

# When the going gets hot ... Volunteering in a Greenhouse World

## Victorian Environment Friends Network Conference Highlights

held at Grantville 11-13 September 2009

### Friday afternoon-evening

- 4pm Excursion to Phillip Island Penguin Parade with bus driver Bob Splatt

### Ray Lewis, Friends of Ricketts Point Marine Park

- Ray's underwater slides showed species from Ricketts Point Marine Park.
- Eleven Armed Australian Sea Star eating a mussel,
- Waratah Anemone with spring loaded spears on the end of a string,
- Lions-mane Jellyfish – a real stinger,
- Cyano bacteria – invented photosynthesis, made all life on earth possible,
- Kelp – bubbles full of nitrogen enabling the plant to float to light,
- Port Jackson Sharks - unchanged in 50 million years,
- Porcupine fish – second most toxic fish on earth,
- Decorator Crab – made up with sea grass,
- Striped-backed Chiton – last creature to develop eyes,
- Grass worts – studied for their salt tolerant abilities.

### Peter Huthwaite, Phillip Island Landcare and Bass Coast Landcare Network

- When formed in 1987 issues included salinity, deforestation, loss of wildlife.
- On Phillip Island five tons of firewood burnt in kilns for every ton of chicory.
- Issues today are related to urbanization and climate change.
- Landcarers complete salinity mapping using quad bikes and GPS.
- Landholders help create wildlife corridors crossing private land.
- Projects include sustainability audits of households, water management and pest plant and animal work.
- 60 out of 110 Landcare Facilitators lost their jobs because funding redirected to 'Caring for Country'.
- Local shire employing staff and the Landcare Network paying wages.
- Employment of corporate fund-raiser 3 day per week raises \$600,000 per year.
- Development of Land Stewardship projects, farmers do conservation work for payment.
- Hopes that Biodiversity White paper will make consultation with Aboriginal community more meaningful.
- With future deficit Federal Budgets the new challenge is to compete for conservation dollars against Schools and Hospitals.
- In the future we need to engage the landholders who own big chunks of land.

### Mark Manthief, Phillip Island Nature Park

- Formed under Crown lands (Reserves) Act 1978 in 1996 by Kennett government to look after Penguin parade, Koala Conservation Centre, Churchhill Island Heritage Centre and The Knobbies.
- Manage 1,805 ha and have 1,057,000 visitors per year, income \$16,000,000 per year. \$4,000,000 profit per year that is used for conservation work. There are 163 tickets and packages.
- Research work on penguins and koalas. Employ 26 conservation staff, 6 full time research staff, 12 PhD students
- No government funding.
- Activities include planting 60,000 plants, satellite tracking of penguins, eliminating foxes (one fox can kill 50 penguins a night).
- Satellite tracking of penguins shows they dive to 50m and feed on way up.
- Projects include new buildings at Koala Conservation Centre, a new Wildlife Hospital in 2010. Aiming to set up degree course in Eco-tourism.

### Saturday morning

#### Volunteering and climate change – a birds eye view

#### Don Saunders, past Director of National Parks, now Conservation Coordinator with Bird Observation & Conservation Australia (BOCA):

- Climate change now unequivocal, higher temperatures, more storms, greater fire danger.
- Many species will be unable to adapt, there will be some winners, some losers.
- Introduced species are likely to be advantaged.
- Much of the data available on changes in bird communities is the result of long-term data collection by amateurs.
- Pied Imperial Pigeons have extended their range south and are no longer migratory in some areas.
- Kookaburras are seen at higher altitudes.

- Sacred Kingfishers and Rainbow Bee-eaters are staying longer in the south.
- Grey Crowned Babblers, studied by ANU & CSIRO, have bred to a smaller body size compared with historic size. This is thought to be a response to warmer climate. Smaller bodies cool more quickly.
- Warmer ocean waters benefit Little Penguins, providing a wider feeding area.
- Wedge-tailed Shearwaters are disadvantaged by warmer waters.
- Drying of wetlands has a huge impact on birds, but as they are migratory the effect is complex.
- Along the Coorong increased salinity means that where there were normally nesting Pelicans now there are Banded Stilts that tolerate salinity.
- Research by the Malleefowl Recovery Group shows reduced breeding by Malleefowl has resulted from less winter rainfall as the species relies on wet fermentation to prepare the nest mound.
- Localized bird species are threatened by more frequent and more severe bush fire.
- Birds like the Mallee Emu Wren are killed by fire.
- Little Penguins do not run from fire.
- The recommendation by the Parliamentary Committee that 300,000ha be burnt each year is a huge and unsustainable increase from the already high 130,000ha currently prescribed annually. This and the clearing of roadsides threatens the availability of tree hollows and the species that rely on tree hollows to breed and shelter.
- Rising sea levels threaten salt marshes used by Orange Bellied Parrots.
- Hooded Plover and Fairy Tern beach habitat is threatened by rising seas and sea surges. Volunteers are lifting eggs onto sandbags to save them.
- Collateral damage from sustainable energy generation, e.g. wind farms can kill species such as Wedged-tailed Eagles and Broilgas. (Tasmania, Willaura/Penshurst)
- **What should Volunteers do?**
- Continue collecting data over long periods. This provides a way of assessing change. Undertake local research. Volunteers already do most of the valuable long-term research.
- Get involved in planning. Have input to the development of DSE fire plans. Tell DSE when plans threaten species.
- The future of conservation is with private land. It is about connecting patches that we do have through corridors on private land. Conservation Covenants make a tremendous difference.
- Victorian Environment Assessment Council study of remnant vegetation looks at connectivity. Make a submission to look at what could be added to improve habitat.

### Introduction to the history of Bass Valley

#### Libby Skidmore, Bass Valley Historical Society:

- George Bass is Libby's hero. She recommended Miriam Epstensen's, 2005 book, *The Life of George Bass*.
- Bass 'discovered' Westernport and sailed up the Bass River in January 1798. He camped on the banks to repair his whale boat after finding fresh water here.
- The local tribe, the Bunurong, were observed by Bass. The French explorers treated Aboriginal people well. Bunurong middens are still found along the shore.
- Hazel Bennett, wife of William Bennett, kept a diary in the 1880s and passed through the Grantville area on the way to Port Albert. Hazel had eight children. According to Hazel's diary crossing creeks in the area was a nightmare.
- Grantville was settled because Deep Creek supplied fresh water.
- Much of the land was alienated in the 1870s. By the 1890s Grantville was a roaring place with four hotels.
- Seagrass was harvested from Western Port, called 'Alpinité' then made into insulation.
- Timber harvesting was the major industry of Grantville with wooden tramway tracks to carry logs leading from the forest to Queen's Wharf, a jetty built by Alexander Stewart.
- Robert Massey and Samuel Anderson grew wheat and built a flour mill with an undershot wheel that used the tidal flow of the creek to grind flour.
- Grantville was the end of the Cobb & Co Coach route. It cost 5/- to travel from Dandenong by coach.
- Grantville's sale yards were the third biggest in the state until 1929.
- The first local school was the Deep Creek National School built in 1872.
- Grantville's newspaper, *The Westernport Times*, was closed when the office was burnt in 1906.

## **Climate change and national parks, Phil Ingamells, campaigner Victorian National Parks Association:**

- Mid-latitude westerly weather system's have retreated toward the south pole.
- This has an impact on rainfall, stream flow, storms, wildfires and temperatures.
- In 1851 Baron Von Mueller arrived in Australia. He went first to Mt Buffalo and the Australian Alps as he knew no plant survey work had been done there.
- Men like Joseph Hooker supported Charles Darwin in developing and promoting his theory of *Origin of Species* because he saw it anchored in scientific truth, rather than in power of the elite and the church. (Ref *Darwin's Armada*)
- Examples of climate change from Jasper National Park, Canada, include the receding Athabasca Glacier near Jasper, Canada.
- Potential for new invasions by exotic species as climate changes, these include such plants as willows and bamboo.
- Potential for species to migrate toward poles as the climate warms.
- Lack of severe cold means that some species, such as Pine Beetles, normally killed during winter, survive. Pine Beetles kill pine trees.
- Remnant native vegetation is 37% of the original extent in Victoria.
- If sea level rises there is no potential for wetlands to migrate inland because of development.
- Fire prone eucalypts have invaded ancient rainforests.
- Bogong moths fly from the grasslands in NSW to the Alps. The moths feed mammals in the Alps, but grasslands are under threat.
- Trees are invading places like frost hollows in Mt Buffalo National Park.
- In Victorian Alps capacity for species to migrate is very low because of limited area and altitude.
- The fire indexes for forest and grassland are different.
- Example of Wilson's Prom NP fires in 2009 showing how some areas that were burnt were the areas burnt in the fires of 2007, giving no time for seed set.
- 130,000ha of prescribed burning for 2008, now mandated burning of 300,000 calls for burning not based on any truth or science. Enormous pressure for inappropriate burning, has potential to change whole ecosystems.
- We need to anchor decisions in knowledge and science not in the power of talk back radio.
- Friends should collect long-term data on changes in species and make submissions to the Bush Fires Royal Commission on fuel reduction burning.

## **Jennifer Wolcott – Parks Victoria**

- Jennifer came to say thank you to Friends on behalf of Parks Victoria.
- *'Volunteers connect parks to communities.'*
- Kookaburra Awards, 25 year anniversary grants, Friends kits, support for the Friends Network Conference, volunteer training and Bush Guardian Grants, are all ways in which Parks Victoria recognize and support volunteers.
- Challenges for Friends as volunteers include Climate Change, the need to draw in non-anglo volunteers and the need to engage young people.
- Ken Harris, Friends of Morwell NP, won 2009 Kookaburra Award, Friends of Westgate Park won the 2009 Landcare group award.

## **Saturday afternoon, short walks and tours**

- Walk at Cape Woolamai led by Tony Woodford.
- Bass River Valley walk led by Phil Westwood.
- Churchill Island visit led by Bob Splatt.
- Corinella Cemetery and Historic sites led by Libby Skidmore.
- The Gurdies Flora Reserve led by Jenny Rejske.
- Wildflower walk led by Gidga Walker

## **Saturday evening, 25 Years of Friends of French Island.**

### **Dr Geoff Lacey, Friends of French Island:**

- Chris Chandler and Des Quinn were inaugural members.
- First meeting was at the Chandler home on French Island in February 1984.
- First excursion to Tortoise Head April 1984 had 18 people.
- This set the tone for the future with weeding, monitoring and political action.
- FOFI have an annual planting with French Island Landcare.
- Friends began a long term task of monitoring birds and noting the intimate relationship between landscape and species.
- Landscape can be mapped using Ian Sergeant's *Land Systems* of 1975.
- Features include Bittern and Flinders Dune systems from the last ice age.
- Friends have noted prime spots for different species of bird, for example cliff tops for raptors, sheltered shore lines for migratory waders, Rams Island as wader roost and for Fairy Terns. Friends have set up photo points as a form of monitoring.
- Friends campaigned successfully to get SEC land on the bluff with a Sea Eagle's nest included in the park.

- Changes in vegetation communities include Messmate Forest developing grassy bracken under-storey where there was once heathy under-storey.
- Friends enter species observations into the DSE mapping system.
- *'... Ultimately nature is beyond our management but we may be able to repair damage that has been done...'*
- *'... Layers of meaning in the landscape may be revealed by monitoring and observing the land itself...'*

## **Around Friends Groups, Tony Woodford**

- Presentations were made by Friends of Wyperfeld, Friends of Great South Walk, Friends of Werribee Gorge & Long Forest Mallee, Bayside Friends Network, Friends of Corinella Heathland, Friends of Buckley Falls, Friends of Terric Terric,
- Friends of Tara Bulga NP, Honoring Cara Healey, *first female Parks Victoria Ranger* and Friends of Seawinds.

## **'Seeding the Future', Judy Allen**

- Launch of DVD on native seeds. Judy Allen's DVD *'The Natural Gardener, Seeding the Future, seed collecting and cleaning for friends, landcare and gardeners.'* was shown.
- It will be distributed free by Melbourne Water and will be available to Friends.

## **Sunday Soap Box, Sue Wright**

- Margaret Boyd, *Make-up of Friends groups,*
- Sue Haymen-Fox, *Preservation of data collected by Friends,*
- Joan Lindross, *Trail bikes in the Otways and submissions to the Bushfire Royal Commission.*

## **VEFN Annual General Meeting**

### **Election of VEFN Management Committee 2009-11**

- Margaret Boyd, Neil Duncan, Maelor Himbury, Tony Woodford and Sue Wright were re-elected to the VEFN Committee for the next two years.

## **About Water, Prof. Nancy Millis, Professor Microbiology, Melbourne University**

- Water demand down from a 3% annual growth rate p.a. to 1% growth p.a.
- Decrease is due to implementing a system of payment based on the volume of water used.
- Obsession with growth means that we will run out of water in Melbourne by 2060.
- Water supply should include household tanks and use of grey water on gardens.
- At a community level redirecting storm water, better urban design, recycling treated effluent and desalination would help supply.
- Recycling water, including sewage treatment, includes managing risks.
- Risks include microbial, bacteria, protozoa and viruses.
- Use of membrane filters showed a trade-off between better quality outcomes requiring increased energy for high pressure to push water through fine membranes.
- Comparisons were made between problems solved by using effluent as opposed to desalinating seawater.
- The greatest disadvantages of desalination were seen as the need to remove high levels of salt and the huge amount of energy needed to pump treated water to a suitable storage like Cardinia Dam. *'... from the sea everywhere is up!'*

## **Volunteering and Friends Groups: Panel**

- Following presentations by Hazel Maynard, Volunteering Victoria and David Gabriel-Jones, Public Land Consultancy, questions from the floor were discussed by Hazel Maynard, David Gabriel-Jones, Barbara Jakob, Bayside Environment Friends Network and Sjaan Field, Volunteering Coordinator, Parks Victoria.

## **VEFN Presentation of Best Friend Awards 2009**

- Four Best Friends Awards were announced by Professor Nancy Millis.
- Geoff Lacey nominated by Friends of French Island.
- Ken Harris nominated by Friends of Morwell National Park.
- David Barr nominated by Friends of Wilson Reserve.
- Wally Mortimer nominated by Friends of Wonangatta.
- Award Presentations were made to Geoff Lacey and Ken Harris.

*(Please note: these highlights have not been checked by the presenters)*

## **The VEFN acknowledges the support of Parks Victoria and the VNPA**