

THE CREEK

Volume 13 No2, April 2009

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

THE BALCOMBE LAGOONS

John Inchley reports

February 2009

The Creek is slowly drying up as the drought persists: the upper regions are very dry. There is no flowing water from the Briars, and the Estuary has become a series of lagoons. Has any one seen the mud bank as large as this recent photo?



Waterwatch data gathered in February show consistent trends since last November: salinity and

phosphate concentrations have increased as the creek evaporates, and dissolved oxygen has fallen as there is no water flowing.

We are hopeful that these trends will reverse when we finally get some decent rain (as they did after the December rains).

We are able to test at three sites now, thanks to the Waterwatch team of Michael Sanders, Gayle O'Connor, Harry Harris, Andy McQuigan, Mary Stemp and John Inchley.

Postscript, March 2009

Since writing this article, strong winds and a high tide on March 4th forced the sea over the sand bar and into the estuary, increasing the depth by two feet and completely covering the mud banks. The creek flowed backwards as far

as the Uralla Road bridge, making the creek water still more saline.

Then, with the downpours over the weekend of March 14th-15th, water started flowing downstream once more, from The Briars and beyond.



Waterwatchers at work: Michael Sanders fishing for samples, helped by Harry Harris and Gayle O'Connor

BERG welcomes new members:

Gillian & Warren Johnson
Phillip Gray

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN *from Keith Wilson*

Like all creeks and rivers, our Balcombe Creek and its tributaries are precious assets. One of those tributaries is the Devilbend Creek. We mentioned in the February newsletter that Parks Victoria has called for submissions on its draft plan for management of the Devilbend Reserve including the Bittern and Devilbend water storages. BERG has submitted its response, which members are welcome to view – contact Angela Kirsner on 9509 6116.

Readers may be aware that I am a devotee of the writings of Professor Geoffrey Blainey. The

following sketch, from his *Triumph of the Nomads*, seems relevant to our area. Let your minds wander.

“In most regions the Aboriginals fished or travelled in frail vessels. These flimsy craft, however, had at least one strong advantage, they were quickly built and were thus appropriate for nomads who carried few possessions.

“The simplest vessel was a floating log... The bark canoes of the inland rivers and sheltered bays seemed ... so precarious, so likely to be swamped by five-inch waves or so likely to capsize when boarded, that they called for a man with the bodily poise of a tight-rope walker. Indeed, the canoeist

stood rather than sat as he poled his craft through the water...

“In Melbourne suburbs a few canoe trees stand, the trunk still revealing the long rounded tongue of bark which had been neatly cut away by the boat builder.”

The Balcombe estuary must have been a paradise for fishing from such craft.

CAN YOU HELP?

BERG is holding a fund-raising **Sausage Sizzle**

at Bunnings, on Saturday 18th April. We need more volunteers to help on the stall – you do not need to cook. Please phone Hazel Athey on 5974 3034 or 0419 899 560.

And come and buy a sausage!

FIELD NEWS *from Field Officer Liz Barraclough*

Clean Up Australia Day

Sunday 1st March saw 51 people – rather more than in previous years – register with BERG to clean up the rubbish around Mt Martha, particularly the foreshore. We filled 28 large recycling bags with bottles, cans and paper, and a 4-cubic-metre skip with an old bike and tyres from the creek, rags, plastic bags, butts, discarded chairs, and other assorted junk.

Greg Hunt, our Federal MP, chose Clean Up Australia Day to hand over the Caring for our Country grant cheques to BERG and the Sunshine Reserve Conservation and Fireguard Group.



Greg Hunt MP (left) with Councillor Anne Shaw (Mayor, Mornington Peninsula Shire), Liz Barraclough with grandson Cameron (BERG) and Malcolm Gordon (Sunshine Reserve Conservation & Fireguard Group)

Working bees

In February we hand-weeded the area planted last year near the stormwater outlet downstream from Uralla Rd bridge.

Though not everyone's favourite, hand-weeding is the most important follow-up work. Weeds move rapidly into a newly prepared area, but if the new vegetation can get established it will shade out or out-compete many weeds. We could see examples where we were working: lush two-year-old *Poa* plantings cover the ground, leaving little bare earth for weed seedlings.

Being a little obsessive makes a huge difference to the quality of the revegetation. The old gardener's saying 'One year's

seeding is seven years' weeding' is very true.



February morning tea on the board walk

March saw us back in the same area, tackling the Eau de Cologne Mint, Wandering Jew (*Tradescantia albiflora*) and, for those with gumboots, the non-indigenous Cumbungi – tall, reed-like aquatic plants with an extensive creeping root system. The Cumbungi were spreading down from the stormwater drain into the creek.

We finished work just in time. An hour later it was pouring with wonderful rain, and later in the afternoon the whole area was flooded and flowing fast. It would have tested not only our gumboots but our swimming skills as well!

Advice from an Expert

Local ecologist Gidja Walker has provided us with advice on our work plan for this year. Gidja, Jo Thyer (leader of our contractor, Naturelinks) and I inspected the foreshore, the area near Uralla bridge, and Hopetoun Creek wetland, before Mary Stemp joined us at the Bunyip.

I then took Gidja to the Century Drive retarding basin and wetland site to advise on preparation for the aquatic planting on 21st March. The

planting day was a great success (see photos, right). A good crowd from BERG and the local Landcare group planted some 2000 water and bog plants.

North of the Uralla bridge, under a great old Manna Gum, Gidja pointed out evidence of owls – regurgitated pellets, the size and shape of medium dog droppings, but identifiable by their whitish colour and the small lumps of possum fur throughout.

There are many small birds in this area. BERG member and ornithologist John Rawlins recently saw (or heard) Welcome Swallows, Rufus Whistlers, Scrub Wrens, Silvereyes, Brown-headed Honey-eaters, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, Dusky Wood Swallows, Yellow Robins, Brown Thornbills, White-naped Honeyeaters, Crimson Rosellas and Eastern Rosellas; and near the Augusta St Bridge, a Brush Bronzewing.



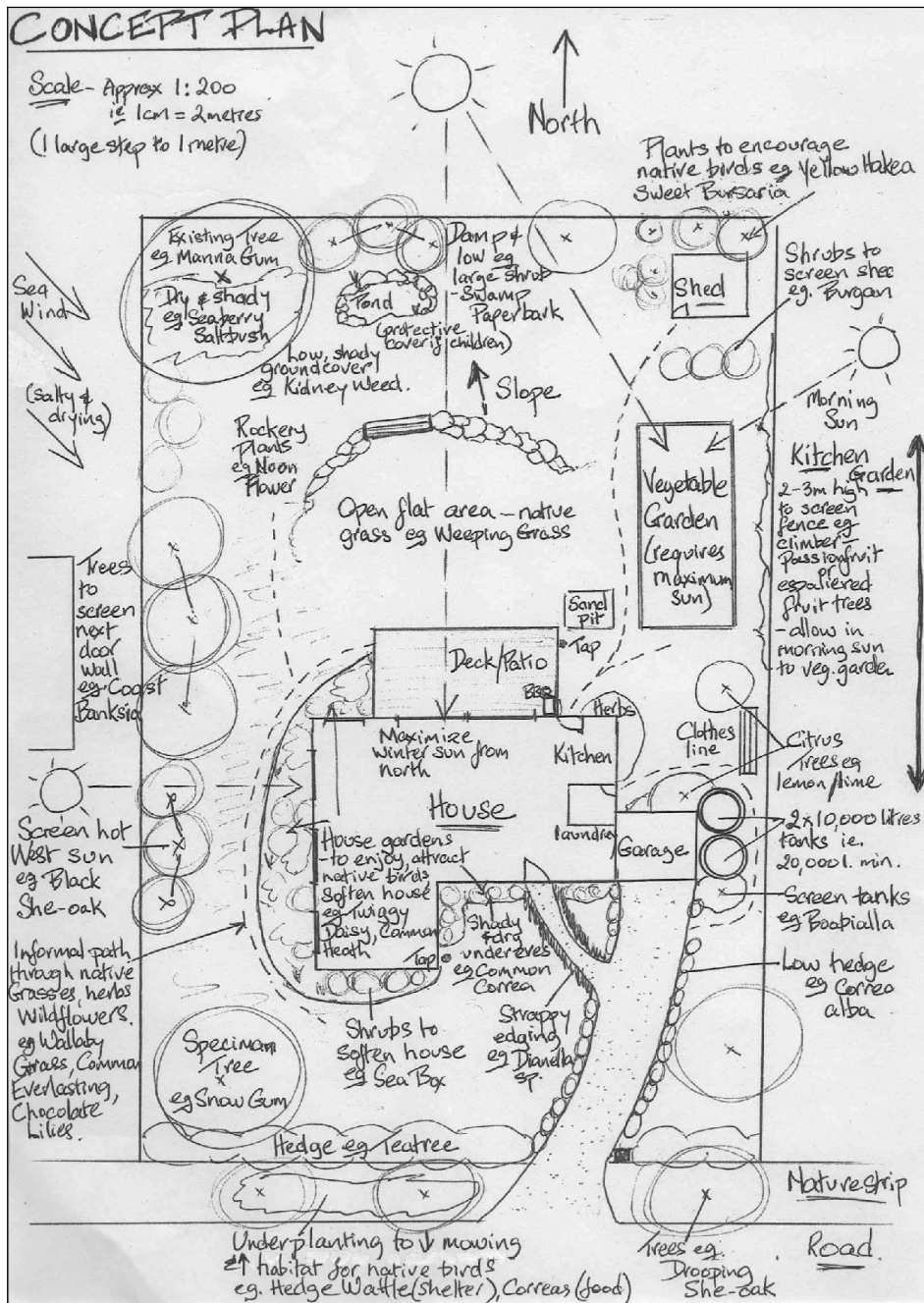
The first of many loads of weeds from the March working bee



Planting at Century Drive wetland. Above: the crew at work. Below: Tony O'Connor and son Luke tackle the 'deep' water plants

GARDENING WITH INDIGENOUS PLANTS

Another in our occasional series. To get you started, **Liz Barraclough**, an experienced garden designer as well as BERG's Field Officer, has prepared a sample plan of an indigenous garden, together with plant names and steps in planning.



Steps in planning your indigenous garden

1. Look at your garden or space and decide on which of your existing structures and plants you want to keep, and which are to go.
2. Think about how you want to use the space, what structures and activities you want to accommodate, eg shed, vegetable garden, play area. Decide on the style of garden you want, eg formal or relaxed, cottage, bushland.
3. Look at magazines and other gardens, not only for the style you like, but also, perhaps more important, for what grows well in neighbouring or similar style local gardens.
4. Be realistic. Consider how much time you have and want to spend maintaining your garden.
5. Sketch a rough concept plan. It is then easier to select the appropriate plants, with help from suitable references or the local nurseryman.
6. When selecting plants, consider their function and purpose, eg hedge, screen, specimen, shade, colour, edible, bird-attracting.

Plants are labelled on the plan by their common names. Their botanical names are given below

Black She-oak:	<i>Allocasuarina littoralis</i>	Swamp Paperbark	<i>Melaleuca ericifolia</i>
Drooping She-oak:	<i>Allocasuarina verticillata</i>	Noon Flower/Pigface	<i>Carpobrotus rossi</i>
Burgan	<i>Kunzia ericoides</i>	Common Everlasting	<i>Chrysocephalum apiculatum</i>
Common Correa	<i>Correa reflexa</i>	Twiggy Daisy	<i>Olearia ramulosa</i>
White Correa	<i>Correa alba</i>	Kidney Weed	<i>Dichondra repens</i>
Chocolate Lily	<i>Artropodium stricta</i>	Snow Gum	<i>Eucalyptus pauciflora</i>
Spiny-headed Mat-rush	<i>Lomandra longifolia</i>	Manna Gum	<i>Eucalyptus pryoriana</i>
Tea-tree	<i>Leptospermum laevigatum</i>	Sweet Bursaria	<i>Bursaria spinosa</i>
Black-anther Flax Lily	<i>Dianella revoluta</i>	Weeping Grass	<i>Microlena microides</i>
Coast Banksia	<i>Banksia integrifolia</i>	Wallaby Grass	<i>Danthonia sp.</i>
Boobialla	<i>Myoporum insulare</i>	Seabax	<i>Alyxia buxifolia</i>
Yellow Hakea	<i>Hakea nodosa</i>	Common Heath	<i>Epacris impressa</i>
Seaberry Saltbush	<i>Rhagodia candolleana</i>		

THANKS!

Complete Colour Printing, who most generously donated printing of *The Creek* from October 2007 to February 2009, continues to support our newsletter. Australia's leading Environmentally Responsible Printers, Complete Colour is ISO 14001 certified and prints using a chemical recirculation system. The paper on which the newsletter is printed is Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified and uses 100% vegetable-based inks. For more information please visit www.completecolour.com.au.



LOCAL SCHOOLS WIN SUSTAINABILITY AWARDS

Mornington Secondary College (MSC) is one of a number of schools on the Peninsula to be awarded Mayoral Sustainability Awards by Anne Shaw, Mayor of the Mornington Peninsula Shire.

BERG member Tony O'Connor, who received a Mayoral award on behalf of MSC, said it was a great inspiration to the students undertaking the various sustainability projects around his school. Those students and projects included the MSC "ECO-warriors" team, who have made great inroads into energy and water savings at the school, and the MSC "Hands on Learning team", who are currently making an energy-efficient mud-brick house and creating landscapes with indigenous plants.

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 19th April and 17th May. 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 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 9th May, 9.00 am, at the Augusta St Bridge. ❖ Fairbairn Bushland Reserve Friends Group working bees: 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 meetings 18th April and 30th 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 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 GREENFIELDS GROUP HAZEL ATHEY • CENTURY DVE HABITAT LINK GROUP TONY O'CONNOR</p>		
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