



Earthcare St Kilda Newsletter

June

July

2008

We do what we can, where we are

Katherine Nelson
will be presenting some of her
research into
Local and Cambodian Orchids
7.30pm Thursday 26th June
at
Port Phillip Ecocentre



Glossodia major in Grassy Dry Forest.

Thermal Wind Cheaters
for Sale with Rakali Logo

Very warm and
cosy. Lots of
pockets.

\$28



Rakali Watch Report: Or the strange case of the chip and pigeon!

Someone once said that the unexpected was often best. So imagine a typical sultry autumn evening standing on a small bridge over the Elwood Canal. Nothing much was going on as seemed to be usual these days at the canal. Expectations of seeing our little friends were lower than the tide.

A check of the watch revealed it was three minutes since my last check and at least seven since arriving on the bridge. As usual the canal seemed to have the normal amount of flotsam and jetsam floating on the surface - a chip box, twigs, newspaper and something suspiciously rubbery we won't speculate further on! Imagine then the surprise on seeing a very large rakali swimming to the chip box, tearing it apart, extracting a chip and swimming away with its prize clenched firmly between its jaws. Almost better than Christmas to a rakali watcher!

So now imagine the extraordinary events about to unfold a few moments later. In the distance and in the middle of the canal we spotted a pigeon floating gently towards us. At first we thought it dead until the beams of our torches showed tiny movements of the head.

We speculated whether we should mount a rescue operation when suddenly the bird was attacked by our large chip eating rakali. A tremendous flurry of feathers ending once our rakali got a hold of its prey and dragging it under the water to drown the hapless bird. So much for mounting a rescue.

If you wish to come along to an evening watch rakali then contact me on bob_alyson@rakali.com

We do have a website www.rakali.com where you can check out photos etc

Bob Tammik



"Local Live Sparks Fraser Frog Bog" Community project

The City of Port Phillip recently launched the "Small Poppy" grants scheme.

Projects are selected for funding on the basis of selection criteria set out in the Small Poppy Grants Guidelines. The Small Poppy Grants scheme will potentially provide money for neighbourhood groups (or community-of-interest groups) to undertake a broad range of citizen-led projects that aim to improve living in the City of Port Phillip.

John Hipwell proposes that a community group be convened, made up of local primary school children, their teachers and parents, local ecology experts and concerned local neighbourhood members.

This community group ("Local Live Sparks") which will research, develop and establish a frog bog in the nature reserve next to the Fraser Street Light Rail Station. The Frog Bog will be a community barometer (visual and audible) for climate change and the health of the local environment. There is arguably no greater message to deliver the world than to act 'green'.

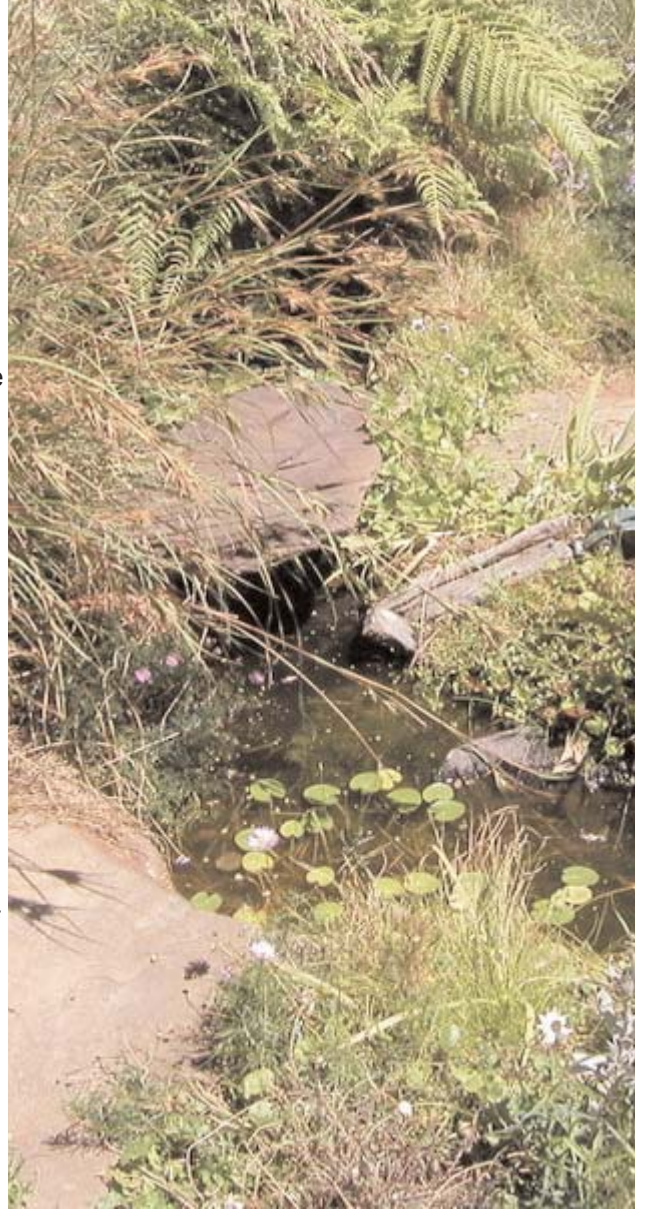
Frogs are an "Indicator Species" when it comes to climate change. Their sensitivity to the health of their habitat makes them an ideal symbol of raising awareness about the impacts of climate change on our local environment. By creating a micro-habitat in a prominent location, that can be visited by local children, the local community and the general public, we can all learn about Port Phillip's natural heritage and the native species we share this region and the planet with. Being an indicator species, the frogs will symbolise how fragile the environment is and how important it is to change our damaging habits and contribute to the climate challenge. The more frogs that chirp and croak the healthier the environment is.

The Fraser Frog Bog will be a natural audiovisual education site that will encourage independent learning across a wide demographic. Through the exposure to a unique engaging and comprehensible ecosystem, the Frog Bog will foster a positive empathy for the environment, encouraging optimistic attitudinal change.

Our city lives all too easily remove us from nature and the natural processes we all rely on for survival. The frogs will be a reminder to locals that it is not just humans in big cities who are affected by climate change - that as well as our community, our local flora and fauna are also relying on us to create a healthy future.

John seeks interest from members of Earthcare and the wider community to join the Local Live Sparks group Small Poppy grant application and to partake in the three or four meetings and the one day build process.

If interested in more information please contact John on 0407 545 511 or john@hips.com.au



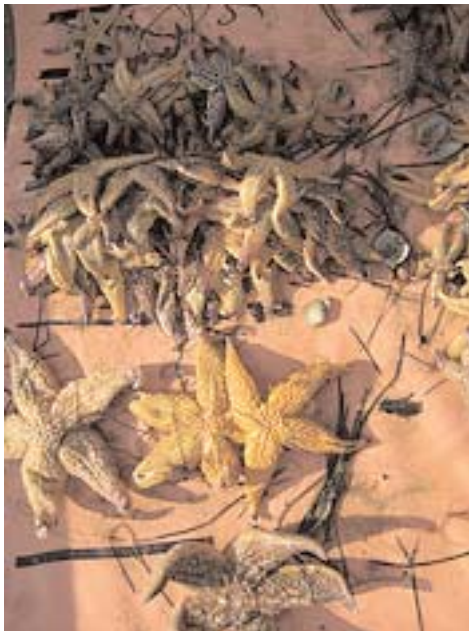
Northern Pacific Sea Star Collection

With all the beautiful diversity of marine life within Port Philip bay it's hard to imagine that we would ever have to deal with any harmful, unwelcome visitors. Unfortunately however, an introduced species of sea star, the Northern Pacific Seastar, has been found inhabiting the bay and causing devastation to native wildlife. Scientists are searching for a long term solution to this pest. However in the meantime a team of very brave souls ventured into the water on the 24th of May 2008 to help remove these seastars from St Kilda Pier.

We had an incredibly successful day. In the 3 hours spent in the water the team was able to remove a remarkable 2,573 seastars, ranging from less than 5cm to 25cm in length. We also received some great community involvement, with beach goers joining in on the collection, and the life saving club volunteering the shed as our meeting point. Thank you to everyone who volunteered on the day. I hope everyone had as much fun as I did.

**Due to the success of this cleanup day
we are planning another for the 5th of July.**

Anyone who is interested in attending can send an email to kfine@netspace.net.au



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St Kilda Breakwater Penguin Report 2007-2008

St Kilda penguins have had a better year for food and weather although they are taking a wider spectrum of prey. There have only been a couple of storms where a few burrows were damaged and weights have generally been good. There were 184 instances of breeding and the chicks were well fed.

The first eggs were laid in July with a peak in October and some healthy looking fledgelings matured. Almost all the penguins moulted in March which is a bit unusual as moulting is usually spread over a longer period but we had fewer struggling brown feathered moulting penguins this year.

Penguin monitoring has some very long term volunteers and the number of volunteers has had to be fixed at 25 with a waiting list for any new comers.

The three penguin research teams continue to monitor the colony twice a month to add to the 20 years of data. A big thankyou to all the people who regularly give up their Sunday evenings no matter what the weather to brave penguin beaks, penguin excrement, and rock hopping in the dark.

A frame work for penguin and rakali research was created and can be viewed on www.stkildapenguins.com.au

Tiana Preston has been continuing her research for her PhD and Darren Giling wrote a paper on the distribution of penguins along the breakwater, plus various students have written essays and assignments.

Zoe Hogg and Tiana Preston attended a penguin conference in Hobart and put St Kilda penguins on the map along with a world wide study of all penguin species. A web site for all penguin matters world wide was created and this can be accessed on www.penguin.net.nz

The Public Board Walk became a popular spot for penguin watching and generally the public were respectful of the wildlife.

Parks Victoria put in a new fence and gate on the breakwater which is keeping out most of the unwelcome visitors to the colony. In the public area a small fence was erected at the base of the rock wall and this is giving some protection to the penguins in that area. Parks Victoria are currently looking at other solutions to the growing number of visitors to the board walk.

Some of the penguin team created a family tour called Beach Buddies which includes a look at the penguin colony but also investigates the total environment of St Kilda Harbour

Earthcare Received a \$2000 grant from the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife to be spent on microchips for the coming year. We have also received donations from Urban Penguin Tours.

Earthcare is concerned about the impacts of toxic substances being released from the mouth of the Yarra during dredging and is keeping a watchful eye on proceedings

Channel Deepening issues are still unresolved with no penguin monitoring of the St Kilda colony by PoMC. We are hoping to at least get toxic monitoring of the penguins but are at present relying on our own statistical analysis of the weights of the colony to give us an indication of any problems.

Two recently beach washed dead penguins have been sent for analysis to give us a benchmark of the types and quantity of heavy metals they are carrying, as well as DDT and other chemicals they may have stored over their life cycle.

The St Kilda penguin website www.stkildapenguins.com.au is getting a steady stream of visitors.

A couple of our very old penguins have not been seen this year but we still have on the breakwater some banded in 1991. They become better at avoiding us as the years go by so we only rarely catch them. Peg Leg our one legged penguin raised chicks again despite being on show to the public all day every day. I think he will have a quieter time this year as he has had to move his burrow due to storm damage and he now has a secluded spot higher up the breakwater wall, although it must take him some time to get there with one leg.

Population Estimates using breeding site observations

A new program for analysis of population estimates is currently being researched. This will give us a better formula than the current method therefore population estimates may change during 2008.

Current estimate of population using present method is 854 penguins.

Zoe Hogg