

THE CREEK

Volume 15 No 6, December 2011

 Balcombe Estuary Rehabilitation Group
No A0034645Y ABN 50 224 628 623

THANKS MARY

Mary Stemp, who has served as BERG's honorary secretary since shortly after the organisation's inception, stepped down from the position at the recent BERG AGM. We are enormously grateful for her many years of dedication and hard work.



Retiring 'Hon Sec' Mary Stemp
Photo: Richard Kirsner

Mary will not, of course, remain idle. In addition to continuing to run the long-standing Tuesday working group, which has made the Bunyip area the showpiece of the reserve, she has taken on the role of BERG historian, and in this capacity, remains on committee.

Your committee

The new BERG committee was elected unopposed at the AGM. The executive is President John Inchley, Vice-president Michael Sanders, Secretary Di Lewis, and Treasurer Richard Kirsner. The six ordinary committee members are Liz Barraclough, Pam Hearn, Geoff Kaye, Angela Kirsner, Jenny Selby, and Barbara Thraves. At the first meeting of the new committee, on 26th November, four other members were co-opted: Hazel Athey, Ros Crompton, Tony O'Connor and Mary Stemp.

WETLAND TRAINING COURSE

The Shire is sponsoring a 2-day Wetlands course, with field trips.

Where: The Briars

When: January 21st & 28th 2012

Cost: Free to group members

Contact: Liz Barraclough 0408 388 430

FISHING THE CREEK

by Ollie Pearse

I am a local fisherman at Balcombe estuary. It is a fishing paradise for me, it offers great fish species like bream, flathead, mullet and estuary perch. The estuary I think is one of the best and cleanest fishing destinations on the Mornington Peninsula and I will do my part to keep it a sustainable fishery for generations ahead. The one problem I have is the rubbish



Ollie Pearse (right) and friend on the way to the creek to fish.

Photo Liz Barraclough

problem. I have seen discarded fishing lines, cans and plastic bags left in the water by careless fishermen. It's a disgrace to see a local treasure being treated like this. When I go fishing at Balcombe estuary I use only environmentally friendly materials and I think others should do the same if they want to keep the estuary a healthy ecosystem.

Thanks, tight lines and good luck!

A RARE BIRD

by Pam Hearn & Andris Niedra

On Monday, 7th November, Andris noticed a strange bird bobbing through the long grass in our backyard, which backs onto the Norfolk-Hopetoun Reserve (we had deliberately not mown so as not to disturb our nesting Eastern Rosellas). There turned out to be a family – two adults and three or four young ones. At first we thought they were Quails, but a colleague from Peninsula Bird Observers identified them as Buff-banded Rails, a shy waterbird that is prized by birdwatchers.



Photo: Andris Niedra

We watched the family search for insects amongst the grass tussocks and after about five minutes, the parents shepherded the youngsters through our fence (despite the lack of obvious holes!). They disappeared into the long grass on the banks of Hopetoun Creek (which eventually flows into Balcombe Creek).

Interestingly, another local birdo had a recent sighting of a Buff-banded Rail in his yard, in the area past Hearn Road. It's not something you would expect to see on a suburban block, so we were pretty happy. With the warm, damp weather and amazing vegetation growth, there have been many unusual bird sightings this year.

GETTING DOWN TO BEDROCK

Angela Kirsner reports

Leon Costermans, our speaker at the AGM, took his audience on a dizzying and fascinating journey through some 500 million years of geological time to give us an understanding of how the Mornington Peninsula arose and has been shaped.



Leon Costermans at the AGM
Photo: Richard Kirsner

He showed how intrusions of magma from the lower level of the earth's crust some 370 million years ago formed the granite outcrops we know as Arthur's Seat, Mt Martha and Mt Eliza; and how, between 130 and 60 million years ago, a vast rift separated the Australian continent from Antarctica, and sediment from volcanoes further east washed several kilometres deep across what is now southern Victoria.

He talked of the lava flows from volcanic activity 50-40 million years ago, which formed the rich basalt regions of Phillip Island and much of the Peninsula's south east. The photo below shows the dramatic change where the basalt stops at Main Creek and volcanic soils give way to sand. The forests over the basalt were cleared long ago because these soils produce the best pasture grass. The coastal vegetation on its sandy soils remains.

Between 23 and 3 million years



Photo Leon Costermans

ago, much of the Peninsula was under water again, with sea and river movements carrying sand across the land. Fossils distinguish the layers of sea sand from river sand, and one can see them

embedded in layers all round our coastline, including Fossil Beach.

Over the last 100,000 years, a series of ice ages have seen falling sea levels, increasing winds and sparser vegetation. Prevailing winds from the southwest swept sand from the exposed continental shelf to form the narrow Nepean Peninsula, and one can see the changes in wind direction in the criss-cross patterns in the rock platforms and cliffs.

Leon's take-home message for bushland regeneration was, know your geology. The yellowish sands of beach dunes often contain calcium carbonate, from shelly material, and support a range of coastal plants. Step back from the coastal fringe into older dunes and the sand is greyer, more acid, with more organic matter. It supports a heathland community – a coastal fringe species planted in this region is a plant out of place.

Even on these older sands, the vegetation community depends on drainage – the difference, for example, between a crest and a swale (see photo).



At Langwarrin, dramatic change in heathland vegetation between upper and lower slopes Photo: Leon Costermans

Von Guerard's paintings, with their meticulous botanical and geological accuracy, give us some sense of what we have lost. This open landscape of Drooping Sheokes and Manna Gums was described in early accounts as being like 'a gentleman's park'.



Schnapper Point from 'Beleura' 1870, Eugene von Guerard

FIELD NEWS

Field Officer Liz Barraclough reports

Working bees

In **October**, we removed seedlings of Polygala, Pittosporum, Coast Wattle and masses of Flax-leaf Broom from both sides of Maude Street. We were following up some years of weeding, with the aim of preventing seeding and gradually reducing weed germination.

Flax-leaf Broom, a fairly recently emergent weed, is rivalling Polygala as one of the most predominant and invasive weeds along the coast.

We really enjoyed the rich diversity of wildflowers in bloom. This area, especially the west side of Maude St, which is so worth protecting, is unfortunately being invaded by Agapanthus, Polygala, Pittosporum and Flax-leaf Broom from adjoining properties. Maybe we can explore grants to help these landowners with a weed control program.

In **November** we weeded between the estuary and the campground carpark and roadway, the foreshore across the Esplanade, and the central bed of the picnic area. And BERG's master painters did a terrific job painting the inside of our much needed new storeroom.

We also joined in the 'Clean UP Dumping' event, organised by the Shire, which focused on cleaning up the thousands of items illegally dumped on public land each year. And we collected any other rubbish we found along the foreshore.

There is no December working-bee – we resume on 15th January.

The **Friday Morning Group**, like many others in this warm, damp weather, continues to battle emerging weeds such as Fumitory, Panic Veldt Grass, Angled Onion, Thistles and Forget-me-nots. Their work has been largely in the Uralla Bridge area. At least the weather has extended the planting season – the group has put some 350 plants in the ground over the past couple of months, largely grasses and sedges.



Ros Crompton, BERG's newest Committee member, hard at work painting BERG's new storeroom, helped by Jenny Rolleston and Barb Thraves
Photo: Angela Kirsner

Grants

We currently have six grants to fund our work, and have just received \$10,250 from the Shire under our 2011-12 Memorandum of Understanding, for on-going works in the Reserve that are not covered by our grants.

Further grant applications have been submitted for 2011-12 for:

- **Caring for our Country Coast Action Coastcare Grant** – for follow-up weed control along the foreshore between the Yacht Club and South Beach carparks and the north side of the estuary to Victoria Crescent
- **Community Action Grant** – a 3-site follow-up, along the foreshore from the north carpark to Victoria Crescent, in the Hyacinth Orchid area near the eastern end of the Ferraro Ovals, and in a section of Swamp Scrub on the north bank east of the end of Augusta Street
- two **Melbourne Water Community Grants** for the riparian zones both sides of Balcombe Creek from Uralla Road Bridge west towards Augusta Street bridge, and Hopetoun Creek, east side from the kindergarten to the reed swamp.

All our grant applications ask for funding for community awareness commitments, such as newsletter printing, training and workshops, and interpretive signage.

River Health Seminar

I was one of a number of 'BERGers' who attended a seminar on 'River Health in the Mornington Peninsula Catchment' run by Melbourne Water at Coolart in October.

Of particular interest were the new Estuary Watch program that Melbourne Water is putting in place to complement and extend Waterwatch, and their research on fish as indicators of estuary health.

TRIGGER PLANTS

Much of this article is drawn from 'An Introduction to Trigger Plants' by Rica Erickson, originally published in Australian Plants, December 1961, republished in Australian Plants online, June 2000, and available at <http://anpsa.org.au/APOL18/jun00-3.html>

Trigger plants are among the most fascinating of plants. Each flower has a sensitive column arising from the flower's throat. When an insect probes the flower, the column is triggered to swing instantly over the insect's back, depositing or picking up pollen. This column or style is what gives the species its generic name, *Stylidium*.

Our local variety, the Grass-leaf Trigger, *Stylidium graminifolium* (see photos), is coming towards the end of its flowering season. You may have seen its tufted, grass-like leaves, with flower stalks about 40 cm tall, along the edge of the reserve in Maude Street.

All except four of the known 136 *Stylidium* species are found in Australia, with every state represented and almost 100 in south Western Australia. They are found from grassy plains and open heaths to rocky slopes and sand-plain, in forests and by drying water holes and creeks. One even grows in the shadow of Ayers Rock.

Cow Kicks, *Stylidium schoenoides*, the largest flowered of them all, has a powerful trigger action that quite justifies the name.



Cow Kicks in SW Western Australia, the trigger poised between the two more upright petals Photo: Angela Kirsner

The plants range in height from a few centimetres to 1.8 metres. Some are bushy, several grow in wiry creeping mats, and others have dense rosettes of leaves.

To watch the flower in action, take a fine straw of grass and poke it carefully into the flower's throat. The poised trigger, resting in a spring-like curve between the petals, will sweep up rapidly in an arc over the flower. Then, over a couple of minutes, it will reposition itself in a slow jerking movement. It then needs about ten minutes to regain its sensitivity.

On hot days the response is much swifter and the time needed to rest much shorter – a neat response to the fact that insects work much faster in warm weather.

Through a magnifying lens, the apex of the trigger is beautiful, often with a glistening fringe. Some of the columns are crowned with anthers bearing four neat packets of pollen, others have the stigma looking like a hairy pincushion. The anthers appear first on each trigger but as they mature and the pollen is shed, they are [cont. over]



Stylidium graminifolium showing, left, the trigger poised (top flowers) and 'triggered' (lower flower); centre, the flower stalk; and right, flower stalks above the tufted base
Photos: Angela Kirsner

Trigger Plants cont.

pushed aside by the development of the stigma. This successive development prevents self-pollination, while the trigger action neatly ensures cross-pollination.

A young flower will deposit pollen on an insect in exactly the spot where the stigma of an older flower of the same species will gather it up, as the insect seeks the attractive nectar from every flower of the species within reach.

No one has yet determined just what makes the trigger work, although scientists have studied the problem spasmodically since the early 19th century, when Trigger Plants were first grown in the hothouses of Europe.

EMAILING THE CREEK

If you would like to receive email notification of a link to *The Creek* on the BERG website, rather than receiving hard copy by post, please let us know at info@berg.org.au.

BERG welcomes new members:

Lorraine Rysdyk, Ann & Derek Braham, Indra Kurzeme & family, Deirdre Morgan, Anna Whelan, Louise Permezel, Marilyn Johnson, Roger Gilpin, Claudia Bonnielle, Bill Frazer, Paul Thompson, Glenn Simkin, Susie Katchor, Sue Davies, Suzette Hosken, Sharron Meager, Maureen & Michael Henry, Rayna Guthrie, Anna Whelan

| 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 15th January. 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 Sue Betheras, 0408 808 201 or Liz Barraclough, 0408 388 430. ❖ 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 10th December and 14th January. Enquiries to John Inchley on 5974 1095. ❖ BERG Committee meets every 7-9 weeks at Mt Martha House, Saturdays 9.30am. Next meeting 21st January. All members welcome. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Fairbairn Bushland Reserve Friends Group working bees. Contact John Stoker, 5977 1397 or Judith Whittaker 5974 8174. ❖ 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 DI LEWIS • TREASURER RICHARD KIRSNER FIELD OFFICER LIZ BARRACLOUGH • NEWSLETTER, MEMBERSHIP ANGELA KIRSNER • MINUTES SECRETARY PAM HEARN SCHOOLS LIAISON JENNY SELBY • ROTARY CLUB LIAISON GEOFF KAYE • PUBLICITY BARBARA THRIVES CO-OPTED: HOPETOUN CREEK GREENFIELD RESERVE GROUP HAZEL ATHEY • CENTURY DVE HABITAT LINK GROUP TONY O'CONNOR • PUBLICITY ROS CROMPTON • HISTORIAN MARY STEMPT</p> | | |
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 If undelivered, please return to:
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