



FriendsNET

Newsletter of the Victorian Environment Friends Network

Number 68 August 2009

Special feature – Frogwatching by volunteers

Groups in action

In this issue, we are throwing our spotlight on an activity undertaken by a number of Friends groups, and which others might consider – frogwatching.

On this page, Robert Bender (9499 2413) describes how his group became involved.

More reports on page 2.

My group, the Friends of Wilson Reserve, started a regular frogging survey in September 1998. It has now been under way for nearly 11 years. We have done our night walk 127 times, yielding a large database of frog call history for the area. Why do we do it? Because in the late 1980s herpetologists discovered a sudden alarming decline in frog numbers of several species; some became rapidly extinct. Frogs call seasonally, some for only 3 months each year, so the few herpetologists could not possibly survey all frog populations and started a volunteer scheme.

It is a wonderful opportunity to learn about a little-known aspect of our country's ecology and to contribute to scientific knowledge of frog distribution and abundance. All it requires is going for a walk along some waterway – river, creek, billabong, system of ponds – with simple equipment – torch, tape recorder, data sheet. And a little training in recognising the calls of the few species likely to live in any location – we have found 8 species so far, 7 local, one exotic.

There are many resources available to help people quickly become competent at frog identification – two good websites – Melbourne Water Frog Census and the Amphibian Research Centre – with call recordings

online, distribution maps, photos, descriptions of frogs. And there are several good published field guides. I use the *Frogwatch* manual on Victorian frogs (out of print), and Martyn Robinson's *Field Guide to Frogs of Australia* (Australian Museum).

We go for a monthly evening walk after sunset around three Yarra billabongs and 12 ponds around the Ivanhoe public golf course, stopping at each for a minute or three to listen for frogs – they often go quiet on detecting the ground vibration of footsteps but start calling soon after we stop. We take a data sheet listing the ponds and billabongs and the names of frog species known to be in the area, and we record presence/absence and the condition of the water body, as some of them dry out seasonally. We estimate number of frogs calling but it is only rough, essentially one/few/many, though we try to put a number to it.

Frogs from different genera (Froglets, Marsh Frogs, Tree Frogs) have very different calls, easy to tell apart, but species within the same genus (Spotted vs Striped Marsh Frogs for example) require a bit of practice to build confidence in identifying a call. Frogs, having porous skins, vulnerable to disease, should not be handled.

Data sheet and tape go to the Melbourne Water Frog Census office in Werribee. The data is added to the distribution maps on their website. We keep our own database of frog species heard, ponds/billabongs in which they are calling, and estimated numbers heard. It is valued by the Council conservation department and by Melbourne Water's researchers. Other local groups advertise their night walks so there are opportunities to meet fellow enthusiasts and learn what frogs they are finding.

It is really valuable information being collected about an important group of very sensitive animals, and opens up great opportunities to learn about the biology of frogs, endangered frog species and efforts to combat threats to their future survival. It is also a joy to be out in the wild at night.



The Growling Grass Frog, an endangered species, is still found in the Melbourne region.

It has been recorded over 40 times through Melbourne Water's Frog Census

– photo courtesy Melbourne Water



Frog Census volunteer Deirdre Farrell hoping to record frogs in the lake area of Blackburn Lake Sanctuary. Photo courtesy Melbourne Water.

Friends of Warrandyte State Park's 'Frogland'

In 1993, Pat Coupar, along with some keen Friends group members, decided to create a wetland. A 'wet, boggy area' downhill from the Pound Bend Nursery was the perfect place. This area was receiving the storm water as well as runoff from the nursery watering system.

Pat Coupar's article 'Frogland' in a 1993 newsletter describes how the dam was bulldozed, banks were moulded, and clean straw was added in the water. The straw sank over 2 weeks and as it started to rot provided a source of food for aquatic organisms, as well as protection. Huge hollow logs were placed in and around the dam, providing even more habitat. With the addition of appropriate wetland plants, Frogland was born. Within a short time Pat observed a pair of breeding frogs. At least five species of frog have been heard or seen in Frogland and adjacent areas since then.

That was 16 years ago, and as with all of nature, some things have changed. With improved drainage works, much of the runoff water now goes directly into a nearby larger dam. The changed drainage, the years of drought, plus attempts to improve water efficiency, have meant that Frogland is now an ephemeral wetland. Ongoing efforts are required to control weeds by burns, hand weeding and occasional spraying.

Although dry in summer, it is still important habitat for frogs and other small critters including (at times) a Tiger Snake and a Brown Snake. Within the nursery, baths for aquatic plants now offer breeding space for Ewing's Tree

Frog. Other species breed in the large dam so the nursery and surrounds, including Frogland, are home to the following frogs:

Ewing's Tree Frog *Litoria ewingi*

Peron's Tree Frog (aka Maniacal Cackle Frog) *Litoria peronii*

Eastern Pobblebonk *Limnodynastes dumerili*

Spotted Marsh Frog *Limnodynastes tasmaniensis*

Eastern Common Froglet *Crinia signifera*

Linda Rogan 9435 5806

Friends of Braeside's 'Frog Hollow'

Members of this group are developing 'Frog Hollow' near the community garden adjacent to the park office. It is in the very early stages of development, with the soil-base and seating having been prepared. Water is being pumped in but a concern is the current low water levels in the park which may further affect this and other projects. Members of the friends are involved in the Frogwatch program and it will be interesting to watch future developments.

Margaret Hunter 9588 0867

Friends of Salt Creek & Associated Parklands

The group reports that recordings of frog calls were sent to Melbourne Water as e-mail attachments (.wma files) and, after a while, reports of an expert were sent back identifying three species – Spotted Marsh Frog, Pobblebonk Frog and Common Eastern Froglet. Harry Burley, 9458 1872

About Melbourne Water Frog Census

The Census aims to:

- Increase community knowledge of frogs found in the greater Melbourne area.
- Increase the understanding of where frogs are found.
- Raise community awareness about the health of local rivers, creeks and wetlands.

The presence of a variety of frog species indicates that a river, creek or wetland is healthy and their continued existence is a very positive sign.

From mid 2007 to September 2008 over 500 call recordings were received with 12 species represented.

Full details on participating are on the web site:

<http://frogs.melbournewater.com.au>

Fire, Friends, Future... something to think about (from Friends of Plenty River Newsletter July 2009)

Once all the official investigations into the February fires have been finalised and reported upon, no doubt a whole fresh round of public debate and discussion will follow, and I shouldn't be surprised if all this ends up having some effect on the operation of Friends groups whose aim is to restore and maintain indigenous vegetation. So perhaps right now is an opportune time for ourselves to be thinking matters through regarding our own goals and strategies. For all I know, Friends groups may start to come under scrutiny in a way which we have never had to deal with before, and it's at least conceivable that a view may start to emerge, from certain sections of the community, to the effect that Friends

groups had better alter their ways, so that their activities and aims are consonant with the minimisation of fire risk. If the nature and siting of plantings undertaken by Friends groups ever do become the subject of new official recommendations – because of a perceived need of the community to readjust to the potential hazards of fire – then obviously as a Friends group we would be wanting to cooperate with the authorities in a responsible fashion. But it may be necessary for Friends groups to become more active in the domain of public opinion so as to ensure that the community understands much more clearly the value of what Friends groups are doing. Kevin Ley 9435 3840

From your Network Committee Convener

This issue I turn over this space to our newest committee member, Neil Duncan (Secretary, Friends of Organ Pipes), who provides his view on joining the VEFN Committee.

'The Environmental Friends Network Committee needs new members to enable it to continue the vital work of representing the various Friends groups around Victoria. The Committee organises the biennial conference and seminars, the Best Friend Award and liaises with Parks Victoria to provide a united voice for the Friends groups.

'A position on the committee is not an onerous

duty as there is usually just one meeting a month and about four times a year with Parks Victoria. The more people that are on the committee the easier the task is for everyone and the better our views can be canvassed to put forward to Parks Victoria.

'Before the conference please talk to your Friends group committee so you can put forward member/s who would be willing to help share in this interesting and necessary position for the continued well-being of the Environmental Friends Network and ultimately the well-being of the individual Friends groups.'



Maelor Himbury
(Friends of Maribyrnong
Valley) Network
Committee Convener
9374 1902 (h)

Experience Exchange (your space)

More on Corporate Volunteers (See *FriendsNET* 65)

I am the Business & Community Partnerships Manager for **Volunteering Victoria**. I am currently sourcing opportunities for employee volunteers 2009. If you have any Volunteer roles available that do not involve direct fundraising, please email these to me and they will be posted on our calendar. Please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss possible opportunities or the employee volunteering program in general; I am always happy to chat.

Marisa Nowak 9934 0504

Website tips (See *FriendsNET* 66)

Thank you for your great newsletter. I noticed you're asking for tips on building your own website. One method I can recommend if a group really wants to save money is to use a free website publishing tool such as WordPress or Google Sites. I've used WordPress to create two websites so far and found it a very useful tool for getting a web presence without having to pay for domain hosting or having to know too much about building a website. WordPress was created to help people create their own blogsite but can also be used to build simple

websites. It has about 20 templates you can use for your website, and depending on your skill level with an imaging editing tool such as Photoshop you can usually give the site your own flavour by creating your own Header image. The other great thing about WordPress is that it allows visitors to make comments to stories that appear on your site.

John Sampson 6227 9547

Succession in groups (See *F'NET* 66)

The Friends of Wyperfeld constitution puts a limit of 3 year successive terms on all positions. I think this works really well as it gives opportunities for variation on ways of doing things and therefore new paths may be forged. A frequent turnover of positions enables a support network to form, a cross-pollination of ideas and skills sharing. However, I think it's sometimes a challenge to broaden the office bearer group. It is important to identify a couple of prospective candidates for the new role. This needs to be done well in advance, say 6 to 18 months well before the election of a new Convener for instance. This gives potential candidates some time to think about how they might slot into the position.

Jenny Harrington 0421 168 926

These responses to items in earlier issues were held over because of our special post-fires issue no. 67.

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

The Friends of Mallacoota – celebrating 25 years of achievements!

The Friends of Mallacoota grew directly out of a public meeting in June 1983 attended by approximately 140 people, including officials from all local management bodies. It formally came into existence in October 1983 and now has well over 100 members who hold a wide range of opinions.

In its 25 years it has achieved a great deal. Hundreds, probably thousands of letters have

– continued on page 4



Groups in action

Members of the Friends of Mallacoota celebrate their 25 years.

FriendsNET may be downloaded from the Network web site (home.vicnet.net.au/~friends) and emailed to group members. Articles in FriendsNET may be used in Group newsletters with acknowledgement.

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been written in support of other groups and causes and objecting to various proposals. There have been many practical achievements including the publication of 'Stepping Stones', 'Animals of Croajingolong National Park', flower and animal posters and the Mallacoota Walking Track brochure. The group was involved in having Mortimer's Paddock retained as a public reserve, in ensuring no building took place on the foreshore, the introduction of height limits for buildings, the construction of a gazebo, and the classification and fencing of a Mallacoota Gum. Funding was obtained to employ locals to upgrade the Mallacoota Walking Track, realign the Genoa Peak track and restore the Betka Beach area. Hundreds of trees have been planted. There is a weekly weeding group. Members are involved in the ongoing Devlins Gully Restoration Project, in beach cleaning and volunteering in the Information Shed. They are cooperating with the Historical Society and the Lions to renovate the old boat shed near Bucklands Jetty. A recent initiative is coordinating a project for the installation of solar power in an additional 60 houses.

Group Convener, Jeannette Davey, says 'We believe the Friends of Mallacoota will grow and prosper as so many residents and visitors have a deep affection for, and a strong attachment to, this special place and wish its environment to be cared for and preserved.'

Contact: June Drake (Secretary) 5158 0504

How to contact us ...

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Deadline for
November issue:
15 October 2009

Conference reminder!

Will your group be represented at the Friends Network Conference on 11–13 September at Grantville? See flyer with FN67, or go to our website for details.

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

Group Grapevine

Two examples of financial stress within Parks Victoria have come to notice. **Friends of Nyerimilang** report having spent \$37,000 of their hard earned funds on termite treatment and repairs to Nyerimilang Homestead in the last financial year. Funding was not available from Parks Victoria whose additional contribution was \$7,000 for floor coverings. **Friends of Woodlands Historic Park** have spent grant money on blackberry and erosion control and rabbit warren ripping which could be regarded as basic management tasks.

Friends of Edwards Lake, originally formed in 2000, has been reconvened and is back in action implementing restoration works and community activities at the lake and along Edgars Creek. Contact is Lee McKenzie 0419 750 532.

The **Friends of Wonnangatta Valley** have a Merchandise Coordinator, Susan Abbey 5977 3611, who reports \$900 sales on their Easter weekend in the valley. On offer were a range of clothing, a beanie, bookmarks and stickers all featuring their logo. Now they also have available rear spare wheel tyre covers at \$120 delivered.

The **Friends of Ocean Grove Nature Reserve**, in the fashion of the times, have developed a 'Vision' – The Friends of Ocean Grove Nature Reserve will work in partnership with Parks Victoria to preserve and enhance the reserve's natural values, foster community appreciation and create a social network of like-minded people.

Friends of Terricks annual gathering is on the weekend of 2–4 October. Everyone welcome. Contact Simon Starr 5455 7116.

Wildflower Shows

ANGAIR Annual Wildflower Show 2009: 19 & 20 September, Memorial Hall Anglesea. 5263 1085
angair@pipeline.com.au. <http://users.pipeline.com.au/~angair/mainpage.htm>

Friends of Kooyoorra 2009 Wildflower Show. Friday, Saturday & Sunday 18–20 September. Rheola Hall. Contact Rob Scholes 5437 3255

Friends of Brisbane Ranges Biennial Wildflower Show Sunday 11 October from 10 am, Anakie Hall, Staughtonvale Rd, Anakie 3221. Contact Helena Lindorff helenal@pacific.net.au or Judy Locke 5367 2922.
<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~fobr/>

Weedbuster Week

7–13 September. Go to www.weedbusters.info for details.

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