

THE CREEK

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Alcombe Estuary Rehabilitation Group

No A0034645Y ABN 50 224 628 623

TUESDAY IN THE BUNYIP

Mary Stemp reports

After several weeks of burning weeds, Isobel, Pam and I got down to ground level for some serious hand-weeding, particularly of the orchid patches. This is in keeping with our rehabilitation strategy to remove weeds and hope that indigenous plants and grasses will regenerate in the spaces. Thus we do very little planting.

Our discoveries included numerous clumps of Greenhood orchids (perhaps of two or three different types), with sprinklings in places where we haven't noticed them before. And the clump below Daly's Dell has filled out over the last couple of years. We think this is a good year for orchids (photo, back page).



Now that we're more aware of them, we are finding a number clusters of Mosquito orchids (photo, left), often tucked close to the ground around clumps of Dianella. They can be recognised by their tiny heart-shaped dark-green leaves

about 1 cm across, deep red underneath. The minute, mosquito-like flowers grow on fine stalks and can only be seen clearly using a magnifying lens.

The trained eye of our bird-observing Pam discovered yet another patch of orchids similar to the Mosquitoes but a lighter green

and no red. They are almost certainly Gnat orchids, large or small depending on when they bloom: small in September, large in August.

And while searching for them, we found Swamp Rat holes with their trade-mark tunnels through the grasses.

If you want to check out the orchids for yourself, go along the lower path from Daly's Dell towards La Trobe Street with your eyes to the ground. And *please*, keep your dogs on leads and clean up their poo.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

According to journalist Andrew Revkin, reporting in the *New York Times*, there is a worldwide trend to "return long buried rivers, streams and drains to green sanctuaries". It's called "daylighting" and started in Seoul, Korea, when Lord Mayor Lee Myung-bak opened drains and tunnels linked with the Cheonggyecheon river and exposed the waterway to the elements. Much planting and removal of rubbish and bitumen has restored the stream. Since the project began, fish species have increased from 4 to 25, bird species from 6 to 36, and insect species from 15 to 192. And about 90,000 pedestrians visit the rejuvenated stream banks on an average day.

Environmentalists also point out that open watercourses handle flooding rains better than buried sewers do, and streams tend to cool areas overheated by sun-baked asphalt, and to nourish greenery. New York, San Antonio, Singapore, Los Angeles and other cities are following Seoul's lead.

Keith Wilson

NOTICE OF MEETING AND CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

THE 2009 BERG ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

WILL BE HELD ON

SATURDAY 10TH OCTOBER

at Mt Martha House

9.30 am registration for the meeting at 10.00 am

Our guest speaker, at 11.00, will be

Ben Cullen,

Port Phillip & Westernport Conservation Officer, Trust for Nature

Ben will talk about the Trust's invaluable work in preserving remnant natural bushland, with particular emphasis on the Mornington Peninsula, where it has been establishing conservation covenants and playing a major role in the preservation of parks and reserves for over thirty years.

Meeting Agenda

- Welcome and apologies
- Minutes of 2008 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 available from Mary Stemp, ph 5974 3996. Nominations in writing, signed by two BERG members, & accompanied by the candidate's written consent, must be with the Secretary by Saturday 3rd October 2009.

FIELD NEWS

Field Officer Liz Barraclough reports

A major grant for BERG

We have just been notified that BERG will receive \$50,000 for a 2-year project under the Commonwealth Government's Caring for our Country initiative.

We are pretty excited about this. The project is "to address the ecological decline of the Balcombe Estuary Reserve, the related Mt Martha foreshore and the associated Balcombe Creek". In effect, this is a continuation of the work we have been doing over the last 12 years. However, we will also be fine-tuning our planning, mapping, follow-up and monitoring processes for an ecosystem which is particularly sensitive and vulnerable to the pressures of population increase, development, water shortage and climate change.

Under the grant, we have undertaken to reduce weed species, especially Bridal Creeper, a "Weed of National Significance"; encourage the resulting regeneration; plant to extend the existing indigenous vegetation; and control introduced pests and predators. All this will help in another of our tasks, to protect the nationally significant Dwarf Galaxias (tiny fish). We will also be striving to increase community awareness of and participation in our work.

Working bees

At the June and July working bees we planted lots of Coast Banksias and a few other "locals" along the foreshore between the South Beach carpark and the end of Watson Rd. This work is fulfilling our obligation under our 2008 Caring for our Country Community Coastcare grant, to rehabilitate the threatened and significant Coast Banksia Woodland along our narrow coastal strip.

Planting was slow in quite difficult terrain, but we felt satisfied that the specific



Above: Judith Whittaker and John Inchley planting Banksias at the July working bee

Help needed!
 We always need extra hands at our regular monthly working bees - first Sunday of the month, 9.00 to 12.00.
 Meet at the Rotunda.
 Enquiries to Liz, 0408 388 430



Above & below: Division of labour! Balcombe Grammar students and BERG Barbara Thraves at work in the Reserve



techniques we used would give our plants a chance of surviving another hot summer (the article on the next page describes this in more detail).

Planting with Balcombe Grammar

Each Wednesday for eight weeks, 25 Balcombe Grammar School students from years 6, 8 and 9 will

help us revegetate areas in the reserves along Balcombe and Hopetoun Creeks. They will be mulching, planting and doing some woody weeding as part of their community service program.

Their contribution is very much appreciated. Without them, we would have no chance of getting all our allocated number of plants in the ground in our limited and ever-shrinking optimal planting season.

On the first of these days, 22nd July, 40 students (our complement will normally be a more manageable 25!) did a great job spreading 70+ cubic metres of mulch and planting 270 *Lomandra longifolia* in the campground area beside the estuary. It was a mammoth job undertaken in wind and rain. The Year 8 students worked very hard, in good humour and without complaint. They were accompanied by two teachers, and I was supported by three wonderful BERG helpers.

Can you help?
 We'd appreciate some extra hands working with the Balcombe Grammar students.
 Time: approx 11.30 am to 2.15 pm
 Dates: August 5th, 19th, 26th;
 September 2nd, 9th, 16th
 Contact Liz on 0408 388 430.

World Environment Day

BERG joined a number of environment groups from the Mornington Peninsula on Friday 5th June, for United Nations World Environment Day. We were invited to set up a display to promote our activities (see picture). The event, with speakers and a panel discussion, was run by the Shire's Social Planning and Community Development department.



The aim was to "promote community interest in what is happening to the planet and humanity, and inspire people to think about how they might be able to make a change towards a more healthy, hopeful future".

WHAT'S HAPPENED TO OUR BANKSIAS?

by Liz Barraclough



All along the Mornington Peninsula coastline, the Coast Banksias (*Banksia integrifolia*) have been suffering from die-back. The Shire has commissioned surveys and reports, and encouraged Friends Groups to apply for grants to address this situation.

A number of explanations have been put forward for the die-back, and it is likely that a combination of factors is to blame. Banksias have always been subject to borer attack, but with very few borer predators left (eg, Black-tailed Cockatoos), this has become a real problem. Stress from prolonged drought makes the trees more susceptible to insect attack, and with less indigenous



understorey, there are fewer insect-eating birds. Polluted winds act like a surfactant, breaking down the waxy protective coating on the Banksia leaves and leaving them more vulnerable to the effects of salt.

Local ecologist Gidja Walker suggests other possible contributors, including fungal attack to the roots, and increased drying of the soil profile due to road cutting through aquifers and redirecting of water. This only exacerbates the effect of drought.

Over the past two years, we have planted hundreds of Banksias, but few made it through last summer's extreme weather, although we planted as early as June. So we asked Gidja's advice.

On close inspection of our foreshore, she found quite a bit

of natural regeneration that we had failed to notice, particularly among the Teatree opposite the end of Watson Road. Indeed, the regeneration is of the sort of density that might be expected.

Gidja also suggested that the profile of the coast is changing. Much of the Teatree and Coast Wattle scrub that was once among and behind the boatsheds has gone, and is gradually re-establishing a little further back from the beach. Its loss has left the banksias exposed and vulnerable; its regeneration further back, however, may be providing protection for the regeneration of Banksias, albeit in a strip of land bounded and limited by the road. Coast Wattles also add nitrogen to the soil, and with the Teatree, they provide protection for fauna, which further enrich the soil with their droppings. All this helps to support Banksia regeneration.

Interestingly, the one spot where our Banksia plantings are thriving is on the north bank, in the bushland beside the sewer track from Victoria Crescent to the bridge. This is consistent with Gidja's views outlined above. The land here is lower, more protected, damper, and the soil deeper and richer than that along the foreshore.

Gidja recommended a number of strategies, which we are following.

We are working to control weedy annual grasses and spray out the perennial weed grasses, Kikuyu and Buffalo Grass, taking care to avoid the Sand-hill Sword-sedge (*Lepidosperma concavum*).

To protect the soil/sand, we have laid out thinly cut Teatree brush with seeds on it, as Teatree is indigenous on this coastal strip, and a pioneer for Banksia regeneration.

We are planting lots more Coast

Banksias, and some groves of Drooping Sheokes (*Allocasuarina verticillata*). Sheokes have a microbic action on the soil, and the fallen needles protect the ground. A number of indigenous understorey plants are able to survive under them, including Seaberry Saltbush (*Rhagodia candolleana*), Bower Spinach (*Tetragonia implexicom*), Black Anther Flax-lily (*Dianella brevicaulis*) and Pigface (*Carpobrotus rossii*).

To improve the diversity, we will also plant Showy Bossiaea (*Bossiaea cineria*) in heathy areas, hoping it will regenerate naturally over time;



Sweet Bursaria (*Bursaria spinosa*); a few Boobiella (*Myoporum insulare*) along the edge to shade out the Kikuyu; and more Coast Sword-sedge (*Lepidosperma gladiatum*), which can be easily propagated by division. We will also plant the very attractive and decidedly prickly Hedge Wattle (*Acacia paradoxa*), particularly along informal tracks that are destroying vegetation.

In planting, we are comparing tube-stock ranging from very small to medium and larger (almost what I call "over-cooked"). We are also mixing water-holding gel with the soil deep at the base of some plants. For all plants, we are digging deeper holes and really disturbing the soil; leaving a hollow round the plant to maximize its water catching and holding capacity; applying Saturaid to encourage maximum water penetration; and finishing with a very good deep watering in.

Ideally, we would trial regular deep watering over the dry season for the first year, to increase the chance of survival – but this is beyond our capacity, with a couple of hundred plants, some in fairly inaccessible terrain. Perhaps we shall trial watering just a few.

We plan to monitor these new plantings over the next 2-5 years.

Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos are back in Mt Martha after 30 plus years. They have been seen in small numbers around our reserve, and the Sunshine Bushland Reserve June newsletter tells of a flock of 11 birds seen several times feeding during June.

A NIGHT VISITOR

Recently, after lights out, we heard sounds of rustle, rustle, rustle in the house. We turned on the lights again, investigated, and found a tiny bat flying about, landing, and looking around in a very perplexed manner. It had the sweetest little face.

Getting it outside was interesting but finally, with all the lights on, it flew out into the darkness. I suspect it may have been hiding in the dry washing we brought in after dark.

Hazel Athey

Correction and Apology!

We included, in the June edition, our thanks to Perry Schwarz for installing the rock and plaque recognising Mt Martha Primary School's planting. Perry's firm is **Baytree Landscaping** (not Bayside Landscaping).



Greenhood orchids growing by the track in the Bunyip (see article on page 1)

Free Weed Awareness Training

Local ecologist Gidja Walker is presenting a training workshop on weed identification, spread, hygiene, and legal responsibilities. Organised by Mornington Peninsula Shire and Chisolm Institute, the workshop is open to anyone who volunteers in the bush. Places limited to 25 – first come, first served.

Date: 21st August, 12pm to 2pm

Place: Chisolm Institute, Rosebud campus, Boneo Rd

Bookings: Robin Allan – ph 5990 7172, email r.allan@chisolm.edu.au

BERG Working Bees	Other Activities	Meetings
<p>❖ Monthly working bee: 3rd Sunday, from 9.00 to 12.00. Next are 16th August and 20th September. 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.</p> <p>❖ Tuesdays 9.00 to 12.00, coffee break 10.30. Contact Mary Stemp to confirm, on 5974 3996.</p> <p>❖ 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.</p>	<p>❖ Waterwatch: next physical and chemical testing on Saturday 15th August, 9.00 am, at the Augusta St Bridge.</p> <p>❖ Fairbairn Bushland Reserve Friends Group working bees: contact John Stoker for details on 5974 4726.</p>	<p>❖ BERG Committee meets every 7-8 weeks at Mt Martha House, Saturdays 9.30. Next meeting 14th September. All members welcome.</p> <p>❖ BERG AGM Saturday 10th October, 9.30 am, Mt Martha House.</p> <p>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>
<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 THRAVES 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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