

THE CREEK

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Balcombe Estuary Rehabilitation Group

No A0034645Y ABN 50 224 628 623

TOOLS TO HAND!

Some months ago BERG bought an elderly but sound trailer. Michael Sanders has transformed it, and it made its debut at the September working bee, holding all the tools and gadgets and first aid equipment and other things that we might need. The final step, which is underway, is to have some BERG publicity painted on the sides and rear. Thank you Michael!



All fitted out! The interior of BERG's wonderful new works trailer

PIONEERS OF THE PLANT WORLD

This article is adapted from *Farmnote* 46/2000: *Pioneer plants in revegetation*, by Nathan McQuoid, Manager, Vegetation Services, Greening Australia (WA) and Colin Holt, Revegetation Development Officer, Agriculture WA, for Agriculture WA (see www.agric.wa.gov.au).

Among natural plant communities, there exist plants that are exclusively adapted to be "pioneers". These plants dominate the early years of the community's life. Following a disturbance, they move in quickly and aggressively and stabilise the soil surface, dominating for ten years or so.

It is important to include such plants in revegetation projects. They give quick ground coverage, reduce weed invasion and provide protection for longer-lived species. Pioneer plants mature and set seed quickly, creating a seed source for recovery if the revegetation were to be affected by a disturbance.

Ideally, revegetation should aim to create vegetation systems that mimic nature, using the species that make up the different components of natural communities indigenous to the site. Perhaps the most important of these components is the ability to replace itself after a major disturbance.

Disturbance

"Disturbance" in this context describes an event that affects vegetation and soil. It may remove plants directly or alter the environment to favour other species.

The most common disturbances are fire, extreme winds, flood, nutrient increase, soil movement by machinery or erosion, grazing, water-table recharge, and salinity.

A disturbance creates conditions that trigger plants either to germinate from seed or to resprout, or both. Some examples of disturbance and plant response are:

- healthy bush recovering and flourishing after what appears to be destructive fire;
 - native grasses beginning to dominate a previously disturbed area that is now stabilising;
 - long-term grazing of bush that removes palatable plants and allows weed invasion; and
- (continued page 2)

NOTICE OF MEETING AND CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

2010 BERG

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

SATURDAY 6TH NOVEMBER
at Mt Martha House
9.30 am registration for the meeting at 10.00 am

Guest speaker, at 11.00, is
Dr Valerie Tarrant,
Environmental and Social Historian
speaking on

"Local Communities and Conservation in Greater Melbourne: Stories from the 1950s to the Present"

Valerie has been a hands-on conservationist since the late 1960s – notably, she was a founding member of the Black Rock and Sandringham Conservation Association. As a historian, she wrote her PhD thesis on "Melbourne's Indigenous Plants Movement: The Return of the Natives". And she's a great speaker!

[Note change from speaker advertised last newsletter]

Meeting Agenda

- Welcome and apologies
- Minutes of 2009 AGM
- Committee reports:
President, John Inchley;
Treasurer, Richard Kirsner;
Field Officer, Liz Barraclough
- Election: President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary, 6 ordinary committee members.
- Appointment of Auditor

Nominations for Office Bearers and Committee

Forms are 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 30th October.

- mass germination of wetland shrub and tree species, like *Melaleucas*, after flood.

It will be interesting to watch the swamp areas of the Balcombe Estuary Reserve after the frequent inundation we have seen over recent months. Will we see massive recruitment of sedges and rushes and herbaceous species? Weeds are certainly likely to be a problem, with small pieces of *Tradescantia* washed downstream from infested areas.



Kennedia prostrata (Running Postman) carpets the ground in October 2008, below regenerating *Acacia pycnantha* (Golden Wattle) after fire at Mt Martha Park

Pioneer plants

Native pioneer plants, sometimes called colonising plants, respond quickly to occupy an area that has been affected by a disturbance. Native grasses, ground covers, and many wattles are great Australian pioneer plants.

Many introduced weeds are also pioneer plants, and are often more efficient colonisers than the native pioneer species. Disturbed sites need to be managed to control weeds and favour the indigenous pioneer plants.

Pioneering plants have several important strategies for success:

- the ability to germinate *en masse* in huge numbers when conditions are right;
- very tough seed that often remains viable in the ground for long periods (decades or more);
- effective dispersal mechanisms, such as winged or “Velcro” seeds, or palatability to birds, mammals and insects;

- the ability to grow quickly and provide ground cover to reduce competition from other plants;
- resistance to grazing (many are prickly or poisonous).
- the ability to set seed quickly, as many of them are short-lived.

The prescribed burn patch in the Balcombe Estuary Reserve provided a dramatic example of germination *en masse*, with many hundreds of Black Wattles (*Acacia mearnsii*) striving for light and space in the early years after the 2005 prescribed burn.

Other pioneer species indigenous to Mt Martha, as demonstrated in the prescribed burn site, include *Senecio* sp, *Kennedia prostrata* (Running Postman), daisies such as *Cassinia aculeata* and *Ozothamnus ferrugineus*, and *Solanum aviculare* (Kangaroo Apple), which grows rapidly to around two metres and dies within about five years.



Thickets of Black Wattles about 30 months after the 2005 prescribed burn

Pioneer plants recruit easily and heavily, but they also die in large numbers because of competition for water and nutrients. Attrition, also the result of their relatively short life spans, is important. It allows longer-lived plants greater access to water and nutrients and provides dead plant material which:

- provides habitat, shelter and food for many animals;
- provides many beneficial fungi and other micro-organisms with suitable habitat and resources;
- enables recycling to occur on site; and
- provides microclimate protection for growing plants.

This type of recovery is common after fire in healthy bushland. There are important lessons for regeneration projects:

- Indigenous pioneer plants are necessary as part of the recovery process and therefore should be integral in revegetation.
- They supply cover for the vegetation system that will eventually dominate.
- They build up a seed bank in the soil so that the next time there is a disturbance they can again dominate as pioneer species.
- Many are nitrogen fixing and introduce nitrogen into the system.



Solanum aviculare (Kangaroo Apple, a common pioneer plant, in flower and fruit

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY

Come to an inaugural meeting of the new Mornington Peninsula branch of the APS, at Mornington Community Information and Support Centre, **Thursday 7th October, 7.30pm**. Hear a talk by gardener and author Diana Snape, and help to decide on future activities.

Enquiries: Philip Robinson 5975 2914, Brian Henderson 5983 5134.

BRIDGE MAINTENANCE

Council has advised that Vic Roads will be doing routine painting maintenance and concrete repair works to the under side of the Esplanade bridge this summer. The project is expected to take around 12 weeks from February to early April 2011. Works will be planned to minimise environmental impact and maintain pedestrian access to the beach over the busy summer period.

FIELD NEWS

Field Officer Liz Barraclough reports

Working bees

At the August and September working bees we planted over 550 coastal indigenous plants along the foreshore reserve, from the south beach carpark north to Victoria Crescent. It was a great achievement, as the terrain is not easy and the conditions were blowy, damp and exposed.

Our aim is to improve the diversity of the foreshore vegetation. We are removing the woody and scrambling weeds (Polygala, Boneseed, Scrambling Dock, Dolichus Pea), selectively so we don't destabilise the soil base, and replacing them middle storey species (and more Banksias), to protect and rehabilitate the threatened Coast Banksia Woodland, which is a vital component of the ecology of Mount Martha.

Friday morning group

Although our declared reason for being is hand-weeding, our small band of three or four has recently been spending its time planting in the Uralla Bridge area, when the area has not been under water.

Then, in mid September, we spent a day planting to enhance the area opposite the Mount Martha shops, following up our offer to help the Shire once they'd prepared the site. Concern has been expressed that the area is rapidly being suburban-ized and losing its coastal charm and attraction. Our work was an attempt to turn this tide a little, planting local coastal species to restore a little of the seaside and bushland feel of old Mt Martha.

Grants

We again received a \$2300 GVEHO grant towards this



Swamped! Plantings near Uralla Bridge



Friday group members planting in front of the Mount Martha shops

financial year's administration costs. This frees up precious funds from members' donations for more vital on-ground works.

We have applied for another

Caring For Our Country, Community Action Grant (2010-11), to follow-up the Bridal Creeper control and to rehabilitate the vegetation below Citation Oval and around the nearby Old Quarry.

Community awareness and involvement

Raising community awareness of the Balcombe Estuary, its ecological and environmental value, and the issues facing it, as a microcosm of wider environmental concerns, is a central part of BERG's work and a requirement under our grants. Working with schools is an important part of this work.

For the seven weeks of term three, **Balcombe Grammar** year 6 and year 8 students have again spent each Wednesday working with BERG to mulch and plant (1,760 plants!) the easement that runs from the school to Greenfield Way and the riparian zone of

Hopetoun Creek. We hope to enhance this each year until we have an indigenous habitat corridor linking the planting at the school with the creek. Local ecologists Gidja Walker and Paul Bertuch introduced the students to the ecological principles behind their practical contribution. Lots of thanks to the very patient and hard working BERG volunteers – Hazel Athey, Jean Severn, Roo Rawlins, Flo Gason and Jenny Selby – for giving up so much of their time in mostly rotten weather.

Osborne Primary School has been keen to "green" and improve the school grounds, especially round some of the new buildings and so, as part of our community

BERG MT MARTHA
BALCOMBE ESTUARY REHABILITATION GROUP

BERG is a locally supported group which works to restore and maintain the Balcombe Creek Estuary with its 44 Ha bushland reserves. This is the last unspoilt estuary on the east side of Port Phillip. It is a haven for local plants, birds, lizards, frogs, fish and small mammals.

HEALTHY ESTUARY
HEALTHY COMMUNITY

BERG is supported by the community in many ways. Members take part in working bees, school education, grants and general administration.

With skilled guidance and planning, we restore the bushland, control weeds, monitor water quality and build community awareness and support.

www.berg.org.au

Banner Headlines!

There was brief mention in the last newsletter of the first of BERG's new pull-up banners (about 2m high), to be used at presentations, displays and functions. We now have two, pictured above. They have already proved a boon at stalls and talks.

Thanks to our creative publicity and media team, Barb Thraves, Di Lewis, Jenny Rolleston and especially Ros Crompton, who put so much time and work into the design and production of the banners.

awareness program, BERG contributed about 80 suitable plants for the designated areas. We helped the school to prepare a planting plan for the students and parents to follow at their working-bee.

Weedbuster Week is also important in building community awareness and knowledge – this time, of invasive local weed species. Again this year we set up our annual weed display and information stand outside the local IGA with Sunshine Reserve Conservation & Fireguard Group. We showed passers-by samples of

the weeds, talked about why they are a problem, and highlighted the problem of “garden escapes” – resilient plants that thrive and prosper in local gardens, and so easily jump the fence to colonise local bushland.

A bonus from the Weedbuster stall was the boost to our membership – 3 family members and 5 single members joined on the day.

I was also asked to give a talk on BERG’s work at a “Chicks to Boilers” women’s lunch at Brooklands in Mornington in August.

BERG welcomes new members:
 Elaine & Jock MacMillan
 Greg Ellis & family
 Anja Ottensmeyer & family
 Wendy & Paul Williams
 Marion & Steve Fraser
 Paul & Jan Green
 Pia Spreen
 Fiona Rush
 Peta Munroe
 Sue Parker
 Pru Evans

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 17th October and 21st November. Meet at the Rotunda (Mel: 144 K11). If late, call Liz Barraclough (0408 388 430) for the work site. ❖ Tuesdays 9.30 till morning tea, meet at Kindergarten car park, Watson Rd. Contact Mary Stemp to confirm, on 5974 3996. ❖ Fridays 10.00 to 12.00. For meeting place call Liz Barraclough 0408 388 430 or Sue Betheras 0408 808 201. ❖ Hopetoun Creek Greenfield Reserve. Contact Hazel Athey, 0419 899 560. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Waterwatch testing every 3rd Saturday, 9.00 am, Augusta St Bridge. Next are 16th October and 20th November. Enquiries to John Inchley on 5974 1095 ❖ Fairbairn Bushland Reserve Friends Group working bees. Contact John Stoker, 5977 1397. ❖ Penboc birdwatching 2nd Wednesday and 3rd Sunday, Contact www.penboc.org.au or Max Burrows on 9789 0224. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ BERG Committee meets every 7-8 weeks at Mt Martha House, Saturdays 9.30 am. Next meeting 13th November. All members welcome. ❖ BERG AGM Saturday 6th November, 9.30 am, Mt Martha House ❖ SPIFFA (Southern Peninsula Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association) 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 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 GEOFF KAYE • 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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