Autumn 2004

ISSUE 30

Victorian Landcare & CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

News on the Victorian Landcare Forum

The fate of the barking owl

Charlton farmers fight salinity

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Cover photograph:
Tess plants a tree.
By Carrie Tiffany.

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Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management is published for the Victorian Landcare community by the Victorian Farmers Federation in partnership with the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Alcoa World Alumina Australia, the Victorian Catchment Management Council and the Natural Heritage Trust.

From the editors

We hope you enjoy our first issue for 2004.

This year promises to be an important one for the future of Landcare across the State. We urge you to get involved in the Victorian Landcare Forum which will be running during the first half of the year.

The forum will provide an opportunity for members of the Landcare community to have their say about the future development of Landcare. See the story opposite for further information.

Farewell, Mike Gooey

One of our editors, Mike Gooey, has moved on from his position at DSE and his role with the magazine to take up a new position at DPI.

We thank Mike for his hard work and commitment over several years and wish him well with his new responsibilities.

Joanne Webber from DSE will be taking over the editorial role from Mike. Joanne certainly doesn't need breaking in as she has been involved in behind-the-scenes work on the magazine for some time. Many of you will remember her for the sterling job she did organising the Victorian Landcare Awards last year. Welcome, Joanne.

Wimmera wetlands celebration

The Landcare year got off to a good start in the Wimmera with around 300 people braving a very hot day to celebrate World Wetlands Day in early February.

The Wimmera CMA ferried people from Stawell, Dimboola, Nhill, Kaniva and Horsham to the region's west to explore the Wimmera's wetland hot spots.

The tour visited Lakes Ratzcastle and Charlegrark, west of Edenhope, and Lake Wallace in the heart of Edenhope.

Local schoolchildren mingled with ecologists, hydrogeologists, ornithologists and Landcarers. This was the fourth time the Wimmera community has celebrated the region's wetlands with participation doubling since the first tour to Ramsar-listed Lake Albacutya in 2000.

Organiser Brooke Turner said that there are more than 3000 wetlands in the Wimmera which account for about 25 per cent of the wetlands in Victoria.

Send us your stories

We are always interested in hearing from our readers. If you have a story, a letter, a comment or a suggestion please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Mathew Guy, Carrie Tiffany and Joanne Webber

Grades five and six students from Goroke present the history of Lake Charlegrark during World Wetlands Day celebrations in the Wimmera.

Native plants on the net

Finding valuable information on plants in the Murray-Darling Basin took a major leap forward last month with the launch of a virtual herbarium on the Internet.

The virtual herbarium, which is found at http://www.csu.edu.au/herbarium/ allows Internet users to see specimens and read relevant information about native plants and weeds in a free, easy-to-use database. The site was developed by herbarium staff at Charles Sturt University's Thurgoona Campus.

CSU Herbarium Officer Kylie Kent says the virtual herbarium is an exciting development that provides a wealth of free information to the general public.

"The virtual herbarium will help farmers and other land managers to identify plant species and to learn more about native plants and weeds in the region."

The herbarium database houses information for over 3400 specimens, with over 2000 high-quality images of plant specimens. Handy information on the distribution, ecology and propagation of many species can also be accessed online.

Victorian Landcare Forum – 3-4 June 2004

By Mark Costello

From its starting point in the mid 1980s, when farmers got together to tackle rabbits, weeds and production issues, local Landcare groups have been a focal point for community thinking and action.

Landcare groups have planned and organised on-ground work, influenced local practices, been a voice for community opinion and created a place for people to meet and talk about issues that affect their livelihood and communities.

This year a Landcare Forum is being organised so that local community groups can draw their thoughts about the role of community Landcare together and strongly influence the future direction of Landcare.

The forum does not have a 'position' or pre-determined outcome; rather, it invites those active in Landcare to reach their own position and provide recommendations for future arrangements.

The forum will provide a space for an honest assessment of what Landcare has become and what it might be in the future. It leaves the scope of Landcare's role open.

The forum has three phases:

1. Through April and May, people planning to attend the forum will talk within their community Landcare groups and networks about the forum's focus questions.
2. Community members, support staff and policymakers will meet 3-4 June 2004 in Bendigo to discuss the future roles of community Landcare, develop recommendations and to decide who is responsible to ensure the recommendations are addressed.
3. The Forum reconvenes 16 July 2004 with agencies and decision-makers invited to discuss the proposed roles, recommendations and responsibilities for action.

To register your early interest please email your details to landcare.forum2004@dse.vic.gov.au For further information visit www.landcare.net.au or contact Mark Costello, Statewide Landcare Facilitator, on 5430 4526.

Landcare going to the US?

Landcare could be Australia's next overseas export following a visit from Jim Mosely, Deputy Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture.

Deputy Secretary Mosely had been impressed with reports about Landcare from previous US delegations to Australia and wanted to see it for himself.

A whirlwind tour in February took in the Grow West Project at Bacchus Marsh and the Woady Yaloak Catchment Group near Linton.

After the tour Jim Mosely said the secret of Landcare's success seemed to stem from it being a people's movement, rather than a Government-driven program.

He was interested in the diversity and flexibility of Landcare and noted that there are many different models reflecting the needs of individual communities.

When asked whether he thought that Landcare would emerge in the US, he was very positive and said, "Absolutely".

Deputy Secretary of the US Department of Agriculture, Jim Mosely, discusses Landcare with Grow West Project Co-ordinator, Carmen Zerafa.

Amendments to the Catchment and Land Protection Act

Catchment Management

The *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* (CaLP Act) provides the legislative framework for the management of land in Victoria, including the control of declared pests, noxious weeds and pest animals.

Last year the Victorian Parliament passed amendments that will strengthen the CaLP Act through tighter administrative processes and enforcement powers.

What changes have been made?

The major changes are:

- Maximum penalties have been increased, to reflect the costs of remedial action and act as a greater deterrent against intentional and inadvertent poor land management activities;
- Powers within the Act have been improved and the administrative processes simplified to ensure effective and efficient management of infringements; and
- New penalties have been introduced to reflect a need for more stringent controls on certain activities.

Penalties

The penalty provisions throughout the Act have been revised and increased to:

- Provide a greater deterrent for landowners failing to meet their obligations under the Act.
- Make them commensurate with the cost of noxious weed and pest animal control (rabbits and foxes).
- Deter the trade, possession and movement of illegal exotic pest animals, monkeys, large cats and reptiles, in Victoria.

Powers

The powers of the Act have been revised to improve the administration of the Act, by providing:

- Power to enter commercial premises, to monitor the trade and possession of pest animals and noxious weeds;
- Power to enter land and premises for noxious weed and pest animal inspections;
- Power to seize noxious weeds and pest animals that are possessed illegally or being offered for sale;
- The collection of DNA samples of pest animals and noxious weeds for analysis; and
- Power to require a person to retain pest animals by service of a notice to that person.

The role of Catchment Management Officers

DSE is responsible for administering the Act and employs Catchment Management Officers (CMOs) through DPI to enforce the provisions of the Act. CMOs are responsible for providing advice and assistance to land managers as well as:

- Undertaking inspections for noxious weeds and established pest animals (rabbits, foxes, wild dogs, feral pigs and goats) on land throughout Victoria.
- Undertaking investigations into the trade and possession of pest animals and noxious weeds.
- The power to enter and search land, which includes buildings, shops, nurseries and other commercial premises to ensure the provisions of the Act are being complied with.

The amendments to the CaLP Act came into effect on 5 January 2004.
For further information call the DSE Customer Service Centre on 136 186.
Copies of the Act can be downloaded from: www.dms.dpc.vic.gov.au

Clunes group cleans up at Queen's Park

Group News

John Sayers from the Clunes Landcare Group poses in front of the new fence around Queen's Park.

Clunes, north of Ballarat, is the site of the first reported find of gold in Victoria. The Clunes Landcare Group is an urban-based Landcare group formed to clean up Creswick Creek which flows through the centre of the town.

When Pamela Manning started work with the group as the new Landcare Co-ordinator the group's highest priorities were poplar control and clearing work along the creek.

Concern for the creek also spread to nearby Queen's Park which has a very high heritage significance within the township. The group put a project outline together to rehabilitate the park and applied to Ballarat Regional Industries for it to be considered as a Work for the Dole project.

The project was approved to work alongside a project running in Creswick's Calambeen Park and using, where possible, participants from the Clunes/Creswick area.

Trevor Godfrey from Ballarat Regional Industries supervised the project which involved working with ten participants every second week. The works involved re-establishing the walking path through the centre of the park, re-establishing the picket fence around the boundary and installing seating along the top of the creek line to give a pleasant view down into the creek.

The project has run for six months. As well as the crew of workers the community is involved in shaping the pickets for the fence and regular morning and afternoon tea visits to show appreciation for the work being done. With the project completed the community will now paint the sealer on the fence over a series of working bees.

According to Pamela Manning the project has lifted the profile of the Landcare group within the town.

"The Queen's Park project demonstrates how Landcare groups can achieve a lot in areas which are not generally seen as having a Landcare focus. The group also took advantage of a labour initiative which helped them to tackle a project which otherwise would have been too big."

Clunes resident and Landcare Group member John Sayers, who shaped all of the pickets for the new fence, said that the project had really pulled the town together.

"We are looking forward to the next project to finish the park," John Sayers concluded.

Longeranong College students helped out with tree planting.

From salt scald to picture

It gives fifth-generation Charlton farmers Dennis and Glenda Watts a lot of pleasure to look around a valley that they have transformed from a degraded paddock scarred by salt to a productive and picturesque landscape.

The Watts' mixed farm is about 20 kilometres south of Charlton. It is within the Pental Hills targeted project area, one of the North Central Dryland Salinity Program's 10 priority areas in the north central region.

The rehabilitation work that was started in the early 1970s by Dennis' father and uncles has now been completed. Dennis Watts said working with Charlton DPI Project Manager Aaron Watts has enabled them to complete a comprehensive paddock plan for the affected area.

The plan addressed the cause of salinity in the paddock and reduced runoff by using water where it falls. This has helped stop recharge to the groundwater and improved the water quality.

Dennis said his father, Lloyd, and his uncles took the first step to recovery for the paddock in the early 1970s through the Soil Conservation Authority. The men worked to fill in several large eroded gullies and established diversion banks and waterways.

Success with saltbush

Despite this work, large salt scalds later formed in the paddock. The scalds stretched from the side of the valley down to a dam in the middle of the paddock. This was tackled by planting 4000 saltbush on the scalds in the early 1990s, which quickly had an impact.

"Within two years we could start to see a difference in the health of the area. We were anxious to see if the salt would re-emerge during the wet years in the late 1990s, but the saltbush did its job and we've seen no sign of it," Dennis said.

"This was a good shot in the arm for us because it showed us that we could actually do something effective about the problem."

At this stage the bottom of the valley had totally recovered and the saltbush had both lucerne and ryegrass through it which provided valuable grazing for sheep twice a year.

The next step in the rehabilitation process was to establish a farm forestry plantation of 6500 trees to reduce recharge to the groundwater system.

The plantation, comprising Sheoak, Ironbark, Weeping Mile and Lightwood, is growing well and will provide a valuable resource of craft wood and furniture timber in about 20 years.

Repairing the hills

Last year, with assistance from the North Central Dryland Salinity Program (implemented by DPI), Glenda and Dennis turned their attention to revegetating the ridges surrounding the valley.

"We've had our eye on these hills for a while as they are recharge areas that were having a detrimental impact on other areas of the farm," Dennis said.

"We chose to plant indigenous trees because the areas were too rocky to be cultivated, but after the trees were established and addressing the recharge problem, we could still continue to crash graze it periodically," he said.

Glenda and Dennis attribute much of the transformation of their paddock to planning, funding and labour assistance from the Buloke Biolink and DPI. The North Central Dryland Salinity Program is supported by the North Central Catchment Management Authority and is funded by the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, a joint State-Commonwealth program.

"We just couldn't have done it by ourselves, it's just too big a job both financially and physically, despite our best intentions. If we had had to do it ourselves, it would have taken years of doing one little patch at a time.

"Now we know we're heading in the right direction – the salt and erosion are under control and we're seeing a lot more birds than we did five years ago," Dennis said.

Student teams help with planting

Buloke Biolink Co-ordinator Rob O'Shannessy co-opted his fellow Conservation and Land Management students from Longeranong College near

Dennis and Glenda Watts are continuing work that began in the 1970s to recover land lost to salinity.

postcard

By Jill Karena

Deep-rooted saltbush thrives on an old salt scald providing sheep feed and helping lower watertables.

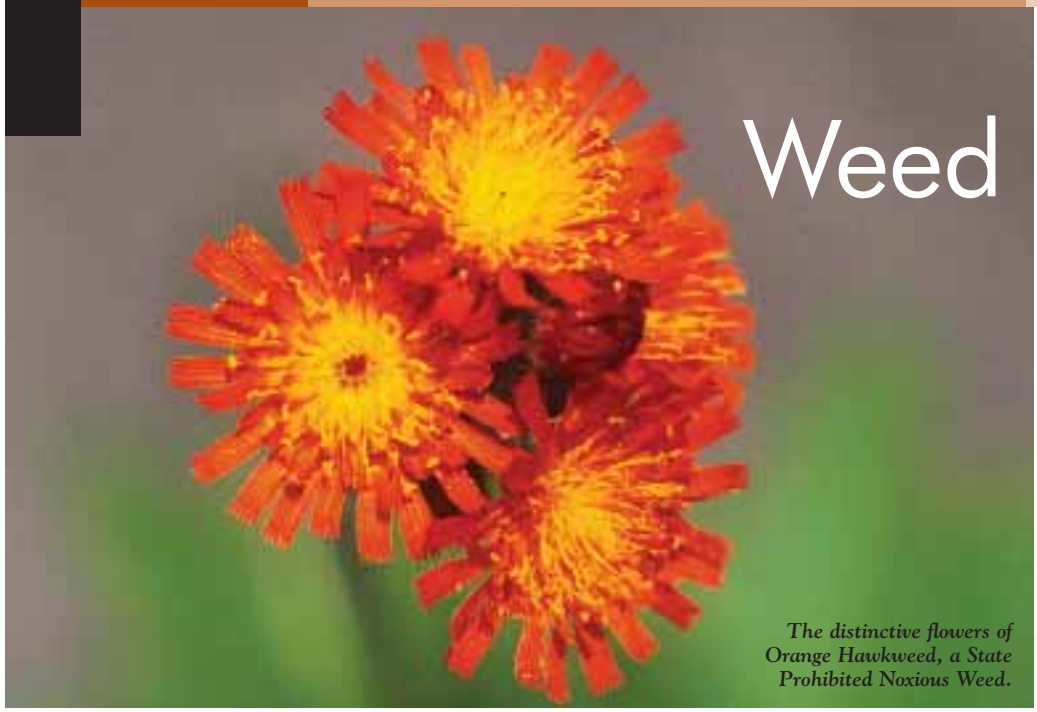
Horsham to help Dennis and Glenda with their planting. The original team of students put 3000 local provenance native seedlings in the ground and they repeated the effort last year.

Tree planting lines around the hills were ripped by a bulldozer to ensure the young trees had the best possible start. Dennis and Glenda walked over the entire 32 kilometres of rip lines with a handheld rotary hoe.

Although it was labour intensive, Rob said the results proved how beneficial good preparation was. Last year's trees were watered three times, with 99% of them coming through the summer and taking off well this year.

"Those of us who returned to plant last year were amazed at the growth and pretty pleased to have been part of such a successful project. It's great that there are increasing numbers of people like Dennis and Glenda who are doing their best to get trees and birds back into the landscape with the understanding that they are tackling salinity, saving the topsoil and establishing wind protection for their farming activities," explained Rob O'Shannessy.

For further information contact DPI Project Manager Aaron Watts on 5491 1566.



The distinctive flowers of Orange Hawkweed, a State Prohibited Noxious Weed.

Weed Update

By Kate Blood

New hawkweed for Victoria

A new hawkweed was discovered near Falls Creek in the Alpine National Park last December.

The new herb, King Devil Hawkweed *(Hieracium praealtum ssp. bauhinii)*, is closely related to Orange Hawkweed *(Hieracium aurantiacum)* which is already under an active eradication campaign in and around Falls Creek.

King Devil Hawkweed is a perennial herb that has stems to over 70 centimetres tall when flowering. Each flowering stem can have 5 to 25 yellow daisy-like flowers. The plant spreads by seed and by strawberry-like runners.

The new hawkweed was discovered by DSE officer Rudi Pleschutschnig from Mt Beauty. Rudi and local Parks Victoria staff have been conducting further surveillance for the new weed and undertaking work to treat the weed with herbicide.

The King Devil Hawkweed is a new weed for Victoria and probably Australia. It is already a significant problem in New Zealand, the USA and Canada. It originates from central Europe.

Introduced *Hieracium praealtum* along with *Hieracium pilosella* in New Zealand are among the most abundant tussock grassland species in the moderate to low rainfall areas of the South Island high country.

King Devil Hawkweed has serious weed potential in Australia and, as such, all species of *Hieracium* are prohibited for entry to Australia by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS). All species are now State Prohibited Noxious Weeds in Victoria.

Orange Hawkweed work continues

Orange Hawkweed has been established in and around the Falls Creek village since January 1999.

An active eradication program has been underway involving a number of groups including the Falls Creek Resort Management Board, Parks Victoria, Falls Creek Ski Lifts, DPI and DSE.

Schuss Ski Club and other groups and businesses have been actively involved in reporting infestations as they are found and local contractor Jill Dawson has been successfully treating infestations with herbicide.

This perennial herb grows to 40 centimetres tall when flowering and like the King Devil Hawkweed spreads by seed and runners. Orange Hawkweed has clusters of orange flowers at the top of the flowering stem and is quite distinctive in the field.

The new King Devil Hawkweed in contrast looks superficially like many other weeds and indigenous plants in the high country so is more difficult

A new weed, King Devil Hawkweed, has been discovered near Falls Creek covering about 0.8 hectares.

Alpine Ecology Course participants learn about Orange Hawkweed at Falls Creek.

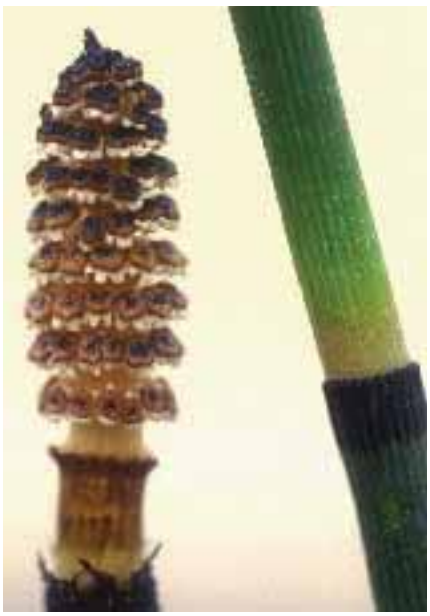
to recognise in the field.

Orange Hawkweed is prohibited entry to Australia by AQIS and is on the National Environmental Alert List of Weeds – a national list of 28 plants that are in the early stages of establishment and have the potential to become a significant threat to biodiversity if they are not managed. It is also a State Prohibited Noxious Weed in Victoria.

At Falls Creek, Orange Hawkweed escaped from a garden within the village. It has been found in nurseries and markets in Victoria and is a serious weed in New Zealand, the USA, Canada, Britain and parts of Europe.

It has also been recorded in Tasmania and an infestation was found in the Jagungal Wilderness of Kosciuszko National Park in December 2003. It originates from Europe and is a common lawn and garden weed in the UK. Plants have recently been removed from the Ballarat Botanic Gardens.

A close-up of the spore cone of a horsetail plant found on sale in Victoria.



Nursery surveys

Retail and wholesale nurseries have been inspected by DPI staff across much of Victoria looking for declared noxious weeds, particularly the State Prohibited Noxious Weeds declared in 2003.

The most common weeds found for sale are species of *Equisetum* or Horsetail. All plants are removed and destroyed under strict hygiene and quarantine conditions to ensure they do not spread. Information is shared with interstate colleagues about illegal trading.

The National Herbarium of Victoria in Melbourne continues to play an important role in the identification of potential, new and emerging weeds.

For further information contact Kate Blood, Project Leader, Weed Alert Rapid Response, DPI Beaufort on 5349 2833 or Kate.Blood@dpi.vic.gov.au

The flowers of the new weed, King Devil Hawkweed, near Falls Creek.

Flower heads of King Devil Hawkweed are bottled for quarantine incineration before plants are sprayed.

Orange Hawkweed growing among other weeds at Falls Creek.

One of the species of horsetail, a State Prohibited Noxious Weed in Victoria.

Drought and fires threaten

The incessant trilling of baby barking owls tells us that we are close to the nest.

"These are my 'bombproof' owls, the ones least disturbed by human presence," says Natasha Schedvin as we make our way quietly through a forest of black cypress pine and red and long leaf box trees.

Natasha is a doctoral student at Charles Sturt University's School of Environmental and Information Sciences in NSW and a member of the Johnstone Centre for Research in Natural Resources and Society.

For the past three years she has been researching barking owls, an endangered species in Victoria. Over that time, she has tracked 13 owls for 130 nights in and around Chiltern-Pilot National Park in north-east Victoria. Up until last year's bushfires this area had one of the densest populations in south-east Australia.

This particular breeding pair we are watching live in the Woolshed Valley and is the most successful of the 23 pairs Natasha has studied. Over the past four years they have raised three chicks (the maximum number for barking owls) annually.

A male owl, large and unperturbed, is perched on a low branch. As we approach he just bothers to open his distinctive yellow eyes. Later, the female swoops from tree to tree, issuing a warning call that explains why these owls have earned the name the 'screaming woman' owl. The female owl is the smaller of the two, weighing around 600 grams, compared to the male's 800 grams.

There are three chicks in this nest in the hollow of a dead tree but only two make an appearance.

Fortunately the pair's nesting tree (and the pair) was spared in the fires which burnt much of the owls' natural habitat and destroyed six of the nest sites Natasha had been observing.

the barking owl

By Margrit Beemster

"The situation last breeding season was very, very poor," says Natasha.

"My population of 23 pairs is now down to nine, and of those pairs, only two successfully produced young. We don't have owls nesting in the burnt areas any more."

One of the reasons the bushfires were so devastating is that owls are very territorial and don't move to new locations easily. Breeding pairs seem to stay and defend their patch at all cost.

"With the coincidence of drought and the fires they've been dealt a double whammy," says Natasha.

"As any landholder knows the impact of a drought is felt for some time after it finishes. I would expect the combination of the two has resulted in a lack of abundant food sources required when owls are breeding. It's been very sad."

One of the key contributing factors to the previously abundant barking owl population is the large connected blocks of box-ironbark woodland present in Chiltern-Pilot National Park and its surrounds.

"It's one of the forest types we've lost a lot of in Australia," says Natasha whose research is looking at the owls' habitat requirements with a view to further refining conservation management practices.

Natasha Schedvin checks on a breeding pair in the Woolshed Valley.

Baby barking owls in their nest.

Pictures courtesy of Alex Massey at the Border Mail.

The southern sub-species of barking owl was once widespread across the east coast of Australia and the south-west corner of Western Australia. It is a woodland bird found in the foothills of the Australian Alps and in the River Red Gum forests along the Murray.

"They seem to be declining but we don't know why yet. The northern sub-species is doing quite well, but it's a different case down south," says Natasha.

Owls are at the top of the food chain and eat lots of creatures like bats, possums and parrots and even other endangered species like squirrel gliders.

"Given this varied diet, you would expect them to do well in all sorts of environments so the question is why aren't they? They seem to like the edges of woodlands that abut pastures, the more fertile sites and strips along the drainage lines. This country is productive and provides more prey for them to live on. I am hoping my analysis will give details of what it is about the species habitat's characteristics that impacts on their survival."

Barking owls use large old trees as nesting hollows (as does most of the wildlife they prey on) which in many areas are a limited resource.

"We don't know much about our large forest owls. In fact we don't know much about our owls full-stop," says Natasha.

Hopefully her research work will help fill in some of those gaps in our knowledge.

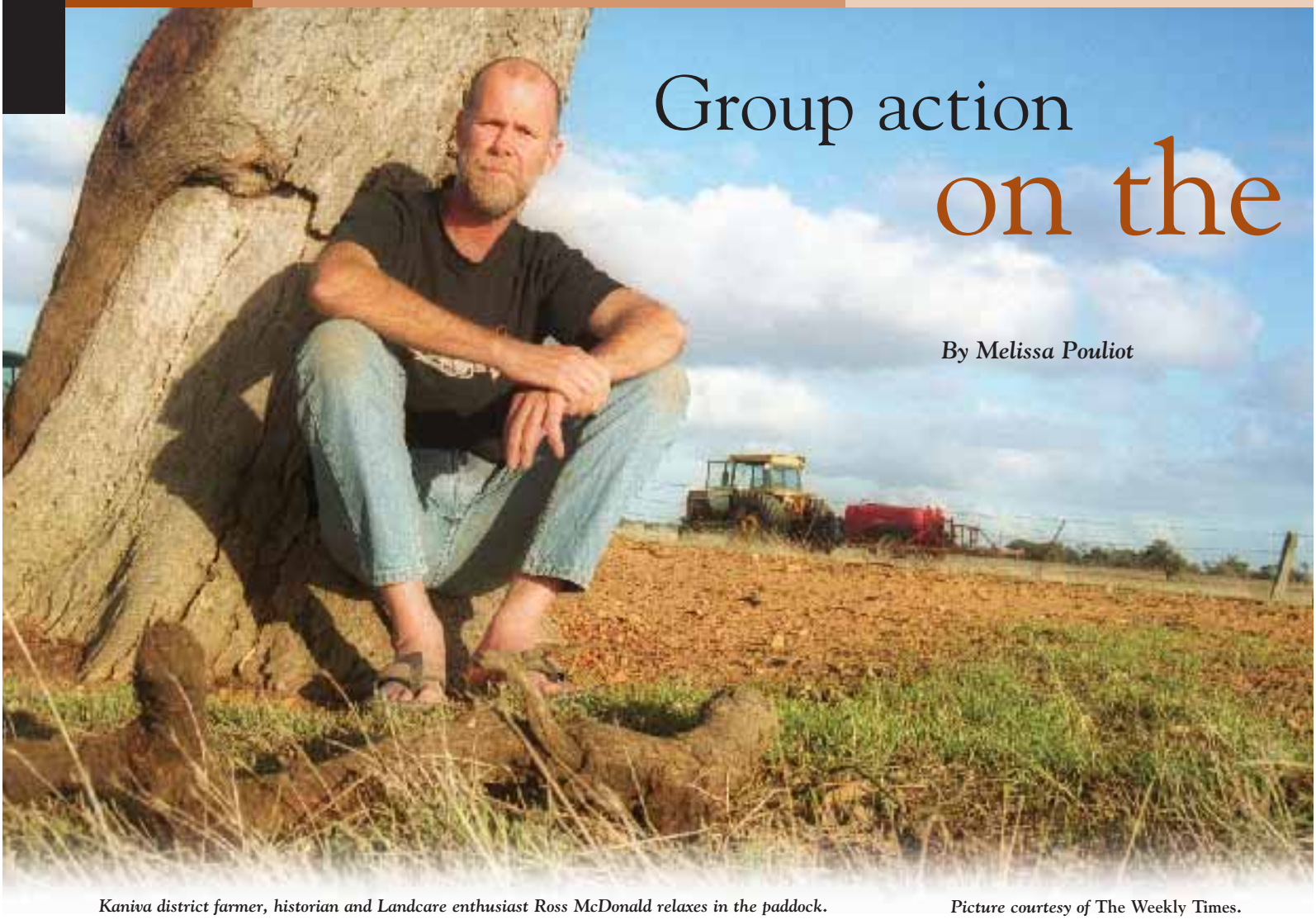
Natasha has spoken to and worked with members of various Landcare groups in the region in the Wooragee, Indigo Valley, Chiltern, and Springhurst/Byawatha areas. She is known as 'the barking owl lady', especially among the 80 or so landholders who allowed her access to their properties.

"Many of them have been very hospitable and interested and some have helped me trap owls," says Natasha who, as a thank you, is organising a barbecue with donated supplies of barking owl wine from Millbrook Winery in Western Australia.

Meanwhile, barking owls remain listed as endangered in Victoria, threatened in NSW, and as rare in South Australia.

Group action on the

By Melissa Pouliot



Kaniva district farmer, historian and Landcare enthusiast Ross McDonald relaxes in the paddock. *Picture courtesy of* **The Weekly Times.**

The Kaniva District Landcare group is relatively new to the Landcare scene but it has made major inroads into local environmental work including rabbit and weed control and some extensive revegetation projects.

The group got underway back in 1997 after Alan Meyer, a third-generation Kaniva district farmer, and Rob Scalzo called a preliminary meeting. Around 20 people turned up – all of them in favour of forming a Landcare group.

A year later around 50 people came to the group's inaugural meeting and were part of a productive brainstorming session.

"Ours is a real community group, not just a farming group," Rob Scalzo, who has since moved away from Kaniva but maintains strong links with the group, said.

"About one-third of our membership is from the town, the rest from the farming areas. We also co-ordinate a TOPCROP program."

Ross McDonald, who is well known in the district for his preference for wearing thongs in all seasons, is the group's president. Landcare is just one of many of Ross's passions, which also include history and the future of farming.

Alan, Rob and Ross work closely with weeds facilitator Nolan Roll and rabbit facilitator Rob Baillie to keep projects kicking along. Rob also facilitates the group's trees and vegetation projects.

A facelift for Serviceton

Weeds, rabbits, vegetation projects and a touch of history were part of my field trip with the group last year. On a cold winter's day, regular rain gusts blew across the western plains. First stop was the Serviceton Railway Station to look at a tree-planting project the group completed several years ago.

A stroll along the long, wide platform, through the beautifully restored dining room, down into the cold cellar and into the dark dungeon added to a memorable visit to this sparsely populated area on the western fringe of the Wimmera.

According to Alan Meyer the Serviceton Railway Station project was a way for the active group to create a unique environment around a unique landmark.

"This site was an awesome eyesore. It was just a patch of weeds and very little native vegetation was left around the area.

"We thought it would be a great idea to plant trees and shrubs to create a good environment around this amazing historic building," Alan said.

western front

Group News

Another Serviceton project the group is extremely proud of is at the town's reservoir. The disused reservoir is the only permanent waterhole in the entire district – worth nurturing for the long-term future of the area.

In 2000 the group planted 1000 trees at the site, where people gather for fishing, camping and barbecues. In 2001 they planted a further 500 trees and are actively seeking heritage funding to fix an old jetty that needs replacing.

Healthy turnover

At the group's last annual meeting, Alan Meyer, who proficiently fills the treasurer's role, reported the previous year's turnover of grants and submissions was $90,000. This included grants from State Government Second Generation Landcare funding, which is distributed by the Wimmera CMA.

The group's great mix of urban and rural Landcare projects combined with a positive 'can do' attitude will ensure that things are never quiet on the 'western front'.

For further information contact Mark Edwards at the Wimmera CMA on 5382 1544.

Rob Scalzo admires a Grey Mulga at the Serviceton Railway Station.

An original stand of River Red Gums makes an attractive feature in this paddock west of Kaniva in Western Victoria.

Plantations and greenhouse – your questions

This new Sugar Gum plantation, established with the help of Victorian Government private forestry initiatives, will be managed for firewood and sawn timber.

Graeme Anderson works for DPI in Geelong as the local manager of the Plantations for Greenhouse Program. Plantations for Greenhouse is a $1.5m Victorian Government Greenhouse and Private Forestry initiative which is establishing over 1500 hectares of new longer-term timber and greenhouse plantations across Victoria in partnership with local farm forest growers.

Graeme spends much of his time answering questions from landholders about plantations and greenhouse. Here are some of the most frequent queries.

Q. Can you briefly explain the concept of carbon sinks?

A. Climate change or the 'enhanced greenhouse effect' is caused by the increased concentration of greenhouse gases (such as CO^2) in the atmosphere. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions is a fundamental task; however, the planting of new forests can sequester (absorb) greenhouse gas from the atmosphere and serve as a valuable 'sink'. The stored carbon in these new greenhouse plantings will become a saleable commodity in future.

Q. What's the use of planting trees as a greenhouse sink if they will eventually be cut down?

A. Most people think that planting trees as a carbon sink that will eventually be harvested defeats the purpose. Why not plant the trees and just leave them there?

Surprisingly, a plantation established on cleared farmland that is managed for longer-term production of renewable firewood and timber has even greater greenhouse benefits than a tree planting that is just left alone to grow old. This is because there is generally a limit to the amount of carbon that a forest can absorb, and at full maturity the forest will be at an equilibrium. However, a forest/plantation managed to produce a sustainable (ongoing) supply of greenhouse friendly products such as timber helps to free up the forest to grow and store more carbon (until it reaches equilibrium again).

Q. Doesn't burning firewood increase our greenhouse emissions?

A. The burning of most fuel to produce energy (oil, coal, gas, wood) releases greenhouse emissions. One critical difference is that firewood that is sourced from a renewable plantation is actually greenhouse neutral – this means the carbon released from burning the wood is taken back (sequestered) by the plantation as it regrows. It's basically a greenhouse gas recycling program.

A group of Master Treegrowers learn how Sugar Gums can be managed to provide sawn timber and fuelwood supplies.

answered

Sugar Gum plantations in western Victoria supplied regular fuelwood and timber for much of the last century. Once established, these plantations can grow on to be harvested repeatedly, as the cut stumps will regrow.

Q. How can a renewable plantation that produces firewood actually provide a net greenhouse carbon sink whilst still producing an energy resource at the same time?

A. It's all about the change in landuse from cleared agricultural land (with low carbon storage) to a new sustainable plantation based landuse. Over the longer term (repeated rotations) the plantation goes on to produce a plentiful supply of wood products such as fuelwood (energy), while at the same time substantially increasing the overall carbon levels that are stored on site. The key aspect is the change to a forested landuse which increases longer-term carbon usage and storage.

Q. Are Sugar Gum plantations good for greenhouse?

A. A recent report by the Australian Greenhouse Office (AGO) looked at the greenhouse emissions from woodheating resulting from various firewood production systems.

The report found that there is actually a net sequestration of carbon per unit of energy produced from burning firewood collected from a coppiced short rotation Sugar Gum plantation.

However, the AGO report showed that collecting firewood from the thinnings, harvest residues and other material from beneath a plantation grown for sawlog production (long rotation Sugar Gum) provided the greatest benefits in terms of carbon sequestered per unit of energy produced.

Q. What happens to the greenhouse benefit if I grow the trees, cut them down and then return the land to pasture?

A. If at the end of the day you harvest all the trees and return the land to the original agricultural landuse – the final carbon stored on the land is likely to return to the very low carbon levels found initially. While this may not result in a net carbon sink, if all of the wood grown was used as a fuel source it would have provided a greenhouse benefit due to the fact that an equivalent amount of other greenhouse emitting fuel (and thus emissions) was not required.

This outcome is still better than no plantation at all. However, permanent landuse change towards plantations has much better outcomes for greenhouse.

Q. Do plantations provide other benefits aside from greenhouse?

A. Well-designed plantations can provide many other benefits such as salinity control, farm shelter, biodiversity and improved catchment health as well as producing fuelwood and timber.

For more information about Plantations for Greenhouse contact your regional DPI Private Forestry Officer or Graeme Anderson at DPI Geelong on 5226 4821.

Tree growers wanted in the

A group of farmers in north-east Victoria are aiming to be a major supplier of high quality sawlogs to the timber processing industry by 2015. To achieve this they have formed a co-operative and are looking for other like-minded timber growers to be part of their enterprise.

Farm Forestry North East (FFORNE) is a group of 130 growers who have established native hardwood plantations for sawlog production on farms in the north-east. From 1996 to 1998, with financial assistance from the Victorian State Government, the landholders established eucalypt sawlog plantations in minimum 10-hectare lots.

There are currently 1700 hectares of trees planted. All the follow-up silviculture such as pruning and thinning has been the responsibility of the landholders.

Diversifying a small property

Peter and Kate Houghton planted 8000 blue gums on ten hectares of their property at Lurg, near Benalla, in 1998. The Houghtons moved to the area as active retirees. They breed thoroughbred horses, run sheep and manage the plantation.

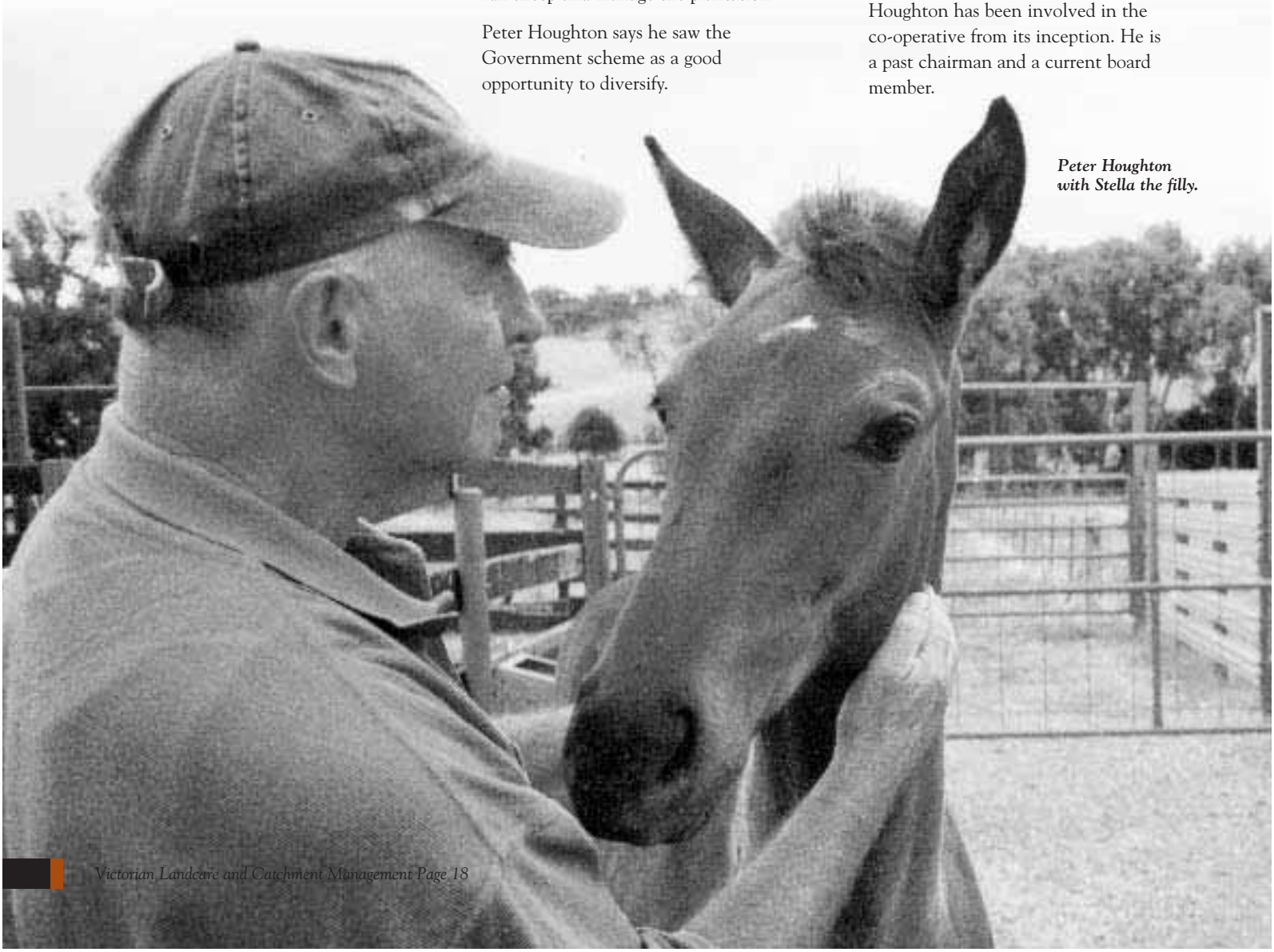
Peter Houghton says he saw the Government scheme as a good opportunity to diversify.

"It was a challenge for me – to learn about tree growing, and, more recently, to get involved in business planning and marketing."

Peter had completed all of the pruning and thinning on the plantation himself until recently when he hired a contractor for lift pruning.

"Now the trees are starting to get a bit bigger I'm not so keen on the ladders."

The FFORNE Hardwood Co-operative was formally registered in 1999 and has around 70 registered members. Peter Houghton has been involved in the co-operative from its inception. He is a past chairman and a current board member.



Peter Houghton with Stella the filly.

north-east

Group News

Business plan points to expansion

Peter and the other growers realised that in order to have an ongoing and viable hardwood sawlog industry, investment was needed to increase the size of the resource. Funding was sought through NHT to develop a business plan to determine the best way forward to make this expansion happen.

Peter explains that by forming a co-operative the growers can work as a single entity to finance expansion and trade with a market that traditionally has been small and made up of very large companies.

"Our goal is to produce an annual yield of 200,000m^3 of high quality logs by harvesting 1000 hectares per year from an estate of 20,000 hectares which will give FFORNE a sufficient level of market power and be attractive as a supply source for major sawmills."

To meet this target FFORNE will need to establish 1000 hectares of new plantations on farms annually for the next 20 years; and to attract at least 25 landowners each year (with 40-50 hectares of suitable land).

According to Peter there are more than 800,000 hectares of suitable land in the north-east capable of growing eucalypt plantations and FFORNE needs less than 2% of this land to achieve sufficient supply to sawmills.

Consistent quality essential

The expansion aims are based on sound economic, social and environmental principles. Farm forestry adds diversity to rural production, brings industry, employment and skills to the region and reduces dependence on native forests.

Peter Houghton says one of the keys to the long-term success of FFORNE will be the consistent quality of the sawlogs produced across the different plantations. This means high quality, intensive management – a feature of FFORNE's operations to date.

"FFORNE is a venue for sharing skills and knowledge and making sure we are all on-track to produce the best possible product. The group runs some very professional field days and there is a great deal of technical information available."

The next step for FFORNE is to implement its business plan and find funding to employ a qualified business manager.

FFORNE envisages plantations as being an integral part of a diverse farming business. Peter and Kate Houghton agree that there are other benefits besides timber. They are really enjoying the birds and other wildlife the trees are attracting to their property.

For further information about FFORNE contact Peter Houghton on 5766 4212 or write to The Secretary, Box 538 Benalla 3671.

Kate Houghton checks a mare and foal.

Peter inspects his Blue Gum plantation.

Why hardwood plantations can be good for farms:

- Plantations create compatible agricultural, hydrological and social outcomes.
- Plantations can provide good shelter for stock and increase lambing rates and survival.
- Plantations can help to protect crops.
- Plantations can help to reduce salinity levels.
- Plantations reduce wind and water erosion.
- Plantations improve the landscape.

Plantation companies target foxes

Fox control is one of the core land management responsibilities for timber companies in south-west Victoria.

John Matthews, a DPI Pest Plant and Animal Team Leader who works closely with timber companies in the Green Triangle area, would like to see a change in the perception that the forest industry harbours foxes and is doing little about them.

John Matthews assists timber companies to develop best-practice fox control programs. In his experience it usually only takes one request from a neighbouring property to have company action implemented.

"Companies welcome requests from neighbouring properties, and deal with them promptly and appropriately. The forest managers regularly make contact with departmental staff and Landcare groups because, in general, forest managers are extremely supportive of community baiting programs.

"Landowners and plantation owners realise that working in isolation only gives short-term relief; working co-operatively magnifies the results," he said.

Great Southern Plantations Ltd (GPSL), Timbercorp, Integrated Tree Cropping (ITC) and Treecorp all emphasised the need for a joint approach to fox control, with Government, the community and the timber companies working together.

Timbercorp has recently implemented large-scale fox baiting operations on treefarms in the Hamilton and Mumbannar regions in conjunction with members of the community and DPI.

Integrated Tree Cropping (ITC) has baited around plantations in the northern area of the estate, its activities coinciding with the local farmers' fox control action. The joint effort is planned at the optimum time for lamb production.

ITC also gives support to threatened wildlife by co-ordinating fox control to assist the Eastern Barred Bandicoot Recovery Program.

According to John Matthews GPSL, Treecorp, ITC and Timbercorp all adhere to strict protocols when undertaking baiting programs.

"The level of professionalism is very high. The companies always notify their neighbours and invite discussion on baiting. There is a real recognition that to be successful a program needs to be well planned and collaborative.

"Nobody wants to see other foxes recolonising previously baited areas."

Les Robinson (right) from GPSL and Anthony Tys from Timbercorp (centre) discuss fox control with Ryan Cook (left) and John Matthews (kneeling) from DPI Hamilton.

Fox on the run

Foxes throughout Victoria will be under pressure this autumn and spring.

As part of the 'Fox on the Run' program DPI is working with farmers to conduct large-scale baiting campaigns to protect lambs from fox attack.

Jason Riethmuller, Fox Project Co-ordinator from Horsham, said that DPI will be working with farmers in autumn and spring to co-ordinate comprehensive fox control campaigns and protect vulnerable livestock.

"Treating foxes at least twice a year is important because you can target vulnerable life stages.

"Spring is when vixens are vulnerable because they are looking for food to support a young family. Autumn is when juvenile foxes are dispersing and looking to establish territories of their own and are scavenging to survive."

According to Jason the most successful fox control campaigns use a variety of approaches, such as baiting, shooting and den fumigation, over a large area of land in a concentrated period of time.

"Foxes live in family groups and are territorial animals with well-defined home ranges but may move more than 10-15 kilometres outside their territory searching for prey.

"Because of their ability to travel large distances and quickly recolonise small areas, achieving effective fox control requires co-ordination and a spirit of co-operation between neighbours and groups of neighbours."

Jason Riethmuller is encouraging as many landholders as possible to get involved in order to make the project work.

"Foxes have a real impact on lamb marking percentages and cost the industry millions of dollars a year. But this is something we can change when we all work together. We need as many landholders involved as we can so that the effect of the program has widespread benefits."

Jason Riethmuller is keen to hear from landholders and Landcare groups who want to be involved.

"We can assist them in developing a program for their area," he said.

For further information contact Jason Riethmuller on 5362 0716.

Weed control by helicopter

By Melissa Pouliot

Paterson's Curse is the focus of an annual weed control program in the steep hills of Elmhurst in the upper Wimmera Catchment.

Paterson's Curse has been discussed by landholders in the area since the Second World War but it wasn't until the 1970s that it became a concern. Landholders organised a working bee where about 40 people pulled weeds out by hand.

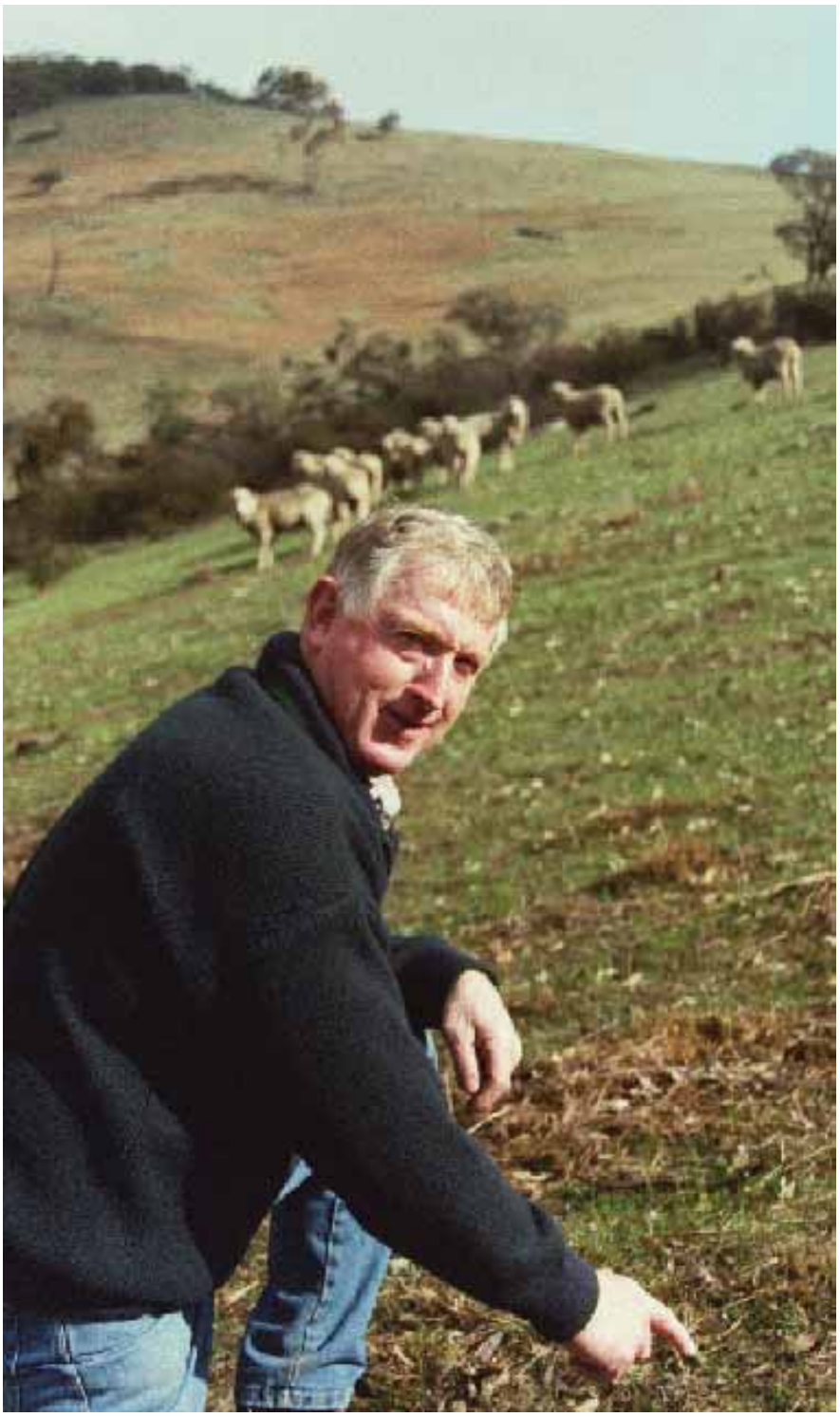
The curse lay low for a few years but about four years ago landholders became concerned and decided it was time for further action.

Because of the steep terrain, slope and difficulty of access to the hills area, the Landcare group decided it needed a plan to look at different ways to tackle the problem. Having a plan meant the group could successfully bid for funding through programs such as Wimmera Catchment Management Authority's Second Generation Landcare Grants.

Successful grant applications have resulted in a novel weed-control method – using a helicopter. It's the first time this method of weed control has been used in the region and it has been very successful. The group has now completed three rounds of helicopter spraying.

Group member Michael Greene said that helicopter spraying combined with handpicking and using a boomspray on a tractor in accessible areas had significantly reduced weed infestations.

For further information contact Mark Edwards at Wimmera CMA on 5382 1544.



Michael Greene of Elmhurst checks the success of a helicopter spraying program on his property.

In Brief

The Revegetation Book

The Hopkins Moyne Land Management Group has launched a new book to assist landholders to plan their revegetation works and identify indigenous species that are easy to grow in the local area.

This excellent small publication contains details about 21 species, from how and when to collect seed, to what other species it grows with, to its role in the ecological community.

The high quality colour photographs allow for easy identification of the form, leaves, flowers and nuts of each species. There is also a section on planning revegetation works and a list of relevant publications and websites.

The group received funding assistance from Alcoa to help produce the book and has also utilised the knowledge of local staff from Greening Australia and DSE.

Copies are available from various local outlets for $5.50 or by sending a cheque for $7.50 to the Hopkins Moyne Land Management Group, PO Box 43, Hawkesdale 3274. For further information call Karen Wales on 5599 8224.

Indigenous Flora Species Selection Guide

A beautifully illustrated guide to native vegetation is being distributed to farmers in the Wellington Catchment around Maffra to help them with land rehabilitation works.

The *Indigenous Flora Species Selection Guide* was launched with a spring wildflower walk along the Munro railway reserve east of Maffra last year. The guide provides information about choosing the right species mix in re-establishing vegetation communities that have been cleared in the region.

The guide comprises a list of species from the major ecological vegetation classes (EVCs) that occurred in the area of each Landcare group in the Maffra and Districts Landcare Network.

The Revegetation Book produced by the Hopkins Moyne Land Management Group has lots of advice for tree planters of all ages.

The guide is a product of the Wellington Greenprint project of the Edison Mission Energy Landcare Program, with additional sponsorship from Greening Australia and the Wellington Shire Council.

It is a valuable reference tool and includes maps which detail the EVCs in each area, identify the location of remnants and provide an understanding of the local landscape.

For further information please contact Clare McInnes on 0428 311 518.

Is it a native?

The Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club have produced a CD to assist with weed identification in Central Victoria.

Is it a native? was produced for landholders and Landcare group members involved in revegetation projects and/or replacing introduced plants with natives local to the area.

According to the CD's author, Ern Perkins, some native plants of central Victoria are often mistakenly identified as weeds.

The CD was produced with assistance from the Shire of Mount Alexander, the North Central CMA and some private donors.

Is it a native? is available from the Mount Alexander Shire Council offices at 25 Lyttleton Street, Castlemaine, or by sending a cheque for $7.00 to the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc, PO Box 324, Castlemaine 3450.

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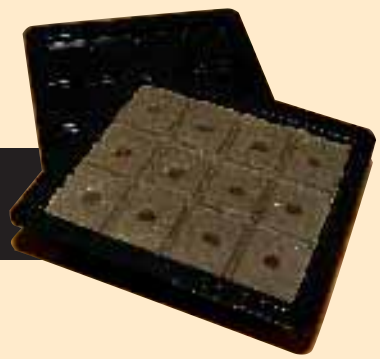

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For more information about coordinated fox baiting programs in your area contact your local DPI Regional Fox Control Coordinator:

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Wimmera/Mallee/North central - 5362 0716
East/West Gippsland - 5183 9121
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