



*We do what we  
can, where we  
are*

Earthcare  
meeting  
Thursday  
February 23  
8.00pm

**POWER TO  
CHANGE**

-----  
Call Bob and  
Alyson to join  
rakali watch  
9531 5001  
-----

Call Zoe to join  
or observe  
penguin  
research  
0402 164 482  
February 26  
March 12  
March 26  
April 9  
April 23

Gardening on  
the breakwater  
That's new!  
30<sup>th</sup> April  
11 am

Penguin  
Symposium  
June 11

# Earthcare News

February-March 2006



## **POWER TO CHANGE**

**SARAH CAMERON**  
8.00pm February 23<sup>rd</sup>

at

**Ecocentre, corner Blessington/Herbert Sts  
St Kilda**

**KICK-START COMMUNITY ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE**

An Elwood Canal Rakali



## MEMBERSHIP

PLEASE  
RENEW  
YOUR  
MEMBERSHIP

Earthcare  
runs on a  
shoestring.

EARTHCARE  
needs  
membership  
numbers  
to get grants

EARTHCARE  
needs  
membership  
money to  
survive.

If you are not  
a member  
you are not  
insured as a  
volunteer.

**The AGM  
will be  
on the  
20<sup>th</sup> April  
2006**

## RAKALI WATCH

The Symposium was held at the end of October with over 40 people attending the day sessions and 20 + in the evening. Another symposium will be held at the end of 2007.

Our major project this year is to make a short educational film on Rakali living on the breakwater, Albert Park Lake and Elwood canal. Our other project is to test the water quality at regular intervals in Albert Park Lake. We believe the water quality seriously impacts on the number of animals we see in the lake. We will keep you posted with what we find.

Currently we are seeing good numbers of Rakali around the breakwater and in the Elwood Canal - the Rakali photograph was taken by Andrew looking into a drain about 30 centimetres from the animal while standing in the mud of the Elwood Canal.

Lastly - if you would like to join us then please phone Bob or Alyson on 9531 5001.

## PENGUIN RESEARCH



overweight, feathers all awry, getting dirty and hungry,  
just sitting here waiting for moult to end

This is the busy season for penguin research. A big thankyou to all volunteers for coming during the holiday season and for working very late nights.

The St Kilda penguins are excelling yet again at producing chicks. They have been laying eggs since June 2005 and we still have a number of 4-week-old chicks on the breakwater.

Most of the colony without chicks are moulting and there are tiny feathers everywhere. Each penguin had about 10,000 feathers, about 3 to 4 times more than a flying bird. That's a lot of feathers to regrow, and the penguin has to nearly double its weight before starting the process.

The St Kilda Penguin research team will be celebrating their 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary on June 11 2006. A celebration including a symposium will be on the agenda. We will keep you posted on the final program.

Thankyou to those people who have already paid their membership.



One very big fat premoult penguin

We do not have internet banking. If you do not have a cheque book leave the money in a sealed envelope at the Ecocentre or pay at the next meeting, rakali watch, or penguin night.

I wish to join/ renew membership of Earthcare St Kilda Inc.  
\$10 Concession  
\$20 Individual  
\$30 Family  
I wish to make a donation \$.....

Please return completed form to PO Box 287 Elwood 3184

Name.....New ....Renewal.....

Address.....

Suburb/ City.....P/code.....

Phone number.....

email.....

I would like to receive my newsletter by email YES/NO

My special interest is .....

.....

## Port Phillip Nature Watch



Blue Banded Bee

At this time last year my PPNW article commenced with a report on the Tawny Frogmouths in the St Kilda Botanical Gardens, which were doing very well and managed to raise two broods of chicks.



Winter planting  
dates will be in  
the next  
newsletter

Port Phillip  
Nature Watch  
Call Andrew  
on 9531 2270

Some bad news has occurred since then as the adult female was found dead in the gardens at the end of February, but the adult male and second brood chick stayed around and then disappeared about two months later. The old dead pine tree in which they nested was removed in mid April last year. For the rest of 2005 despite much searching the birds could not be found.

After the bad news of 2005 it is good news in 2006. A family of four Tawny Frogmouths was discovered by David Eades (a local bird enthusiast) in another pine tree in the gardens and Neil Blake saw them soon after. There is an interesting story around this family, which will be told by Neil in the Ecocentre's next newsletter so I will not steal his thunder. I saw the family for the first time today (13 February 2006) and can say all four appear to be in good health.

The only report I got from other Earthcare members was from Jill Sokol on 30 December who noticed something seriously amiss in Elwood Canal with lots of small fish (bream?) dead in the water at low tide on the bend of the canal between Broadway and John St. She noted that the rotting algae lining the canal seemed very much on the nose and wondered what the bubbles were rising from the bottom. I had a look the next day and observed exactly the same phenomenon as described by Jill.

The likely cause of the fish deaths (mostly Smooth Toadfish and the odd bream) is a natural process called eutrophication, which occurs when bacteria consuming dead plant matter take up nearly all the available oxygen in the water and release CO<sub>2</sub> in return. Seaweed and algae had been accumulating for some time in the canal late last year creating ideal conditions for this process to occur. When there was a combination of very hot conditions in the high 30s to low 40s (as temp rises water has a reduced ability to store oxygen) and a very low tide the situation arose in which the fish could not survive. Most fish are clever enough to move out with the tide and I have seen many heading out, but for those that remained death was inevitable. The water is usually again habitable for fish when the high tide returns with fresh oxygenated water.

The bubbles seen rising from the mud at the bottom in such conditions are likely to be methane or CO<sub>2</sub>, which are created by bacteria and other microorganisms eating dead organic (mostly plant) material in the soil.

#### Satin Flycatcher

While going for the usual walk and doing a routine inspection of the blue wrens near Elwood Canal, I noticed what I initially thought was a Willie Wagtail in the sheoaks. I then noticed this bird was behaving in a very different manner and observed it was being a lot more elusive than a typical Willie Wagtail. I got one good look and took this photo before it disappeared, and immediately recognised it was a male **Satin Flycatcher**. For most of the time during my observation the flycatcher stayed low in the dense vegetation before moving to higher branches in the sheoaks where I could get a good look at it.

Even though they look superficially similar the Satin Flycatcher can be easily identified from a Willie Wagtail in that it has a glossy blue sheen over the black plumage, a shorter tail in proportion to body length and a slight crest on the head. It does not wag its long tail nor does it have a white brow, which are the distinguishing features of the Willie Wagtail.

I asked Michael Norris, a very experienced naturalist and wildlife expert for City of Bayside (he is now a councilor) and he informed me that there have been very few sightings of this bird in Melbourne's bayside suburbs. He has recorded them about once every four years, almost all occurring in November, the same month as my observation.

#### Native Bee

In my Elwood garden I heard a high pitched buzz and saw this insect actively darting around and then hovering absolutely still around a flowering Black-anther Flax-lily, *Dianella revoluta*. On closer inspection of an image I somehow managed to take and after referring to a reference on insects – *A Field Guide to Insects in Australia* by Paul Zborowski & Ross Storey, I identified it as a **Bluebanded Bee, *Amegilla* sp.**

It was easier taking a photo of it hovering for about a second before it darted away at high speed, than it was when settled on a flower obtaining pollen, an activity which only took a fraction of a second with a lot of rapid movement.

This native bee is solitary and live in burrows excavated in hard soil. The larvae are housed in wax-lined cells and are fed with beebread, dry pellets composed of pollen and honey by the parent.

Andrew McCutcheon.