

THE CREEK

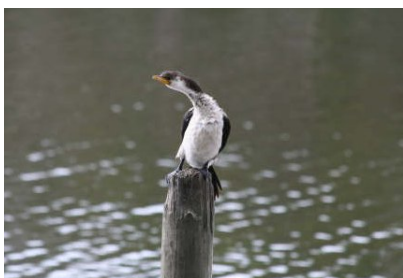
Volume 13 No3, June 2009

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

BIRDING ALONG THE BOARDWALK

*PENBOC, the Mornington Peninsula branch of Bird Observation & Conservation Australia recently set off, binoculars in hand, through the reserve. Our thanks to **Larry Wakefield** for this report.*

In the face of a blustery westerly gale, nine hardy and obviously keen birdos gathered at the Balcombe Estuary picnic ground on Sunday 15th March. As we set off, our leader, Neil Shelley noted that the birds were noticeably absent, hardly surprising considering the conditions. A quick scan over the estuary revealed Silver Gulls and Crested Terns hunkered down, heads into the wind, while ten Little Pied and two Little Black Cormorants were grimly holding on their perches in a dead gum tree next to the water. Still, you never know what is likely to turn up, so we pressed on along the boardwalk track.



A Little Pied Cormorant surveys the estuary. Photo by Pam Hearn

It wasn't long before the calls of Brown-headed Honeyeaters attracted our attention and after a bit of a search among wildly thrashing branches and leaves, we spotted them along with Brown Thornbills and Silvereyes. Ten minutes into the outing and we already had logged ten species. Amazing!

As we moved up Balcombe Creek and into the shelter of the Swamp Paperbark, birds were spotted regularly in ones or twos. This looked like the place to shelter from the wind, judging from the sight of three Crested Pigeons huddled in a tree, trying to ignore the Grey Butcherbird that was checking them out. Further along the track, Eucalypts were in flower. Numerous Red and Little Wattlebirds were feeding on the blossoms and it wasn't long before we obtained good views of Musk Lorikeets, which we heard long before we saw them.

By the time we reached the footbridge near the old quarry, our tally for the morning had reached 32 and with the brief sighting of Red-browed Finches on the way back, 33 species was a very respectable list for such an atrocious day.

The complete species list for the day was:

- Australian Wood Duck
- Pacific Black Duck
- Spotted Dove
- Crested Pigeon
- Little Pied Cormorant
- Little Black Cormorant
- White-faced Heron
- Dusky Moorhen
- Crested Tern
- Silver Gull
- Rainbow Lorikeet
- Musk Lorikeet
- Superb Fairy-wren
- White-browed Scrubwren
- Brown Thornbill
- Spotted Pardalote
- White-eared Honeyeater
- Noisy Miner
- Little Wattlebird
- Red Wattlebird
- New Holland Honeyeater
- Brown-headed Honeyeater

- Golden Whistler
- Grey Shrike-thrush
- Grey Butcherbird
- Australian Magpie
- Grey Fantail
- Little Raven
- Eastern Yellow Robin
- Silvereye
- Common Blackbird
- Common Myna
- Red-browed Finch

Common Ringtail Possums and Short-finned Eels were also observed during the outing.

A PROFITABLE SIZZLE!

The BERG sausage sizzle at Bunnings on Saturday 18th May raised a grand total of \$1,400. It also stimulated lots of interest in BERG among the customers.

Hazel Athey, the stall's tireless organiser, is to be congratulated!

Thanks also to Andrew at Mt Martha IGA supermarket for his advice and help with the sausages; to Bakers Delight at Bentons Square, who supplied the bread at low cost; and to BERG member Lel Stella who donated and prepared all the onions.

And thanks to the team of BERG stalwarts who manned the stall all day!



Hazel Athey and Jenny Selby at work on the production line

RABBIT CONTROL

John Inchley reports

Rabbits are a serious ecological and agricultural pest on the Mornington Peninsula. They destroy indigenous vegetation (including seedlings planted by BERG), displace native animals and cause large-scale soil disturbance. We see their work in various areas of the reserve, notably the old soccer pitch, the Ferrero reserve and the area above it that we have long dubbed the 'rabbit paddock'.

BERG recently took part in a rabbit control program together with the Mornington Shire and Transfields' Environment Officer, Tristan Cole. Our timing was excellent; baiting started mid-March, when drought conditions had left little or no natural food, so the rabbits readily took the free food offered. Initially this was simply juicy chopped carrots; then, when they got used to taking this food, the carrots were laced with pindone (similar to Ratsak). Baits were enclosed in a pegged mesh cage (as in the photo) and placed at least three metres from any bush. This strategy keeps the baits away from birds and domestic animals, and from the indigenous Swamp Rats, which will not break cover to reach the carrots.



John Inchley inspects a baited rabbit cage

The Shire closed off the baited areas to the public, as people and dog traffic would disturb the rabbits' take-up. The poisoned rabbits do not pose a threat to domestic animals; it is estimated that a dog or cat would have to eat seven or eight rabbits to be affected by the poison.

The program was very successful, particularly on the soccer pitch (where we had 5 stations), adjoining private land and Balcombe Creek Estate (6 stations), the Hopetoun Creek area (3 stations), and a private property of five acres on Seppelt Ave, backing onto Hopetoun Creek (6 stations). Rabbits were previously in plague proportions in all these areas.

We can claim only moderate success on the rabbit paddock, with some rabbit activity still evident. Perhaps the signage did not deter the enthusiastic dog and people traffic.

We need to apply for funding for rabbit control *every* year to keep the numbers down and expand the program to other areas.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

from Keith Wilson

As I reflect on my 81 years on this planet, one word commands my attention—CHANGE. Think of every aspect of our lives, not in any particular order: music, education, transport, religion, health, food, drink, work, hobbies, sport, shopping, to name a few. Compare what we do today with what was the norm just a generation or two ago.

Change is inevitable, be it brought about by humans or evolutionary.

There seems little doubt that our climate is changing, although the experts disagree on whether or to what extent human activity is driving that change. Read Tim Flannery, Bob Carter of James Cook University, Barry Brook of Adelaide University, Robert Manne of La Trobe University, Ian Plimer, one of Australia's leading earth scientists; throw in Penny Wong and Greg Hunt, and we ordinary mortals might be excused for some confusion.

Does any of this excuse us for contaminating our air and waterways? Certainly not! Should we clean up our act? Yes!

Irrespective of the current drivers of climate change, it is

incumbent on all of us, not just government, to look after our planet to our utmost ability. Clean it up and keep it clean.

At the local level, for members of BERG, and even non-members, come to our working bees and, in this small corner of the planet, plant a tree, clean up some rubbish. And enjoy a delicious morning tea!

A WIDESPREAD WEED

Angela Kirsner reports

Its botanical name is *Allium triquetrum*, but we know it as Angled Onion, an invasive bulb with a strong onion smell, which smothers indigenous grasses and groundcovers. It is listed as a noxious weed in Victoria. The leaves are emerging now, to flower in late winter or early spring.

Mediterranean in origin, Angled Onion thrives in many countries. Staying with friends in Cornwall in May, we found it widespread and flowering exuberantly. Our Cornish friends curse it, as we do.



Angled Onion smothers a Cornish hedgerow

Angled Onion spreads by both bulbs and seeds. Control is best done at the start of the flowering cycle, when the old bulbs are exhausted, new bulbs have not formed, and seeds have not set.

Hand removal is the most satisfactory. Loosen the soil with a fork, pull out the plants (with bulbs), bag them and dispose of them safely. And repeat the task over years to remove all the bulbs. If necessary, large infestations can be sprayed with metsulfuron methyl, a broad-leaf herbicide sold as "Brush Off" – take care to follow the safety directions.

FIELD NEWS

Field Officer Liz Barraclough reports

Working bees

The April working-bee was spent at Hopetoun Creek dragging out piles of Coprosma that Naturelinks had previously cut and painted. We left the more inaccessible and less conspicuous piles to rot, which Coprosma does relatively quickly in the damp conditions over winter. Fallen branches and brush that posed a fire risk were cut up and added to the stacks to be mulched. We also hand-weeded an area to be planted out with indigenous grasses by Balcombe College students in July.

Over the next few weeks Naturelinks will selectively spray a number of the priority weeds, including Cape Ivy, Tradescantia, Buttercup, Arum Lilies and *Senecio angulatus*, along the creek from the end of Greenfield Way south into the wetland area below Hopetoun Drive. They will brush-cut the remains of the scrambling species to reduce the height and mass of dead material and improve access for follow-up weed control and planting.

Tracy from Naturelinks supervised the May working-bee as I was away. Unfortunately only three turned up; obviously, 'when the dragon's away...!' Nevertheless, they did some very worthwhile weeding of Boneseed on the north bank upstream of Uralla bridge. They also hand-weeded and cut and painted *Solanum pseudocapsicum* along the south bank, exposing a lot of Poas, and some Clematis and Native Raspberry. The Tradescantia will be sprayed later. It requires

repeated follow-up until every bit of plant material is removed; any gardener will attest to its amazing ability to regrow and recolonise from the smallest remnant. The contract works in these areas will be funded from our Melbourne Water grants.

Estuary in flood

Saturday 25th April saw strong winds with gusts up to 120 kph, producing a surge and huge swells. The Mt Martha Lifesaving and Yacht Club carpark was flooded,



Seawater roars upstream from the bridge during the 25th April storm (above), inundating the platforms and camp ground. (below)



waves poured over the sandbar and into the estuary, and the level of salty water some distance up the creek rose about a metre. Thirty millilitres of rain added to the flooding, leaving both platforms on the estuary were under water. The seat nearest to the Esplanade bridge appeared to be floating!

At around 10.30am, the pressure from the substantial upstream flow of water forced a dramatic rupture of the sandbar at the estuary mouth. The creek roared through in metre-high surf-like waves and in minutes the platforms had magically reappeared.

A number of sea walls were severely damaged.

Another controlled burn

By the time this newsletter gets to you, we hope that the designated and prepared area east of Henley St will be burnt. As with our previous controlled burn, it will be fascinating to watch the diversity of regeneration of indigenous species. We shall provide regular updates and interpretation of the regrowth.

Congratulations!

Congratulations to Jo Tetteroo (previously Jo Thyer, leader of the local Naturelinks team) for her successful application to join the Mornington Peninsula Shire's Natural Systems Team. Jo will oversee the Balcombe Creek catchment as part of her role as Conservation Officer. This will be great for BERG, as she has in-depth on-ground experience and knowledge of our area, as well as being familiar with the workings and the crew of our contractor, Naturelinks, and BERG members.

Another grant success

Our application for a 2008-2009 GVEHO (Grants for Voluntary Environmental and Heritage Organizations) federal grant has been successful. This provides us with \$2300 for administration costs.

THANKS!

...to ESSO AUSTRALIA PTY LTD

In January BERG received \$2350 from Esso Australia – the second time they have supported us in this way. Part of this money has financed the purchase of a second Waterwatch kit to support BERG’s expanded Waterwatch team and monitoring program.

The kit contains conductivity and PH metres, chemical kits to measure dissolved oxygen, phosphates and nitrates, and a turbidity tube.

...and to PERRY SCHWARZ, of BAYSIDE LANDSCAPES

Perry donated and installed the boulder near the end of Henley Avenue, with its plaque recognising Mt Martha Primary School’s work in planting planted this area.



Perry Schwarz placing the boulder in the reserve, and attaching the plaque to it

Tuesday Working Bee time change

Please note that the starting time of the weekly Tuesday working bee has changed to 9.00 (instead of 9.30).

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 21st June and 19th July. 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 9.00 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 15th August, 9.00 am, at the Augusta St Bridge. ❖ Fairbairn Bushland Reserve Friends Group working bees: 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 25th July. All members welcome. ❖ BERG AGM: Saturday 10th October, 9.30 for a 10.00 a.m. start – all 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 STEMPT • 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 • HOPETOUN CREEK GREENFIELDS GROUP HAZEL ATHEY • CENTURY DVE HABITAT LINK GROUP TONY O’CONNOR</p>		
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