

# THE CREEK

Volume 13 No 6, December 2009

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

## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

*John Inchley took over the BERG Presidency from Keith Wilson at the AGM in October*

As new president, I wish to Acknowledge Keith Wilson's enormous contribution to BERG as President over the past ten years. 'My use-by date is up,' explained Keith. Yet fellow 'BERG-ers' will maintain that his passion, endeavour and vision for BERG will not fade, but live with us for many years to come.

BERG secretary Mary Stemp farewelled Keith at the AGM, stating that his leadership qualities of service (at working bees, committee meetings, community meetings), integrity, preparedness to listen and respect others' opinions, and his vision for the future have inspired so many of us. (And we will miss his President's Column!)



*Presentation at the AGM: Liz Barraclough hands Keith Wilson a painting of the estuary by BERG member Gayle O'Connor, while Mary Stemp looks on*

Some 18 months ago, I accompanied Keith to the Mt Martha Primary School, where he enthralled three Grade 5 classes with stories about the 'wall-to-wall carpet' of short finned eels awaiting the estuary opening to begin their migration to Coral Sea, where they spawn; and the baby

whale stranded in Coff's Harbour (where Keith had retired). It was cared for over several weeks before dying from ingesting a plastic bag. Both stories, of course, had relevance to the Balcombe Creek estuary, which Keith gently drove home.

At our last meeting for the year, the BERG Committee unanimously elected Keith as the first Honorary Life Member of BERG, for his outstanding contribution. Congratulations Keith! I only hope I can fill those very large shoes!

### Sighting our eels

We all know that BERG's emblem is the short-finned eel. Our Waterwatch group was delighted to have netted a small (10 cm) eel while collecting macroinvertebrates some six months ago. This was our first sighting of eels for some time, thought local ecologist Mal Legg listed them in his 2008 fauna survey of the reserve.

This same study revealed that some 17 bird species and 9 reptile species have disappeared from the estuary over the past nine years. Our community, through BERG, needs to be vigilant in monitoring and improving the reserve habitat to sustain our present flora and fauna. This of course is BERG's mission.

I would like to hear from people who have recently sighted or caught any short finned eels, as numbers seem to be decreasing.

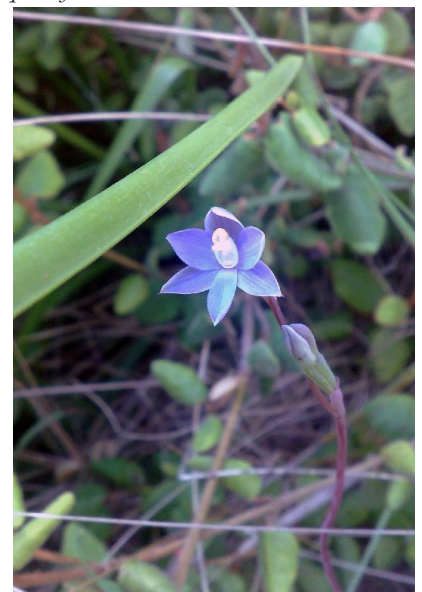
My thanks to all the BERG members, community groups and businesses who support us in so many ways – financially, working bees, committees, signage, plaques etc. I hope you and your families have an enjoyable and safe festive season.

## ORCHIDS IN THE BUNYIP

Tracey Westwood, who runs our Naturelinks team, took these photos of Sun Orchids in the Bunyip, just below the Kindergarten.



*Above is the Salmon Sun Orchid (Thelymitra rubra), and below, the Slender Sun Orchid, Thelymitra pauciflora.*



## FIELD NEWS

*Field Officer Liz Barraclough reports*

### Working bees

In October, we worked along the southern side of Balcombe Creek near the Uralla Rd stormwater drainage outlet. We handed weeded around the thriving tufts of grasses (*Poa labillardieri*), removed woody weeds, and planted another 200 Poas. The aim is to out-compete the weeds, but control of the grassy weeds, particularly the Panic Veldt Grass (*Erbarta erecta*), is a constant battle.

In November, we took the whipper snipper to the weed grasses near Hopetoun Creek, along Greenfield Way, before they seeded. We also weeded among the plantings along the walking track that runs alongside Balcombe Grammar to the Highway.

### A BERG trailer

BERG has been given an old Mornington Peninsula Shire trailer, which will be ideal for storing and transporting our equipment for working bees. Russell Ardley, at Mornington Peninsula Youth Enterprises, is treating it for rust, Progress Signs will spray paint it with the BERG logo, and Michael Sanders will organise new tyres and add some fittings.

### Grants

We have applied for Melbourne Water grants for three extension and follow-up projects, with the emphasis on weed control and planting. The grants are for Hopetoun Creek Greenfield Way Reserve, Century Drive retarding basin/wetland, and Balcombe Creek from the 'horror patch' to the Geoff Kaye Bridge.

We are also applying for a \$5,000 Caring for Our Country Coastal Grant to follow up work along the foreshore from Coolangatta Rd to the northern car park.

### Thanks!

... to all the BERGers who have slaved at working-bees and contributed in many different ways. Have a good rest and a terrific Christmas, and see you in the New Year.

## FIRE MANAGEMENT IN BUSHLAND RESERVES

*Jo-Anne Tetteroo, Conservation Officer with the Mornington Peninsula Shire, spoke to the BERG AGM about fire management. This is a synopsis of her talk.*

Mornington Peninsula Shire's Natural Systems Team, consisting of four conservation officers, manages over 200 bushland reserves across the Peninsula. This involves protecting and enhancing biodiversity and planning and implementing fire management works.

Most of these bushland reserves have a Fire Management Map, over 100 of which have been approved by the Municipal Fire Prevention Committee and adopted by Council. The maps outline the fire management works to be undertaken in each reserve over a 5-year period. The works are prioritised across the Shire and implemented on a programmed basis throughout the year.

The map for each reserve takes into account the reserve's characteristics and the many variables that could affect fire behaviour. These might include the type, amount and arrangement of fuel (fine fuel, thinner than your finger, is kindling and reducing it is important in reducing fire hazards); slope (fire travels faster uphill); aspect (vegetation on a north-facing slope tends to be drier); and prevailing weather conditions.

A main aim of fire management works within bushland reserves such as the Balcombe Estuary Reserve is to minimise the likelihood of direct flame contact and radiant heat onto adjoining assets (houses or other buildings).

Such works typically reduce fuel along boundaries in what are known as Fuel Management Zones (FMZ), which are divided into two categories: FMZ1 and FMZ2. An FMZ1 is a highly modified zone where fine fuels are heavily reduced for a width of 5-10 metres along a boundary line. These zones are typically easy to walk through

and can still contain some isolated trees and sparse midstorey. They are generally slashed four times a year to maintain low fine fuel levels. When the characteristics of the reserve (size, shape, slope, vegetation type, proximity of adjoining assets) dictate the need to modify the fuel load further, an FMZ2 is created. This is less heavily modified; works typically involve removal of fallen fine fuels, woody weeds and blackberries.

Managing vegetation in this way allows us to reduce fuel loads while maintaining the ecological integrity of the reserve.

Residents living close to bushland reserves must understand that the bushland vegetation could catch fire, and this may produce embers that can travel great distances. The Shire's fire prevention works are designed to alleviate direct flame contact and radiant heat onto neighbouring houses, but ember attack is beyond such management. You, as a bushland neighbour, are responsible for maintaining your own property for the fire season.

Take time to look at the CFA's website ([www.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au)) to learn what you and your family need to do to become Fire Ready.

To find out more about the Shire's fire management works in the Balcombe Estuary Reserve, come along to the 'Fire Walk and Talk' on Thursday 10th December at 5 pm. Meet at the Pre-school car park opposite Moore St, Mt Martha (Melways ref 144 K11). Please RSVP on 5950 1263.

### Second prescription burn planned for Balcombe Estuary

A prescription burn is where prepared vegetation is deliberately lit under strict conditions to reduce fuel loads and increase biodiversity through natural regeneration. Each prescription burn requires much planning and an approved 'prescription' that details the strict conditions under which the burn can occur. In 2005, a prescription burn was undertaken in the Balcombe Estuary Reserve near *(continued page 4)*

## TRUST FOR NATURE – PROTECTING OUR BUSHLAND

*Ben Cullen, Port Phillip and Westernport Conservation Officer with Trust for Nature, spoke at the BERG AGM. This article presents the main points of his talk.*



Trust for Nature (TFN) was established by the Victorian Conservation Trust Act in 1972 to conserve privately owned bush-land. A significant proportion of our remaining quality bushland remains in private hands, including many areas of wilderness that are almost untouched. Almost all the indigenous vegetation on the Peninsula falls into a threatened category, so the need is urgent.

Funding is always tight. TFN relies to a large extent on donations, with some monies through grants and trusts, and some government funding.

### Buying bushland

TFN works through two broad mechanisms: purchase and covenant. Properties bought for conservation, or occasionally donated or bequeathed, may be 'revolved' on to National Parks or Parks Vic for management. Others are retained and managed by TFN, and a few are on-sold, protected by a conservation covenant, and the funds are used to buy and protect more bushland.

Over the years, TFN has purchased 111 properties and revolved 41 into national or state parks. On the Mornington Peninsula, for example, TFN purchased a large part of what is now Arthur's Seat State Park and revolved it on to Parks Vic. Murnong, the native dandelion that is now rare on the Peninsula, was found on this land and was a driving force in the purchase.

A bequest funded the purchase of the McKellar Flora Reserve,

next to Seawinds Park on Arthur's Seat, and this too was 'revolved' on to National Parks. It is one of the few remaining places where Purple Eyebrights, *Euphrasia collina* subsp *Muelleri*, grow.

When Green's Bush was to be sold by its long-standing owners, TFN raised funds to buy part of it, and the State Government bought the rest. TFN also raised funds to buy and protect the Edithvale Wetlands.

### Covenants

Landholders may also approach TFN to have their own patch of bushland protected by a conservation covenant. This is a binding, in-perpetuity agreement that goes on the title of the property, and has stood the test of time – in 30 years these covenants have never been broken. Ownership remains with the landholder – it's like having your own national park in your back yard. This is particularly valuable if the protected land extends an existing reserve or habitat corridor.

All the covenanted lands are added to the National Reserve system, which includes national and state parks, Indigenous lands and other protected lands.

Before putting a covenant in place, TFN assesses the property for environmental and ecological value, and talks to the owner about exactly what they want protected. TFN may, for example, set up a domestic area or an area of farmland where the owners can do what they like, and protect the rest. The process takes at least a few months or longer, to ensure the land is protected properly.

There are now over 1500 covenants in Victoria, including about 12 on the Mornington Peninsula.

TFN helps the owners to devise a management plan, and conducts stewardship visits to assess and assist in managing the protected area. But often it's the owner who really knows the protected land, and sees changes there over time.

All this knowledge is recorded and TFN now has up to 30 years

of history of some properties – an invaluable resource in tracking progress, monitoring the effects of climate and other factors, and managing the properties into the future.

TFN also logs sightings and communities of threatened species, wherever they may occur – for example, on the Peninsula, the Southern Brown Bandicoot, Growling Grass Frog, Cape Barren Geese, Sun Orchids, Lipped Spider Orchid, Royal Spoonbill, White Footed Dunart. These records can help to slow down the process of development and add caveats for developers.

### You can help

TFN would like individuals, groups or councils to let them know about private properties or public lands that you think should be protected. TFN can approach landholders and see if they can help them. Or you may nominate a council reserve – a number of council reserves are covenanted and even new freeways have to go round them

Let TFN know if you find a threatened species, and its locality, so it can be added to the data base.

And consider if a covenant is an option for your property. There are no costs involved, TFN covers the cost through donations and government funding.

*You can contact Ben Cullen at Trust for Nature on 0407 044 821, or at [benc@tfn.org.au](mailto:benc@tfn.org.au). To learn more about TFN, visit the website at [www.trustfornature.org.au](http://www.trustfornature.org.au).*

### BERG welcomes new members:

Andrew & Jan Jones  
Ben Cullen

### CORRECTION

In October, we published a photo of Ibis flying overhead. It was, however, the Australian White Ibis, not (as labelled) the Straw-necked Ibis, (previously known as the Sacred Ibis) – both of which are different species to the African Sacred Ibis. The different species are superficially similar. Thanks to Neil Shelley for this clarification.

**Fire Management in Bushland Reserves – cont from page 2**

the pre-school, with excellent results. Earlier this year another section of the reserve, next to the 2005 burn site, was prepared for a burn. The burn was planned for autumn, but the strict conditions required were not met, so we are now hoping to carry it out before summer if the prescribed conditions can be met.

Several large Southern Mahogany Gums (*Eucalyptus botryooides*) near the second burn site were removed under a planning permit from the Department of Sustainability and

Environment. This species, indigenous to eastern coastal forests from Lakes Entrance to Newcastle, is an environmental weed on the Peninsula. The specific concern is that it is able to hybridise with indigenous Manna Gums (*Eucalyptus viminalis*). The hybrid eucalypts tend to germinate *en masse* after disturbance and can quickly out-compete the Manna Gums. We saw this in the 2005 burn site, where vast numbers of hybrid eucalypt seedlings emerged after the burn and careful, intense weeding was required to remove

them all and allow the local Manna Gums to regenerate naturally.



*Trees dropped, waiting to burn on the planned 2009 burn site in the reserve. Behind the fence is the 2005 burn site, now a diverse and thriving bushland.*

BERG Working Bees	Other Activities	Meetings
<p>❖ <b>Monthly working bee:</b> 3rd Sunday, from 9.00 to 12.00. Next is <b>17<sup>th</sup> January</b>. 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>❖ <b>Tuesdays</b> 9.00 to 12.00, coffee break 10.30 – restarting after the summer heat. Contact Mary Stemp on 5974 3996.</p> <p>❖ <b>Hopetoun Creek Greenfield Reserve</b>, first Monday of the month, 9.30 to 12.30. Contact Hazel Athey to confirm, on 5974 3034 or 0419 899 560.</p>	<p>❖ <b>Waterwatch:</b> next physical and chemical testing on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> February, 9.00 am, at the Augusta St Bridge.</p> <p>❖ <b>Fairbairn Bushland Reserve Friends Group</b> working bees – contact John Stoker for details on 5974 4726.</p>	<p>❖ <b>BERG Committee</b> meets every 7-8 weeks at Mt Martha House, Saturdays 9.30. Next meeting 9<sup>th</sup> January. All members welcome.</p> <p>❖ <b>SPIFFA</b> (Southern Peninsula Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association) meets 1<sup>st</sup> Monday of the month, 7.30 pm, at Parks Vic, Hinton St, Rosebud (Mel 170 C4). Contact Jan Dwyer on 5986 6566.</p>
<p><b>BERG COMMITTEE</b></p> <p>PRESIDENT JOHN INCHLEY • VICE PRESIDENT MICHAEL SANDERS • 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 • CENTURY DVE HABITAT LINK GROUP TONY O'CONNOR                  CO-OPTED MEMBERS: HARRY HARRIS • DIANNE LEWIS                  HOPETOON CREEK GREENFIELD RESERVE GROUP HAZEL ATHEY • PUBLICITY BARBARA THRIVES</p>		
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