

THE CREEK

Volume 15 No 1, February 2011



Alcombe Estuary Rehabilitation Group

No A0034645Y ABN 50 224 628 623

A WANDERING WATER DRAGON

Sue Betheras reports

After Christmas I was walking along the boardwalk and stopped at Uralla bridge to examine our plants after the excellent spring rains when I was diverted by movement amongst the Carex and flood debris. A large lizard was looking at me. It had an impressive crest warning me to keep my distance and a body roughly 25-30 cm with a longer tail. I managed to take several photos and sent a couple to Liz, who sent them on to Paul Bertuch and Norm McKinlay for identification.

The first suggestion from both was a Tree Dragon or Jacky Lizard. I then took the pictures to The Briars wetland course, where Norm and numerous shire staff examined them. Sue Brabaender got out the reptile books and all agreed it was a Gippsland Water dragon, far from home.



Photo Sue Betheras

It had distinctive dark bands on its tail, a spiny crest, and the blotches of yellow and orange on the throat indicated a male. We concluded that it had most likely been purchased as a pet and subsequently dumped in the creek. Not a very satisfactory ending to this story!

Volunteers are needed for the **MORNINGTON PENINSULA SCHOOLS' ENVIRONMENT WEEK AT THE BRIARS** 28TH MARCH– 1ST APRIL 2011 BERG has been involved in this valuable event for many years. We help with student environmental programs such as Waterwatch or Horticulture. No experience needed

Contact Jenny Selby, on 5974 2402 or selby.jennifer.j@edumail.vic.gov.au

Clean Up Australia Day

SUNDAY 6TH MARCH

Join with BERG to clean up the beach, creek and surrounding areas

Register and collect a rubbish bag at the car park on the corner of The Esplanade and Watson Road (opposite the shops), anytime from 9.30am to about 1.00pm.

Bring gloves if possible - there are limited numbers available.

COME TO A PRESENTATION ON

SMALL BATS

by Paul Bertuch, after the next BERG committee meeting, Saturday 19th March. Paul will tell us about the bat population in the Reserve - species, habitat, habits, monitoring program and recent research. All welcome. Meeting will be as usual at 9.30am followed by Paul at around 11.00, after morning-tea. (All BERG Committee meetings are open to members)

BERG welcomes new members:
Vivien Fajgenbaum & family

WATERWATCH

John Inchley reports

Since last August, we have increased Waterwatch testing to monthly (every second Saturday) from three monthly. The more regular data will make trends clearer and explanations more reliable.

Still of concern are the relatively high phosphate readings, though differences between test sites (The Briars, Uralla Road, Augusta St.) are not consistent. Ongoing data may help to make the patterns clearer.

Also of concern are the low dissolved oxygen levels, only reaching the 80% threshold after heavy rain when the creek is in full spate. This might be explained by the homogeneity of the environment and absence of riffles (water running over rocks, snags etc). When the creek is sluggish, on the other hand, build-up of organic matter on the creek bed may be broken down by micro-organisms, consuming oxygen.

In December, during the very heavy rain, turbidity was concerningly high at Uralla Bridge, but not at the Briars, where testing is done above the spillway. Further investigation showed the turbidity to be coming from Harrap Creek, which is receiving increasing run-off from the developments upstream. Readings at Augusta St, however, were not high, so the silt responsible for the high readings must be settling between Uralla Bridge and Augusta St. The January testing showed turbidity to be back to normal at all sites.

The latest Waterwatch results can be found on the BERG website, www.berg.org.au.

FIELD NEWS

Field Officer Liz Barraclough reports

Welcome back – I hope you all had a great festive season and holiday.

January working bees

We had a good turn-out and the weather was kind – unusually, not too hot, not too wet! We started work on the Polygala seedlings in the reserve around the corner of Maude St and Victoria Cres.

We also explored the stretch between Maude St and the creek to assess its state and the work needed. A third of this zone, at the Alice St end, proved almost impenetrable with dense bracken, fallen Teatree and weeds. John Inchley and Pete Wade emerged from it totally dishevelled and exhausted, as if they had fought their way out of the deepest, jungle! This area will require a huge effort and will need to be targeted through a separate new grant.

The rest of the area, nearer Victoria Cres, requires more work but is rich in diversity, with patches of Maidenhair Fern, Dichondra, Poa, Indigofera australis and Coprosma quadrifida (Native Currant). With careful and selective weed control this area has great potential.

The Friday and Tuesday morning groups will soon be starting back, weather permitting. If you'd like to join us, contact: Tuesday – Mary Stemp (5974 3996), Friday – Liz (0408 388 430) or Sue Betheras (0408 808 201).

Four new grants

We have been successful with four more grant applications:

- Caring for our Country Community Action Grant – \$11,800, for restoring the grassy woodland above the firetrack and below Citation Oval. This will dovetail with work under the Melbourne Water grant (below) along the Balcombe Creek;
- Melbourne Water Project Grant – \$13,700.50, basically for weed control, with a little diversity

planting, in the riparian zone between the Uralla Rd and Geoff Kaye bridges;

- Melbourne Water Group Support Grant – \$1100, for further training for BERG volunteers and to upgrade signage along the creek and walking tracks, especially directional signs;
- Melbourne Water Project Grant for Hopetoun Creek – \$12,622.50, to continue weed control and enhancement planting of the riparian zone from below the kindergarten in Greenfield Way to Bay Road.

Over the next few weeks we will be surveying and checking sites of present and future grants, and drawing up work plans, spreadsheets and Google maps.

Upgrading our skills

In December and January Sue Betheras and I attended a course on identification of grasses and wetland species, sponsored by the Shire and held at The Briars. We learnt a lot, under the tutelage of ecologist Dr Graeme Lorimer. Here are some examples.

To distinguish grasses, sedges, rushes, lilies and other similar types of plant, you usually need the identifying features of the seed-head (or 'inflorescence') as well as the stem, leaf/blade, ligule and root. The majority of sedges have triangular stems, which are best seen just below inflorescence.

Lomandra species have male and female plants which, in some species, have flowers that look very different. They are important as a food source for Skipper butterflies, whose larvae eat the sides of the leaves.

Microlena stipoides, the local grass that makes such good lawns, is self-pollinating.



Delicate seed heads of *Microlena stipoides*
Photograph Angela Kirsner

The genus of *Dianella revoluta* is now divided into *Dianella admixta* (Spreading or Black-anthered Flaxlily) and *Dianella brevicaulis* (flowers low down on plant). The Mornington Peninsula has both.

Kangaroo Grass is called *Themeda triandra* in Victoria but *Themeda australis* in NSW!

Poas – those wonderful tufty grasses – produce over 100,000 seeds each year. But the various species can be difficult to distinguish. Four are found in our Reserve. *Poa ensiformis* grows in gullies, likes higher rainfall but not salt winds, and can be recognized by its flat leaf and its clear, more a lime green colour. *Poa poiformis* has low flowers, no higher than the foliage, with fine leaves and copious cobwebby hairs. *Poa morrisii* is smaller with velvety leaves. *Poa labillardieri* occurs on flood plains or alluvium. It can have a bluish or blue-green tinge, and its flowers are above the foliage.

P. poiformis and *P. labillardieri* can overlap in the estuary area.

The weed and local species of *Juncus* are easily confused. The weed *Juncus acutus* or Spiny Rush has sharp pointed capsules in one dense cluster per stem, which also ends above the seed head in a very sharp point. The coastal indigenous *Juncus kraussii* or Sea Rush has paler, smaller, blunt capsules in looser clusters, with a number of clusters per stem.

There are two indigenous species of Cumbungi (Bulrushes) and one introduced, which is a serious weed in some areas. They can be difficult to tell apart, particularly if none of the brown cylindrical seed heads are present. The spikes of the introduced one are dark, while the locals are cinnamon or mid brown.

Erharta erecta, the ubiquitous South African weed grass, takes only 4 weeks from germination to seed production in spring, but 12 weeks in autumn, so this is the best time to target it. Ants are the main dispersal agent, eating most of the seed and spreading the rest.

IN FLOWER IN THE RESERVE

Text and photos by Angela Kirsner

Hyacinth Orchid, *Dipodium roseum*

The hyacinth orchid, *Dipodium roseum*, is showing its occasional flashes of pink among the tea tree in the reserve, east of the ovals. I also found a fine patch of them in the bushy nature strips opposite the reserve along Maude St.



Victoria has about 270 of Australia's 700 orchid species, including and six of the country's 12 species of *Dipodium*.

Two of these six are endangered and two rare, but the hyacinth orchid is far more common, scattered across most of the state except the north west.

Dipodium is derived from the Greek, *di* meaning two and *podium* meaning foot, referring to the two stalks of the pollen mass. *Roseum* is from the Latin *rosea*, referring to the rose colour of the flower.

Dipodium roseum grows mostly in open woodland and forest, preferring poor sandy or rocky soils. It is a saprophytic orchid – that is, it gets its nourishment from dead and decaying organic matter, which it obtains via a mycorrhizal fungus. With no leaves, it cannot produce its own food.

In December or January, a dark, green to reddish-black flower spike sprouts up to 90 cm high from the stout rhizome, and produces 15 to 40 rose pink flowers with small dark red dots. The perianth (petals and sepals) are about 20 mm long and curve backwards at the ends; this distinguishes it from the similar *D. punctatum*, where the perianth segments are not curved back.

The rhizome was a food source for Aboriginal people.

Sweet Bursaria, *Bursaria spinosa*

Bursaria spinosa, in the Pittosporaceae family, has many common names – Sweet Bursaria, Christmas Bush (that's when it flowers), Prickly Box or Blackthorn (so called by early pastoralists, because it snagged the coats of their stock), and Native Box (reflecting its early use as a hedging plant). It is widespread in open forest and woodland in coastal Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania.

An erect, prickly shrub or tree up to about 3-4 metres, it has small oval leaves and masses of tiny creamy-white, sweetly scented flowers from November to February. *Bursaria*, from the Latin *bursa*, a sac or purse-like structure, describes the attractive brown seed pods (still green in the photo) that hang on the branches long after flowering. *Spinosa* means spiny or thorny.

Sweet Bursaria is a useful garden plant.

It prefers a sunny or lightly shaded position in most reasonably drained soils, and is drought and lime tolerant. Tip pruning will prevent it from becoming leggy, and a close planted row will form an impenetrable hedge if clipped. Propagation is from seed, which germinates readily, or cuttings.

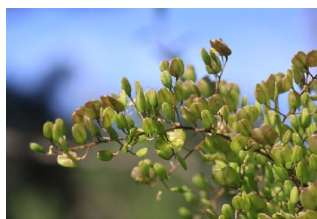
Given its spiky nature, *Bursaria* makes wonderful habitat for insects and birds, and a protective framework for other seedlings to germinate. The network of branches forms a sought-after location for spiders' webs, to snare the many insects attracted to the sweet smelling flowers. This in turn attracts small birds (robins, fantails, thornbills, honeyeaters), which collect spiders' web remnants to knit their nests together. The

dense, prickly branches provide excellent protection for these smaller birds. The rare Eltham Copper Butterfly lays its eggs on the shoots and stems, and the larvae eat the leaves while being attended by local ants (who feed off secretions of sugar and other bits and pieces from the larvae, and in return probably destroy nasty fungi and bacteria). The adult butterflies then feed on the nectar in the *Bursaria* flowers.

Australia's early settlers rubbed the leaves on their skin to help prevent sunburn, and World War II military forces refined this, extracting from the leaves a



glycoside named Aesculin. Until this was discovered, Aesculin had had to be obtained from the bark of English chestnut trees, which had to be felled first. Aesculin proved very important to the military forces, as the active ingredient in a sun screen lotion used by the fully exposed allied turret



gunners during their many bombing raids over Europe. The Australian Forces also found it a valuable bacteriological reagent in testing for tropical diseases, and an effective treatment of blood vessel disorders and haemorrhoids.

Much of the information on *Bursaria* is from articles by Phil Watson, on the website of The Australian Plants Society Tasmania, and Tim Entwistle, Executive Director of the Botanic Gardens Trust, Sydney. See <http://www.apstas.com/bursaria.htm> and <http://talkingplants.blogspot.com/2010/02/busy-bursaria.html>

SAUSAGE SIZZLE SUCCESS!

Hazel Athey, sausage sizzler extraordinaire, reports

Our pre-Christmas sausage sizzle outside Bunnings, on 17th December, raised \$553 for BERG. The delicious breakfast sausages, purchased from Mt Martha butcher Bells, sold well despite the stormy weather.

We owe thanks to a number of people. Jenny Mann and the staff of Bunnings Mornington were very helpful.

Lel Stella prepared the onions in her industrial kitchen. That was fantastic!

And lots of people helped on the day: Martin and Barbara Thraves, Jean Severn, Sue Hall, Gay Briggs, Merilyn Wiley, Kristin Denton, Gayle O'Connor, Michael Sanders, Jenny Rolleston, Di Lewis, Earline Whitehead, Liz Barraclough, Lyn Douglas and Flo Gason.

IT'S TIME TO DEAD-HEAD YOUR AGGIES!



Agapanthus look great in the garden, but they are a major pest in bushland, forming a

dense mat that allows space to nothing else. If you have them growing, keep them under control by dead-heading them before the seeds dry and drop, and put the seed heads safely in a green recycling bin. Don't dump them in bushland!

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 are 20th February & 20th March. Meet at the Rotunda (Mel: 144 K11). If running late, phone Liz Barraclough on 0408 388 430 to find the work site. ❖ Tuesdays 9.00 to 12.00 in cooler months. Call Mary Stemp to confirm, 5974 3996. ❖ Friday mornings. For details 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: 2nd Saturday, 9.00 am, meet at Augusta St Bridge. Next are 12th February and 12th March. Enquiries to John Inchley on 5974 1095. ❖ BERG Committee meets every 7-8 weeks at Mt Martha House, Saturdays 9.30am. Next meeting 19th March. 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 Max Burrows 9789 0224, or www.penboc.org.au. ❖ SPIFFA (Southern Peninsula Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association) 1st Monday, 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 FIELD OFFICER LIZ BARRACLOUGH • NEWSLETTER, MEMBERSHIP ANGELA KIRSNER • MINUTES SECRETARY PAM HEARN SCHOOLS LIAISON JENNY SELBY • ROTARY CLUB LIAISON GEOFF KAYE • HOPETOUN CREEK GREENFIELD RESERVE GROUP HAZEL ATHEY CO-OPTED MEMBERS: DIANNE LEWIS • PUBLICITY BARBARA THRAVES • CENTURY DVE HABITAT LINK GROUP TONY O'CONNOR</p>		
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