



Berg
Mt Martha

Caring for the Balcombe Estuary Reserves

THE CREEK

Volume 17 No 6, December 2013

BUMPER CHRISTMAS EDITION!

This edition of The Creek runs to 8 pages – a reflection of the expanding range of BERG Mt Martha's activities. Enjoy it and have a wonderful and safe festive season!

MEET BERG MT MARTHA'S NEW PRESIDENT

Graham Hubbard was elected as President of BERG Mt Martha at the AGM in October, with John Inchley retiring from the position after three hard-working years. A member since 2007 and a regular at our working bees, Graham led our invaluable strategic planning exercise in 2012, after which he was persuaded to take on the Vice-Presidency.



John Inchley (left) hands over to new president Graham Hubbard at the BERG Mt Martha AGM Photo Richard Kirsner

Graham's expertise is in understanding how organisations tick and helping them to do it better. He has decades of experience as a senior business academic, consultant, facilitator, trainer and mentor.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

From Graham Hubbard

In my first newsletter as new President, I would like to thank John Inchley for doing such a great job over the last three years and positioning BERG Mt Martha so

well for the future. I have big shoes to fill!

Achievements in 2013

It has been a great year for BERG Mt Martha. We have:

- significantly increased our Active Volunteer numbers and now have backups for most of our major positions (except for President!)
- developed a very active Community Awareness and Education Group, with a quarterly program of speakers and many other events and activities
- formed a relationship with Mt Martha Community Bank/Bendigo Bank and begun to receive financial and other dividends from that relationship (see Martin Thraves' article on page 3).
- launched the Yellow Robin Audio Trail and maintained an active schools program
- defended the Reserves in the Ferrero Master Plan submissions and consultations
- developed plans for all areas of the Reserves and done significant work in the old quarry below Citation Oval and many other areas
- started new projects such as the Bird Hide, the Bird Brochure, and the Estuary Sedimentation project. And the new Maude St burn site provides lots of opportunities on the north side of the Reserves for future indigenous restoration work.

Challenges for 2014

In January, the Committee will review the Strategic Plan and set specific actions for 2014. Two major challenges we face are significant reductions in government grant funding at all levels and significant pressures from rapid urban development. But we have many opportunities to further engage you, as members, and the community, to

increase knowledge of what we do and to gain more active support.

Thank you, volunteers!

Each time I attend meetings or working bees and talk to our many talented, expert members, I realise what a wonderful resource the Reserves are, what great expertise and passion our members have and how important is the work we do, operationally, administratively, and in lobbying for protection of this environment. Thanks to all of you who have been involved.

A lot has been done since 1997. But there's lots more to do! I hope you'll join with me next year on some of our many projects and activities to promote BERG Mt Martha's strategy of **preserving and restoring the precious ecology of the Balcombe Estuary and Reserves through its technical expertise, passionate volunteerism and community involvement.** It's a strategy worth working for!

CAN YOU HELP?

FIRST AIDERS NEEDED

On March 30th 2014, 10am–2pm, BERG Mt Martha is planning to hold a Family Day at the Estuary.

We are hoping that one or more people with First Aid Certification might be able to give us some time on duty. If you can help, phone Jenny Rolleston on 5975 4268, or BERG on 0447 160 288, or email info@berg.org.au

OCCASIONAL COOKS WANTED

We're delighted that Kaye Young has taken on the task of coordinating food at BERG Mt Martha events and working bees. She is gathering names of people who would be happy to make the occasional cake, or maybe a salad for a BERG event, or the like. If you can help, email info@berg.org.au or phone Kaye on 5973 113.

BERG MT MARTHA AT THE ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS CRANBOURNE

Sue Betheras reports

On Friday 20th September about 20 BERGers spent the morning exploring the bushland of the Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne, with Bron Merritt, the Gardens' Bushland Manager.

The bushland comprises 350 hectares of the 600 hectare site, but only three of the RBG Cranbourne's 40-50 staff (including 10-15 horticultural staff) have the task of looking after it. The bushland includes five vegetation types: Heath Woodland, Stringybark Woodland, Grassy Woodland, Swamp Paperbark & Wet Heath, and Pasture Grassland.

The Trig Point offers wonderful views of the Australian Garden and surrounding bush as well as the racecourse to the north and all the housing developments around the perimeter.



RBG Cranbourne was defeated in efforts to exclude the existing habitat corridor to the south from subdivision so the Gardens bushland would link with further bushland areas. Within five years the site will be ringed by houses and the problems they bring. In bushland areas, for example, there are about four foxes per square kilometre, compared to 16 in urban areas, as well as dogs, cats, people, and pressure from neighbours when carrying out control burns. Then there are the burgeoning populations of wallabies and bandicoots within the gardens, thriving with the

permanent water and ideal conditions provided. Currently release gates in the fences allow excess wallabies and bandicoots to spread into surrounding, linking bushland, but future housing development will put an end to this.

Next we visited the high Perched Swamp, now full of water after being empty for the past 15 years. The viewing platform is on a pontoon which moves with the water level. The swamp has lots of peat and mosses and is surrounded by swamp paperbark.



Bron showed us their most recent control burn site, seven hectares burnt in April. She talked about some of the hazards of the burn process, for instance, the possibility of coral fern going up in 'puffs' of fire and its embers spreading the fire by jumping the control burn lines. The burn was designed to be patchy, leaving the canopies intact, but the intensity of the fire from burning bracken led to unintended crown scorch. Bron commented that *Gahnia radula* ignites easily like the bracken. All RBG-C staff at fire-trained and the local CFA on call during any burns on the site.



By the time we reached the Lakes Track over to Wylies Creek Wetlands & Grassland the rain had settled in and we scuttled across the grasslands paths to shelter under Dame Elisabeth Murdoch's Gazebo, where we had more fascinating discussions about the RBG bush. For example:

- Bandicoots are often seen here. They eat insects and fungi and dig in ground debris, aerating and turning the soil.
- Increases in wallaby numbers are causing much damage to vegetation. They eat everything and their grazing has a bonsai effect on shrubs!
- Feral animals are a real problem. Bron suggested that if Dingos could be reintroduced, they would reduce the problem as they control foxes and cats. While Dingos kill for food, they are not 'thrill killers' like foxes and cats.
- The management plan for weed control is to weed each area thoroughly every five years. The main weeds are Sallow Wattle on higher slopes, Pittosporum in low areas, Sweet Vernal grass, Inkweed, and Broom on the edges of grassland.
- Common Frogs and Banjo Frogs are the most common in the swamp.

As the rain settled, and we resumed our walk across the grassland past Cranbourne's Weather Station, the Woodland Picnic Area, and then – a last surprise – a HUGE wombat hole undermining the road and extending three metres out the other side. The staff's best efforts had failed to persuade the resident wombat to move elsewhere!



Many BERG members stayed for lunch at the Boon Wurrung Café and then joined one of the garden tours run by Garden Ambassadors.

Photos: Watched by a Swamp Wallaby! & An Echidna on the burn site – photos Sue Betheras. BERGers with Bron, & The giant wombat hole – photos Liz Barradough.

Interested but couldn't make it?

BERG Mt Martha has been asked to organise this Cranbourne excursion a second time, for people who were unable to come in September. If you are interested, please let us know on 0447 160 288, or info@berg.org.au.

INTRODUCING THE BERG MT MARTHA CHRISTMAS GIVING CARD

Are you looking for a creative Christmas gift idea that will last much longer than your average Christmas pud? Are you interested in sharing your Christmas giving with BERG Mt Martha?

A BERG Mt Martha Yellow Robin Christmas Giving Card might be the ideal gift for you to give friends, family and 'people who have everything' this Christmas.

The pictures show what our new card looks like – inside and out.

On the front is a beautiful Yellow Robin saying: *This Christmas, you've just helped to protect my habitat!*

Inside says: *Instead of a bottle of Grange Hermitage, I bought you a gift which will help BERG Mt Martha to fund its restoration work in the Yellow Robin's home – the Balcombe Estuary Reserves.*

How does the card work?

Just like the famous Oxfam goats, chooks and coloured pencil donation cards, you decide how much to spend on each gift card.

For example, a \$24 card would help BERG Mt Martha buy 18 indigenous plants from The Briars Nursery; \$48 would help us buy a bat box; and \$99 would help buy a

bundle of timber for the planned bird hide or a super dooper new lopper!

By the way, if you'd simply like to make a Christmas donation yourself, perhaps targeting an area you'd like to support, we will send our card to you anyway, with our heartfelt thanks!

What do I do next?

Email us at info@berg.org.au or phone us on 0447 160 288 no later than **Monday 9 December** telling us how many cards you want (one, two, three or a flock!), and how much you would like to spend on each card (\$24, \$48, \$99 or any other amount over \$20). Don't forget your donation is tax deductible.

We will be delighted to thank you for your wonderful support by sending you an invoice back with payment options. When we receive payment, we will wing you or hand deliver your beautiful handcrafted Yellow Robin gift cards, by **13 December**, ready for you to give to your loved ones.

Win-win at Christmas!

The person receiving this card will find out from you that this gift will help protect the

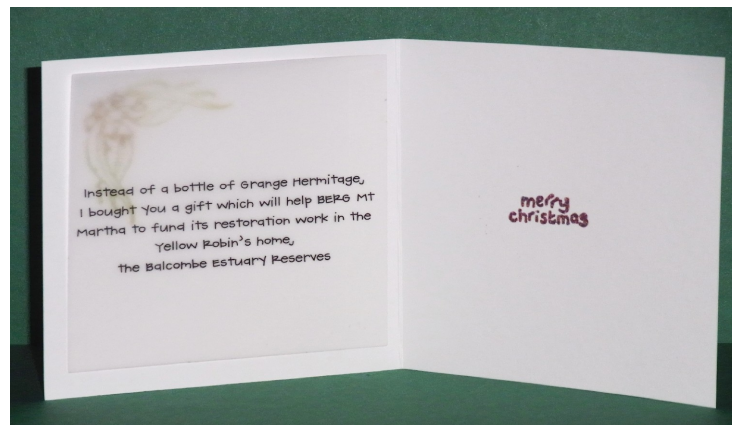


habitat of all the Yellow Robins, Pobblebunks and Paperbarks that we care for in the Balcombe Estuary Reserves.

And you'll know that you've supported a great cause!

So instead of buying chocolates, perfume, jocks or socks this year, think about buying a gift card that will make a lot of plants and birds in our Estuary very happy.

We look forward to your support for this new BERG Mt Martha fund raising initiative!



MOUNT MARTHA COMMUNITY BANK AND BERG MT MARTHA

From Martin Thraves, BERG Mt Martha member, and Community Representative, Mount Martha Community Bank

Community banks are quite special organisations. While they work under the umbrella of the Bendigo and Adelaide Bank, each community bank is locally owned and operated, and part of its profits is reinvested into its community through grants to community groups and projects.

For the Mount Martha Community Bank, BERG Mt Martha is one of those community groups. Already the Bank has given BERG \$1000 to build the splendid notice board in the Old Campground.

BERG Mt Martha members can help to boost this ongoing support. When using a Mount Martha Community Bank service please

mention your BERG membership and the bank will make a donation to BERG Mt Martha. Recently BERG received a cheque for \$60 because members conducted business at the Mount Martha Community Bank.

The bank services include opening an account, financial planning, home loans, car and holiday loans and insurance. The Mount Martha Community bank is owned by the community of Mount Martha. The 360 shareholders are residents and 80% of any profits go toward community organisations and projects such as BERG.



WILDLIFE AT THE BRIARS

Angela Kirsner reports

Jarrold Ruch was our speaker at the BERG Mt Martha AGM in October. Jarrold (right) has been Ranger at The Briars for almost three years now, and he described the exciting developments there.



Photo Richard Kirsner

The Wildlife Sanctuary is the property's conservation hub. Its 220 acres have recently been enclosed by five kilometres of chicken-mesh feral exclusion fence. Within this is a mix of old growth Manna Gum woodland, created wetlands, and restored farmlands replanted in the 1980s with indigenous plants. The fence's only disadvantage is that it excludes indigenous animals outside the fence from moving through the landscape.

Located at the node of a number of creek systems (Devilbend, Tuerong, Claypit, Homestead, Stocklys, Harrap and Balcombe creeks, all draining via the Balcombe Estuary), The Briars when it was settled was one of the most fertile and bio-diverse areas of Mt Martha.

Restoring original fauna

The plan is to reintroduce into the sanctuary a number of its original fauna, and eventually to re-release some of their offspring elsewhere as part of a larger program. The Briars is working groups from the ACT to Tasmania to set up such a program.



Southern Brown Bandicoot Photo Angela Kirsner

Already the sanctuary is home to number of Eastern Grey Kangaroos and Swamp Wallabies relocated from Healesville Sanctuary, and three Emus from Werribee Open Range Zoo, plus a couple of Red-bellied Pademelons. Southern Brown Bandi-

coots, Long-nosed Potoroos and Eastern Bettongs will follow. These once common species are now either extinct or endangered on the Peninsula.

Until a larger program is in place, with somewhere to relocate offspring, the Red-bellied Pademelons in the sanctuary are sterilised, as without foxes, their prolific breeding would overstretch the sanctuary's resources.

While they are not breeding, however, they 'service' the bush in other ways. Red-bellied Pademelons, together with Swamp Wallabies and Red-necked Wallabies, are browsers that eat a lot of above-ground fungi, while the Long-nosed Potoroo turns over the topsoil to find truffles and underground fungi. Research has shown the importance of fungi-eating fauna in distributing spores and maintaining the healthy and diverse populations of fungi that are an integral part of healthy bushland

When we lose species from bushland, we lose such services and the bush changes. In another example, the sanctuary's three emus flock to any emerging bracken and eat it down, and the bracken is not returning nearly so thickly. Emus also eat lots of seeds, which are scarified by hydrochloric acid in the emus' gut, then distributed in neat fertiliser packages!

As they nibble on bulbs and roots, Southern Bettongs mix leaf litter and humus through the topsoil, keeping it soft, open and fertile, while the omnivorous Southern Brown Bandicoot keeps populations of grubs, beetle larvae and worms in check.

Cape Barren Geese, also important grazers and recyclers, are returning to The Briars. There used to be huge flocks of them on the Peninsula.

Within the wetlands, Crake Pond is home to Dwarf Galaxias, an endangered fish species relocated when the freeway extension threatened their home. The pond is free of Mosquito Fish, the tiny introduced fish that nibble the fins off Galaxias so that they die.

Developing a Whole Farm Plan

A plan to manage the whole of The Briars in an integrated way is still

being developed, but one part of it involves allowing the Swamp Paperbark and its associated riparian species to extend further out beyond from the creek lines, and keep stock to upper areas. The Melaleucas provide a vital filtration system to remove the superphosphates and nutrients from farmland and can kill much of the life in the creeks.



Swamp Paperbark filter agricultural nutrients out of water Photo Angela Kirsner

Complementing this will be a strip grazing system, where each narrow strip of pasture is grazed only one or two days in every 80. This allows the pastures to become very deep-rooted, and rain water penetrates far down into the soil, rather than rapid, silt-laden run-off from compacted soil that causes rapid rises and falls in creek levels. With strip grazing, water deep down in the soil can take two or three years to seep into the creek system. This means that creeks are always running and always clear, flowing over a base of sand and pebbles that are vital for the life cycle of many creek species.

Another part of the farm plan is to revegetate around some of big old Manna Gums in the paddocks, to restore areas of Sheoke, where Southern Brown Bandicoots love to snuffle around after fungi and insects, and to plant lots of dense, prickly local shrubs that provide habitat for small birds: *Acacia verticillata*, *A paradoxa*, and *Bursaria spinosa*.

Direct seeding

Jarrold has considerable experience restoring degraded areas by sowing with indigenous seeds using a direct seeding machine, a method he intends to use at The Briars.

The seed mix can include as many species as are available, and they will germinate according to whether they are genetically correct for the area – that is, only the seeds that are best for the area will survive – about 90% don't germinate, or if they do, they don't make it; but those that survive, thrive. Germination also respects the natural succession of plants, with the short-lived 'pioneer' plants growing first, preparing the soil and providing shelter for trees and shrubs that are longer term and harder to establish.

The urgent need for biolinks

Jarrold emphasised the hugely increasing pressures on bushland created by encroaching urbanisation. There is an urgent need to expand the areas available to fauna through a regional strategy that sets up biolinks and manages feral animals, particularly foxes. We cannot afford to act in isolation.

LEARNING ABOUT BATS

Angela Kirsner reports

BERG Mt Martha's bat box program, which started five years ago and now has some 30 boxes in place, is based on the world-class program founded by Robert Bender at the Organ Pipes National Park. This article describes some highlights from a talk Robert gave at The Briars on 9th November.

The Organ Pipes National Park was created 1972 – a patch of degraded farmland donated to the government in lieu of unpaid taxes. It had been clear-felled for grazing long before, and 90 per cent of it was covered with 27 weed species. But it has the spectacular organ pipes formation of columnar basalt and geologists wanted this protected. In 1972, the only mechanism to do this was to make it a national park.

Fauna surveys in 1988 found that, despite a total absence of old trees with hollows, seven species of bats were using the park.

So in 1992, Robert Bender, a retired accounting teacher with no biological or zoological background, started with a few other volunteers to install bat boxes. They were novices, but they learnt fast, and under Robert's guidance together with Dr Natasha Schedvin, whose

PhD research on bats is the foundation for the program's ongoing research, the program has become world class, contributing hugely to knowledge about bats.

For over two years, the bats ignored the first ten boxes, then in 1994, 35 Gould's Wattled Bats (about 15g and the size of a thumb) moved in. For the next two years, they were the only species using the boxes, but they were breeding there and numbers were increasing.

Robert and his team learnt rapidly that the size of the slit entrance at the bottom of the box is critical. More than 20mm and rats and possums get in, while the size of a bat's skull determines the boxes it will use. In 1997, they put up some smaller boxes with 12mm entrances, and Large Forest Bats moved in, also using the boxes as breeding sites. Despite the name, these tiny guys weigh only 8g, half the size of Gould's Wattled Bats.

Over the first five years, all the bats vanished in winter until Robert and his team made some boxes of much thicker timber, to provide better insulation against temperature changes. English research had shown that bats over winter need a fairly constant low temperature, as they hibernate and have little food available (insects are not about in winter). That cannot afford warmth that speeds up their activity and energy usage. With the better insulated boxes, eventually some of the bats stayed, though it took a couple of years – bats, it seems, change their habits slowly.



A White-striped Freetail Bat

Photo courtesy Robert Bender

White-striped Freetail Bats are the giants of the micro-bat world, at around 40g. While smaller bats hunt within the canopy, Freetail fly fast

above it, but in 2000, the first one appeared in a bat box – it had come down into the canopy to roost. Freetail are known to breed in groups of 300 or more. So at Organ Pipes, they set up three large boxes, and the Freetail moved in, although they have never used the boxes for breeding.

From the first 35 bats recorded at Organ Pipes in summer 1994, numbers have grown to 470 recorded in summer 2012, all shown to be offspring from the first lot. And there is no sign that the community has stopped increasing.

Recently, a Sugar Glider was found in bat box, so three Sugar Glider boxes were added, and the gliders have moved in!



A Sugar Glider enjoying a bat box

Photo courtesy Robert Bender

A second bat box program

A few years after founding the Organ Pipes program, Robert started a second project in the 40-hectare Wilson Reserve on the north bank of the Yarra. It had been cleared in the 1850s for dairy farming, and its regenerating woodland is still far too young to include tree hollows.

Eight boxes were installed in 2000 but only in 2005 did one lone bat move in. Then the population took off. There are now a total of 20 boxes.

Banding program

In late 1994, Robert and his team starting banding the Organ Pipes bats with bird bands (other than the Freetail, which do not tolerate bands). The banding is done after the young ones' bones are fully grown, at about 3 months. Banding continued until 2004, and restarted in 2012. Four hundred bats have been banded to date, about one third male, the rest female. At Ivanhoe, banding started in 2011, and they

have now banded 170 bats, nearly all Gould's.

Monitoring of these bats has yielded a wealth of information on their life histories and social patterns. Working from two high ladders, it takes the Organ Pipes team two or three hours to extract the bats from 37 boxes, then two minutes per bat to weigh, measure and inspect each one. Consider that there are 470 banded bats to be inspected! The team has accumulated a massive 18,000 bat capture records to June 2013.

Getting together

Female bats are very sociable –lots of bats together in a box will always be female, while a single bat will almost certainly be male. Up to 28 bats in a box is common, but the team once recorded 86, and they have found a strong correlation between box size and bat numbers. The bigger groups tend to be maternity gatherings in summer.



Together! Female bats crowd into a box

Photo courtesy Robert Bender

At most, only about half the bat boxes are in use at a time. One reason for this is the need to escape parasites. Bats are host to three types of blood-suckers: bat flies, ticks, and mites. The flies never leave their hosts, but mites and ticks hop off to digest their meal, so when the bats get too itchy, they move to another box and leave behind some of these free-loaders.

Motherhood

Bats mate in April or May, but the ova are not fertilised till Spring, when food is available again – the females store the semen for 4 months. Fertilisation is probably triggered by temperature, but this is not the whole story, as the females don't all become pregnant at once. Over the pregnancy, their weight increases by an alarming 50%.

Gould's Wattle Bats almost always bear twins, but other bats have only one baby each year. The furless young latch onto the mother's teats and hang on until they are quite large – for the first few weeks, she flies with them, until she can leave them behind on her forays, returning to check on them every hour or so.

Banding has allowed the team to track breeding patterns, as well as the life expectancy of bats. It seems that the females breed each year until they die, and a few bats have been monitored over 10 or 11 years.

Around March or April there is an exodus of young bats, aged 5-6 months, from the colony, and an influx of other young bats from elsewhere – a strategy that avoids interbreeding with parents.

Winter torpor

In April, bats pack on the fat to prepare for their torpor over winter, when they will lose one third of their weight. To minimise energy use, they lower their heart and breathing rates dramatically, and their body temperature to about 1 degree above ambient temperature, and they fly only briefly once or twice a week. It is likely that a lot of young ones die over winter because they don't have sufficient fat reserves.

Maintaining the bat boxes

It is vital to make sure that the bat boxes are in good shape and have not been taken over by other species. Ants find them an attractive and dry home, and their bites are a definite deterrent to bats! The team's preferred solution is to prop the box open with a stick, which persuades the ants to depart, but while the box is open, others may move in. A Ringtail Possum, for example, may consider it a good spot to sleep, and the team can't close the lid again till they find the box empty. This has been known to take months! Then, when the lid is closed again, the ants may return...

MONITORING BERG'S BAT BOXES

After Robert Bender finished his talk at The Briars (see previous article), he helped Paul Bertuch and a number of interested followers to check BERG Mt Martha's bat boxes, which are spread through the Balcombe Estuary Reserves and along Hopetoun Creek.

We found a total of ten adult Gould's Wattle Bats *Chalinolobus Gouldii*, including five in one box (almost certainly females) along with four or five young. Another box had two, and there was one in each of three more boxes, almost certainly males.

Excitingly, Robert identified one adult Large Forest Bat *Vespadelus*

darlingtoni, in another box. It was the first of this species found in BERG Mt Martha's bat boxes.

At Hopetoun Creek, one of the two Sugar Glider boxes housed two Gliders, with one in the other. There were none in the Sugar Glider Boxes in the Balcombe Creek area.



Robert Bender checking a BERG bat box Photo Angela Kirsner



Gould's Wattle Bats in a BERG bat box Photo Paul Bertuch

Paul Bertuch will monitor the bat boxes again in February or March. If you'd like to help, call him at 0438 681 946 or eco-agri@bigpond.com

FIELD NEWS

Field Officer Liz Barraclough reports

Sunday working bees

In September, we planted 114 indigenous coastal trees and shrubs on the foreshore between Bay Rd and South Beach car park, and cut and painted a few remaining Boneseed and Polygala.

Woody weeding below Citation Oval was the focus in October, mainly Pittosporum and Boneseed.

In November, an army of women plus John Inchley weeded and mulched the old campground, to tidy it for summer – masses of thistles, Sticky Weed and Panic Veldt Grass! We ran out of time, so hope we can organize to remove the remaining messy weeds, as some parts still look thoroughly unkempt!

Friday morning group

On Friday mornings we are continuing to weed two areas. Beside the Maude St burn site they are removing regenerating woody and grassy weed seedlings; and around Uralla Bridge and the old quarry, they are tackling grassy weeds and Scotch Thistles. They have also planted trees, shrubs, sedges and grasses in the quarry area.

NOVEMBER BIRD SURVEY

Pam Hearn reports

David Ap-Thomas and I did our scheduled bird survey on a dull Tuesday morning in November. Things were very quiet as we started, with mostly Silver Gulls on the estuary mudflats and a Red Wattlebird in the camp ground.

As we progressed, we heard a few Brown Thornbills in the foliage and the distant calls of Rufous Whistlers. Even the Bunyip area was quiet. Back on the Boardwalk, lots of Yellow Robins were about – we saw some feeding fledgling young. We saw and heard White-browed Scrubwrens, and flocks of Silvereyes flitting around, these two being the most numerous for the day. (And there were many dog-walkers with dogs off-leash!)

Eventually we sighted a female Rufous Whistler, and we heard but

Tuesday Group

This group has put in many hours of hand weeding in an area among the Tea Tree they have dubbed 'Grass Tree Triangle.' The small Grass Trees, inadvertently mown earlier in the year, are returning strongly and a number of other small indigenous species have appeared as well as Banksia seedlings.

Grants

We have received the MOU grant from the Shire for 2013/14, totalling \$8,750 for weed control, nesting box maintenance and monitoring, and feral animal control.

We have applied for a 2014 round Melbourne Water Community Grant to continue work along the north side of Balcombe Creek between the Augusta and Uralla bridges, and in two sites along Hopetoun Creek: below Balcombe Kindergarten and south from Ferraro Ovals.

Working with Deakin University

Again this year we met and briefed Environmental and Life Science students on the ecology of the estuary, Balcombe Creek and the reserves, as part of their Round-the-Bay excursion. I followed this up with a lecture at Deakin, Burwood on 'The Role and Contribution of

Community Groups to the Local Environment'.

Melbourne Water Forum

Melbourne Water had contracted consultants to assess the effectiveness of their communication and engagement with landholders and groups about their incentives programs and grants. The forum was part of this assessment. I represented BERG, together with Anne Scally (who was also there as a private landholder).

Fire walk and talk

BERG members, neighbours of the Reserve and Maude Street residents were invited by the Shire's Fire Education Officer Katie McKenzie and Conservation Officer Jo Tetteroo to discuss the recent prescribed burn at Maude St, bushfire survival planning, and how to prepare your property for bushfire.

In torrential rain, David Street kindly offered his sitting room on the Tuesday so the Maude Street talk could go ahead. In similar weather the next day, no-one turned up for the advertised talk in the Old Campground. We may therefore include a fire briefing at the January or February working-bee.

didn't see a Golden Whistler. Despite the dull, damp and windy weather, we had a good list of 43 species for the day.



Silvereye in a Kangaroo Apple Photo Pam Hearn

Thanks to David Morris MP

for conducting the election of office bearers at the AGM, and to his office for help with photocopying.

BERG Mt Martha
welcomes new members

Ken & Jeanna Liscombe,
Denise Mack, Christopher Devlin,
Amanda Haimona

INTERESTED IN THE HABITAT CONSERVATION & MANAGEMENT COURSE?

BERG Mt Martha has, over past years, funded various members to do this core training for environmental volunteers, but this year the course was advertised too late for us to find funds. We don't want this to happen again. We want to know, ahead of time, who might be interested so we can apply for funding in good time.

The course runs on the Peninsula over several weekends. Topics covered include plant identification, animals in bushland, invertebrates, bushland ecology & management, fire ecology, site assessment and planning, intervention techniques and weed strategies.

If you are interested, let us know at info@berg.org.au, or phone Liz on 0408 388 430 with any enquiries.

ESTUARY WATCH

John Inchley reports

Melbourne Water has asked BERG Mt Martha to run a pilot Estuary Watch program in the Balcombe Creek estuary. (Another Estuary Watch trial is underway at Merricks.) This will complement our Waterwatch monitoring, which takes place in the fresh water upstream. We hope the data will eventually help us to understand the natural processes in the estuary, such as opening of the creek mouth.

Emily Howes, BERG Mt Martha member, has already been

collecting data. Monitoring includes:

- the condition of the mouth, with photos from two set points, and noting tide and weather conditions. We measure the depth at the jetty and, if the entrance is closed, the height of the creek compared to the sea level
- physical and chemical parameters at varying depths in the estuary, also monitored from the jetty.

We have been interested to note the layering effect separating the seawater and fresh water. Electrical conductivity – a measure of salinity – is ten times higher at the bottom



A photo-point record of the estuary mouth Photo Emily Howes

than at the top. Also at the bottom, turbidity is lower (clearer water), pH higher (less acidic), and dissolved oxygen lower. We have much to learn about the significance of these findings.

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 is 19th January. 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 in the cooler months; meet in the Kinder car park, Watson Rd. Call Mary Stemp on 5974 3996 ❖ Friday mornings. Call Sue Betheras on 0408 808 201. ❖ Hopetoun Creek Greenfield Reserve Call Hazel Athey on 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 (not December) at Mt Martha House, 9.00am. Next is 11th January. All members welcome. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Fairbairn Bushland Reserve Friends Group working bees, call Judith Whittaker 5974 8174 or John Stoker 5977 1397. ❖ BirdLife Mornington Peninsula bird-watching 2nd Wednesday and 3rd Sunday. Enquiries to 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</p> <p>PRESIDENT GRAHAM HUBBARD • VICE PRESIDENT POSITION NOT FILLED • SECRETARY DI LEWIS • TREASURER RICHARD KIRSNER FIELD OFFICER LIZ BARRACLUGH • NEWSLETTER ANGELA KIRSNER • WATERWATCH COORDINATOR JOHN INCHLEY • ROTARY CLUB LIAISON GEOFF KAYE • COMMUNITY AWARENESS BARBARA THRIVES • JOHN TREVILLAN • RICHIE BALL</p>		
<p>Balcombe Estuary Reserves Group Mt Martha Inc. No. A0034645Y ABN 50 224 628 623 Mail: PO Box 433 Mt Martha 3934 Email: info@berg.org.au Mob: 0447 160 288 Web: www.berg.org.au</p>		

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