

THE CREEK

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BERG Mt Martha – Caring for the Balcombe Estuary Reserves

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SUSTAINABILITY FESTIVAL

Di Lewis reports

Finding bugs in water from Balcombe Creek was a highlight for kid at the Shire's Sustainability Festival, held on Sunday 17th March at The Briars.

This Waterwatch activity was BERG Mt Martha's contribution to the day. We helped the children identify Water Boatmen, Backswimmers, water beetles, snails, and freshwater crabs, as well as Caddisfly and Damselfly larvae. We were delighted to find these last two, as they are indicative of good water quality.

The Festival had lots of stalls offering 'green' information, crafts and food, with tours of the heirloom garden, activities on indigenous culture, tips on green living, and a community arts project using recycled materials.

CAN YOU HELP?

BALCOMBE GRAMMAR COMMUNITY SERVICE PROGRAM WITH BERG

BERG will be working with Year 7s in the reserve over 4 days, 12noon to 2.30, on April 24, May 8 & 22, & June 5.

Contact Liz Barraclough
0408 388 430 if you can help.

HOPETOUN GREENFIELD WORKING BEE

Sat 27th April, 9.30 - 12.00 noon.
Meet at the Kindergarten carpark off Greenfield Way. Contact Hazel Athey 0419 899 560
Delicious morning-tea supplied.



Above: Louise and Matthew look for bugs (macroinvertebrates) in a sample of creek water at the BERG stall at the Sustainability Festival; and Max inspects some under the microscope Photos Di Lewis. Below: a Backswimmer (so called because it swims upside down) and a Damselfly larva Photos A Kirsner



WATERWATCH

John Inchley reports

Freshwater macroinvertebrates, the little bugs that scoot around in and on the water of creeks and ponds, are the ultimate indicator of a healthy waterway. They are an essential part of the food chain, with larger animals such as fish and birds relying on them as a food source. And many macroinvertebrates are very sensitive to changes in water quality and the presence of pollutants

As the name suggests, macroinvertebrates have no backbone and, while small, can be seen with the naked eye. Every six months, BERG Mt Martha's Waterwatch team does a macroinvertebrate count. Armed with nets and plastic containers, we check at two freshwater sites above the tidal reaches of the estuary.

In January, we found eight of the 26 species targeted by the Waterwatch program (see table next page). The high numbers of some of these species indicate that our water quality is acceptable, consistent with the physical and chemical data we measure monthly, but the small range of species in the creek has long been a concern. We suspect this is due to the lack of habitat features such as rock ledges, stagnant pools and snags, as well as the presence of the small but voracious Mosquito Fish, an introduced predator. This may be consistent with the high numbers of Caddisfly larvae, which protect

Macroinvertebrates found in the Creek at January testing			
Sensitivity to water quality	Macro-invertebrates	Uralla Rd Bridge	The Briars
Very sensitive	Caddisfly larva	56	100+
Sensitive	Damsel Fly larva	—	1
	Freshwater Shrimp	2	11
	Freshwater Crab	5	12
	Water Mite	3	—
Tolerant	Water Boatman	18	1
	Freshwater Snail	13	400+
Very tolerant	Mosquito larva	3	1



Tony O'Connor (above) at the gateway of his property, wetland to the right; and (at bottom of page) explaining some details about his house to BERG members Photos A Kirsner

themselves by living inside a small hollow stick.

The high numbers we collected may also relate to the lack of flow in the creek over this very dry summer. This has also resulted, further down-stream in extremely high electrical conductivity, a measure of salinity. (BERG's Waterwatch results are graphed at <http://www.berg.org.au/our-work/waterwatch>.)

Thanks to Waterwatchers Mark Patrick, Ann Scally, and John and Roo Rawlins. If you'd like to help us, even occasionally, contact John Inchley, on 5974 1095. Testing is usually on the 4th Sunday morning of each month.

FROGS AND ALL SUSTAINABLE LIVING IN THE HEART OF MT MARTHA

Standing on the front deck of Tony O'Connor's mud brick house in Century Drive, less than two kms from Benton's Square, you'd swear civilisation was a million miles away. Moorhens poke at the grass, the Balcombe Creek winds below, and a night heron flashes past.

Over the last 15 years local environmentalist, teacher and activist, Tony, and his wife Leanne, have transformed a treeless five-acre block into a haven for birds and wildlife, complete with froggy wetland, solar passive mud brick house, orchard, and veggie garden and chook house that work together.

Tony took time out on Friday 1 March to share his experiences

and know-how with 30 interested BERG Mt Martha members when he conducted a two-hour twilight tour of his magical 'suburban' property.

He explained how to become a creative recycler of construction materials—his house features five old SEC poles, beautiful yellow stringybark boards from an old bridge, and recycled windows—and how to revegetate an empty paddock, build an aviary, and create a wetland using hundreds of trucks of free fill from some local developers and 140 different wetland plant species.

Tony's wetland is now happy host to five frog species, including the growling grass frog; black, wood and teal ducks; rails, snipe and night herons; tortoises, yabbies and nice-sized edible silver perch.

The rest of the property has a good smattering of indigenous bush rats burrowing in composting mounds of garden waste, blue-tongued lizards that love to feast on apricots from the orchard, and some grass-mowing sheep who will one day be lamb chops.

Tony is also the driving force behind the Century Drive Habitat Link Group, a sub-group of BERG, which has clothed the

street in indigenous vegetation and transformed the retarding basin next door into another thriving wetland that filters the dirty stormwater from the street and discharges it crystal-clear into Balcombe Creek.

Tony's next dream is to work with the Balcombe and Moorooduc Landcare Group, local school kids and the local community to make a walking track and nature trail along the creek from the retarding basin, to connect up with the tracks through The Briars and the Balcombe Estuary reserves. He plans to create specialist habitats along the way, including bat, possum and bird boxes, piles of rocks for reptiles, and logs for ground dwelling animals.

Thanks to Bells Gourmet Meats and Mt Martha Supa IGA for their support of the BBQ at this function.



FIELD NEWS

From Field Officer Liz Barraclough

Working bees

In February, five hot BERGers moved a few barrow-loads of mulch around the campground before giving in to the heat. In March, however, on a cool and invigorating morning, a dozen of us, including a couple of faces new to working bees, weeded the beds in the old campground and spread two huge piles of mulch in record time. Our aim was to define the edges of the beds and smother weed growth.

The Friday Morning Group is delighted to have John Stirling, Dean Russell, Richie Ball and Claudia Bonnielle join us when available. Already Sue Betheras has inducted Claudia and Dean into the art of weeding the ubiquitous Panic Veldt Grass in the Uralla Rd bridge area.

Monitoring & assessment workshop

There was lots of interest in this workshop run by Naturelinks' Vyv Stryder, in the Hyacinth Orchid area on 1st March. We learnt about defining a quadrat, identifying and recording the species within it at regular intervals, and taking photos from defined photo-points. We will follow up with a session on the ecological relationships within the quadrats, to give us a better understanding of what we are monitoring and why.

Grants

From **Coastcare Victoria** we have received a Community Grant of \$11,404.50 to rehabilitate foreshore vegetation from Bay Road to the South Beach carpark. We will focus on the narrow but high-profile roadside strip, to complement work done further in under an earlier grant and enable the public to see the sort of work we have been doing further into this foreshore strip.

We were delighted to receive a cheque for \$1000 from the **Bendigo Bank** as a major contri-

bution towards a BERG Mt Martha notice board which will be erected beside the main walking track entrance to the old campground. It will introduce visitors to the reserve with up-to-date information on seasonal variations and sightings of plants and native animals, as well as BERG and other events.

As we had been warned, our funding from both Melbourne Water and GVESH0 was cut this year and we will have to revise our works program to suit. From Melbourne Water we received \$15,382.40 (about \$10,000 less than we'd hoped). About \$1000 will go towards the proposed Audio Trail (see below), and the rest to follow up in the Balcombe Estuary and Hopetoun/Greenfield reserves.

Our GVESH0 grant of \$1500 is for administrative costs such as insurance, postage, stationery, and meeting room hire.

Audio trail

We are currently developing an Interpretive Audio Trail through the reserves. Stations at points of interest along the tracks and boardwalk will each carry a 'code cube' which can be read using an app on a smart phone or ipad. This will connect to the audio trail via a specialised website.

We hope particularly to hook younger visitors via a technology that is second nature to them. The trail is being developed by



Liz's small grandsons pick up their Clean Up Australia Day gloves from Mt Martha Rotarians! Photo Liz Barraclough

Seeds Interpretation Services, a branch of Seeds Bushland Restoration. We aim to have it finished by early May.

Clean Up Australia Day

We were delighted to have the Rotary Club of Mount Martha take over the 'on-the-day' organisation of the 2013 Clean Up Australia Day in our area, and hope other groups may help us in other years.

About 30 adults and 15 children registered (though we think there were rather more actually helping) and filled a heap of rubbish and recycling bags, as well as dragging out a large armchair, a BBQ, car tyres, a TV and the rest....

1% FOR THE PLANET

BERG Mt Martha has recently signed up with *1% for the Planet*, an innovative global alliance of companies that give 1% of their revenue to a network of over 3000 approved environmental organisations. Over 1300 member companies in 43 countries have donated \$70m to environmental groups since the organisation began in 2002.

BERG Mt Martha can now receive donations from member companies. If your business joins *1% for the Planet*, it can support a healthier environment and help BERG. Could you persuade your employer to join this very worthwhile network? See www.onepercentfortheplanet.org for more information.



Martin Thraves hands a cheque from Bendigo Bank for \$1000 to BERG president John Inchley Photo A Kirsner

BERG MT MARTHA'S HISTORY

Mary Stemp is writing a history of BERG Mt Martha and would be delighted to receive any relevant memories or anecdotes. Contact her on 5974 3996 or mstemp@iprimus.com.au.

BERG Mt Martha welcomes new members: Annette Dowd & family, Verity, Steve & Gwendoline Mapp, John Stirling, Dean Russell, Margaret Mackie

BATS AT DUSK

Paul Bertuch reports

At dusk on recent hot evenings I have seen many bats, probably Gould's Wattled Bats, along the tracks from the tennis courts to the Ferrero Ovals. Look towards the sunset along the tracks and you will see them catching insects on the wing between the trees.

The next Bat Box check is Sunday 28 April, 1pm. If you'd like to be involved, call Paul on 0488 762 179.

BIODIVERSITY SYMPOSIUM

FRIENDS GROUP NETWORK DAY

Hosted by Mornington Peninsula Shire on Sat 13 April, at Coolart, with a wonderful range of speakers, including Lindy Lumsden on bats, Pina Milne on bryophytes, & Ed McNabb on nocturnal fauna. Limited places available. For information, call 5950 1263.

BERG Mt Martha Working Bees	Other BERG Mt Martha activities	Other Groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Monthly working bee: 3rd Sunday, between 9 & 12 am. Next are 21st April and 19th May. Meet at the Rotunda (Mel: 144 K11) or call Liz Barraclough on 0408 388 430 to find the work site. ❖ Tuesdays 9.00 to 12.00 in the cooler months. Call Mary Stemp, 5974 3996 ❖ Friday mornings. Call Sue Betheras, 0408 808 201. ❖ Hopetoun Creek Greenfield Reserve 27th April 9am-12noon. Call Hazel Athey, 0419 899 560 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Waterwatch testing: 4th Sunday at Augusta St Bridge. Call John Inchley, 5974 1095. ❖ BERG Committee meets 2nd Saturday each month at Mt Martha House, 9.00am. Next are 13th April, 11th May. All members welcome. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Fairbairn Bushland Reserve Friends Group working bees. Fri April 5 & 19, 10-12.30, & Sun April 14 & May 19, 9.30-12. Call Judith Whittaker 5974 8174. ❖ BirdLife Mornington Peninsula bird-watching 2nd Wednesday and 3rd Sunday. Enquiries Max Burrows 9789 0224, mornington@birdlife.org.au or www.birdlife.org.au/locations/birdlife-mornington-peninsula. ❖ SPIFFA 1st Monday, 7.30 pm, at Parks Vic, Hinton St, Rosebud. Enquiries 5988 6529, or www.spiffa.org.
<p>BERG MT MARTHA COMMITTEE PRESIDENT JOHN INCHLEY • VICE PRESIDENT GRAHAM HUBBARD • SECRETARY DI LEWIS • TREASURER RICHARD KIRSNER FIELD OFFICER LIZ BARRACLOUGH • NEWSLETTER, MEMBERSHIP ANGELA KIRSNER • SCHOOLS LIAISON JENNY SELBY • ROTARY CLUB LIAISON GEOFF KAYE • PUBLICITY BARBARA THRAVES & ROS CROMPTON • MICHAEL SANDERS HOPETOUN CREEK GREENFIELD RESERVE GROUP HAZEL ATHEY • CENTURY DVE HABITAT LINK GROUP TONY O'CONNOR</p>		
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