



Earthcare News

We do what we can, where we are

**MAY – JULY
2003**

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SPECIAL ARTICLES

See page 3 for an update on the Northern Pacific Seastar and the Giant European Fanworm

See page 5 for Port Phillip Nature watch



Giant European Fanworm – S. Spallanzanii

EARTHCARE MEETING AND ECOHOUSE BONANZA

Thursday 29 May – 7 for 7.30pm
ECOCENTRE
55a Blessington St, St Kilda

**GUEST SPEAKER
JULIAN DONLEN
President of the Ecocentre**

**ALL WELCOME
LIGHT REFRESHMENTS PROVIDED**

The EcoHouse project aims to inspire builders, architects, home-owners and tenants to find environmentally sustainable ways to build, renovate and live in houses. The EcoHouse is a sustainable demonstration and education house,

office and community Centre.

Earthcare initiated the EcoHouse project in 1999. The major structural aspects of the projects are now complete. John Thwaites MP, the Honourable Minister for Sustainability and Environment, and Liz Johnston, Mayor of the City of Port Phillip are set to launch the project on 5 June (World Environment Day).

The EcoHouse Bonanza is Earthcare's way of celebrating this important milestone. It will also provide an opportunity for Earthcare members and interested residents to learn more about the project and be empowered to make positive, environmentally friendly changes to their houses and lives.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – 27 March '03

The evening was opened by a general chat with refreshments which gave everyone an opportunity to get to know each other. This was followed by a brief presentation of the annual report and the election of a committee.

Cam Walker from Friends of the Earth was Earthcare's guest speaker and he talked about global warming and the effects not only on St Kilda but on low lying islands and the resulting global warming refugee problem.

Many thanks to the previous committee members for all their hard work over the last year and welcome to new members.

EARTHCARE COMMITTEE 2003

President..... Sue Pennicuik
Co-president..... Jo Samuel King
Vice President..... Andrew McCutcheon
Secretary..... Zoe Hogg
Treasurer..... Angela Suter

Committee Members

Matt Green	Rob Scott
Alison Strachan	Ina Nelson
Yvette Jaczina	Amanda Richter
Jess Abrahams	Joe Malignaggi
Robyn Mitchell	

NEIL BLAKE Wins Centenary Medal

Congratulations to Neil Blake on winning the Centenary of Federation Award. As most people at Earthcare know, Neil's achievements are legendary. In his quiet, determined way he has been steadily building communication and understanding between individuals, groups and council staff within Port Phillip and right around the Bay. Here are just a few of his achievements:

- The study of the St Kilda Breakwater penguin colony was initiated by Neil in 1986. Once a fortnight for 16 years, rain hail or shine, a dedicated band of volunteers has gone out to the St Kilda breakwater with Neil to study the penguins in their habitat. Neil has rarely missed the penguin research
- In 1989, Neil founded Earthcare as a practical local volunteer group initially to support the penguin study group. Rapidly, Earthcare became

a group with a much broader focus to protect, research and enhance the indigenous flora and fauna of St. Kilda.

- Neil was instrumental in the founding the Port Phillip EcoCentre to support local community environmental groups and individuals in sustainable living, to protect and enhance biodiversity. Further submissions, again involving Neil, found a home for the concept in the old gardener's cottage in the St. Kilda Botanical Gardens in 1999.
- Neil has shown tremendous dedication to local environmental projects as the EcoCentre's Coordinator. This is most evident in the transformation of the EcoCentre house and garden into a model of urban sustainable design through the Earthcare initiated EcoHouse Project.

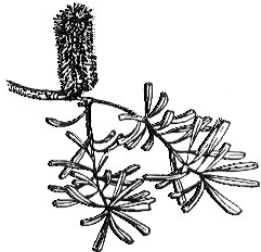
PLANTING CALENDAR

DATE	EVENT	CONTACT	LOCATION/COMMENTS
14 June, Saturday 10am-1pm	Railway embankment re-vegetation, planting and weeding, combined with Sandy Rail	Earthcare www.vicnet.net.au/~earthcare T: 0500 832 784	Grosvenor St (Melways 58D12) Light refreshments, tools & training provided
15 June, Sunday 10am- 4pm	Plantings	Friends of Westgate Park George Fotheringham T: 9428 4820	Free vegie lunch
22 June, Sunday 10am-2pm	Corroboree Tree Grasslands	Parks Community Association John Addie T: 9696 2043	Next to and East of Junction Oval St Kilda (Melways 58 B8)
23 June, Monday 9am-3pm	Corroboree Tree Grasslands With the staff of the National Bank Australia	Parks Community Association John Addie T: 9696 2043	Next to and East of Junction Oval St Kilda (Melways 58 B8)
28 June, Saturday 9.30am-12pm	Plantings	Friends of Port Melbourne Foreshore Janet Bolitho T: 9645 2269	Perce White Reserve (Melways J2M)
20 July, Sunday 10am-4pm	Plantings	Friends of Westgate Park George Fotheringham T: 9428 4820	Free vegie lunch North side of bridge; entry & car park off Todd Road (Melways 56F1)
25 July, Friday 9am-3pm	Schools Tree day Corroboree Tree Grasslands	Parks Community Association John Addie T: 9696 2043	Planet Ark promo support Next to and East of Junction Oval St Kilda (Melways 58 B8)
27 July, Sunday 11am-2pm	National Tree Day Point Ormond	Earthcare M: 0500 832 784 www.vicnet.net.au/~earthcare	Planet Ark promo support (Melways 67A3)

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALISON STRACHAN

Who recently gave birth to a beautiful baby girl – we wish you sleep filled nights and happy days!

INDIGENOUS PLANTS OF THE SANDBELT



“This radiant book would be a marvelous present and should be used by every organisation with land in Bayside ...”

Indigenous Plants of the Sandbelt is a gardening guide for south-eastern Melbourne by Rob Scott, Neil Blake, Jeannie Campbell, Doug Evans, Nicholas Williams

The book has been an outstanding success, with enough sales already to guarantee a second printing.

Earthcare is keen to share this success with our loyal members and **OFFER** this **FANTASTIC BOOK PLUS MEMBERSHIP** for
\$40 single
\$50 family
\$30 student or healthcare card holder

You can post a cheque requesting book/membership offer to PO Box 287 Elwood, 3184.

If you need more reasons, here are extracts from Michael Norris's (Bayside's wildlife guru) review from the excellent Banksia Bulletin Summer 2002 edition.

“This radiant book would be a marvelous present and should be used by every organisation with land in Bayside. It is about the glimpses of a paradise we can enjoy through conservation, revegetation and, above all, gardening. The original paradise – the

vegetation communities and fauna of the Sandbelt stretching from South Yarra to Frankston and from the Bay to the Princes Highway – is sadly largely lost.

The first half of the book has history lessons – geology, a walk through various vegetation communities with Charles French in 1890, human impacts and faunal extinctions – and moves on to planning, planting and tending gardens. The list of 22 interesting remnants implies eight new outings for me! And the stuff on planning gardens – including how to attract fauna - really got me thinking about how to meet the needs of my Three-lined Skinks and Hills Hoist while trying to introduce sun-loving plants and butterflies.

The second half is a visual delight which describes 180 or so Sandbelt plants available from indigenous nurseries. They are divided into wetland plants, ground covers and grasses, small shrubs, medium to large shrubs and trees. The brief text on each species manages to include practical tips on planting and care and much else. Symbols show size, value to butterflies and the months of flowering. With all the photos, such as one of an indigenous thistle, this is also going to be useful as a field guide.”

THE CORROBOREE TREE GRASSLANDS

“... we must thank a lot of volunteers for hand watering”

The Corroboree Tree Grasslands survived the worst of the drought with only 10-15% plant losses. For this we must thank a lot of volunteers for hand watering and an element of bad luck! We sprang a leak in a water pipe in the middle of an area set aside for future plantings. Unfortunately it took Parks Victoria a long time to fix it but...the leak was up the hill from a lot of our newer plantings of *Microlaena Stipoides* so, as the water trickled down the hill for a good part of the summer, they were watered by 'misadventure'.

We are now going into full swing with our plantings. We have about 10-12 000 native grasses to put in over the next 3 months and we always appreciate any help we can get with that task.

Our planting schedule is:

Sunday May 25 - 10 am to 2 pm

Monday May 26 - 10am to 4 pm with the staff of the National Australia Bank

Sunday June 22 - 10 am to 2 pm

Monday June 23 - 9 am to 3 pm - with the staff of the National Australia Bank

Friday July 25 - 9 am to 3 pm - Schools Planting Day

Sunday July 27 - 9 am to 3 pm - National Tree Planting Day.

All welcome

Tools and training provided

Good company and good weather guaranteed!

GREAT SUPPORT FROM INDUSTRY

The Parks Community Association has a number of offers from industry to assist us with our planting program this year. Some have been before - like the ANZ bank; others are joining us for the first time, like National Australia Bank, Holden Ltd and General Electric. The three groups from General Electric should make an enormous difference to our progress for the year. (Already we have 1000 more plants in the ground than we scheduled for this time of the year). 26/5/03. Look for updated schedule at <<http://www.seek.com.au>>

John Addie

President

Parks Community Association

UPDATE ON THE NORTHERN PACIFIC SEASTAR AND THE GIANT EUROPEAN FANWORM...

The subaquatic health of St Kilda harbour appears to be taking another barrage from the Northern Pacific Seastar - *Amurensis*. The

numbers of *Amurensis* have escalated rapidly during May. Our current hypothesis is that they are coming back into shallow water as the water temperature drops.

Our first removal day for the season occurred on Sunday 11 May. It was run by Claire Phillips for her Environment Badge leading to the award of Queens Scout. 6 divers with 7 surface support crew removed 1067 *Amurensis* weighing in at 152rkg.

A survey was carried out prior to the removal day. Not only were the numbers of *Amurensis* extremely alarming, but also the population of Giant European Fanworm - *S. Spallanzanii* was found to be very dense along the Pier. *Spallanzanii* competes with native filter feeders. CSIRO studies suggest that it has the potential to alter nutrient availability, upsetting the trophic balance of the marine ecosystem and leading to a decreased ability of the Bay to absorb nitrogen and leading to favourable conditions for algal blooms.

Amurensis and *Spallanzanii* are rapidly and very significantly changing the ecosystems of the upper parts of Port Phillip Bay and St Kilda Harbour is the most obvious public face of this problem.

We are planning our response to this matter now. This will include more clean-up days of St Kilda Harbour, more detailed surveying of the Harbour and increased public awareness activity. If you would like to assist in these initiatives please email Matt Green on matt@ecosecurities.com.



The Northern Pacific Seastar - Amurensis.

NATURELINKS NEWS

For urban bushland sites within the City of Port Phillip, 2002 to 2003 was a year to be remembered. It saw the departure of Excel Corporation, a dry winter, a dry spring, and a very dry and hot summer, the planting of several thousand plants and the redevelopment of many of the bushland areas.

Over a seven month period, with the assistance of friends groups and volunteers, 25,000 plants were successfully planted. With the hot and dry summer continual hand watering proved advantageous at those sites with water access. This drought also highlighted which species were extremely tolerant to dry conditions. The bad news however is that at a rough count, we lost over 50% of what was planted this year.

Weed control has again used many of the resources of Naturelinks, friends groups and volunteers. There has been a significant reduction in the cover of weed species across Port Phillip, leading to the environmental and aesthetic enhancement of these areas. Naturelinks has used industry-leading technology in the control of a broad range of weed species. This has resulted in weeds

being controlled sooner and, subsequently, a decline in seed production and long term herbicide use. Associated with the reduction in weed cover has been an increase in the identification of native recruiting species.

Over recent years a lack of management plans has resulted in a lack of direction and decline in environmental value of the bushland areas within Port Phillip. It is hoped that this will be the year in which these plans will be written so that direction and attainable goals can be realised. Needless to say, some previously neglected sites had extensive work carried out. Over-dominant species were reduced, fences established, site surveys carried out and litter removed.

Friends groups and volunteers should look forward to a year filled of planting and education. Finally, the staff at Naturelinks would like to thank all of the volunteers who have participated in aiding the environmental ideals for the bushland areas in the City of Port Phillip for 2002 – 2003.



ECOHOUSE

Thank you for your hard work, this Saturday and over the last weeks (and weeks and weeks)! We are getting there. The meeting room is finished and looking fantastic and the interior is virtually complete. The tasks that need doing prior to the launch are as follows:

INTERIOR

1. Finish the internal painting-a little more work in the corridor on the trimmings and we are done.
2. Tiles in the big bathroom and in the kitchen and resource room seem to call out "dirt come and get me" in their current state. We may be able to fix this problem by scrubbing them really clean and then coating them in gloss varnish. This will provide a sealed, easy to clean surface but will require a decent amount of elbow grease.
3. Clean up-once the bathroom tiles are sealed, we can move the gear back in there and do a tidy up and

general clean in the process.

4. Curtains-need cleaning, general attention and hanging. (Are there any more pelmets that need to go up?)

EXTERIOR PAINTING

This is a rather big task. Many of the windows need a decent amount of preparation (sanding and cleaning) prior to painting. Undercoat needs to go on the wood that is to be painted (fortunately most of the wooden windows do not need painting).

TIME FOR VOLUNTEERING

If you have any spare time during the week, please feel free to lend a hand to these tasks-odds on the place will be open and just asking to be attended to. Please ring Neil on 9209 6491 to organise a suitable time-Wednesday is the best day for him.

FUNNY PENGUINS!



During late March and early April we noticed some of the penguins in St Kilda were a strange colour. They were grey/brown with cream splotches, and their feathers were broken. We contacted The Phillip Island Nature Park who also had some brown penguins, although

they not like ours.

Meaghan, Zoe and Amelia collected four penguins and they were sent to the Phillip Island animal hospital where they were named the 'Funny Penguins'. With rest and good feeding they have recovered. Two have completely moulted, one has been released on the breakwater and one at Phillip Island. The other two are well on the way to a brand new set of feathers. Marg Healy Phillip Island animal hospital prefers to release them from the island sanctuary because the birds' plumage is at risk during car travel. Marg says; "if they get hot or pooh a lot, they can actually de-waterproof and you wouldn't know. I'm sure they will be fine getting home on their own as we know that these guys are better navigators than humans with a GPS. The Tassy birds during the oil spill (1995) who were released 300km down the coast and reappeared back in the oil 4 days later are good examples of this."

PORT PHILLIP NATURE WATCH

Welcome to '*Port Phillip Nature Watch*', a new project for all members of Earthcare and other local environmental groups (Parks Community Assoc., Friends of Port Melbourne Foreshore, SKINC etc) to participate in recording interesting or unusual sightings of wildlife within the City of Port Phillip. With more than one hundred members living within the City of Port Phillip, that's 100+ pairs of eyes observing and recording wildlife, at any time or during any activity in your backyard or elsewhere within the municipality such as parks and reserves, beaches and harbours or streets. Everyone, including those with a very limited knowledge of natural history or environmental issues, is encouraged to participate.

Your observation may be very important in helping to determine the status of some species, and possibly tell us how our environment is changing, for better or worse. Over a period of time we will be able to gain a better understanding and build up a database of bird, mammal, reptile, amphibian, fish, insect and other invertebrate species that live within or pass through the City of Port Phillip. Results of this ongoing survey will provide useful data on the biodiversity of our municipality and a potential guide to improved management of our parklands, reserves and foreshore.

Some of you may remember 'The Port Phillip Timelines Project' a collaborative endeavor between Earthcare and the Gould League of Victoria Inc, which had similar aims to this new project. Unfortunately it never got off the ground, but information and data gained from 'Port Phillip Nature Watch' will be used to complement the 'Timelines Project'. It will be forwarded to the Gould League, through the project coordinator.

Sightings will be placed in either one of two categories:

Interesting – Species observed for which the City of Port Phillip is part of their range of natural distribution, but are rare or are not normally seen in an urban or changed environment. Most sightings will be of this category.

Unusual – Species observed for which the Melbourne area is well outside their range of natural distribution. They may be common where they naturally occur elsewhere in Victoria or another State, but are most unlikely to be seen here. Very few sightings are likely to be placed in this category.

This system is very similar to that successfully used by the Bird Observers Club for reporting sightings of birds by club members.

To participate here are some tips:

- If you see what you consider a species of fauna of special interest record how many individuals, exact location, description of habitat, and date/s observed. If you are unsure of what species you were looking at, provide a good description including size, form, colour and distinctive markings. Good references to start with are the books *Wild Things – Fauna of the City of Port Phillip* produced by Earthcare, edited by Charlotte Roseby, and *Secrets of the Seaside Suburbs – A Guide to the Wildlife of Port Phillip* by Meyer Eidelson.
- There are a large number of bird species that would be of

interest, and it is expected that birds will form most of our reported sightings. For example some species I have recently observed include a Great Crested Grebe in St Kilda Marina, Black Shouldered Kite (X2) at Pt Ormond, Crested Pigeon (X2) beside Elwood Canal, White Eyed Duck (up to 20) in St Kilda Botanic Gardens pond, Fork-Tailed Swift (numerous) flying overhead and a Rufous Whistler (single female) in my back garden. Good references are *The Field Guide to the Birds of Australia* by Graham Pizzey & Frank Knight (Angus & Robertson) or *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia* by Simpson & Day (Viking).

- Mammals of interest would most likely be limited to the small insectivorous bats (microbats) which are very difficult to detect, or dolphins, seals and maybe whales offshore. A good reference is *A Field Guide to the Mammals of Australia* by Peter Menkhorst and Frank Knight (Oxford University Press).
- Please do not report wildlife species common to and well established in the area, for example mammals such as Grey-headed Flying Foxes, Brushtail or Ringtail possums or birds such as magpies, wattle birds, white plumed honeyeaters and rainbow lorikeets. This list of course includes very common introduced bird species (e.g. Mynas, pigeons, turtle-doves, sparrows, starlings etc). This also includes the only reptile likely to be seen in the backyard, the Marbled Gecko a common but very secretive nocturnal reptile.
- The chances of sighting reptiles or amphibians are very slim, but two species of frog, Ewing's Tree Frog and Common Froglet, may make their presence heard, especially if you live near a park with bodies of permanent water. Zoe Hogg currently has both these species in her Middle Park back garden, which has a pond and indigenous vegetation. There is a chance of seeing blue tongue lizards or tortoises, but they are most likely to be someone's escaped pets.
- Invertebrates are much harder to categorize and for people to identify, but the most obvious to look for are conspicuous insects such as butterflies, moths and beetles. In March I saw a Monarch (or Wanderer) butterfly, but I suspect it was an escapee from an attempt to display them in the St Kilda Botanic Gardens glasshouse. It would also be interesting if anyone spots the large Emperor Gum moth or its large bright green and blue caterpillars.
- A species of special interest to Earthcare is the Rakali or Water Rat. Any sightings outside the St Kilda Harbour area, such as Elwood Canal or anywhere along the City of Port Phillip shoreline should be taken note of and reported. There is some concern that numbers of Rakali are in decline due to the Northern Pacific Seastar entering the food chain and competing for food (marine mollusks and crustaceans).

All sightings considered as interesting or unusual, which can be reasonably authenticated will be reported in the Earthcare Newsletter. If you have any sightings to report, or any enquiries please contact the project coordinator Andrew McCutcheon on 9531 2270, or email amccutcheon@melb.globaldial.com



**Earthcare
PO Box 287
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VIC 3184**

Phone:
0500 832 784

MEMBERSHIP – *Anyone overdue? – Please pay ASAP*

Thank you for your support during the last year we look forward to seeing you at Earthcare activities in 2003.

Members who joined for the first time after October 2002 will not need to re-subscribe.

MEMBERSHIP OR RENEWAL FORM

Membership of Earthcare St. Kilda Inc. is per calendar year, February to January.

Membership helps to support Earthcare projects and includes a bi-monthly newsletter and information about coming events.

I wish to join Earthcare St. Kilda Inc.

\$10 Student/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.....

How did you hear about us?.....

We're on the Web - See us at:

www.vicnet.net.au/~earthcare

Print Post: 343396/00013

If undeliverable, please return to:

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