

THE CREEK

Volume 13 No1, February 2009

 **Alcombe Estuary Rehabilitation Group**
No A0034645Y ABN 50 224 628 623

THERE'S BUGS IN THE WATER!

John Inchley reports on Waterwatch

The BERG waterwatch team has been monitoring the health of the creek over a number of years. Our three-monthly physical and chemical data suggest that the conditions are suitable to sustain aquatic animal and plant life. Nearly all collected data fall within the given sustainability parameters.

We also survey macro-invertebrates every six months, to provide a more accurate picture of the creek's health. The list below shows the results of the December survey. (All freshwater 'bugs' are classified from 'highly sensitive' to 'very tolerant' of water conditions.)

Classification	'Bugs' found	Total
Very sensitive	eg Mayfly nymph (0)	0
Sensitive	Damselfly nymph (5) Dragonfly nymph (5) Freshwater shrimp (3) water mites (40)	53
Tolerant	Water boatman (2) Freshwater snails (20)	22
Very tolerant	mosquito larvae (2) Blood worms (3)	5
Grand total:		81

Based on these results, the condition of the creek is classified as 'Good', as may have been predicted from the physical and chemical data.

One of the remaining concerns is the stormwater and road run-off in rain events, causing silting of the creek.



Damselfly Nymph (top) and Freshwater Shrimp (below – up to 35 mm long)

NOTE: The next physical and chemical testing is Saturday 14th February, 9.00 am, at the Augusta St bridge.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

The special general meeting notified in the December newsletter was held on January 10th, and the two motions passed unanimously.

The motion first increased our very cheap membership fees from \$4 to \$5 for individuals and from \$6 to \$10 for families – a necessary rise to keep pace with costs, but still keeping fees low to encourage as wide a membership as possible. We continue to be delighted by the high proportion of members who send a donation (tax deductible!) with their membership renewal each year.

The second motion enables the Committee to co-opt up to four members for the year, in addition to the ten elected members, to make the most of available and

willing talent. Under this provision, we have coopted four people who continue to make a significant contribution to BERG's activities: **Harry Harris**, who retired as Vice President at the last AGM; **Hazel Athey** and **Tony O'Connor**, the moving forces behind the Hopetoun Creek Greenfield Group and the Century Drive Habitat Link Group, respectively; and **Michael Sanders**, a stalwart of working bees who has recently trained to become our accredited chain saw operator.

As I pen this, Barack Obama is just days away from his inauguration as the 44th President of the USA.

What, you may ask, has that got to do with BERG?

I think it has something to do with everyone. All of us will in

some way be touched by this momentous event. The first Afro-American to succeed to that office is in itself a magnificent achievement. He comes with apparent world-wide acclaim and goodwill. He comes at a time when the world is enmeshed in financial distress, seemingly intractable turmoil in the Middle East and elsewhere, climate change, and a host of problems that will demand every ounce of energy at his disposal. The responsibility on his shoulders is gigantic.

I suspect that if he can achieve a fraction of what the world is hoping for, history will stand and applaud.

Keith Wilson

BIRD RESCUE

By Pam Hearn and Andris Niedra

On return from a holiday in October, we were delighted to find a pair of Crimson Rosellas nesting in an excavated hollow in an old Staghorn fern in our back yard. There were six eggs initially. A couple of weeks later we found one on the ground, probably infertile, but five babies hatched.

A week later, icy winds and rain descended, and we found the hatchlings on the ground. We assumed the nesting chamber had become soaked and they had worked their way out. We put them back, but out they came again. So we took them inside, into warmth.

Initial advice suggested we put

them in another nest box in view of the parents, hoping they would return to their young. This was not successful, and 90 minutes later we brought them inside again.

Wildlife Victoria directed us to Michelle Thomas from Australian Wildlife Assistance Rescue and Education – AWARE – in Frankston. By 6.30pm, one of her carers had picked up the babies.

Michelle has been a co-ordinator and rehabilitator with AWARE for 18 years. She and her workers are all volunteers and, other than partial funding for animal housing, rely for ongoing expenses on donations or their own pockets.

The smallest of our babies did not make it, but on 28th December Michelle returned with four young



Crimson Rosellas to release them back in our garden. Soon, they were feeding independently, though we provided some back-up food and had three of them regularly visit us. They have slowly integrated into a local Crimson Rosella population and we are confident they will thrive.

For animal emergencies, contact Michelle at any time on 0412 433 727. The AWARE website is www.awarewildlife.org.au.

FIELD NEWS

Field Officer Liz Barraclough reports

Working bees

Despite the January heat and the competing holiday season, eight of us spent the morning giving the campground and Mirang Ave area a general clean-up and refurbishment. Thanks to a reported sighting and rescue of one of our directional signs from the wild sea at the north beach, we were able to repair and reinstate it in solid concrete at the end of the campground. We also scrubbed the charcoal graffiti from the rotunda walls, swept, tidied, then collected rubbish and weeded along the pathways, carpark and roadside.

Grants

Four grant applications for 2009 have been successful:

- “Caring for our Country” – \$17,360 to continue restoration of the Coast Banksia Woodland and foreshore vegetation from Bay Rd to just beyond the south carpark, with follow-up work north to Coolangatta Rd.

And three Melbourne Water Community Grants:

- \$14,505 to extend rehabilitation along the north and south banks of

the creek from the Uralla Rd bridge east towards the Nepean Hwy,

- \$500 towards up-dating and reprinting the BERG pamphlet,
- \$9,610 to continue work on the Hopetoun Creek wetland and riparian zone along Greenfield Way.

Balcombe Grammar on board

Mt Martha’s new school, Balcombe Grammar School, has approached us with a proposal to help BERG with its environmental projects as part of the school’s community service program. We look forward to this new liaison and the opportunity to involve more local students in our work.

Can you help?

We’d appreciated some extra hands to help us working with Balcombe Grammar students (yrs 5-8) in the reserve for 2-3 hours on some Wednesdays during terms 2 and 3 (teachers & parents will be there too).

Contact Liz on 0408 388 430.

Devilbend update

The Devilbend Draft Management Plan is available for public comment on the Parks Vic website, at <http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au/3devilbend.cfm>. Parks Victoria is keen to receive comment from

anyone interested in the future management and conservation of this unique environment.

Indigenous gardens in Mt Martha

BERG has long planned to make demonstration indigenous gardens to inspire local gardeners.

Recently we met with Simon Thorning (MPSC Natural Systems Team Leader), Councillor Anne Shaw and Greg Powell (MPSC roadside landscaping and maintenance team) to discuss making such gardens in public areas – at the Mt Martha shops, and on naturestrips and roadsides. Our aim is both to highlight the landscaping potential of indigenous plants, and to enhance and promote Mt Martha’s natural coastal character.

We plan to show-case various styles of indigenous landscape and plantings, both formal and informal – e.g wildflower meadow, drought-tolerant lawn, hedging, screening.

Would you like to be part of this project?

If you would like to plant your naturestrip with indigenous plants, the Shire and BERG would offer their help in design, labour and provision of plants

Contact Liz on 0408 388 430.

AN INDIGENOUS GARDEN AT MERRICKS



Merricks Beach Garden was open to the public in November 2008 as part of Australia's Open Garden Scheme. The

garden was created by Roban Cumming, of Peninsula Bushworks, and Richard Aarons. This article is taken from the Roban's notes for visitors and also draws on posters developed by Richard.

When we started in 2004, this two-acre block was the fenced corner of a paddock with cars sinking to the axles in winter, soils cracking in summer, and howling, salty winds. Once, it was part of a vast woodland that extended along the coast and to the hills inland.



The garden reconstructs the vegetation that grew here, as far as we can deduce, before European settlement. Apart from a pocket of herbs and vegetables by the house, the rest is indigenous.

The brief called for a sustainable, low maintenance landscape, with indigenous plants to provide shelter, shade and privacy and attract wildlife, whilst retaining views to the surrounding landscape. There was to be open space for recreation, with lawns and paths, a streamline pondage, and a vegetable garden. The work was to run alongside the building of the house and shed.

The block was wet and poorly drained, so we made a series of low mounds and shallow swales to redirect the water. We now have a

streamline that floods with rain, and shallow ponds that spring to life with frogs, hold water for a time, then drain away.

To minimise disturbance and compaction of the soil, after this initial excavation work all vehicles and machinery were kept off prepared areas. Any areas that had been compacted were deep-ripped before mulching.

The site had the full suite of grass and broad leaf weeds. We sprayed, followed-up with spot spraying, then wheel-barrowed 100 truckloads of mulch to blanket the ground.

A rabbit-proof boundary fence was essential. Dense plantings of tree canopy, understorey and ground cover along the fence line provide some barrier to weeds from the surrounding pastureland. The garden abuts the foreshore reserve and the plantings follow the natural progression inland from coastal vegetation to coastal woodland.

We planted grasses first in this windswept world – Kangaroo, Wallaby, Weeping, Plume, Reed-Bent, Love, Spear, Tussock, Mat Grasses. They provided protection for the next plantings, of shrub and tree seedlings – Peppermint, Messmate, Manna and Swamp Gums, Blackwood and Black Wattle, Drooping Sheoak, Coast Banksia and Boobialla. Soon we had our first shade. As protection grew, we added more herbs, groundcovers and wildflowers – Bidgee-Widgee, Kidney Weed, Violets, Running Postman, Vanilla Lilies.

We used no water to speak of, and no fertiliser.

The most altered landforms were the hardest to revegetate. In summer, the mounds cracked in deep chasms. We filled them with mulch and continued to put in new plant varieties to increase the diversity and find the best balance.

Gradually the fauna moved in – a wallaby, a blue-tongue lizard, a



copperhead snake, a tortoise in the 'stream', swamp rat runways in the grass and more birds with every visit. Blue wrens in the grass, a white-faced heron in the pond and a black shouldered kite above were early visitors.

A koala has settled in and rarely leaves the place. He has done the rounds of the eucalypts since the first, at about 1.5 metres, could hold his weight. It took these trees almost six months to grow past his severe prunings before he returned on another lap.

We now have a small forest and woodland track, secluded corners, lots of shade, and lots more flowers as plants mature. Little of the initial 10,000 square metres of bare mulch remains exposed.

Little maintenance is now needed, 4 or 5 hours a week of hand weeding and planting, with some pruning and infrequent grass cutting. The lawn is weeping grass and kidney weed.

The plants have all been propagated, under permit, from seed and cuttings collected over many years from remnant indigenous vegetation in this area, on roadsides, foreshores, bushland reserves and private properties. We have planted over 100 species so far, and some 15,000 individual plants. Our objective is to have as much as possible of the flora and fauna diversity self-propagating and self-maintaining



CAN YOU HELP?

**VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED FOR THE
SCHOOLS PROGRAM AT THE BRIARS,
DURING MORNINGTON PENINSULA
ENVIRONMENT WEEK
MARCH 16TH - 20TH**

Tasks ranging from helping students to pot seedlings or carry out waterwatch surveys, to cutting up fruit for fruit tasting or preparing lunch for volunteers.

Any help appreciated -
Half day or full day.

Contact **Jenny Selby** on 59742402 or
selby.jennifer.j@edumail.vic.gov.au

We've had enquiries about whether **SNOW GUMS** are indigenous to the Seppelt Ave area. It seems they are, at least nearby, so plantings should thrive here.

BERG welcomes new members
RM MacKenzie & CJ Spencer

THANKS! Complete Colour Printing, who donate printing of *The Creek*, have found with regret that due to the economic downturn, they are no longer able to cover the printing costs fully. They can, however, offer partial support, for which we are most grateful. We are looking at other options to make up the shortfall.

**Clean Up Australia Day
SUNDAY 1ST MARCH**
Join with **BERG** to clean up
Mount Martha!

Register and collect a rubbish bag at the Village Green Car Park, cnr The Esplanade and Watson Road, anytime from 9.30am to 12.30pm. Bring gloves and tongs if you need them.

BERG will coordinate clean-up along the beach and foreshore, Balcombe Creek, roadsides and reserves from Balcombe Point towards Mornington, northwards and eastwards.

BERG Working Bees	Other Activities	Meetings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Monthly working bee: 3rd Sunday, from 9.00 to 12.00. Next are 15th February and 15th March. Meet at the Rotunda (Mel: 144 K11). If running late, phone Liz (0408 388 430) to find the work site. Coffee and BERG-baked delicacies at 10.30. ❖ Tuesdays starting March, 9.30 to 12.00, coffee break 10.30. Contact Mary Stemp to confirm, on 5974 3996. ❖ Hopetoun Creek Greenfield Reserve, first Monday of the month, 9.30 to 12.30. Contact Hazel Athey to confirm, on 5974 3034 or 0419 899 560. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Waterwatch: next physical and chemical testing on Saturday 14th February, 9.00 am, at the Augusta St Bridge. ❖ Fairbairn Bushland Reserve Friends Group working bees: 22nd March, 26th April, & 24th May – contact John Stoker for details on 5974 4726. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ BERG Committee meets every 7-8 weeks at Mt Martha House, Saturdays 9.30. Next meeting 21st February. All members welcome. ❖ SPIFFA (Southern Peninsula Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association) meets 1st Monday of the month, 7.30 pm, at Parks Vic, Hinton St, Rosebud (Mel 170 C4). Contact Jan Dwyer on 5986 6566.
<p>BERG COMMITTEE</p> <p>PRESIDENT KEITH WILSON • VICE PRESIDENT JOHN INCHLEY • SECRETARY MARY STEMPE • TREASURER RICHARD KIRSNER FIELD OFFICER LIZ BARRACLOUGH • NEWSLETTER, MEMBERSHIP ANGELA KIRSNER • MINUTES SECRETARY PAM HEARN SCHOOLS LIAISON JENNY SELBY • ROTARY CLUB LIAISON ANDY MCGUIGAN • PUBLICITY BARBARA THRIVES CO-OPTED MEMBERS: HARRY HARRIS • MICHAEL SANDERS • HOPETOON CREEK GREENFIELD GROUP HAZEL ATHEY • CENTURY DVE HABITAT LINK GROUP TONY O'CONNOR</p>		
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