



FriendsNET

Newsletter of the Victorian Environment Friends Network
Number 72 August 2010

This issue's special focus: Marine Friends



Geoff Wescott
– Associate Professor of
Environment at Deakin
University's Melbourne
Campus

Most of us know little about the marine environment. In recent years, there has been increased interest and an explosion of knowledge, but it is the old story – the more we learn, the more it is realised how little is known. A long-time advocate for marine conservation, Dr Geoff Wescott, is our guest contributor to this special marine issue. We also feature two Friends groups working on coastal environments.

Marine Conservation Needs You

The southern seas of Australia, including the coastal waters of Victoria, are full of surprises. Here, over 80% of all species are endemic to this region – a stunning figure, far in excess of any Victorian land equivalent.

Yet the protection of our marine species and the marine environment in Victoria is haphazard to say the least.

Whilst a 20 year battle resulted in the declaration of 5.3% of Victoria's coastal waters into highly protected (or 'no-take') marine national parks and sanctuaries in late 2002, not a single further no-take reserve has been declared since.

Compare this to what has happened on land: 11.9% of all land (and approx. 25% of public land, the more relevant comparison) is now in national parks and the State Government has managed to declare 6 new national parks in the last eight years (bringing the total to 45) on land – but has not managed to add a single new marine reserve in the same period.

In terms of marine biodiversity, a similar picture emerges. Whilst a very positive step was the inclusion of an objective of 'maintaining marine ecological integrity' as one of three top priorities in the Victorian Coastal Strategy in 2008, and there is a proposal for a 'Victorian Marine Plan' to be prepared (outlined in the White Paper on Land [sic] and Biodiversity, in 2009), there are few tangible signs of progress on either of these fronts.

Hence it has come down to the VNPA and its fourth Nature Conservation Review to 'take up the baton again' (it was the third review which provided the momentum for increased marine reserves last time). See VNPA's 'Protecting our Seas and Shores'.

As well, individual contributions are needed again, at two levels:

- First, in terms of 'hands-on' action, there are several community groups and Friends groups to become involved in. These include 'Sea Search', 'Reef Life Survey' and Friends of Mushroom Reef, Rickett's Point, The Bluff, Jawbone and Corner Inlet to name a few.
- Secondly, it is time to tell your local politician to stop ignoring the marine environment and come in behind the VNPA's marine recommendations.

Good luck with these initiatives – you can make a real difference to 'kick starting' marine conservation in Victoria.

Geoff Wescott

Groups in Action: Making Marine Connections



Yellow-striped Leatherjacket (photo at Ricketts Point by Ray Lewis)

Friends of the Bluff are one of a growing number of coastal focused Friends groups that are actively involved in the management of marine protected areas established in 2002 as the Victorian system of Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries.

Extending the group's interest from the terrestrial environment and revegetating the Bluff itself, Friends of the Bluff became actively involved in programs to raise awareness of the significance of the new Marine Sanctuary.

The diversity of habitats including both sandstone and basalt intertidal reefs, sandy beaches, kelp forests, and the estuary,

From your Network Committee Convener



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

During May, in my job as volunteer coordinator at the Australian Conservation Foundation, I did some internet searching to find planting days I could recommend to our volunteers. In some cases these were readily available, in others it required a follow-up email to Councils to find what was going on. This pointed out to me that it is worthwhile finding out how your activities are advertised on the web. I am happy to receive any information you would like to provide about community plantings so I can pass it on to our volunteers and to corporates who are looking for opportunities for staff to participate. Email m.himbury@acfonline.org.au.

Requests for corporate volunteers can also be made through Volunteering Victoria, Eastern Volunteers, Volunteer West and the People and Parks Foundation.

Parks Victoria is currently working on the Greater Alpine National Parks Management Plan. While this is of particular interest to Friends groups in the area, it is also of value to other Parks Victoria Friends groups as it will act as the template for future plans.

You can participate at
www.weplan.parks.vic.gov.au/alpine

Friends of the Bluff, continued from page 1

all within its seventeen hectares, make the Marine Sanctuary a popular place to visit to interact with local marine life. Upwards of twenty thousand visitors have participated in various programs, and organisations such as the nearby Marine Discovery Centre in Queenscliff, the Coast Action / Coastcare program, and many schools and universities, make constant use of the site for building awareness of the rich and diverse nature of Victoria's marine environment.

A project initiated soon after the park was established aimed to provide a means of connecting the local community and visitors with the sanctuary through imagery and stories. Led by a couple of passionate group members with experience in web design and teaching, the *Living on the Edge* CD was developed and made accessible through the group's website at www.barwonbluff.com.au. This extraordinary collection of images, natural and cultural values information, presentations, video footage, lesson plans for schools, and much more was developed by volunteers contributing what they could capturing images, writing materials, and compiling the information into accessible formats. The *Living on the Edge* project and website went on to be recognised in 2005 with both a Victorian Coastal Award for Excellence and a national Banksia award.

Inspired by this success, Friends of the Bluff have gone on to develop a number of field guides including booklets on the *Plants that Clothe the Bluff*, *Life on the Edge - a guide to intertidal marine life*, and *Birds of the Bluff*. These are great



tools to help people recognise the extraordinary natural diversity found locally and, through interpretation, help to connect them with opportunities for personal involvement in protecting the site.

Active involvement in the town's annual Festival of the Sea, now in its tenth year, has also been a significant activity. Each year the group facilitates a comprehensive program of activities for locals of all ages. Family science nights for the local primary school, community seminars, a popular *Land Sea and Sky* slide show, schools field days, rockpool rambles, canoe trips and mudflats meanders, as well as displays and info stalls, all contribute to sharing the passion for the natural environment and its protection.

For more information visit the *Living on the Edge* website at www.barwonbluff.com.au

Mark Rodrigue 8627 4845

Marine Care Ricketts Point Inc. is a Friends group located on the Port Phillip Bay foreshore, where it shares premises with the Beaumaris Life Saving Club. It was established in 2003 after a twenty year public campaign, led by a local resident and teacher, Bob Whiteway, to have the area declared a marine sanctuary.

The sanctuary extends from Black Rock to Mentone and about 500 metres out into the Bay, and its sandstone reefs are very rich with algae and hence they host abundant marine life.

There are over 60 members, a committee of 11 and a further 10 members with extra areas of responsibility, such as



Friends of the Bluff undertaking the Great Victorian Fish Count (Mark Rodrigue, photo). Above right: Barwon Bluff (Google Earth)

science, disabled diving, dive boat, etc. The group is a proactive one and very busy. Members scuba dive, free dive and snorkel. Activities are underpinned by a year-round series of meetings and summer and winter weekly snorkeling events. Other activities include: supporting a number of University marine research projects (as well as its own); taking school tours through its Marine Education Centre; subtidal, intertidal and reef sea-life monitoring and species logging; support of local sister groups; public education; environmental and facilities upgrade lobbying ... and more.

Recent observations by the group include:

- A pair of humpback whales close in shore, off the Ricketts Point Tea Rooms in July.
- The first recorded Golden Pot-bellied Seahorse in the sanctuary in late May. Also during May, a family of Royal Spoonbills took up residence on the reef.
- Arrival of exotic pests – an alga, a kelp and a lovely reddish seaweed known as *Grataloupia turuturu!*
- On two occasions they have had the rare privilege of being surrounded by shoals of salmon in their thousands, in only a couple of metres of water.

Members have developed a level of local marine species knowledge, and the group now has a substantial marine images base, comprised both stills and video. It also produces a quarterly newsletter. By Christmas we hope to be associated with a glass-bottomed boat regularly viewing in the sanctuary. This could well be a highlight of our busy *Summer by the Sea* program.

Find out more about Marine Care Ricketts Point by going to our website www.marinecare.org.au or by contacting Ray Lewis on 0408 308 768 or ray.lewis@greypath.com.



Above: Shoals of Salmon



Left: Golden Pot-bellied Seahorse

(Photos in the Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuary by Ray Lewis)

Experience Exchange (your space)

Our May issue featured Municipal Groups. Robert Bender of Friends of Wilson Reserve, City of Banyule, has submitted these suggestions for managing a conservation effort in a Council reserve.

- Develop a good working relationship with the managing Council's environment and field staff: share planning of the year's activities; be sensitive to their views on what are acceptable tasks for a volunteer group and the range of plant species appropriate to the area; try not to make too much extra work for them (such as by making mountains of weeds for them to remove); communicate with them a lot, as with providing newsletters, reports of activities, copies of scientific permits, reports on what was done with grant money, reports on vandalism issues.
- Join in activities organised by Council staff, e.g. Clean Up Australia day, World Environment Day, community planting days in combination with other local conservation groups.
- Become aware of how responsibilities for the area are divided between the Council and other authorities, such as Melbourne Water, or Parks Victoria.
- Council reserves are on a much smaller scale than national parks so the field staff are much more visible, making it much easier to develop relationships if you are out and about in your park a fair bit. They are also much more likely to notice what you are doing.

A Solution to our Ageing Volunteer System

The Friends Group of the Lilydale to Warburton Rail Trail has been active for about 15 years, working to beautify the Trail with many native vegetation plantings. Owing to a range of factors including people shifting from the area and people getting older, the number of active members has declined. Efforts to attract new members have not had much success.

As a result, the regular third Sunday working bees have been mostly replaced with special mulching and planting days during the week using local Secondary and Primary School students with the valuable assistance of the State Government Department of Planning and Community Development, and the Yarra Ranges Council. For example, over the past four years, about 400 metres of the Trail, at its Beresford Rd commencement, have been successfully planted with local vegetation; this has been repeated at other Trail locations.

If you would like more information please contact me on 5967 2829.

Pat O'Shaughnessy
President Friends of the Lilydale to Warburton Rail Trail

How to contact us ...

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Group Grapevine

Sjaan Field, Parks Victoria Volunteer and Community Programs Coordinator, reports Friends Groups contributed 108,842 of 192,645 volunteer hours (57%) in 2009/10. Parks Victoria thanks all members of Friends groups for their continued support and contribution to Parks Victoria's reserves, parks and waterways.

The **Friends of Woodlands Historic Park** report that last year, after approximately 22 remarkable years, John and Gladys Sweetten retired as volunteer guides at Woodlands Homestead. Their exceptional contribution was recognised with Best Friend Awards in 2002.

The **Friends of Damper Creek Bushland Reserve** held a 'Good Neighbour Community Planting Day' on Sunday 30 May. The plants and BBQ were funded by a project grant from Melbourne Water. In response to the Friends' letterbox drop to houses abutting the 11 hectare reserve, 90+ adults and children enthusiastically participated. 4,650 indigenous tube stock were planted with guidance and assistance from the Monash City Council Bushcrew.

The **Friends of Werribee Gorge & Long Forest Mallee** played a leading role in the organisation of *Grow West* on Sunday 18 July. 6,000 tube stock were planted on private property at Ingliston, adjacent to the Werribee Gorge.

The **Friends of Morwell National Park** have been removing old concrete fence posts for use as creek-crossing stepping stones.

Laminated notices about working bees stapled to posts at the reserve entrances brought a big dividend for the **Friends of Wilson Reserve** as they had the largest turnout for several years – an estimated 22 people – for their first winter planting.

Congratulations of **Bob Anderson**, president of the **Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater**, on the award of an Order of Australia Medal in the 2010 Queen's Birthday Honours list.

And we welcome

Friends of the Taradale Nature Conservation Reserve Formed in November 2009 and incorporated with 10 members. The reserve is managed by Parks Victoria, Castlemaine. John Sinnott 9489 7661 or 5423 2437

If your group has not appeared in *FriendsNET* it may be because we do not receive your newsletter. Please ensure we are on your distribution list.

**Deadline for November issue:
15 October 2010**

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

Vale

Ron Pearson, a leading member of the **Friends of Braeside Park** – particularly its nursery, died on 25/5/2010, aged 87.

Peter Schauble, president of **Friends of George Tindale Memorial Garden** from 1997 to 2000, died on 22/6/2010, aged 54.

Wildflower Shows

Grampians 30 Sept. – 3 Oct. Halls Gap Hall.

Anglesea 18–19 Sept. Memorial Hall, McMillan Street, Anglesea.

Kooyoora 18–19 Sept. Rheola Hall. Includes Wildflower tours.

Brisbane Ranges – held biennially, no show this year.

Volunteer for the Show

Members of Friends Groups are invited to volunteer at the Parks Victoria display during the Royal Melbourne Show 2010. The role will be to assist Parks Victoria's marketing division in promoting Parks Victoria and answering public enquires about volunteering with Parks Victoria's Friends Groups. Volunteers are required between 11:00am and 4:00pm with a one hour break for lunch, from **Saturday 18 to Tuesday 28 September**. Contact Bernice Dowling on 9881 6715 Monday to Wednesday or e-mail bdowling@parks.vic.gov.au

Environmental crime hotline

To report wildlife, forestry and exotic animal crime or any suspicious activity to DSE's compliance team phone – 13 6186.

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