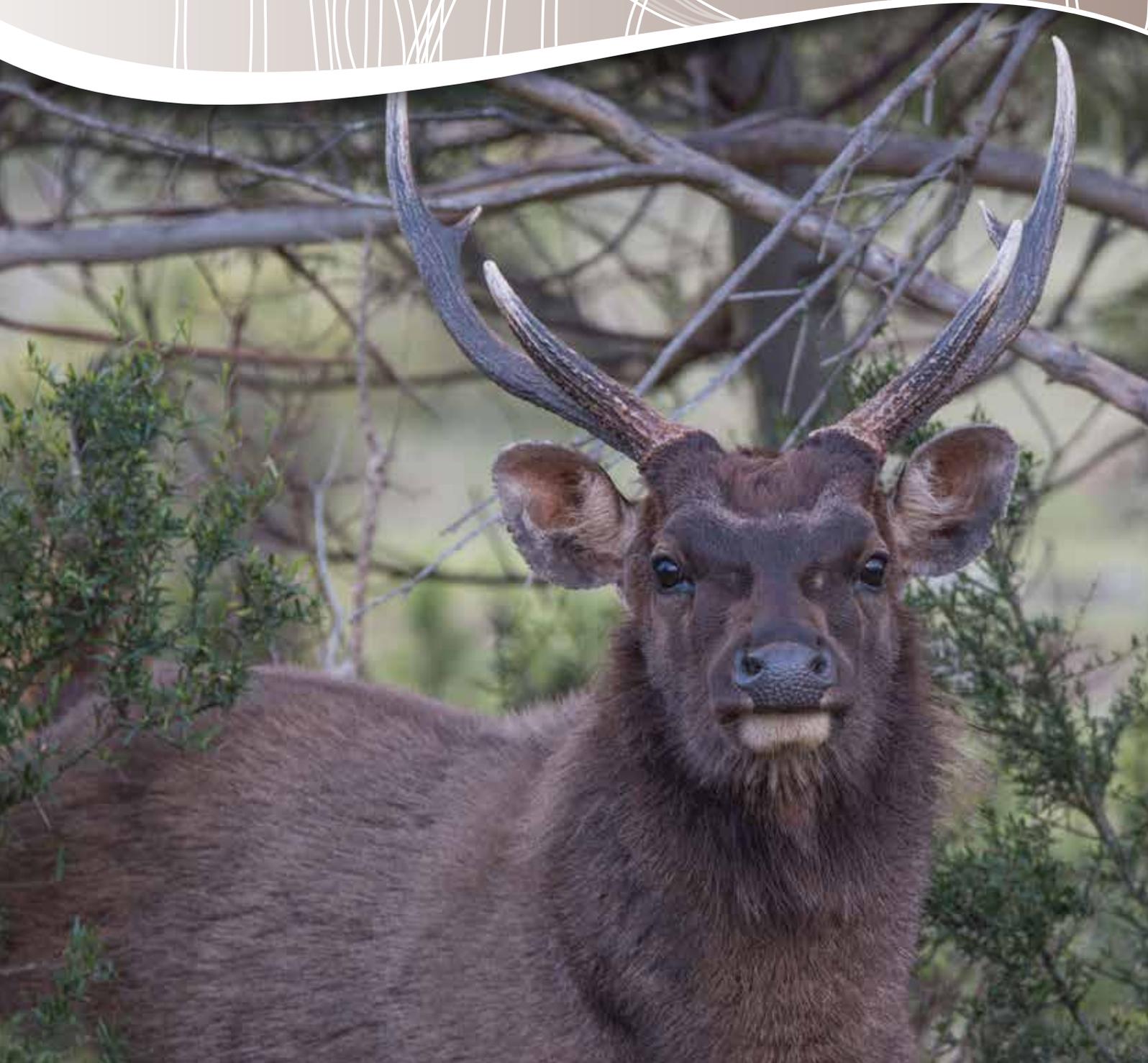


VICTORIAN

# LANDCARE

Winter 2021 Issue 81

& CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT



## INVASIVE PLANTS AND ANIMALS

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Managing deer

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Understanding weed history

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Fox and rabbit control on the Bunurong Coast



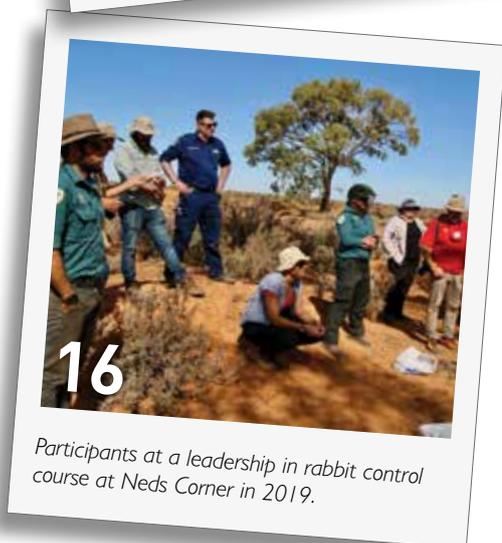
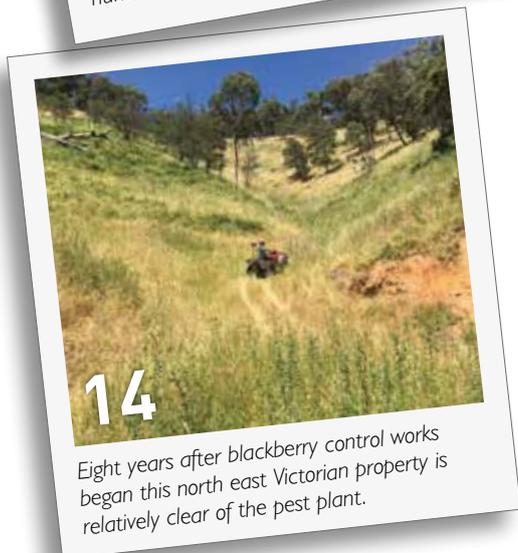
Victorian  
**Landcare**  
Program



**VICTORIA**  
State  
Government

# Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management

WINTER 2021 ISSUE 81



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### Cover photograph

Close encounter with a sambar stag (*Cervus unicolor*) in the Alpine National Park, Victoria. Photograph by Reg Gordon.



# From the Minister

Faced with bushfires, drought and floods, and the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, Landcarers across Victoria have endured unparalleled challenges in recent years.

Despite this, Landcarers have stayed active – rebuilding communities with projects including habitat restoration for threatened species, bushland regeneration, wellbeing and mental health activities, and engaging volunteers who want to contribute.

The work of the Landcare individuals, groups and networks in the community should be celebrated.

The 2021 Victorian Landcare Awards are an ideal opportunity to recognise our Landcarers and environmental volunteers. The awards span urban and rural communities excelling in sustainable agricultural practices, environmental protection, conservation of land and waterways, coastlines and biodiversity.

I invite you all to make nominations for the awards, which recognise people and community groups for their outstanding contributions to preserving the unique Victorian landscape.

The stories in this edition focus on invasive plants and animals. The magazine has returned to this theme regularly over its 25-year history because it is such an important issue for Landcare across the state.

Invasive plant and animal control is costly and can be hard, physical work. Making

evidence-based decisions and ensuring activity is targeted in the right areas is crucial.

The Southern Ark project, funded by the Victorian Government's Weeds and Pests on Public Land and the \$51.5 million Bushfire Biodiversity Response and Recovery programs, was expanded after the 2019-20 bushfires in East Gippsland destroyed habitat and put native animals at further risk from foxes.

Southern Ark land managers used the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning's decision support tool, Strategic Management Prospects, to decide where to expand fox control efforts.

Around Ararat, native vegetation is now flourishing following control of one of Victoria's worst weeds, gorse. The Upper Hopkins Land Management Group and the Ararat Landcare Group have worked together to control gorse in their area for more than 20 years.

The vigilance of these two groups has restored the once gorse-choked Cemetery Creek, which runs through Ararat. A creek-side walking track now allows locals and visitors to experience the wildflowers nearby.

In the Yarra Valley, the Round the Bend Conservation Co-operative, a group of residents who live on a 132-hectare property at the Bend of Islands, identified that panic veldt grass was spreading from their house sites into the bush, creating a significant biodiversity threat.

The residents set about identifying, surveying and hand-pulling this invasive weed with a five-year target to control it. They met this target in September 2020 and have almost eradicated it.

The Southern Otway Landcare Network is targeting emerging weeds in its area, aiming to eradicate them before they take hold. The network has held successful working bees to control tree dahlia, which has escaped gardens and spread quickly down the Barham River.

This issue also features a story on new approaches to deer control in the Mitta Valley. Victorian Government funding and our \$19.2 million Victorian Deer Control Strategy is helping landholders and communities to reduce the impact deer are having across the state.

I hope you enjoy this issue of the magazine. I look forward to celebrating the achievements of the nominees of this year's Victorian Landcare Awards.

The Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio  
Minister for Energy, Environment and  
Climate Change  
Minister for Solar Homes

[LANDCAREAUSTRALIA.ORG.AU/LANDCARE-AWARDS-2021](https://landcareaustralia.org.au/landcare-awards-2021)

## 2021 VICTORIAN LANDCARE AWARDS

**NOMINATIONS OPEN** CLOSING 30 JUNE 2021



“

Given that the weed was spreading from our house sites and starting to advance into the bush we knew we needed to act.

”



An aerial view of the Round the Bend Conservation Co-operative.

## A Co-operative approach to panic veldt grass

Round the Bend Conservation Co-operative was established in 1971 by a group of residents who live on a 132-hectare property at the Bend of Islands, north east of Melbourne. We are interested in preserving the natural environment through residential conservation, which aims to reduce and contain the impact of our living in the bush.



The wine-lipped spider orchid is making a comeback on the co-op.

Over the co-op's 50 years we have tackled many threats to the native bush. In 2012 we decided to take a more strategic approach and engaged an expert ecologist, Dylan Osler, to assess the state of the flora on the property and recommend a strategy to best protect and enhance biodiversity. Dylan's report identified a new lurking problem. The perennial grass weed, *Ehrharta erecta*, also known as panic veldt grass, was the biggest single threat to the local environment.

*Ehrharta*, a native of South Africa and Yemen, is believed to have been introduced to Victoria in birdseed in 1950. It is now widespread across Victoria.

According to Dylan, *Ehrharta* is a particularly invasive weed that is notoriously difficult to control.

"It can seed every six weeks throughout the year and can tolerate a wide range of conditions, from dry to wet. It has the potential to displace a whole range

of different species, like orchids, small daisies and annuals and has the capacity to completely take over the ground cover," Dylan said.

Given that the weed was spreading from our house sites and starting to advance into the bush we knew we needed to act. Our first challenge was to identify the extent of the problem. We found that the weed was mostly emanating from garden beds, effluent disposal systems and areas of stormwater runoff.

### Zones and scales define infestation

Each house site was divided into zones. We created a scale from zero to five to define the level of infestation at each zone. A score of one indicated 15 or fewer mostly small plants, or less than 5 per cent coverage. A score of four indicated more than 100 well-established plants with 25-50 per cent coverage. Fortunately none of our sites scored a five – a severe infestation with greater than 50 per cent coverage.



The property supports diverse flora and fauna including the endangered brush-tailed phascogale.

By Karyn Kamminga

We then developed a control plan and timeline for each site. Our goal was to have most sites at a score of zero and no sites with a score above one by the end of the five-year project.

The control method was hand pulling. As *Ehrharta* can be confused with a range of native grasses, especially *Microleana stipoides*, our next challenge was to find a practical identification method that could be easily used by all residents.

After much research our project coordinator, Frank Pierce, discovered that when peeling a leaf away from the stem *Ehrharta* has a shield (a membranous ligule) present, while native grasses do not.

According to Frank this was a big breakthrough.

“Identifying *Ehrharta* was a challenge – it looked just like any other grass. But soon I could identify it with some confidence,” Frank said.

### Hand pulling is hard work

In fact our biggest challenge was making sure we got all residents on board with such a long-term program of weeding. Hand-pulling a grass like *Ehrharta* is tough going, but the project would have failed if everyone didn't participate.

A lot of work went into communicating with residents about the aims and

importance of the project. The detailed documenting of progress at each site was also important because we could see that we were making a difference over time.

Bringing in a consultant to periodically advise, support and encourage each resident on site gave the project a big boost. Even residents who were unable to physically do the work saw the importance of the project and engaged someone to do the weeding for them.

We met our five-year target in September 2020. Consistent follow-up monitoring will be required to stop any outbreaks and we'll use a consultant to conduct an annual check of sites every September as a safety net.

This project has taught us the value of having guidance from an ecological expert – especially in assisting and encouraging us to keep going over such a long period of time.

According to resident Richard Laurie, the sense of achievement felt by others was contagious.

“To end the project with such a positive result demonstrates just what can be achieved when everyone plays their part,” Richard said.

Most importantly, the project has demonstrated that by working strategically and co-operatively we could successfully tackle a weed that many people thought

“In fact our biggest challenge was making sure we got all residents on board with such a long-term program of weeding.”

was impossible to control. This seems a fitting achievement to celebrate in our 50th anniversary year.

Karyn Kamminga is secretary of Round the Bend Conservation Co-operative. For more information go to [www.roundthebend.org.au](http://www.roundthebend.org.au)



An example of *Ehrharta erecta* invading a patch of orchids.

# Managing deer in the Mitta Valley

By Karen Moroney and Simon Feillafe

The deer problem began in Victoria in the late 1880s when several deer species were released by acclimatisation societies which were set up to introduce non-native species to Australia for economic and nostalgic reasons. In north east Victoria there are now self-sustaining and expanding herds of sambar deer (*Cervus rusa*), red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) and fallow deer (*Dama dama*) with smaller numbers of rusa (*Rusa timorensis*) and wapiti/ elk (*Cervus canadensis*).

The introduction of deer farming enterprises in the 1980s saw red and fallow deer numbers grow. Escapees and deliberate releases also increased. Deer were once regarded as attractive in the landscape, but they have now reached population levels in some areas where they are impacting on the environment and on farm productivity. Landholders and public land managers are increasingly faced with making management decisions on how to handle the deer problem.

In 2015 the Mitta Valley Landcare Group (MVLG), with support from the North East CMA, began a deer project driven by local landholder and community concerns. Community engagement and input from State Government agencies, hunting organisations, and Victoria Police helped to set the parameters for the project. We wanted to understand the impact deer were having on landholders

and the community, the impact of deer on the environment and the increasing impacts and management of illegal hunting.

Over the next four years MVLG held four deer forums. The first two were focused on community engagement and gathering information from relevant experts to build our knowledge on the deer issue. The second two forums focused on solutions through understanding deer biology and the harvesting initiative.

MVLG also joined the Hume Region Deer Management Forum, which meets every six months in Wangaratta. In between these major events, there were many opportunities to share information with other local groups including the Upper Ovens Valley, Benambra Dinner Plain Omeo, and Upper Murray Landcare groups.

The aim was to determine actions that the community could support to help us manage the problem at the grass roots level. We have also been able to contribute our knowledge and experiences to a broader regional and state audience.

## Commercial harvesting has landholder benefits

Knowledge and recommendations from the MVLG forums has informed two key strategies. In March 2018 legislative changes were passed in the Victorian Parliament removing

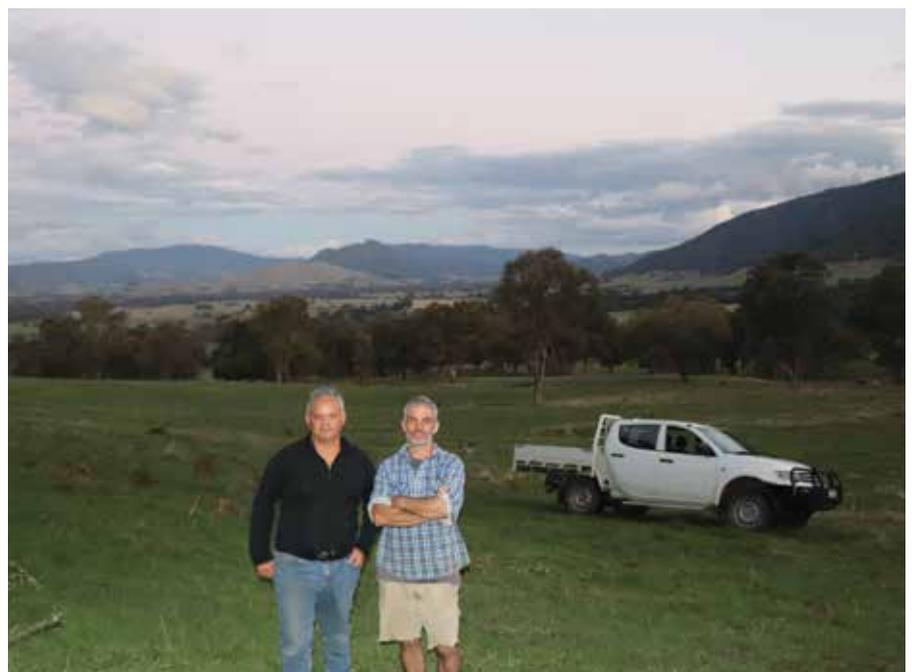
the barriers to commercial harvesting of wild deer. This set in train professional harvesting, which has commercial opportunities for the harvester and benefits for the landholder.

This has allowed landholders to manage deer numbers in a consistent, controlled and best practice manner.

“

*Deer were once regarded as attractive in the landscape, but they have now reached population levels in some areas where they are impacting on the environment and on farm productivity.*

”



From left, Simon Feillafe, Mitta to Murray Landcare Network Facilitator with landholder and member of the Mitta Valley Landcare Group, Ben Teek. Ben has changed his grazing regime to manage deer attracted to his property from the crown land forest on his boundary.



*A herd of fallow deer seen regularly on private land opposite an aged-care facility at Baranduda, 10 kilometres from Wodonga.*

Each carcase earns the landholder a small return. Harvesters are currently earning \$1.90 to \$2.50 a kilogram with landholders receiving \$0.50 per kilogram depending on the processor being used. The average processed weight of a carcase is 86 kilograms.

In late 2020 the State Government released the Victorian Deer Control Strategy. The strategy recognises that the large numbers of deer and their wide distribution across Victoria mean that decisions need to be made to determine where deer control can be most effective in reducing the impact of deer on environmental, agricultural, and Aboriginal cultural heritage values, and public safety. The strategy commits the Victorian Government to working with land managers and the community to develop Regional Deer Control Plans.

There is satisfaction for MVLG in seeing our deer project inform this strategy and that the strategy includes a set of actions to guide communities like ours to tackle the deer challenge.

### **A mix of management methods**

Landholders have needed to be adaptive to manage deer and the issues that come with them. Like many pest species there is more than one management method required. Many landholders are adjusting their rotational grazing patterns due to deer. They graze paddocks that adjoin the bush hard by the onset of winter until early

spring so the deer are not attracted when feed is limited. Where the costs and benefits are justified we are also seeing the use of deer proof fences.

Landholders may decide to allow recreational and professional harvesters on to their properties. Some are investing in their own thermal rifle scopes and hunting deer at night using moon cycles. This has proven to be more effective than spotlighting from vehicles. As deer is increasingly being seen as desirable meat

there is also a social element as landholders work together and exchange ideas on butchering and cooking deer in its various cuts.

*Karen Moroney is a member of Mitta Valley Landcare Group. Simon Feillafe is Mitta to Murray Landcare Facilitator. Simon's position is funded through the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program. For more information go to [www.mittavalleylandcaregroup.com](http://www.mittavalleylandcaregroup.com) or email [sfeillafe@outlook.com](mailto:sfeillafe@outlook.com)*



*Landholder Ben Teek from Tallangatta South next to a fence on his property that has been damaged by deer.*



An invasive cacti identification workshop coordinated by the WESI Team at Cactus Country, Strathmerton in 2019.

## Understanding weed history helps control future spread

When faced with an early invader weed at a new location, it's interesting to consider that every weed has a history. How did the weed arrive at this location? Was it dumped in garden waste or were the seeds carried by a bird from a nearby garden? What garden did it come from



Diminutive and mighty-spreading South African weed orchid (*Disa bracteata*) in grassy woodland at Beaufort in November 2016. This weed can be difficult to identify contributing to its establishment in Victoria.

and what is the history of its horticultural origins, popularity, cultivation and use as a garden plant? All weeds must come from somewhere. Every weed has a history.

### The South African weed orchid (SAWO) story

In 1996, before the internet and mobile phones, faxes were being used to alert Victoria's chief rangers, flora and fauna and catchment coordinators, about the threat of an invasive orchid. A South Australian botanist and conservationist, Enid Robertson, alerted Victorians that South African weed orchid (*Disa bracteata*) had spread from Western Australia to South Australia and rapidly established itself in the landscape.

Unfortunately, South African weed orchid (SAWO), also called African weed orchid and Monadenia, had already arrived here. The first record was near Bacchus Marsh from 1991 and it was probably in Victoria earlier. The tricky thing with SAWO is that it is small, hard to see and looks like our indigenous ground orchids. Despite its size SAWO releases 2.5 million highly mobile seeds per plant each year.

Fast forward to spring and early summer of 2020. A very wet season and great growing conditions for SAWO. People familiar with SAWO started reporting huge population increases and first-

time recorders started finding it in new locations. The distribution map on the Atlas of Living Australia now shows many dots in southern Victoria. It is well and truly established and continuing to expand its range. That's in just 30 years.

The very fine seeds of SAWO can be blown kilometres by the wind and are easily spread by machinery, vehicles, and on footwear. In hindsight, it was unrealistic to think it could have been stopped from entering Victoria given the seed-source upwind in South Australia.

### Early invader weeds

Fortunately, there are many environmental weeds that can be prevented from establishing in new areas. Many of them are grown as garden plants. Some recent examples include Amazon frogbit (*Limnobium laevigatum*), stinking hellebore (*Helleborus foetidus*), and African or cape daisy (*Dimorphotheca* or *Osteospermum* species).

Amazon frogbit is a floating aquatic plant from South America that is being traded for aquarium and garden use. The first infestation was recorded in Victoria in 2019 at Gembrook and further infestations have been discovered at various sites around Melbourne and in Gippsland. These are under active management to prevent their establishment.



A serious threat to wetlands and waterbodies, floating aquatic pond plant Amazon frogbit (*Limnobium laevigatum*) in Gippsland, February 2020.

**By Kate Blood and Bianca Gold**

Stinking hellebore is a perennial garden plant from Europe that was recorded recently on a roadside in far south west Victoria within an area of significant native vegetation.

There are several species of African or cape daisy that have been popular with gardeners in recent years and are increasingly being seen in areas of natural vegetation and on random roadsides.

### **The WESI Team**

We can influence the future of early invader weeds. DELWP has a statewide project team called Weeds at the Early Stage of Invasion (WESI). The WESI project supports public land and biodiversity managers, including environment-based community groups and volunteers to manage high-risk invasive plants at the early stage of invasion that threaten biodiversity.

The WESI team provide information tools, run training activities on early invader weed identification and share information through social media. You can also subscribe to our online newsletter to help raise awareness and build capability of those dealing with early invader weeds.

### **Fire and environmental weeds**

In late 2020, the WESI team collaborated with many agencies and groups, including Landcare Victoria Inc., to develop a series

of four webinars about environmental weed management after fire. Each webinar showcases practical examples based on scientific knowledge. The webinars were recorded and remain viewable on-demand.

The webinars were funded by the Victorian Government's \$51.5 million Bushfire Biodiversity Response and Recovery program. For more information go to [www.wildlife.vic.gov.au](http://www.wildlife.vic.gov.au) and search for biodiversity, response and recovery.

We may have missed our chance with SAWO in Victoria, however, we can prevent other weeds from becoming established. Landcare group members and landholders are well placed to observe their local environment, observe changes and notice plants that look out of place. Investigating new plant arrivals, recording their location and reporting them early can prevent early invader weeds from getting a foothold. It is essential to seek advice and follow through, including monitoring.

Using the WESI project early invader weed tools and activities can assist with familiarising yourself with new weeds, working out what risk they might pose, how far they have spread and deciding what to do about them. Understanding the history of weeds can reduce their impact on the future.

*The very fine seeds of SAWO can be blown kilometres by the wind and are easily spread by machinery, vehicles, and on footwear.*

*Kate Blood and Bianca Gold are the WESI Team at DELWP funded under the Weeds and Pests on Public Land Program. For more information go to [www.environment.vic.gov.au](http://www.environment.vic.gov.au) and search under invasive plants and animals and early invaders, email [customer.service@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:customer.service@delwp.vic.gov.au) or call 136 186.*



*Invasive garden plant African or cape daisy (*Dimorphotheca* or *Osteospermum* species) on a roadside in the Wimmera in October 2016. How did it get here?*

# Fox and rabbit control on the Bunurong coast

By Jillian Staton and Susan Koci

Over the past three years South Gippsland Landcare Network (SGLN) has been working with project partners including West Gippsland CMA, Parks Victoria, Trust for Nature and other stakeholders on fox and rabbit control across 16,000 hectares of the Bunurong coast.

The area contains important remnant vegetation including 10 threatened plant species, 30 threatened fauna species and is visited by 17 internationally important migratory birds.

The Bunurong coast forms a large portion of SGLN's boundary and is a priority landscape under the Victorian Government's *Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037* plan.

Modelling and local knowledge indicated one important way to conserve biodiversity in the area was to reduce the impact of foxes and rabbits on fauna and flora. A joint proposal was developed by SGLN and the West Gippsland CMA in 2018 with funding provided by the Victorian Government's Biodiversity Response Planning program to implement the project.

The aim of the three-year project was to achieve a reduction in fox and rabbit numbers, and give landholders the incentive and skills to carry on control work into the future. Staff from Bass Coast Landcare Network and independent local contractor,



The Bunurong coast at Venus Bay, South Gippsland. The area has high biodiversity values.

Peter Wright, carried out control activities on both public and private land.

## Engaging with public and private landholders

Landholders along the Bunurong coast include Parks Victoria (which manages the Cape Liptrap Coastal Park), South Gippsland Shire Council (SGSC), large and small-scale farmers, lifestylers, holiday homeowners and township residents.

SGLN used its existing relationships with Tarwin Landcare Group, Trust for Nature, and Friends of Venus Bay Peninsula to engage with as many private landholders as possible. In total 30 private landholders, plus Parks Victoria and SGSC agreed to participate.

Landholders were given the opportunity to obtain their Agricultural Chemical Users Permit (ACUP) and 1080 accreditation at training days organised and funded by the project.

## Targeted fox baiting

Contractors determined the best locations for 1080-baiting and soft-jaw trapping based on landholder knowledge, known fox habitat, vegetation and topography. Free-feeds (poison-free meat) were laid at potential sites and field cameras recorded which animals, if any, took them.

The site was abandoned when non-target animals were observed. Trapping was used in areas of high human activity.

Fox control was timed to coincide with lambing and fox breeding seasons, and to avoid holiday periods. So far, seven five-week-rounds of baiting have been carried out at 185 stations, resulting in 1759 baits being laid. Fox activity at the baiting sites (scats, prints, digging patterns, camera images) show that 421 lethal baits have been taken by foxes.



Peter Wright setting up a soft-jaw fox trap at Venus Bay in March 2021.



Modelling and local knowledge indicated one important way to conserve biodiversity in the area was to reduce the impact of foxes and rabbits on fauna and flora.





Trapping and baiting has reduced fox numbers along the South Gippsland coast.



*Fox control was timed to coincide with lambing and fox breeding seasons, and to avoid holiday periods.*



Alongside baiting, soft-jaw trapping has been carried out nine times for periods of seven nights. Forty traps have been laid at 20 sites near Venus Bay and Point Smythe, capturing 44 foxes.

**Wet spring hampers rabbit control**

Prior to releasing the calcivirus, contractors carried out spotlight surveys to identify areas with dense rabbit populations and provided free-feed carrots to encourage rabbits. This was followed by the dispersal of 600 kilograms of K5 calcivirus-inoculated carrots across 52 locations. The carrots were fed out during summer to coincide with low food availability and high fly numbers.

COVID-19 restrictions caused delays in providing training, and some landholders were reluctant to allow contractors on their properties. Fortunately, SGLN and the contractors had COVID-19 SafeWork plans, which eased most people's concerns.

The biggest challenge for rabbit control was the weather. The rabbit population declined significantly after the early 2020 release of calcivirus, but the following warm, wet spring provided ideal conditions for the population to increase. Also, two cooler than average summers have resulted in fewer flies, which reduced the spread of the virus.

Contractors report that the number of bait-takes and trapped foxes has declined since the start of the project, indicating that

the fox population has decreased. This conclusion is supported by fewer signs of fox activity, increased lambing rates and fewer foxes as roadkill.

The initial reduction in rabbit populations was encouraging, and indicated that in more favourable weather conditions, the K5 calcivirus will be effective.

An important part of the project was asking landholders to commit to ongoing

control work so that native flora and fauna can recover from the impacts of foxes and rabbits. SGLN is offering training in best practice pest control, by assisting landholders achieve their ACUP and 1080 permits. Training was delayed due to COVID-19, but it was held in May 2021.

*Jillian Staton is President of SGLN. Susan Koci is Project Support Officer for SGLN. For more information email [info@sgl.net.au](mailto:info@sgl.net.au)*



Jason Good, Bass Coast Landcare Network's Pest Plant and Animal Team Leader, laying 1080 bait for foxes along the Bunurong coast at Tarwin South.

Crew members were from a range of backgrounds, many whose working lives were upended by coronavirus (COVID-19) and the associated lockdowns.



The South East Environmental Work Crew with landholders Richard Price and Marijke de Bever-Price on their Jindivick property.

## Work crews blitz weeds and change lives

By Barry Kennedy

With fires raging across much of the eastern seaboard in December 2019, Melbourne-based IT professional Belinda McPhee felt a call to action. She wanted to champion the environment with her own hands rather than from behind a keyboard.

Less than 18 months on, and despite an untimely pandemic, Belinda now gets her hands dirty daily combating weeds and other environmental threats.

Belinda is one of more than 60 people who joined the Port Phillip and Westernport CMA's (PPWCMA) Environmental and Agricultural Work Crews project as a member of the Central Environmental Work Crew.



Belinda McPhee at the Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater nursery in Yellingbo learning how to divide and propagate seedlings.

"I worked in IT for 15 years, but then there was just this day I thought, the world's on fire, I have to do something, so I quit that day," Belinda said.

"I enrolled in a Certificate IV in Conservation and Land Management and I was getting so much out of it and the volunteering for my practical studies, and then came coronavirus (COVID-19).

"I lost a little momentum with the volunteering in particular, but I got out on Parks Victoria land in between the lockdowns and in the course of the studies I learnt about the CMA's work crews."

Supported by the Victorian Government through the Working for Victoria Initiative, the PPWCMA's Environmental and Agricultural Work Crews project supported farmers, organisations and community groups to deliver their agricultural and environmental projects while providing employment to Victorians. The PPWCMA was one of a number of organisations delivering projects through this initiative.

Six crews worked across the western (Werribee and Maribymong catchments),

central (Yarra catchment) and south-eastern areas of the Port Phillip and Western Port region to provide a range of agricultural and environmental services.

### Crews tackle weeds on public and private land

The crews were allocated to a mix of settings each day, including Parks Victoria and local government properties, Landcare work sites and private agricultural properties.

Crew members were from a range of backgrounds, many whose working lives were upended by coronavirus (COVID-19) and the associated lockdowns.

For Finnish-born Western Environmental Work Crew member Melissa Tuliranta, 2020 started in Warrnambool where she was working from home supporting an eco-tourism business she had founded. By the time she relocated back to Melbourne mid-year, her former industry had stalled, and she was living off JobKeeper.

But toiling with mates tackling weeds and being part of a team has been a tonic for her.



Melissa Tuliranta removing tree guards from a former Grow West planting site.



*Landcare groups and landholders have seen weed and pest infestations confronted, and stalled projects reinvigorated.*



"I have the best crew; we are all completely different in our life experience and background but are really like minded," Melissa said.

**Crew members make friends for life**

"When you are together all day working beside each other, you end up learning a lot about everyone – I think we'll be friends for life. At the end of the day I can see the impact of our efforts to take out weeds like prickly pear in Bacchus Marsh and boneseed at Plenty Gorge – it's really satisfying."

Last year Aaron Harris was a pro-golfer and a manager at a pro-shop, but this career stalled with coronavirus (COVID-19). Aaron is now second in charge of the Central Environment Work Crew.

"The pandemic made me reassess everything and it demonstrated how fleeting so many of our concerns are. My empathy went out to nurses and supermarket staff keeping us going throughout COVID-19... since this role came along, I've gained an appreciation for Landcare – all of these people are making serious contributions to the world."

"I've learnt so much about how our Australian environment is imperiled by weeds and pests and what an effort it takes as a community to rehabilitate it," Aaron said.

**Blackberry attack succeeds**

It's not just the crew members that have benefitted. Landcare groups and landholders have seen weed and pest infestations confronted, and stalled projects reinvigorated.

Marijke de Bever-Price witnessed the blackberry problem on her Jindivick property obliterated in one day.

"We have a wetlands project that we had replanted through a Landcare grant which is actually a citizen science site for the local primary school kids."

"Birds dropping blackberry seeds had set off an infestation which had got out of hand. When the crew came, my husband and I got to work with them – they had a real motivation about them – once they took in what they were doing they just got to work and were so positive and mindful," Marijke said.

Since the program began the crews have worked at more than 50 sites.

The crews were assisted by members of the Andersons Creek Landcare Group and Moorabool Landcare Network. Invasive weeds including boxthorn, boneseed and pittosporum have been tackled.

Crew members have received training in first aid, chemical handling, and animal safety.

The PPWCMA's Environmental and Agricultural Work Crews project concluded in May 2021. Many crew members are now getting paid employment in the environmental sector as well as volunteering for groups.

**Barry Kennedy is Regional Landcare Coordinator for PPWCMA. For more information email [barry.kennedy@ppwcma.vic.gov.au](mailto:barry.kennedy@ppwcma.vic.gov.au)**



Aaron Harris at a weed control and replanting day at Yellingbo Conservation Reserve.

# Strong community relationships help repair and restore land after fire

By Lyn Coulston

The Upper Murray Landcare Network (UMLN) is located in Towong Shire in north east Victoria. The eight member groups are centred around the Cudgewa Creek Catchment, the Biggara/Bunroy area, along the Murray River at Tintaldra and in the upper catchment of the Koetong creek. The North East Blackberry Action Group (NEBAG) and the Upper Murray Catchment Farm Tree Group are members of UMLN and operate across the entire area.

In 2003, fire and drought in the region led UMLN to reflect on how to support landholders following natural disaster. It was clear that being well prepared would provide the best chance of delivering on-ground support to landholders and achieving the most effective land management outcomes.

The Community Recovery Committee set the goal of being better prepared for any exceptional circumstances by 2015. UMLN took this on board from a land management perspective and started to put in place processes to ensure land managers would be supported in a timely way so they could respond to natural events which impacted on their ability to manage their properties.

## Blackberry a priority after 2003 fire and drought

Consultation with community members on areas of concern saw weeds, and in particular blackberries, identified as a priority by land managers and the wider community. The North East Blackberry Action Group was formed, and an engagement process began where property managers were asked to agree to a visit and sign on to a three-year blackberry management plan. No one who was contacted refused a visit and it took two years for the initial visits to be completed.

A project officer was employed for six weeks a year to visit properties and offer follow up support annually. Herbicide wasn't provided, however an incentive to establish access tracks on steep slopes to protect remnant vegetation was offered. The blackberry infestations were most severe on underutilised land on the difficult to access slopes which was often where remnant vegetation was threatened.

While blackberry management was the initial reason for the engagement, most people became interested in taking an



Garth Short demonstrating chemical control using drones in hard to access sites.

integrated approach to better management of their properties. The project manager referred landholders to UMLN and its member groups where they could then apply for funding to repair gullies, fence wetlands, and plant corridors and shelter belts.

Most importantly, by asking people what they wanted to know, the attendance at field days and information sessions increased and new skills were learned. This approach has now been in place for 15 years. More than 200 land managers have been involved and there has been a reduction in blackberry infestations from more than 5000 hectares to 800 hectares. The program is overseen by a strong and committed steering committee of Landcare representatives, public land managers and plantation owners.

While gains were made with weeds, pest animals continued to be an overwhelming problem. In 2015, the community identified deer as having a severe impact on water quality, vegetation, and pasture in the valleys of the Upper Murray.

A forum was convened to hear from speakers about the status of deer and management options. This was followed by a facilitated workshop to identify the main concerns and find out if anything was being done to assist private landholders to control deer and reduce impacts. Gaps in landholder knowledge about options were raised, along with the problems being caused by illegal hunting and antisocial behaviour such as shooting from roads near rural properties.

As a result of the workshop a *Deer Management Folder for Private Landholders* was published to provide information for people without the internet. A Rural Watch Program was also set up and signs were provided to rural communities.

Submissions were prepared for the Parliamentary Enquiry into Invasive Species Management and lobbying was done with local Members of Parliament. Our recommendation that the commercial harvesting of deer be made legal was adopted. This provides a royalty for deer harvested on private property for



NEBAG committee members with a remote controlled mulcher at a Victorian Blackberry Taskforce field day at Walwa in March 2020. From left, Kevin Whitehead, Charles Kidd, Lyn Coulston, Noel Cheshire, Hugh Dunchue, Ben Clifton (Project Officer), Barton Roberts (Executive Officer of Victorian Blackberry Taskforce), and Terry O'Keeffe.

landholders. Deer numbers have declined after the recent fire and work is underway constructing deer exclusion fences where practical.

### 2019 fires test preparedness

The sustained efforts of the last 15 years to engage and develop relationships with land managers were tested when the worst-case scenario occurred in late December 2019. Devastating bushfires swept through the Upper Murray. The huge loss of livestock, homes and livelihoods impacted most residents and the surrounding land and water resources.

NEBAG and UMLN members who hadn't been burnt out met three weeks after the fire to design an immediate recovery program via an Expression of Interest form for an onsite visit and assessment of land management works needed. This was distributed through many channels to be completed and returned when the landholders were ready.

Nine requests were received before the end of January 2020 and 131 property visits have been undertaken to the end of February 2021. All the assessments were costed and then we waited for grant

opportunities to become available. This didn't occur until June 2020.

Funding was received in November 2020, too late for the planting season. Blackberry was prominent in assistance requests with burnt plants already 20 centimetres high just three weeks after the fire.

Essentially, we are starting again – repairing land and water assets and dealing with weeds we thought we had controlled years ago. The purple hills returned with a massive flowering of Paterson's curse not seen for many years as the biocontrol agents had done their job well. Unfortunately, the seed bank was still in the soil and after the fires came through and the rain started, there was no holding it back.

We have learnt that preparedness gives an immediate advantage, and that relationships and trust mean a lot in a crisis. Although the blackberry program is about weed management it was the beginning of a 15-year collaboration with many partners about many different land management issues. When people reached out to Landcare, we were ready to respond. We will continue to do so thanks to our committed volunteer members, facilitators and land management professionals who generously share their time and skills.

*Lyn Coulston is UMLN Secretary.  
For more information email  
umlandcare@bigpond.com*



A field day on deer exclusion fencing held at Nariel Valley in June 2018.



*By asking people what they wanted to know, the attendance at field days and information sessions increased and new skills were learned.*





A group of upcoming rabbit control leaders in the field at Euroa in 2018.

## Rabbit control leaders share knowledge across communities

By Heidi Kleinert

**Who can you go to for advice on rabbit control if no one in your community or workplace has the knowledge? Can you find everything you need on the internet? What do you do when local rabbit expertise has been lost to retirement or organisational churn?**

The Victorian Rabbit Action Network (VRAN) and Agriculture Victoria have co-designed a course on leadership in rabbit control to rebuild rabbit knowledge in Victoria. The free course is open to people from communities, agencies and industry who have a stake in controlling the impact of rabbits across our landscapes.

Three courses have been delivered across Victoria since 2015, training more than 60 people. VRAN plans to make the course an annual event. The course is delivered by VRAN mentors who share their knowledge and experience of best-practice rabbit management and community-led action. The aim is that course participants become their local 'go to' person on rabbit management.

A mix of classroom and field-based training gives participants an opportunity to experience the tools and equipment used in an effective rabbit control program. The course covers ecology, rabbit biology, Victoria's legislative framework and how

to implement an integrated rabbit control program.

VRAN recognise that rabbit issues are complex for everyone. Mentors discuss their personal experiences such as working in sensitive cultural heritage landscapes, the challenge of rural and peri-urban environments, the importance of collaboration, community engagement, and why rabbit work is challenging.

Networking is a key focus of the course. Participants get to learn alongside a group of people who are facing similar scenarios and challenges. This broadens networks and builds a community of interest.

Three learning networks have been formed to provide ongoing support and motivation after the training. Rabbit management is hard work. The learning networks are an opportunity for members to get together to exchange ideas, share challenges, seek feedback on programs and provide a deeper understanding of how complex rabbit management can be.

The learning network programs often include a field trip to a location where a member is working on a rabbit program so members get a firsthand look at each others workplace or backyard. If members have information gaps they can call on guest speakers to join the meeting.

Evaluation of the course and learning networks shows that participants have increased confidence in best-practice rabbit control, improved relationships across different parts of the rabbit management system, and changed mindsets about how institutions and community groups can work together.

VRAN is aiming to boost the capacity of these local leaders and create a ripple effect across Victoria, with rabbit knowledge being sustained and shared across communities.

**Heidi Kleinert is the VRAN Executive Officer. For more information go to [www.vran.com.au](http://www.vran.com.au)**



# Cactus control at Mt Korong – step by step

By Kate Lee

**Mt Korong Eco-Watch (MKEW) is a group of 20 landholders and community members who come together to support the biodiversity of Mt Korong and surrounding country in north central Victoria.**

Wheel cactus (*Opuntia robusta*) and to a lesser degree prickly pear (*Opuntia stricta*) had been encroaching on large areas of public and private land across Loddon Shire, spread largely by parrots eating their fruits. In 2018, MKEW decided to institute a regime of cactus control at Mt Korong before the infestation grew to uncontrollable levels.

As we are a small group of mainly older members, we took a systematic, persistent control approach. The target area was broken up into clearly marked chunks that could be covered by a handful of volunteers during a three-hour working bee. The cacti are stabbed in each outer lobe with an injection of herbicide (transported in a backpack) using a specially adapted sheep-drenching gun. The working bees were held from 9am until noon on the same day as our monthly meetings.

MKEW obtained permission from farmers adjoining Mt Korong and Parks Victoria before starting work in August 2018. Parks Victoria Ranger Nic Van Den Bronk joined us for our first working bee and a local farmer donated a drum of herbicide after we treated his cacti. Our injecting gear is borrowed from the Loddon Plains Landcare Network.

After our initial working bee in 2018 we had three in 2019 and three in 2020. Between three and 10 workers turn up and we usually manage to cover the day's target area. Participants walk in line-search style, with one person marking our leading edge using GPS tracking. That way we can document the extent of areas treated.



Wheel cactus on Mt Korong before injection.



MKEW volunteer Lachlan Peters at a cactus control working bee in 2020.

Cacti are injected, photographed, mapped, and marked with spray paint as we go. Slopes are tackled in stages by placing people up the slope at 10-20 metre intervals and following contours, rather than participants climbing straight up and down repeatedly, which is exhausting.

Our map shows that at least one more working bee is needed before we have completed a full sweep of the whole of Mt Korong Nature Conservation Reserve. The steep, southern slopes of the mount are generally too moist and sunless for cacti, so will probably not require treatment.

The next stage of the project will be to begin retracing our steps with hoes and buckets to pick up any cacti germinants



The same cactus ten months after treatment.

and to treat any mature cacti that may have been missed.

The group is proud of its efforts to rid Mt Korong of wheel cactus and prickly pear. It's great to see these weeds eradicated from this beautiful landscape.

### Some tips for cactus control

- Strike early before the job is too big.
- Concentrate on the area your group takes responsibility for and do the job gradually, in manageable chunks.
- Don't worry about low numbers in your group. Even a few people can achieve a lot.
- Encourage young family members to come along and join in.
- Treat the project as a fun social occasion and great exercise.
- Plan your project well, follow safety precautions and map your progress.

**Kate Lee is Secretary of MKEW. For more information email [katiecarrotlee@gmail.com](mailto:katiecarrotlee@gmail.com)**



*Wheel cactus (*Opuntia robusta*) and to a lesser degree prickly pear (*Opuntia stricta*) had been encroaching on large areas of public and private land across Loddon Shire, spread largely by parrots eating their fruits.*





# An early strike at tree dahlia in the southern Otways

By Oliver Kerr

**Weeds are a huge and often demoralising problem in the southern Otways. Plants like blackberry are common across the landscape and seem to recolonise as quickly as you remove them. Eradication can seem like an impossible dream.**

The Southern Otway Landcare Network (SOLN), along with its partner organisations, has decided to prioritise emerging weeds. By implementing targeted and comprehensive control, we hope to be able to remove new weed species before they become widespread. This benefits the environment, is an efficient use of resources and provides some positive results for our members.

Along the eastern branch of the Barham River tree dahlia (*Dahlia imperialis*) has escaped from gardens and is rapidly spreading along the course of the river. Tree dahlia is a fast growing perennial from South America. It grows up to five metres high with thick bamboo-like canes and has large purple flowers. Tree dahlia grows quickly in riparian areas, choking out native species and altering the hydrology and natural ecosystem of the river.

Late last year, while cycling home after work, I got chatting with a local landholder who was concerned about the spread of weeds. According to Greg Ware, the tree dahlia had spread more than a kilometre in the past five years. I suggested a monthly working bee and Greg jumped at the idea.



SOLN volunteers attack a clump of tree dahlia at our first working bee on the Barham River, near Apollo Bay.

Our first working bee, in conjunction with the Otway Barham Landcare Group (OBLG), was on Greg's property on the Barham River near Apollo Bay, where we trialled cutting the tree dahlia, pasting the cut ends with herbicide, and stacking the branches on a large blackberry patch. Removing the branches was critical as tree dahlias send down roots and re-sprout from fallen branches. Recent heavy rains

meant the river had swollen so we were not able to access as many of the clumps as we had hoped, but we removed three infestations on the near bank and got the ball rolling.

Greg's family organised a barbecue and provided fresh scones with homemade blackberry jam. The working bee was a great social occasion for the 14 people who attended (including children and babies) as we were just coming out of lockdown restrictions.

At the next working bee, we targeted an upstream infestation and approached another landholder who has happy to be involved.

This has been a highly successful venture for SOLN and OBLG. We have engaged new members and built an increased awareness in the community around emerging weeds. SOLN and the OBLG are now applying for a grant to extend their tree dahlia control project. The battle has only just begun, but with the potential to remove a damaging weed permanently from our environment, it is well worth the fight.

**Oliver Kerr is a project coordinator with SOLN. For more information email [oliver.landcare@soln.org](mailto:oliver.landcare@soln.org)**



This fallen log was discovered under a large clump of tree dahlia. Thanks to the Leopold Football Club for their help in rescuing it.



# Strategic support tool helps guide Southern Ark expansion

By Kimberley Height and Alex Kusmanoff

**The Southern Ark project is the largest wildlife management project in Victoria, delivering effective fox control across one million hectares in East Gippsland, for the benefit of native wildlife.**

Over the last 15 years, Southern Ark has reduced fox numbers to very low levels using approximately 5000 bait stations distributed across the national parks and state forests in the East Gippsland Forest Management Area.

The intensity and scale of the 2019-20 bushfires destroyed much of the vegetation and ground cover across the Southern Ark project area. This put surviving native animals at even greater risk from foxes, as they struggled to recover in an environment with little food and shelter.

After the fires, a decision was made to expand Southern Ark as part of an integrated invasive species management program across the fire-affected landscape. Land managers were faced with complex decisions about which areas would be most suitable for the expansion. There were many factors to consider, including local knowledge of pest animal threats, post-fire assessments and which native species were most in need of protection.

A key support tool for this planning was Strategic Management Prospects (SMP). SMP is a publicly available tool developed by DELWP that helps identify what actions to do and where to do them, based on the greatest benefit to the most species at the least cost.



A fox checks out a lure at a trapping site in the Club Terrace State Forest near Cann River.

In the case of the Southern Ark expansion using SMP reassured program managers that delivering fox control in the newly identified areas would provide the most benefit to native species after the fires.

In 2020, the Southern Ark project area was expanded over approximately 106,000 hectares, including a 64,000-hectare extension into the Colquhoun and Kenny State Forests, and the Tambo Forest Management Area.

The Southern Ark team closely engages with local communities across East Gippsland and the community has continued to support Southern Ark as it expands to deal with the impacts of the fires.

Andy Murray, Southern Ark Operations Manager, has received many messages of support from the community.

"Landholders have been disheartened by the devastation but also cheered by signs of recovery. The Southern Ark team was

on the ground quickly restoring sites and equipment and this has been a positive sign for the community," Andy said.

This community sentiment is reflected in support from the Victorian Government and key stakeholders. The ongoing support provided to Southern Ark will help ensure that wildlife in East Gippsland have the best chance of survival into the future.

The Southern Ark project is managed out of the Orbost DELWP office and funded through the Victorian Government's Weeds and Pests on Public Land and Bushfire Biodiversity Response and Recovery programs.

SMP is available through NatureKit, one of DELWP's publicly accessible data tools at [www.environment.vic.gov.au/biodiversity/naturekit](http://www.environment.vic.gov.au/biodiversity/naturekit)

**Kimberley Height and Alex Kusmanoff are Project Officer and Senior Policy Officer at DELWP. For more information on Southern Ark email [Andrew.murray@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:Andrew.murray@delwp.vic.gov.au)**



Endangered long-footed potoroos are benefitting from the expansion of the Southern Ark.



Now that gorse has been controlled in and around Ararat, the native vegetation can flourish.



Gorse in seed at Mt Clear in 2020.

# A community approach to gorse in Ararat and the Upper Hopkins

By Ayesha Burdett

**Gorse is an upright, woody shrub with bright yellow flowers that can produce huge numbers of seeds. The seeds spread rapidly and can remain dormant in the soil for up to 30 years. Gorse is one of the worst weeds in Victoria. It degrades pasture and creates habitat for rabbits, foxes, and feral cats. It is a tough weed to tackle and requires ongoing vigilance.**

The Ararat Landcare Group (ALG) and Upper Hopkins Land Management Group (UHLMG) have been working with industry partners to reduce the spread of gorse in the region since the early 2000s.

It is a project that has required dedication and persistence from many Landcarers.

Initially, the gorse was so tall and dense that it was impossible to walk through

and Cemetery Creek was completely covered. The Ararat Prison Community Support Gang worked to clear heavy infestations of gorse in 2002, which enabled access to Cemetery Creek so the gorse control program could continue. Recently, a Working for Victoria work crew from Glenelg Hopkins CMA has assisted with gorse control on crown land around Ararat.

Now that gorse has been controlled in and around Ararat, the native vegetation can flourish. The existing native vegetation has been supplemented by tree planting projects by Landcarers, high school students and other community members. The landscape in the Flint Hill Reserve has also been significantly improved.

Part of the success of the weed control program in Ararat is due to the dedicated



Keith Little investigates the recent herbicide spraying of gorse along Cemetery Creek. Regrowth will be monitored and controlled by Ararat Landcare Group members.

volunteers and the partnership between ALG and UHLMG with support and coordination from Peter Forster and Una Allender. This partnership has resulted in control of the gorse infestation around Ararat, on public land, and along key waterways and roadsides. The groups continue to share equipment and knowledge.



*Gorse is controlled along Cemetery Creek (left of the fence) by Ararat Landcare Group members. On private land, gorse is starting to dominate the understorey.*

### **Impressive commitment from Ararat locals**

John Graham was one of the leaders of Ararat's gorse eradication program. John was an incredibly active member of the ALG, committing two mornings every week to spraying gorse and other weeds, while carefully avoiding native vegetation. John spent 14 years controlling gorse and training others to identify and control weeds. His efforts have made a remarkable difference.

Other leaders in the war on weeds in the region include Peter Forster, Keith Little, Aileen Banfield and Stephen Hughan.

It is an ongoing challenge to control weeds as they spread along waterways, roadsides, and on private land in the region, and Landcare members continue to monitor the sites and remove gorse by spraying and chipping during their monthly working bees.

**Ayesha Burdett is Landcare Facilitator for UHLMG. Ayesha's position is funded through the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program. For more information email [Facilitator@upperhopkins.org.au](mailto:Facilitator@upperhopkins.org.au)**

## Hands-on action across the catchment

*By Peter Forster*

My memories of gorse go back 60 years when Ararat was surrounded by a ring of dense gorse infestations. Cemetery Creek, which runs through Ararat, was heavily infested. Taking the shortcut to school on my bike involved threading my way through dense gorse.

In the 1980s, Christine and I returned to a family sheep farm south of Ararat. We soon realised we needed to improve our land management practices. This included work on controlling a large infestation of gorse on Captains Creek. We joined the Upper Hopkins Land Management Group (UHLMG) and started fencing and revegetating the creek upstream where erosion was an issue, but not gorse.

UHLMG's priorities at that time were addressing dryland salinity, gorse and rabbits. We worked on recharge planting and gorse control on waterways and roadsides. We obtained an ex-government spray unit for members to use and a small grant from the Victorian Gorse Task Force (VGT) for chemicals to tackle gorse on all major waterways. The Ararat Shire also contracted the group to map gorse and spray roadsides.

Roadside weed control responsibility has now shifted from adjoining landholders to local government. This change in responsibility has greatly improved control of many weed species. Glenelg Hopkins CMA also contributed to gorse control in the Upper Hopkins region with a program called Woody Weed War on Waterways.

Some farmers were reluctant to control gorse when the upper catchment

peri-urban area was heavily infested. Fortunately, the urban Ararat Landcare Group (ALG) was formed with assistance from the South West Landcare Project and the Ararat Council. ALG members organised a gorse mulching trial on Cemetery Creek at the Western Highway entrance to the city. The group obtained a spray unit and worked on crown land in and around Ararat with CMA and VGT grant assistance.

An offshoot from the ALG was the Ararat Regional Biolinks Group (ARBG), which took on committee of management responsibilities for many crown land areas around Ararat. They were very effective in obtaining grants from DELWP to control gorse on Cemetery Creek and other crown land areas.

The end result of this coordinated attack on gorse and other woody weeds is a much healthier catchment and more biodiverse wildlife corridors on many waterways. The dense stands of gorse at Cemetery Creek at Ararat have been replaced with a public walking track with wildflowers to admire.

The UHLMG, ALG and ARBG continue with their great work, having already achieved a much-improved catchment condition for all to enjoy.

Christine and I still monitor Captains Creek for new gorse plants more than 30 years after we began our first control works. The creek is now fully fenced and planted with local native species.

***Peter Forster is a member of the Victorian Gorse Taskforce. For more information go to [www.vicgorsetaskforce.com.au](http://www.vicgorsetaskforce.com.au)***



*Christine Forster inspecting a gorse free Captains Creek in September 2010.*

# Weed warriors of the south west

By Kristy Brewer

Victoria's south west boasts a breathtaking coast, vast stands of native forests, heathlands and swamps, and many productive farm enterprises, but for those of us who recognise pest plants it can be hard to stay positive and focus on the beauty. The rapid rate at which pest plants are marching down the highways and through the back roads of our farmland and on towards our greatest assets can feel overwhelming.

Our catchment is most likely just like yours – full of energetic people committed to partnerships and projects aimed at protecting and restoring the biodiversity of our landscapes for our communities to enjoy now and in the future. This is a brief roundup of some of the weed warriors of the region.

**Southwest Environmental Alliance (SEA)** is the Landcare, Coastcare and Friends network in the Portland basin. SEA meets six times a year and encourages groups to get organised, plan ahead, apply for funding collaboratively and to stay positive.

SEA provides a platform for networking and producing media content for the catchment that benefits all the environmental groups who are working together to create positive environmental change. Together we have developed and maintained some great partnerships and are always looking for opportunities to work with new groups and organisations.



Before: Blacks Road near Portland had been infested with sweet pittosporum for many years.



After: Blacks Road Portland after the Southwest Woody Weed Action Team clean up in 2021. Dramatic improvements in roadside character have motivated many new members to join the group.

“

*The rapid rate at which pest plants are marching down the highways and through the back roads of our farmland and on towards our greatest assets can feel overwhelming.*

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Over the past six months SEA worked collaboratively with the Glenelg Shire Council to produce 10 new weed flyers for the region. The flyers aim to inform, educate, and motivate the community to control weeds in their gardens and local bushland environments. In March 2021 SEA undertook a 10-week campaign called Monday's Mongrel to raise awareness of each weed.

**For more information follow SEA on Facebook or go to [www.sealliance.org.au](http://www.sealliance.org.au)**

**Southwest Woody Weed Action Team (SWAT)** is a group of 30 energetic volunteers who have been working together for the past two years in the Cobboboonee forest and surrounding roadsides. SWAT's executive committee has forged partnerships with private landholders and DELWP to control sweet pittosporum on roadsides, private property, crown land and in blue gum plantations.

SWAT has many knowledgeable and weed-savvy members including former DELWP



A Portland Coastal Cliffs Incorporated planting day held in November 2020.



*All the successful weed warrior groups and projects in south west Victoria demonstrate strong leadership and good communication skills.*



staff, weed contractors, farmers and bush enthusiasts. They have expertise in weed control techniques, plant identification and an understanding of fire and ecology. The mix of skills in the team is proving to be a great asset.

SWAT holds a weekly working bee at a pre-determined site. Letterbox drops to landholders surrounding the project site are conducted a week prior to the team's arrival. This is a great way of picking up new members and interest from surrounding landholders.

SWAT is headed by local fisher and farmer Garry Kerr. Garry and his team have worked on SWAT's project outcomes and goals and developed the group's

occupational health and safety policy and procedures. Last year the group undertook a chemical user's course and a chainsaw course. These qualifications are necessary for some of the agencies they are working in partnership with and are also a benefit for insurance cover.

**Portland Coastal Cliffs Incorporated** (PCCI) community group has made a sustained effort to control highly invasive sea spurge on Portland's main beach. PCCI has been running a 'purge the spurge' campaign for two years.

The group, led by Debbie Oakley, who has been involved since 2006, has a fierce work ethic and a can-do attitude. The results of the sea spurge control campaign

have been fantastic. After lots of hand weeding, mainly in among the native plants, and hand spraying in the open dune areas, the endemic native hairy spinifex is now making a comeback.

PCCI has garnered community support through being active on Facebook and posting regular updates. A volunteer who is part of the work-for-the-dole program regularly assists the group and Debbie has used her liaison skills to pursue and maintain many successful partnerships.

PCCI has partnered with Scripture Union Family Mission, the International Student Volunteers Program (through Conservation Volunteers Australia), and the Portland Reengagement Program.

In 2020, the group secured funding through Pacific Hydro to produce a digital story and webpage. For more information go to [www.portlandcoastalcliffs.com/membership](http://www.portlandcoastalcliffs.com/membership)

All the successful weed warrior groups and projects in south west Victoria demonstrate strong leadership and good communication skills. The drive and passion of the individuals involved to improve the biodiversity of our coasts, bushlands, wetlands, parks, farmland and roadsides is inspiring.

**Kristy Brewer is Landcare Facilitator for Southwest Environmental Alliance. Kristy's position is funded through the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program. For more information email [facilitator@sealliance.org.au](mailto:facilitator@sealliance.org.au)**



Participants from the Scripture Union Family Mission and PCCI member Nikolaus Oakley beside an enormous pile of hand weeded sea spurge that was removed in January 2021.



A working bee on the 100 steps in June 2020 provided a good physical workout for TBLC members.

# 100 steps protect Tambo Bluff

By Meralin Fawcus

Tambo Bluff Landcare Coastcare (TBLC) is proud of the recent changes at Tambo Bluff Estate at Metung, adjacent to 90 Mile Beach. A set of 100 wooden steps wind beautifully through restored banksia woodland and hundreds of new native plants indigenous to the area. The original eroded escarpment was part of the old sea cliffs that existed prior to the formation of the Gippsland Lakes.

Several geological layers and land formations laid down over millions of years can be seen in places along the cliff-face but water, wind and time caused a slump in the deep sand deposit. Several old foot tracks created by haphazard pedestrian use had depleted the native vegetation. The thin, erodible soils were not helped by poor drainage and the impact of farming dating back to the 1860s – particularly over-grazing and rabbits.

The fine sand beach that was the focus of family picnics decades ago, has shifted and been altered by prevailing south-westerly winds and storm waves, causing a dynamic change in the environment along the coastline. Much of the sand was moved inland by floodwater and storm waves in the 1990s. A dune swale that lies behind a secondary dune and barrier beach was built up over thousands of years and connects to Dolphin Lagoon to the north, which formed as the barrier beach cut off stream flow to the lake.

In 2005, East Gippsland Shire Council (EGSC) adopted a Tambo Bluff Subdivision Review. Four major walking tracks were proposed by residents and TBLC to replace informal tracks leading from the clifftops to the coastal beaches that were damaging the environment. James Street was identified as a priority.

EGSC decided an existing goat track would be replaced with 100 steps. Plantings of agapanthus were removed and an eradication program for various garden escapees like century plant that was growing on the cliffs, was undertaken.

The project was funded by EGSC and Coastcare, with plenty of people power from TBLC. The mass indigenous planting, maintenance, and watering regimes by TBLC have paid off and the steps now provide an unobtrusive access to Lake King. A mesh path at the bottom of the steps links to the remaining beach track, which was left in its natural state to regenerate.

At the top and bottom of the walkway two illustrated information boards highlight the local birds and animals. A directional bollard on the beach completes the project.

The revegetation provides important habitat and refuge for many native species including swamp wallaby, eastern swamp

rat, bush rat, and agile antechinus. Echidnas and wombats also live here.

The 100 steps were important for local safety and wellbeing during the recent bushfires, forming an integral part of residents' evacuation plans. During COVID restrictions the 100 steps offered a secluded, natural environment as an alternative to home exercise and were used by many residents and visitors.

**Meralin Fawcus is a committee member of TBLC. For more information email [president@tblc.org.au](mailto:president@tblc.org.au)**



The 100 steps at Tambo Bluff after completion.



# Canid Pest Ejectors reducing fox numbers at St Helens

By Lisette Mill

**Canid Pest Ejectors (CPEs) were first developed in the US in the 1930s as a spring activated device for the control of coyotes. The ejectors are staked in the ground and topped with a meat bait. The firm upward motion of a canid grasping the bait releases a sealed capsule of 1080 or PAPP into the mouth of the animal.**

In 2018 Basalt to Bay Landcare Network (BBLN) approached Parks Victoria to secure a permit to use CPEs in the St Helens Flora Reserve inland from Yambuk.

BBLN aimed to reduce fox pressure on southern brown bandicoots by reducing numbers of foxes all year round.

CPEs can be used in winter when the reserve soil is sodden. They are easy to use, are reusable, have a very low risk of off target kill, are used with a remote camera to record visits from predator and prey, and enable accurate record keeping of fox kills.

We began the program in October 2018. Between seven and 12 CPEs are

set around the perimeter and along the internal tracks of the reserve with a remote camera on at least one CPE every month.

The CPEs have been very successful. Foxes do not learn to evade the CPEs and there is no sub-lethal dose or caching of baits – a strong consideration in a farming district when the neighbours all have working dogs. At one CPE we filmed I checked the site every six days and we removed four juvenile foxes over one month. One CPE with an unchanged meat bait attracted possums, wallabies, birds and reptiles but remained untriggered until a fox activated it after three months. No buried bait would survive that long.



*A Canid Pest Ejector with dehydrated beef lure at St Helens Flora Reserve.*



*A BirdLife Warramboul excursion to St Helens Flora Reserve in 2019. The fox control program is helping to protect local biodiversity.*

Overall, we are averaging one dead fox per fortnight. As the reserve provides the best vegetation cover in the area new foxes keep arriving so we plan to continue the program for as long as funding allows.

We have learnt to avoid placing the devices in dense vegetation as rodents, including native species, like to chew off the meat lure. If a CPE isn't triggered for six weeks, it is moved.

Placing CPEs on the edges of the reserve's tracks work best because this is where foxes tend to hunt and travel. A droplet trail of fish oil along the track leading to the lure helps direct the highly sensitive nose of any fox passing by.

The program has had multiple benefits for wildlife. We've been able to detect feral cats on our remote sensing cameras as they are also attracted to the lures. There has been an increase in ground nesting bird species in the reserve and on adjoining farmland and we are seeing evidence of bandicoots in new locations in the Reserve.

***Lisette Mill is network facilitator for BBLN. Lisette's position is funded through the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program. For more information email [facilitator@basalttobay.org.au](mailto:facilitator@basalttobay.org.au)***

# Around the State – News from the Regional

## Aboriginal Landcare Facilitator

Warrnambool Wave School has used a Victorian Junior Landcare and Biodiversity Grant to create a garden of indigenous plants at the school and take a field trip to the Basalt to Bay Landcare Network's Green Line Project. This former railway line site is home to a heritage-listed Aboriginal scar tree that is now managed and protected for biodiversity conservation by VicTrack in partnership with Landcare.

The field trip was an opportunity to learn from Traditional Owner Brett Clarke, a Kirrae Whurrong man, who helped students identify indigenous plants and explained their many uses as food and medicine. Brett also demonstrated a variety of Aboriginal tools and weapons and explained how Aboriginal people used them for collecting, hunting, and harvesting resources on Country.

The day was a great success with both students and teachers learning a lot about Aboriginal culture and connection to Country.

*For more information please contact Jackson Chatfield on [Jackson.chatfield@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:Jackson.chatfield@delwp.vic.gov.au) or 0419 504 451.*



*Traditional Owner Brett Clarke (left) teaches a student from Warrnambool Wave School how to dig tubers using an Aboriginal digging stick.*

## Corangamite

The Australian Government's Wild Otways Initiative, Community Environment Grants Program, has awarded \$855,000 in funding to Landcare and other natural resource management community groups to deliver 23 projects in the region. These projects will deliver critical on-ground works for our community and local environment, including threatened species protection.

In early May the Corangamite, Goulburn Broken, North Central and North East

CMA's partnered to deliver Cascade Connections, a networking and peer learning event for Landcare facilitators across the four CMA regions.

Corangamite Lakes Landcare Area ran a Budj Bim Aboriginal heritage day tour for its community in April, including a visit to Tyrendarra Indigenous Protected Area to learn about complex fish and eel traps. Bellarine Landcare Group has partnered with Agriculture Victoria to trial an online farm planning short course and with the Otway Agroforestry Network through the CMA's National Landcare Program funding to deliver a Master TreeGrower course.

*For more information visit [www.ccma.vic.gov.au](http://www.ccma.vic.gov.au) (Get involved/ Landcare) or contact Elisia Dowling on 0418 397 521.*

## East Gippsland

The community continues to focus on bushfire recovery across the large area that was impacted by the 2019/2020 summer bushfire. Funding has been sourced for several recovery projects including on-ground works, species-specific recovery, capacity building and learning and training projects. Far East Victoria Landcare has employed Shirali Dave as Bushfire Recovery Project Officer working with communities to provide support and project delivery.

Landcare staff from across East Gippsland presented at a Statewide Integrated Flora and Fauna Teams (SWIFT) seminar on fire recovery projects within the region in March and presented at a recovery forum in April.

Landcare groups in non-fire affected areas are working on their five-year strategic plans, as well as looking at project ideas for coming funding opportunities.

*For more information visit [www.egcma.vic.gov.au](http://www.egcma.vic.gov.au) (What we do/Landcare) or contact Carolyn Cameron on 0419 892 268.*

## Glenelg Hopkins

Landcare groups were delighted to see the return of the Victorian Landcare Grants. The grants are a key activity for many of the production focused Landcare groups. They provide an important opportunity for members to collaborate and learn from each other. Strong commodity prices are another catalyst to increase the biodiversity on their farms.

The CMA's Working for Victoria Crew have done a fantastic job assisting many Landcare groups around the region. They have worked on weed control and helped many landholders plant and protect paddock trees.

The Upper Hopkins Land Management Group and the Beyond Bolac Catchment Action Group teamed up to run a marquee at the Lake Bolac Eel Festival Harmony Day. There was a lot of interest in the groups' activities and it proved to be good recruitment opportunity.

*For more information visit [www.ghcma.vic.gov.au](http://www.ghcma.vic.gov.au) (Get Involved/Landcare) or contact Tony Lithgow on 0418 180 996.*

## Goulburn Broken

It was all about facilitation in the region over the first quarter of 2021 – what do we need to do to retain our existing Landcare facilitators and how conservation management networks and environmental volunteer groups go about applying for Landcare facilitator funding through the 2021-24 Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program.

It has been great to see groups and networks getting back to doing some events like field days, property inspections and even face-to-face meetings with the easing of COVID-19 restrictions. We have also been catching up on a few postponed AGMs.

The loss of face-to-face interaction over the past year has highlighted the significant role that groups play in the social connection of our communities.

*For more information visit [www.gbcma.vic.gov.au](http://www.gbcma.vic.gov.au) (The Region/Community natural resource management) or contact Tony Kubeil on 0408 597 213.*

## Mallee

The region experienced below average rainfall over summer and into autumn. There's hope for improved rainfall conditions in the near future.

The CMA congratulates all community groups for successfully completing and reporting their works from the 2019-20 Victorian Landcare Grants. Excellent on-ground achievements were completed through this round of grants, including substantial areas of pest plant and animal control, revegetation, and educational events for schools. We look forward to the projects that will be delivered through the next round of Victorian Landcare Grants.

*For more information visit [www.malleecma.vic.gov.au](http://www.malleecma.vic.gov.au) or contact Nelson Burand-Hicks on 0427 540 469.*

## North Central

The Landcare community has welcomed the recent opportunities to apply for various environmental grants to support their projects and priorities. We wish every applicant the best with their submissions.

# Landcare Coordinators

The Cascade Connections Landcare Facilitator Forum bought Landcare support staff from across four catchments together on 3–4 May in Creswick. Workshop sessions focused on inclusive leadership, resilience thinking and peer-support. 2021 was the event's third iteration. It continues to grow from strength to strength in support of facilitator networking and development opportunities.

The CMA was thrilled to get back out into the community delivering face-to-face drop-in sessions to complement the draft Regional Catchment Strategy release in March. The strategy can be viewed online at [www.northcentral.rcs.vic.gov.au/](http://www.northcentral.rcs.vic.gov.au/)

**For more information visit [nccma.vic.gov.au](http://nccma.vic.gov.au) (Get involved/Landcare) or contact Tess Grieves on 0438 357 874.**

## North East

The Landcare community has been very active with many groups hosting activities. Three networks worked together to host a number of dung beetle workshops for property owners, which were met with great interest.

All the Landcare facilitators funded through the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program have been involved in the process of groups and networks applying for Landcare facilitator funding through the 2021–24 Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program. Groups and networks have also been actively seeking out new funding and grant opportunities and getting ready for the tree planting season over autumn and winter.

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

## Port Phillip and Western Port

Many Landcarers in the region have been busy with grant writing, taking part in the application phase of the 2021–24 Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program, and returning to COVID-safe on-ground volunteer activities.

Another bumper round of applications is expected to be received for the Victorian Landcare Grants. The CMA has the most Landcare and environmental volunteering groups in Victoria, making it a challenging task for the seven members of the Regional Assessment Panel for the Victorian Landcare Grants.

Many Landcare groups benefitted from the Working for Victoria Environmental and Agricultural Work Crews that assisted on dozens of sites across the region clearing woody weeds and planting projects.



*Volunteers at a Tarrangower Cactus Control Group community field day near Maldon treat an infestation of wheel cactus plants by direct injection of herbicide.*

The CMA has announced that it will be integrated into Melbourne Water from January 2022. With all the CMA's roles going across to Melbourne Water through the new arrangement, Landcare support (from 2022) will be part of the suite of services provided by Melbourne Water. However, there is not expected to be any significant change in how these services are provided.

The development and maintenance of Partnership Agreements with Landcare networks and the renewal of a Regional Landcare Support Plan will continue to be developed over 2021.

**For more information visit [ppwcm.vic.gov.au](http://ppwcm.vic.gov.au) (What we do/Landcare support) or contact Barry Kennedy on 0447 821 559.**

## West Gippsland

Parts of Gippsland received decent rain in March which increased soil moisture for tree planting projects. There were many happy farmers as dams and water tanks over flowed.

Yarram Yarram Landcare Network has been successful in gaining \$100,000 in funding through the Australian Government Smart Farms Small Grants Program and will work with farmers, foresters and fishers to improve water quality at Corner Inlet.

Dr Russ Barrow from the National Dung Beetle Ecosystems Engineers project presented a series of field days in Gippsland to educate landowners on the benefits of dung beetles. In addition to these field days, the Regional Agriculture Landcare Facilitator is supporting South Gippsland

Landcare Network to establish dung beetle nurseries throughout Bass Coast, Latrobe and Maffra Landcare Networks.

Maffra and District Landcare Network is working closely with the Wellington Shire to deliver the Wellington Weeds and Pest Animal Control Project.

**For more information visit [wgcm.vic.gov.au](http://wgcm.vic.gov.au) (Getting involved/Landcare) or contact Marnie Ellis on 0472 503 088.**

## Wimmera

After a challenging year for Landcare groups and networks across the region, we are all looking for opportunities to reconnect and inject some fresh motivation and inspiration into local activities.

Landcare facilitator positions will play a vital role in helping to rebuild momentum at a local and regional level by providing support and resources for groups, landholders, and volunteers. Landcare groups who have participated in the application process for the 2021–24 Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program look forward to next steps.

A new soil moisture and weather station program coordinated by the CMA as part of the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund will engage with many Landcare groups across the region to improve management of natural resources and build drought resilience into agricultural and broader landscapes.

**For more information visit [wcma.vic.gov.au](http://wcma.vic.gov.au) (Get involved/Landcare) or contact Joel Boyd on 0429 949 196.**

# Progress and change at Landcare Victoria Incorporated

By Andrew Maclean

In early 2020, the Board of Landcare Victoria Incorporated (LVI) began a major program of reform. Strategic directions and priorities were reviewed with the aim of improving leadership, and the services LVI provides to members. This work was supported by generous donations from the Rendere Trust (Phillipson family), and the Upotipotpon Foundation (Crothers family).

I was appointed in the new role of Chief Executive Officer in July 2020, followed by Claire Hetzel as Landcare Development Coordinator, and Amanda Grace as Office Coordinator.

The board has adopted a new strategic plan for LVI with three key goals: a strong voice for Victorian Landcare; a thriving and resilient landcare community; and, a healthy organisation.

The Landcare community knows how important the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program is for the past and future success of Landcare. An economic analysis completed by LVI in 2020 demonstrated that government support for Landcare facilitators generates a return on investment of at least 7:1. LVI will continue to work with DELWP



The new team at LVI – Chief Executive Officer Andrew Maclean, Office Coordinator Amanda Grace and Landcare Development Coordinator Claire Hetzel.

to ensure the program is as effective and equitable as possible.

Recent activities have included a submission to the Parliamentary Enquiry into Ecosystem Decline where we stressed that reversing the long-term trend of ecosystem decline depends heavily on Landcare.

LVI plans to take a stronger role in securing resources for Landcare. For example, through our national partnerships, we hope to secure substantial new funding for bushfire recovery.

One of our urgent priorities is improving LVI's communication capacity and performance. A new website and more active use of social media will be part of this.

The Board and staff are grateful for the support and encouragement of the Landcare community as we make steady progress towards stronger support for our members.

**For more information email [andrew.maclean@lvi.org.au](mailto:andrew.maclean@lvi.org.au)**

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

Contact Landcare Victoria Incorporated  
Phone: 9207 5527 Fax: 9207 5500 Email: [info@lvi.org.au](mailto: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/](http://www.landcarevic.org.au/landcare-magazine/)  
Back issues of the magazine can be accessed online as pdfs.

## Next issue

Issue 82 of the magazine, to be published in October 2021, will feature stories on the winners of the 2021 Victorian Landcare Awards. The theme for issue 83, and details on story submission will be provided in issue 82.

To contact the magazine's editor email: [editorviclandcare@gmail.com](mailto:editorviclandcare@gmail.com)



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