



Earthcare News

We do what we can, where we are

**AUG – SEPT
2003**

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SPECIAL ARTICLES

*See Page 2 about the
documentary
“Growing Local
Knowledge”*

*See Page 4 for the story
about the native water
rat - the Rakali*

*See Page 5 for Port
Phillip Nature Watch*

**GUEST SPEAKER, LISA FALDON TO TALK ABOUT THE
CHANNEL DEEPENING PROJECT IN PORT PHILLIP ON:**

**Thursday 31 July – 7 for 7.30pm
AT THE
ECOCENTRE**

55a Blessington St, St Kilda

**GUEST SPEAKER
Lisa Faldon**

Port of Melbourne Corporation

ALL WELCOME

LIGHT REFRESHMENTS PROVIDED

Lisa Faldon, from the Port of Melbourne Corporation will be our welcome guest speaker at the next Earthcare meeting. Lisa will talk about the proposed Channel Deepening Project. This project is said by PMC to be vital for the ongoing competitiveness of Melbourne as Australia's largest container port.

In May 2002, the Minister for Planning announced that an Environment Effects Statement (EES) process would be required for the channel deepening project under the Environment Effects

Act 1978.

In addition, the Commonwealth government has agreed to accredit the EES process to meet the assessment requirements under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act). The EEC is set to be completed within the next few months.

Naturally we are concerned about the impacts that this project may have on the ecosystems of the Bay and we have raised these with Lisa for discussion at the meeting.

Our concerns include:

- The potential impacts on the St Kilda Harbour penguins
- The potential for increased turbidity and mobilisation of heavy metals
- The potential impacts on the tidal flushings and levels in the Bay

Lisa has agreed to come along and brief us on the PMC's activities to assess the potential environmental effects and to answer our questions about this very significant project.

Please come along and bring your friends for this meeting.

EARTH BUMBLEBEES IN VICTORIA

Earthcare has been advised by the CoPP that in early June, the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) 'captured' a large earth bumblebee (*Bobus terrestris*) in the vicinity of the Melbourne Docks. Bumblebees occur in Tasmania, but have not been known in Victoria before and it is thought that should they become established, they could pose a threat to the environment and to primary production. DPI has been conducting surveys on Webb and Appleton Docks and the foreshore and parks and gardens in the area.

If you happen to see what you think could be a bumblebee (they are of a yellowy-brown colour with a white or buff tip on the abdomen, rather than the orangey-brown colour of the familiar honeybee and they are larger than a honeybee), please contact the DNRE Customer Service Centre on 136 186, with details - date, time, location, description, etc. Please note that bumblebees can sting, so DNRE advise that people do not attempt to capture them unless they are a person who is competent in the handling of stinging insects and it is safe to do so.

PLANTING CALENDAR

DATE	EVENT	CONTACT	LOCATION/COMMENTS
Sunday 20 July	10am – 4pm	Friends of Westgate Park George Fotheringham T: 9428 4820	Free vegie lunch. Melways 56F1, north side of bridge; entry & car park off Todd Road
Friday 25 July	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)
Sunday 27 July	National Tree Planting Day 11 – 2pm	Earthcare T: 0500 832 784 www.vicnet.net.au/~earthcare	Point Ormond Planet Ark promo support (Melways 67A3)
Sunday 27* July	Arrive at 9.30, finish by 12 noon	Friends of Port Melbourne Foreshore Janet Bolitho T: 9645 2269	Perce White Reserve* (Melways J2M)
Sunday 27 July	Corroboree Tree Grasslands	Parks Community Association John Addie T: 9696 2043	Next to, and East of Junction Oval, St Kilda (Melways 58 B8)
Sunday 3 Aug	Penguin Research	Details & time Angela T: 9527 8334	Meet at Start of St Kilda Pier
Sunday 17 Aug	10am – 4pm	Friends of Westgate Park George Fotheringham T: 9428 4820	Free vegie lunch
Saturday 23 Aug	Earthcare Planting 11am – 2pm	Earthcare T: 0500 832 784	St Kilda Breakwater – see article below Please contact Zoe 0402 164 482 if you are able to bring a wheelbarrow
Saturday 30 Aug	9.30am – 12 noon	Friends of Port Melbourne Foreshore Janet Bolitho T: 9645 2269	Perce White Reserve* (Melways J2M)
Sunday 7 Sept	Penguin Research	Details & time Angela T: 9527 8334	Meet at Start of St Kilda Pier
Sunday 21 Sept	10am – 4pm	Friends of Westgate Park George Fotheringham T: 9428 4820	Free vegie lunch. North side of bridge; entry & car park off Todd Road (Melways 56F1)
Sunday 28 Sept	9.30am – 12 noon	Friends of Port Melbourne Foreshore Janet Bolitho T: 9645 2269	Perce White Reserve* (Melways J2M)

GROWING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

A 40 minute video documentary is to be funded by the City of Port Phillip called "Growing Local Knowledge". The documentary will be about Dr Beth Gott's research into Koori plants and their uses. Dr Beth Gott has been an active member of Earthcare for many years, contributing immensely to Earthcare's relationship between its members and the wider community.

The documentary will also include interviews with community members, footage of historically, environmentally and culturally significant local site and will be a significant resource to be kept and used by the Koori community.

The resource will be distributed to the council, libraries, schools, universities and environmental groups. The video will also be available for purchase nationally.

It is envisaged that "Growing Local Knowledge"

will contribute towards narrowing the cultural gap between Koori and non-Koori's and the promotion of reconciliation at a grassroots level.

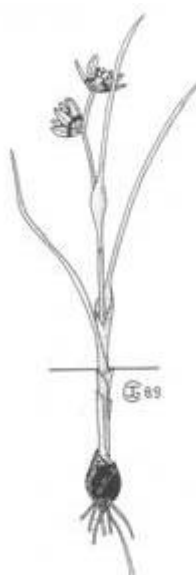
PLANTING ON BREAKWATER

Planting on the St Kilda Breakwater will be on Saturday 23 August, between 11am and 2pm.

The main activity on this day will be transporting seaweed mulch to the end of the breakwater.

When the seaweed has been dumped at the end of the breakwater you will have the pleasure of planting and hopefully watching the vegetation establish itself. You should be able to see its progress from Beaconsfield Parade.

Please contact Zoe on 0402 164 482 if you are able to bring a wheelbarrow.



ABOVE – Early Nancy (Sci: *Wurmbea dioica*) A fine-leaved native lily, the first one to flower in the spring. The flowers are white with purple bands and centres, and are (usually) separately male and female. The corms were probably cooked before eating.

PENGUINS: WHERE ARE THEY? WHAT ARE THEY DOING?



On 15 June there was a wonderful full moon. It was a beautiful night to be on the breakwater looking for penguins...and that is just what we were doing... LOOKING!

We only caught 5 penguins and observed 37 penguins. Not a busy night, but by no means the least we have recorded on a particular occasion. Some of the team are doing some research on these phenomena so look out for further publications of data. There were even less penguins ashore on the 7 July, it was a very windy night and the few that were ashore were snuggled right at the back of their burrows. The ones we

handled were fat and content. The penguin year begins in May and we found our first eggs for the year on 1 June, only one clutch, but they are definitely thinking about it.

The seagulls are busy, they have two nests and chicks were heard in the salt bush. This is a fairly new development on the breakwater we have only once observed seagulls rear chicks. They have occasionally laid eggs but these have been eaten or broken, probably by pacific gulls. Two of the eggs we found on penguin research night have since disappeared.

BAG YOURSELF – A BETTER ENVIRONMENT

News poll research conducted during Clean Up Australia's Bag Yourself A Better Environment campaign shows that Australian shoppers are changing their plastic bag behaviour. Shoppers say they no longer automatically take a plastic bag, with 56% of those surveyed likely to refuse some or all of the bags offered to them. And 43% say they may choose to use alternatives to plastic bags, such as calico or re-useable plastic bags



Bag Yourself A Better Environment is Clean Up Australia's ongoing call for voluntary efforts by retailers and customers to reduce plastic bag

use, increase recycling and reduce the number of plastic bags in the environment and waste stream. The campaign was developed and implemented by Clean Up Australia in partnership with the Commonwealth Government's Environment Australia, Coles, Bi-Lo, Woolworths and Safeway supermarkets, the Australian Retailers Association and members of the community.

People who wish to change their bag habits should contact Clean Up Australia on 1800 024 890.



A new survey of the Water Rat (Rakali) has commenced to determine the distribution and wellbeing of the species in waters within the City of Port Phillip. Little is known of Rakali and their habitat requirements. 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).

The intention of this survey is to give us all a picture of their population size, habits, food requirements and habitat needs. The survey will only consist of observing and recording sightings at dusk and early evening for a duration of about 1-2 hours at fortnightly intervals. Trapping may be considered if at all at a later stage.

The extent of the survey will include all waters in the City of Port Phillip where populations of Rakali are known to exist. Specifically two zones of shoreline will be concentrated on. They are:

- St Kilda Breakwater and harbor area.
- Boat entrance of St Kilda Mariner to Point Ormond, including Elwood Canal.

Other areas such as Albert Park Lake, Port Melbourne foreshore will be considered if it can be confirmed that populations exist along that shoreline.

A database of information will be built up during the

NEW SURVEY ON THE RAKALI (water rat)

course of the survey, which will be prepared and managed by Tiana Preston, a new member of Earthcare. She has recently graduated with a degree in ecology at Monash University, and completed honours looking at the effects of sewage pollution on Port Phillip Bay.

Already two surveys have been completed on 25 June and 9 July, both confined to the St Kilda Harbour area. Findings so far indicate a healthy population, which appears to be coping with foreign invaders such as Northern Pacific Seastars and Giant European Fanworm. In fact the Rakalis have taken a liking to the fanworms, as the remains are present in the animals feeding middens. The June survey was a particularly good night with at least 8 different individuals identified from numerous and frequent sightings. On the most recent survey at least 3 individuals were observed outside the breakwater along its entire length.

Unfortunately only six people turned up for the second survey – not enough to obtain effective results. It's suitable for people of all ages, including kids, with the opportunity to spot other animals along the way.

There will be a rakali watch fortnightly starting 23 July. If anyone wishes to participate please contact Tiana Preston on M: 0403 893 757 or email tianap@hotmail.com, or myself on 9531 2270 or email amccutcheon@melb.globaldial.com.

Andrew McCutcheon

REPORT ON THE 1st RAKALI WATCH FOR 2003

25 JUNE 2003 - approximately 6.30 – 8.10pm – some rakali were observed before this time. Approximately 14 people attended the watch.

As this was our first rakali watch, the aim of this observation night was to introduce participants to the rakali and general monitoring program. It also helped to give organisers an indication of how many participants to expect in future.

The rakali were observed in different areas of the breakwater, giving an idea of where to conduct the monitoring in future. The animals did not seem to be particularly disturbed by torchlight shining directly on them. All of the information will not only give an indication of the rakali in the area, but the best way to conduct the monitoring program in future.

At least 8 rakali were observed. Distinguishing between different individuals was quite difficult, which can be addressed by improving the monitoring program. 1 large

individual was observed on the seaward side of the breakwater, near the fence. Several animals emerged at once in the sheltered side of the breakwater at around 7.45pm. Interactions between the animals (both fighting and apparently friendly play) was observed. Many individuals were seen to either board boats, or eat on rocks emerging from the water. Food eaten was hard to identify, but some kind of fan worms were apparent with 2 individuals. 1 rakali scat was collected.

Depending on the weather conditions, we may either monitor at the pier again, or at the marina. It is hoped that the monitoring will continue every fortnight (coinciding with low tide).

Finally, thank you to everyone who came along to the first rakali watch! Please feel free to invite others, any queries can be directed to Tiana on 0403 893 757 or tianap@hotmail.com. Hope to see you all on the 9th!

PORT PHILLIP NATURE WATCH

Since the launch of *'Port Phillip Nature Watch'* in the last newsletter I have only received a handful of reported sightings of interesting birds by committee members of Earthcare. I am convinced there is plenty to see and report in City of Port Phillip – it is up to all members of Earthcare, Parks Community Assoc., Friends of Port Melbourne Foreshore, and other Earthcare News subscribers to participate and make this project successful.

If you see a bird or animal you consider worth reporting here are the six questions you will need to answer:

- **What species is it?**
If you are unsure of what species you were looking at, provide a good description including size, form, colour and distinctive markings. It may help to say it looks like a well-known species most people can identify, e.g. the bird is large and black like a crow (actually a raven) but has some white plumage. From that description I would identify it as a Pied Currawong, a bird which is increasing in numbers in Melbourne's eastern suburbs.
- **Where exactly did you see it?**
Provide details on the location, which may be your home address, street or park, or section of shoreline. Remember the sighting must be within the boundaries of or directly offshore from the City of Port Phillip.
- **How many individuals were there?**
Was there just one or more individuals observed? If there was a large number sighted make a rough estimate and give an approximate answer to the nearest multiple of ten or even by the hundreds if applicable, e.g. 10+, 20+, 70+, 100+, 200+ or whatever.
- **What type of habitat was the species observed in?**
Was it seen in a tree or shrub, on a power line or building, on the ground, or over sea or within wetland?
- **What were the date, approx. time and duration of observation?**
Determining duration is important as the bird or animal maybe just passing through, spending a short period or maybe taking up residence in your area. If it is a case of a species staying for some time then please provide details on when it was first observed and last seen, or whether it is still there.
- **What type of activity did the bird or animal display?**
Was it moving quickly or slowly, flying/gliding, walking/hopping/jumping, or swimming/floating/diving? Also to the best of your ability try to determine whether it was active or sleeping, feeding, courting/mating, preening, displaying, attacking or defending.

If you have any sightings to report, or any questions about this project I can be contacted on 9531 2270, or email amccutcheon@melb.globaldial.com.

And now some brief notes about observations made by myself over the last few months. Of particular interest is the number of bird species moving into City of Port Phillip, and calling it home

either temporarily or permanently. Many of you may recall that Rainbow Lorikeets were only an occasional sighting as recently as the mid-nineties, but they are now very common, increasing in numbers and have taken up residence, especially in the palm trees around O'Donnell Gardens in St Kilda.

Other species to look for are the Crested Pigeon, which seems to be moving its distribution rapidly south. Its range was previously well north of the Great Divide, but has probably been driven south by a succession of droughts. I know of at least 2 birds that have taken up residence along Elwood Canal, which I have repeatedly seen over the last six months. There are at least 10 in the Elsternwick Park/golf course area just outside City of Port Phillip. Jo Samuel-King observed a single bird in Canterbury Rd urban forest, half way between Fraser and Armstrong streets. From this observation one can conclude they may be taking up residence in Albert Park.

Also over the last six months the recent drought seems to have pushed a number of duck species, which have not been frequently seen in the past into City of Port Phillip. They include Chestnut Teal (Elwood Canal and Albert Park Lake), Grey Teal (Elwood Canal and St Kilda Harbour) and White-Eyed or Hardhead Duck (in Albert Park Lake and St Kilda Botanical Gardens pond). They have joined our regular residents, the Pacific Black Duck and various Mallard hybrids. Whether they stay over this winter is not known, but the chances are they will disperse as conditions elsewhere in Victoria improve.

Recently I have observed a pair of Long Billed Corellas joining in with the Rainbow Lorikeets late in the day at O'Donnell Gardens. Maybe these two birds are considering taking up residence as well. We should know after the next spring. Previously I have only seen them flying overhead to destinations well beyond CoPP. The normal range of distribution is in the Western District of Victoria, but it has recently extended west to the SE Corner of South Australia and more recently east to Melbourne.

Another interesting sighting was by Sue Pennicuk. On 26 May she saw a group of approximately 30 to 40 cormorants mixed in with about 6 or 7 pelicans very close to shore (only 1 to 2 metres from the shoreline) next to the rock breakwater at Point Ormond. They appeared to be diving for fish. At around the same time I remember seeing a similar number of cormorants and 2 pelicans 100 metres offshore at West Beach. They were feeding on fish (probably anchovies), and gradually working their way north towards Port Melbourne.

Andrew McCutcheon

Pied Cormorant

Scientific name:
Threskiornis molucca
Origin and range:
Found over much of northern, eastern and far south-west Australia; not in Tasmania. Found in Africa, across southern Asia, New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.
The pied cormorant is strongly nomadic.





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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

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