



FriendsNET

Newsletter of the Victorian Environment Friends Network

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From your Network Committee Convener...



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Valley) Network
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It may be an inconvenient truth but it's unavoidable – we're all getting older and for many the work isn't getting any easier.

That is why the Friends Network is organising a seminar focusing on how to attract more members to your group and how to keep them there. Topics will include such things as nabbing neighbours, making your group family-friendly, bridging the age divide, marketing for results, what puts people off, filling the leadership vacuum, leader burn-out and succession planning. As you can see, it's a one day workshop no Friends Group committee can afford to miss.

Make a note of the date: Saturday 14 April
– details in February *FriendsNET*.

And regarding that other 'inconvenient truth', the theme of the 12th Biennial Conference is 'Meeting the climate of change'.

Now, that doesn't mean we will spend all our time talking about global warming – there are many other challenges facing us and we will be looking at how the Friends Movement can respond effectively.

Naturally, there will be all the other things that make each Friends Conference so enjoyable – the walks, Best Friend Award and the general 'melee' – so make plans to attend.

The conference will be held at Rawson Village (NE from Moe) on 7–9 September next year. More details in coming issues of *FriendsNET*.

Groups in action

Feral horse monitoring in the Cobberas area

The cattle have gone but wild horses remain. Jenny Edwards of Friends of the Cobberas reports on their research project in the Alpine National Park

Photos: Left—Cobberas country. Right—Friends taking a break during photo monitoring.

The Friends of the Cobberas is a small but enthusiastic Friends group looking after a very remote part of the Alpine National Park – the Cobberas area between Benambra and the Snowy River.

An ambitious project was suggested to scientifically monitor the impacts of Feral Horses (colloquially called brumbies) that roam this part of the High Country in quite high concentrations. A grant was sourced from the Australian Alps Liaison Committee and consultants Kevin Thiele and Suzanne Prober

(of Ecological Interactions) were appointed to establish the Feral Horse Exclusion Plots Project in conjunction with the Friends.

The project aims 'to monitor the effects of enclosure from feral horses on floristic composition and structure of favoured grazing areas (grasslands) and on bank condition and disturbance of streams draining these areas'.

Friends used their local knowledge to assist the consultants and Parks Victoria rangers to select two sites at Cowombat Flat and Native Cat Flat

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frequented by feral horses, but not grazed by cattle, ensuring that impacts could be directly attributed to horses.

Fences were erected in July 1999. Each site consists of 4 replicate pairs of plots, one fenced and one unfenced, as well as 4 replicate pairs of stream segments, again one fenced and one unfenced. From time to time horses damage the fences, leaning in to reach the long feed, so the Friends regularly check the plots to ensure fences remain in good condition and annually take a set of prescribed photos from designated photo points. It is beautiful wild country, so no great chore to gather Friends for the outings!

In March 2001, Friends were devastated to find the plots at Native Cat Flat vandalised with wires cut in all the fences. A working bee saw a big turnout to collect the dangerous loose wire, fit new wires and strengthen fences. Much discussion occurred on how to stop this happening again.

The group applied for a Parks Victoria Community Grant to produce and install interpretive signs to explain the reason for the fences and to demonstrate the cooperation of the various groups involved with the project to date. As the project had the backing of the Mountain Cattlemen's Association and Alpine Brumby Management Association as well as Parks Victoria and the Friends, it represented a wide range of community interest groups. The signs were erected in April 2002. It is with great pleasure that we report no further vandalism has occurred at either site – public education worked!



Photos: Comparisons
of parts of stream
transects outside (left)
and within a fenced
area (right)

This is a long-term project, and although from about year two there were dramatic visual differences between the fenced and unfenced plots, it is expected that changes to the composition of plant species within the exclusion plots could take many years. Although ten years was a suggested period for first monitoring, the Friends received a Parks Victoria Grant in 2005 for monitoring in year six.

Ecological Interactions were again contracted to conduct floristic and streambank monitoring. Blessed with superb weather, this was a fantastic opportunity for Friends to ask questions and learn from Suzanne and Kevin, who have an exceptional knowledge of flora, fauna and ecology.

Spectacular results are not expected at this early stage. The consultants have indicated that apart from a much greater height of vegetation growth as a result of enclosure, the stream structure and function will show the most striking changes.

Friends contact ranger Paul Tumino said 'Involvement with this project provides an excellent opportunity to step out of everyday life, spend time in the great outdoors and be involved in a worthwhile scientific project. Congratulations to the Friends of the Cobberas for continued ownership, enthusiasm and assistance with the project.'

Anyone interested in more information on Friends of the Cobberas or the Feral Horse Monitoring Project can go to the website www.friendscobberas.com.au or email the group info@friendscobberas.com.au



Last call: Nominations for 2007 Best Friend Award

Is your group more than 10 years old? Do you have a member who has both made an outstanding contribution and shown exceptional dedication? If so, nominate that person for the prestigious Best Friend Award. Download a nomination form from our web site – home.vicnet.net.au/~friends, pick one up at the VNPA office, or contact the Award Secretary, Margaret Boyd 9560 8084.

Nominations close at the end of this year (December 2006).

Volunteer Safety Vests

Parks Victoria is trialling the use of high visibility vests for volunteers working on estate managed by Parks Victoria. The vests can be worn for identified safety risks (e.g. roadsides) or to improve the wearers' visual presence in the park and to promote their role as volunteers. If your group is interested in being part of the trial, contact Kerry Murphy, the Volunteer Coordinator, Parks Victoria 13 1963.

Experience Exchange (your space)

If in ANY doubt, DON'T pull it out!

'Friends groups are amongst the biggest threats to endangered plants.'

As you can imagine, that took me aback. Especially as it was said by a highly respected professional botanist, Graeme Lorimer. He made the remark during a Spring Opening visit to the Bay Road Heathland Sanctuary soon after the latest ecological burn. I, as one of the volunteer guides, pointed out some large daisies and cheerfully said they must be weeds.

He took a sample and later emailed me to say it was actually the introduced Ox-eye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare* which differs from the indigenous *Brachyscome diversifolia* mainly by its being nearly hairless (rather than quite hairy) and having leaves whose bases clasp the stems (rather than tapering to the base). I breathed a sigh of relief.

So what about the plant in Jo Hurse's photo (below)? To me it looks much like another flat weed, but it is actually a rarity: the Dune Thistle or Coast Sow-thistle *Actites megalocarpa*.



The indigenous Dune Thistle

This was 'previously quite common on the primary dunes throughout the Bayside foreshore area [but] sand cleaning, high visitor pressure and inappropriate management has resulted in the decline of this species within the Port Phillip Region.' So said Simon Cropper in his 2002 annual monitoring report for the City of Bayside.

He had found some plants at the Brighton Dunes and two of our local expert botanists, John Eichler and Val Stajsic, were thrilled to rediscover the colony this May. Val says the Herbarium holds only two samples from Brighton – from 1887!

Jo, our Bushland Team Leader, heard the wonderful news. She had been looking after some Dune Thistles in Port Melbourne and could now continue the work in Bayside. So she took Mark and Clare from the bushland crew, the Friends group, and me, to see the plants. Sadly the three largest plants had been uprooted a day or so before.

To a botanist the Dune Thistle is distinctive because of its finely serrated leaves that are succulent and have maroon margins. But look at more photographs, such as those in the excellent Viridans publications or the one in the wonderful *Indigenous Plants of the Sandbelt: a Gardening Guide for South-eastern Melbourne* (now available in a revised reprint) and you will see the leaves can be much more indented, or greener. Anyhow an amateur like me couldn't possibly have pulled any while casually weeding the foreshore for thistles or by confusing it with *Gazania* – could I? Hope not!



Cr Michael Norris of Bayside Council sounds a warning. Michael has been actively involved in Bayside conservation for many years.

Share your questions, experiences or ideas – contact a Committee member (see page 4)

How can we make ourselves known?

All groups are constantly looking for more helpers and supporters, but we often miss opportunities for the best form of promotion of our activities – personal contact. Two groups aim to catch the interest of passers-by.

Friends of Damper Creek report that their September working bee was held on a beautiful sunny morning pulling weeds – 'Lots of interest from passers-by that will hopefully result in new memberships'. They have two estate agent type display boards donated by Stockdale and Leggo that they place either end of the work area to let passers-by know what is going on, and their monthly working bees produce an average of two families who become financial members with some becoming regular helpers.

The **Friends of Langwarrin FFR** have had two 2-sided attractive signs made through Parks Victoria grant money, and they are placed one at the Reserve entrance gate, and one near the working site. Special information can be added as required. Coordinator Leon Costermans says 'Although we haven't exactly been overwhelmed by people offering to work with us, passers-by do stop and talk to us and we can explain what we're doing and why – good for gaining wider support. The commonest comment: "You're doing a great job!"'

How do other groups attract the attention and interest of people? A good 'PR person' on site with the group? What is your experience? What else can be done? Please let us know.



Geoff's Group Grapevine

Three of our longest established Friends Groups have decided to call it a day.

The **Friends of Mt Buffalo** was formed in 1983. Over the years it has had many projects, including revegetating a large area at Nug Nug.

The **Friends of the You Yangs** started in 1985 with Geoff Gaynor as Convener. Erection of nest boxes and restoration of old sand pits were two of its projects.

Friends of the Warbys commenced in 1989 on the instigation of Helen Curtis who has remained heavily involved. Notable among its achievements is establishing the Arboretum at Wenhams, now suffering because of the drought.

Whilst the decline of these groups is most regrettable and of concern, the dedicated commitment of their many members over so many years has made a significant contribution to reserve management in Victoria. All three Groups supported parks managed by Parks Victoria with whom the Network Committee is having discussions.

The **Friends of Damper Creek** report the death on 4 Sept. of Frank Palmer, one of its founders in 1993 and since then its 'figurehead and inspiration'.

2006 Port Phillip and Westernport CMA Landcare Awards have gone to **Friends of Lower Kororoit Creek**, **Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater** and the **Darebin Parklands Association**.

The **Friends of Pt Addis** have changed their name to **Friends of Point Addis Marine National Park**.

The **Friends of the Werribee Gorge and Long Forest Mallee** have launched their 278 page comprehensive *Birds of the Long Forest 1889-2005* in A4 format with notes on 174 species and many illustrations including some in colour. It is available at the Bacchus Marsh Newsagency for \$35.00, or contact Bob Reid 5357 2462.

In October 2006 the **Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater** launched their *Yellingbo - a special place*, a lavishly illustrated full colour 52 page A4 book presented in chapters based on six seasons, with geological notes and species lists. It is available by sending a cheque or postal note for \$28.00 (\$25.00 plus \$3.00 postage) to Friends of Helmeted Honeyeater, PO Box 131, Woori Yallock 3139.

Combined get-togethers are becoming popular, for example, a joint end-of-year BBQ in Anakie Gorge, now re-opened after the fire, by the **Friends of Brisbane Ranges NP**, **Friends of Werribee Gorge and Long Forest Mallee** and **Friends of the Lerderderg**.

If undelivered, return to:
Victorian Environment Friends Network
c/- VNPA, 60 Leicester Street
CARLTON 3053

And we welcome...

Friends of George Tindale Memorial Gardens

The late George & Ruth Tindale created a wonderful garden in Sherbrooke Road, Sherbrooke, Melway 75J2. The group has been working in the gardens since 1984, fortnightly on Tuesdays and on the 2nd & 4th Saturdays. Rod Cantrill 9763 6745

Friends of Lochsport Lakes & Coast

Formed in July, this group of 20 members is focused on protection and recreation use of public land in the Lochsport area. Grant Soosalu 5146 0322.

Friends of Monbulk Creek - Selby Trestle Bridge Group

Every Tuesday from 11 am - 3 pm this small group works on the 'Yanakie' 10 ha site in the Dandenong Ranges National Park. Vicki Boyle 9754 4505

Friends of Westbreen Creek

Westbreen Creek is a tributary of the Moonee Ponds Creek, Melway 17A6. The aim is to increase the habitat qualities and biodiversity of the creek for the frogs, birds and local residents, and protect the rare Growling Grass Frog. Judy Allen 9306 7154

Greening of Riddell

Since 1988 the group has worked hard to enhance the indigenous species of Wybejong Creek and to 'provide an environmental perspective on issues affecting Riddells Creek'. Lyn Hovey 5428 6940

Friends of Rokeby Crossover

Formed in late 2003 by a mix of local people whose aim is to protect and maintain the bushland so it can remain a clean and safe home for wildlife and be enjoyed by the various user groups. David Dawson 5626 8263

Warringal Conservation Society

At last this group, active since 1970, is formally affiliated with the Network. It aims to make governments at all levels aware of environmental issues and to restore and enhance indigenous vegetation in Banyule. Heather Smith 9455 2771

Geelong Regional Scout Board

This management board has been affiliated as an Associate Member. Scouts are involved in conservation projects at Eumeralla Scout Camp, Anglesea.



Geoff Durham
is one of the Network's
Group Liaison Officers

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