

Autumn 2005

ISSUE 34

L *Victorian* **Landcare** & CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

Plantations
benefit birds

Controlled
traffic farming

Managing grasslands with grazing



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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 and the Victorian Catchment Management Council.



The Shearers: Andrew Chapman

A touring exhibition

"These images have been shot in outback, Victoria, NSW, Queensland and South Australia – semi-arid areas that have always been the backbone of Australia's once thriving wool industry. Falling world prices for wool, the global move to synthetics and a seven-year drought have seen farmers struggle to make ends meet.

"Most of *The Shearers* has been shot in dry and dusty conditions in the back blocks of Australia, areas that many Australians are not familiar with. As a documentary photographer this is a rich tapestry to shoot images from." – Andrew Chapman

Exhibition dates:

April 28th – July 5th 2005 Museum of the Riverina, Wagga, NSW.

August 15th – November 20th 2005 State Library of NSW, Sydney.

December 1st 2005 – January 15th 2006 Mildura Regional Art Gallery, Mildura, Vic.

January 22nd – March 22nd 2006 Broken Hill Art Gallery, Broken Hill, NSW.

May 3rd – July 16th 2006 Horsham Regional Arts Centre, Horsham, Vic.

From the editors

2005 Victorian Landcare Awards

In this issue the Minister for Environment, John Thwaites, invites everyone to send in nominations for the 2005 Victorian Landcare Awards.

There is a category for everyone so consider nominating yourself, your group and/or others doing great work in caring for our State. Remember, you don't have to be in a Landcare group to enter. Entries close on Friday 1 July 2005.

For more information or an entry form please contact the DSE Customer Service Centre on 136 186 or visit www.dse.vic.gov.au

The Woody Yaloak Catchment Group won the Sensis Landcare Catchment Award at the 2003 Victorian Landcare Awards and went on to line up against some very impressive projects from around Australia before taking out the National award in September 2004.

Alice Knight, past chair of the Woody Yaloak Catchment Group, said winning the award brought an almost overwhelming demand from people within the catchment wanting to get involved in projects.

"It was very exciting. The publicity from the awards really increased the uptake of on-ground works. Many landholders are working away as individuals or with neighbours but when they saw the catchment group on the television and in all of the papers it was a great reminder for them of the broader projects they could link up with.

"The Woody Catchment is a productive catchment and we have had very strong interest in some of our cropping projects and the Pro Graze courses we are running," Alice said.

Alice encouraged other groups to enter the awards.

"Woody applied many times before actually winning, but we got there in the end," she said.

Interest in on-ground works in the Woody Yaloak Catchment is at an all-time high after the catchment group won the Sensis Landcare Catchment Award in 2004. Pasture projects, like this chicory and phalaris paddock at Dereel, have been especially popular.

Categories for the 2005 Victorian Landcare Awards

1. Alcan Landcare Indigenous Community Award
2. Alcoa Landcare Community Group Award
3. Bushcare Nature Conservation Award
4. Murray Darling Basin Commission Rivercare Award
5. Australian Government Landcare Regional Award
6. National Landcare Program Individual Landcarer Award
7. Natural Heritage Trust Coastcare Community Award
8. Landcare Australia Local Government Landcare Community Partnerships Award
9. Rural Press Landcare Primary Producer Award
10. Westpac Landcare Education Award Landcare community across the State.

New DSE State Co-ordinator

David Lucas has joined DSE as the new Statewide Landcare Community Development Co-ordinator.

David has spent most of his professional life in West and Central Africa working in collaboration with the Environment Ministries of the Cameroonian and Guinean Governments, a variety of local and international non-governmental organisations and many diverse local communities.

David's key area of interest is in working with local communities to overcome obstacles to increased capacity and innovation.

"This leads us to address the root causes of environmental problems and find new ways to sustainably manage natural resources to the economic and social benefit of whole communities," David said.

David returned to Victoria with his young family last year and is looking forward to working closely with the Landcare community across the State.



David Lucas comes to Landcare after working on capacity building projects in Africa. This photograph was taken during a mountain climbing expedition in Fiji.

Letters

Best letter

The prize for the best letter in this issue goes to Jim Blucher for sharing his experiences of dealing with feral cats. Jim will receive a copy of *The Little Green Handbook*, by Ron Nielsen. A fascinating read, Nielsen argues that with proper global management we can have both global economic growth and a sustainable future.

A new book is now up for grabs so please send your letters to Carrie Tiffany (address on page 2). Letters must include a name, address and telephone number and be less than 300 words. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.



Dear Editors,

I write on behalf of the Alpine Conservation and Access Group in response to the article on restoring our high country mosslands in the last issue.

The facts are that less than 1% of the alpine grazed area is covered in moss beds. Extended bed areas only occur in very slow moving water where filtered subterranean water is forced to the surface by clay seams or rock barriers. A moss bed will not survive on rain alone.

Water purification by moss beds is infinitesimal. Water is purified by subterranean seepage and when flowing over gravel in catchment streams. Only a very small percentage of this water flows through moss beds.

There are many areas of moss beds in the Kiewa Valley that are very healthy and have been grazed continuously for over 150 years.

Lightning strike and aboriginal burning assisted in keeping moss beds healthy. Aboriginals used moss to carry fire as it will smoulder for weeks. Cattle are a necessity to maintain healthy fuel load reduction and soil aeration which many scientists seem to know nothing about.

These facts are backed up by my lifetime's experience of experimentation and ownership of moss bed land.

Alan Mull
Mt Beauty

Dear Editors,

I believe the cat problem is one of our own making...

When we shifted to this area 40 years ago we brought our ageing suburban cat with us. Although our cat died a few years later we still noticed birds being killed in our garden. The unwanted kittens from the township four kilometres away were being dumped nearby.

Over the next ten years as the size and plant diversity of our garden increased so did the number of bird species, and the number of birds being killed.

I turned to cage traps and after some trial and error was catching a feral cat every two or three weeks. The most effective bait proved to be the carcass of a fresh

roast chicken. Now after nearly two decades of trapping I rarely hear a cat calling in tomming season.

The bird species count in the garden has increased from the original eight to about 50 with nine of these species using the garden for breeding. We also grow fruit trees and roses and find the birds very effective at controlling aphids and codling moth.

Jim Blucher
Morwell

Dear Editors,

I can relate to your reader from Gannawarra Shire concerned about the issue of domestic cats. In 2003 our family moved 30 kilometres out of town to the edge of a National Park surrounded by native bush.

Our first decision was to leave our much loved ten-year-old cat behind with family and to visit it often. How could we enjoy our new environment knowing that our cat may be preying on the many small birds that visit our garden and most importantly, those small animals and birds that we don't see?

On the issue of tree guards cooking newly planted tube stock, I too have experienced this problem. I have changed to using wire netting formed into a cylinder with wire ties and placed over two stakes. As these trees only need protecting from rabbits and not the elements I have seen great results.

Kaye Sullivan
Mt Richmond

Message from the Minister for Environment



As the Minister for Environment, I am delighted to be responsible for the Victorian Government's support of Landcare through DSE's Victorian Landcare Program.

After nearly two decades of Landcare in Victoria, the Victorian Government continues to be committed to effective natural resource management and recognises Landcare as a vital community movement that provides opportunities for landholders to work together to address problems in their local area.

In July, I was pleased to be invited to close the 2004 Victorian Landcare Forum.

Holding regular forums with the Landcare community is a key milestone within the Government's *Victorian Action Plan for Second Generation Landcare*. Over 450 Landcarers and stakeholders came together and explored opportunities for making community Landcare even stronger. It was fantastic to see so many Landcare volunteers involved and demonstrating that they care.

It gives me great pleasure to call for nominations for the 2005 Victorian Landcare Awards. The Awards are a great opportunity for individuals, community groups and networks to reflect on their achievements and celebrate their successes.

I encourage all Landcarers and members of other community groups to consider nominating themselves and others.

Congratulations to the 2003 Victorian Landcare Award winners, Woody Yaloak Catchment Group and the Northern United Forestry Group, for going on to win at the 2004 National Landcare Awards.

I am proud to have the task of continuing to build on the success of Landcare and achieving the vision for Landcare in Victoria of *Healthy Landscapes – Sustainable Communities*.

John Thwaites
Minister for Environment

Around the

News from the Regional



State Industry Landcare Co-ordinator Ian Linley recently visited the region to meet with Landcare and DPI support staff working to address tunnel erosion and improve pasture cover in the foothill areas of East Gippsland.

Mallee

The Mallee Regional Landcare Support Strategy was launched in Ouyen in March. The strategy, which will be implemented over the next five years, aims to widen coverage of Landcare and develop new partnerships.

Five new Landcare co-ordinators have been appointed in the Mallee region: Hamish Deans at Ouyen, Mark Amos at Birchip, Malcolm Vallance at Swan Hill, Karen Nalder at Irymple and Simon Watson at Murrayville.

For more information contact Brendon Thomas on 5051 4377.

North Central

The North Central CMA works with 150 Landcare groups throughout north-central Victoria. These groups are supported locally by a team of eight shire-based Landcare coordinators and regionally by the Landcare and Community Capacity Team Leader.

Landcare co-ordinators are based in the Loddon, Campaspe, Gannawarra, Bendigo, Buloke/Northern Grampians, Mt Alexander/Macedon Ranges and Central Goldfields/Hepburn shires.

New Landcare co-ordinators have recently been appointed: Trevor Barker for Loddon, Andrew Dawson for Campaspe, Rachel Clarke for Gannawarra and Chris Pollock for Mount Alexander/Macedon Ranges.

For more information contact Amy Cooper on 5440 1814.

North East

Landcare groups have been holding Creatures of the Night spotlight tours, supported by the North East CMA and

Corangamite

A From Firewood to Furniture event is being held by Grow West / Moorabool Gorge Recovery Program. A range of presenters will describe products that can be produced by farm forestry and give an overview of the decision-making process from plantation location and species selection through to markets and transport considerations. Phone 5226 4833 for more information.

Beyond our borders is a fantastic opportunity for landholders in the Lismore region to experience and appreciate Landcare projects from other regions across Victoria. This event will be held during spring 2005 and the full itinerary is yet to be finalised. Phone 5596 2395 for more information.

For more information contact Polly Hall on 5232 9100.

East Gippsland

A Qantas Airlines, Landcare Australia Limited and local Landcare community tree planting event will be held on 28 and 29 May in the Benambra, Hinnomunjie area. All welcome.

A community Landcare forum and celebration of Landcare evening will be held on 14 October. The evening will showcase and premiere a film based on the history and personal stories of Landcare in the catchment.

Groups in the Bairnsdale area are advised that a Greencorps team is available to help with Landcare projects between the months of April and September 2005.

The region wishes to congratulate Matthew Stephenson for his service to East Gippsland Landcare over the past four and a half years.

For more information contact Darren Williams on 5153 0462.

Goulburn Broken

A kit for new landowners is being developed by the Benalla Rural City and the Strathbogie Shire Council. New rural residents will receive the kit, which highlights land management information for each of the shires, when they purchase land.

The kit aims to give residents general land management information, contact details of relevant agencies and businesses that supply goods and services to rural landholders.

A major component of the information kit is the Land Management Directory. The directory contains data and contact details to assist landholders identify contacts for various land management issues. Details of local suppliers, products and services are also included.

For more information contact Heather Holder on 5761 1654.

State

Landcare Co-ordinators

Indigo Shire Council, over the spring and summer period around the region. Led by Natasha Schedvin from Charles Sturt University, local Landcare members, friends and their families have attended over ten night tours and seen a range of species, including gliders, possums and bats.

North East Landcare Group representatives have been participating in workshops held by the CMA to help plan the new Landcare co-ordination support program for next financial year. Four workshops were held around the region to get feedback to plan steering groups and employment arrangements for the new program.

Groups in the Ovens Landcare Network area are continuing their soil health education programs following successful project funding through the National Landcare Program.

For further information contact Tom Croft on (02) 6043 7600.

Port Phillip and Westernport

Landcare support staff have recently received training in facilitation skills to help them assist groups to prepare their own strategic and action plans. Support staff from the Wimmera and Glenelg Hopkins regions also participated in the training, opening up the possibility of a more consistent approach to this process across the State.

A regional forum was held to bring together a diverse range of community Landcare support people to develop a shared vision and program logic for our support for community Landcare.

For further information contact Doug Evans on 9296 4662.



Karak, the mascot of the Commonwealth Games, was a hit at the Wimmera Machinery Field Days.

West Gippsland

Recent events have included a workshop on Revisiting our Landcare Support Strategy, the South Gippsland Landcare Network Awards Dinner and a DSE Landcare stand at the Lardner Field Days.

GippsLandcare consortium has approved 233 on-ground works projects across the region.

Community engagement events planned for the future include the Yarram Yarram Catchments Network Awards Dinner on 3 June, the Yarram Yarram Catchments Network Envirofest on 2 September, and the Lake Wellington Landcare Network Awards Dinner on 14 October.

The Maffra and District Landcare Network Spring Planting Festival will run from September to November and the South Gippsland Landcare Network Spring Planting Festival will run from August to October.

For further information contact Phillip McGarry on 5662 4555.

Wimmera

The Wimmera Landcare team is currently delivering the GIS Catchman information sessions to landholders and groups to assist with catchment, property and project planning.

Feedback from Landcare members indicates growing interest in accessing Wimmera CMA's recent aerial photography information which will provide additional resource information and further assist uptake in planning and monitoring.

Landcare figured strongly at the Wimmera Field Days in early March. Group members, co-ordinators and Wimmera Landcare Advisory Committee members spent a few hours each at the display speaking to locals and visitors about their projects and activities.

For more information contact Max Skeen on 5382 1644.

Landcaring for

The Wurundjeri knew Melbourne's icon river as Birrarung – meaning the river of mists. Recent publicity portrays the Yarra River more like a sewerage mains discharging straight into Port Phillip Bay.

A combination of mains and septic sewerage leakage, urban run-off, industrial and agricultural run-off are all having a negative impact on the Yarra. While critique is needed, so too is recognition.

There are 25 Landcare groups in the Yarra catchment working hard to deliver the improved catchment management that gets water quality results. Their combined efforts should lead to less nitrogen, sediment and stock nutrients entering the river system. The following group snapshots demonstrate the range of innovative projects that Landcare groups are involved in.

The urban rural fringe

WACMAC (Whittlesea, Arthurs Creek, Merriang, Cottles Bridge and now Strathewen) is a partnership of five Landcare groups in the Diamond Creek and Plenty River catchments, northern tributaries of the Yarra.

The WACMAC network has developed an innovative partnership with a private training provider to deliver good quality, low priced, whole farm planning courses. To complement this approach they have selected and developed a number of high profile demonstration sites to show the

on-ground results of best practice. The farms selected are typical of the land uses and size of the urban rural fringe.

Merriang Landcare Group member Rob Dabal believes that the WACMAC approach of promoting the benefits of whole farm planning has led to more landholders taking on improved practices.

"In this area five years ago some landholders viewed gully erosion as an asset – it provided shelter for stock. Now they have fenced off their creek frontage. Multiply this effect many times over and the Yarra's water quality can only stand to gain," Rob said.

Biodiversity along the Merri Creek

The Merriang Landcare Group runs an indigenous nursery growing more than 20,000 plants a year on a totally voluntary basis.

The plants are used for the group's own work and sold to raise revenue. Some are contract grown for Melbourne Water's Stream Frontage Management Program, a popular initiative that provides financial and technical support for landholders to protect and enhance watercourses running through their properties.

The group has also developed a Biodiversity Action Plan in conjunction with DSE and are working with their members to protect and enhance priority areas of endangered ecosystems along the Merri Creek valley.

More than trees at Macclesfield

The Macclesfield Landcare Group works in the hills just east of the Dandenong Ranges. They have a well-organised and integrated approach to tackling weeds, pest plants and animals, stream frontage and biodiversity issues.

Group Secretary Irene Pearey, who won the Individual Caring for Private Land Award at the 2004 Port Phillip and Westernport CMA Regional Landcare Awards, said that support from the CMA's community grants scheme to employ a pest plant and animal facilitator, subsidise members to attend whole farm planning courses, and produce a Landcare group promotional brochure has helped the group reach a wider audience.

"People are recognising the work we have done in the Macclesfield area and the group is now well placed to link our projects with others around us," Irene said.

The country in the city

The Collingwood Children's Farm is a Landcare group with a difference. Located just four kilometres from the centre of Melbourne, the Collingwood community has planted nearly 10,000 trees along the farm's one kilometre of Yarra River frontage in the last decade.

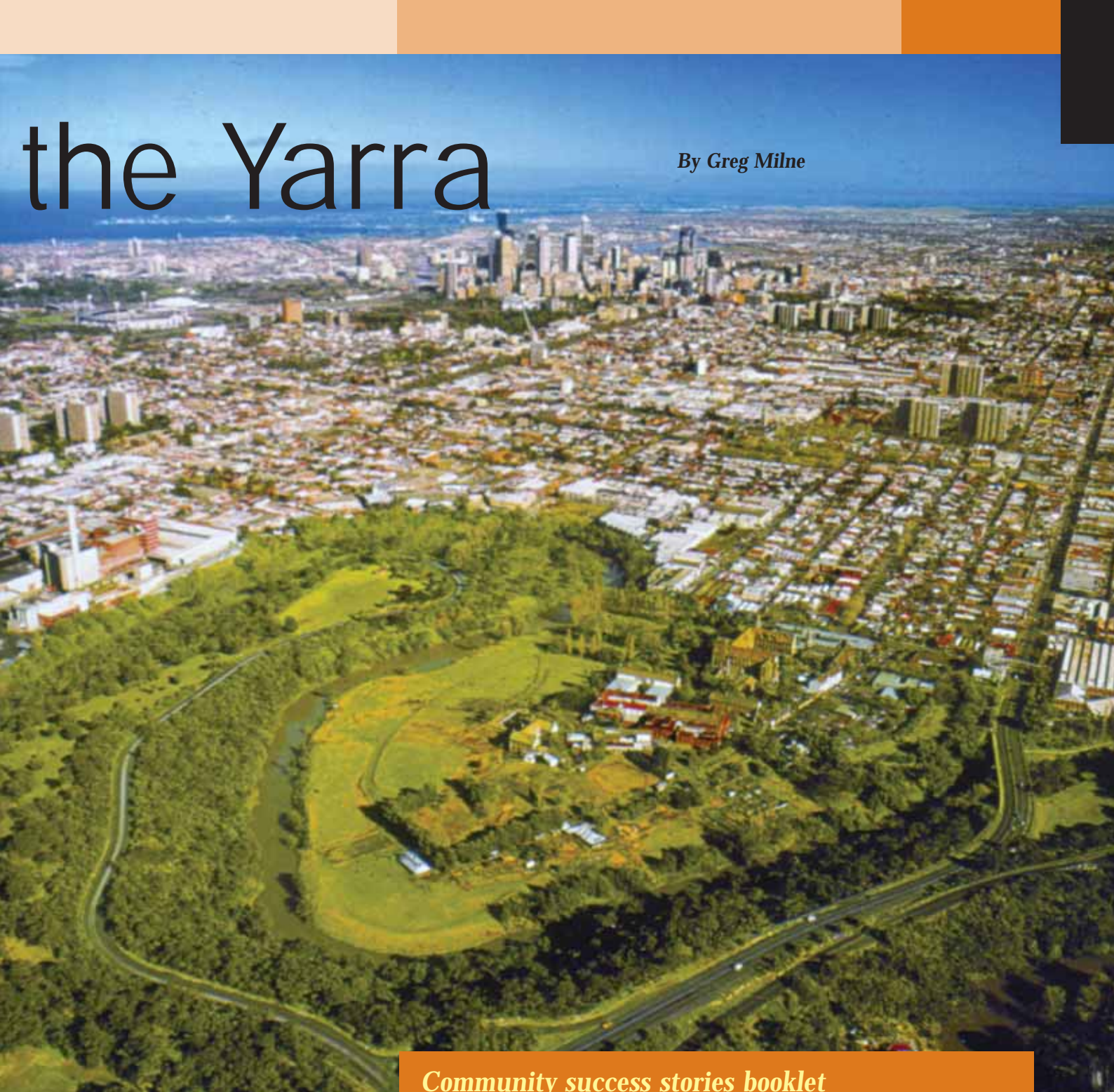
The Children's Farm attracts tens of thousands of visitors every year. Melbourne's Capital City Bike Trail runs along the farm's upper boundary providing a great view of Landcare in action to many thousands who cycle past. The farm provides a great opportunity for city people to experience Landcare and helps to enlist their support for the movement.

Unsung heroes

The Landcare movement is full of unsung heroes and the wealth of experience, local knowledge and dedication amongst the Landcare groups of the Yarra catchment is especially impressive. Recognition of their

Viewbank Primary School students point out the way to a group of walkers who followed the Yarra from the river's mouth beside Williamstown to its headwaters near the summit of Mt Baw Baw.





the Yarra

By Greg Milne

Melbourne's rural urban interface – a challenge for Landcare in the Yarra catchment.

collective achievement is needed and deserved, but there is still a lot to be done before we can go for a celebratory swim at Southgate.

Greg Milne in the Yarra Landcare co-ordinator for the Port Phillip and Westernport CMA. For further information on any of these projects contact Greg on 9296 4627.

Community success stories booklet

The Port Phillip and Westernport CMA have produced a booklet outlining some of the inspirational success stories from the region.

Stories of Community Landcare Success – Port Phillip and Westernport Region 2004 is a compilation of 53 stories and provides a fascinating snapshot of community Landcare activity in the region. It illustrates

the diverse nature of the region's groups, the activities they undertake, and the issues they address.

Sixteen of the stories in the booklet are from groups working in the Yarra catchment. The booklet is available in pdf format from www.ppwcm.vic.gov.au or by contacting Greg Milne on 9296 4627.

Plantations can



Scarlet robins are often found in eucalypt plantations.

People and industry invest effort into establishing eucalypt plantations on farmland for many purposes, often hoping that they will provide habitat for native wildlife. Until recently, there was little information about which species would benefit and even less about ways to improve the value of new plantations for wildlife while meeting commercial objectives.

Now a team of biologists from the Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research (DSE) and DPI is addressing these questions, in collaboration with the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation and the Natural Heritage Trust. The five-year project focuses on practical ways to enhance biodiversity values in commercial eucalypt plantations.

Five experimental plantations have been established in north-east Victoria, with understorey shrubs planted among the eucalypts. Existing eucalypt plantations (five + years old) are also being examined at 59 sites in north-east and central-west Victoria, along with nearby sites in farmland and remnant forest.

More birds in plantations than on farmland

So far the study has shown that plantations support higher densities of forest birds and mammals than cleared farmland, and slightly lower densities than native forest. The reverse applies to open-country birds.

Pessimists expected that introduced birds or invasive native species would dominate

the bird fauna, but this was not the case. Introduced birds formed less than 1% of the bird population in plantations compared with 1.7% in native forest and 2.5% in cleared farmland. Evidence was found that plantations could help protect adjacent remnant native vegetation against adverse effects of stock and invasive birds.

The common mammals in eucalypt plantations included bats (recorded by ultrasonic detection at all sites) and eastern grey kangaroos. Plantations provided day-time shelter for kangaroos and night-time foraging for bats, which need large old hollow-bearing trees for roosting and are known to fly many kilometres between roosting and foraging habitats.

benefit wildlife

By Richard Loyn

Tree-living marsupials were scarce but five species were recorded by spotlighting or hair-tubing, mainly close to remnant native forest. Five introduced mammal species were also recorded, in low numbers.

Forest birds benefit

The common birds in plantations were species that were also common in nearby native forest, along with a few that favour open country like the Australian magpie and yellow-rumped thornbill.

Forest birds that feed from the eucalypt canopy, like the striated thornbill, or open ground among trees, like the buff-rumped thornbill, were as common as in native forest, and made little use of open farmland. They have clearly benefited from plantation establishment. A forest bird that often visits open farmland in winter, the flame robin, was common in eucalypt plantations and nearby pasture. Seed-eating parrots and finches were as common as in forest.

Insectivorous birds that forage from understorey, honeyeaters, carnivores and hollow-nesting birds inhabited plantations at intermediate densities (higher than open farmland, lower than native forest). Insectivorous birds that feed from the eucalypt bark, like the white-throated tree creeper, used some plantations, but were much less common than in native forest.

Positive contribution to conservation

Further analysis is planned to examine how various habitat features like retained old trees contribute to the value of plantations as habitat for wildlife, and how values can be enhanced through small changes to plantation design or management.

We hope to extend the project by examining low-rainfall plantations in the Wimmera and extensive plantations in south-west Victoria. We propose to compare more patches of remnant native vegetation embedded in eucalypt plantations or farmland.

The study so far confirms what many tree growers know or hope. Eucalypt plantations can make positive contributions to conserving forest wildlife

in rural landscapes, even though they cannot be expected to provide the complex habitat needs of all species.

For further information contact Richard Loyn on 9450 8703.

The study on wildlife in eucalypt plantations is being undertaken by Richard Loyn, Edward McNabb and Phoebe Macak from the Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research and Philippa Noble from DPI Wangaratta.

Superb fairy wrens are common in eucalypt plantations, feeding from open ground and using the young trees for shelter, roosting and nesting.



Flame robins are winter visitors from the forests and mountains: they use plantations for shelter and foraging and also forage widely into nearby paddocks.



Controlled traffic farming in the



Dennis Hobbs explains his farming methods at a field day on his property near Warracknabeal.

I first met Dennis Hobbs around 1992, when we had a look at a revegetation project on his parents' family farm near Warracknabeal in the northern Wimmera.

A few years later we met again when Wimmera CMA hosted a visiting group of farmers and natural resource managers from NSW to the region. We ended up on the Hobbs farm talking to Dennis and his wife Leah about their different approach to Landcare.

Dennis was underway on a 12-month plan to change to a controlled traffic farming system.

Benefits for the soil

This system is reasonably new to the Wimmera although it's been around for a while in other States. Controlled traffic farming is growing in popularity and drawing the attention of many farmers who are seriously considering their futures in a changing climate and challenging economic world.

Dennis explained the benefits of the system as reversing the effects of soil compaction, improving soil structure, halting topsoil loss through wind erosion and returning unproductive areas of the farm to productivity.

Since that visit Dennis has become a member of the Wimmera Landcare Advisory Committee adding to the already impressive level of community expertise. The committee looks at how farmer involvement in Landcare can be maintained and how sustainable land management systems that fit with individual and resource management requirements can be implemented.

Dennis is the last person to say he is an innovator, but that's exactly the role he is playing.

"We just had to change, I don't have the manpower to do everything the same old way. We have to accept the fact that the soil is not in the best shape, but there's something we can do about that.

"Controlled traffic farming reduces soil compaction, promotes plant root development and provides the best chance of establishing a productive crop in low rainfall and light soils. Combine this with minimum or no-till and it has a strong place in the current farming climate," Dennis said.

Queensland consultants

As is often the case when trying something new, one of the key concerns is access to local information and expertise. Dennis and his family made the trip to Queensland to source the controlled traffic farming information he required. He is continually searching for information and assistance from whoever can help and is willing to pass the information he has gained on to others.

Bernard Noonan is an important source of local information and support. Bernard works for DPI and the Wimmera Conservation Farming Association as a soil project officer. He supports a growing group of farmers interested in innovative agriculture.

Dennis Hobbs is well aware of financial and social issues currently facing agriculture. To survive in the long term he believes that farming systems need to change.

"Farmers must be open to alternative systems, or at least understand that they have options. When a farmer looks over the fence and sees a better way of operating we need to be willing and able to support them to make changes and to succeed," Dennis said.

For further information contact Max Skeen on 5382 1544.

Wimmera

By Max Skeen



Controlled traffic farming offers:

- Property planning advice and assistance
- Farm layout and design including paddock layout and track and machinery width
- Measuring responses and interpreting data
- Managing improved soils
- Improved environmental outcomes along with personal and social benefits
- Monitoring and record keeping
- New technology and access to R&D

Dennis Hobbs in a controlled traffic farming paddock.



Grazing as a tool for grassland mana



Terrick Terrick National Park, about 60 kilometres from Echuca, contains one of the best remnants of northern plains grasslands in Victoria. The park was a former grazing property and timber reserve. It has Victoria's most significant stand of white cypress pine, and stands of grey and yellow box and provides habitat for numerous endangered flora and fauna species.

Charles Sturt University student Nicky Bruce has spent many months in the field at Terrick Terrick researching the effect of grazing as a management tool for conservation.

"Parks Victoria has decided to keep the sheep and keep the status quo, at least, until we know more about how to manage grasslands for conservation," said Nicky.

Maintaining the status quo

Nicky explained that the area has been grazed by Europeans for the last 150 years and many of the native species have survived – although what was lost will never be known.

"Parks Victoria has adopted a status quo management style. This means if we continue to graze the property as it always has been in the past, we can be fairly confident in maintaining what we've got while we also explore other management options and grazing approaches."

Plant cover is a very important element of grassland ecosystem management. It can determine the level of diversity of plants and animals. Too much may lead to a loss of plant species from increased competition while too little may result in a loss of habitat for ground dwelling animals.

"Therefore being able to monitor grassland cover patterns over time will enable more precise grazing strategies to

be implemented to ensure the long-term conservation of the grasslands."

Nicky's research is funded by an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant in partnership with Parks Victoria.

Rangers work with grazier

Nicky explained the importance of Terrick Terrick's history.

"The park was a sheep grazing property in the middle of dryland cropping country. Through a series of circumstances much of the 1200-hectare property was never cultivated. That, combined with light stocking rates for more than 100 years, allowed many of the native plants to survive."

Parks Victoria has kept on the farm's previous stock manager, Russell Shawcross, who runs 700 to 800 crossbred ewes on the property. Russell and ranger-in-charge Mark Tscharke work together to manage the grazing regime so as to have the least impact on the native species.

"At first glance, especially when it's not spring, you could wonder what's so different about Terrick Terrick compared to other grazing properties. But when you get down and have a look it's very different especially in spring when the diversity of plants flowering is enormous. It's like a whole forest in miniature; however, it is much more dynamic.

"The real challenge is to manage the peaks and troughs that you get with the different seasons throughout the year. In a week even, things can change very quickly. Unlike managing, say, a forest here your management has to be right on

Ranger Mark Tscharke discusses grassland management with Nicky Bruce.



gement

the ball. Just like in a forest environment what you do can affect the fauna that live in the area. It's very interesting and challenging to manage the fauna and the vegetation together," Mark said.

According to Mark another challenge of managing Terrick Terrick is that there is only limited knowledge from previous experience. He is hopeful Nicky's research will not only provide an understanding of the dynamics of the grasslands over time but also provide grazing management recommendations for the existing management plan.

A Paper Sunray. Twenty-six rare or threatened plant species are known to occur within the grasslands.



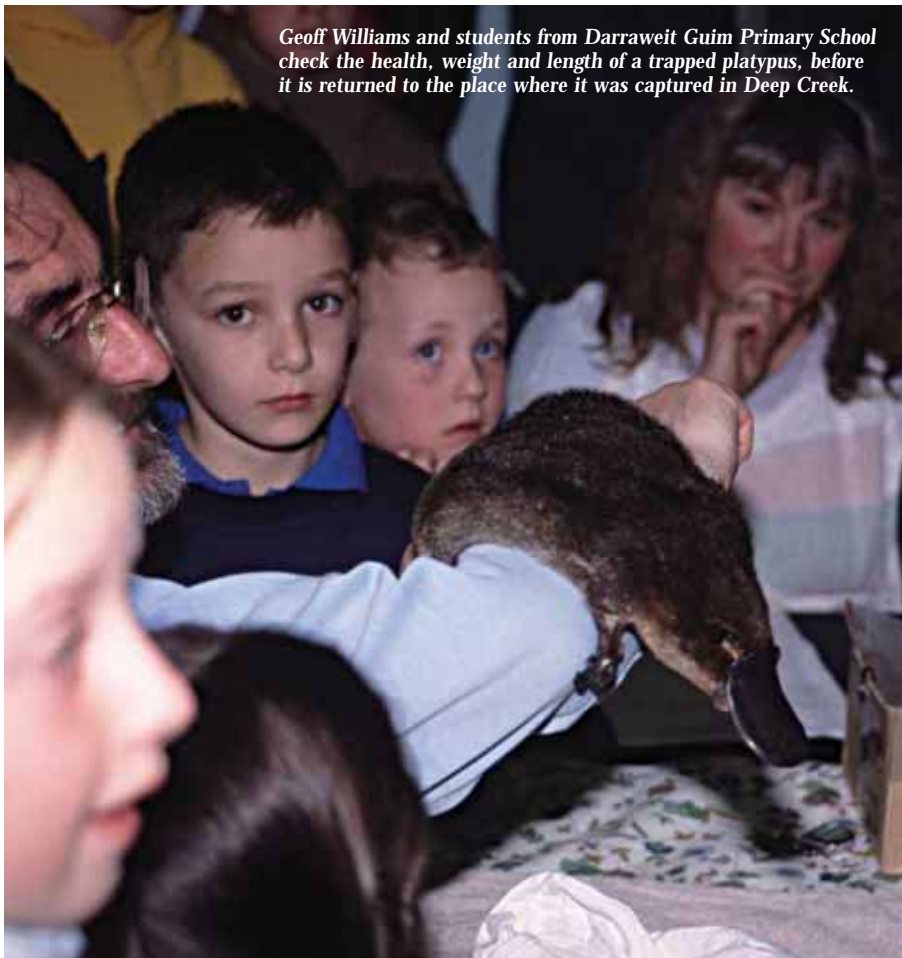
By Margrit Beemster

Terrick Terrick is home to over 100 species of birds including the endangered plains wanderer.



Platypus encounter

in Deep



Geoff Williams and students from Darraweit Guim Primary School check the health, weight and length of a trapped platypus, before it is returned to the place where it was captured in Deep Creek.

Since 2001, the Australian Platypus Conservancy (APC) has been working with Darraweit Guim Primary School and the Upper Maribyrnong Catchment Landcare Group in a community-based program to improve the habitat quality of this river. The important work of the APC is supported by a variety of agencies, philanthropic trusts, corporate sponsors and individuals, with Melbourne Water as its major sponsor.

Over the course of the afternoon last spring several more fyke nets were carefully set up at four sites along a ten kilometre stretch of Deep Creek, in and around Darraweit Guim. These nets were positioned to trap platypus that were either moving up or down the creek.

Later that evening we were tempted back to a fabulous BBQ put on by the Landcare group before going out to check the nets for the first time. The nets at all the sites were checked every two hours during the night (until dawn), to see if they contained platypuses, water rats, native and/or introduced fish.

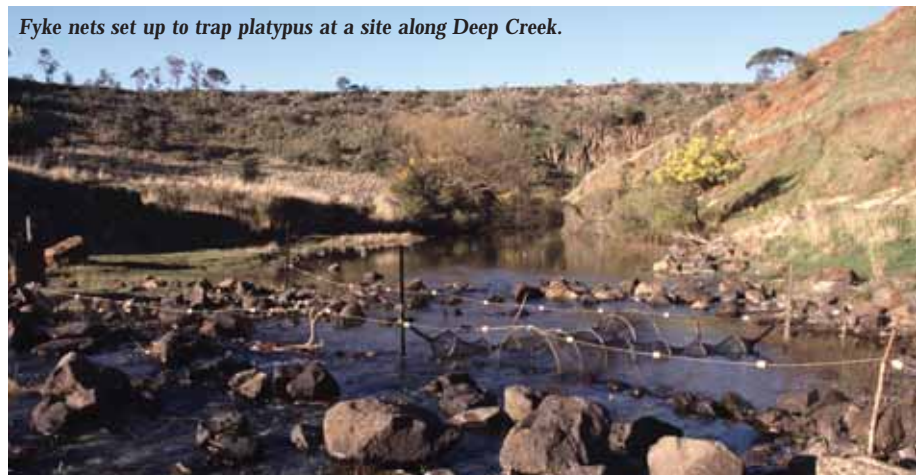
The first round of net checking did not appear too promising and I was beginning to think it would be a long and fruitless night. However, in the second last net

As I drove into the sunny parking area of Darraweit Guim Primary School one afternoon in spring 2004, I could hear the sound of children's laughter over the rippling and gurgling of Deep Creek.

Peering over the edge of the creek's bank, I saw around thirty Grade 4 to 6 students in a line along the creek handing large river rocks to Geoff Williams from the Australian Platypus Conservancy.

Geoff, resplendent in green waders, was carefully setting the specially designed fyke nets (one net facing upstream and the other facing downstream) and weighing them down with the stones eagerly supplied by the primary school students. The Darraweit Guim September 2004 platypus survey was underway!

Darraweit Guim is a small community on the north-western fringe of Melbourne. Deep Creek runs through the area and ultimately flows into the Maribyrnong River.



Fyke nets set up to trap platypus at a site along Deep Creek.

Creek

By John Milkins



Geoff's experienced eyes picked out a small furry shape in the moonlight and he gently extracted a young female platypus from the net.

"She's probably from last breeding season," he said quietly.

Moments later I was gently carrying a cotton sack containing a wriggling platypus back to the truck. I closed the vehicle door as softly as possible so as not to alarm the young animal.

Back at the Darraweit Guim Hall, the sense of anticipation in the room was electric as the community gathered around the table waiting for the arrival of a platypus that had been trapped.

Geoff explained the ground rules for the checking process and the younger children came to the front. Then, very gently, he began the process of measuring and weighing the young platypus, keeping her covered as much as possible in the cotton sack to keep her calm.

During this process he asked the children some questions about platypuses and I was astounded at the level of knowledge they displayed. Did you know that there is a tick that only lives on platypuses and the relative abundance of these parasites can provide an indication of local platypus numbers? Do you know the answer to the question of how many individual hairs there are in a square centimetre of platypus hide?*

After this session, there were many eager volunteers for the next round of checks of the nets! By dawn, the results of the survey were encouraging – Geoff and his dedicated volunteers had over the course of the previous night trapped eight male platypuses and two females.

The greater numbers of male platypuses trapped is similar to the results of previous surveys in the area and possibly indicates a



Geoff Williams from the Australian Platypus Conservancy with Sharon Flack, Cathy Tobin and Mark Spedding from the Upper Maribyrnong Catchment Group setting out the fyke nets.

lack of aquatic insects as a food supply for breeding females. The ten animals were weighed, measured, checked for health, injury and parasites and then carefully returned to the exact sections of the creek where they were trapped.

As I drove home that night, I thought about the inspiring difference that can be made when a community gets behind

an effort to encourage native animals back into the area.

For more information contact the Australian Platypus Conservancy on 9716 1626.

* Answer: 600-900hairs/mm².

John Mikins is an Environmental Project Officer with the City of Whittlesea.

Winning ways

Darraweit Guim Primary School won the Youth Organisation Caring for Land Award at the 2004 Port Phillip and Westernport Regional Landcare Awards and will be automatically nominated in the Victorian Education Award category of the 2005 Victorian Landcare Awards.

Over the past four years the Upper Maribyrnong Catchment Group, together with Darraweit Guim Primary School, have been actively engaged in on-going projects to remove woody weeds, restore indigenous riparian vegetation and fence off riparian zones along Deep Creek in Darraweit Guim.

It is anticipated that over time this work will lead to an improvement in the streamside vegetation and habitat for platypus. This section of Deep Creek should ultimately be capable of supporting an increased resident platypus population, optimal breeding conditions for females and a better-balanced sex ratio.



Students, past students, parents and Landcare group members at the opening of Pony Paddock Park.

New life for old pony paddock

The old pony paddock at Congupna Primary School has been given a new lease of life thanks to the efforts of the local Congupna and Tallygaroopna Landcare Group.

When Congupna Primary School opened in 1902 both teachers and pupils used the neighbouring paddock for their horses during the day. The paddock hasn't been used since the 1970s, but at a recent back-to-function at the school many old timers shared stories about the pony paddock.

Landcare members Carolyn and John Edwards drew up an initial plan to revegetate the paddock and were successful in applying for a grant from Parks Victoria. More recently a grant from the local council has assisted with building a post and rail fence.

The group has cleared the peppercorn trees, removed debris and noxious weeds, built tracks and benches and put up nesting boxes to encourage native bird life.

The tree planting part of the project has been done with the help of current students from Congupna Primary School. Each student has planted their own tree and is now responsible for caring for it.

Pony Paddock Park was officially opened late last year at a function attended by many past users of the paddock. The project has been a great example of how Landcare can involve the whole community. The park will be an asset to the school and the Congupna area for many years to come.

For more information contact Rob Slee on 5821 8237.

Landcare group members erecting the post and rail fence.



The Land Gate

www.landcare.net.au

The Landcare Gateway is a single start point for information about Landcare on the web. The website includes the Victorian Gateway, plus regional portals for every CMA region. All Statewide notices of funding, resource information and events are placed on the Gateway.

Since the Gateway went Statewide last year usage has been steadily increasing. There are now over 230 members of the various sites and about 130 groups with online content. Some groups have taken up the site with enthusiasm and have loaded all their group history, projects and newsletters.

Training in how to load content

Training in how to load content onto the site has been provided for regional Landcare co-ordinators and group co-ordinators in the North East, Goulburn Broken and East Gippsland regions. Further training is planned in other regions.

If you want to find out how to add information to the Gateway for your group, contact your regional Landcare co-ordinator.

Keep up with the latest news

If you want to keep up to date with the latest information you can now subscribe to email notices from the Landcare Gateway, or your regional Gateway.

To receive emails for Victoria-wide notices go to www.landcare.net.au and join the site as a new user. Then follow the instructions to subscribe to the notices. For regional emails, you will need to also join and subscribe to your regional Gateway site.

Arcadia Landcarer an inspiration



Anyone can contribute

Anyone with internet access can use the site, contribute to the discussion forums, or load their group content. The system does not require web design skills as it does the work for you. Reasonable computer skills are all that is needed, and a user guide is available on the site. Many people are able to use the system with no training.

If you would like your Landcare, Coastcare or related group to have a presence on the Gateway, go to www.landcare.net.au/regions then to your region, and fill in the contribute form, or contact your local or regional Landcare co-ordinator.

If you would like to provide volunteer web support to others, by adding content for other groups, or useful links and information, please join and fill in the contribute form also.

Visit the Landcare Gateway at www.landcare.net.au

Arcadia District Landcare Group stalwart Collier McCracken has won the inaugural Shepparton Irrigation Region (SIR) Landcare Award. The award was announced at the Healthy Rivers, Healthy Communities Forum held at Dookie late last year.

The SIR Landcare Award specifically aims to reward a voluntary Shepparton Irrigation Region Landcarer who has shown commitment to Landcare by working tirelessly for their Landcare group over a period of time.

Collier McCracken has been involved in the Arcadia and District Landcare Group since it was established in 1994. He was secretary of the group from 1994 until 1999 when he became president. He has attended every meeting of the group, organised guest speakers, provided advice and guidance on environmental plantings and organised many field days and farm walks.

Collier has a keen interest in indigenous plants. He often undertakes site inspections throughout the district, sharing his knowledge and assisting with ground preparation using his own equipment.

Collier believes that these activities provide invaluable opportunities for landowners to become aware of the benefits of sustainability and biodiversity. He uses the revegetation work on his own property as an example. With the assistance of the Goulburn Broken CMA and Trust for Nature a covenant has been placed on a 58-hectare section of red gum grassy woodland on the McCracken property.

Collier, and his wife, Jackie, have also been actively involved in the management of the Arcadia Bushland



Russell Pell (left) presents Collier and Jackie McCracken with the 2004 SIR Landcare Award.

Reserve, doing such works as replacing fencing, weed eradication, revegetation and protection of threatened plant species.

Collier has evolved methods of direct 'niche' seeding to assist landowners in establishing revegetation areas when seeding plants are scarce, as well as volunteering his time to work with various work teams on district properties at planting sites.

Working with DPI he has inspected and mapped district roads suitable for corridor plantings of indigenous plant species.

And his efforts aren't limited to his own community. The Arcadia and District Landcare Group is a member of the Goulburn Murray Landcare Network and since 2002, Collier has filled the position of secretary for the network which supports the 42 Landcare groups within the Shepparton Irrigation Region.

Russell Pell, Chair of SIR Implementation Committee, said that with over a decade of voluntary service to Landcare Collier McCracken was a more than worthy winner of the award.

Bonang River revival



The headwaters of the Dellicknora River. This infestation of willows is being targeted for control works by the Bonang River Landcare Group.

The Bonang River is located in the beautiful high country in far north-east Victoria, just south of the Victorian-NSW border. The community of Bonang is small and tight knit. It is made up of a mix of larger agricultural landholders and small lifestyle landholdings surrounded by National Park and State Forest.

The Bonang River Landcare Group formed in the late 1980s with a focus on local issues of concern such as stream-bank health, erosion control, weed control including blackberries, serrated tussock and willows. Pest animal control was also a focus of the group, particularly wild dogs, foxes and rabbits.

In recent years interest in the Landcare group dwindled as episodes of drought, floods and fires took their toll on the community and the group went through the natural wax-and-wane cycle common to many groups.

However, in the past 12 months Bonang has welcomed the arrival of several younger landholders keen to share the natural beauty of the valley. This new blood has renewed interest and the level of enthusiasm in protecting the local environment, and provided an ideal

opportunity to rejuvenate the Landcare group.

The 'revived' group has now met several times and has chosen to tackle willow control as its first project. The group was successful in receiving an Envirofund grant for a willow control program in the headwaters of the Bonang and Deddick Rivers.

The project will involve targeting light to medium willow infestations throughout the catchment, with control works commencing in the headwaters.

This approach will also ensure the group maximises the number of landholders involved and the area covered, plus by working from the upstream reaches first, it would also reduce the risk of willow recontamination downstream.

The Envirofund project has also been used as a seeding fund, assisting the group to work in closer collaboration with the East Gippsland CMA, who has also received funding to undertake willow management throughout the Deddick River catchment over the next few years.

A contractor started in mid-March this year and the work has already started



Targeting small outbreaks of young willows on the Bonang River will prevent further infestations from establishing downstream.

people talking. The area is fortunate to have significant areas of native riparian vegetation still intact, so revegetation of the areas currently infested by willows should occur naturally, with only a small amount of hand revegetation around denser willow infested sites needed.

The future is looking bright for the group with members also recently completing a survey determining other areas of interest for environmental and Landcare activity. The results of the survey are being used to help shape the group's future direction and focus, ensuring a successful and sustainable future for the Bonang River Landcare Group.

For further information contact Helen Davies on (02) 6458 4003.

Wimmera News

By *Melissa Pouliot*

New native vegetation book

Two Wimmera naturalists have released a book on the benefits of native vegetation.

Clive Crouch and Neil Marriott have compiled a gamut of anecdotal evidence for *Tangible Benefits of Native Vegetation*, a book that explores the ecological and possible financial value of native vegetation to farmers and landholders.

The book, which is the culmination of years of research, has been produced for Wimmera CMA. It presents a variety of case studies to demonstrate the changing attitudes of farmers and landholders to restore and conserve natural habitats that once existed.

"In any natural ecosystem everything is connected to everything else and everything is recycled," Clive Crouch said.

"Conservation and restoring biodiversity are noble goals and may be feel good activities for country and city people alike, but they may also bring about some economic benefits to local landholders."

The book can be downloaded from www.wcma.vic.gov.au or contact the CMA in Horsham on 5382 1544.

One of the two Healthy Waterways Incentive Scheme projects on Alan Green's sheep and poultry property at Great Western.



Urban wetlands day

A dreamtime story and the many fun things to do at an urban wetland were the highlights of the fifth Wimmera celebration of World Wetlands Day.

Horsham 298 and Lutheran Primary School pupils were among the special guests at the Wimmera CMA event, which took about 250 people on a tour of urban wetlands at different stages of development.

The 298 pupils gave their own spin on what urban wetlands offer to their community such as fishing, yabbing, photography, bird watching and relaxation.

The Lutheran pupils brought to life a dreamtime story based on the creation of Wimmera landforms and fauna. The story had an indigenous perspective on the living things that inhabit our wetlands.

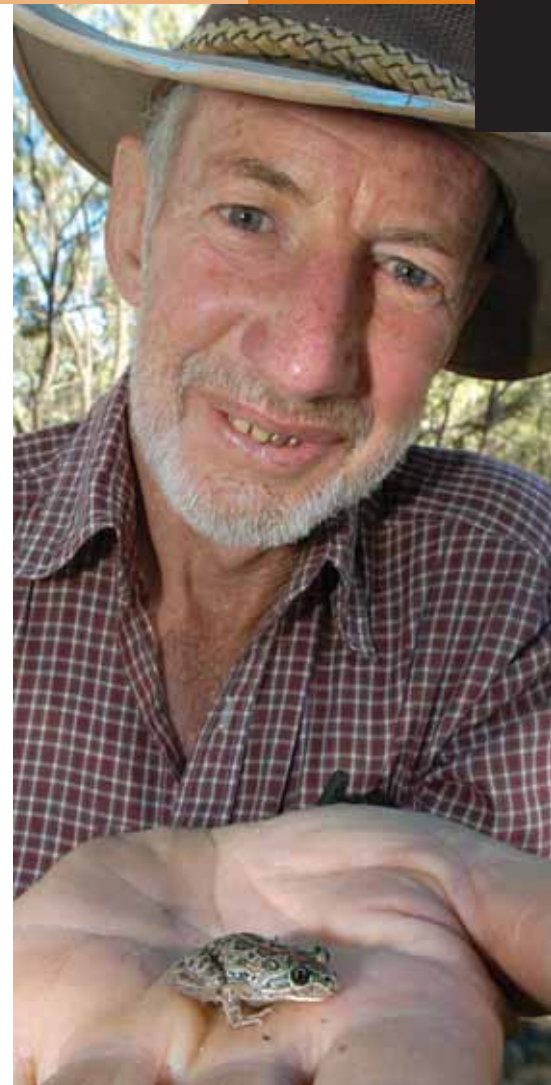
How urban wetlands affect the real estate market, how a litter trap works, managing stormwater, water sensitive urban design and wetland birds and plants were among topics covered at the event.

The tour of five Horsham wetlands culminated in a party in the park with live music at established urban wetland Weir Park, on the banks of the Wimmera River.

Farmers help build healthy waterways

Great Western sheep and poultry producer Alan Green has installed over seven kilometres of fencing and planted 2000 plants in two Healthy Waterways Incentive Scheme projects.

Wimmera CMA is offering up to \$3.20 a metre for fencing to landholders wanting to protect their waterways under the scheme.



Author Clive Crouch says frogs are a good indicator of the health of the environment. Picture courtesy Wimmera Mail-Times

Incentives are available for fencing to protect rivers, creeks, streams, lakes and swamps and the CMA has extended the scheme to also include wetlands across the region.

The scheme also offers funding for alternative watering systems such as off-stream dams or solar pumps with tanks and troughs. More than 150 landholders have tapped into the scheme over the past six years, with excellent results.

Alan Green says his work to stop sheep entering the Allanvale Creek on his property has allowed native grass to grow back and is halting erosion.

For further information about the Wimmera Healthy Waterways Incentive Scheme contact Glenn Dixon on 5382 1544.



Cypress pines survive



The destruction at Mt Pilot after the 2003 bushfires.

The rebirth of the Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park after the January 2003 bushfires is quietly exciting. The landscape is still filled with the black outlines of burnt trees, but as you walk through thick hip-height regeneration of stringy bark and box trees, native grasses and shrubs it's clear that the bush is coming back. The birds and insects have returned and the land no longer has the eerie silence it had in the aftermath of the fires.

A black cypress pine seedling.



For former Charles Sturt University honours student Christine Watson from Chiltern the greatest joy is the thousands of black cypress pine (*Callitris endlicheri*) seedlings that have regenerated.

Slow growing but long lived

Compared to their eucalypt and wattle counterparts, the pines are small, only up to 25 centimetres tall. But the more you walk, the more you find the distinctive dark green plants that look like baby Christmas trees.

"The pines are much slower growing than the eucalypts but then they live a lot longer," explains Christine, who has spent more than a year studying the pines' recovery since the bushfires.

"They are small now but they'll be able to compete with the other vegetation. Their

future isn't bleak provided we don't get another major fire within the next 30 years. If that were to happen it would be disastrous as time is required for the pines to mature and build up sufficient seed source to ensure replenishment of the population before another fire event."

Christine spent a strenuous seven months out in the field scrambling over and surveying some 5000 hectares of rugged terrain. She was assisted in her research by DSE, Parks Victoria and local Country Fire Authority brigades.

Killed by leaf scorch

The completed study paints an important picture of the fire's impact on the largest reserved area of black cypress pines in Victoria. Before the fire, the pines were distributed over 44% of the park, half of

the fires at Chiltern

By Margrit Beemster

which were dense *Callitris* with very little eucalypt, the other half more scattered.

“We have found that the pines do not survive high intensity fires to any great extent with a survival rate of 0.2 trees per hectare,” says Christine. “In the low intensity fire areas it was 3.4 trees per hectare.”

The pines are very fire sensitive. If they are subject to 100% leaf scorch they die, unlike many eucalypts. Their way of ensuring the species survives a bushfire is from seed fall from the pines’ woody cones after a fire.

Future positive

Christine is very optimistic for the pines’ future, an opinion she bases on a visit to another pines site in the National Park which was burnt out in the ‘70s but has since recovered.

Christine says that while there has been limited research on the pines, they are known to live a long time. As part of her research she delved into old newspaper files and historical records to try to determine what effects previous fires have had on the pines.

“This area has had some pretty big fires – in 1899, 1927, 1940 and 1985. What’s interesting is all those fires were a year after major bushfires elsewhere in Victoria, except for the most recent fires.

“It made me think last year’s fire really was a 1-in-a-100-years event,” says Christine.



Researcher Christine Watson assesses the condition of burnt cypress pines.

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