



Berg
Mt Martha

Caring for the Balcombe Estuary Reserves

THE CREEK

Volume 17 No 5, October 2013



Diary Date:

Come and Learn About
our Micro-bats

1.00 pm Saturday 9th November
at The Briars Information Centre

ROBERT BENDER,

founder of the

Organ Pipes Bat Box Program
will speak on this ground-breaking
research and conservation program.

He will then share his wealth of
knowledge with us as we check the
BERG Bat and Sugar Glider boxes,
both directly and with pole cameras.

To RSVP or for information on
BERG Mt Martha's Fauna Box
program, contact Paul Bertuch,
0488 762 179, or
eco-agri@bigpond.com.



Photos Paul Bertuch

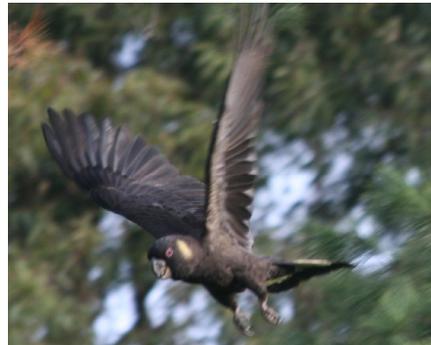
BIRD JOTTINGS

From Pam Hearn

We waited in hope for the
autumn arrival of Black
Cockatoos in Mt Martha this year.
Until a few years ago, they were

uncommon here, but after the
Gippsland fires there were huge
flocks of 80+ birds flying over at
dusk. Since then we have seen
regular groups, but the great black
cockie invasion did not happen this
year, only the odd few.

We saw our first group of five
feeding in a nearby pine tree on
3rd May. Since then, I have seen a
larger group with one loud squawker,
and a flock of nine flying over.



Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo

Photo Pam Hearn

In late August, I heard a King
Parrot flying along the Norfolk-
Hopetoun Reserve gully behind our
garden. And we are delighted to have
our resident Buff-banded Rail still
regularly visiting our backyard.

And a Leucistic Noisy Miner

Mary Stemp told me about a white
Noisy Miner in her Glamorgan
Crescent garden. It visits frequently,
and seems to hang around with
other miners. It really stands out
against the green tree foliage!



Leucistic Noisy Miner Photo Pam Hearn

Note: Leucism is a genetic mutation
that prevents melanin and any other
pigment from being deposited

normally in feathers. The bird may
be totally white or have white
patches, but the condition doesn't
affect the eyes, only the feathers.
Albinism, by contrast, is a genetic
mutation that stops the body
producing melanin at all. Without
melanin, the eyes are pink because
their only colour comes from the
blood vessels in the retina.

Typically these birds do not
survive long because they are so
much more visible to predators.

NOTICE OF MEETING AND CALL FOR
NOMINATIONS

2013 BERG MT MARTHA
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

SATURDAY 26TH OCTOBER
at Mt Martha House

9.30 am registration for the
meeting at 10.00 am

Guest speaker, at 11.00, is

Jarrold Ruch

Ranger at The Briars

Jarrold will tell us about our indigenous
fauna past and present, The Briars
Wildlife Sanctuary and its place in rare
species recovery, and managing our
bushland to increase wildlife habitat.

Meeting Agenda

- Welcome and apologies
- Minutes of 2012 AGM
- Committee reports:
 - President, John Inchley
 - Treasurer, Richard Kirsner
 - Field Officer, Liz Barraclough
- Election: President, Vice-President,
Treasurer, Secretary, & up to 10
ordinary committee members.
- Appointment of Auditor

Nominations for office bearers & committee

For nomination forms call 0447 160 208 or
go to www.berg.org.au, under 'Resources'.

Nominations in writing, signed by two
BERG members & accompanied by the
candidate's written consent, must be with the
Secretary by Saturday 19th October.

GAZING AT THE GROUND WITH GIDJA

Article & photos: Angela Kirsner

About a dozen BERGers enjoyed a fascinating (if cold!) morning at the Maude Street burn site with ecologist Gidja Walker. We were there to learn about the site's ecology and consider how it will be managed and monitored.



The site was burnt in April after the Tea Tree had been felled as part of the Shire's fire prevention regime. Interestingly Gidja questioned the received wisdom that Tea Tree is a weed

except as a frontline coastal plant. After decades of working in bushland, she regards Tea Tree as an early coloniser of disturbed ground. Left to itself, after about 50 or 60 years it senesces, falls and rots, providing habitat for many species. Tea Tree seeds are less likely to germinate in the ground cover of mosses and leaf litter that will have accumulated – their seeds germinate mostly on bare ground, so what regenerates is a Grassy Woodland. The Tea Tree at this site were very close to senescence, and Gidja suggested that the area must have been burnt maybe 50 years ago. (In fact, a fire burnt much of the Victoria Crescent hillside, and presumably this area, in the late 1940s.)

In monitoring the site, Gidja emphasised the importance of not trampling newly emergent seedlings and compacting the soil. She cited an example where monitoring quadrats were almost devoid of regeneration because of the tramping feet of those inspecting the site too often. She suggested that the site be assessed in detail at one, three and ten years after the burn – otherwise, keep off!

The adjacent strip along the road edge has not been burned, but was

weeded earlier, and is rich in heathland plants: sedges, the green-flowering *Correa reflexa*, Apple Berry (*Billardiera scandens*), Silky Guinea Flower (*Hibbertia* sp), pea flower bushes (*Bossiaea* sp), pink and white heath (*Epacris* sp), and covering barer areas of the ground, patches of the tiny annual succulent, *Crassula* sp, both red and green leafed varieties.

There are a number of colonies of Nodding Greenhood Orchids, and we found a small patch of Tall Greenhoods (pictured). Gidja showed us how, when an insect visits, the long 'tongue' (the labellum) of the flower flicks up and pushes the insect deeper into the flower's throat to ensure it picks up pollen. Many orchid flowers are uniquely matched to a particular insect species.



Orchids are colonising species, with a large mat of tuber that spreads underground, and Gidja told how they love to be disturbed, as by a scabbling *Antechinus* or *Echidna*.

This roadstrip strip is also rich in mosses and lichens, as is the bushland adjacent to the burnt area. The moss layer, Gidja says, is the most important element here, but is often wiped out by intense fire, as it has been in the deeply burnt areas. The moss provides a nursery for many indigenous seedlings, while below it, the top inch of soil holds the densest biodiversity, a seething world of fungi and microorganisms.

There are also large patches of the tiny Blue Bottle Daisy (*Lagenophora* sp – see photo), a plant that makes a



wonderful part of an indigenous lawn, together with kidney weed (*Dichondra repens*) and Pennywort.



The site has been burned in parallel strips, and in the centre of each, the intense heat left only a small portion of the seed bank. In the less intensely burnt areas between these strips, by contrast, there is lots happening.

Most obvious are the masses of native *Pelargonium*. Gidja identified three species, including *P. australe*, and the red-stemmed *P. inodorum*, which is seen only after fire.

We were all surprised by her identification of a broad-leaved grass as a form of *Microlaena stipoides*. Many of us would have removed it as a weed. It highlighted the need always to err on the side of caution in weeding – if in doubt, leave it!



There are delicate Wood Rushes (*Luzula* sp), which, though relatively uncommon, are plentiful here. And there are lots of lily seedlings,

strappy green leaves that we won't be able to identify until they flower.

There was something new to learn at each step. Bracken, which is unfurling its fronds among the native *Pelargoniums* (see photo below), is invaluable as both a creator of humus and a carbon sink. If left to itself, it will eventually succumb to a dominant overstorey, but if cut and disturbed, it loves to regenerate.



And even in the blackened areas, there are masses of tiny Black Wattles and some Running Postman seedlings (*Kennedia* sp).

A number of different indigenous daisy species are showing their heads, including Tree Everlasting (*Ozothamnus ferrugineus*), Twiggy Daisy (*Olearia ramulosa*), and various indigenous Fireweeds (*Senecio* sp). This was another lesson – many of us had thought one of these Fireweeds (see photo below) to be the weed Ragwort, but Gidja pointed out the difference – Ragwort has leaves that are smoother and more deeply indented, and a purplish woody base that is hard to remove.



On the bare blackened soil were various fungi, including patches of small orange discs clustered together (see photo below). This is *Anthraxobium muelleri*, one of the Cup Fungi; it is always associated with burnt areas.



We found weeds as well, of course including a fair sprinkling of Boneseed seedlings and flatweeds. Odd patches of tiny *Polygala* seedlings almost certainly mark the sites of ants' nests, as ants collect and carry the seeds underground. Gidja recorded the location of the patches using an app on her phone, and we will return to weed these when the seedlings are a little more visible, but before they seed in two or three years' time.

FIELD NEWS

Field Officer Liz Barraclough reports

Working bees

John Inchley led the August working bee, in my absence. The target was the woody weeds in the bushland on the slope between Citation Oval and the fire track below, beyond the end of Augusta Street. In June, we had tackled this slope from below; in August we went in from Citation Oval and found a veritable forest of *Pittosporum* and Pines (with some indigenous undertorey), as well as quite a bit of dumped rubbish. The relatively small crew rapidly warmed up on this cold morning with all the cutting and dabbing, but there is still masses to be done here – maybe the target for a future grant.

(The September working bee report will be in the next edition.)

The Friday Morning Group has planted 56 trees and shrubs in the open area below the old quarry near the Uralla Bridge, and is continuing weed control in this area.

In preparation for the workshop with Gidja Walker at the Maude St burn site (see previous page), the Friday Group also laid out a transect line of quadrats (1m x 1m every 10m), and took photographs at 2 months post burn, as a record for an ongoing monitoring program. Along the unburnt western boundary of the burn site, the group has been hand-weeding *Pittosporum* and *Polygala* seedlings.

The Tuesday Group, working as always in the Bunyip, has been concentrating on spraying Panic Veldt Grass and hand-weeding between the kindergarten fence and

firetrack as well as general weeding alongside the lower path.

Ferrero & Citation Reserves Masterplan

Stakeholders were invited to view the preliminary draft of the masterplan on 22nd August before it goes out for public comment. It basically addresses the sporting facilities and car-parking issues without, we are pleased to say, encroaching on the reserves. We shall continue to keep a watching brief.

Sharing the grant writing load

Three of us from BERG Mt Martha – Di Lewis, Jenny Rolleston and I – attended an excellent workshop on grant writing sponsored by the Shire. It has equipped us to improve and streamline the grant writing process and make it more accessible, so we can spread the load and take up the kind offers of other BERG members who have offered their help.

Weedbusting again

BERG Mt Martha and the Sunshine Reserve Conservation & Fireguard Group again combined to set up the annual Weedbuster Information and Display stand outside the IGA on Saturday 24th August.



The aim is to improve the local community's knowledge and awareness of local weed invasion issues, to help them understand how weeds within their own properties can have on the broader environment, and to enlist their help in local weed control and management.



Hazel Athey offers weed advice
Photos Richard Kirsner

BERG Mt Martha
welcomes new members
Anita Faras & Peter Markowicz

FERAL FAUNA OF THE MT MARTHA AREA

By Malcolm Legg

From The Friends of The Briars newsletter, August 2013

Three species of introduced birds are causing the most concern on the Mornington Peninsula. The Common Blackbird has established itself in most bushland areas across the peninsula and is a prolific spreader of habitat-changing weeds species, especially berry-producing species. In the last 50 years or so they are probably the main contributor to

the rapid spread of Sweet Pittosporum and English Blackberry etc. across our remaining bushland sites. They have also displaced native species such as the Bassian Thrush.

During the late 19th century Common Starling and Common Myna were introduced to Victoria to control insect activity in market gardens. They quickly spread and large populations are found on the Mornington Peninsula today. Both species breed in tree hollows and are highly competitive and aggressive towards our native hollow-dependant fauna. During

springs they breed and quickly take over breeding hollows that are for our hollow-breeding fauna. They also spread diseases and parasites, and they throw the eggs and chicks out of the hollows of so many native bird species.

Today integrated and ongoing feral fauna control programs are being conducted across the region and as a result, feral species are declining and native species are increasing. It is very important to confine pets to your property. The Mornington Peninsula Shire has a '24/7' cat curfew which helps our wildlife to a degree.

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 20th October and 17th November. Meet at the Rotunda (Mel: 144 K11) or call Liz Barraclough on 0408 388 430 to find the work site. ❖ Tuesdays 9.30 to 11.30, meet in the Kinder carpark, Watson Rd. Call Mary Stemp, 5974 3996 ❖ Friday mornings. Call Sue Betheras, 0408 808 201. ❖ Hopetoun Creek Greenfield Reserve 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 12th October and 9th November. All members welcome. ❖ BERG AGM Sat 26th Nov, 9.30 for 10.00 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Fairbairn Bushland Reserve Friends Group working bees, 10.00 to 12.00 Sun 13th & Fri 25th Oct, Sun 10th & Fri 29th Nov. Call Judith Whittaker 5974 8174 or John Stoker 5977 1397. ❖ 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.
BERG MT MARTHA COMMITTEE PRESIDENT JOHN INCHLEY • VICE PRESIDENT GRAHAM HUBBARD • SECRETARY DI LEWIS • TREASURER RICHARD KIRSNER FIELD OFFICER LIZ BARRACLOUGH • NEWSLETTER ANGELA KIRSNER • SCHOOLS LIAISON JENNY SELBY • ROTARY CLUB LIAISON GEOFF KAYE • PUBLICITY BARBARA THRIVES & ROS CROMPTON • MICHAEL SANDERS HOPETOUN CREEK GREENFIELD RESERVE GROUP HAZEL ATHEY • CENTURY DVE HABITAT LINK GROUP TONY O'CONNOR		
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