



Earthcare News

we do what we can, where we are

August-September 2004

INSIDE

Earthcare Submission on
Channel Deepening Project

Penguin Update

Confessions of a Rat Watcher

Turtle Research in Mexico

Port Phillip Nature Watch

North Pacific Sea Stars

Photographic competition

ACTIVITIES

Planting Calendar

Perce White Reserve.Port
Melbourne 10am-12.00
Saturday 25th September
Sunday 17th October

West Beach St Kilda
16th October 1-3pm

Rakali Research

Wednesday 1 September at
6.15 pm Meeting St Kilda Pier
Rotunda

Wednesday 15 September at
6.15 pm Meeting Albert Park The
Point Restaurant

Wednesday 29 September at
6.15 pm Meeting Elwood Canal
Broadway Bridge

Is anyone available to take over
Rakali watch during October?

Penguin Research Nights

Meet St Kilda Pier
September 5 and 19
October 3 and 17

Call Zoe 0402 164 482 for time.

Earthcare has joined the Port Phillip Conservation Council GEOFFREY GOODE PRESIDENT OF PPCC

**will talk to us about the history and activities of
the Port Phillip Conservation Council**

EARTHCARE MEETING

Thursday August 26th

**7.30 pm at the Port Phillip Ecocentre
55a Blessington St St Kilda**

Earthcare Committee Meeting 30th September 7.00 for 7.15pm
The meeting will be preceded by a presentation of a paper on
Penguin Vocalisation.
All Members Welcome

EARTHCARE SUBMISSION TO THE PLANNING PANELS ON THE PROPOSED CHANNEL DEEPENING PROJECT.

Our submission focussed on the EES process in general and aspects of threats to the general health of Port Phillip Bay and in particular the potential impacts on the Little Penguins. Following is a summary of the submission, which we can be found on our website.

While we acknowledged there has been some formal engagement with the community by the PoMC and its consultants, we observed that the level of engagement had been the minimum to be expected for such a large and complex project. Instead of putting the health of the Bay and community concerns first, it seems to be predetermined that channel deepening will go ahead.

No real alternatives to channel deepening have been explored, so the community is unable to judge as to what would be the best solution from the social, economic and environmental points of view. As a result there is a real sense of a 'fait accompli' - and that the Project is being rushed.

One benefit of the EES process is that it has increased our knowledge of the Bay, its physical processes and complex ecosystems. However, ironically, it has also 'shone a bright light' on how much we still don't know about the Bay. As a consequence, we cannot be fully confident in accurately predicting the effects this Project could have on the long-term health and stability of the Bay.

The economic benefits are difficult to accept. Even on the stated figures, it seems that the Project will cost an awful lot for a relatively small economic

gain, while potentially putting the ecology of the Bay, and particular parts of the Bay, at great risk, directly affecting the communities living beside the Bay.

The 1996 CSIRO Port Phillip Bay Environmental Effects Study categorically recommended that dredging in Port Phillip Bay be minimised in order to protect the vital denitrification function of the benthic organisms.

This is a major reason why scallop dredging in the Bay was ceased. We believe that the importance of the ecological function and services provided by Port Phillip Bay sediments, on which the environmental health, biodiversity and stability of the bay depends, cannot be underestimated or undervalued.

Pressures on the Bay from urban development are already very significant, and increasing. The ability to predict, from monitoring, just when 'enough is enough' seems very low to impossible. In particular, the capacity of the benthic systems to cope with such pressures may already be close to breaking down.

We urge that this issue be given the most serious consideration, both in terms of whether the Project should go ahead at all and, if given the go ahead, what must be done and by whom, to prevent loss of the nitrogen processing capacity of the Bay.

Of particular concern to Earthcare is the effect of dredging in the northern area of the Bay on St Kilda's Little Penguin Colony. The penguins are an iconic species, and being near the top of the food chain are a good indicator of the ecological health of Port Phillip Bay. The colony is currently thriving, with a population estimate of over 500 and growing.

The EES proposes that dredging of the Port Melbourne and Williamstown channels will occur "for 11 weeks predominantly during spring, summer and autumn as necessary in 2005 and 2006." Dredging in the Yarra and Port of Melbourne berths is proposed "for 24 weeks predominantly during spring, summer and autumn as necessary in 2005 and 2006".

We believe that this level of dredging in the north of the Bay, where Little Penguins hunt for anchovies, could result in a significantly decreased foraging ability for the penguins, which rely on good visibility to hunt successfully. The EES acknowledges that "the St Kilda colony may be more prone to 'catastrophic' impacts due to the smaller number of birds that make up the colony." If the channel deepening goes ahead, and if it goes ahead at the pace and intensity proposed in the dredging schedule, we fear that the St Kilda Penguin colony could be at risk of starvation.

The EES acknowledges that the northern part of Port Phillip Bay contains toxic materials within the underlying sediments. Pollutants of significance include lead, mercury, TBT (from ships), DDT, cadmium, petroleum and chlorinated hydrocarbons, concentrated in the sediments of the harbours, drains and creek-mouths,

where the fresh-water meets the salt-water.

The disturbance of these toxic sediments, especially in and around the Yarra River and Williamstown Channel, is likely to significantly increase the levels of toxins found in various fish species. These toxins could pass up the food chain, potentially affecting Little Penguins, as well as other species of water birds, dolphins, and rakali. They will also be a high health risk to humans who regularly fish in the area and consume their catch. As well as the Little Penguins, we also have concern for a range of other sea bird species, which inhabit or seasonally visit Hobson's Bay. They include but are not limited to, Crested Terns, Pacific Gulls, Cormorants (especially Little Pied and Little Black Cormorants), Hoary-headed Grebe and Australasian Gannet.

The City of Port Phillip has a sister city relationship with the Japanese City of Obu, of which the Little Penguin colony is a very important aspect. Earthcare St Kilda's Little Penguin study group has hosted thousands of visitors over the years, including primary, secondary and tertiary students, and there is one Little Penguin tour operator at St Kilda.

Tour boat operators on the Yarra were interviewed, but interestingly not the penguin tour operator. The dredging proposal did not appear to unduly bother most short trip tour operators, as it could even become a talking point when tourists experience the cloudy state of the water. Standards and strategies to prevent and/or mitigate these impacts also need to be prepared for the northern part of the Bay.

We strongly urge the state government to apply the precautionary principle and to explore other transport alternatives before making any decisions about the Channel Deepening Project. We also recommend that, should the Project go ahead in either its present or in an amended form, it is essential that an independent auditor be established to closely monitor the effects of the Project. The auditor should have the power to cease dredging or other operations should adverse impacts or signs of impacts become apparent.

It would also be advisable to set up a panel of interested community groups to assist in overseeing and monitoring the Project. It is vital that the community not just be 'informed' by the proponents of the Project, but be actively involved and able to influence activities and outcomes.



PENGUIN UPDATE

The Penguins have started their breeding season early and we have chicks at various stages of development plus plenty of eggs being hatched. We also have groups of penguins socializing in locations other than the ones they have been previously recorded in.

In mid July the penguins were very heavy but two weeks later their average weight was well down. They have recently been feeding just off the seaward side of the pier along with the other seabirds and you can hear their seagoing yaps as they surface and communicate with each other. We will probably have two breeding seasons this year.

Penguin Research Nights St Kilda Pier

September 5 and 19

October 3 and 17

Call Zoe 0402 164 482 for departure time

CONFESSIONS OF A RAT WATCHER IN WINTER

It's another winter's night on the St Kilda breakwater. A howling wind is whistling around



my ears. It's freezing cold and I am certain it's at least ten degrees below. Now I know how a five and a half foot popsicle feels! Why on earth didn't I put on those two extra jerseys and the thermal undies? Why on earth did I come? I'm certain that I'm not going to see a thing - and I'm cold - and it's now started to drizzle

- what a waste of time.

Let's go home!

Wait! There's one now. Fantastic! It's diving, must count - one two three seconds. What's in its mouth? Wow, it's heading for shore. This is really great, so pleased I'm here. Cold? What cold? Who's complaining! Me? Never! Look over there another one's swimming close to the jetty. Waste of time? Go home? Never!

If you would like to join the Rakali Watch then please phone Alyson and Bob on 9531 5001
Wednesday 1 September at 6.15 pm Meeting St Kilda Pier Rotunda
Wednesday 15 September at 6.15 pm Meeting Albert Park The Point Restaurant
Wednesday 29 September at 6.15 pm Meeting Elwood Canal Broadway Bridge Is anyone available to take over Rakali watch during October?

If you think rakali watch is tough try TURTLES IN MEXICO.

Hi All!

I will set the scene for you:

Colola Beach, Pacific Coast of Mexico, 2 hours from the nearest (crappy) town, Location: middle of nowhere. Temperature: Bloody hot.

Facilities: One building made of palm leaves on the beach. Inhabitants include crabs, lizards, iguanas, toads and rats. Running water: No. Electricity: No. Shower: No One well (yes, a well!!) for washing clothes, dishes, ourselves and flushing the 2 toilets which are located 20 meters away.

Participants: 1 Yank camp leader, 1 Aussie (first Aussie ever at Colola, yey!), 2 Danish chicks (cool), 2 Italian guys (Bob Marley wannabes), 3 Spaniards (1 has been eliminated already, good, we all hated him, wanker), 1 Japanese guy (typical Japanese, very funny) and the rest are just French (who knows how many, they only ever speak in French!).

Clothing: Bikinis (good for hitching rides, our main form of transport, finally Mexican machosim works in our favour!!!), bandanas and sandals.

Life consists of having communal showers with water from the well (yep, no secrets here!), after which we are covered in sweat again 5 minutes later. Beds (planks of wood) are not exactly comfortable. We have no refrigerator (no electricity), so life has become a game of russian roulette with our food. So far I have lost once, a really bad dose of diarrhoea (how do you spell that?) and 3 lots of rice vomit later, I was still feeling seedy. Having to carry from the well to the toilet afterwards doesn't really help at all. Anyway, at least I wasn't the only one afflicted, and after a treatment of acupuncture from Daiskuy, I'm now feeling a whole lot better and back in contention for the title of Survivor. Why am I here? A million dollars? No... That's right, turtles!!! Colola has the largest breeding colony of Negra tortugas in the world. They are just stunning, some are a meter long and about 100 years old. They move so awkwardly on land, but it's just amazing how far they actually go, and how deep their nests are. Also there are Golfina turtles, which are a little smaller and fewer in number. We have baby turtles hatching each day, which we get to release (soo good!), and the rest of the night we sit under the beautiful stars and wait until the turtles have finished laying their eggs, before we dig them up and rebury them in a safe area. The first time I dug up eggs, I accidentally broke one, I was swearing so much in english and spanish that the Mexican guy just couldn't stop laughing. Anyway, it happens, and they generally lay up to 120 eggs in a go, so one is not a huge issue.

Most of the locals of the town (population 800) are really friendly, the guy that runs the project, Jose Luis or Rana (frog) is really good to us and a wealth of knowledge about the turtles. One guy (we name him the fat one) is particularly funny, telling us of his past in people smuggling, drug smuggling, his stint in jail, his wife, children and his girlfriend! Yep, it all really does happen in Mexico!

So for now, adios amigos from Mexico!

From Tiana, penguin and rakali researcher.

Port Phillip Nature Watch

We note that the City of Port Phillip has been awarded the contract for the management of the indigenous vegetation/natural heritage areas of Port Phillip to Spotless. They will commence on 1st September and Naturelinks will cease work from that date. I don't know how the tendering process was administered by CoPP, but I am highly suspicious that price was given the highest priority at the expense of the past track record and quality of work to meet the specifications for proper management of indigenous vegetation. Past performance by Naturelinks was beyond criticism, and much of the credit for the biodiversity we all appreciate can be attributed to good management of these areas of natural vegetation.

As I understand Spotless have good credentials and horticultural skills for management of municipal parks, botanical and formal gardens, such as St Kilda Bot Gardens and St Vincent Gardens. I am not aware however of Spotless having experience and expertise in management of areas of natural vegetation for which very different skills are required, including a vast botanical knowledge of indigenous flora and a good understanding of natural ecosystems and processes. Hopefully I am wrong, but given these valuable areas are under new management we will all need to be keeping a close watch to ensure that the good standard of management and maintenance as demonstrated by Naturelinks is continued by Spotless. Some of our wildlife, especially the Blue Wrens and other native birds are dependent on it!



New Holland
Honey eater

Now to my usual reporting of wildlife sightings. I have received only one report over the last two months and that was from Janet Bolitho. On Saturday 24 July (about 1.30pm) she saw 4 New Holland Honeyeaters sitting in a row on the wire fence on the distichlis patch at Perce White Reserve. On Tuesday 27, they were again seen around 8 am flying back and forth between that area, and a tall dead tree at the western end of the Reserve. This is an interesting species in

that it is common at Perce White Reserve in Port Melbourne, but is strangely absent elsewhere in City of Port Phillip and that includes the foreshore in Elwood, where one would expect to find this species. It is very common along most of Australia's southern coastline from Southeastern Queensland through to WA well north of Perth, and including Tasmania. If anyone observes these easily identified honeyeaters elsewhere in CoPP please let me know. They are predominantly black with white streaks and have a yellow wing patch.

Other sightings of my own which are of interest include:

- A single Laughing Kookaburra in the south west corner of the St Kilda Botanic Gardens, enjoying the area of indigenous vegetation on Sunday 18 July. Neil has informed me that is a very unusual sighting in the gardens.

- A group of approximately ten Little Penguins feeding less than 100 metres offshore from Elwood Beach on 11 August. Other birds in the area include a single Australasian Gannet (500m offshore) and plenty of Crested Terns, Little Pied Cormorants and of course Silver Gulls. The next day (12 Aug) they were at it again at Point Ormond, and this time the penguins were coming in as close as 30 metres offshore. There must be a lot of small food fish in the area around this time of the year, as similar activities were observed at the same time last year.

In previous Newsletters I have written about bird species moving into Port Phillip and calling it home. They included Tawny Frogmouths, Crested Pigeons, Long Billed Corellas, Chestnut Teal, Grey teal and White-Eyed Ducks (St Kilda Botanical Gardens pond). They are still here, although in reduced numbers over winter. All the duck species can still be seen as I write.

Despite it being a cold winter there is plenty to see out there! 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, *email* amccutcheon@melb.globaldial.com. -



Andrew
McCutcheon

Long Billed
Corella

NORTHERN PACIFIC SEA STARS

WADE OUT IN YOUR 'WELLIES'

The North Pacific Seastars are every where you look. There are many in the shallow water. Wade out at low tide and collect a few, remember that each one you collect is a potential parent of millions.

After the storm on Saturday 14th August there were thousands of North Pacific Seastars on the beach and in the shallows. Most were in the 10cm diameter range. There were also masses of Cunjevoi (sea squirts) and a few sponges but no eleven arm seastars. (*They have got more arms to hold on with?*)

Have a look at the new sea star report on the Earthcare website www.earthcarestkilda.org.au

Quicksilver Boardriders Club Coast Care Weekend, Sunday 6th of June, St Kilda, 2004.

Northern Pacific Sea Star Collection

The purpose of this document is to provide a brief overview of events pertaining to the collection of Northern Pacific Sea Stars, on the Quicksilver Boardriders Club Coast Care Weekend, Sunday 6th of June, St Kilda, 2004. A summary of results obtained has been included for public perusal, as well as a functional analysis of these results. Information contained herein has been presented in a format that ensures simplicity of interpretation, whilst maintaining a somewhat comprehensive nature.

The significance of including a collection of NPSS during the given event is primarily focused on the current and potential impact that the species may exert on the biota residing within the Port Phillip Bay region of Victoria's Coastal Zone.

Given the combined environmental and economic concerns, a broader range of stakeholders (in the issue) can be identified, when compared to a problem that is of environmental importance alone. For this reason the potential exists for synergistic relationships to be formed between the Australian Government, Community members and Industry groups in combating the outlined issues. The event during which NPSS collections took place, including all associated developmental, implementation, administrative and reporting work, is an excellent example of a place in which such relationships are developed.

Clinton Smiljanic



'WATER UNDER THE BRIDGE' COMMUNITY PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION

Although more than 100,000 people make the trip over Westgate Bridge each day, few commuters ever venture beneath the landmark to explore Westgate Park. The park has had an interesting history – starting as natural marsh land and being used as a sandmine then rubbish tip before becoming a public park in the 1980s. The threatened growling grass frog has been recorded and many wetland birds use the park to feed and nest. It is now a crucial fragment of habitat so close to the centre of the city.

Over the past two years the Port Phillip EcoCentre has coordinated a project to improve frog habitat in Westgate Park. Holden and Landcare Australia have been major partners and the project that has involved support from the Amphibian Research Centre, Parks Victoria, Victorian University of Technology, City of Melbourne, City of Port Phillip, Friends of Westgate Park, RMIT and St Kilda Indigenous Nursery Co-operative.

To raise awareness and community involvement in the park anyone with a camera and an eye for nature is invited to submit their photographs of this unique park for the 'Water Under the Bridge' community photography exhibition.

The exhibition is aimed at encouraging local residents to take inspiring photos that document the natural aspects of the park and community involvement.

All photographs submitted will be displayed in a special exhibit at Horti Hall in Victoria Street, Melbourne and Gasworks Park in Albert Park.

The Port Phillip EcoCentre and Friends of Westgate Park will run a series of guided walks and photography workshops at the park for budding nature photographers on: - Sunday 19th September 2004

Sunday 17th October
Sunday 21 November

For further information regarding the guided walks or the 'Water Under the Bridge' photo exhibition please visit the Port Phillip EcoCentre's website at www.ecocentre.com or call Alice Molan on 9209 6811.



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?.....

EARTHCARE EMAIL ADDRESS

earthcare@wecare.au.com

Please note that even though it looks a little odd
the au and .com are in the correct order

We're on the web -See us at:

www.earthcarestkilda.org.au

October Earthcare meeting

Thursday 28th October

7.30pm

Stuart Cochrane

Local frogs

If undeliverable, please return to:

The Secretary

Earthcare St Kilda Inc

PO Box 287

ELWOOD

VIC 3184