

VICTORIAN

LANDCARE

Spring 2020 Issue 79

& CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT



ROADSIDES, RAIL RESERVES AND TRAILS

Reflections on a healing walk

Newham's roadside rangers

Restoring the High Country Rail Trail



Victorian
Landcare
Program



Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management

SPRING 2020 ISSUE 79

Contents

04 Roadside mapping in the Bass Coast

The Bass Coast Landcare Network has been working with the local council on mapping and controlling roadside weeds since the early 2000s.

06 Managing roadsides and reserves to protect endangered grasslands

A partnership project has achieved some significant milestones in protecting the critically endangered Natural Temperate Grasslands of the Victorian Volcanic Plain.

09 Governance training increases group capacity

Landcare facilitators and committee members across Victoria have been able to participate in governance training organised by Mallee CMA and delivered by webinar.

12 A community bonds over The Poet's Walk

The Poet's Walk Working Group has honoured local poet and sculptor John Butler by building a walking track around the township of Swifts Creek.

14 The value of roadside remnant vegetation

An overview of the Upper Maribyrnong Catchment Group's work to protect areas of significant remnant native vegetation along rural roadsides.

20 Nicholson River Landcare Group turns a bare paddock into a walk

The Nicholson River Landcare Group has revegetated a bare Crown land paddock, originally part of the old Nicholson Railway Station grounds.

24 Roadside revegetation critical for Hindmarsh biolink

The Hindmarsh biolink has joined the Big Desert to the Little Desert with a 2000-kilometre link. Thousands of trees have been planted along 18 roadside sites at community planting days.

26 Around the State

Find out what's happening in Landcare across Victoria.



22

Two yellow box trees on Sandy Creek Road, Maldon. The tree in front is about 545 years old.



23

Friends of the Great South West Walk carted coastal wattle to be carted to the walk as scrub matting erosion control.



25

The Tallangatta Tall Trestle Treadle annual bike ride attracts visitors from far and wide.

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Cover photograph

Lake Bolac Eel Festival Healing Walk participant Abby on the last day of the 2019 walk at Brady Swamp. Photograph by Veronica Phillips.



From the Minister

While 2020 has presented challenges, the arrival of spring can be refreshing and reinvigorating, bringing with it a sense of renewed optimism for all of us.

The Victorian Government continues to fund and support vital bushfire recovery efforts for communities and the environment.

This edition of the magazine focuses on how our Landcare and environmental volunteering groups and networks are managing projects on roadsides, rail reserves and walking trails across Victoria. They have shown great tenacity and resilience in changing how they function to continue their important work, while keeping everyone safe and following public health measures.

Bass Coast Landcare Network share their weed management successes along rural roads in the hills and coastal flats of southern Gippsland. In partnership with Bass Coast Shire Council, they identified and mapped roadside weeds in 2014 and again in 2019. This targeted approach to weed control has worked very well.

Another dedicated roadside weed control group is the aptly named the weedies from Newham and District Landcare Group. For 15 years they have cut, painted and pulled out roadside weeds to improve landscape connectivity. They also do community education and advocacy. Their vision is for locals to become biodiversity custodians for rural roadsides.

The Great Victorian Rail Trail is Australia's longest and very popular with tourists. Friends of the Great Victorian Rail Trail and Up2Us Landcare Alliance collaborated to revegetate part of the trail near Mansfield. They've created an important corridor that links habitat for our precious native plants and wildlife.

A survey of mature, remnant eucalypts in the Victorian Goldfields has estimated that the trees – many of them on roadsides – could be between 170 and 545 years old. The Maldon Urban Landcare Group, which conducted the survey, is working to ensure the trees are protected.

We received a wealth of articles from our Landcare and environmental volunteering community for this issue. Although public health restrictions have put many activities on hold this year, I can see from the insightful stories in this issue that their dedication to improving Victoria's environment is unwavering.

The Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio

Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change

Minister for Solar Homes

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A Bass Coast Landcare Network works crew supervisor setting up for roadside weed spraying.

Roadside maps the key to weed control in the Bass Coast

By Anna Brayley

In southern Gippsland a relatively small network of rural roads (around 530 kilometres) wind through the hills and coastal flats of Bass Coast Shire. Known for its beaches, penguins, and fertile farming landscape, the shire has only 14 per cent cover of bushland, most of it fragmented. Roadside reserves are important for maintaining bushland cover and quality in the area, and there are designated roadsides with significant vegetation.

The Bass Coast Landcare Network (BCLN) has been working in partnership with the Bass Coast Shire Council (BCSC) on roadside weed control since the early 2000s. BCLN began by engaging landholders to undertake weed control through a chemical handout scheme and managing contractors to target the worst of the weeds.

The program now sees all BCSC roadside weed funding, including DELWP roadside weed funding, directed to contractors including the BCLN. In 2014 Diana Whittington, Coordinator Land and Catchment at BCSC, commissioned BCLN to comprehensively map six Weeds of National Significance throughout the shire's rural road network. Blackberry, English broom, watsonia, gorse, bridal creeper, and Spanish heath were identified and mapped as being at high, medium or low density.

According to Robbie Gray, Ecosystem Services Manager at BCLN, the maps allowed for a more strategic and targeted approach to weed control.

“The mapping project meant we could maximise the effectiveness of the weed control program to the point that all large mature infestations have been controlled,” Robbie said.

The mapping was repeated by BCLN again in 2019, with several other weeds such as ivy species, woody weeds, and creepers such as blue periwinkle, wandering trad, and bluebell creeper included.

The BCSC Rural Engagement Group – an advisory body that provides a forum for discussion between the agricultural sector and Council, successfully lobbied for an increase in the BCSC budget for the program. According to Robbie Gray, the funding increase means the annual program can now be expanded.

“We can include a sweep targeting creepers and climbers, as well as systematically chipping away at woody weeds,” Robbie said.

BCLN has also worked on an initiative developed by Diana Whittington where BCSC roadside maintenance crews are trained to identify and manage native and exotic vegetation on roadsides. At the end of the training the BCSC staff workshopped



Significant vegetation signs are dotted around the Bass Coast Shire's road network.

ideas for reducing weed spread, avoiding unnecessary removal of vegetation, encouraging regeneration, and keeping their slashing regime to a minimum requirement.

Diana Whittington believes the program is getting stronger and more effective as time goes on.

“We have seen a considerable decrease in weed infestations since BCLN began managing the roadside weed control program. For example, a 39 per cent decrease in blackberries on roadsides over six years. We are really looking forward to seeing the impact that will be made over the next few years,” Diana said.

Anna Brayley is Communications and Administration Assistant at BCLN. For more information email anna.brayley@basscoastlandcare.org.au



A group of cyclists on the Great Victorian Rail Trail east of Olivers Road, Mansfield, alongside the revegetation works.

The Friends group plans its work on the trail based on accessibility to the area, previous work performed, and the opportunity to further develop the trail.

Partnership benefits the Great Victorian Rail Trail

By Ross Vaughan

The Great Victorian Rail Trail (GVRT) extends 120 kilometres from Tallarook to Mansfield with a 13-kilometre additional leg to Alexandra. It is a popular walking, cycling and horse-riding trail and also an important linear corridor providing habitat for native flora and fauna.

In 2018 the Friends of the GVRT, primarily based in Mansfield, received a Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) grant to undertake remedial work and provide additional vegetation on a section of the trail at Olivers Road near Mansfield.

The Friends group plans its work on the trail based on accessibility to the area, previous work performed, and the opportunity to further develop the trail. Their recent project was supported by a partnership with the local Landcare network, the Up2Us Landcare Alliance, who also successfully obtained a Victorian Landcare Grant.

According to Kim Magnay, project officer with Up2Us, the grant enabled the expansion of the planting project and the doubling of the project area.

"It was great to be able to support the Friends of the GVRT by assisting them with the grant.

The additional funds also meant that revegetation work was extended to include the historic Woodfield station precinct, west of Bonnie Doon," Kim said.

The biggest task was managing the infestation of phalaris on the trail. The Friends worked on decreasing the biomass by mechanical slashing and then spraying in autumn to create the environment for local indigenous plants to thrive.

With the preparation complete, the Mansfield community came together at the site for a National Tree Day (NTD) planting at the end of July 2019.

"The NTD workforce varied from young to old, from experienced to inexperienced. Everyone gets in and helps each other. We also had members of Fords Creek Landcare Group supporting peer learning between the different environmental groups," Kim said.

More than 60 people assisted with the planting of 250 seedlings. The speed of the planting and positive response from all those involved made for a very successful day. An after-planting barbecue gave people a good opportunity to socialise and connect.

The Friends group, with continuing support from Up2Us, has undertaken stage two of the project in 2020 by further extending the revegetated area. This involved the planting of another 600 seedlings by small groups of volunteers during June and July to comply with COVID-19 guidelines.

Ross Vaughan is chair of the Friends of the Great Victorian Rail Trail. For more information email ross_vaughan@bigpond.com



More than 60 volunteers planting along the Great Victorian Rail Trail near Mansfield in 2019.

Managing roadsides and reserves to protect endangered grasslands

By Aggie Stevenson, Ammie Jackson and Jess Lill

A partnership project has achieved some significant milestones in protecting the critically endangered Natural Temperate Grasslands of the Victorian Volcanic Plain (VVP). The VVP extends from Melbourne to near the South Australian border, and from Warrnambool in the south to the Grampians and Ararat in the north. It is one of 15 biodiversity hotspots in Australia and supports more than 25 nationally threatened flora and fauna species.

The grasslands were once widespread throughout the VVP, but the region has been extensively cleared for agriculture and less than one per cent of the previous extent of the grasslands now remain. Most of the high-quality grasslands are limited to small, isolated pockets on roadsides and rail reserves.

The linear formation of these reserves makes the grasslands more susceptible to weed invasion which creates challenges for management. Weeds severely impact on native grasslands by competing for space, resources and pollinators. Other threats include vegetation clearing, fragmentation, rabbits, soil disturbance, road, rail and utilities works and maintenance, a lack of burning, and stock grazing and droving.



Chocolate lilies and featherheads at the Cressy Harness Track.

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The linear formation of these reserves makes the grasslands more susceptible to weed invasion which creates challenges for management.

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In 2014 DELWP, in partnership with the Glenelg Hopkins and Corangamite CMAs, received funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program for a Linear Reserves Project (LRP), with the aim of reducing critical threats to native grasslands on these reserves and enhancing their condition, connectivity and resilience.

Further funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program

and Victorian Government's Biodiversity On-ground Action and Biodiversity Response Planning programs has enabled the LRP to continue and expand.

Weeds a major threat

The LRP uses a multifaceted approach to targeted weed control. High conservation value roadsides and reserves in the VVP are protected using selective herbicide control, fire management, stakeholder



Natural Temperate Grasslands in flower on the Victorian Volcanic Plain.

engagement and improved partnerships. Experienced weed control contractors target invasive pasture grasses and declared species including phalaris, serrated tussock, Chilean needle grass and South African weed orchid.

The project also uses burning as a means to reduce weeds and the associated biomass in the grasslands. As burning is a natural process under which these native grasslands were formed, this process also has other ecological benefits for the grasslands and associated flora and fauna species. Where possible, weed spraying activities are coordinated as a follow-up control method on recently burnt sites to help maximise control effectiveness.

The LRP also aims to raise awareness of native grasslands and educate the community about their significance. To date, 15 field days and education events have been held, targeting specific audiences including weed contractors, utility managers, public land managers, local landholders, conservation and Landcare groups and government authorities. Grassland identification events have also been held to help spraying contractors learn more about the complexities of managing grassland ecosystems. Country Fire Authority (CFA) staff and volunteers have also attended field days focusing on the benefits of fire for enhancing grasslands.

This partnership project involves a diverse range of land managers and stakeholders, including the CFA, local government, Regional Roads Victoria, rail authorities,

Parks Victoria, Traditional Owners, contractors, Federation University, La Trobe University and the Arthur Rylah Institute (ARI).

Vite Vite partnership success

The successful partnerships developed as part of the LRP was demonstrated in 2019 at the Vite Vite Rail Reserve. The small reserve, near Derrinalum, has high-value grasslands with records of the threatened striped legless lizard and of seven threatened flora species, including spiny rice flower and fragrant leek orchid. The reserve's vegetation quality had been declining in recent years and it was in urgent need of management to prevent weed infestations.

Undertaking work on sites managed by rail authorities had previously been challenging as legislation requires on-site contractors to be supervised by an accredited Track Protection Officer, which has been cost prohibitive to the LRP. Through discussions with the Australian Rail and Track Corporation (ARTC) an agreement was reached which enabled safe and practical access to the site for approved LRP staff.

The first step of the Vite Vite site activities was to complete a site burn. CFA brigades from Lismore and Vite Vite coordinated a successful fuel reduction burn in May 2019. This resulted in a reduction of fuel load and weeds and an improvement in grassland vegetation quality. ARTC arranged and funded a fence to be constructed between the rail track and the grassland vegetation to allow the site to be accessed safely by

weed control contractors. Contractors were engaged in spring 2019 to carry out follow up weed control.

The skill and effort of the CFA volunteers who participated in the fuel reduction burn should be noted, with a special mention of Chris and Val Lang, whose local knowledge and proactivity has led to this enhancement of native grasslands.

continued...

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High conservation value roadsides and reserves in the VVP are protected using selective herbicide control, fire management, stakeholder engagement and improved partnerships.

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Button wrinklewort seedlings grown from cross pollinating the single plant from Caramut with flowers from the close by Wickliffe population.

Caramut endangered daisy is regenerated

The Glenelg Hopkins CMA has been successful at recovering a critically endangered perennial daisy after a single surviving plant was discovered on a roadside at Caramut in south-west Victoria in 2019.

The button wrinklewort was only known to occur on nine roadside and rail reserve sites in the region. The Glenelg Hopkins CMA's Button Wrinklewort Recovery Project team is made up of staff from Glenelg Hopkins CMA, ARI, La Trobe University, Monash University and a dedicated field naturalist from Ballarat.

The team believed it had visited and collected leaf samples for genetic analysis from all known populations of this plant in south-west Victoria. However, in 2019 the team was alerted to a previously unknown individual plant on a roadside near Caramut.

Unable to cross-pollinate with itself, measurements from the base of the plant's stem suggested it had been successfully living alone at the site for several years.

Over the spring of 2019, Aggie Stevenson and Ben Zeeman attempted to pollinate the daisy's flowers by selecting flower heads from a larger button wrinklewort population at Wickliffe and manually cross-pollinating the flowers.

The pollination was hugely successful. In March 2020 many tiny button wrinklewort seedlings from the Caramut plant germinated. It is anticipated that, with permit approval, the seedlings will be planted at the Caramut site in spring 2020, thereby creating a whole new multi-plant population of button wrinkleworts.

Aggie Stevenson is a Senior NRM Planner at Glenelg Hopkins CMA. Ammie Jackson is a Project Officer at DELWP. Jess Lill is a Biodiversity Project Manager at Corangamite CMA.

For more information email ammie.jackson@delwp.vic.gov.au



Blue devil at Vite Vite Rail Reserve

Mallee governance training supports Landcare across Victoria

By Megan Frankel-Vaughan

Landcare facilitators and committee members across Victoria have been able to participate in governance training organised by Mallee CMA and delivered by webinar.

The training was originally intended to be conducted in person to support local groups. The Mallee CMA region is the largest catchment in the state, covering nearly 2.5 million hectares of agricultural land. Most of the work of Mallee Landcare groups is rabbit and weed control, particularly on roadsides.

Forty-three per cent of the catchment is public land, including four national parks, extensive state forests, 500 small reserves, and more than 6000 registered Aboriginal features/sites. On-ground Landcare works within the Mallee CMA occur in environmentally and culturally sensitive areas, so groups need to be operating as effectively as possible and have appropriate processes and procedures for the delivery of on-ground projects in place.

According to Nelson Burand-Hicks from the Mallee CMA, when the governance training was moved to webinar due to COVID-19, all groups across the state were offered an opportunity to join.

"The training was aimed at increasing the capacity of groups to be effective through giving them guidance, direction and ideas," Nelson said.

Two governance webinar sessions were held in May with 70 participants. The sessions were recorded and are now available to other Landcare members within the Mallee and across Victoria by contacting Nelson Burand-Hicks. The training sessions explored a range of governance topics, including the role of those who govern community organisations, understanding community organisational rules, and charity and tax status and obligations.

The training used scenarios focused on common challenges for groups, including liability, health and safety laws, and conflict of interest.

According to Murrayville Landcare Group Facilitator, Fiona Willersdorf, the training helped her to understand her group's structure and the committee members' responsibilities as they relate to their primary work of rabbit and pest plant control.

"At the moment, we have a map of Murrayville and we focus on different areas depending on the funding we have. It never stops, but you can see from the records that the rabbits are reducing every year and the funding is going further," Fiona said.

"Communicating regularly with farmers, particularly those neighbouring public roadsides, is one of the best ways to ensure our group is effective and efficient. For example, we have a great contractor and liaise with him regularly. He is able to give us some feedback and advice about the areas we could target," she said.

The webinar format was well received by Mallee participants where distance can be a challenge when accessing training opportunities. Landcare group committee members and Landcare facilitators across Victoria can access the training by contacting Nelson Burand-Hicks at Mallee CMA.

Megan Frankel-Vaughan is a Mildura journalist. For more information contact Mallee CMA's Regional Landcare Coordinator Nelson Burand-Hicks at Nelson.Burand-Hicks@malleecma.com.au



Murrayville Landcare Facilitator Fiona Willersdorf took part in the governance training and says she now has a greater grasp on her Landcare group's roles and responsibilities.

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The training sessions explored a range of governance topics, including the role of those who govern community organisations, understanding community organisational rules, and charity and tax status and obligations.

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The weedies – Newham Landcare's roadside rangers

By Helen Scott



Newham and District Landcare Group (NDLG) formed in 2004 with the aim of protecting and enhancing remnant vegetation and revegetating links between remnants. To date we have invested more than one million dollars in grants and matching contributions in the Cobaw Biolink, which will join the Macedon Regional Park with the Cobaw State Forest and beyond.

The NDLG Roadside Management Group first met in 2005 with nine members. We decided to focus on weed management to improve landscape connectivity. We talked to the Macedon Ranges Shire Council's (MRSC) Environment Officer, nominated priority roads, and began mapping weed infestations and entering this data on the MRSC database.

The group is known as the weedies. For the past 15 years we have organised working bees to cut and paint and pull roadside weeds – always capped off with morning tea. Meeting bi-monthly, our convenor records hours worked on roadside control, worth thousands of dollars at paid rates. We report on a monthly basis to NDLG.

The weedies have held many information and education sessions including workshops on indigenous plant propagation and grasslands, wildflower walks and local expos – often with guest speakers. We even have a song dedicated to us – *The weedies lament*.

Ecological studies yield positive results

We have identified gaps in policy, implementation and guidance on roadside conservation. In 2015, after concerns that roadside biodiversity was being compromised by the actions of landowners, MRSC staff and contractors, NDLG commissioned and funded ecological studies on local roadsides under threat.

The studies documented complex ecosystems with several rare and endangered species. They have proved useful when countering destructive practices. The weedies record roadside damage and threats including verge grading and drainage works; waste dumping; weeds spread by machinery and horses; inappropriate slashing and mowing; removal of woody habitat; and inappropriate planting of non-native windbreak trees.

The studies, and our constant communications with MRSC staff about poor practices, have yielded results. We have received grants, been alerted about forthcoming work and have an agreement to manage a particularly precious roadside.

In 2015 two of us presented a paper on rural roadsides to MRSC Councillors, and made a budget submission for a roadside management plan, unsuccessfully. We went on to organise an educational evening inviting people to re-visualise roadsides as a landscape web of indigenous flora and fauna. An MRSC officer and a research scientist member of NDLG spoke to more than 50 people in the Newham Hall followed by supper and a chance to view our displays and make suggestions. We were chuffed when the MRSC later featured roadsides in their *Shire Life* newsletter and produced a brochure, *Maintaining our Roadsides – who does what?*

Political action followed. Alice Aird and I helped initiate a Ranges Citizen for Open Government group, which, with the local Forum for Democratic Renewal, organised community campaigns for a more consultative Council. In 2016 we took our Federal and State Members of Parliament on a roadsides bus tour to demonstrate high-quality remnants and the damage they have been subject to. Other Landcare and environmental groups joined us at Newham Hall where we engaged the politicians in lively discussion.

Constant, vigorous lobbying

Later that year we presented a paper on getting local government to lift its game on roadside management to 40 Landcare professionals at a forum run by the Victorian Landcare Council. We were delighted by loud applause, also to hear we were later described as bushrangers by Victorian Landcare Council member Ross Colliver in another presentation we did to the neighbouring Riddells Creek Landcare Group.

"Alice Aird and Helen Scott from over the hill, have been campaigning to get residents and the Shire to look after roadside vegetation. I think of them as bushrangers, a species of citizen scientist, out on the ground, keeping a look out for what's happening, ringing bells and insisting that people think a lot harder about the impact



Members of NDLG and other groups get together to talk about roadside conservation in the Newham Hall in 2015.



Wildflowers and native stipa grasses along a roadside in Newham.

they are having on this beautiful place we live in," Ross said.

The decade of lobbying continued. We consulted with Regional Roads Victoria, attended Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) community drop-ins, submitted to VEAC's Central West investigation into public lands, and to Shire strategies, making sure that roadsides featured in all. In 2017 a MRSC Roadside Management Plan was at last announced. Several weedies have been invited to a focus group on the draft plan in 2020.

We continue to build on ever improving relationships with MRSC environmental officers and support them in communications with Council. We argue that significant roadsides have asset value and are worthy of investment in asset protection.

MRSC now has a roadsides page on its website and this year they invited us to partner in a federally funded Newham Roadside Biodiversity Monitoring Project. Results of 20 spotlight surveys of native fauna species using remnant biodiverse corridors on 10 roadsides will be uploaded to the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas. An educational brochure, community workshops and report are forthcoming.

Fire and hazard reduction on roadsides remain controversial and emotive issues. In 2019 the CFA, NDLG, other local Landcare groups and adjoining property owners collaborated with MRSC on their Three Chain Road Fire Risk Mitigation Action Plan.

What works and what next?

We believe persistence has been the key to our success. The weedies are a squeaky wheel, but we always use courtesy, document what we do and make sure we acknowledge achievement. Networking with other Landcare and environment groups has been important, as well as publicity via our website, newspaper and newsletter articles and displays at local events. Community education through well-organised events is crucial.

We have learned that it is when our emotions are stirred, we move into action.

Love for the landscape and sadness at its destruction can overcome a sense of powerlessness. We want local people to become citizen scientists who are custodians of our rural roadsides. Encouraging people to keep a photographic diary of a favourite tiny wilderness can be both a scientific record and a work of art. We see a role for involving local artists, and filmmakers. The work of the weedies continues!

Helen Scott is Secretary of NDLG. For more information on the weedies go to the rural roadsides page at www.newhamlandcare.info or email orseda@outlook.com



Morning tea on Whitebridge Road, Newham after a roadside working bee in 2017.

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The Poet’s Walk was
launched in May 2019
with a twilight parade of
the handmade waterbugs –
nearly 100 sculptures from
tiny to huge.
”



From left Bob Butler, Rhonda Butler, Dave Butler, Judith Butler, Ted Cole and Ben Buckley at one of the stone cairns displaying John Butler’s poem at the opening of The Poet’s Walk.

A community bonds over The Poet’s Walk

In 2002 sculptor and poet John Butler adopted a neglected parcel of Crown land that wrapped around part of the township of Swifts Creek where he lived, at the site where the creek named for the township and the Tambo River merge. John was inspired by the creek and its majestic old manna gums and grey boxes that provide important habitat for local wildlife. His vision was to rehabilitate the land for local use by building a walking track marked by stone cairns with verses from his poem, *The River*.

John worked with local students to clear the 1.2-kilometre track. DELWP and the neighbouring landowner then started to mow the track. Cattle and sheep kept the weeds down, but blackberries took over once the stock were fenced out.

John passed away in 2014 before his dream was realised. Fortunately, he left some clues behind – the poem, sketches of handmade cairns and some preliminary concrete slabs along the track, now overgrown with grass and weeds.

Community inspired by John Butler’s vision

In 2017 the East Gippsland CMA provided Swifts Creek Ensay Landcare Group (SCELG) with Regional Riparian Action Plan funding to undertake weed control work along the riverbank. Locals attended

a community meeting where stories about John Butler and the proposed walk were shared. The Poet’s Walk Working Group, under the auspice of the SCELG, was formed and planning got underway. The East Gippsland Shire Council (EGSC) and DELWP helped us unravel the intricacies of land ownership and responsibilities.

Spraying blackberries came first. A local spraying contractor worked his way from the edges of the mountainous berries into the centre. We engaged Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation and the local Gippsland Drought Employment Program crew who mulched up the weeds, felled hazardous trees and burnt old peppercorns. Regular working bees were held, with locals turning up with shovels, trailers, wheelbarrows, and tractors for the heavy work.

Hot cuppas and cake around the burning piles were a welcome reward and helped to build a strong bond within the group. Soon, we could see the Swifts Creek and Tambo River safely without being harmed by thorns and barbed wire.

Our first trial planting section was sprayed, weed mat was laid and the plants put in. Wood chip mulch was not able to be used due to the bushfires in the area and some weeds grew beneath that lifted the weed mat.

We used a different method for two new sections. The areas were dug over completely, weed mat laid and mulch put on thickly straight away.

The group has learnt many lessons along the way. We know that good site preparation is critical, although plant selection can be trial and error. Follow up watering is essential as is mulching and weeding regularly. Some plants were not planted deep enough so training for volunteers was needed.

East Gippsland Shire Council provided a heritage grant to complete six hand crafted cairns along the track, and one bankside flood marker, marking the height of the 1998 flooding of the creek. A local stonemason was employed and held a workshop to share his knowledge and skills. John’s poem was engraved on to metal signs, and attached, verse by verse, on to the cairns.

Art and nature combine

SCELG members were inspired to learn more about the ecology of the waterways. With the support of the Swifts Creek Angling Club and the Great Alpine Gallery we invited freshwater ecologist John Gooderham from National Waterbug Blitz to run an on-site workshop. Then the gallery held a series of workshops for locals to create replicas of the tiny water creatures



One of the 100 waterbug sculptures that lit the way on the evening launch of The Poet's Walk in 2019.

Following the success of the art workshops, we are now planting an eco-dye and basketry resources garden, with plants that are endemic to the area.

By Helenka King, Anne Richardson and Lisa Lee

that live within it. This project, called The Living River, was funded by the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal and EGSC.

The Poet's Walk was launched in May 2019 with a twilight parade of the handmade waterbugs – nearly 100 sculptures from tiny to huge. Locals walked the trail and viewed the stone cairns. John Butler's wife Judith was part of the celebration and his son David performed a reading of his father's poem. The township had been in drought, but the evening was also marked by a downpour – another gift to the environment.

Value and recognition

The SCELG was highly commended in the Landcare Community Group Award category at the 2019 Victorian Landcare Awards for the project, and the Working Group won the Community Group of the Year in the Omeo Lions Club's Australia Day Awards in 2020.

In 2019 the EGSC added The Poet's Walk to its asset register and has taken responsibility for its maintenance, improvements and care. It has been a wide-reaching collaboration between The Poet's Walk Working Group and many other community groups and government agencies.

As part of a grant from East Gippsland Water we produced a *Poets Walk Plant Guide* to encourage others to plant along



Volunteers from The Poet's Walk Working Group enjoy a hot drink after a working bee.

the waterways. The guide gives advice on planning, planting times, precautions, site location, species selection, site preparation, ongoing maintenance and plant propagation. It is available on the Great Alpine Gallery website, and The Poet's Walk Facebook page.

The Poet's Walk project continues with much energy and enthusiasm. All plantings are monitored regularly, and the plant guide updated as needed. Following the success of the art workshops, we are now planting an eco-dye and basketry resources garden, with plants that are endemic to the area.

The project has brought the community together to protect and enhance our local environment for now and for future generations. It is a testament to John Butler's vision.

Lisa Lee is the Landcare Facilitator for the Benambra, Dinner Plain, Omeo and Swifts Creek Ensay Landcare Groups. Her position is funded through the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program. For more information on the Poet's Walk email Anne Richardson from The Poet's Walk Working Group at anne@riverleblue.com

The value of roadside remnant vegetation

By John Robinson

Remnant vegetation on rural roadside reserves may be locally or regionally significant. It may contain rare or threatened flora species and often provides habitat and ecological connectivity in fragmented landscapes. Remnant roadside vegetation also provides examples of native plant communities that may be absent from adjoining cleared private land providing a valuable genetic resource and seed bank for seed collection (with appropriate seed collection permits), to help propagate local plants for revegetation projects.



A significant roadside vegetation sign erected by Macedon Ranges Shire along Simons Hill Road in Darraweit Guim.

Healthy stands of roadside remnant vegetation benefit adjoining farming land by providing shelter and shade for livestock and wind protection for pastures and crops.

The Upper Maribyrnong Catchment Group (UMCG) has had a strong focus on protecting areas of significant remnant native vegetation along rural roadsides since its formation in 1988. This has included undertaking weed control projects on roadside reserves with high or medium conservation values, which has required collaboration with local governments as the land manager of local rural roads.

Roadside conservation survey

In 1994, Jim Robinson, a UMCG committee member, initiated a project to assess the conservation values of the former Shire of Kilmore's 300-kilometres of rural roadsides. In conjunction with the shire the group secured an Australian Government Save the Bush (National Landcare Program) grant to undertake the shire's first survey to assess and map its roadsides for their conservation value.

David Laurie, a local botanist and nurseryman from Reedy Creek, was engaged to coordinate the survey. The then Victorian Roadside Conservation Committee's *Roadside Assessment Manual* provided the assessment method. Volunteers from four local Landcare groups did the driving while David used 'windscreen ecology' to rank vegetation as low, medium or high conservation value.

David Laurie's *Report on Conservation Values of Roadsides within the Shire of Kilmore* (1994) provided a ranking, a brief descriptive summary of each section of roadside assessed and identified weeds, firewood removal and gravel removal as the three main threatening processes for the shire's roadsides.

Conservation assessments of rural roadsides managed by Mitchell Shire (the former Shire of Kilmore was amalgamated into Mitchell Shire in 1994) have been undertaken over the past 25 years. Some municipalities, including Mitchell and Macedon Ranges Shires, have also installed signs along rural roadsides to identify strips of significant roadside vegetation.

Healthy stands of roadside remnant vegetation benefit adjoining farming land by providing shelter and shade for livestock and wind protection for pastures and crops.



Landcare group members with the rubbish they collected from Poulter's Lane, Bylands, on Clean Up Australia Day, 2012.



Chocolate lilies along a wildflower walk at Poulter's Lane, Bylands. The towers on Pretty Sally Hill are in the background.

Volunteers from four local Landcare groups did the driving while David used 'windscreen ecology' to rank vegetation as low, medium or high conservation value.

Old Sydney Road Flora Reserve

David Laurie's report identified a 600-metre section of Old Sydney Road, Wallan, as containing the finest section of roadside remnant vegetation observed during the assessment. He rated it as an irreplaceable example of the original vegetation of the area, noting the almost total absence of weeds and intactness of the native ground flora.

"...consideration should be given to gazettement as a flora reserve... Mature trees contain extensive nest hollows. An understorey of wattles and native peas is present. The ground flora is rich in native grasses, forbs, orchids and smaller shrubs. This section is also part of the important wildlife corridor [along Old Sydney Road] between Wallan-Darraweit Road and Stockdale Road," David Laurie wrote.

A preliminary botanical survey by the UMCG in spring 1995 found more than 50 flora species at the site and subsequent surveys have identified more than 80 flora species, including 16 different orchids. Yam daisy, or murnong in the Woi Wurrung language of the Wurundjeri people, is common. This tuber with a yellow flower (it resembles a dandelion at first glance) was once a plentiful staple food source before it was rapidly eaten out by sheep, cattle and rabbits after colonisation.

The UMCG has organised many spring wildflower walks along Old Sydney Road and other high conservation roadsides to observe the beautiful wildflowers and increase awareness of the relatively intact, diverse

and rich remnant local flora along roadsides. UMCG has also produced a colour brochure on the flora of the proposed flora reserve.

The UMCG sought support for the site to be declared a flora reserve, and support came from parties including the Maribymong Catchment Committee set up by the Port Phillip Regional Catchment and Land Protection Board (now Port Phillip and Westernport CMA) which included an action in the Maribymong Catchment Action Program (1999) on gazettement of the flora reserve. The Mitchell Shire Environment Advisory Committee also included an action in the shire's previous Environment Strategy (2008) that supported the gazettement of the flora reserve.

The site has still not been gazetted. The UMCG needs to redouble its efforts to ensure the 2.66-hectare Old Sydney Road Flora Reserve is finally gazetted.

Beckingsale Bushland Reserve

In 1982 a 5.17-hectare reserve that adjoins Wallan-Darraweit Guim Road was gazetted under a Land Conservation Council recommendation as it provides one of the remaining local examples of bushland that is relatively intact.

The reserve is not pristine. It was grazed by livestock up to 1981, has an erosion gully and a small area of woody weeds. In 1998 the UMCG made a submission to the Place Names Committee to have it named the Beckingsale Bushland Reserve in recognition of local landholder Jim Beckingsale's instrumental role in its gazettement.

Parks Victoria manages the reserve, which hosts a regular stream of bushwalkers. The UMCG has secured funding for fencing, signposting, an off-road car park and for woody weed and erosion control. The group has also held several wildflower walks and clean-ups at the reserve, organised a botanical survey, installed pamphlet boxes and produced a pamphlet for self-guided walks.

Rubbish and weeds

Illegal rubbish dumping threatens rural roadsides with high conservation values, such as Old Sydney Road. Rubbish dumping often occurs on roadsides with wide reserves, little traffic, and gaps in the roadside vegetation where vehicles can stop and dump rubbish. The UMCG has organised many Clean Up Australia Day rubbish collections along roadsides with many ute loads of rubbish collected.

According to Claudia James, a UMCG member who lives along Old Sydney Road, rubbish dumping is increasing.

"Before, people used to hide it and you didn't notice it so much, but now it's just blatant. At one Clean Up Australia Day collection we even found a fibre glass swimming pool in the bushes," Claudia said.

Weeds, including those imported from dumped garden refuse, are another major issue. Since the mid-1990s the UMCG has secured around \$50,000 of grants for weed control across 30-40 kilometres of high and medium conservation roadsides.

continued...



Heads down on a wildflower walk at Old Sydney Road Flora Reserve.

This included securing four rounds of Victorian Government Bush Guardians funding, Parks Victoria Volunteer Group Grants (for Beckingsale Bushland Reserve), Victorian Landcare Grants, and Melbourne Water Community Grants.

The main weeds treated were gorse, cape broom, briar rose, hawthorn and other woody weeds. Mitchell Shire has also undertaken weed control along designated sections of the same roadsides targeted by

the UMCG for treatment and Macedon Ranges Shire has funded the group to treat weeds along two sections of roadside.

Unused road reserves

Victoria has more than 120,000 hectares of unused road reserves that support native vegetation. They are often overlooked as biodiversity assets despite containing an important proportion of our remnant vegetation. DELWP provides licences over unused roads for agricultural uses (such as livestock grazing), for up to 99 years to owners of adjoining private land.

The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) in its *Remnant Native Vegetation Investigation* (2011) estimated that about half of the total area of Victoria's unused road reserves have been fully cleared of native vegetation, with a substantial remaining portion in a degraded condition. Despite this, the report found that some unused road reserves contain significant stands of remnant vegetation including an understorey structure with good biodiversity values, as they have been fenced off to exclude grazing by livestock.

The VEAC investigation recommended a comprehensive inventory of road reserves (both used and unused), including site condition and the mapping of significant native vegetation be undertaken. According to VEAC, biodiversity conservation and ecological connectivity should be adopted as management objectives for appropriate unused road reserves.



Murnong in flower along Poulter's Lane, Bylands, at a spring wildflower walk in 2014.

“

Victoria has more than 120,000 hectares of unused road reserves that support native vegetation. They are often overlooked as biodiversity assets despite containing an important proportion of our remnant vegetation.

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Many Landcare groups and networks play important roles supporting nature conservation in their areas, including taking action to conserve and protect remnant roadside vegetation. The UMCG continues its work on rural roadsides.

John Robinson is Secretary of the Upper Maribyrnong Catchment Group. For more information email upper.maribyrnong.landcare@gmail.com

Lockington group regenerates local rail reserves

By Wendy Sims



Lockington & District Landcare Group (L&DLG) was formed in 1993 to undertake revegetation to tackle salinity caused by rising water tables, improve habitat for native birds and to regenerate disused railway reserves in the group's area.

The group has sunk and monitored ground water bores, worked with the Lockington Consolidated School on Junior Landcare, and worked on rabbit control and roadside weeds. The railway line between Lockington and Kotta has been revegetated and a seed orchard was established at the old Kotta Railway Station. Sustainable soil issues have also been a focus for the group with an extensive dung beetle program as well as the establishment of seven moisture probes with full weather stations across the district which provide vital information to local farmers.

The group went into recess in 2007 but reformed in 2011. We now have a solid membership of 27 committed local families.

In July 2017 the group negotiated with Parks Victoria for permission to plant trees and shrubs along the old Elmore to Cohuna railway line between O'Donnell and Diggara roads. This 2.5-kilometre section of the line was closed in the late 1980s. The existing railway fence line was repaired by a local fencing contractor and gates were added at each end of the plantation to protect the trees and shrubs from wandering stock.

Trees and shrubs were selected under the advice of Drew Gailey from the Australian

Plants Society in Echuca and purchased from the Rochester Native Nursery.

In October 2018, after a very dry winter, our members planted half the area with 1600 trees and shrubs. The remaining 1400 plants were established in August 2019. The plants were loosened in their tubes prior to planting and the species selected to provide a good variety. A tree planting machine was used that also gave the plants their first watering.

On both planting days we were assisted by students from Lockington Consolidated School who staked the plants and erected tree guards. We all enjoyed a very welcome sausage sizzle after the hard work.

The new plants were watered twice in the following couple of months and we were fortunate to get some summer rain. Around 70 per cent of the plants have survived. We have not had any significant problems with weeds, our philosophy being: prepare the ground well, give them some water to establish their roots and then let them fight for survival as our summers can be challenging and trees that have to look for water from the beginning will last longer.

We hope that the plantations established by the Lockington Landcare will provide habitat corridors for birds and small animals in our area. This branch of the railway line went from Elmore to Cohuna so perhaps in the future the tree line will continue to the north providing a wooded area towards the Murray River.

My advice to any group that plans to establish tree plantations in the future – get the local school children involved, their enthusiasm and energy makes the day physically less draining. It also gives the children a sense of ownership of the project, improves their awareness of nature and establishes a commitment to the environment. These children are the future Landcare group in this area.

The L&DLG has not met since February 2020 due to the COVID-19 restrictions. We are looking forward to the easing of restrictions and being able to meet again and plan our future projects.

Wendy Sims is President of the L&DLG.
For more information email
wendys1904@gmail.com



Grade three and four students from Lockington Consolidated School installing tree guards and stakes at the plantings along the old Elmore to Cohuna railway line in October 2018.

The railway line between Lockington and Kotta has been revegetated and a seed orchard was established at the old Kotta Railway Station.

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Each walk is a selection of past experiences, links and places, all pulled together by the organisers for that year. It exists as it is undertaken by the walkers.

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A river red gum in the Wannon River delta.



Lake Bolac Eel Festival Healing Walk progressing through woodland.

Reflecting on a healing walk

The Lake Bolac Eel Festival Healing Walk began when Lake Bolac local, and acclaimed musician and author, Neil Murray, had the idea of walking with Traditional Owners along the Hopkins River, following the path of the migrating eels.

The first walk took place in 2005 and preceded the first Lake Bolac Eel Festival, Kuyang Lapakira – Plenty Eels. A Healing Walk has taken place before each festival since then.

Each walk is a selection of past experiences, links and places, all pulled together by the organisers for that year. It exists as it is undertaken by the walkers.

In late November 2019 the walkers included cooks, artists, musicians, writers, plant-lovers, poets, orators, and filmmakers. A few of us gathered at Lake Bolac to load our swags, bags, hopes and fears into a couple of four-wheel drives. We travelled to our starting point east of Gariwerd, in Djab Wurrung Country.

While I waited beside the road to wave down the latecomers, yellow-tailed black cockatoos headed for their night-time roosts, and things started to slow down. It had taken a lot of energy and organisation to prepare for five days walking, now we were settling in.

The walk was led by Neil Murray and Lou Hollis from the festival crew, with support from Daryl Clark and his trusty truck.

Most of us had planted a few trees in our lives, and some of us had been involved in Landcare, Coastcare or social justice issues for decades. We all obviously liked to walk.

Taking steps

The walk skirted around Gariwerd, passing through stringybark and red gum forests. Most of the walk was undulating to flat; dirt tracks, a little bitumen, or through the forest. There was one monster hill. Neil's advice was to just do three steps then stop. I managed 5–10 steps before pausing to look back over the wetlands of the magnificent Wannon River floodplain. We met with the Wannon River on many occasions. In that country the river braids and splits, feeds wetlands and soaks, then comes back together.

Each person brought their stories. We laughed a lot, cooked communally,



Early morning mist looking towards Walker Swamp.

By Jodie Honan

swam in brown water and slept on the ground, some of us sharing the comforts of the open-air tarp. When you aren't doing much, there is a lot more to see and hear. We listened to each other, and also to the other-than-human presences around us.

As Neil Murray writes in his history of the walk: "When you walk in country, things come to you. Your senses sharpen. Your perception of time and distance adapts to walking pace and you see everything within that parameter. You are alert to detail. It's not just that you notice particular rocks, soil, tracks, grasses, plants, trees, insects, lizards, birds and animals – but you begin to discern why you see them. What caused them and what relationship they have with something else. In short, everything speaks. Everything has a story."

On our last evening we camped at Walker Swamp Restoration Reserve in the sand forest. The growling grass frogs and mopokes sang us to sleep. In the morning we heard broilgas calling through the mist. The final day we walked through huge red gums on our way to a tea-coloured farm billabong for a last swim and lunch.

Walking together

A walk like that rearranges things. The walk slows people down. It gives time. There is an intimacy to sharing food, sleep, blisters, and stories day after day. Maybe we just



The walkers gathered around the campfire in the evening.

had a very special group, but I suspect the spirit in which the walk is conducted allows that to happen. And somehow those things are healing. We fell into the rhythms of walking, of each other, and of the country. There were hiccups and breaks, it wasn't all peace and love, but regaining the rhythm afterwards felt good.

Why do people go on a healing walk? Not everyone said why they were there. Maybe it was to heal something in themselves, to help others heal, or to heal the country as we walked. All these things happened. There was a lot of care for people and for land. Caring for both can be quiet, action isn't always required.

Somehow the experience of the walk has made these last few months of isolating, not

moving, and social distancing a little easier for me. Walking day after day, living only with what you have, getting along with whoever you are with, not achieving, listening.

In 2020 the Lake Bolac Eel Festival was held over because of COVID-19, but hopes are high for 2021. As Neil Murray says, "Nothing good is ever lost. It's all just residing in the shade."

I only took three photographs during the walk, so thank you to my fellow walkers who shared theirs for this article.

Jodie Honan is a member of the South Beach Wetlands and Landcare Group. For more information on the Lake Bolac Eel Festival and healing walk go to www.eelfestival.org.au

Nicholson River Landcare Group turns a bare paddock into a beautiful walk

By Merryl Wright



The Nicholson River Landcare Group (NRLG) formed in 2004. The group is located east of the city of Bairnsdale and has an area of 3096 hectares encompassing the Nicholson River from its mouth up to Sarsfield.

In 2016 the group got underway with a project to revegetate a bare Crown land paddock, originally part of the old Nicholson Railway Station grounds. The East Gippsland Rail Trail (EGRT) is adjacent to the south side of the paddock, with a new housing sub-division under development on its north border.

The aim was to provide a walking track and vegetation corridor between the housing subdivision and the EGRT Reserve and to connect Sarsfield Road with the Michael Oxer Reserve on the west bank of the Nicholson River, forming a walking loop to join the EGRT at the old Nicholson River railway trestle bridge.

The work began by fencing off a seven-metre wide corridor along the entire 260 metre length of the northern boundary. Funding and in-kind support were provided by the East Gippsland Rail Trail Committee of Management, Friends of the East Gippsland Rail Trail, the Green Army, East Gippsland Shire and volunteers from NRLG.

The paddock had been grazed for many years and required minimal preparation work. A walking track was plotted out and a mixture of 2000 indigenous trees, understorey plants and Plains Grassy Forest grasses were planted and guarded to prevent damage from rabbits.



In July 2020 the bare paddock is now The Old Station Walk – an attractive walking track and wildlife corridor.

More than 60 cubic metres of eucalypt mulch was spread in the small area for water retention and weed suppression. The walk was kept fenced off from the public to allow time for the plants to establish.

During this period, further clearing took place on the west end of the corridor with old fencing removed and some vegetation cut back to extend the walking track to the west bank of the Nicholson River and link up with the EGRT at the railway bridge.

For the final major works in 2018, a National Landcare Program Community Grant provided the funding to construct a fully graveled pathway, install entrance gates and signage, and more planting and mulching. A viewing seat overlooking the river was also installed at the western end of the walk.

By 2020 the original plantings of eucalypts, casuarinas, wattles and other indigenous

flora had grown so strongly, despite drought conditions, that we had to prune overhanging vegetation to keep the walk clear for users.

Now that the trees and other plants are fully established, The Old Station Walk provides safe access and an additional route for residents in the three new subdivisions. The project has created significant new wildlife habitat and we are seeing an increase in birdlife in the area.

The Old Station Walk will make a long-term contribution to the growing village of Nicholson. The project demonstrates how the quality of Crown land can be creatively retained and enhanced, providing important community and environmental assets for the future.

Merryl Wright is Secretary of Nicholson River Landcare Inc. For more information email merrylwright@bigpond.com



Michael Oxer and Sue Peirce from the Nicholson River Landcare Group survey the empty paddock before work commenced in 2016.



Vigilance is critical. Preparing for broadacre spraying of serrated tussock.

The VSTWP has seen a number of cases over the past few years where invasive plants such as serrated tussock and Chilean needle grass have been spread across the landscape through poor vehicle and machinery hygiene.

Weed hygiene survey highlights spread issues

By Ivan Carter

The Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party (VSTWP) has undertaken a recent survey of weed hygiene processes as the first step in developing a best practice manual on weed hygiene for contractors and land managers.

The VSTWP contracted a research company to survey a broad cross section of 41 stakeholders. The respondents were a mix of private contractors, local governments, CMAs, linear reserve managers and public/private landowners.

The VSTWP has seen a number of cases over the past few years where invasive plants such as serrated tussock and Chilean needle grass have been spread across the landscape through poor vehicle and machinery hygiene. This has resulted in new infestations where these weeds had previously not occurred. One example is roadside slashing conducted when invasive plants are in full seed. The seed can then be carried on machinery to new locations.

The survey highlighted the complex collaborative networks involved in invasive plant management.

Ninety per cent of land managers surveyed had a weed management strategy in place, with 87 per cent of these indicating that their strategy is mostly followed. Respondents were generally confident in establishing their weed management strategy and response

plans, despite limited awareness and usage of the wide variety of weed management information resources available to them. Half of the landholders surveyed encountered difficulties in putting the plans into practice, particularly with mapping, monitoring and actively responding to weed outbreaks.

Three-quarters of respondents employed contractors to work on their land, with a range of control mechanisms in place (formal and informal) relating to weed hygiene. However, only 20 per cent audit their contractors annually or more often, with 39 per cent reporting they have never conducted an audit. Audits conducted in the past 12 months found 69 per cent compliance, with the remaining audits finding only minor infractions.

The VSTWP will use the results to produce a booklet for best practice weed hygiene and contract management for all stakeholders and contractors in the field. The most affordable method of control for invasive plants is prevention of spread. The VSTWP will be focusing its efforts on serrated tussock and other invasive plants across Victoria.

Ivan Carter is Community Engagement Officer for the VSTWP. For more information on the survey email info@serratedtussock.com



Serrated tussock can produce up to 10,000 seeds per plant per year.

Survey reveals living treasures on Maldon roadsides

By Bev Phillips



In 2017 the Maldon Urban Landcare Group (MULGA) set out to conduct a major survey of the indigenous eucalypts that have been growing in the area since before European settlement – pre 1852. We spent two years surveying 308 eucalypts on roadsides and private and public land.

Each tree was photographed and recorded by species, its diameter over bark at 1.3 metres and GPS location.

The species recorded were grey box (*Eucalyptus microcarpa*), yellow box (*Eucalyptus melliodora*), red box (*Eucalyptus polyanthemus* subsp. *vestita*), long-leaved box (*Eucalyptus goniocalyx*), yellow gum (*Eucalyptus leucoxylon* subsp. *pruinosa*) and one red stringybark (*Eucalyptus macrorhyncha*).

We calculated the age of the trees using an average growth rate of 3.5 millimetres a year across the trunk diameter for box-ironbark forest trees in the Maldon area that was used in a report completed for the Environment Conservation Council in 2001.

Our survey revealed an estimated age range of 170 to 545 years across the trees. We found that 87 per cent of the trees had an estimated age of 200 years or greater. The tree data has been entered on the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas.

All of the six species listed above occur along our roadsides, in fact 199 of the eucalypts surveyed grow along 30 kilometres of roadsides at the urban edge of Maldon. The majority of our roadside trees are grey box (40 per cent) and yellow box (37 per cent). Eighty-two per cent of our roadside eucalypts have an estimated age of 200-399 years. There are eight trees with an estimated age of 400 years or greater. Five of these occur along Sandy Creek Road, including the oldest roadside tree surveyed, an amazing yellow box with an estimated age of 545 years.

It is remarkable that these roadside eucalypts have survived. By 1854, during the goldrush, the Maldon population numbered 20,000. The landscape was turned up from mining and the forests were aggressively cleared. By 1890 the surrounding landscape was almost completely denuded of trees. All the roadsides we surveyed were active goldmining areas, so we don't know why the trees were spared – perhaps to provide shade for people or horses.

MULGA is working to achieve long-term protection for these important eucalypts under the Mt Alexander Shire Council's (MASC) Planning Scheme, and/or the National Trusts of Australia's Register of Significant Trees.

According to a MASC conservation value and weed distribution map from 2007-2014, approximately 10 per cent of the roadsides we surveyed were classified as having medium conservation value. The rest were classified as low conservation value, possibly as there is minimal indigenous understorey and groundcover. The significance of the pre-1852 eucalypts was not acknowledged.

It is rare to see a remnant eucalypt in the bushland and forests surrounding Maldon today. The narrow corridors of living treasures along the roadsides we surveyed are very significant and must have greater protection.

Bev Phillips is Secretary of MULGA.
For more information email
maldonurbanlandcare@gmail.com



Forty-foot Lane, Maldon. The grey box at the left is estimated to be 200 years old, and behind 190 years old. The yellow box at the right has an estimated age of 320 years.

The many Friends of the Great South West Walk

By Jen Johns



The Great South West Walk is a bushwalking trail comprising short loop walks, full day walks and an intrepid, spectacular 250-kilometre coastal loop that begins and ends in Portland.

The Friends of the Great South West Walk (FGSWW) formed in 1984 and has around 140 members.

The FGSWW has been working on erosion control and revegetation along the spectacular cliff-top section of the walk from Springs Camp to Cape Bridgewater with the aim of improving the landscape and also reducing degradation and maintenance required on the walk. Historic overgrazing, combined with wind and water erosion, has reduced soil and vegetation cover, exposing rugged rock along the cliff-top walk.

The FGSWW Landcare team holds an annual planning meeting to determine working party timelines and tasks. The Landcare team's Tuesday Gang volunteer weekly on track maintenance and preparing projects for larger groups of volunteers.

FGSWW has been working with Year 8 outdoor education students from Melbourne's Wesley College for almost 25 years. Approximately 350 Wesley students visit the region to camp each year and spend around 1.5 hours a day for the two days of their hike working on the trail.

The reliable, ongoing contribution of Wesley College has enabled FGSWW to accumulate

photographic records and statistical data over time which demonstrate rates of success on different sections of the walk. This is of great assistance with forward planning.

Earlier this year the Tuesday Gang cut and carted coastal wattle, delivering it some distance over difficult terrain to exposed sections of the walk such as the Basalt Lookout and Twin Pools. Volunteer teams then cut, rolled and laid lengths of hessian mesh from bales delivered on site, to stem rapid erosion degradation on steeper slopes and along the track before the students arrived. Wesley students and staff then weaved the coastal wattle into the mesh, re-covering and extending a large exposed area.

It was encouraging to see cushion bush and common tussock regenerating in the area once shelter was established. More varied regeneration will now follow. For our final working bee for the year the Tuesday Gang and Wesley students worked together to protect the large exposed sand dune face at Peacocks Blow. It was estimated that Wesley students and staff contribute around 1200 hours of environmental work to the walk each year.

Bill Golding, founding member of FGSWW loves working alongside the students.



Wesley College students working along the walk.

"When you work with these incredible Wesley kids, you come home walking on air," Bill said.

COVID-19 saw the most recent Wesley camp cancelled but plans are now in place for a number of camps later in 2020. FGSWW is grateful to the Glenelg Hopkins CMA for a Victorian Landcare Grant to fund materials.

The team is encouraged by the growing band of volunteers who willingly give of their time, energy and expertise. An association with the local South West TAFE College, Portland Campus, has recently been established. Running successful and enjoyable working bees means many volunteers return, often with new recruits. They make positive connections and have a worthwhile experiencing improving our natural environment in a spectacular coastal location.

FGSWW has received a number of awards for its work including a prestigious Parks Victoria Banksia Foundation Award and a Victorian Landcare Award. The awards acknowledge the valuable voluntary commitment and time dedicated to ensuring the continuation of Landcare on the Great South West Walk.

Jen Johns is a member of the FGSWW. For more information go to www.greatsouthwestwalk.com or email friends@greatsouthwestwalk.com



Peacocks Blow in 2019 showing excellent revegetation progress after erosion control works.

Roadside revegetation critical for Hindmarsh biolink

By Jonathan Starks

Project Hindmarsh started on a lounge room floor in Nhill in 1997, when a group of concerned local residents began looking over a newly produced map that showed all the remnant vegetation along roadsides in the West Wimmera and Hindmarsh Shires.

The map had been put together by an enthusiastic environmental consultant, Rob Scalzo, engaged by the West Wimmera Tree Group to document the extent and condition of native vegetation on roadsides in the two shires. Many of the two chain (40 metres) and three chain (60 metres) roads in the shires were originally set aside as stock routes. The native vegetation along some of these roads was the only remaining native vegetation left in the district, and often still in good condition. But there were also many lengths where no native vegetation remained at all.

Rob Scalzo's map identified 100 kilometres of gaps in roadside connectivity.

"If the gaps were closed, a 2000-kilometre link between national parks, waterways, wetlands and remnants – joining the Big Desert to the Little Desert, could be created," Rob said.

The Hindmarsh biolink quickly became the signature project of the Hindmarsh Landcare Network.

The first Project Hindmarsh community planting weekend was held in 1998.

The trees were ordered but the newly established Hindmarsh Landcare Network had no money. The committee began urgent fundraising, developing partnerships and seeking volunteers.

Former Hindmarsh Landcare Network Chairperson Darryl Argall described it as not-quite organised chaos.

"Around 300 city and country volunteers came along to that first planting weekend, working side by side planting thousands of trees along 18 roadside sites, and all involved had a fantastic time," Darryl said.

In the first three years, Project Hindmarsh planted over 120,000 trees and shrubs and established 402 kilometres of direct seeding lines covering 250 hectares. There were successes, but also failures. In 2000, volunteers were devastated when 1440 trees were found dead within a fortnight of being planted after they were deliberately sprayed with herbicide.

The final tree in the link between the Big Desert and Little Desert was planted in 2001 by the then Federal Environment Minister, Senator Robert Hill. The planting took place at Leftys Corner, a three-chain road intersection north of Kiata. A plaque was erected after the ceremonial planting to commemorate the occasion.

Project Hindmarsh continues to build links along the chain. Roadside plantings have continued for many years, but the



Leftys Corner, north of Kiata, was the site for the planting of the final tree in the Hindmarsh biolink in 2001.

focus has shifted towards the restoration of cleared land, planting shelterbelts and restoring degraded remnant woodlands.

2020 has been a challenge. Unfortunately, we could not host a community planting weekend, but we still managed to get 12,500 plants in the ground across four sites along the Wimmera River and floodplain, using contractors. The plantings will further strengthen the river's function as a biolink corridor and complement all the hard work along roadsides from weekends past.

Project Hindmarsh is a credit to the many hundreds of dedicated volunteers who have supported us over the last 22 years. We look forward to building many more links between the Big Desert and Little Desert regions in the future.

Jonathan Starks is Landcare Facilitator for the Hindmarsh Landcare Network. For more information email jstarks@hindmarshlandcare.org.au



A Project Hindmarsh community planting along Rintoules Road in 2008.



Members of the Bonegilla Action Group at work on the High Country Rail Trail.

Victoria's High Country Rail Trail – an impressive community achievement

By Anne Stelling

Community discussions about developing the old Cudgewa rail line in north east Victoria into the High Country Rail Trail got underway in the 1990s. Parklands Albury Wodonga (PAW) was appointed as Committee of Management for the first 40 kilometres of the trail in 2000.

The community got cracking with restoration works along the degraded rail corridor between Wodonga and Cudgewa, including the regeneration of native ecosystems and restoration of a number of historic timber trestle bridges.

Three dedicated volunteer groups were formed along the rail corridor: the Bonegilla Advisory Group, Tallangatta Advisory Group and Koetong-Shelley Development Association. The groups had regular planning meetings and working bees. In the first six years more than 865 volunteers contributed in excess of 37,239 volunteer hours in developing, managing and marketing the trail.

Since then in-kind contributions, fundraising and project funding secured by PAW has enabled fencing and revegetation of more than 80 kilometres of the corridor.

The rail trail traverses a variety of environments and altitudes, from the wetlands and floodplains of the Kiewa River, through fertile farmland on the slopes to the steep forested hills of the high country.

Grasslands have been managed in partnership with local CFA units, with a three-yearly burning regime resulting in the return of quality native grasses. These burns have also been valuable training exercises for new CFA recruits.

The cluster revegetation of native trees and shrubs on former farmland has resulted in connected corridors providing habitat for native fauna to travel through and adapt to climate change.

Where the trail traverses farmland, fencing combined with new lease arrangements has enabled management for the regeneration of native ecosystems. Changing from permanent grazing to environmental grazing has seen native wetland grasses regenerate and eliminated pugging during the winter months.

Public awareness has grown from the ground up. Thousands of individuals,

groups, businesses, schools and clubs have been involved through community planting days, fundraisers and working bees. The restoration of historic trestle bridges on the route has attracted specialist groups including the Puffing Billy Preservation Society.

The trail is used by walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Events such as the Sandy Creek Bridge Walk, Whistle Stop High Tea, cycle tours, railway history walks, and natural and cultural heritage activities are hugely popular. Community members recently contributed artwork and designed signs to raise awareness of the environment and cultural heritage assets along the trail.

Over 20 years the High Country Rail Trail has evolved from being a fragmented and neglected remnant of history to an iconic rail corridor connecting the legendary Victorian High Country to the mighty Murray River.

Anne Stelling is Communications Ranger with Parklands Albury Wodonga. For more information email Anne@parklands-alburywodonga.org.au

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Around the State – News from the Regional

Aboriginal Landcare Facilitator

We are making the most of online opportunities to stay connected as we continue to adapt to the challenges of COVID-19. It's not ideal, but it demonstrates the resilience of our Landcare communities who continue to care for the Country during these times.

Victoria's Aboriginal Landcare Facilitator teamed up with Coastcare to deliver an online Aboriginal cultural heritage workshop in June. The workshop answered questions and provided practical advice on engaging with Traditional Owners along our coastlines.

The partnership between Mt Toolebewong and District Landcare Group and Wurundjeri Traditional Owners continues. Brush-tailed phascogale nest boxes are soon to be installed at Wurundjeri's Galeena Beek property in Healesville.

For more information please contact Jackson Chatfield on jackson.chatfield@delwp.vic.gov.au or 0419 504 451.

Corangamite

During National Volunteer Week in May the CMA launched the Landcare Volunteer Recognition Program, a two-month campaign to encourage award nominations for Landcare groups and individual Landcare volunteers. Nominees will be acknowledged at an online event later in 2020.

Governing a Community Group governance training was delivered in May over two webinars to Landcare executive members in Corangamite, courtesy of the Mallee CMA. A four-part Messaging for Change webinar series delivered by Dr Trudy Ryan in partnership with Goulburn Broken and North Central CMAs was also provided to Landcare facilitators across the state.

The annual Landcare Group Health Survey was sent out to Landcare groups to complete.

Corangamite Landcare group and network chairs and Landcare facilitators held their quarterly meetings online and a monthly community of practice has been set up to better support our Landcare facilitators.

There are currently 24 Landcare projects underway in the region funded through the 2019/20 Victorian Landcare Grants.

For more information visit www.ccma.vic.gov.au (What we do/Community Landcare) or contact Elisia Dowling on 0418 397 521.

East Gippsland

The region has faced a number of significant challenges over the past few months which have come on top of several years of drought. Bushfires impacted over half of the region during summer and COVID-19 is bringing new and unprecedented challenges.

Resilience is a word that is synonymous with Landcare – communities rallying together to support those in need, offering words of kindness, donations and a listening ear. Landcarers have looked to online options for learning, meetings and as a way to communicate. Working bees planned around social distancing requirements have also been successful.

Landcare communities are finding ways to adapt and respond to the challenges they are presented with.

For more information visit www.egcma.com.au (What we do/Landcare) or contact Carolyn Cameron on 0419 892 268.

Glenelg Hopkins

We are living through strange times – self-isolation, social distancing and working from home are the new norms – so for the average farmer, nothing has changed!

The normal timing of the Victorian Landcare Grants funding has been delayed, but Landcare facilitators are continuing to help their group and network members with other funding sources, information and advice.

Online communication platforms have seen a fast uptake. Many groups have now conducted meetings online and video conferencing is the new field day. It's not the same as face to face, but it does give the ability for more people to participate in more events. I think it will be the new norm.

For more information visit www.ghcma.vic.gov.au (Get involved/Landcare) or contact Tony Lithgow on 0418 180 996.

Goulburn Broken

Thanks to our Regional Agriculture Landcare Facilitator Kerstie Lee for delivering values-based messaging for Landcare training recently. Originally

planned for our regional catchup, the training was conducted online for 50 Landcare facilitators across the state. The feedback was very positive. Participants were impressed by how the training was tailored to their needs and relevant to their Landcare experiences.

We have been busy looking at options to maintain and expand support to the catchment's community-based natural resource management (NRM) groups under the next iteration of the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program. We have also been able to complete the review of the Community NRM Action Plan.

For more information visit www.gbcma.vic.gov.au (Community natural resource management) or contact Tony Kubeil on 0408 597 213.

Mallee

The CMA has continued to support individual Landcare groups and Landcare facilitators in what has become a trying time for all Victorians.

Landcare projects are still being delivered and communication is strong. The community spirit in the Mallee is certainly still alive. Governance training was delivered in May 2020 via webinar, which was recorded and is now available to all Landcare groups in Victoria by contacting Nelson Burand-Hicks.

For more information visit www.malleecma.vic.gov.au or contact Nelson Burand-Hicks on 0427 540 468.

North Central

The region celebrated Landcare Week from August 3–9 with a social media campaign featuring beautiful Landcare imagery on Instagram and Facebook. It's a joy to highlight our amazing volunteers, the landscape scale changes created through Landcare and the innovation groups have shown during COVID-19.

We got down and dirty with dung beetles during June, hosting a seminar with researcher Dr Bernard Doube. The informative seminar included data showing how soil health and carbon content improves, animal gut parasites are reduced, fly numbers fall and water soaks into the soil more effectively, when dung beetles are present. To watch the seminar search for dung beetles with Dr Bernard Doube on YouTube.

Landcare Coordinators



The Raywood Regenerative Agriculture Farmer Group used social distancing when inspecting a multi-species crop that has provided winter feed for lambing ewes.

Our Regional Agriculture Landcare Facilitator, Darren Bain, undertook socially distanced paddock walks during July. The walks were held with the Raywood Regenerative Agriculture Group to look at how three local producers are using different methods to keep feed up to their livestock through winter.

For more information visit www.nccma.vic.gov.au (Landcare) or contact Tess Grieves on 0438 357 874.

North East

The region has had a whirlwind year so far with bushfires and COVID-19. It's been a challenge, but groups are adapting well to the changes, using the available technology to continue meeting and collaborating.

Many group projects are continuing. While some events have been cancelled many groups are determined to deliver on their targets and are working within the new rules in order to operate safely.

As the new Regional Landcare Coordinator, I have big shoes to fill. We wish the departing Tom Croft well in his retirement. Tom will always be part of Landcare in the region. It's been great to meet and talk with the network and group executives. I look forward to a time when we can catch up face-to-face.

For more information visit www.necma.vic.gov.au (Solutions/Landcare & community groups) or contact Richard Dalkin on 0409 683 467.

Port Phillip and Western Port

Landcare groups in the region have again proved their resilience and adaptability as many of their activities have been hampered by COVID-19. Several groups have continued to schedule and run planting events. Morning tea and chat is no longer possible but socially-distanced works with smaller groups staggered over longer periods are keeping projects on track.

The CMA will soon be signing a partnership agreement with NatureWest. The CMA has recently appointed three Farms2Schools coordinators, a pilot program which will bring farmers to students explaining the process from produce to plate. New works crew employees, funded through the Victorian Government Agriculture Workforce Plan, are also coming on board. The crew will be supporting agricultural and environmental projects across the region.

We are looking forward to a series of workshops and cultural awareness activities delivered by our Indigenous parties for Landcare and other environmental volunteer groups situated in the Maribyrnong and Werribee catchments. The series is part of DELWP's Waterways of the West Action Plan.

For more information visit www.ppwcm.vic.gov.au/landcare/ or contact Barry Kennedy on 0447 821 559.



Richard Dalkin, the North East CMA's new Regional Landcare Coordinator, has been meeting group and network executives online.

West Gippsland

It's been perfect weather conditions for tree planting this year in West Gippsland. Sadly, many groups have had to postpone plantings and events due to COVID-19. Some groups who typically relied on schools or community members for tree plantings have had to turn to contractors, individual volunteers, or run small-scale, socially distanced planting days.

Lots of groups have moved their meetings to online platforms, others are using the downtime to plan for future projects. It's great to see Landcare members supporting each other and utilising the social capital they have built up over many years.

Congratulations to Yarram Yarram Landcare Network and South Gippsland Landcare Network who were successful in receiving National Landcare Program Small Farms Smart Grants.

For more information visit www.wgcma.vic.gov.au (Getting involved/Landcare) or contact Kathleen Brack on 0428 619 671.

Wimmera

A big part of the work of our local farming and Landcare groups is done by getting together in the paddock and sharing information and establishing new connections. Now we are unable to get together, we have been using webinars to bring the paddock to the people.

Webinar topics have ranged from making and using compost on your farm, to effective use of soil probes and weather stations and other management practices that improve the condition of soil, biodiversity and vegetation.

We are fortunate to work with such fantastic and passionate groups in our region, who are quick to tackle challenges and have built capacity to deliver information and activities through these online tools.

After farewelling Ray Zippel in June, we welcomed Bronwyn Bant to the Regional Agriculture Landcare Facilitator role. Bronwyn brings lots of great experience and ideas to our Wimmera Landcare team.

For more information visit www.wcma.vic.gov.au (Get involved/Landcare) or contact Joel Boyd on 0429 949 196.

Vale John Fenton

By Carrie Tiffany

One of Victoria's Landcare stalwarts, John Fenton, died in May. I had the honour of visiting John and Cicely's property, Lanark, near Branhholme in 1997 to report on the release of 50 eastern barred bandicoots into the bushland habitat they had created on the farm.

John and Cicely moved to Lanark in the 1960s. The farm had been aggressively cleared and its wetlands drained.

John quickly saw the need to improve shelter on the farm and became keenly interested in farm forestry. He saw the conservation benefits that revegetation could bring along with the improvements in productivity.

John and Cicely hosted many field days at Lanark. By the time John had finished with planting – a life's work of planting – 20 per cent of the property was

restored to native habitat with no loss of productivity.

John was an advocate for Traditional Knowledge being used and respected in farming practices. He supported the local Gunditjmara people's aspirations to achieve UNESCO World Heritage listing for the Budj Bim Cultural Landscape and attended the community celebration in Heywood last year when this was achieved.

John was interested in music and poetry and was an avid reader. In 2010 he published a book with Phillip Derriman, *The Untrained Environmentalist – how an Australian grazier brought his barren property back to life*.

Lanark is now under the management of John and Cicely's son, David. He is committed to continuing the inspiring work of his family.



Farmer and conservationist John Fenton on his property, Lanark, near Branhholme.

The *Victorian Landcare & Catchment Management* magazine is published by the Victorian Government Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and distributed in partnership with Landcare Victoria Incorporated and the Victorian Catchment Management Council. The magazine aims to raise awareness of Landcare and natural resource management among Victorian farmers, landholders, the Victorian Landcare community and the wider community.



Mailing list enquiries and to receive your copy via email alert

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Phone: 9207 5527 Fax: 9207 5500 Email: info@lvi.org.au

Read the magazine online

To access the *Victorian Landcare & Catchment Management* magazine online (as web pages or pdfs) go to www.landcarevic.org.au/landcare-magazine/

Back issues of the magazine can be accessed online as pdfs.

Next issue

The next issue of the magazine, to be published in Summer 2021, will feature stories on Landcare, small farms and food production.

We are interested in how Landcare groups and networks are supporting their members in planning and managing small farms and with the sustainability issues around food production – both at a household and an agricultural scale.

Our readers are keen to learn about the success of different projects, as well as what hasn't worked, and the insights and reflections of your group or network along the way.

The magazine fills up with stories very quickly so please get in touch with the editor well before the copy deadline.

Contributions for the Summer 2021 issue should be sent to the editor by 6 November 2020.

Email: editorviclandcare@gmail.com



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