



*We do what we can,  
where we are*

# Earthcare News

June July 2006

**Page 2  
READ MORE ABOUT  
POWERFUL OWLS  
IN ST KILDA**

**Earthcare Meeting  
David Harper CoPP**

**PLANNING BEHIND  
ST KILDA'S EDGE  
FORESHORE  
PROJECT**

**Thursday June 15  
8pm**

**PLANTING DAYS  
page 3**



**COME AND HEAR ALL ABOUT PENGUINS  
AT THE PENGUIN SYMPOSIUM**

**SUNDAY JUNE 11<sup>TH</sup>**

**ROYAL MELBOURNE YACHT SQUADRON  
PIER ROAD ST KILDA**

**11AM TO 5PM**



Penguin Vocalisation  
Satellite Tracking of Breeding Penguins  
Penguins at the Zoo  
DNA sampling of Penguins along the  
Victorian Coast  
St Kilda colony Update  
Movement of Penguins in Port Phillip Bay  
Film of the St. Kilda Team at work  
Lunch and afternoon tea provided  
St Kilda Breakwater Penguin Viewing

**PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF VENUE**

**PREREGISTRATION IS ESSENTIAL  
A REGISTRATION FORM IS ATTACHED  
TO THIS NEWSLETTER**

If you are too late to send the money and form  
call 0402 164 482 or email  
[earthcarestkilda@mossie.com.au](mailto:earthcarestkilda@mossie.com.au) before June 9  
and pay at the door

# EARTHCARE GENERAL MEETING

David Harper, Foreshore Co-ordinator  
City of Port Phillip

Will give us a talk on

**Planning Behind St Kilda's Edge - Foreshore Project**  
and  
Understanding the planning system used by CoPP

**Thursday 15 June - 7.30 for 8.00pm**

Port Phillip Ecocentre  
Corner Blessington and Herbert Streets, St Kilda



## PORT PHILLIP NATURE WATCH

**April -May 2006**

Since PPNW commenced in 2003 there has been no month more exciting than May 2006 all because we had a very distinguished visitor in the St Kilda Botanic Gardens - a Powerful Owl *Ninox strenua*. It was discovered on Thursday 4 May by David Eades on one of his regular bird surveys in the gardens and was reported to me by Neil Blake. I wasted no time in going to the gardens to see it roosting high up in the group of cypress trees at the Dickens Street (South) side of the gardens holding a half eaten pigeon (rock dove) under its left foot. Paul, Clare and I returned to the site in the early

evening to watch the owl eating the rest of the pigeon. In the process it disgorged some pellets of indigestible matter consisting of bones, fur and feathers, which were sterilised in an oven at Deakin University and analysed afterwards. After swallowing the last portion of pigeon it rubbed its beak against the branch on which it was resting, probably to clean off any remaining scraps of food. It then flew to another low branch approx 2.5 above the ground before flying off into the night. I managed to take some great photos that evening of the owl in action some of which are included in this newsletter.

The Powerful Owl remained in the gardens for at least a week and finally departed on the evening of Wednesday 10 May. During that exciting week it roosted in several different locations in that group of trees every day except Saturday 6 May when it was either well hidden or roosting elsewhere. On Monday 8 May Clare and Kaye inspected it on the afternoon and noticed it being harassed by 3 to 4 Rainbow Lorikeets. The owl did not appear to be disturbed by this raucous attention.

On Wednesday 10 May the owl was observed clutching another item of prey under its right foot, this time a young Brushtail Possum. I watched it on that Wednesday evening moving around the gardens with Neil Blake. It did not appear to be disturbed by our presence as we stood very close to it on a low branch. We walked away from it still perched on that branch at about 7.00pm. Sadly that was the last time the bird was seen by anyone in the gardens. We have been looking for it since, but with no success.

Powerful Owls naturally inhabit eucalypt forests along the south-east coast of Australia from South Queensland to South West Victoria. They occur mainly on the coastal side of the Great Dividing Range and prefer wet forests and those with a dense canopy, where there are suitable and very large hollows for nesting, and are large enough in area to support the owl's large feeding territories of 300 -1500 hectares. Prey consists mainly of arboreal mammals such as possums and gliders, roosting birds and occasionally terrestrial mammals such as rabbits and small marsupials. Although food is plentiful in St Kilda in the form of possums and roosting birds Powerful Owls are unlikely to settle here permanently to breed, because there are no suitable tree hollows large enough for breeding.

## **WINTER PLANTING**

City of Port Phillip, Spotless and Earthcare have organised planting days for this winter at three of our most cherished sites in our Natural Heritage Areas.

The Planting Day locations and dates are:

Grosvenor St, Balaclava

Sunday 25 June, 11.00am - 1.00pm.

Elwood foreshore/Point Ormond -

Sunday 30 July (National Tree Planting Day), 10.00am - 1.00pm.

West Beach, St Kilda

Sunday 20 August, 11.00am - 1.00pm.

You are also welcome to attend the planning days for these plantings, in which we will work out what type of plants and quantity are required, and where to place them. Dates for these meetings are Thursday 8 June for Grosvenor Street, Tuesday 18 July for Elwood Foreshore at the Beach House Café and Tuesday 8 August for West Beach. All planning meetings will commence at 10.30 am

In the meantime all three of the St Kilda Botanical Gardens Tawny Frogmouths were there while all this excitement took place, but seemed to be lying low and roosting apart from each other in different and unusual places each day. I got the impression they may have been spooked by the big owl, suspecting they could be its next meal. Since the owl left the gardens I have noticed the Tawnies are returning to their normal roosting trees.



fan tail cuckoo

I will now briefly mention other sightings over the last two months:

- Visiting birds in the coastal vegetation along Elwood foreshore include a Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, female Flame Robins on two separate days and a new one for our bird list an immature Fan-tail Cuckoo on Wednesday 26 April.
- A pair of hybrid ducks in the watercourse at Elsternwick Golfcourse. They are cross between Pacific Black Duck and Chestnut Teal. They are still there and appear to be residents to the area.
- Lots of Australasian Gannets observed feeding offshore from Sandringham to Elwood in the first two weeks of May, while we were checking traps for Bayside City Councils Rakali Survey.
- Birds reported to me by Tony Flude and George Fotheringham at Westgate Park include Common Greenshank, Pied Oyster Catchers, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters, Rufous Fantail, Black-shouldered kite, 2 pairs of Blue-winged Shoveler, Little or Intermediate Egrets and a Royal Spoonbill. It seems that with all the good work by Friends of Westgate Park that the bird watching potential is only getting better with the passing of time. On a recent walk I saw some of these species myself and noted that there must be a least four or five Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters in the numerous sheoaks planted throughout the park. Hopefully these elusive birds will become residents there.
- A dead Gould's Wattleed Bat was found just outside the PP

Ecocentre on Friday 12 May. It had a band on its wing and after Neil made some enquiries it was found to be banded in Organ Pipes National Park in 2003. This bat certainly traveled a good distance, in this case 30 kilometres, which is unusual for this species.



- On Sunday 28 May Neil Blake saw a Common Bronzewing Pigeon in Perce White Reserve while watching lots of Superb Fairy-wrens. This is another bird species very rarely seen in CoPP.

And some Breaking News - Just when I thought that was all and was in the process of completing this article I am given a report of another owl, this time in a private back yard. Elizabeth Defriest and Tom Sapontsis have a small owl roosting during the day in a Willow Myrtle in their back garden. It was discovered by their daughter Nina during Easter, and was seen as recently as Friday 26 May a period of over six weeks indicating it must be a St Kilda resident. I went to investigate on Saturday 27 May and could not find it, but found plenty of evidence on the ground in the form of disgorged pellets. From the description given it is almost certainly a Boobook Owl *Ninox boobook*, a much smaller relative to the Powerful Owl. It is nice to get a report on a living Boobook Owl this time, not a dead one as reported in the last newsletter.

As soon as the owl returns Elizabeth and Tom will contact me and I will go and obtain some photos, which should be easy as the roosting branch is no more than 4 metres above the ground.

If you see any interesting wildlife no matter how insignificant they may appear to you, and it may well be in your back yard please send in or email me a report. I can be contacted on 9531 2270, or email [amc-cutcheon@aapt.net.au](mailto:amc-cutcheon@aapt.net.au)

Andrew McCutcheon



## BAYSIDE RAKALI SURVEY MAY 2006

Over the past month Earthcare Rakali Watch have taken part in a Survey of Rakali at four major sites. Our main involvement was surveying the Elstercreek from the golf course to the St Kilda Street Bridge/Elwood Canal and Elsternwick Park. Three animals were caught over the four evenings - one huge male being caught twice. Each was microchipped, measured and weighed. Andrew took some fantastic photos and I shot some film, currently being edited.

See the next newsletter for details of the result of this survey

### RAKALI SYMPOSIUM 2007

Planning is already under way for the next Symposium. It looks as if it will be a joint venture with Bayside, possibly being held at the Bayside City Council Buildings late October 2007. We have several speakers confirmed already, there will be more information as it comes to hand.

Bob Tammick

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Earthcare St Kilda  
presents

# PENGUIN SYMPOSIUM

SUNDAY JUNE 11  
11am-5pm  
at

Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron  
Pier Road. St Kilda

Lunch and afternoon tea provided



Origins of the St Kilda Penguin Colony Study  
Satellite Tracking of Breeding penguins in Victoria  
Diet of St Kilda penguins  
Penguins at the Zoo  
DNA Sampling of Penguin Colonies in SE Australia  
Penguin Vocalisation  
Movement of Penguins in Port Phillip Bay  
St Kilda Colony Update  
St Kilda Breakwater penguin viewing at 6pm

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## Penguin Symposium Booking Form

Register early, numbers are limited. Registration Essential

Name.....

Phone.....email.....

I wish to book ..... people for the Penguin Symposium

I enclose \$..... being for .....people at \$5 each

.....people will be attending the 6pm breakwater viewing

Send to PO Box 287 Elwood 3184

details 0402 164 482

