

Bend of Islands Conservation Association

Newsletter No. 22

What Native's Flowering?



Botanical Name: Hymenanthera dentata
Common Name: Tree violet
Family: Violaceae

A large shrub or small tree up to 4 metres in height found growing along the Yarra River or in gullies. In rocky places it is more stunted in form.

It is quite an uncommon plant, and very different in plant form and habit to the very common native ground cover *Viola hederacea*, which is also from the same family.

The Tree Violet is a stiff, widely branching shrub which may have a few spines along the branches.

The leaves are narrow and 1 - 5 cm long with irregular margins.

The tiny bell flowers (3 - 4 mm long) are yellow, intensely fragrant and crowded along the underside of the branches. Although our native ground cover violet has no scent at all the fragrance of the Tree Violet is not unlike the florist or garden violet.

The flowering period is from May to October followed by small white to purplish berries from December to February. These fruits are a favourite food for many small birds such as silvereyes as well as honeyeaters and parrots.

CRIC HENRY

Weeping Willows

The weeping willow, traditionally the symbol of sorrow, desolation and desertion, presents perhaps the single most critical threat to native riparian species throughout the Bend of Islands reaches of the Yarra. The worst infestations occur around the sections of rapids where a single small branch floating downstream and lodging in rocks can in a few short years become a major obstruction to life and limb of canoeist and river flow.

The local invasion originates mainly from the practice of upstream farmers, who rather than fence off their properties from the river, have used plantings of willow to repair the damage caused to the river bank by their watering stock. Other trees stem from past plantings in the Bend of Islands itself, by early landowners wishing to bring a bit of old England in the Australian bush.

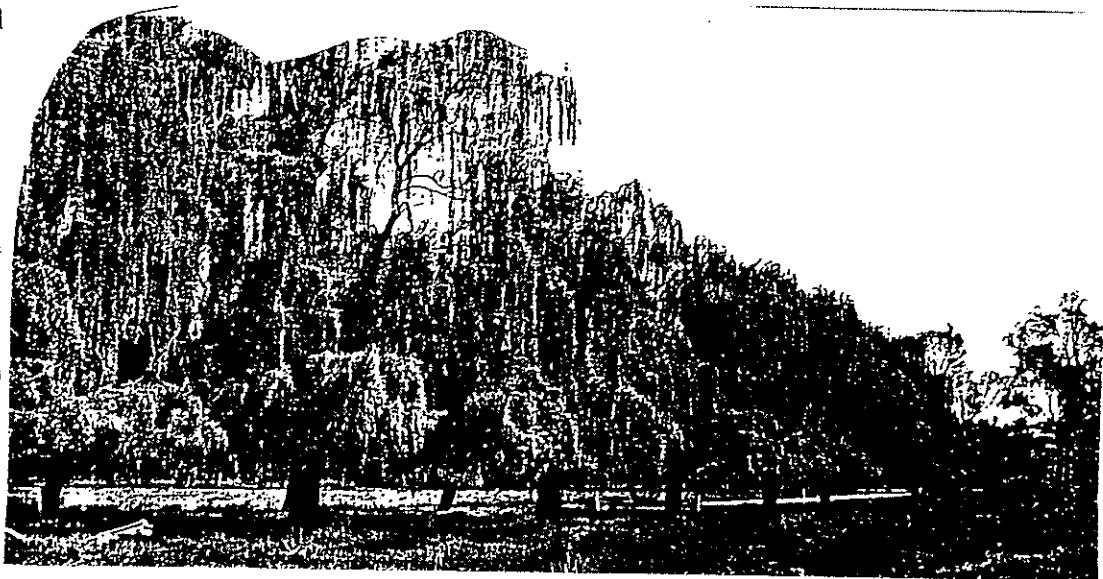
Working bees by BICA members during the late summers of '86, '87 and '88, using injection and frilling techniques, managed to eliminate many trees along the E.L.Z. frontage. Further more, a particularly enthusiastic canoeist Andrew Bodigraden has in his spare time over the past five years been clearing willow trees which pose particular dangers to canoeists. However the greatest progress towards eradication has resulted from the efforts of the Board of Works who over the past three autumns have embarked on a program of willow eradication, whereby the trees are bodily hauled out by powerful bulldozers. Their program is aimed at the total removal of all willows within the six year period and replacement by native species.

Meanwhile, upstream farmers as recently as last summer were still planting willows.

The problem will therefore be with us for many years yet. European vegetation fosters European animals and interfaces with the habitat of the local birds and animals. A not uncommon site along the river is that of a possum drey (nest) exposed on a leafless winter willow. Hardly a safe haven from hovering hawk or night hunting powerful owl. The Wind in the Willows is a beautiful fairy story of a Far Away Land, enjoyed by adult and child alike but...

The bind with the Willow is that
It belongs to the haunt of the Cat,
Together with Mole, Toad, Badger and Rat,
Not Possum, Echidna nor wandering Wombat.

Mick Woiwod.





More and more people are interested in the idea of making known to others their concern for wildlife on their property.

The survival of wildlife species depends on the conservation of habitat which provides food, shelter and breeding sites.

In Victoria, such habitat has been reduced in many localities as land is cleared and used for agriculture, urban or industrial development. However, wildlife conservation can go hand in hand with the management of rural and suburban land; many landholders have undertaken the planned management of portions of their properties for the benefit of wildlife.

A SEAL OF APPROVAL

The Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands and the Bird Observers Club of Victoria are taking steps to recognise new or

existing wildlife conservation efforts by landholders. They are making available Land for Wildlife signs for display on a property, to acknowledge and advertise the owners' endeavours to conserve wildlife.

BENEFITS FOR LANDOWNERS

It is natural for people to feel a special responsibility for something which they nurture or help to establish. For this reason, landholders can take pride in native animals whose habitat continues to exist because of the property owners' efforts to enhance and protect the environment. The benefits to landholders can include...

- . the satisfaction of doing something positive for wildlife conservation.
- . aesthetic enhancement and long term appreciation of property values.
- . the pleasure of observing native wildlife.
- . natural pest control of insects, mice and rabbits.
- . increased stock shelter and shade.
- . expert advice on methods of enhancing a property's wildlife value.

HOW TO QUALIFY

Property owners will need to establish some minimum standards and management practices before the Land for Wildlife sign is given to them. These may include retaining or

recreating native gardens, protecting dams for waterbirds, establishing shelter belts with native trees and shrubs, protecting streamside vegetation, and conserving trees which have hollows for nests and shelter.

The Land for Wildlife status may be cancelled if the landholder fails to maintain an acceptable standard.

HOW TO APPLY

Property owners who provide or maintain wildlife habitat on their properties may apply for recognition of their wildlife conservation efforts to...

- . Mr. Steve Craig
Department of Conservation, Forests and Land
P.O. Box 246, Healesville 3777
Tel (059) 624900

Officers of the organisation will assess the provision and/or management of wildlife habitat by the landholder once an application is received.

Upon their recommendation the Department will acknowledge the achievement by entering the property on a special register and supplying a Land for Wildlife sign to be displayed on the property.

There are already two properties registered in the ELZ and we invite you to apply as above, or contact Mike Felling on 7120286 for further details.

March Fly Catcher

While working outside in February, I was beset as usual by hordes of ravenous March flies. But one February day, I was visited by an amazing insect that we need to find out more about and to encourage. Flying like a wasp and about the size of a large European wasp, this marvellous character actually attacks March flies while they are sitting, and carries them off, hopefully to feast on. It took two March flies in a few minutes, one off a sheet of tin, the other off my leg. It seized them just like a robber fly catches prey and flew away with them!

The insect is about 2 cm long, has large eyes, is greyish-green with a longish abdomen that as far as I could see had paler stripes across it. It can hover but also dart about quite quickly, and does both whenever March flies are abundant; they tended to settle or nick off when it was present. Its buzz is quite characteristic and loud, and not easily mistaken for anything else. I could not bring myself to catch and kill such a wonderful invention of the gods and have been unsuccessful in tracking it down just by reeding about the families of wasps and flies that are known to be reaptors in CSIRO's Insects of Australia. It doesn't look like any of the diagrams. I'll continue to ask entomologists of my acquaintance; you might like to do likewise. And please, check out any loudly buzzing greyish-green wasp-like creature carefully before batting it away: it may be one of your best friends in March-fly country!

Terry O'Brien

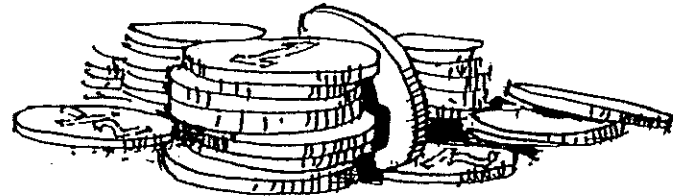


Subscriptions

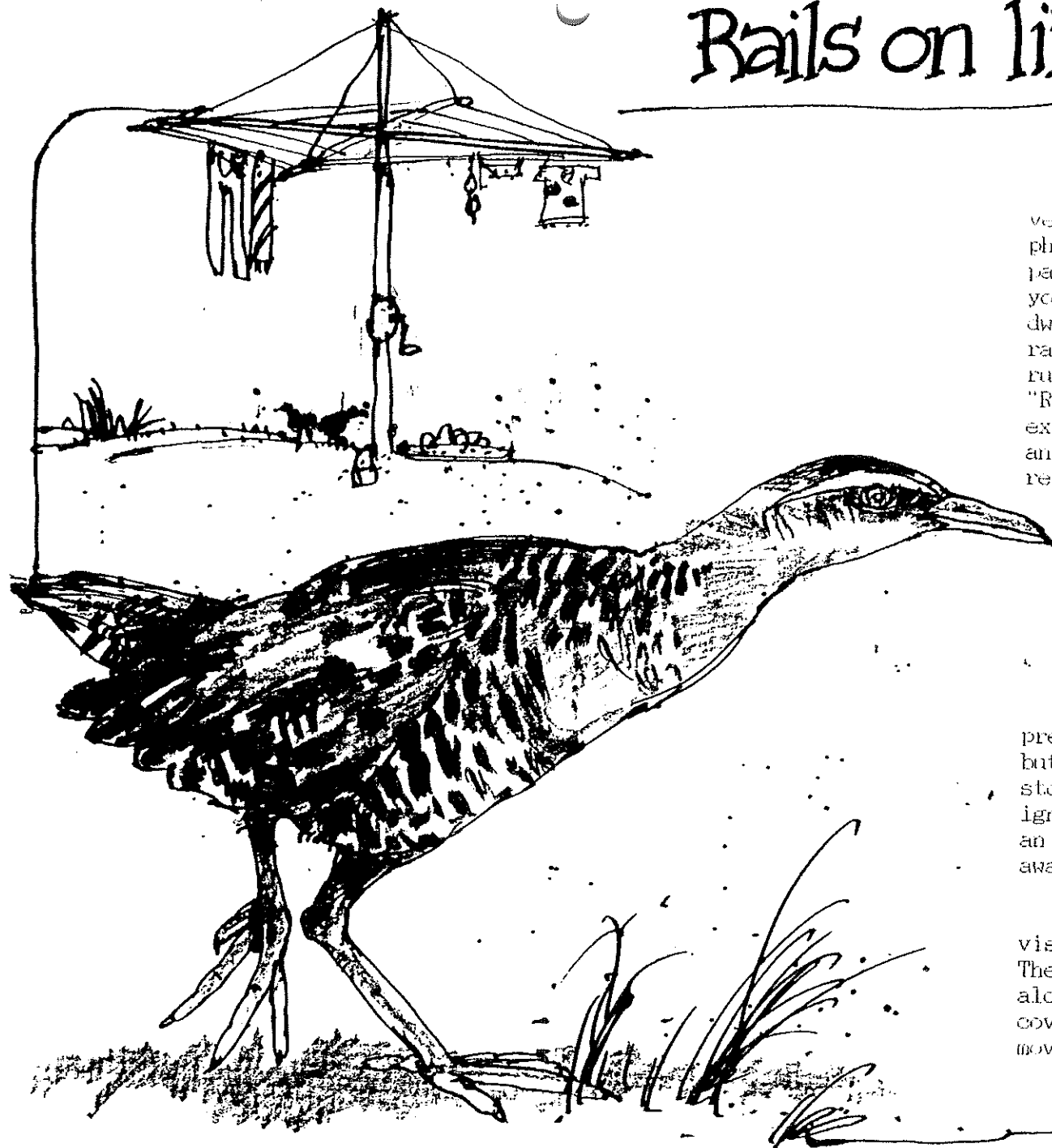
Subscriptions

The Association runs almost entirely on the income from subscriptions, so if you have not paid yours this year, could you please do a.s.a.p.

so



Rails on line



For several months we've had three new very welcome guests around the house, *Rallus philippensis* - one immature and two adult painted rails. As most bird books will tell you, these very shy ground-nesting and ground dwelling birds are not commonly sighted. They rarely fly unless absolutely necessary, and run quickly when disturbed (somewhat like "Roadrunner" from the comic strip) are extremely nervous and flick their tails, like an Eastern swamp hen (perhaps a distant relative) when sensing danger.

They say Hills Hoists are an eyesore, but from underneath ours we first spied our new visitors, and they have also taken to the verandahs, but retreat to the dam if sprung at their favourite task of scratching (chook-like) in mulch for insects.

After the three became accustomed to our presence they would not head for the hills, but only slowly saunter for cover and if we stood still and not look at them they'd ignore us. One gained great pluck and chased an eager insect-foraging young butcherbird away from its choice patch with wings hoisted and head down.

Unfortunately we have lately had a local visiting dog and have not seen our friends. They frequent wet grasslands, swamps and along watercourses, wherever they can run for cover. So watch out for them, they may have moved on down the line.

Wendi Henderson

Azure Kingfisher

Although only occasionally observed in the ELZ, usually along the Yarra River, the Azure Kingfisher is well worth watching out for.

It's a small bird, about the size of a sparrow (17-19 cm including a 4-5 cm bill), but identification is made easy by the richness of its colouring. Apart from a white or buff spot on the side of the neck, its head, back and wings are a deep, glossy blue while its underparts are a sharply contrasting cinnamon/brown. Immature birds are generally paler blue above and have duller underparts. Unlike most Kingfishers, its tail is quite short.

Azure Kingfishers can be found singly or in pairs, invariably near water, and the first indication of the bird's presence is often its distinctive call. They hunt exclusively over water and are frequently seen perched on a bare branch less than a metre above the surface of a river or stream. They can sometimes sit in this position for an hour or more, looking intently into the water - bobbing their head if uneasy or excited. Once sighting their prey (fish, crustaceans and water insects), they dive at it, grasp it in their bill, then return to their perch to eat it head first.

Breeding: The breeding pair use their bills to excavate a metre-long tunnel in the bank of a river or creek. They loosely line this nest with fish bones, scales and the remains of crustaceans. The breeding period extends from September to January and there are usually from four to seven eggs which are rounded and



Azure Kingfisher

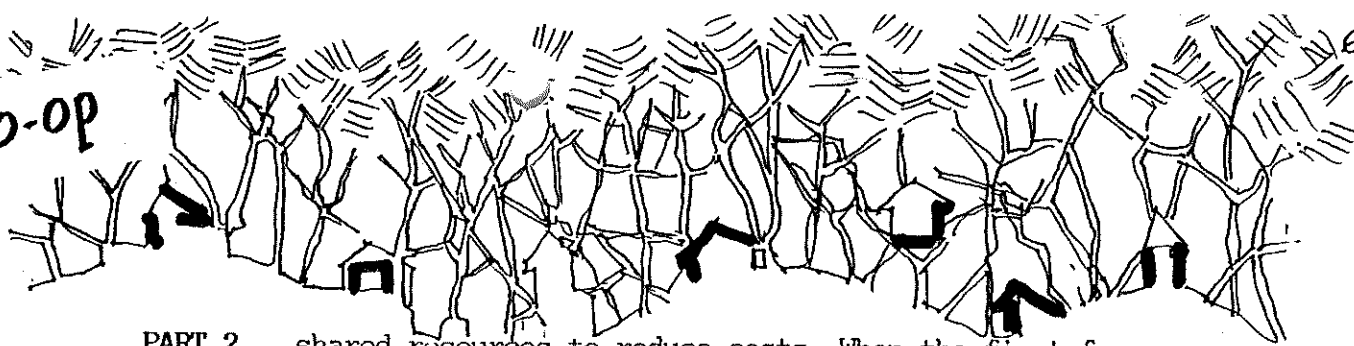
glossy white. Incubation takes 20-22 days and the young fledge in 3-4 weeks.

Voice: A shrill, distinctive "peet, peet"; often given while in flight.

Habitat: Tree-lined creeks, river, lakes and swamps. The Azure Kingfisher is believed to be sedentary and adult pairs have been observed to remain in a permanent territory of 200-500 metres of river bank.

Robyn Duff

My Potted History of the Co-op



PART 2

The Co-op is responsible for 326 acres of natural bushland situated between the Sugarloaf Dam and Skyline Road approximately 1.5 km long and 0.75 km wide. The land is hilly with three access tracks from Skyline Road to the 32 house sites winding along the ridge lines. There are 16 sites occupied at this stage with one of these still under construction, but well on the way.

The house sites were chosen early in the Co-op's development and it was decided to minimise our impact on the land by siting them as close to the already existing tracks as was possible whilst still providing a pleasant location for each shareholder. Fortunately there have been few disputes as to the location of the sites over the years and most members feel they have the best site on the Co-op. I know I have.

The planning that went into the sites has paid off in many ways by not only reducing our impact on the major part of the bush on our property but also by reducing the cost of providing services to the houses and access for materials during construction.

When a member decides to build on his/her site, a careful process of consultation and negotiation occurs between the member and the Building Committee. All parties are concerned with the location of the buildings on the site, the impact both visually and physically and the safety of the design, i.e. in relation to fire and erosion. These procedures will seem unduly bureaucratic to most, but the Co-op prides itself on its care taken for both the environment and the proper planning procedures, plus prior to evolving these methods we had a couple of minor disasters.

Nearly all who have built have been owner/builders and many members have contributed labour and in some cases loans to assist fellow members to finish their homes. This has helped members learn needed skills and

shared resources to reduce costs. When the first few houses were started, for some of us every weekend was spent on the Co-op making bricks, humping huge pieces of second-hand timber, doing many tasks in the most complicated way possible. There is no connection between the over-design of most of these houses and the number of members with an engineering background. I would expect many of these houses to outlive us by the odd century. Still it was all great fun and boy, did we learn a lot. One member is in the process of extending his house and not one of his new upright timbers will be hand adzed.

Each house site is 1/8 of an acre and this site includes all buildings for residential and recreational purposes. A further 1/4 acre is allowed for a kitchen garden to allow members to grow food and decorative plants in a controlled environment apart from the bush. The size of the kitchen garden has proven to be too large to cultivate due to lack of water available and the impact a garden that size creates. These two plots may in fact overlap and in my case my kitchen garden is on my house site (when I say 'my', I of course mean 'our'!) The Co-op owns the land and the house site and the kitchen garden site are leased to the members on a semi-permanent basis. The leases are created for 200 years, so the intention was always to make this venture succeed. These leases are an entitlement to each shareholder and they are attached to specific sites as referred to above.

That's enough for this issue. Should anyone be interested in knowing more about the Co-op, we are always pleased to provide more information.

To be continued...Neil Harvey

THE RIVER

ABANDONED HIGH LEVEL MEANDER
 The Yarra once occupied this area - meandering in a loop almost to Oxley Bridge, at which point Watsons Creek flowed into it. The meander was severed when the Yarra breached the resistant strike ridges which now form the rapids on Clare Watson's property. The neck of the abandoned meander is on the site of an Aboriginal composite and stone tool workshop.

WILLOWS
 The Basket Willow is found in a number of areas along the Yarra. It spreads by shooting from underground stems and also via small branches which having been broken off and carried down stream become lodged in rocks or vegetation and start growing again. The willows cause channel silting and contribute to stream blockage.

THE ISLAND
 This is the largest island in the River Yarra and it has been 42 years in the making. It is situated at a point where the river flows over strike ridges of resistant Burgite Formation. The strike ridges trap sand, gravel, branches and logs which are gradually colonised by grasses, sedges and, eventually, shrubs.

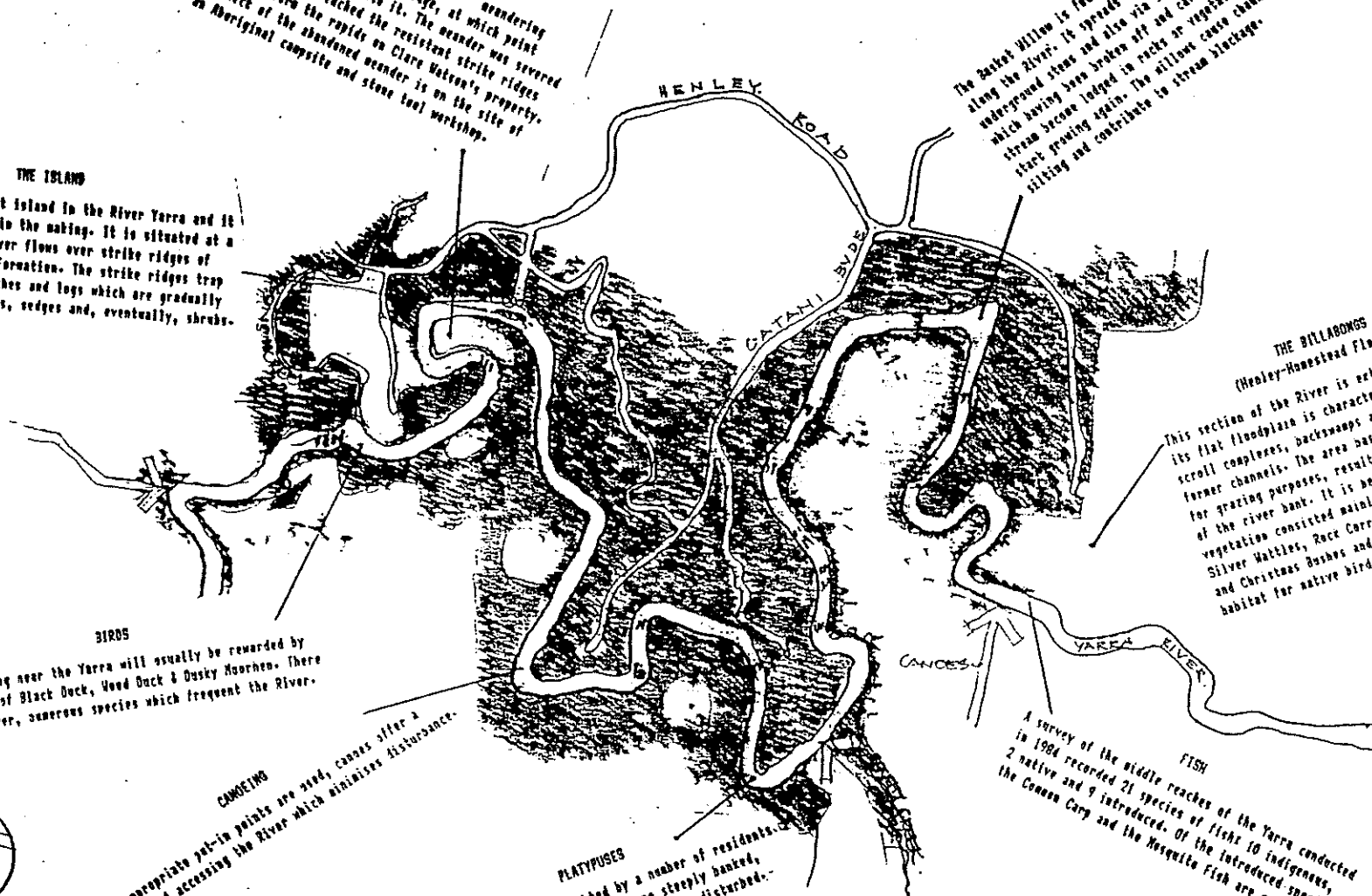
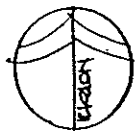
THE BILLABONGS
 (Wenley-Homestead Floodplain)
 This section of the River is extremely circuitous and its flat floodplain is characterised by meander belts, scroll complexes, backswoops and numerous abandoned former channels. The area has been extensively cleared for grazing purposes, resulting in considerable erosion of the river bank. It is believed that the original vegetation consisted mainly of Mannia Gums, Blackwoods, Silver Wattles, Rock Correas, Scented Paperbarks, Peas and Christmas Bushes and that it provided an excellent habitat for native birds and animals.

BIRDS
 Birdwatching near the Yarra will usually be rewarded by sightings of Black Duck, Wood Duck & Dusky Moorhen. There are, however, numerous species which frequent the River.

CANOEING
 If appropriate put-in points are used, canoeing offers a method of accessing the River which minimises disturbance.

PLATYPUSES
 Platypuses have been sighted by a number of residents. They require river areas which are steeply banked, contain deep pools and are relatively undisturbed.

FISH
 A survey of the middle reaches of the Yarra conducted in 1984 recorded 21 species of fish 10 indigenous, 2 native and 9 introduced. Of the introduced species, the Common Carp and the Mosquito Fish are major pests.



THE RIVER — OTHER SIDE

WITTONS RESERVE

Owned and managed by the Shire of Lillydale. A popular river access point for swimmers and consists. Its recreational facilities were never adequately designed or developed. Many years of intensive use, have left it severely degraded by soil erosion and weed infestation.

CLIFFORD PARK

19 ha. area owned by the Scout Assoc. It is being developed as an activity / camping centre. Supports up to 200 campers during weekends in Autumn and Spring. Parts have become severely degraded by vegetation removal & soil erosion.

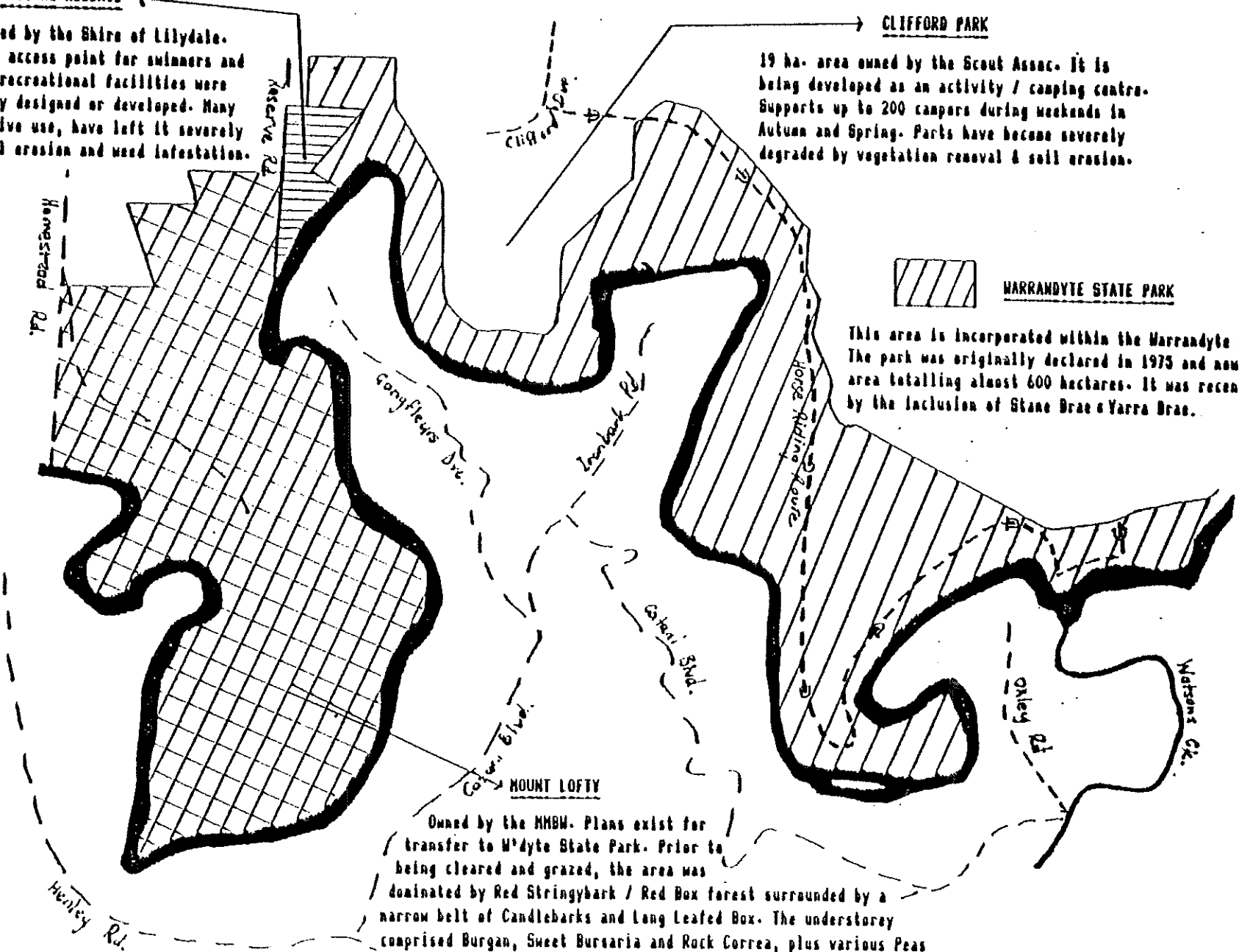


WARRANDYTE STATE PARK

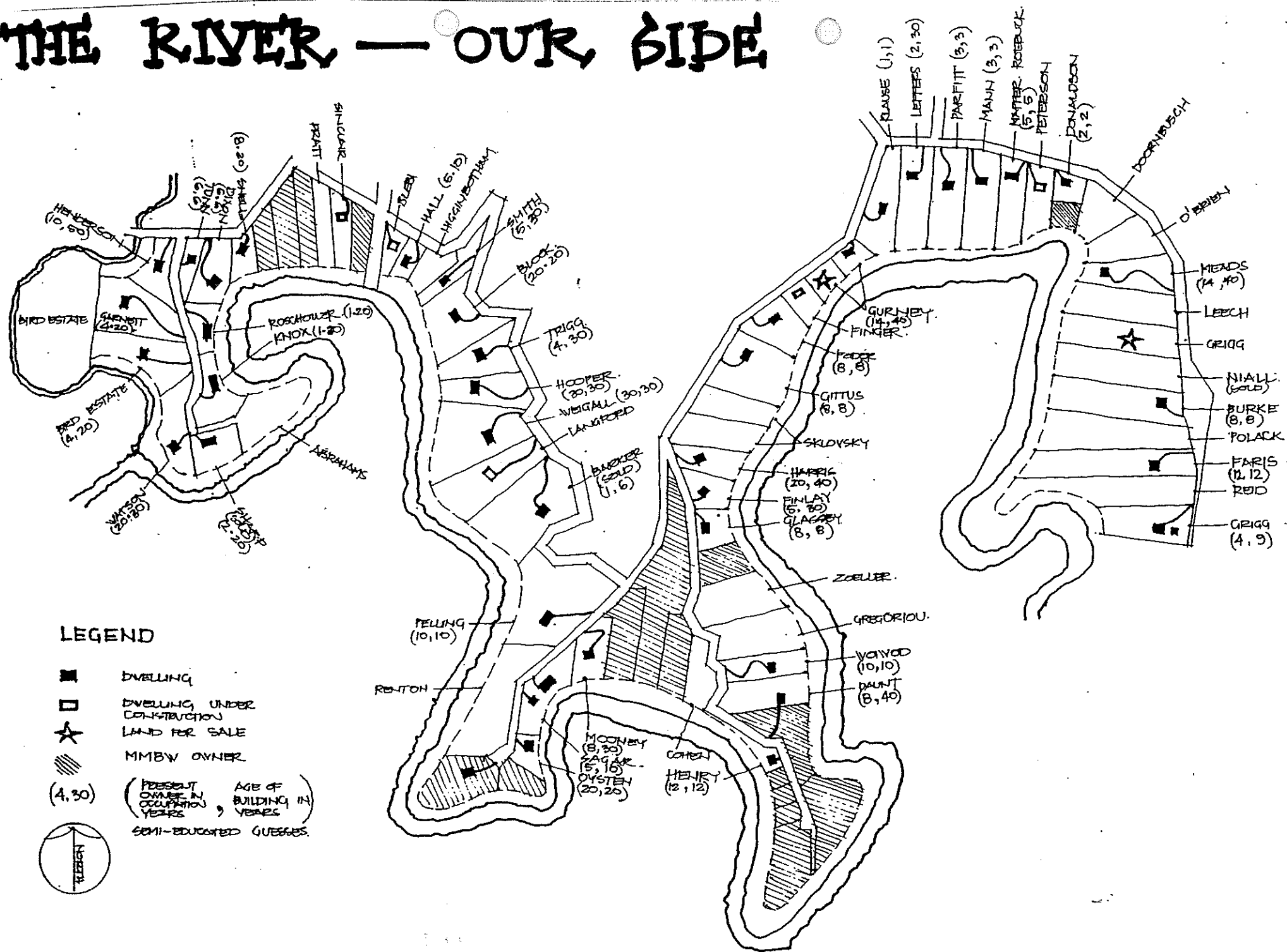
This area is incorporated within the Warrandyte State Park. The park was originally declared in 1975 and now covers an area totalling almost 600 hectares. It was recently extended by the inclusion of Stone Brae & Yarra Brae.

MOUNT LOFTY

Owned by the MMBM. Plans exist for transfer to M'dyte State Park. Prior to being cleared and grazed, the area was dominated by Red Stringybark / Red Box forest surrounded by a narrow belt of Candlebarks and Long Leaved Box. The understorey comprised Burgan, Sweet Burbaria and Rock Correa, plus various Peas



THE RIVER — OUR SIDE



PLATYPUS



Far from the trouble and toil of town
Where the reed-beds sweep and shiver,
Look for a fragment of velvet brown -
Old man platypus drifting down,
Drifting along the river.
And he plays and dives in the river bends
In a style that is most elusive:
With few relations and fewer friends,
For old man platypus descends
From a family most exclusive!

A.B. ("Banjo") Paterson

So unusual is the appearance of the platypus that pelts of the first specimens sent to Europe were considered to be an elaborate hoax made of bird and mammal parts joined together.

The early settlers gave it descriptive names like duckbill and watermole, while the Aborigines called it mallingong and boondaburra. In 1799 it was named Platypus anatinus, but it was found that a group of beetles had already been so classified. To avoid confusion, the scientific name Ornithorhynchus anatinus, (bird-like snout) was allotted. Is it any wonder that most of us stick to Platypus?

Platypuses, along with the two species of echidna, are the only known members of an order of the mammal class known as Monotremata, which refers to the fact that these animals have a single external opening for both excretion and reproduction.

The platypus has a body much the size of a man's forearm and its tail, used for steering

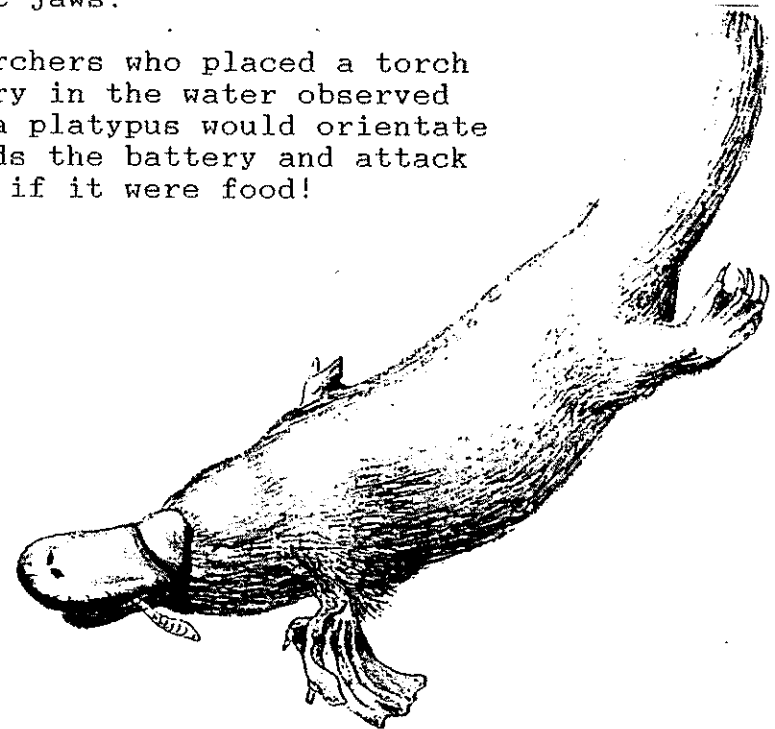
during swimming, is only as big as a hand. Both webbed front feet provide propulsion when swimming, and when out of the water the webs are folded back to expose broad nails for walking and digging. The rear feet are only partially webbed, acting merely as rudders for swimming, and as anchors when digging.

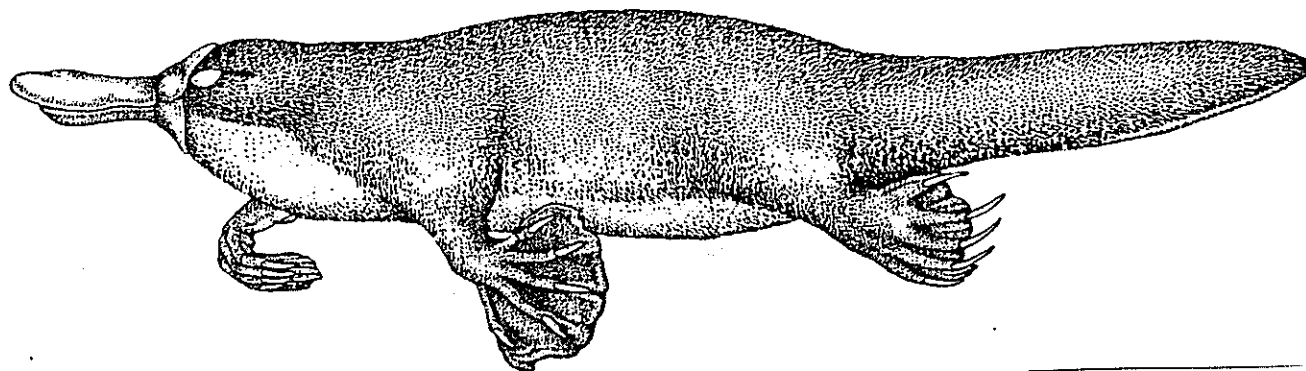
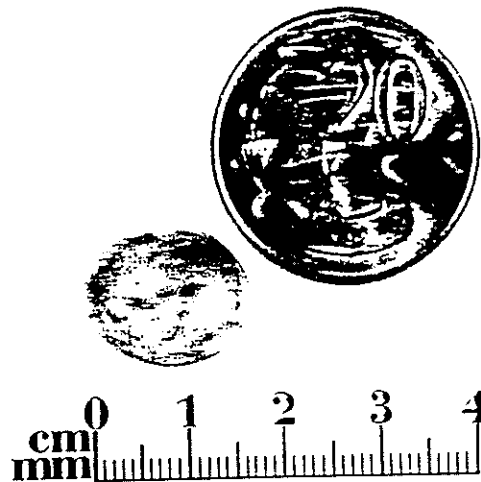
During the minute-and-a-half that it remains under water, the platypus is essentially cut off from the outside world: its eyes, ears and nostrils close tightly.

HI-TECH NOSE

When feeding, the platypus patrols the water by wagging its soft, sensitive bill from side to side until weak electrical fields from prey are detected. It then begins erratic movements over a small area until tactile pressure on the bill causes the prey to be seized with a rapid snap of the jaws.

Researchers who placed a torch battery in the water observed that a platypus would orientate towards the battery and attack it as if it were food!





The platypus varies its diet from insect nymphs and larvae in December to small bottom-dwelling shrimp-like crustaceans through the year. According to the MMBW's "the Yarra Book" yabbies are a gourmet delight.

BRINGING UP BABY

From May to July the reproductive organs enlarge from their previous inactive state. At the same time the males become aggressive and engage in frequent combat with other males, using a toxin-filled spur on each hind leg. Humans who have been accidentally spurred reported agonizing pain.

Courtship among platypuses is an elaborate ritual of aquatic acrobatics. After copulation from one to three eggs begin a gestation period of about twenty days, during which they absorb nourishment and acquire three shell layers.

Females prepare for the arrival of their eggs by constructing a special nesting burrow containing grass and leaves. Hatchlings have a sharp "egg tooth" on the upper jaw (as do many reptiles) which enables them to tear open their rubbery shells. The tiny platypuses drink milk from their mother's two fur-covered nipples

while being held securely by her tail curled around them.

When weaned (usually in late summer or early autumn), the young platypus begins diving for food much as adults do, snapping it up from the bottom and storing it in one of its two cheek pouches. When both pouches are full, the platypus swims to the surface and transfers the pouch contents to its mouth for grinding between the horny pads where distant ancestors had teeth. During the early mornings and evenings of this season the newly emerged juveniles can be seen playing in the water with much splashing than adults display.

Platypuses successfully breed into old age, which can be up to twelve years, and may spend most of their lives in the same body of water.

PLATYPUS-WATCHING

Platypuses are very sensitive to noises and movements on the river bank, but patient observation at dusk or dawn can be rewarded by sightings of diving and surfacing. The mealtime usually lasts from twenty minutes to an hour.

Local resident Clair Watson has spotted the secretive animals in the water where Watson's Creek joins the Yarra and suggests that the

best way to see them is to sit and fish at dusk.

Terry O'Brien has done just that with some success. He believes evening to be the best time, and suggests use of a spotlight after first detecting a platypus.

Sheila Dixon has seen platypuses floating along the river on the bend below her house, with bills creating a wake either side like a small boat.

Burrows are usually tunnelled just below ground level, with entrances above the water. There can be more than one entrance to each burrow with platypuses using several burrows during their daily activities.

Mick Woiodod found several oval shaped burrows between two and four feet above the river with mudslide marks between burrow and water. However, regular watching has not resulted in a single siting by Mick so far. We think he will probably continue his search because, as he says, "It would be nice to know that the only two monotremes in the world are on this block".

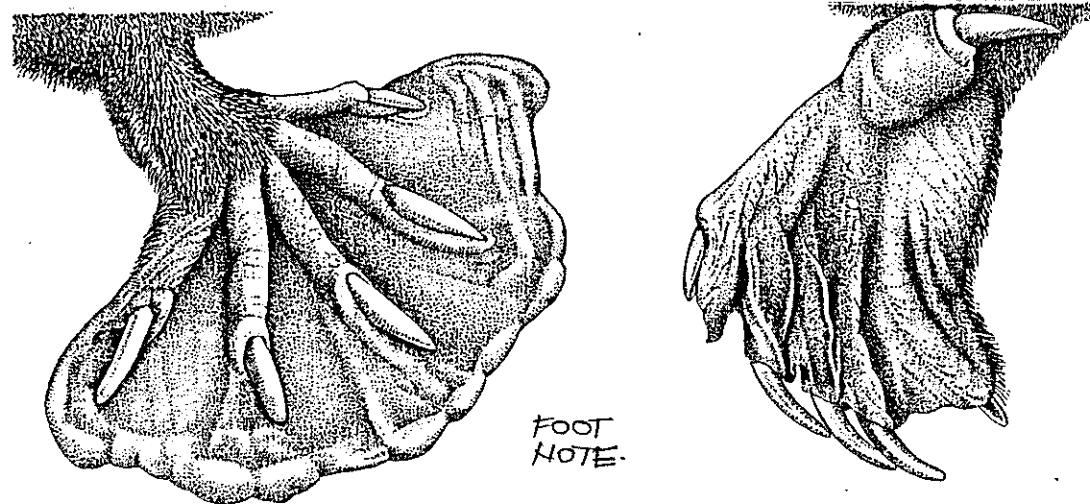
At the turn of the century the platypus was almost rendered extinct by hunters. Today it is heavily protected, so the species has made a remarkable comeback in numbers. Surveys show that the platypus is now present and even abundant in waters east of the Great Dividing Range, from northern Queensland to the southern part of Tasmania, therefore, inhabiting a varied range of waters. It must contend with water that may drop to zero degrees Celsius, yet, like other mammals it maintains its normal body temperature (thirty-two degrees) by adjusting its metabolic rate.

Upstream a few kilometres from the E.L.Z., at Badger Creek, platypuses are plentiful. Healesville Sanctuary-based researcher Melody Serena is radio-tracking platypuses in that area and believes there may be about two adults per kilometre. Platypuses have been a feature of the Healesville Sanctuary from the beginning, when Robert Eadie's "Splash" became world famous. It would come out when Robert whistled and run up his arm to be nuzzled.

"PLATYPODES"?

If your family is threatening to break up over pronunciation of platypus plurals, here is naturalist David Fleay's advice: "Platypi is disqualified because of the incompatibility of a Latin plural with a Greek noun. "Platypodes", though possible correct, would never catch on, so he suggests "platypuses" as a simple solution. Understanding the complexities of the enigmatic little animals themselves is a little harder!

Alan Bluhm



Useful Plants of the Bend of Islands

The following is a list of all the indigenous edible berries I have sampled in the Bend of Isles area. From my observations and plant lists I have seen, this is a complete list. I would appreciate any additions to the list. (Seeds will appear in a separate list in the future.)

Acrotriche servulata HONEY POTS

Small green berries are hidden in the foliage near the base of plants and are reasonably tasty if you can beat the small beasties. The flowers, also hard to find, usually have copious nectar that can be searched out.

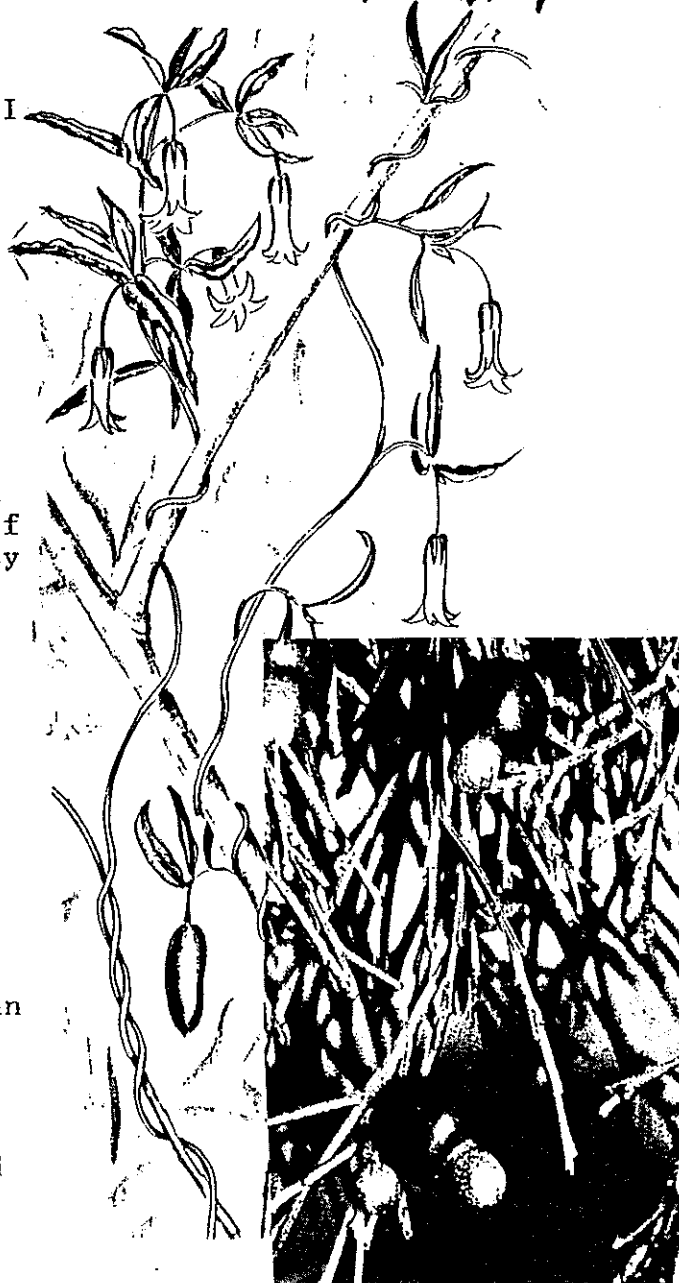
Amyema miquelii BOX MISTLETOE Edible, sticky berries.

Astroloma humifusum CRANBERRY HEATH

Small, slow-growing prostrate plants. Small green berries can be eaten raw or cooked.

Billardiera scandens COMMON APPLE BERRY

Climber with green flowers and greenish berries (1/2 - 1"



long) that become translucent when ripe. Fruit can be consumed raw when ripe and has a pleasant flavour. The seeds can also be chewed and eaten. Unripe fruit can be eaten when cooked or made into jam.

Cassytha melantha COARSE DODDER LAUREL

Dealt with in a recent Newsletter.

Dianella revoluta SPREADING FLAX LILY

Pulp of purplish berries can be eaten, but not all plants have pleasant tasting berries - beware! Aborigines also ate the white leaf bases and used the berries as dyes. The main use for them was weaving the leaves into baskets.

Exocarpos cupressiformis CHERRY BALLART

Parasitic tree resembling a Casuarina. Suckers when roots are disturbed, hence very common along roadsides. Fruit about 1/4" across, bright red with a green seed attached. Pleasant enough when ripe, but usually only a few berries ripen at once. Also, it is hard to beat the birds and possums to them. The only solution I can come up with is to pick fruits when you see them and

Child Minding

Edible Fruits cont.
put them into a bag in the freezer until you get enough to make them worth eating.

Rufus parvifolius
SMALL-LEAF BRAMBLE

A fairly tasty raspberry, smaller than the cultivated variety in all respects. Aborigines soaked leaves in water and drank to cure diarrhoea.



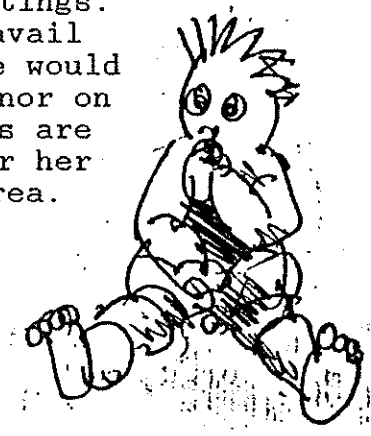
Solanum laciniatum
LARGE KANGAROO APPLE

The bright orange fruit are reminiscent of small tree tomatoes. Unfortunately the resemblance ceases there. These are very bitter fruit. If you must eat them, wait until the fruit is well coloured and the skin has burst. The seeds are very hard. Surprisingly, I sampled fruit of this species in Warrandyte and found it fairly pleasant, so it appears there is some variation in flavour between populations. They can be made into jam, but you must have very ripe fruit and remove skins in the same manner as you would with tree tomatoes, then pass through a strainer to eliminate the seeds. Probably will still taste awful, though.



Rodney Barker

Eleanor Fowler has very kindly offered to take on child minding during BICA meetings. If you would like to avail yourself of this service would you please contact Eleanor on 7120558. Sincere thanks are extended to Eleanor for her assistance in this area.



HERMAN MULLER
Our deepest sympathy is extended to Kristina, Henny and Suzanne. Herman died on Friday 29th June after a short illness.

Sheila's River Links

Sheila Dixon lives in a house inspired by the Maine home of 19th century American author Harriet Beecher Stowe, built above Henley Road not far past Oxley Bridge over Watsons Creek. The weathered silver grey of the exterior blends into the landscape of the 4 acres overlooking the river.

This piece of the river is precious to her as it makes up her very earliest memories of wonderful childhood adventures, long summer days 'mucking around' on home-built rafts, picnicking on the sandy beach and swimming in the deep pools. Growing up the 1930s, she spent every school holiday in this same area, the river giving the bush the magic ingredient. In this river she learnt to swim by being dropped in the water by

older cousins, for the whole area of river frontage between Catani Boulevard and Watsons Creek, backing onto Henley Road, had been bought in 1910 by Sheila's grandfather to become a holiday retreat for the OXLEY clan. A huge wooden Canadian canoe and a punt for the shallow water were there for all to use. Girls and boys fished for hours and hours pulling in blackfish, redfin, bream, yellow belly, brown trout, eel, fresh water crays and mussels with simple tackle. It was not unusual to see Black Swans on the wing or in the quieter spots of the water. Grandmother OXLEY had a number of three sided simple huts built at various spots in the bush where she watched and encouraged the children to look out for animals and birds.

It was not just childish imagination that made the Yarra River seem much wider, deeper and its beaches sandier, for it was in fact much deeper and wider. The Upper Yarra Dam alters not only the amount of water flowing down the river, but varies it throughout the day as valves are opened and closed. The greatest excitement for every child was seeing the dead cows rushing down the middle of the river, rolling over the rapids during the flood times. Memories of the river intermingle between the generations, so that both Sheila and her children more than twenty years later discovered the same secret fossils on the banks and built the same sort of raft and lived the same fantasy of exploring the river. A new generation will soon continue the family link with the river and its life.



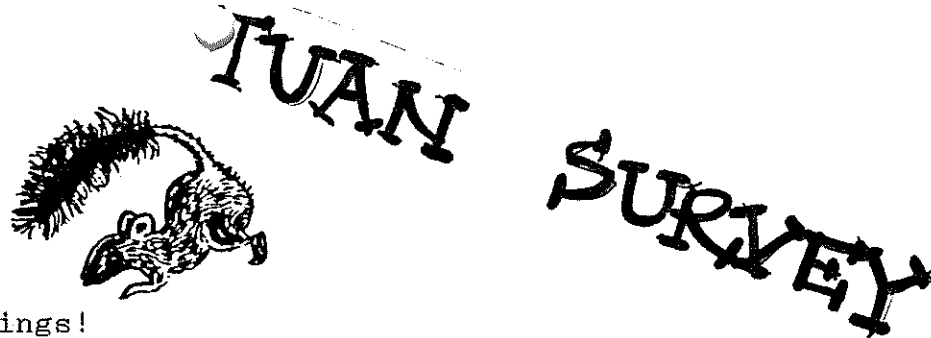
ORIGINAL CAMP 1911.

Sheila's River Links cont.

In the first few years after her grandfather bought these 80 acres for 200 pounds, he and his wife and children camped on the sandy bank in a spot that became known as 'Camp'. Slowly as the six children grew up, 'weekenders' of simple construction were built, then a more substantial house (for Sheila's grandmother). Aunts, uncles and cousins were scattered throughout the bush in her growing years and throughout the growing years of her children. The 1962 bushfires burnt through, and most of the rough buildings perished in the flames including the home of Sheila's parents. Some family members were discouraged by talk of the dam flooding the area and the threat of future bushfires. Slowly, bit by bit, small parcels of the eighty acres were sold until by 1985 the only piece left in the family was Sheila's small block.

In that year Sheila made the sudden decision to move permanently to her land on the river. After selling her tiny Carlton terrace, she had an architect design and build the delightful home she now lives in. She describes her relationship with the river: "It is almost anthropomorphic. I use it as a living thing. If it was not there I would not see the wombats, hear the little coots at night. There is so much of the wildlife that is there only because of the river. To be away in the city and then come back here in the night and open my door to hear the 'woosh' of the river flowing past, and the full moon rising above, it is just wonderful. I live here because it is here!"

Wendy Bradley



Greetings!

For those of you who wondered where I disappeared to after the slide show last November, or pondered the white Subaru parked at odd places, or noticed the frequent display of the "aurora australis" in the treetops (my red spotlight), I now supply an update of my Christmas Hills research on brush-tailed phascogales.

I trapped for tuans (= phascogales) throughout the Co-op and BICA property last December without success. I then left the wooden traps in place, with doors locked open, so that any local tuans would become familiar with the novel intrusions to their domain.

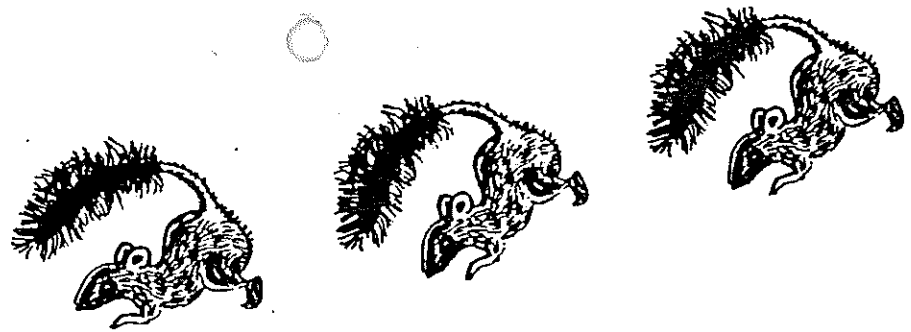
Trapping during early April yielded excellent results: 3 male and 3 female tuans were radio-collared. I have since been monitoring these individuals to determine their movements, foraging patterns, and nest selection. The map below shows the approximate home ranges of each animal. Like my Chiltern females, the local females have largely discrete home ranges. This implies territoriality (i.e. aggression keeps the neighbour out) or simply mutual avoidance in an area extensive enough to support many animals. Six tuans in such a large area may seem like a very low population density compared to sugar gliders or ringtails, but your tuan population is an unusually dense one compared to other sites in Victoria.

Tuan Survey cont.

The Co-op tuans forage in a manner similar to my other radio-collared tuans at Chiltern and Whipstick (N. of Bendigo). They are unique, however, in their frequent use of Stringybarks, a species disdained by my tuans elsewhere. (Insects are very difficult to capture among the coarse bark [try it!], and even Christmas Hills tuans only forage briefly on Stringybarks as they search for large conspicuous insects). The low number of flowering Ironbarks is forcing tuans to be more insectivorous than previous observations would predict. Female B is fortunate to have one heavily flowering tree in her home range, and spends much of her night foraging flower to flower for nectar.

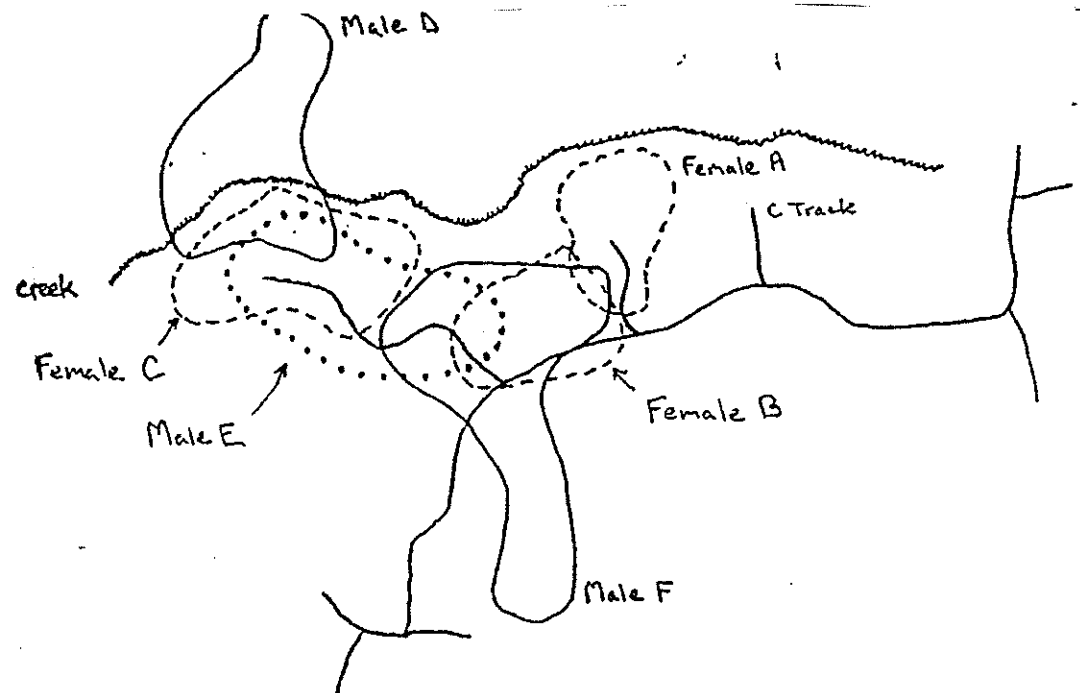
Your block of land is blessed with many good nest sites. I have marked some of the tuan hollows with small blue ribbons which may help you identify and protect important "habitat" trees during future burns. The colder weather is increasing tuan use of houses so do not be overly surprised to see me pointing my aerial towards your attic. I try to be as circumspect as possible when tracking these house-using tuans, but if I do intrude on your privacy please tell me and I will give your house a wider berth in the future.

I hate to end on a sad note yet must report the recent death of Female C. She was killed and consumed by a predator, with all evidence pointing to a feral cat as the culprit. Male D's radio signal disappeared at the same time and it is possible that his collar was crunched as he was killed. Mortality data from my Chiltern study site likewise suggests cats are important predators there. Your efforts at cat control in your area may be a major factor in maintaining the local tuan



population whilst other nearby populations have become extinct. I have cat traps available for anyone who repeatedly sees a fowl feline near their house.

Todd Soderquist
42 Symons Street
Healesville 3777
(059) 623157



Mick Woivod

Address: Gongflers Drive

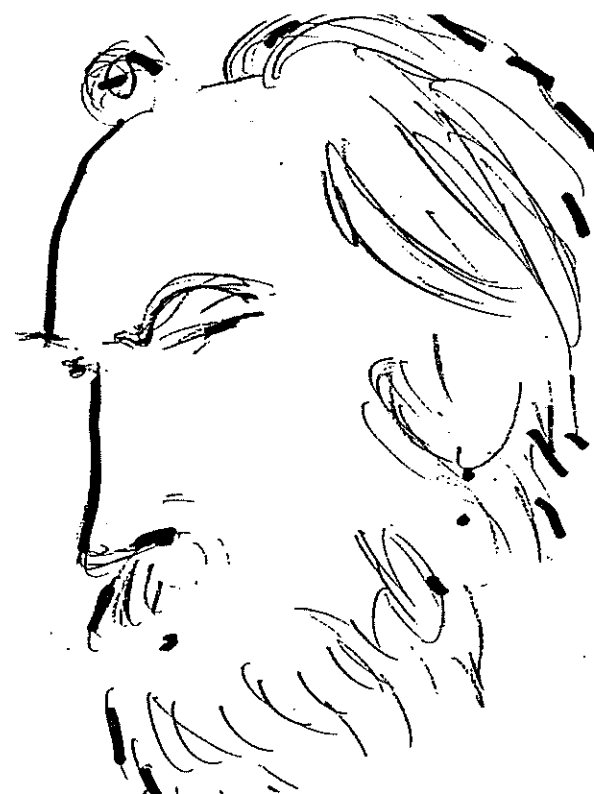
Mick and Marg have built a large, solid mud brick home on the eastern slope of the river overlooking Mt. Lofty. The river is invisible to the eye but its sounds can be heard filtered through the vegetation. To reach the river it is necessary to follow a winding track through the tea tree, footsteps muffled by the fallen leaves, the light diffused by the shrubs that meet and interlock just above head height, the bends in the track hiding all but a few feet of vista until suddenly a clearing appears before the adventurer and there is the river, rushing and swirling past, right at our feet. It is like entering some slight warp in time and reality to make this journey.

Some people like to fish, but Mick finds it needs more patience than he has, but what he loves is to paddle down the river in a canoe. "There is only one way to really see a river," he says, "and that is from the water." This section of the river is still in good condition as, apart from a few willows, there are not a lot of exotic specimens of trees or other vegetation. Walking is pleasant and easy along the banks for quite some way, without fencing

to impede progress or the need to trespass on private property.

On the river banks are different sorts of plant and animal life. Wombat burrows are all around and they can be seen if approached quietly. The platypus is more elusive although one has been sighted close to Mick's. On this section of the river (although not found only here, of course) are the only two monotremes (egg laying animals) in the world. That both these, the echidna and the platypus, are found on the Woivods' bit of the river is a source of great pride to them. People who don't live by the river will rarely see some of the bird life found here, the Azure Kingfisher, Rufus Fantail, the Golden Whistler, Redbrowed Firetail, Coots, Moorehens, Whitefaced Herons and ducks. the most outstanding vegetation feature is the Manna Gum, a beautiful tree. From this point down stream there are many large old specimens.

On the upstream section of the river joining Mick and Marg's place is the tail end of a 50 metre island; it is also the bottom end of one of the more difficult rapids. Below this is a deep water pool with rapids on both the top and bottom side. Downstream of this is a deep water pool used for swimming that they



access from a level area, probably one of the better swimming holes in the river. Below this again is another series of rapids and another island. The river is wide at this point and warm in the summer time.

They have owned their piece of the river for exactly 10 years and in asking Mick what the best thing is about living so close to the river he says, "It is the atmosphere, the physical aspect of the fog in winter swirling around the river, right up to the house. It is relaxing to watch this and remember that the aboriginal people called this 'River of Mists'. It is also the wonderful sunrise and the equally lovely moonrise."

Wendy Bradley

Environmental Tours



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August 12-16 September 9-13 November 18-22

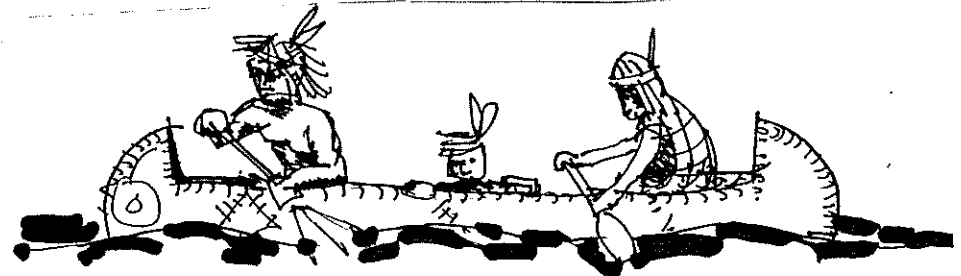
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Canoe Trip

On Easter Monday last, a motley group of local residents, 24 in number, set out from upstream of Yerring Gorge and risked all to paddle, capsize, swim and generally enjoy themselves down to Mick and Marg Woiwod's.

Even though the weather was miserable, the river icy and the canoeing skills generally lacking, it was great fun. This has become a regular event about Easter time, so join in next time.

Thanks Mick and Marg for the warm soup on arrival and for turning on yet another folksy barbeque.
Ross Henry



Dee Pelling

It is a steep descent, slipping and sliding down a rough track from the house toward the water. At first the country is dry and timbered with Stringybark and a few Ironbarks but quickly begins to change its nature as the Tea Tree begins to close overhead and form weird shapes and patterns with its branches, and the soft mulch underfoot sprouts moss, ferns and fungi and a damp lush smell fills the air. Here the sound of the river is muffled by the undergrowth until suddenly, without warning, the steep path stops abruptly at the river bank - another step and we would be in over our heads! It is wide and brown and deep and still, looking upstream into the distance. Downstream the river disappears around a bend and a short stroll along a perilously narrow path brings us a lovely vista of the water passing noisily over the rapids. A little ledge or shelf is above the swimming spot; a huge rock face rises behind and to get into the water it is necessary for the swimmers to lower themselves down onto a rock shelf into the water. In the middle of the river is the most stunning aspect of all with the bush surrounding.

Where it fronts Dee and Michael's place, the Yarra is at a turning point with a long straight stretch of water behind, after leaving the Ironbark Peninsula, coming to a point where a creek runs into the river creating a deep wide section perfect for swimming. The rapids form past this section.

The river mists swirl around the valley during winter, meeting up with the warm air currents that send them billowing back from where they came, but never reaching the house that perches so high above.

Initially the river was not all that important in deciding to buy land, but once they looked at the block and realized it fronted the water, then it began to gain in importance. It was only when they began to explore it the year after they began building that they found the river was accessible and so beautiful. It was a gradual pleasurable sensation coming to love the river.

Swimming is one of the pastimes that all the Pelling family share, often together but sometimes alone. Michael has built two canoes so that they can all have the wonderful opportunity to explore the river by canoe.

Dee's favourite time on the river is summer, when the light gives it a certain magic. It is at these times



Address: Ironbark Road

Dee and Michael's house is built high above the river on the crest of the hill. Although its windows face out toward the water, from inside the house only a glimpse can be spotted through the dense bush cover, down river toward the rapids. Walking around the house the eye is teased by a promise of more than just a brief aspect from this stance or that, but rarely is more seen. But the soothing sound of water rushing over rapids forms a continuous background to every day, every night and every season.

My Part of the River cont.

that she sits by it, relaxing and absorbing its special calmness. Around the river banks are certain flora and fauna not seen higher up in the dry country. Wallabies are seen down in this area, although the kangaroos so obvious throughout other parts of the ELZ are absent. The koalas come into the moist gullies, but the rocky shelf discourages echidnas, although on the slopes down to the river wombat burrows are all around. The bird life varies from the drier areas, particularly with the smaller birds attracted to the moistness. The wood ducks fly along the river at night, their honking clearly heard from the house above. Tea Tree grows thickly, with reeds on the water's edge, and huge old Manna Gums stand out white against the grey-green of the bush. Another older, gnarled variety of Tea Tree also grows on the banks, native Casuarina, various acacias with many colours, shapes and sizes of fungi and moss growing underfoot and on dead timber around.

The river in summer holds a translucent green and blue light with shafts of warm yellow just on dusk, and through the day sparkles with the reflected sunlight, although in winter it looks grey and sombre and rather depressing.

For Dee the river gives a special dimension to living in the area. The sounds of water become important and

restful and the knowledge that it gives life to so many different life forms makes it something very special. "For me it is a spiritual thing. I feel very privileged to live here. As a family it has given us a focus, a place for great fun and fellowship."

Wendy Bradley



Unusual Sightings

Your May news sheet asked re interesting sightings. I've belonged to the Co-op since June 1972 and it's the first time I've had the joy of seeing a baby wombat. The dear little thing would be about 12" long with little bright black eyes, and we had a good look as it wasn't frightened of us.

Hazel Rich

