

THE CREEK

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

WALKING THE DOG

Jo-Anne Tetteroo, Conservation Officer with the Mornington Peninsula Shire, reports

The Mornington Peninsula Shire installed a number of new dog-related signs at Balcombe Estuary Reserve last December. They read:

Dogs must be on-leash at all times in this bushland reserve

Off-leash dogs stress native wildlife long after the dog has left.

The Shire is assessing the sustainability of continuing to allow dog access.

A 3-month trial is underway to observe dog walkers' behaviour.

Keeping your dog on-leash protects all dog owners continuing to be able to access public open space.

During January and February, Shire officers patrolled the reserve at various times of the day, weekdays and weekends, observing and engaging with dog walkers. Co-operative dog walkers were asked to complete one of the following statements:

- "In future I will put my dog on a lead because..." (for dog walkers with their dogs off lead), or
- "I walk my dog on a lead because..." (for dog walkers with their dogs on lead).

Our aim was to find out what we can do to ensure people walk their dogs on a lead in future. Signage alone isn't enough.

We found that 60% of people using the reserve were dog walkers. Of over 80 dog walkers observed during the patrols, 70% had their dogs on a lead – better than we had expected.

What the "on lead" dog walkers had to say

Dog walkers with their dogs on a lead were the clear majority and

they were very vocal about "off lead" walkers potentially spoiling dog walking privileges for all. The main reason given for walking their dogs on a lead was to protect the dog and keep it under control around other dogs and people. Many people mentioned that they lived locally, really enjoyed walking their dog through the reserve, and wanted to protect this privilege. Only a handful of people gave protection of native wildlife and vegetation as the reason for using a lead. Also surprisingly low on the list of reasons was "because it's the law".

Every dog owner I spoke to had poo bags with them, which was great to see. They, along with many other people using the boardwalk, were disgusted by the amount of dog poo on the boardwalk – again, a small minority of people spoiling the experience for everyone.

What the "off lead" dog walkers had to say

Dog walkers with their dogs off lead were often difficult to engage and were quite defensive of their actions. Those who were approachable didn't really complete the statement we posed to them; rather they offered up a range of excuses as to why their dog was off lead. These included "she's an old dog", "he just walks beside me", "my dog would never attack other dogs / children / wildlife", "I didn't realise it should be", "my dogs like to have a run around", and "I've always walked my dog off lead through here".

The handful who completed the statement "in future I will put my dog on a lead because..." said they would do so because they might get fined.



Off-lead dogs forge tracks through the scrub, destroying vegetation and eroding the creek banks, as here, beside a boardwalk platform

Where to from here?

It is encouraging that people walking their dogs off lead in the reserve are in the minority. However, given the high number of dog walkers who use the reserve, this minority still amounts to quite high numbers, and their impact on the environment is a real concern.

Unfortunately our survey didn't elicit the information we were after from people walking their dogs off lead. We intend to reword the question and hope to get more useful information next time.

Continuing on from this three month trial, Shire officers will be maintaining an active presence in the reserve, particularly during high-use periods such as school holidays and over summer. Through these patrols we will continue to observe dog walkers' behaviour, engage with them over dogs off lead and dog poo issues, and issue fines to those who do not comply with the local laws for this reserve.

We hope this continued engagement will enable us to come up with some more effective solutions to a very common problem.

FIELD NEWS

Liz Barraclough reports

Working bees

In April we removed lots of woody weeds, including large amounts of Hawthorn along the fire track on the north bank near Uralla Bridge, and Boneseed, Pittosporum and Gorse from the quarry area. We will monitor regeneration and, where necessary, spot-plant to increase diversity and enhance the habitat corridors down to the riparian area.



Liz's car is instantly identifiable at working bees during the planting season!

At the May working bee, we planted lots along the foreshore, south of the yacht club – Banksias, Sheokes, Rhagodias, white Correas and various other things – into wonderfully moist ground. It was great to see the many Banksias we planted here last year thriving.



Those who were at the March working bee may be interested to know that the skink we thought might have been the nationally significant Swamp Skink (pictured) has, in fact, been identified by skink expert Norm McKinlay, from Chinaman's Creek (where the rare skink does reside) as a Southern Water Skink. It is very welcome nevertheless!

Grants

We were successful with our \$5,000 Caring for our Country Coastal Grant application, and work will begin along the foreshore from Coolangatta Road to the northern carpark in the next few months. The best thing about this grant is that as soon as we have finished these works, we can reapply for another \$5,000 for further essential follow-up.

New hand-weeding team

Sue Betheras and I have decided to spend a few pleasant hours on Friday mornings weeding the Poa plantings along the boardwalk in the Uralla Bridge area.

Join us if you're interested!

We'll meet in the small carpark by the Uralla Rd bridge at 10.00 am. You need not commit to being a 'regular', just come when you can. Equipment and morning-tea provided. Contact Liz on 0408 388 430 or Sue on 5974 3687 – or just turn up!

Balcombe Grammar

BERG will again this year be part of the school's third-term community service program, with students from years 6 and 8.

Rather than simply more planting and mulching, this year we are planning a more varied program, introducing ecological principles through activities that demonstrate the inter-relationship between plants, animals and their habitat. There will be bird watching, frog surveying, monitoring of nesting boxes, and mapping. We plan to explore ways of monitoring and recording using photography, dictaphones or GPS, and to have these sessions presented by experts such as Gidja Walker (local ecologist) and Paul Bertuch (fauna ecologist).

Can you help with the students?

We would again love some BERG helpers to work with the teachers and parents, 11.30am – 2.30pm, on Wednesday July 21st & 27th.

August 4th, 11th & 18th
September 8th & 15th.

If you can help on any of these days, contact Liz on 0408 388 430 or email liz.barra@bigpond.com

Habitat Management Course

The course, which includes five BERG participants, is nearing its end. It's been very intensive – five full weekend programs, Friday evening as well as all day Saturday and Sunday, and we have learnt heaps. Watch for a comprehensive report in the next newsletter.

Publicity for BERG

On May 13th, Barbara Thraves and I set up a BERG stall at the "Peninsula Volunteering Expo 2010", presented by Mornington Peninsula Shire and The Volunteering Resource Service on May 13th. The aim of the Expo was to show-case volunteering on the Peninsula and information on opportunities for prospective volunteers.



Barb Thraves behind the BERG stall at the Peninsula Volunteering Expo 2010

IT'S PLANTING TIME! HANDS NEEDED AT EXTRA WORKING BEES

...with delicious home-baked morning/afternoon tea provided!

Century Drive Group

Date: Saturday 5th June, 2–4 pm.
Place: Retarding basin, next to 9 Century Drive (Melways 146 A8)
Contact: Tony O'Connor
0404 951 500.

Hopetoun Creek Greenfield Reserve Group

Two dates: Sunday 30th May and Sunday 11th July, 9.30am–12 noon.
Place: Greenfield Way.
Contact: Hazel Athey 5974 3034

Harrap Creek Group

Date: Sunday 25th July, 9.30am–12 noon
Place: Meet at foot bridge, end of Baystone Court., off Hyperno Way.
Contact: Liz Barraclough
0408 388 430

FREE PLANTS!

Once again, BERG is offering indigenous plants to Mt Martha residents. This is part of meeting our grant obligations to increase community awareness of the importance of indigenous plants as habitat for native animal populations, especially the birds.

Here's a sample:

Trees

- *Acacia melanoxylon* (Blackwood), a dense, handsome screening tree.
- *Allocasuarina littoralis* (Black Sheoke), elegant mop-heads, wonderful in groups, with weed-suppressing needles.
- *Allocasuarina verticillata* (Drooping Sheoke), darker and more erect.



The drooping orange flowers of a male Allocasuarina verticillata (females have small fluffy red flowers on the stem)

- *Eucalyptus ovata* (Swamp Gum) thrives in wet or damp places.
- *Eucalyptus pryoriana* (Manna Gum), a large spreading tree, the koalas' gum, but not for small gardens!

Shrubs

- *Acacia paradoxa* (Hedge Wattle), an excellent screening plant, with a dense, prickly habit that is great habitat for small birds. Good in drier areas.



Acacia paradoxa by the roadside

- *Acacia verticillata* (Prickly Wattle) will tolerate damper areas.
- *Correa alba* (White Correa) grows almost anywhere, and forms a good medium to low screen. Its starry white flowers, out now, complement the grey leaves.



Correa alba, now in flower

- *Goodia lotifolia* (Golden Tip, Clover Tree) – an open shrub covered with yellow pea flowers in spring. Grows taller in damper soils, up to 2-3 m.
- *Goodenia ovate* (Hop Goodenia), yellow flowers from spring to autumn, grows most places, a good hedge plant.

Sedges

- *Dianella longifolia* (Pale Flax Lily), green strappy leaves with long stems of delicate mauve-blue flowers followed by rich purple berries. Plant it in drifts.
- *Ficinia nodosa* (Knobby Club-sedge), clumps of delicate needle-like foliage about 60cms high, tough, grows almost anywhere.

Climbers

- *Clematis microphyla* (Small-leaved Clematis), fast-growing, un-fussy, smothered in white star flowers in spring followed by mass of fluffy white seed heads.

Need advice?

We are happy to give advice on what to plant, where, how, and what follow-up care is needed.

For an excellent brochure showing local plants with their size and planting locality, visit www.mornpen.vic.gov.au, go to "Your Environment" then "Flora and Fauna", scroll down and click on "Mornington Peninsula Indigenous Planting Guide".

AUDITOR NEEDED

Jim Thomas, BERG's long-standing honorary auditor, is stepping down after this financial year's audit, so we are looking for a new auditor – a qualified accountant with auditing experience, who is a current member of one of the professional accounting bodies (the latter required for some government grants). Contact John Inchley on 5974 1095.

FROM THE TUESDAY GROUP

The Tuesday Group has been nurturing the Bunyip area (below the kindergarten) for many years. Mary Stemp describes a May morning's work.

At 9:30 I met Isobel and Gwen in the Kindergarten carpark and, despite the unsettled weather and forecast of hail, we decided to work. Our reward was a pleasant morning removing weeds followed by coffee and slice at Gwen's place.

This year we are concentrating our efforts on the areas of the Bunyip immediately beside and below the kinder. A year ago, below the kinder looked like a wasteland after the tea trees were removed as a fire hazard. Now it's transformed, with an amazing array of plants regenerating: Guinea Flower, Running Postman, Boobialla, and many others, with reeds and grasses between starting to compete successfully with the weeds. The Shire is paying Naturelinks to spray flat weeds and our old enemy, Panic Veldt Grass, so we can concentrate on the more manageable aspects of hand weeding amongst the seedlings.

Today we tackled Dodder Laurel, an indigenous parasite. Despite its benign-sounding name, it acts like something out of Harry Potter. Its yellowish-green stems twist around trees and shrubs – in this case, a Banksia and a Casuarina – slowly strangling its victims. Apparently it used to be kept under control by creatures that no longer inhabit the area, and it is rampant. Not only did we rescue a couple of well-established but endangered trees, we also surely dispersed any latent aggression we might have been harbouring!

Last week Pam noticed a small, neat hole in the ground with a number of legs tucked into it. The experts tell us it was almost certainly a Wolf Spider. The males are on the look-out for mates at this time.

And the leaves of Greenhood and Mosquito orchids have appeared along the path edges.

BUSHLAND REGENERATION WORKSHOPS – FREE!

MORNINGTON Peninsula Shire is offering free workshops to bushland volunteers, to provide basic training and knowledge for bushland regeneration.

Bookings essential – contact the Natural Systems Team on 5950 1263. Workshop 1 was in April; three remain:

Workshop 2: Weed control techniques. Possible dates:

Wed June 16th, 2pm–5pm OR

Thurs June 17th, 6pm–9pm OR

Sat June 19th, 10am–1pm.

Workshop 3: Fauna protection and habitat restoration. Possible dates:

Wed Sept 8th, 2pm–5pm OR

Thurs Sept 9th, 6pm–9pm OR

Sat September 11th, 10am–1pm.

Workshop 4: Plant ID in your patch. Possible dates:

Wed Nov 10th, 2pm–5pm OR

Thurs Nov 11th, 6pm–9pm OR

Sat November 13th, 10am–1pm.

BERG welcomes new members:

Sarah Joyce
Diane Kerr
Jay Nemec

THANKS

...from the Mornington Peninsula Schools Environment Week Committee to BERG volunteers who helped with the Waterwatch Program: Jenny Rolleston, Barbara Thraves, Gayle O'Connor, Roo Rawlins, Hazel Athey, Harry Harris, Pam Hearn.

BERG Working Bees	Other Activities	Meetings
<p>❖ Monthly working bee: 3rd Sunday, from 9.00 to 12.00. Next are 20th June and 18th 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.</p> <p>❖ Tuesdays 9.00 to 12.00, coffee break 10.30. Contact Mary Stemp to confirm, on 5974 3996.</p> <p>❖ Century Drive, Hopetoun Creek and Harrap Creek planting bees – see page 2</p>	<p>❖ Waterwatch: next physical and chemical testing on Saturday 21st 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>❖ Penboc birdwatching outings, 2nd Wednesday and 3rd Sunday of each month. Beginners welcome. Contact president Max Burrows on 9789 0224, or go to www.penboc.org.au.</p>	<p>❖ BERG Committee meets every 7-8 weeks at Mt Martha House, Saturdays 9.30 am. Next meeting 26th June. All members welcome.</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 JOHN INCHLEY • VICE PRESIDENT MICHAEL SANDERS • 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 • CENTURY DVE HABITAT LINK GROUP TONY O'CONNOR CO-OPTED MEMBERS: HARRY HARRIS • DIANNE LEWIS HOPETOON CREEK GREENFIELD RESERVE GROUP HAZEL ATHEY • PUBLICITY BARBARA THRAVES</p>		
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