



Earthcare News

we do what, we can where we are

PLANTING

Johnson Reserve
corner of Longmore
and Cowderoy Streets
West St Kilda
Saturday
6th November
1-3pm

PENGUIN VOCALISATION

Bernice was unable to present her paper on penguin vocalisation last month, so she will give a short presentation before Stuart talks about frogs on 28th October. Bernice has been recording penguin sounds each time the penguin research team has gone out this year and we look forward to her analysis of these calls.

BBQ

Celebrate another successful year of Earthcare Activity and make a few decisions for next year at the Earthcare meeting on Thursday 25th November 7.30pm

Its Weed Buster week

WEEDS

We've got big ones, little ones, spikey ones, pretty ones nasty ones, and all stages in between.

Help remove them before they seed

**West St Kilda Beach Salt Marsh
Saturday 16th October 1pm-4pm**

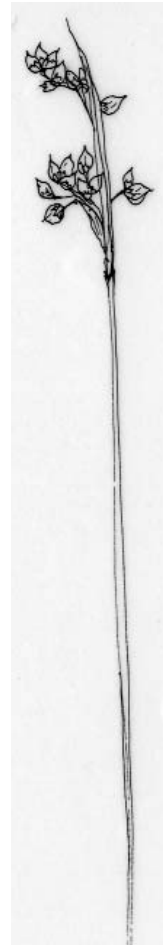
details 0402 164 482

They are easy to remove because they are in sand.



THIS IS A REALLY IMPORTANT TASK
PLEASE COME

Read the Natural Heritage Areas column page 2



Earthcare Meeting Thursday 28th October 7.30pm

FROGS

Stuart Cochrane

Author and Publisher of

Frogs of the Mornington Peninsula and surrounds will be giving an illustrated talk to Earthcare about the frogs in the City of Port Phillip and how we can maintain the current populations and habitats.



NATURAL HERITAGE AREAS IN THE CITY OF PORT PHILLIP

PENGUIN UPDATE - SEPTEMBER 2004

We've seen many chicks this breeding season, and Phil probably experienced the highlight of the year witnessing an egg hatch one research night. We've seen chicks as young as just a few days old, and a number of pairs in good condition. However, there have been some concerns about chicks that we have seen once and then been unable to locate on subsequent research nights.

Are the rakalis a danger to them? We have had excellent rakali sightings on recent penguin nights, and the discovery of a crab claw near a broken egg shell has fuelled speculation that perhaps the rakalis may be preying on very young chicks.

There have been nights when we have seen and heard many penguins, but have only caught a few, and in recent weeks the numbers we have microchipped have been down. Generally, the population appears to be in good condition. The males are around 1200 grams and the females about 950grams.

Sally Cowden



Penguin Research Nights
St Kilda Pier
October 3 and 17
November 7 and 21
Call Zoe 0402 164 482 for departure time

Readers will have noticed comments in our last newsletter regarding the recent change in contractors employed by the Council for the maintenance of the natural heritage areas (or indigenous vegetation areas) in the CoPP.

Earthcare has been very happy with the quality of the work done by the previous contractor - Naturelinks- in maintaining and improving the natural heritage areas, some of which were in very poor condition before being taken over by Naturelinks. Earthcare has been intimately involved in the establishment and maintenance of several of these areas - West Beach and Canterbury Rd in particular, over many years. As recently as June this year, following some intensive community planting and weeding days at West Beach, the site was looking fantastic for the Coast Action Day.

Unfortunately, over the past few weeks, members of Earthcare have been dismayed to notice the increasing weed infestation on several sites, including West Beach, Johnson Reserve, Canterbury Road Reserve, Balaclava Rail and the Elwood Canal and foreshore. West Beach, for example, is infested with its nemeses - juncus acutus and medic, and some of the thistles on the Elwood foreshore and other sites are waist high. These weeds need to be removed before they turn to seed and make an already big problem even worse. Increasing rubbish is also a growing problem at some of the sites.

Admittedly, it is spring time and we've had a fair bit of rain, which has accelerated the growth and multiplication of the weeds. However, weed control is a key task in the management of these areas and the Council should have been well aware that the timing of the contract changeover in the spring season needed to be well managed, and properly resourced - by Council to ensure that years of hard work by Naturelinks and community volunteers is not lost.

On October 7, members of Earthcare and Friends of Port Melbourne's Foreshore met with Council staff and the Contractors to plan indigenous vegetation activities for the next twelve months. At this meeting, we raised the urgent need to deal with the current weed infestation and rubbish as a priority.

The natural heritage areas are important community assets, into which many hours and years of volunteer, community effort and expertise have been invested. You can find out more about the natural heritage areas on the CoPP website at:
http://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/indigenous_vegetation_areas.htm

If you have any concerns about weeds or rubbish in any natural heritage areas, please report these to the City of Port Phillip.

Sue Pennicuick



Port Phillip Nature Watch

Over the last two months I have experienced two interesting sightings and one unusual sighting.

The first was a **Tawny Frogmouth** sitting on a branch of a Plane Tree in Meredith St, Elwood. I was returning back from a late night walk and noticed the bird in the tree and thought maybe if I rush home and get the camera, it might still be there. It was and here is the photo to prove it. These birds are very patient when looking for food, and will typically stay put on a branch for a long time waiting for a small animal to appear on the ground below before pouncing on it. I am not sure what the bird will find on a suburban naturestrip or in a small front garden; possibly a marbled gecko, or more likely snails, insects, spiders or other arthropods commonly found in the garden and which come out at night. Whatever the prey, they are surviving well in our general area, and are continuing to breed in the old pine tree in the St Kilda Botanic Gardens.



The second set of interesting sightings were of gannets and other seabirds feeding on schooling fish along our foreshore in August to early September, as did happen exactly a year ago (see Earthcare News, Oct-Nov 2003). The best sightings I witnessed off Point Ormond were on 13 August and 1 Sept. The second sighting was particularly spectacular in which well over 100

Australasian Gannets accompanied by crested terns and a few Pacific Gulls were in a feeding frenzy for at least half an hour within 20 metres of the shore all the way between Elwood Canal and Pt Ormond! I estimate that a high proportion of the entire colony, which breeds and roosts at Popes Eye (in The Rip near Queenscliff), was present in Elwood that afternoon, including juvenile birds with brown plumage. I managed this time to get some good pictures of the action, including this one clearly showing some diving action



Also, although not as spectacular, I have seen other seabird feeding activities over those two months regularly off Pt Ormond, Elwood Beach and St Kilda Breakwater. The four species always involved were **Crested Terns, Little Pied Cormorants, Silver Gulls** and most interesting our **Little Penguins** diving for small schooling fish, probably anchovies often within 10 metres from the shore. I managed to take this picture of a penguin swimming off St Kilda Breakwater on 3 September. It was feeding on a large school of fish massing in what appeared like a dark cloud against the outer edge of the breakwater.



If ever there was a good indicator that Port Phillip Bay is coming back into good ecological health, it would have to be sightings of sea bird feeding frenzies such as those experienced above and that by Colin Smith below. Hopefully threatening proposals such as channel deepening will not put an end to this.

And now to the unusual sighting: While representing Earthcare at a meeting at Sandridge Beach with City of Port Phillip, Spotless and Friends of Port Melb. Foreshore on 14 September to discuss issues relating to management of the natural heritage areas; I was distracted by an unusual looking bird in the vegetation nearby. After identifying it I was able to interrupt the meeting and get everyone to witness one of the most interesting, if not unusual, bird sightings for the area. It was a single **Blue-winged Parrot**, which is closely related to the better-known and endangered Orange-bellied Parrot, or 'Trumped up Galah' as Jeff Kennett once called it. The Blue-winged Parrot is a small green parrot with a yellow breast and blue wings, and has a yellow face with a deep blue frontal band extending to but not beyond the eye. It is fairly common in coastal heath and salt marsh areas along the coast, but not usually seen this close to Melbourne's CBD. If anyone thinks they have seen this parrot anywhere along our foreshore please let me know.

Other reports received include:

Sighting of Aust. Gannets (huge flock within 50 metres of the beach at times), crested terns and Fairy Penguins (about 5 in a little gaggle) - also Little Pied Cormorant, Silver Gull and Pacific Gull off St Kilda Beach on 27 Aug 2004 between 3.30 and 3.50 pm by Colin Smith. Even the Silver Gulls were diving. Colin Smith looked up from his desk on the morning of

1 September at 11.50 to obtain a glimpse of two pelicans flying over St Kilda Beach. It was a very fleeting

observation but a positive one. Zoe has also reported Pelicans as frequently seen on Albert Park Lake, and less frequently near the Catani Gardens.

On 3 September Neil Blake was very pleased to report Striped Marsh Frogs in the new ponds recently created at Westgate Park.

On 1 October Zoe reported seeing the first hover flies for the season in her garden, and also has froglets emerging from her pond as well as newly laid frog spawn. Many birds are feeding on the grevilleas, despite having two watchful cats in full view. One bird will keep watch (usually a wattle bird and grumble at the cats) while the others feed. So far in the contest its birds 100%, cats nil. The first marbled gecko appeared two weeks ago, but the garden skinks have not appeared yet.

Keep those reported sightings coming in; I am sure there is plenty to see in what appears to be a good spring! If you see any wildlife no matter how insignificant they may seem to you, please let me know.

I can be contacted on 9531 2270, or
email amccutcheon@melb.globaldial.com.

EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT RAKALI BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK

Over the past couple of months a number of people have sent us some fascinating information and photographs on Rakali.

A farmer's daughter from the Echuca area informs us that chickens on their farm have been attacked and killed by Rakali. At first we were sceptical until she described them as the 'rats with the white tails'.



Rakali have been observed breaking into chicken coops to eat eggs and carry off chickens.

On the last Penguin research night we stumbled across 13 middens and spied around 6 individuals along 300 meters of the St Kilda breakwater. Judging by the bits of shell we found the Rakali are doing well. However, and this is just a sneaky suspicion based entirely on circumstantial evidence, we are beginning to wonder if the Rakali along that part of the breakwater are responsible for the disappearance of chicks!

A researcher from WA has designed small radio collars that she hopes to place around the necks of Rakali.

Rakali don't like cold water, which could be one of the reasons we haven't seen so many over the past few months.

One email received recently was asking us to identify a 'rat like animal with a white tip to the tail' observed swimming in a river located in the Blue Mountains of NSW!

Here is an email I received from someone a few weeks back with a lovely photo.

For months my moored boat in Fairlight Sydney NSW has been visited nightly by some type of animal. This animal has been leaving pieces of fish and squid behind not to mention its faecal matter that I seem to find most often as it squeezes through my toes. I thought it could have been roosting ducks or European Rats that grew accustomed to the water and made nightly forays to search for food. I learned about the possibility that it could be a Rakali after doing a little research but people at the Zoo seemed doubtful. The people at WIRES didn't even know what the animal was. Two nights ago I set a live trap to see just what was coming aboard. It turns out that the Manly /Fairlight and probably many other waterfront suburbs in Sydney have an active community of Rakali or water

rats. I have attached a picture of the animal. I released it straight away hoping that the trauma of being in a trap would scare it in to not coming on board again and making a mess.

Lastly – the Rakali watch is going into recess until early November as Alyson and I are overseas.

INVASIVE SPECIES COUNCIL

Despite the disastrous impacts of introduced species such as foxes, rabbits and blackberries, over one hundred new species of foreign plants and animals are introduced into Australia each year. Many of these will harm our wild life, worsening the plight of our threatened species. Some will affect our lifestyles by damaging our homes and gardens, or add \$4 billion annual cost to industry.

Even though the impacts are immense and ongoing, invasive species aren't being tackled seriously. An alarming number of invasive species are still coming in, and staying in Australia.

The Invasive Species Council is a new, independent, non government organisation set up to campaign and advocate to stop further invasions and to contain invading species already present,

One of their objectives is to set up Rapid Response Task Forces to quickly eradicate emerging invaders.

The Earthcare Committee agreed that we should join this council.

INDIGENOUS PLANTS OF THE SANDBELT is almost sold out. Plans are underway to reprint with a few minor alterations.

This has been an extremely successful publication and we look forward to other innovations on the original subject matter.

NORTHERN PACIFIC SEA STARS

Some students from Brighton Secondary College will be going out to collect seastars from around St Kilda Pier and Breakwater on three occasions during October.

They are doing this as a special project, due to the initiative of one of their students who has previously helped in the sea star collections.

Neil Blake and Zoe Hogg have both seen many small seastars on the beach apparently dead after windy conditions. Are they just stunned or are they alive and well?



WHAT'S ON

Weeds

West St Kilda Beach
16th October 1-4pm

Penguin Vocalisation

Ecocentre
28th October 7.30pm

Stuart Cochrane

Frogs

Ecocentre
28th October 8.00pm

Planting

Johnson Reserve
Corner Longmore/ Cowderoy Sts
St Kilda West
6th November 1-3pm

Penguin Research

St Kilda Pier
October 17
November 7 and 21

BBQ

Ecocentre
Thursday 25th November
7.30pm

Earthcare committee meeting 2005 will be in January and the AGM will be in February.

S.K.I.N.C'S SPRING PLANT SALE!!

This year the St.Kilda Indigenous Nursery Co-op is holding its spring plant sale at the Eco-Fair. The Eco-Fair is a new monthly event presented by the Port Phillip Eco-Centre in the St.Kilda Botanical Gardens and S.K.I.N.C are excited to be holding their sale there this year.

The Sale is to be held on the 6th of November from 10am to 4pm at the Cnr. Herbert and Blessington Streets St.Kilda. On sale will be plenty of beautiful indigenous plants, all native to the bayside area of Melbourne. Tubestock and 6" pots will be available at very cheap prices. This year's focus will be wildflowers and grasses including the gorgeous native bluebells that are always popular. Other plants will also be available such as shrubs, groundcovers and pond plants.

S.K.I.N.C's annual sale is always an enjoyable day; being a part of the Eco-Fair this year will be even better. There will be live music, other interesting stalls to visit and the gardens to explore or relax in.

S.K.I.N.C is dedicated to conserving our local flora and providing plants and landscape services to our community at reasonable prices.

Don't forget S.K.I.N.C is mainly a wholesale nursery but is open to the public Monday to Saturday 10am to 4pm (closed weds during winter), and is located at the rear of 525 Williamstown Rd Port Melbourne

Hope to see you at the SPRING SALE!!!!!!

Contact:

Anna Whitelaw or nursery co-ordinators; Rosey Haas, Vanessa Devereux

S.K.I.N.C (St.Kilda Indigenous Nursery Co-operative)
525 Williamstown Rd Port Melbourne

Ph/fax 9645 2477

skinc@iprimus.com.au