field Officer

It will be a most interesting six months ahead to monitor the effect of this amazing dry on the Reserve and surrounding areas, including our gardens. How will naturally established indigenous plants cope compared with ones we have planted? What will be the effect of planting at different times and in different places? And what will be the effect on the estuary and creek – the water levels, flows and quality?

Perhaps it's a year to enjoy a long hot summer in the water and smothered in sunburn cream!!

The last two working bees have tackled weeding. In October – Weedbuster month – we worked along the firetrack below the Bunyip to pull Polygala, Pittosporum and Boneseed seedlings. In November it was great to be joined by some younger members to tackle a large and entrenched patch of Polygala, Boneseed and Italian Buckthorn below the track just before the boardwalk. We have now almost entirely cleared woody weeds from the area below the kindergarten, bowling green and control burn site, right through to the estuary.

I hope everyone has a terrific Christmas and Happy New Year and thank you for all your help and support throughout the year. We hope to see you fit and well and raring to go in 2007.

Liz Barraclough

Jottings from the Bunyip

We were sitting in Daly's Dell when a young woman on the top path stopped and pointed out that there is a possum's nest up in the Tea Tree with two young – we could see their heads poking out. It's been there for some time, but we'd been so busy attacking weeds that we hadn't noticed it.

She also told us she'd recently seen an echidna near the entrance

to the boardwalk, below the Bunyip area. We then spotted four 'diggings', which could be attributed to the echidna, along the Bunyip path.

Mary Stemp

BERG is keen to record keep track of echidna sightings. If you see an echidna, let Mary know, on 5974 3996 or mstemp@iprimus.com.au.

Working safely

Recently I attended an Occupational Health and Safety training for volunteers run by Denis Cox of Coast Action / Coast Care, and have emerged as BERG's OH&S Officer (I guess it's a step up from tea lady!). The purpose is to make us aware of any risks in the work we're doing and take steps to minimise these risks.

When working in scrub, sharp twigs can cause damage to eyes or legs. BERG's committee has approved the purchase of safety goggles and leggings, and we need to ensure that our First Aid Kit is always on site.

Leggings also provide protection from snakes, which I understand have been seen in the Reserve. Expert advice tells us, however, that snakes will not attack humans if we leave them alone. If you encounter a snake, keep still and let it go its own way – snake bites are very often incurred by someone trying to kill a snake.

Insect and spider bites are a risk. Heavy gloves are the answer, and are also important when dabbing herbicide on cut stems of woody weeds. (We require a licence to use a herbicide stronger than Roundup, but even that can be absorbed into the skin.)

To use the weed burner, we require a license from Council, which stipulates stringent conditions including air temperature, and carrying water and a spade. When using it, two of us always work together.

Mary Stemp

Century-Drive Habitat-Link Group



Our Group has been in action most Saturday mornings, but in 2007 we plan to schedule one morning per month. We've achieved a lot:

- Our street plantings are almost finished and starting to grow and take shape.
- From Melbourne Water, we received a \$2200 grant in July for creek plantings and maintenance, and have applied for a second to establish a wetland and landscaping in the Century Drive retarding basin.
- Most Monday afternoons, Benton's Junior College students help us enthusiastically with plantings, nature surveys and lots of good ideas for our "wish list". These include a playground and equipment, landscaping ideas like duck-boxes for the proposed new wetland, nature trails, signs and monuments.
- We are investigating possibilities for a walking and bicycle trail (The Balcombe-Beach Trail) from Century Drive through to the Mt Martha Beach. Stage 1 would be a Century Drive Loop, from the retarding basin along creek to the concrete footpath joining back onto the south end of Century Drive.

With lots of enthusiasm at our end of the Creek, especially with the input of the school, we're looking forward to getting into gear for 2007.

Tony O'Connor & Glyn Rowlands

BERG welcomes new members:

Emily & Tim Howes
Jane Lockie
Lynette Wilks
Marion Hawker
Deirdre & Steven Fitzgerald
Pat Long

Diary Dates

BERG Working Bees

All welcome!

Meet at the Rotunda BBQ (Mel: 144 K11) on:

❖ **3rd Sunday** of every month, from 9.00 to 12.00.

Coffee and BERG-baked delicacies at 10.30. If you're running late, phone Liz's mobile (0408 388 430) to find where we are working. Next working bee

SUNDAY 21ST JANUARY.

❖ **Tuesdays** from 9.30 to 12.00. Coffee break at 10.30.

Bring gloves – other equipment provided.

All queries to Mary Stemp on 5974 3996.

Waterwatch testing: Tuesday February 20th 2007 (every 3 months, third Tuesday of the month)

Meetings

BERG Committee meets every 6 weeks at Mt Martha House, Saturdays 9.30. Next meeting on Saturday 27th January. All members welcome.

SPIFFA (Southern Peninsula Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association) meets 1st Monday of the month, 7.30 pm, at Parks Vic, Hinton Street, Rosebud (Mel 170 C4). Contact Jan Dwyer on 5986 6566.

Friends of Harrap Creek field days 4th Sunday of the month, 9.30. Contact Mary Stemp on 5974 3996.

Fairbairn Bushland Reserve Friends Group working bees: 10 am, March 11th, June 10th 2007 – meet at top of Margeurita Ave. Contact John Stoker on 5974 4726.

Membership Application

I wish to become a family/individual member of BERG and enclose cash/a cheque payable to BERG for:

Joining fee \$1	\$
Individual subscription (per year) \$4	\$
Family subscription (per year) \$5	\$
Donation (tax deductible over \$2)	\$
Total	\$

Please send to:
Membership Secretary
BERG, PO Box 433
Mount Martha 3934

Name

Address.....

.....

Phone..... Fax

Mobile..... Email

THE CREEK
Print Post Approved pp339493/00001
If undelivered, please return to:
BERG, PO Box 433
Mount Martha 3934

**SURFACE
MAIL**

**POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA**