

THE CREEK

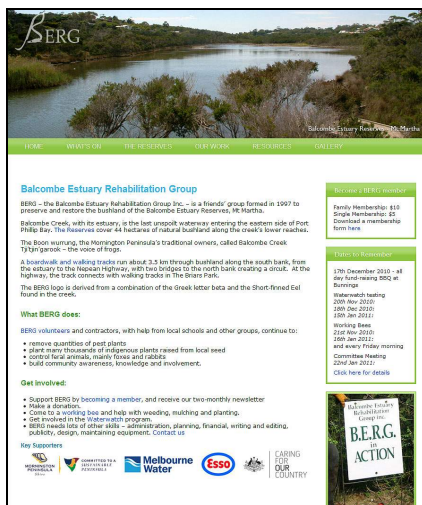
Volume 14 No 6, December 2010

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

WEBSITE REDESIGN

BERG's website has had a total makeover. Launched at the AGM in November, the site was redesigned by Technology Matters, and we have taken to opportunity to rethink and add to the content. For example, the site now includes a gallery of photos of flora, fauna, and BERG activities. Below is an image of the new home page.

The project was funded by members' donations.



Our particular thanks go to Neil Shelley. It was Neil who, many years ago, came to a meeting of the then somewhat IT-naïve Committee and suggested that BERG should have a website. He set it up, organised free hosting, set up the BERG email address, and has maintained the website since that time. We are indebted to him.

We have more additions to the website planned over time, and there are still a few minor tweaks to be done to the existing material. We welcome your comments or suggestions – phone Angela Kirsner on 9509 6116 or email info@berg.org.au.

CAN YOU HELP?

BERG is holding another fundraising **BBQ/Sausage Sizzle** at Bunnings, on Friday 17th December, 8.00am to 5.00 pm.

Can you spare an hour or two to help? Call Hazel Athey on 0419 899 560.

And come and buy a sausage!

BERG REAL ESTATE IN USE!

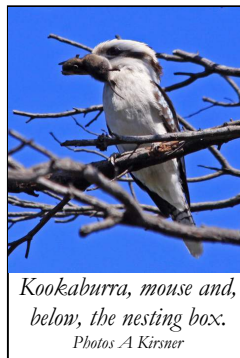
Workers at the November working bee became aware that we were being watched by a Kookaburra, perched high in a dead tree with a mouse held firmly in its beak.

Finally, when most of the workers had moved on, the Kookaburra flew, still with the mouse,

into a nearby large eucalypt. I got there just in time to see it emerge, without the mouse, from a BERG nesting box!

It kept a close eye on us for the rest of the morning. We were, I assume, just a little too close for comfort to its family.

Angela Kirsner



Kookaburra, mouse and, below, the nesting box.
Photos A Kirsner



BERG welcomes new members:

Graham & Vivien Riches
Patricia Nelson
Laurence Cupido & family

BERG'S REPORT CARD

from President John Inchley

I am often asked about the health of the Balcombe Estuary Reserve, and how members can help in the rehabilitation process.

How healthy is our creek?

The health of our reserve includes not only the bush, and how well it provides habitat for the indigenous birds and other animals, but also the health of the creek water itself.

Physical and chemical data collected by our Waterwatch team are within the guidelines, indicating that the water would support a diversity of life, and the banks and waterway habitat are generally good. However, the lack of abundance and diversity of macroinvertebrates raises concerns. Melbourne Water is currently undertaking a fish (and a bird) survey, and this will contribute to the overall picture.

It would be interesting to have a similar assessment of the bushland. One possible instrument is the Department of Sustainability and Environment's Vegetation Field Assessment program. This measures the number and diversity of large trees, tree canopy cover, presence of invasive weeds, and understorey life forms, giving a site condition score.

Parts of our estuary would score well, but other parts remain somewhat degraded, with weed invasion, damage by feral animals, erosion and silting. Much of BERG's work in the next few years will be controlling this weed invasion to allow natural regeneration

How members can help

There are so many ways to help! All you need is energy, time, and a particular interest or skill.

- **Membership** – Simply being a financial member helps us to demonstrate strong support when we apply for grants.
 - **Donations** – These are invaluable. They fund many necessities that are not covered by grants – most recently, the redesign of the our website.
- We have set up working groups to ease the load on committee members, and we welcome your help on any of these:
- **Publicity, media, community liaison and signage** – for those with a flair for designing signs, nature trails, writing articles, public speaking, taking photos
 - **Newsletter** – writing articles, photos, distribution
 - **Website** – regular updating and expanding, development of new pages
 - **Schools liaison** – working with primary and secondary students in ongoing programs relating to the reserve, often in very practical and rewarding ways
 - **Waterwatch** – chemical testing and macroinvertebrate surveys at 3 sites every month – training can be arranged
 - **Feral animal control** – rabbits are a huge problem. We need help in locating and mapping warrens, feeding grounds and damage, and with baiting and fumigation
 - **Equipment maintenance** – an ongoing task
 - **Functions, events, catering** – for example, Clean Up Australia Day, Environment Week, Weed Busters, fund-raising Sausage Sizzles, or just baking a cake for a working bee morning tea
 - **On-ground planning and management** (including grants) – for those with strategic, writing and computer skills, weed ID and mapping. See Liz's report for more on this.

Working bees are our core activities. New faces are always

welcome, be they regular or occasional:

- Our monthly 3rd Sunday working bees (9.00 am, meet at the Rotunda) are renowned for great morning teas!
- The Tuesday Morning Group has been looking after the Bunyip area (below the Kindergarten) for many years, and the results are clear in the quality of the bushland.
- The recently formed Friday Morning Group works wherever it is needed, concentrating largely but not entirely on weeding – a particularly pressing task in this wonderful growing season.

Endless opportunities

There are always new ideas and new tasks that need input and energy. For example:

- We plan to develop a bird hide when we find time.
- A bat monitoring program is planned (see "Field News"), and we also need help to build more bat boxes.
- BERG pamphlets have to be distributed to a number of distribution points (information centres, interested shops etc), and these points need to be monitored to ensure they have supplies.

Watch the newsletter for "Can you help?" requests – you are needed! And contact John Inchley (5974 095) or Liz Barraclough (0408 388 430) if you'd like be involved.

IN FLOWER IN THE RESERVE

The deep pink flowers of *Rubus parvifolius*, the Native Raspberry, will be followed by small, edible red berries. A rambling small shrub or trailing plant, it is covered in hooked thorns. This patch is near the Soccer Pitch. *Photo A Kirser*

A YEAR OF STREAMLINING

Liz Barraclough reports

BERG is doing more than ever, not only in the reserve but beyond, upstream at Century Drive, along our tributaries Hopetoun Creek and Harrap Creek, along the foreshore, even in front of the shops. We work with schools and do lots of other community liaison.

It has become a priority to streamline processes between those involved in our work, notably BERG, our contractor Naturelinks, and the Shire. The aim is to:

- be more inclusive
- spread the workload
- establish continuity and succession planning
- engage more members in a range of different tasks.

We have designed worksheets, using Excel spreadsheets, to plan and track each of our many projects. These are supported by Google Maps. We are also developing activity running sheets, which will make it easier to prepare and organise activities such as planting or weeding working-bees.

The worksheets will:

- assist us in preparing grant applications
- provide works plans for contractors, BERG and the Shire that can be regularly updated
- be invaluable for monitoring what we are doing
- make reporting easier, to granting bodies, the committee, and the membership
- provide an easy and efficient means of communication, collaboration and coordination
- provide better records
- make it easier for members to be both involved in and informed about what we are doing.

John Inchley's report (above) describes our new working groups, also set up to help with delegating and sharing jobs and responsibilities. Clearly we are much more than a group of keen weeders and planters! We welcome your help, and your suggestions.

FIELD NEWS

Field Officer Liz Barraclough reports

Working bees

A faithful core turned up in October to work on the Campground. A previously sprayed out bed where an old Manna Gum had died was planted with a couple more Mannas (so signage may again be relevant), two trays of *Poa poiformis* and a few shrubs. A number of beds were also weeded and the shed cleaned out.

In November, a small but hard working crew tackled the woody weeds, principally Boneseed, near the corner of Uralla Rd and the Highway and along the side of the Soccer Pitch. Behind the Boneseed we found a flourishing patch of Native Raspberry (see photo p.2), and through all the weed grasses, lots of the native Oxalis with its delicate yellow flowers. And the frog hollow we created by the Soccer Pitch some years ago is once again wet and croaking!

Rain and weeds

The Friday morning group has, in this phenomenal growing season, been trying to keep abreast of the weeds in the Uralla Bridge area, as well as weeding and planting along the new boardwalk near the Uralla stormwater drain outlet. Flooding (see photos) has kept weeds at bay in some areas, while in others they have gone berserk!

Monitoring small bats

Fauna ecologist Paul Bertuch, who is monitoring and maintaining our nesting boxes in the reserve, is planning a program to monitor small bats in the reserve.

Paul will draw on the considerable knowledge gained from the Organ Pipes National Park Bat Roost Box project and kindly passed on by Robert Bender. Since 1994, volunteers have monitored bat roost boxes monthly, capturing, identifying, counting, monitoring and weighing the bats. Bat numbers have increased substantially over the years, and the project has revealed much about the lives of bats.

Balcombe Creek in flood

John Inchley took these photos after 56 mm of rain on 31st October brought Mt Martha's October rainfall to 125mm.



A raging torrent, Mt Martha style!



Near the Geoff Kaye Bridge



The inundated boardwalk just downstream from the Uralla Rd bridge.

Two weeks later, the creek was again overflowing after 46mm over the 12th and 13th of November.

In our Reserve, Paul reports that some bat boxes were not being used because they were too open and vulnerable. He has altered them and we hope to see them occupied soon. New boxes will be developed using the Bat Roost Box Kit (see www.bats.org.au/download/bat_roost_box_v4i.pdf) – this will be step one of the project.

Monitoring will involve both visual inspection of the boxes and cameras.

If you are interested in helping Paul with this project, please phone Liz on 0408 388 430.

Keep a watch on our plantings!

When you are at the Mt Martha shops, cast your eye over the plants we put in the ground a few weeks ago. If they seem a little stressed from lack of water, please give us a call or better still, give the plants a drink!

The BERG works trailer

As reported in previous newsletters, Michael Sanders has done a great job outfitting the inside of our new (to BERG) trailer. When next you see it, the outside panels will be adorned with eye-catching BERG signs!

Chemicals users' course

I recently completed a 3-day in-depth chemicals users' course (funded by Parks Vic) at Chisholm Institute, Rosebud campus. The aim of the course was to provide an understanding of the hazards and risks that pest plant and animals pose to agriculture, horticulture and natural resource management, and of the range of pest control methods that are employed. Chemicals are only one of these methods. Using the approach known as "Integrated Pest Management", the answer might be as simple as improving air circulation to discourage fungal attack to plants.

The course also covered legislation and industry standards, understanding Agvet chemicals, their labels and material safety data sheets, personal safety, transport, storage, preparation, application and clean up, protection procedures, records and reports.

Being up to date on all these matters is, of course, important for safe, effective and efficient weed control in the reserve.

Thanks!

...for all your terrific help this year. Wishing everyone a great Christmas and looking forward to seeing you invigorated and raring to go in the New Year!

CONTAMINATED SOIL AT CITATION OVAL

The following summarises an article in the Mornington Peninsula Leader, 1st November 2010. Citation Oval, in Helena Street, abuts the Balcombe Estuary Reserve.

Soil found to be contaminated with arsenic has forced the part closure of the leash-free dog walking area at Mt Martha's Citation Oval. The area has been fenced off and the public advised to avoid the area until Council gives the all-clear.

Citation Oval is the home of South Mornington Football Club,

which bought the soil – for which it had Council approval – to upgrade the carpark next to the leash-free area.

The recent high rainfall has also meant that the contaminated soil has spread beyond the carpark.

In consultation with the EPA, the Shire engaged an independent company to test the soil for a wide range of contaminants. Further tests still being carried out.



It is not clear how the soil became contaminated but council director of sustainable infrastructure Alex Atkins said some soils on the Peninsula contain naturally occurring elevated levels of arsenic. He said that contamination levels detected do not pose any immediate health threats, and contamination of neighbouring properties is unlikely. The Shire's environmental health team is closely monitoring the situation.

BERG will continue to monitor the situation.

BERG Working Bees	Other BERG Activities	Other Groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Monthly working bee: 3rd Sunday, from 9.00 to 12.00. Next is 16th January. Meet at the Rotunda (Mel: 144 K11). If running late, phone Liz Barraclough (0408 388 430) to find the work site. ❖ Tuesdays 9.00 to 12.00. Contact Mary Stemp to confirm, on 5974 3996. ❖ Friday mornings. For details call Liz Barraclough, 0408 388 430 ❖ Hopetoun Creek Greenfield Reserve. Contact Hazel Athey, 0419 899 560. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Waterwatch testing: 3rd Saturday, 9.00 am, meet at Augusta St Bridge. Next are 18th December and 15th January. Enquiries to John Inchley on 5974 1095. ❖ BERG Committee meets every 7-8 weeks at Mt Martha House, Saturdays 9.30am. Next meeting 22nd January. All members welcome 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Fairbairn Bushland Reserve Friends Group working bees. Contact John Stoker, 5977 1397. ❖ Penboc birdwatching 2nd Wednesday and 3rd Sunday. Enquiries www.penboc.org.au or Max Burrows 9789 0224. ❖ SPIFFA (Southern Peninsula Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association) 1st Monday of the month, 7.30 pm, at Parks Vic, Hinton St, Rosebud. Enquiries 5988 6529, or www.spiffa.org.
<p>BERG COMMITTEE</p> <p>PRESIDENT JOHN INCHLEY • VICE PRESIDENT MICHAEL SANDERS • SECRETARY MARY STEMPT • TREASURER RICHARD KIRSNER</p> <p>FIELD OFFICER LIZ BARRACLOUGH • NEWSLETTER, MEMBERSHIP ANGELA KIRSNER • MINUTES SECRETARY PAM HEARN</p> <p>SCHOOLS LIAISON JENNY SELBY • ROTARY CLUB LIAISON GEOFF KAYE • HOPETOON CREEK GREENFIELD RESERVE GROUP HAZEL ATHEY</p> <p>CO-OPTED MEMBERS:</p> <p>DIANNE LEWIS • PUBLICITY BARBARA THRIVES • CENTURY DVE HABITAT LINK GROUP TONY O'CONNOR</p>		
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