

VICTORIAN

LANDCARE

Spring/Summer 09 Issue 47

& CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT



LANDCARE AWARDS FEATURE

Arie Bos – a quiet achiever

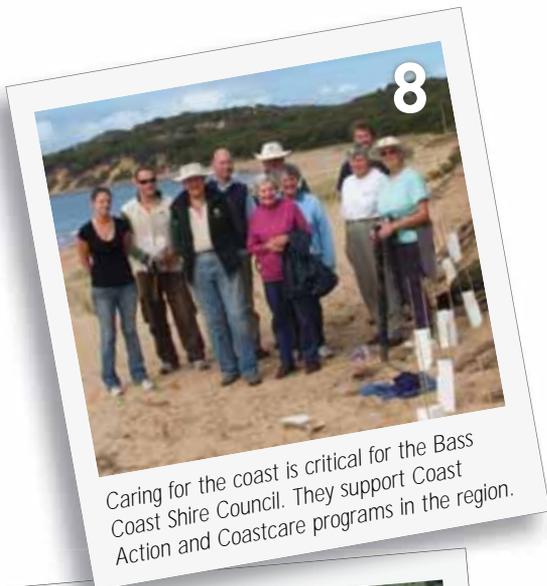
Westgate Park volunteer success

Kamarooka project halts the salt



Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management

SPRING/SUMMER 09 ISSUE 47



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Eastern Yellow Robin in the Yarra Ranges, by Andrew Chapman.

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From the Minister

It gives me great pleasure to be a part of the Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management magazine, a great source of information and inspiration about Landcare in our state.

There's been a lot of activity for Landcarers recently, particularly the 2009 Victorian Landcare Awards held at Government House. It was wonderful to attend and present some richly deserved awards to some of Victoria's inspiring Landcare heroes. The day was a celebration of all the time and effort these volunteers give to protect and restore our state.

This issue of the magazine features stories on all of the award winners. Their achievements make great reading and are a strong motivation for others considering joining a local Landcare group.

The ten regional winners of the Victorian Sustainable Farming Awards show that despite difficult times it is possible to achieve both increased sustainability and increased productivity. Many of the winners

have made major changes in how they run their farm businesses – effective planning has been critical to their success. Water management has an increased focus for these top farmers and carbon is emerging as a significant issue.

This year an exciting new award for a young Landcare leader has been created; won by fifteen-year-old Kayla Groombridge who has been the driving force in a community project to clean up her local river. Kayla is an enthusiastic environmental advocate and a great organiser. I'm sure her story will inspire many other young people to jump in and get involved with their local Landcare project.

At an even younger age, the Landcare activities of the Badger Creek Primary School students would make any adult feel exhausted. The students work in an effective partnership with the local Mt Toolebewong Landcare Group. Not satisfied with transforming their school grounds, the students now head out into



Helen and Keith Barber from the Birchip Landcare Group – winners of the Landcare Community Group Award.

the community to help with clean-ups, tree planting and conducting wildlife surveys. They are very worthy winners of the Victorian Landcare Education Award.

DSE plays an important role in providing support for Victorian Landcare. A series of network readiness forums run this year have been well attended by Landcare groups. The most recent seminar, held in Fitzroy in September, explored new roles and funding options for Landcare networks. It was an opportunity for Landcare members to get together and talk about the future of Landcare. There will be a report on the network readiness forums in the next issue of the magazine.

I look forward to hearing more about the great work of Victorian Landcarers in future issues.

Gavin Jennings, Minister for Environment and Climate Change MLC

From left, Sue Jenkins, Jon Hauser, Moragh Mackay, Jodie Gager, and Paul Speirs from Bass Coast Landcare Network with Paul Smith of Bass Coast Shire (second from right) with their CitiPower/Powercor Landcare Network Award.





The Victorian Landcare Awards ceremony was held in the grand ballroom at Government House.

Top honours for Victoria's Landcarers

The car park at Government House was full of utes during Landcare Week in early September as more than 300 members of Victoria's Landcare community gathered for the announcement of the biennial Victorian Landcare Awards.

The ceremony celebrated the efforts of the volunteers who devote their time to protecting Victoria's natural resources. The welcome to country was presented by Annette Xiberras, Wurundjeri elder. Annette heartily congratulated the Landcare community.

"Caring for country is a step towards reconciliation. When we look after the land and do revegetation works we are restoring it to the plentiful supermarket and chemist shop it once was," she said.

Environment and Climate Change Minister Gavin Jennings, Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture Ben Hardman and Governor of Victoria Professor David de Kretser, AC, presented the awards.

Minister Jennings said the awards celebrate the extraordinary efforts of ordinary Victorians who through their efforts also motivate others to do the same.

"The State Government is taking action to protect and maintain Victoria's valuable natural assets and these awards recognise the contribution of those members of the community who devote so much time

and effort to the environment," Minister Jennings said.

"The nominees and winners are excellent representatives of all the volunteers who contribute so much of their energy to Landcare which is now in its third decade.

"As Victoria faces the challenges of climate change and environmental sustainability, the Government is delighted to support such an inspirational community movement."

The 2009 awards received 111 nominations across 14 categories. The Victorian Landcare Awards also incorporate three additional state-specific awards: the Sustainable Farming Awards, the Heather Mitchell Memorial Fellowship, and the Sidney Plowman Award.

The Sustainable Farming Awards recognise a winner from each of the ten catchment regions and are an amalgamation of the historic Hanslow Cup, John F Hughes Awards and Jack Gilmore Awards.

Winners of the national award categories will now represent Victoria in the National Landcare Awards to be held next year.

Minister Jennings said the State Government was proud of its continued support of more than 1300 Landcare groups and natural resource management community groups throughout Victoria. Over the past five years the Government has contributed more than \$34 million to Landcare programs.



From left, Westpac representative Mark Paton, Badger Creek Primary School Principal Mark Brisbane, students Samantha Denny and Katta O'Donnell, Minister Jennings, Governor Professor de Kretser and parent Coral Jeffs receiving the Westpac Landcare Education Award.



Heather Drendel (centre) from the Mallee receives the Heather Mitchell Memorial Fellowship award from Penny Mitchell, the grand-daughter of Heather Mitchell, Minister Jennings and Governor Professor de Kretser.



Students from Birchip P-12 College get their feet dirty at a wetland planting day.

“

Three wetlands were created along the town's existing stormwater drainage and storage network. Further work was also undertaken to improve the flow, water quality and environmental values.

”

Community Group Landcare Award

Birchip Landcare Group



Sport is safe in the Mallee town of Birchip – thanks to the local Landcare group. The effects of the drought had taken a heavy toll on Birchip with the loss of its major local waterway, Lake Tchum, and water restrictions threatening the town's recreation and sporting grounds.

The Birchip Landcare Group undertook the redesign of the local stormwater and storage systems. The project built on community work undertaken 15 years previously to collect stormwater runoff from streets and drains and direct it to wetlands and a network of settling dams and ponds. Rubbish traps and other works filter the water to remove nutrients before it is spread on the sporting grounds.

Three wetlands were created along the town's existing stormwater drainage and storage network. Further work was also undertaken to improve the flow, water quality and environmental values.

The improved system, undertaken with Birchip Lions Club and with funding from the Australian Government's Community Water Grants, is an example of best-practice management of stormwater for re-use.

According to Keith Barber, a long time member of the Birchip Landcare Group, some townspeople were initially suspicious of the plan to capture and re-use the water.

“When it was first suggested there was a feeling that the wetlands were going to take water away from the catchment. Now it is finished it has unanimous support and people understand that it has actually increased the catchment area.”

Keith is excited about the native plants and animals the wetlands are supporting. He believes the Birchip area was much wetter before European settlement. The group has a bird list from the 1890s that proves broilgas and other waterbirds were not uncommon.

“I think some old water catchment lines run through Birchip, and some of them were almost semi-permanent, but with cultivation and the use of gypsum the water has really dried up. The wetland project goes some way to correcting this.”

Water is a critical issue for the group. Greatly concerned about the loss of open water created by the Wimmera Mallee pipeline they have lobbied for 1000 megalitres of water to be allocated to the environment. Keith Barber says the group is tickled pink about winning the award.

“The Birchip Landcare Group has been going a long time, but this is really exciting. It is terrific to get the recognition. The group has always been broadminded – some groups are mainly interested in



The new Birchip wetlands have been designed to collect and filter stormwater runoff from the town's streets and drains.

rabbits and weeds, but the environment has always been a top priority for us.”

The group has further plans to build a water track through the wetlands so people can visit and appreciate the beautiful environment that has been created. The project is already achieving one of the group's key aims – biodiversity preservation. The silt ponds and wetlands are now providing important refuge for birds, amphibians and other wildlife. Keith Barber hopes the broilgas may even find their way back.

Young Landcare Leader Award

Kayla Groombridge



Yarram Secondary College student Kayla Groombridge has grown up on the doorstep of the Tarra River at Tarraville. For the past five years she has noticed the area around the river becoming more and more of an eyesore. There were infestations of gorse and boxthorn, illegal camping and boat launching, deteriorating river banks resulting in a rapidly advancing scarp and rampant littering and dumping.

Sick of cleaning up the area herself and concerned about the decreasing area of riverbank and vegetation, Kayla wrote a letter to key local organisations in the hope of generating some interest and action.

Since then fifteen-year-old Kayla has been the driving force in a community project to clean up the Tarra River. Kayla has run public meetings for the Robertsons Beach and Tarraville Communities Neighbourhood Management Group to increase awareness of issues facing the river and the ways in which they can be tackled.

Kayla has also championed the removal of several large infestations of boxthorn and gorse. In addition to the clean ups, Kayla has been a focal point for



Fifteen-year-old Kayla Groombridge has driven a community campaign to clean up the Tarra River.

agencies and organisations to co-operate on environmental proposals, including correcting the advancing scarp on the eastern bank of the lower Tarra River, while also rehabilitating the river's foreshore.

On Clean Up Australia Day earlier this year Kayla helped her neighbouring Landcare group remove two ute loads of rubbish from the Woodside Beach foreshore.

Members of the Yarram Yarram Landcare Network say that without Kayla's enthusiastic advocacy and ability to organise and inspire, these projects would have remained in the too hard basket.

Kayla says getting involved in Landcare has made the future clear for her. She wants a career working in the environment and she's prepared to put in some hard yards as a volunteer to get experience. Over the recent September school holidays she completed a six-day project with the Yarram Yarram Landcare Network that included planting 500 trees on a local property and helping to produce a newsletter on biodiversity.

Kayla says it was difficult at first to get involved in Landcare as people her age are not common at meetings and events, but it is getting easier. And she is receiving a great deal of attention for winning the award.

"My family is really proud of me and it's been great at school. Everyone has congratulated me and they are starting to understand what I'm doing. My teachers will even give me time off for Landcare work now."

Kayla has already identified her next big project: tackling the severe erosion at Robertsons Beach at the mouth of the Tarra River.

Landcare Education Award

Badger Creek Primary School



Without paid staff and relying on parents and volunteers from the Mt Toolebewong Landcare Group, the Badger Creek Primary School has transformed its school grounds into a Landcare sanctuary and undertaken a staggering array of community projects.

The students hold weekly Junior Landcare meetings to plan the projects. Works at the school include establishing bird, frog, herb and vegetable gardens, building a community greenhouse, making a compost centre, planting a Scentbark Reserve and two wildlife corridors and developing a weed control plan.

The students also go out into their community to assist with clean ups and tree planting and to conduct night and day animal surveys. They have revegetated three sections of Badger Creek which last year achieved Land for Wildlife accreditation.

The school's Principal, Mark Brisbane, is full of praise for the two parents who drive the project.

"Karen Garth and Coral Jeffs from the Mt Toolebewong Landcare Group have really got this project off the ground. They are both busy women but they never stint on putting time and effort into Landcare at the school.

"It would be difficult to sustain this sort of effort if it just came down to the teachers. Karen and Coral plan a great range of activities for us. They make sure that all of the students get involved and that it is about more than just tree planting – it includes the whole range of sustainability practices."

This small school uses an open-air learning approach to help students develop skills and talents much wider than the classroom. Students from Badger Creek Primary School act as positive Landcare



Badger Creek Primary School students love to get their hands dirty. Planting out the school grounds is a favourite activity.

role models for their peers in the local community.

Quotes from students:

*"I love to care for the environment so the native animals can have a home."
Meghan Rowe, grade six.*

*"I love touching the plants and planting them so there will be more and more plants."
Steph Nixon, grade six.*

Australian Government Coastcare Award

Warrnambool Coastcare Landcare Group & Point Danger Committee of Management



Australian Government

A local student and member of the Warrnambool Coastcare Landcare Group was working on a free range chicken farm when he saw Maremma guardian dogs at work protecting the flock. An Italian breed, Maremma dogs were originally bred thousands of years ago to protect goats from wolf attack.

The student, David Williams, suggested to the group that the dogs might be able to protect Warrnambool's penguins from fox predation. The group did some further investigation and soon had dogs stationed at two separate locations – initially on Middle Island in the heart of Warrnambool's tourist area and within the Merri Marine Sanctuary. The project was extended the following year to Point Danger at Portland to protect shearwaters and Australasian gannet rookeries.

Australasian gannets are fledging from Point Danger for the first time ever, thanks to the Maremma dogs.



Emma and Reamma protecting gannets at Point Danger.

Since the South West Maremma Dog Project began, no penguins have been lost to predation, and numbers have gone up from less than 10 in 2005 to more than 100 in 2009. The aim, to get to a self-sustaining population of 1000, looks achievable.

David Williams has stayed involved in the project, training the dogs, acting as dog handler, doing overnight camping stints on Middle Island and undertaking the heavy task of carrying the dogs on and off the island. John Amor, the Coast Action Coastcare Facilitator at Warrnambool, says David's inspirational thinking has created a major scientific trial for the Coastcare Landcare Group.

"This is the first time anywhere in the world that dogs are being used to protect native animal populations. There have been a lot of doubters and it has been a great deal of work getting all of the approvals from the scientific committees and the RSPCA, but it has been worth it."

The project has taken a huge commitment from the 100-odd Warrnambool Coastcare Landcare Group volunteers, but according to John Amor they love the work.

"Before the Maremma project we had volunteers camping out overnight on Middle Island to try to protect the penguins from foxes, but it just wasn't sustainable. When we got down to four remaining penguins the group had a choice to give in or to fight back. They fought back."

The project has not been without its difficulties. Two years ago ten penguin chicks were accidentally killed by two

Maremma pups. It is believed the dogs were disturbed by the piercing squeal the chicks make when their parents return to the sea. A re-education process has been designed for the dogs. It includes listening to sound recordings of penguin calls, watching penguins on television and visits to the penguins at the Melbourne Zoo and the Phillip Island Penguin Reserve.

John Amor believes that when the Maremmas are able to bond with penguins and penguin chicks from an early age these problems are avoidable.

The Maremma dog protection strategy has also been successfully employed to guard some 200 Australasian gannets fledging at nearby Point Danger. This is the first time a gannet has successfully fledged from this colony. The short-tailed shearwater colony is also making a dramatic recovery after decades of fox predation.

Parks Victoria ranger Peter Hill was amazed at the suggestion from the Point Danger Committee of Management that they trial the use of Maremma dogs to protect a species as sensitive as gannets.

"Gannets have a very complex mating ritual and are very sensitive to disturbance. But since the use of the Maremmas gannets have fledged from the Point Danger colony for the first time ever and they are also attempting to establish a permanent colony. In the past the birds have attempted to raise chicks in the area but because of predation they have never succeeded. The tenacity of the committee is to be applauded," Peter said.



Paul says having clear expectations is fundamental to the Council's relationship with Landcare.



Bass Coast Shire Council residents on rural properties of more than four hectares are asked to submit plans for ways to improve the environmental management of their land.

Local Government Landcare Partnerships Award

Bass Coast Shire Council



Bass Coast Shire is a coastal municipality with a unique, diverse and well-visited coastline and a highly productive farming hinterland. For two decades Bass Coast Shire Council has invested in local Landcare, Coast Action and Coastcare programs to protect and enhance its outstanding natural assets. The effort is paying off – with measurable improvements in both the environment and agribusiness.

Council has developed in-house initiatives such as the corporate plan and recently developed Environment Sustainability Plan, and supports effective community groups such as the Bass Coast Landcare Network. There are also grants for volunteers working on environmental protection and enhancement.

Council has identified 11 primary priority issues and the steps to achieve them. These include partnerships, businesses and local schools, an environmental achievement award and a focus on weed control. Paul Smith, the Council's environment manager, says agriculture and tourism are the two main economic drivers

for the region and that supporting Landcare is a logical way of ensuring the continued sustainability of local agriculture.

"Landcare principles have become an integral part of the Council's environmental management and planning. The local Landcare groups are our way of engaging with private landholders in the region. Landcare really extends our reach."

Paul says he believes one of the reasons for the success of Landcare in the region has been the guaranteed funding that the Council provides.

"Because the groups know that the Council will supply a core amount it allows them to leverage other funding from it. They have been incredibly successful at generating income on top of the Council's contribution. They manage to multiply the money many, many times over."

The Council provides office space and facilities for eight Landcare staff and many others share the use of the GIS and property information databases. Paul says having the staff working so closely creates many positive links.

"We really get a sense of what they are doing and we are able to use their knowledge and ask them for advice. They are also available when people turn up wanting a weed identified or wanting to find out about their local Landcare group."

Paul says having clear expectations is fundamental to the Council's relationship with Landcare.

"We have a memorandum of understanding with Landcare so both sides are clear on what their roles are and what is expected. The annual presentations are a highlight of the year as the groups report on the progress of their different projects."

Peter Huthwaite from the Bass Coast Landcare Network says the relationship has benefits for both parties.

"The real strength of our relationship with Bass Coast Shire Council is that it's truly a partnership and they treat us as equals. We have the usual formal meetings, the annual briefings, the annual planning sessions and so on, but we also have informal meetings and these can be where stuff gets done."



Geoffrey Dunstone, Roland Smith Junior and Ross Smith survey a stretch of the Loddon River.

“

The field assessments are a unique blend of certified Indigenous cultural heritage identification with river health assessment. The bringing together of these two knowledge strands has resulted in a first.

”

Indigenous Landcare Award

Barapa Barapa Indigenous work crew



Co-operation between the Barapa Barapa community and the North Central Catchment Management Authority (NCCMA) has seen 12 of the community's Indigenous men employed to undertake site assessments along the Loddon River, from Appin South to Kerang.

For historic reasons, the Barapa Barapa community's connection to country around the Kerang Lakes and Gunbower Forest has diminished. The NCCMA identified this as a priority natural resource management issue and expressions of interest from the Barapa Barapa community were sought to undertake the project as part of the North Central CMA's Drought Employment Program.

The crew focused on Aboriginal cultural heritage as they moved along the 26-kilometre stretch of the river earlier this year. They also assessed flora and fauna, pest plants and animals, river condition, deep pools, riparian vegetation, fish habitat, rubbish build-up, bank erosion and waterway and boundary fencing in need of repair.

Roland Smith Senior, one of the team leaders for the crew, says it was a good project for the Barapa Barapa nation to get involved with.

"I'm a river person and I've been doing

this sort of work for 20 years or so, but for some of the younger men on the crew it was their first time. Now they've got some experience it will be a good thing to help them get other work in the area."

According to Roland a few of the landholders weren't too keen on them coming on to properties at first.

"It worked out okay. In the end many landholders came down and had a yarn to us about what we were doing."

Tim Shanahan from the NCCMA stressed the importance of cultural heritage protection works in the big picture of natural resource management in the region.

"This project was positive for everyone involved. It gave the Barapa Barapa community an opportunity to reconnect with their traditional country and to identify and record 266 Aboriginal cultural heritage sites along the way. It also increased our understanding of Indigenous issues within the CMA and opened up communication."

According to Tim work of this type had not been undertaken in the region before.

"The field assessments are a unique blend of certified Indigenous cultural heritage

identification with river health assessment. The bringing together of these two knowledge strands has resulted in a first. We now have a holistic picture of a priority stretch of the river. This will help us to achieve the best possible outcomes for natural resource management."

The project included training for the crew in identifying and siting Indigenous cultural heritage and also in identifying native fauna and flora, pest plants and animals, erosion and salinity issues and river health indicators.

The project also provided an opportunity for the sharing of knowledge with the wider community. The crew made contact with all of the private landholders along the river survey area to negotiate access and inform them about the project. The crew also had contact with DPI, Gannawarra Shire, Bendigo Regional Institute of Technology and the North Central CMA.

The crew was employed under the North Central Drought Employment Program. Cultural site information collected by the crew will be made available to Aboriginal Affairs Victoria for confirmation and registration on the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register.

Australian Government Landcare NRM Region Award

North East CMA



Australian Government

Since its formation in 1997, the North East CMA has given top priority to community engagement. The region has the highest rate of Landcare membership amongst farmers in Victoria – there are 50 Landcare groups and three Landcare networks in operation.

The NECMA believes support for these groups is critical.

Over the last decade, the CMA has focused on building the skills and capacity of Landcare groups, their executives, project managers and members to enable them to deliver their priorities. This has included capitalising on a regional soil health strategy by introducing a soil health program; re-energising Landcare by linking sustainable agriculture with natural resource management and supporting many community field days and events.

According to Tom Croft, the region's Landcare team leader, the CMA has focused on building and maintaining group capacity to enable involvement, rather than using groups as a service delivery arm of the CMA.

"Strong and active groups proactively seek out projects in which they can be involved. Landcare groups are about sustainable



Landcare-led projects supported by the CMA, like this dung beetle farm walk at Lucyvale, continue to attract many landholders.

production so their objectives line up neatly with many of the CMA's regional priorities."

Tom says concentrating on building the skills of groups is paying off.

"Our region doesn't have a huge budget, but putting money into Landcare has always been a priority. When we have groups operating at a high capacity they are more effective at attracting funding from other sources. Our groups have been incredibly successful at getting some major projects up and running. This brings additional money into the region and keeps the impetus going."

The NECMA has an important role in assisting rural communities to adjust to challenges such as ongoing drought and recovery after extensive fires in 2003/4, 2006 and again in 2009. It has provided in-kind and financial support for groups to assist them with priority planning, field days, forums, workshops and leadership training.

The CMA has also provided a regional Landcare facilitation service to support Landcare groups in the region. CMA facilitators run education activities, assist groups with funding applications and put new residents in touch with their nearest Landcare group.

The support and partnerships fostered by the NECMA have delivered a wide range of natural resource management projects.

Despite ongoing drought and large-scale fires, about 2000 families are members

of Landcare groups in the north east. The groups have achieved around \$12 million in grants and project funding since 1998.

Tom says the CMA recognises the strength and activity levels of individual groups rise and fall and that strategic support helps the active groups find and deliver works while supporting inactive groups to reinvigorate when they are ready.

"The future for Landcare in the north east remains generally positive," he said.

"Because our groups are very directly part of the community and run by the community they are able to adapt to changed needs quickly – much more quickly than Government agencies. This is critical for the future as natural resource management throws up yet more challenges and gets increasingly complex."

The North East Landcare team from left, Klaus Boelke, Simon Feillafe, Sue Leavold, Catriona Grantham, Geoff McKernan and Tom Croft.



“

Despite ongoing drought and large-scale fires, about 2000 families are members of Landcare groups in the north east.

”

Dr Sidney Plowman Award

Geoff Park

Geoff Park works as a knowledge broker for the North Central CMA. He's interested in landscape restoration and uses his skills as a communicator to catalyse, facilitate and support a host of practical projects across Victoria.

Growing up in Ararat, Geoff spent his childhood yabbing, bird watching and mucking about in the bush. He's still an avid birdwatcher and his eloquent online nature blog is required reading for those in his local Newstead area.

Geoff moved from teaching to a position at the Victorian Landcare Centre at Creswick. He is one of the developers of the Investment Framework for Environmental Resources, a trustee of the Norman Wettenhall Foundation and a member of the Newstead Landcare Group.

Geoff credits much of his success to the teams he has worked with over the years.

"I've worked with some great people and that's how I've learnt – watching how other people communicate and make projects happen.

"My current position is as a knowledge broker. I'm not really sure how to define it – it's basically about fostering social networks, relationships and facilitation. I'm not really interested in moving up a career ladder or from job to job. I like to identify opportunities and then work with a variety of agencies and funding sources to make them happen."

Geoff's involvement with a number of significant natural resource management initiatives has inspired him to investigate the nature and effectiveness of community participation in biodiversity planning.

Geoff believes that Australia's four levels of institutional decision-making can send mixed signals about biodiversity and conservation to both communities and Catchment



Knowledge Broker Geoff Park with Ann Dunstan from Donald identifying high priority natural resource assets in the Avon-Richardson catchment. Geoff will be visiting New Zealand to investigate community-based approaches to biodiversity conservation.

Management Authorities. His experience suggests this can hamper communities' effective participation in landscape restoration plans. Geoff plans to use the award to examine and compare complementary or alternative community-based approaches to biodiversity conservation between Australia and New Zealand.

"New Zealand has a system of regional councils. These are superficially similar to CMAs, but have greater statutory power and autonomy in decision making. I'd like to explore if these arrangements have enabled greater community influence or participation in decision making than is the case in Australia," Geoff said.

People's Choice Award

John Robinson



John Robinson dates his interest in Landcare to his childhood. He grew up on a sheep farm outside Wallan where his mother had a native garden. But it was his time in India in the 1980s that really cemented his interest. John spent eight years working as a volunteer on revegetation projects for a non-government organisation in Maharashtra.

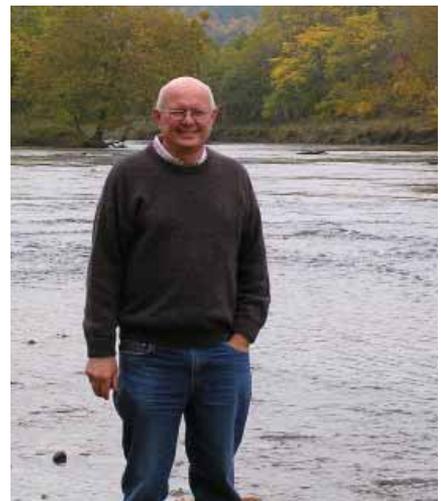
When he came back to Australia John took on the job of managing the family property at Bylands, in the Upper Maribyrnong catchment. The Landcare movement was just taking hold and he joined the Upper Maribyrnong Catchment Group in 1993. John has served as president and secretary of this group, and is currently on the committee.

In 2004, John was a founding member of the Friends of Wallan Creek, which was established with the aim of restoring and enhancing the environmental values of Wallan Creek, one of the tributaries of Merri Creek, as it flows through Wallan. John is

the president of the group and played a key role in the group's recent development of a strategic plan. Since its inception, Friends of Wallan Creek has secured \$75K in funding and has planted 15,000 plants at public reserves in Wallan. The funding was provided from the Australian Government, Victorian Government, Local Government, Landcare Australia Limited and community organisations.

John's professional association with Landcare is equally impressive. He spent six years working as the Werribee and Maribyrnong Landcare Co-ordinator for the Port Phillip and Westernport CMA. The Werribee and Maribyrnong catchments cover 10 local government areas, more than 400,000 hectares, and host 24 Landcare groups and around 100 friends groups. There had been little support for these groups until John was employed in this role.

More recently John has worked intensively in the Upper Maribyrnong catchment.



John Robinson visited the New River on his 2008 Victoria-Virginia Landcare Fellowship.

He assisted with the formation of the Jacksons Creek EcoNetwork and in early 2009 worked closely with three Landcare groups to establish the Upper Deep Creek Landcare Network.

Last year John visited Virginia and North Carolina on a Victoria-Virginia Landcare Fellowship, sponsored by Australian Landcare International, where he got a sense of how Landcare is being applied in the US and how Australian Landcarers can best support the emergent US Landcare initiative.

“

We always start by asking our groups and our farmers what their priorities are – what they want to achieve – then we go out and find the funding from as many possible sources as we can.

”



Dave Bateman from Bass Coast Landcare Network gets stuck in – professional staff work with the community to support land management change.

CitiPower/Powercor Landcare Network Award

Bass Coast Landcare Network



The Bass Coast Landcare Network (BCLN) was formed in 2003 as an affiliation of 11 Landcare groups, enabling them to better position themselves for investment from government, local and corporate programs. The network has become a role model of efficiency and effectiveness, with 60 percent of the region's landholders actively engaged in its activities.

The core purpose of the network is to provide support and resources to its member groups. By exhaustive planning and consultation, the network has developed landholder confidence in the value of best practice and land stewardship.

One priority has been demonstrating methods that address local environmental issues, such as gully and tunnel erosion, salinity, streambank rehabilitation, nutrient management and balancing sustainability and farm productivity.

Jodie Gager, who works in corporate relations for the BCLN, believes the network's success comes down to an early decision to diversify the sources of funding and income as much as possible.

“We always start by asking our groups and our farmers what their priorities are – what they want to achieve – then we go out and find the funding from as many possible sources as we can.

“This means forming partnerships with other agencies like shire councils, water authorities or VicRoads who have similar objectives and targets to meet in the landscape. We are often amazed at how many different agencies often want to do the same thing. The network functions as an environmental service delivery program, assisting our partners in meeting their targets.”

Jodie says the attitude within the network is to always be open to new opportunities.

“If these opportunities align with what groups want to do there are many creative ways of making projects happen.”

According to Jodie diversified funding is a protective factor when times are difficult and money is tight.

“Funding sources ebb and flow. Managing funding is not unlike the challenges of farming – farmers need to be good

planners and good risk managers. We try to bring the same qualities to managing our partnerships and income for the network.”

At the core of the network is a tightly written strategic plan. Jodie explains that the plan prevents reactive behaviour and drifting and keeps them on track. The plan establishes priorities, always for evaluation and review, and creates a sense of unity and common purpose.

“At the core of the plan is the idea of best practice. Everything we do comes down to farmers wanting to improve the way they farm so they can be profitable and have the least environmental impact. There is nothing overly complicated about it – it's really just good common sense.”

Jodie is one of the network's 10 full-time and five part-time staff. With over 120,000 hectares to cover, the BCLN has embraced a practical agenda while always keeping the future in mind.

The long-term aim for the network is land management that ensures the integrity and sustainability of land, water and biodiversity – they are well on the way to achieving this aim.



With cars and trucks roaring overhead Westgate Park is an oasis in the heart of an industrial cityscape.

Urban Landcare Award

Friends of Westgate Park



In 1998 Melbourne artist Naomie Sumner walked along the Yarra River from its source to its mouth. At the end of her journey she travelled through Westgate Park and saw an opportunity to create a landscape that genuinely honoured the river.

Just ten years later the Friends of Westgate Park have transformed the former aircraft factory and tip from an inner city wasteland to a biodiversity gem. Tucked under the Westgate Bridge, the 29-year-old Westgate Park has gone from a flat area of a few gums and shrubs to a 64-hectare showcase with more than 200 species of indigenous plants, including tea trees, River Red Gums, orchids and locally significant salt marsh.

The park is now home to more than 100 species of birds, including swamp hens, ducks, egrets, pelicans and the New Holland Honeyeater – a species not found elsewhere in the region.

Tony Flude, one of the group's many active members, says the success of the project is a testament to the high calibre and dedication of the volunteers who have worked at the park. School groups, corporate volunteers, work for the dole participants and Conservation

Volunteers Australia teams completed 13,000 hours of unpaid work last year alone.

"On any day 20 to 50 volunteers can be found in the park weeding, spreading mulch and helping to look after the more than 200,000 plants that have been established," Tony explains.

Tony got involved because he remembers watching the Westgate Bridge being built – initially with a tip site beneath it. He was fascinated when he noticed something positive happening to the land beneath the bridge.

"We are so fortunate to have an area of open space so close to the city. We can see the city skyline from the top of our hills. And it is going to become increasingly important. There are 200 different species of indigenous plants in the park – that's a fantastic resource for students and international visitors."

Tony believes the key to working successfully with volunteers is to treat people with respect.

"We have people from different cultural and economic backgrounds, and people with disabilities. We try to find appropriate

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The park is now home to more than 100 species of birds, including swamp hens, ducks, egrets, pelicans and the New Holland Honeyeater – a species not found elsewhere in the region.

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Corporate groups have been important contributors to the progress at Westgate Park. This group is from the Melbourne office of PricewaterhouseCoopers.

work for them to do – work that is clearly valuable, but also interesting and worthwhile. People have such a good time here when they are on the work for the dole scheme they often come back voluntarily afterwards. We've also had great support from Landcare Australia – they've been behind us from the start helping with finances and organising corporate volunteers."

Tony sees a very positive future for the park.

"We are never going to finish. There are 64 hectares to work on and in the last ten years we've only touched a fraction of them," he said.



Australian Government

Individual Landcarer Award

Arie Bos

Arie Bos was 11 when his family came to Australia from Holland. They didn't speak a word of English and their experience of dairy farming was hand milking 12 cows that spent most of their lives in a barn.

Arie Bos (left) in full swing at a local Landcare function.



Arie remembers his father hard at work on a dozer clearing the scrubby paddocks on the farm – he has now spent a great deal of his life trying to replant them. Arie's first involvement with Landcare was due to concern for the condition of Shady Creek that runs through his property.

“When I was a boy I was always at the creek playing around and catching fish and eels. As an adult I realised how much it had deteriorated and I was pretty horrified.”

Arie has entirely fenced out the creek on his property and assisted many other locals with creek and river rehabilitation projects. After 13 years of creek restoration works water quality tests are showing improvement.

A few winters ago Arie even noticed the return of a few galaxias – a native fish species that was common when he was a boy.

“It's important for people to understand the interconnectedness of natural systems. Our local rivers and creeks flow into Corner Inlet and Nooramunga National Park which is a Ramsar listed site, important for marine life and birds.

And there are still local fishermen down on the coast who are trying to make a living out of the water. By improving the condition of our local rivers and creeks we have a direct impact on what happens downstream.”

Arie has been president of his local Agnes River Landcare Group for many years; he is also involved with the South Gippsland Network, the Hazel Park Flora Reserve and local schools and community groups. He's as comfortable getting stuck into the practical work of weed control and planting as well as helping to educate and inspire others with his passion for the environment.

Every week he can be found at the local Toora Primary School where he runs the vegetable garden.

Arie is described by locals as a quiet achiever – he rarely talks about his work in repairing and restoring land in the Welshpool area – but he is a legend in the community. The Landcare theme even extends into Arie's life as a musician. For the past 20 years he's been a member of the folk band, Ragwort, Thistles and Other Noxious Weeds.

Heather Mitchell Memorial Fellowship



Heather Drendel

Rain was the cause of Heather Drendel's involvement in Landcare – remarkable given that helping farmers cope with drought is now a major part of her job. Heather's husband was hosting a Landcare meeting on their Rainbow property when a morning shower forced the group to take shelter in the kitchen. Heather was roped in to taking minutes for the meeting and she hasn't looked back since.

Her involvement with the Rainbow and Districts Landcare Group led to a position as co-ordinator of Southern Mallee Landcare three years ago. Locals now describe Heather as the glue that holds the region's strong and growing Landcare network together.

With drought and isolation a constant challenge, Heather's vision is to see the Southern Mallee retain its self-reliance and



Heather Drendel, the visionary co-ordinator of Southern Mallee Landcare.

community spirit. The region is recognised as one of Victoria's busiest for Landcare projects.

Heather puts her success down to the people she works alongside.

“Mallee people are just so resilient. They know tough times and they are familiar with change. It's as if they are programmed to think positively. In my job I am constantly learning from and constantly being challenged by the people I work with. They really are salt of the earth people.”

Heather plans to use the fellowship to visit another dry climate farming region so she can assist her community adapt to a changed climate.

Heather says that agriculture is critical for the small towns of the Mallee.

“Our small rural communities rely on primary producers. If we don't have successful farmers we are going to lose our small towns. These towns are unique communities – they are an important part of Australia's historic and social landscape.”

Landcare Primary Producer Award Sustainable Farming Award – Corangamite

Julie and Sandy Cameron, Meredith



Julie and Sandy Cameron believe that environmental health is an integral part of a sustainable and productive property. Julie and Sandy operate a successful sheep and goat dairy near Meredith. The property includes frontage to the upper Leigh Gorge area and Cargerie Creek. The property has complex management issues including native grasslands, steep riparian slopes prone to tunnel erosion and rabbit invasion, river escarpment, creek frontages and weeds.

The Camerons have created broad buffers of indigenous vegetation to protect the waterways. Native grasslands have been fenced from stock. Land-class fencing has been used in the escarpment and rocky ridge areas and a huge revegetation project has been completed – some of it direct seeded by hand broadcast in the steep and inaccessible areas.

The Camerons believe land which can't be improved – rocky outcrops, steep slopes, remnant bush, waterways and escarpments – should not be grazed or cultivated, while land which is cultivatable should be in full production.

"Every parcel of land has a purpose. When the improved land is fully productive, land taken out for wildlife, conservation and protection doesn't cause a financial loss.

Peter Greig (centre) from the Corangamite CMA congratulates Julie and Sandy Cameron on winning the Primary Producer Award at Government House in September.



Happy Meredith Dairy goats come in for milking.

The conservation areas actually add value to our farm," Julie explains.

"We pursued goat and sheep dairying because we wanted some control on the value of our farm produce. To do this we had to have an intensive farm enterprise with a paddock to plate project. Farm land is expensive, and traditional fine wool sheep and fat lambs didn't offer a sustainable financial return. We started farming during a downturn in wool and lamb prices and found things

pretty tough. A chance meeting with a cheese maker alerted us to the possibility of capturing a niche market."

Both Sandy and Julie have a background in science and have been able to master the microbiology and biochemistry of cheese making. Produce from Meredith Dairy has won numerous awards including a gold medal at the World Cheese Competition held in London in 2002. Julie and Sandy produce many varieties of cheese, fresh goat curd and sheep milk yoghurt.

The Camerons have a work ethic for the property, ensuring the farm practices do not take away from the environment, but enhance it. They are brimming with future plans for the property.

"We would like to produce renewable energy allowing us to be self-sufficient and run the milking plants and factory. We hope to do this by a gasification plant as well as using biomass. Waste material produced on the farm will be used to produce energy instead of going to landfill. Animal manure, whey and animal bedding will be used as fertiliser or in the gasification plant. We also have plans to produce bio diesel to run machinery from canola grown on the farm," Julie says.

West Gippsland Justin and Melissa Ainsworth

Farming is very much a team affair for Melissa and Justin Ainsworth. They both had rural childhoods and were keen for their children to experience growing up on a farm. Four-and-a-half years ago they realised their dream with the purchase of a small beef farm at Stradbroke West.

Justin and Melissa were looking for a property that ticked all of the boxes – farming challenges for Justin and environmental values for Melissa. Melissa works in natural resource management and she was immediately impressed by the geology and remnant vegetation on the farm.

The property has a limestone outcrop with ancient scallop shells dating back millions of years. There are 40 acres of remnant vegetation with damp sand, herb-rich woodland and lowland forest. The understorey is dominated by *Bursaria spinosa* which has not been recorded elsewhere in the region and the rare *Grevillea chrysophaea* has been recorded on the site.

Justin and Melissa have put a quarter of the property under a conservation covenant, but have still been able to make productivity improvements.

They put their success down to a rigorous environmental management system. Sixteen hectares of the farm have been put back to bush. Drought-tolerant perennial pastures are maintained to enhance soil carbon, while reducing wind and rill erosion. Strategic shelterbelts have been



Justin, Cameron, Brooke and Melissa Ainsworth on their small beef farm at Stradbroke West.

established using 17,000 plants grown from seed collected on the property.

Acknowledging that the former fertiliser use on the property was not sustainable or affordable, Justin and Melissa changed to low input farming techniques. The soil fertility has improved and better grazing management has helped to maintain ground cover and pasture growth.

Justin says they have been able to achieve a lot in a short time because of the advice and assistance they have received.

“Very early on we got people from the West Gippsland CMA, Greening Australia, Trust for Nature and the Yarram Yarram Landcare Network together around the kitchen table for a talk about what we needed to do. It quickly became clear that we’ve all got the same goal and that there is support available if you take the trouble to find it.”

The Ainsworths have held many field days on the property and have noticed the positive responses they are getting from visitors.

“When you see the water quality in the area of the creek we have fenced out and revegetated it is hard to argue against,” Melissa says.

“The pasture improvements are very obvious too. If you look at the clover content in an open paddock compared to one of our paddocks with shelterbelts it is clear there is less evaporation, more moisture and less erosion. We’re not saying we’ve got it right, but we’re having a go and it is encouraging when we can see the impact of the changes we are making.”

The drought has hit the area hard. Melissa spent half of each day last summer watering the new trees they had planted.

“Some farmers might have thought that was a waste of time, but after we had collected the seed for those trees and propagated them there was no way I was going to let them die.”

Justin says the children have taken to the farm like ducks to water.

“They love getting their hands dirty and they are a great help too. We couldn’t count how many thousands of trees that they’ve planted.”

Both Justin and Melissa currently work part-time off the farm, but they hope that the productivity improvements they have made will be able to support them in the future.



The Ainsworths property has a limestone outcrop with ancient scallop shells and marine fossils.

North East

The McIntosh family

Nelson McIntosh has spent the past 50 years building bridges. He has built more than 400 bridges across Australia. He lives his life out of a suitcase, but every weekend Nelson McIntosh can be found on the family farm in the Kiewa Valley carrying out a major landscape transformation.

Nelson and Kath McIntosh run the 962-hectare beef cattle farm with help from their six children and their extended families.

"We bought the place 11 years ago and it was a mess. There were no fences, no laneways, no bridges, no water troughs. The pugging from the cattle was terrible. You couldn't even walk across the place without getting bogged."

Every weekend around 18 adults and a dozen grandchildren converge on the property and set to work. The large workforce has been critical in carrying out the family plan to improve water quality and prevent erosion and siltation along the farm's six kilometres of Finn



Every weekend the McIntosh family can be found working together to improve their Kiewa Valley farm – age is no barrier as Kath McIntosh demonstrates with her brood of grandchildren, from left (baby) Liam, Emily, Connor, Claire, Kate (in front), Georgia and Cooper. Behind are Lachlan, Sarah and Ben.

Creek frontage. The project has required sustained maintenance, but has delivered benefits – both for the environment and for the business.

The family has erected more than 13 kilometres of fencing along the creek, protected 102 hectares of riverine ecosystems, revegetated more than six kilometres of eroding river banks and installed 13 permanent off-stream watering troughs. Altered grazing regimes in the river paddocks have encouraged

regeneration. Nelson is hopeful that the new regime will reduce phalaris and improve native perennial grass cover which will assist in drought-proofing the farm and improving biodiversity.

Nelson says it has been a great project for the family.

"It's a good way for us to all spend time together and we are doing something for the future. Having the grandchildren help is terrific. Even the youngsters help out – once they can walk they can plant trees!"

East Gippsland

The Armit family

John Armit took over the running of Bindi Station in 1939. The large station runs from Benambra to Ensay and has been in the Armit family for 100 years. The Armit family has demonstrated a sustained commitment to improving the condition of the property.

John recalls being advised to plant willows in the 1960s and 1970s – he is now working with the East Gippsland CMA to remove them from his rivers and creeks and is growing native seedlings to plant in their place. John has his own nursery on the property and propagates most of his own plants.

The family has been able to maintain and improve many sections of the property while continuing to make a living from the land. They have completed extensive shelterbelts and windbreaks, fenced off and revegetated the creeks and steep areas, established plantations and improved the soil.

John says he got a great deal of help from the soil conservation authority in the early days and because of that he has been successful at managing soil erosion on the property.

Revegetation, the use of perennial pastures, cultivation along contour lines and mechanical methods of diverting water including building rock and grass chutes to reduce gully and gully head erosion have all been used to keep the highly soluble limestone soils in place.

"I'm really careful about erosion and soil movement as everything eventually flows into the Gippsland Lakes. The limestone soil is quite fertile, but the steepness of the land is truly horrible.

"Any dams we put in do not hold, but they do tend to help with run off. I believe that with steep land in this country fencing off areas from sheep is essential to let the land revegetate – but this of course leads to



John Armit with a cattle brand used at Bindi Station in the 1830s.

problems of water in the fenced off areas," John explains.

The Armit family is well known throughout the district for being innovators in sustainable farming methods. John has been trialling new ways of doing things on the property for more than 70 years.

"I'm keen to make sure everything is preserved for the next generation. That's my aim – for the farm to be better preserved than when I got here."

North Central

Andy Hay

In 2003 Andy Hay entered a partnership with the Northern United Forestry Group (NUFG) that would totally transform his farm at Kamarooka. The NUGF was seeking to test the effectiveness of different species of native trees, saltbush and native grasses in rehabilitating land lost to salinity.

The saline land on Andy Hay's property had sat dormant and degraded since the 1950s. Andy had nothing to lose. He joined the NUGF and took up the project with gusto.

Andy and his family worked tirelessly to construct internal subdivision fences on the 40-hectare site and to prepare the land for tree plantations, saltbush and native grasses. Soil samples were taken and analysed, electromagnetic surveys were completed to map salinity and bores were established to monitor the watertable across the trial site.

By 2006 the site had been transformed from a saline wasteland to a green oasis.

Trees have reached three metres in height and lambs are now grazing in what was once the most saline ground.

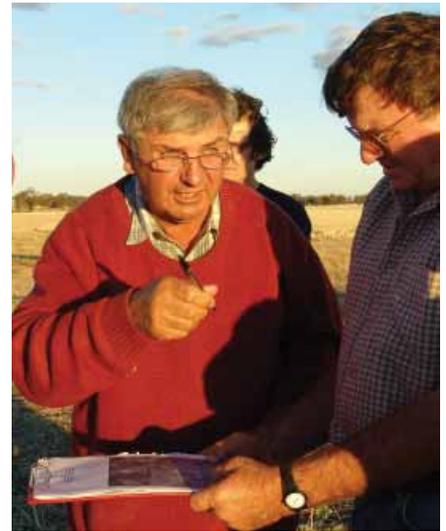
"Before the work I'd graze 10 sheep in that 50/60-acre area. Now I can graze around 400 sheep in the same area. The sheep are also a lot healthier on the saltbush – we don't even have to drench them."

Andy says the project wouldn't have been possible without the work of the NUGF.

"Our family wouldn't have been able to do the scientific work on our own. Yet it is really important work. We've shown how you can turn salinity around in this area and that will have implications for other farmers and land managers right across the country."

Andy hosts many visits to the area from farmers, researchers and university students.

The most positive response has been from Andy's uncle Mac Hay, who farmed the land in the 1950s as it was turning saline.



Andy Hay assists with salinity surveys on his property at Kamarooka.

"In 1956 I sowed two bags of wheat here, but three weeks later there wasn't a shoot to be seen. I got out and scratched around and tasted the seed. All I could taste was salt. One year was all it took – that's how quick the salt came. There wasn't a tree on this paddock when I had it. Now you can't see across it. It is a wonderful thing what you all have done," Mac said.

Mallee Col Beasley

Innovation with water is at the heart of Col Beasley's successful horticulture and aquaculture business west of Redcliffs. Col and his family bought the 10,000-acre property in 1980. Back then it was a grazing property and Col admits to a fair bit of clearing he's since been working hard to repair.

In 1996 Col visited Israel to look at water reuse techniques with the idea of getting the best value out of the water he had available. He converted the property to horticulture using pipelines, starting out with 100 acres which has now expanded to 3000 acres.

Thurla Farms produce avocados, wine grapes, watermelons and rockmelons, but it is fish that have been getting the most attention.

"We started putting a few Murray cod in our dams in 1997. At first it was just in open water. Aquaculture makes sense for anyone with an existing dam or for

horticulturalists because the fish produce a nutrient lift in the water. It's a way of adding value. We made a lot of mistakes early on. In 2000 we started doing some research and some trials before developing the system commercially."

Col Beasley has now developed a highly productive modular system for growing fingerling Murray cod to saleable size. The system uses water from Lower Murray Water's irrigation system before it is used on the many crops Thurla produces. The fish are sold into Australian restaurants and overseas markets.

Using water efficiently is one of Col's major interests. He was awarded the tender to use Mildura's grey water – the contract will provide Thurla Farms with primary treated waste water for the next 50 years.

"It's important to keep thinking ahead. The climate is getting drier and we can't keep pumping water the way we did in the past.



Col Beasley checks the acclimatization tanks. Murray cod are moved through these tanks before they reach the dam.

Trees are critical too. In the past five years we put in 10,000 trees as windbreaks and to help with soil erosion and salinity. In the next 15 months we'll put in 10,000 more."

Col spends a lot of time explaining his methods to anyone prepared to listen.

"This is harsh country and it can be hard to make a living. We need to look after the environment and we need to make a profit or nobody will survive."

Port Phillip and Westernport

Rob and Carol Tylee



Rob and Carol Tylee have planted over 15,000 trees for shade and shelter on their dairy farm.

Starting with a 20 percent share of his parents' farm in Drouin South in 1980, Rob Tylee and his wife, Carol, have built up a 240-hectare dairy farm with 300 cows and 300 young cattle. It has been a lot of work, but the farm is now a showcase property.

The couple has a passion for new ideas and lifelong learning. They have planted 15,000 trees for shade and shelter, fenced off creeks, springs and dams, provided water troughs in all paddocks, fenced off remnant vegetation and built two pond effluent systems to irrigate their paddocks. Both the output and the sustainability of the farm have been improved.

Rob and Carol's farm was one of the first in the area to have their greenhouse emissions audited. They are members of the Westernport Greenhouse Alliance and are actively seeking out ways to improve their emission profile.

"It isn't just about tree planting," Rob explains.

"We are looking at ways to cut our electricity consumption, our water usage and lower our effluent production. We are also looking at the potential to use other natural inputs like wind or solar power. It is about asking a lot of questions: Can we make use of the methane gas we generate with effluent? Can we improve our refrigeration? Will solar pumps meet our water requirements? Can we use different fuels in our tractors?"

In the next three to four years the Tylees hope the farm will be close to carbon neutral.

Rob and Carol were also instrumental in setting up the Lardner and District Landcare Group. Rob says the group is small, but they have a good record of achievement.

"On our group planting days we can get 1000 trees in the ground in half a day. The group offers good support – it's a great venue for sharing knowledge and resources."

Glenelg Hopkins

Mike and Dawn Waite

In the four years since Mike and Dawn Waite purchased their 121-hectare dairy farm at Ecklin South they have transformed the holding into a model of environmental best practice.

Mike and Dawn share milked in the Waikato region of New Zealand for 18 years before they made the decision to move to Australia. According to Dawn, they were looking for a way of buying their own place.

"Mike and I both grew up as townies in Auckland, but we have a passion for dairy farming. In New Zealand we were constantly building up businesses for other people – at one point we were milking 750 cows – but we really wanted to have our own place."

Mike and Dawn have planted more than 6000 new trees on the property and established three hectares of direct seeding around their major waterway, Deep Creek. Direct seeded plantations

act as shelterbelts for biodiversity and improved landscape management. Dairy effluent is captured in three new ponds and reticulated over the farm with a spray irrigation system.

New perennial pasture species that are more productive and sustainable have been established. This has lifted the amount of home grown feed and allowed the milking herd to increase from 200 to more than 300 cows. All young and replacement stock are carried on an adjoining lease block and productivity increases have meant little off-farm feed is required.

Mike and Dawn describe their farm as a little piece of paradise. They are delighted at the bird life the revegetation has attracted and enjoy visits from koalas and the occasional kangaroo.

"When you live on the farm you have to be happy in the environment," Dawn explains.



Dawn and Mike Waite check new trees in one of their shelterbelts.

"Our main priority is to be as environmentally sustainable as possible. This is our home for good now."

The rapid change in farm layout and the adoption of environmental best practice management has generated a lot of interest from local farmers and education groups. Mike and Dawn have quickly become recognised as innovators in the local community.

Wimmera

Dennis and Bronwyn Starick

Dennis and Bronwyn Starick put their farming success down to an ability to think outside the square.

"The way grain prices are today you can put a crop in the ground and get half the predicted price for it. You have to keep thinking about the best possible way to use the land," Dennis explains.

Dennis and Bronwyn run a 410-hectare mixed farm near Antwerp. They bought the property in 1977 knowing they would have to make changes in order to survive. One option was to pursue larger scale high-risk farming. The Staricks decided against this. Instead they reduced the area under crop from 70 to 50 percent, sold their sheep, and started a Boer goat business. They worked with 35 other goat farmers to form the Australian Premium Goat Meat Company and have been able to set a fixed price for their produce.

In 1997 Dennis and Bronwyn completed a whole farm plan and began to review their management practices. The farm was redesigned with extensive revegetation and saltbush plantings to reclaim saline land lost to production. More than 20,000 saltbush and 13,000 native trees have been planted on the property. As a result the soil has improved, as has feed for stock, profitability and production output.

Dennis says the revegetation has had multiple benefits on the farm.

"It's great to be able to look out the back at something green and to notice all the different birds in the area. There are the practical benefits too. A couple of summers ago we had a few days with 140-kilometre an hour winds. On the property next door the stubble eroded badly and was blown up around the fences. In our paddocks with shelterbelts we didn't lose any soil at all."



Dennis and Bronwyn Starick have planted more than 20,000 saltbush on their property to reclaim poorly producing saline areas.

Dennis says Landcare has taught them a great deal.

"There is always someone in our group we can learn something from. We've met a lot of interesting people through our work improving the property – we just need more hours in the day!"

Goulburn Broken

Doug James

Doug James is an innovative sheep and cropping farmer from Bungeet in north east Victoria. The property was originally selected by Doug's great grandfather and has been farmed and expanded by the family since then. Keeping the fragile soils in place has been a major farming challenge over many years.



Doug James checks a crop of oats on his property at Bungeet.

According to Doug much damage was done by rabbits and ploughing in earlier times.

"Part of the farm was under a Soil Conservation Authority Scheme in the 1960s. They were keen on earthworks and building structures to deal with erosion. It seemed to me this was working on the symptom rather than the cause of the problem and that having more ground cover is a better place to start."

Doug learnt the importance of stepping back and doing his own thinking. He developed some early techniques for minimum tillage and direct drilling.

"Back then we were really hampered by a lack of finances and suitable machinery. It was often a case of adapting older machinery to do the job and learning through trial and error."

Doug has now embraced alternative farming methods through pasture cropping. The technique involves sowing cereals into a perennial pasture. The cereals grow through the winter months while the

mostly summer growing perennial grasses are dormant. This has meant that there should be feed on the ground in early summer when many producers are hand feeding.

During the last year Doug has seen extra ground cover and a return of native grasses. This, in turn, has assisted with soil improvement and increased biodiversity. Doug's property has become a focal point for innovation and a venue for field days on pasture cropping techniques.

Doug says it is too early to say if pasture cropping has all the answers and the last few years have been pretty tough.

"It has been hard to sustain the perennials through the long, hot, dry summers we've had lately. Even the native plants really struggle. Right now it is only the cereal crops as a sheep feed source that are keeping us viable. It's a matter of continually tweaking the system to see what works best. The farm is very much a work in progress."

Reader survey results

By Sally MacAdams

The results are in from our recent reader survey and they reveal a huge readership for the magazine. More than 65 percent of readers who completed the survey share their copy of the magazine, usually with one or two other people. If this sample is representative we can estimate a readership of well over 40,000.

Several respondents also reported that they leave their copy in a public place, like a doctor's office, or pass it on to a local library or school, hoping it will reach a wider readership.

There were 575 responses to the survey. Readers completed the survey online, or filled out the paper version included in the last issue. The responses show the majority of magazine readers are typically over 45 years of age, identify themselves as lifestyle or hobby farmers, live in rural areas and are members of a Landcare or similar group.

Readers identified that they preferred stories in the magazine that were practical, involved case studies and highlighted new research findings. The most popular topics for stories included water and drought, sustainable agriculture, pest plants and animals, climate change and biodiversity conservation.

The survey also asked respondents to comment on the main challenges facing Landcare. Drought, climate change, uncertain or low funding, weeds and rabbits, and participation by young people were identified most strongly. Volunteer recruitment and retention more broadly also came through as top concerns.

Some readers raised concerns about the environmental impact of the magazine. The magazine is printed on 100% recycled and recyclable paper – this information can now be found on the back page of each issue. The magazine is also available online. To unsubscribe from the mailing list and subscribe to the email alert send an email to landcare.magazine@dse.vic.gov.au

The results of the reader survey were analysed in detail at the most recent meeting of the magazine's editorial committee and will be used to guide the direction of future issues. We will be responding to the identified need for advice on revitalising Landcare with an ongoing feature on keeping members and volunteers engaged and attracting new ones.

Congratulations to Barry Robertson of St Arnaud and Peter Barrand of Heywood

for winning the early bird prize for participating in the online survey. Both Peter and Barry received a bottle of Worm Wizz worm extract they have put to use on their gardens.

Congratulations also go to our three overall winners. Libby Lambert was first prize winner and elected to receive \$500 from DSE's Victorian Landcare Program on behalf of the Kilcunda Road Social Club to help with the opening of the Kilcunda Road commemorative plaque. Second prize winner Peter Yates was delighted with a planting kit donated by Sure Gro which Woodend Landcare Group will put to good use. Third prize winner Lindsay Marriott received a copy of *Australian Bird Gardens, Creating Havens for Native Birds* by Graham Pizzey.

Thank you to everyone who responded to the survey. Thanks are also due to Rebecca Chanock for assisting with collating the survey data.

For further information contact Sally MacAdams from the DSE Landcare and Community Engagement Team on 9637 8039, or sally.macadams@dse.vic.gov.au

The people behind the pages

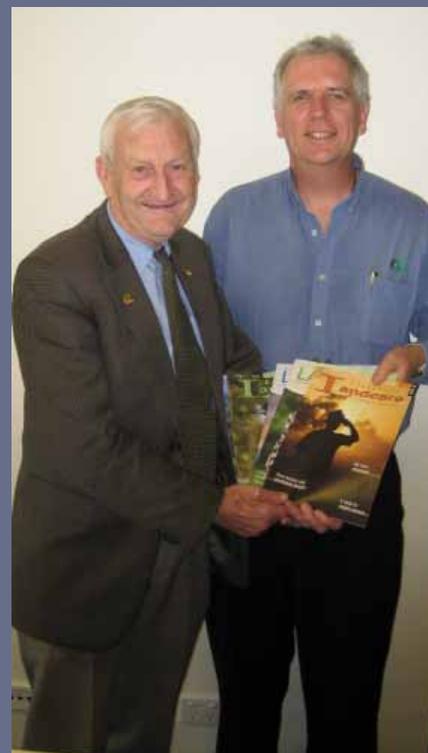
At the most recent editorial meeting two committee stalwarts, Alex Arbuthnot and Doug Evans, stood down.

Alex Arbuthnot was involved in helping to create the magazine back in 1996 and has energetically represented the Victorian Catchment Management Council on the editorial committee since 1999. Alex has been a tireless supporter of the magazine as it has grown and developed.

Doug Evans joined the committee in 2007. Along with his very busy role as the Regional Landcare Co-ordinator for the Port Phillip and Westernport CMA, Doug has been an important advocate for regional Landcare on the committee.

We welcome our new members – Becky Hemming from the East Gippsland CMA and Katie Le Blanc from DPI.

Alex Arbuthnot and Doug Evans with some of the issues of the magazine they have been involved with.



Around the State – News from the

North East

The North East CMA was very pleased to be awarded the Victorian NRM Region Award in the Victorian Landcare Awards. Congratulations also to Nelson and Kath McIntosh for their win in the Regional Sustainable Farming Award.

The CMA ran three information evenings for Landcare in the region, explaining in detail the changes to Landcare support due to changes in funding. These changes have resulted in the North East no longer having Landcare facilitators employed by the CMA. The four previous facilitators have been reassigned to Caring for our Country projects.

About 90 landholders attended the Regional Soil Health Forum run by the Ovens Landcare Network in September. There have been many other events in the region on dung beetles, earthworms, pastures, soil health, and sustainability. For a summary of recent dung beetle monitoring results go to <http://northeast.landcarevic.net.au/dungbeetle>

For further information contact Tom Croft on (02) 6024 9107.

Mallee

Landcare in the north west is currently going through a period of readjustment as groups come to terms with the changes to funding. The loss of co-ordinator support has left some groups unsure if they will be able to sustain current levels of activity. Despite this, the groups remain committed to supporting local and regional natural resource management and are actively exploring other options which will allow them to do so.

Landcare groups in the Victorian Mallee are continuing to participate in the Mallee CMA Environmental Management Action Plan program. Works are aimed at addressing prominent issues of soil erosion, remnant protection and salinity. Second Generation Landcare Grants are proving popular. In the Mallee region as these grants mainly target weeds and rabbits. This is particularly important as reports indicate rabbit numbers are once again on the rise.

Congratulations to the Birchip Landcare Group for winning the Landcare Community Group Award and to Heather Drendel for receiving the prestigious Heather Mitchell Memorial Fellowship.

For further information contact Kevin Chaplin on 5051 4344.

Port Phillip and Westernport

Since the last regional roundup we have learnt that our bids to secure Caring for our Country and Victorian Investment Framework funding for the regional team of Catchment Care Co-ordinators were not successful. Sarah Canham and Kacie Melfi have found alternative work with the CMA, but we have farewelled Sam Bayley and John Robinson.

Just a few days after this news, John Robinson won the People's Choice Award at the recent Victorian Landcare Awards. We congratulate all the winners at the awards, but particularly those associated with this region: John Robinson, Badger Creek Primary School, Friends of Westgate Park, Rob and Carol Tylee, Bass Coast Landcare Network and Bass Coast Shire.

For further information contact Doug Evans on 9296 4662.

Glenelg Hopkins

Many groups in the area have been busy with spring plantings. After years of difficult conditions there is an air of optimism that these plants will finally get away and have good survival rates. Most areas have received good late winter and early spring rains.

The Second Generation Landcare Grants have opened. These grants will again help some very worthwhile group projects across the region. Many groups are continuing to work on their Local Action Plans. We are determined to make these plans usable with relevant documents that will assist in managing post-facilitator support.

Groups have a number of different climate change information sessions and workshops planned across the region. The main focus of the sessions will be on finding practical ways to cope with change.

For further information contact Tony Lithgow on 5571 2526.

Goulburn Broken

Landcare support has been maintained at the 2008/2009 levels due to the co-operation of the CMA and the networks. The Upper Goulburn Landcare Network is continuing with its Fencers without Boundaries project co-ordinating volunteer support for fire recovery.

The Gecko CLaN (Mid Goulburn Catchment Landcare Network) is full steam ahead with projects surrounding sustainable farming projects. We are in the final stages of organising our Landcare Celebration evening in the dryland, which will involve the unveiling of the Landcare honour roll and the launch of the 20-year history of Landcare book, *Milestones, Messages and Memories*.

Lots of work is going on behind the scenes, attempting to secure funding for Landcare support into the future. The executives of the Landcare networks have been extremely valuable in this process.

For further information contact Tony Kubeil on 5761 1619.

Corangamite

A Junior Landcare Conference was held in Lorne during August with 250 students from 30 schools. Students took part in workshops with a kids-teaching-kids focus.

Students at the Junior Landcare Conference held in Lorne planted trees along the foreshore.



Regional Landcare Co-ordinators

The conference aimed to inspire young people to become advocates for the environment.

Twenty members of Lismore Land Protection Group visited Tasmania recently to meet with members of the Tamar Natural Resource Management Group, Launceston City Council, Wynyard Landcare Group, Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association and Cradle Coast Natural Resource Management.

Congratulations to Julie and Sandy Cameron who received the Landcare Primary Producer award and the Corangamite Regional Sustainable Farming award at the recent Victorian Landcare Awards. Well done to all Corangamite nominees who made it this far.

For further information contact Tracey McRae on 5232 9100.

East Gippsland

The East Gippsland Landcare Performance Story 2008/2009 is now complete. The report shows that during 2008/2009 a total of 5573 people contributed towards and/or participated in various elements of Landcare: and 277 hectares of remnants and wetlands were protected and enhanced, 341km of protective fencing was constructed and 84,374 indigenous plants were hand planted.

In addition to these outcomes, Landcare in East Gippsland has held numerous training days and field days, community events and knowledge sharing sessions.

For further information and for a copy of the Performance Story, contact Becky Hemming on 5150 3577.

Wimmera

The last few months have demonstrated once again what Landcare does best – Wimmera groups and networks hosted another round of Landcare planting days, contributing 100,000 trees, shrubs and grasses to what is now a much greener landscape. Community interest in these events continues to increase. More than 650 volunteers supported this year's cause.

Groups and projects have been challenged by recent funding outcomes, but it looks like many will respond and continue their Landcare commitment. A Changing Landcare Landscapes forum held in October allowed networks and groups to present their achievements and reveal future plans.



In early October the Wimmera River came alive again – the river had the first natural flow to reach Dimboola in 13 years.

For further information contact Max Skeen on 5382 1544.

West Gippsland

Congratulations to our Landcare Champions. Arie Boss received the Individual Landcarer Award at the recent Victorian State Landcare Awards, the Bass Coast Landcare Network received the Landcare Network Award, Justin and Melissa Ainsworth received the regional Sustainable Farming Award and Kayla Groombridge received the Young Landcare Leader Award. It was wonderful to see the great work of so many being publicly acknowledged.

More than 100 people attended South Gippsland Landcare Network's Million Tree Project launch at Mossvale Park in September. The CMA and South Gippsland Water have signed up as foundation members and the launch received a mention in Hansard at the House of Representatives in Canberra. Special thanks to Belinda Brennan, Jill Vella and Martin Chatfield for organising a great day.

It is vital we continue to celebrate and recognise the wonderful work of so many volunteers. Even when the funding scenarios change and times get tough it's important to remember that Landcare is always a good news story.

For further information contact Phillip McGarry on 1300 094 262.

North Central

The Landcare community has been through challenging times with the loss of shire-based Landcare co-ordinators at the end of June 2008. Some groups have continued to be supported through existing networks and environment officers based at councils. The CMA met with groups throughout July and August to determine the best way of continuing to support Landcare. An implementation plan has been developed to guide us this year.

Two major networks in our region were successful in their Caring for our Country bids. Connecting Country is a landscape scale biodiversity project in the Mount Alexander shire region. The project will protect Yellow Box Woodland on private land, through stewardship protection programs, community education, supporting Landcare and community group involvement, flora and fauna assessments and a monitoring program for the Brush Tailed Phascogale.

The Buloke and Northern Grampians Landcare Network has received funding for their project to protect and enhance the White Box-Yellow Box vegetation communities and Buloke Woodlands of the Riverina and Murray-Darling depression.

Thanks and farewell to Jennelle Carlier who has returned to Canada and welcome to new acting Regional Landcare Co-ordinator Melanie Taube.

For further information contact Melanie Taube on 5440 1883.

In brief

FTLA – AGM Report

Over 50 members and guests attended the 2009 AGM of the VFF Farm-Tree & Landcare Association (FTLA) in Melbourne in early June.

FTLA President Sue Campbell welcomed the Victorian Catchment Management Council Chair Mick Murphy and new VFF President Andrew Broad to the meeting along with the many committed FTLA members.

Charles Sturt University researcher Dr Allan Curtis was the guest speaker. He persuasively debunked the three most common myths about Landcare – we've done that and it didn't work; we've done that and it is time to move on; and Landcare can't deliver landscape change.

According to Dr Curtis Landcare is a highly successful program and it has been conclusively demonstrated that Landcare members can accomplish significant outcomes on the ground.

However, Dr Curtis pointed out that we have a lot to learn about sustainable farming and biodiversity conservation and in a period of rapid change learning will be critical to success.

Full copies of Dr Curtis' address are available from the FTLA Executive Officer Susi Johnson, on 9207 5527 or by email at sjohnson@vff.org.au

FTLA 2009-10 committee

Susan Campbell from the Springhurst & Byawatha Hills Landcare Group is President, Peter Huthwaite from the Bass Coast Landcare Network is Vice President, Peter Berrisford from the Bellarine Landcare Group is Secretary, Richard Jamieson from H11-H12 Catchment Action Group is Treasurer.



Charles Sturt University researcher Dr Allan Curtis debunks some myths about Landcare at the FTLA AGM. Susan Campbell (at right) was elected as FTLA President.

The ordinary members are Alexander Arbuthnot from Maffra & Districts Landcare Network, Judy Griffiths from Burgoosee Creek Landcare Group, Artur Muchow from Middle Yarra Landcare Network and Kathryn O'Bryan from Leigh Districts Landcare Group. Andrew Stewart from the Otway Agroforestry Network is the immediate past president.

The committee farewelled Bill Wells and Simon Pockley, thanking them for their service, and welcomed two new members – Artur Muchow and Kate O'Bryan.

Next issue – soil secrets

The next issue of the magazine will feature stories on soil carbon, soil biology and managing soil. We welcome contributions on these topics as well as your general Landcare news and views.

Contributions to the next issue should be sent to the editor by 12 February 2010.

Carrie Tiffany, editor

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