

BEND OF ISLANDS CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

DM-1

Number 32

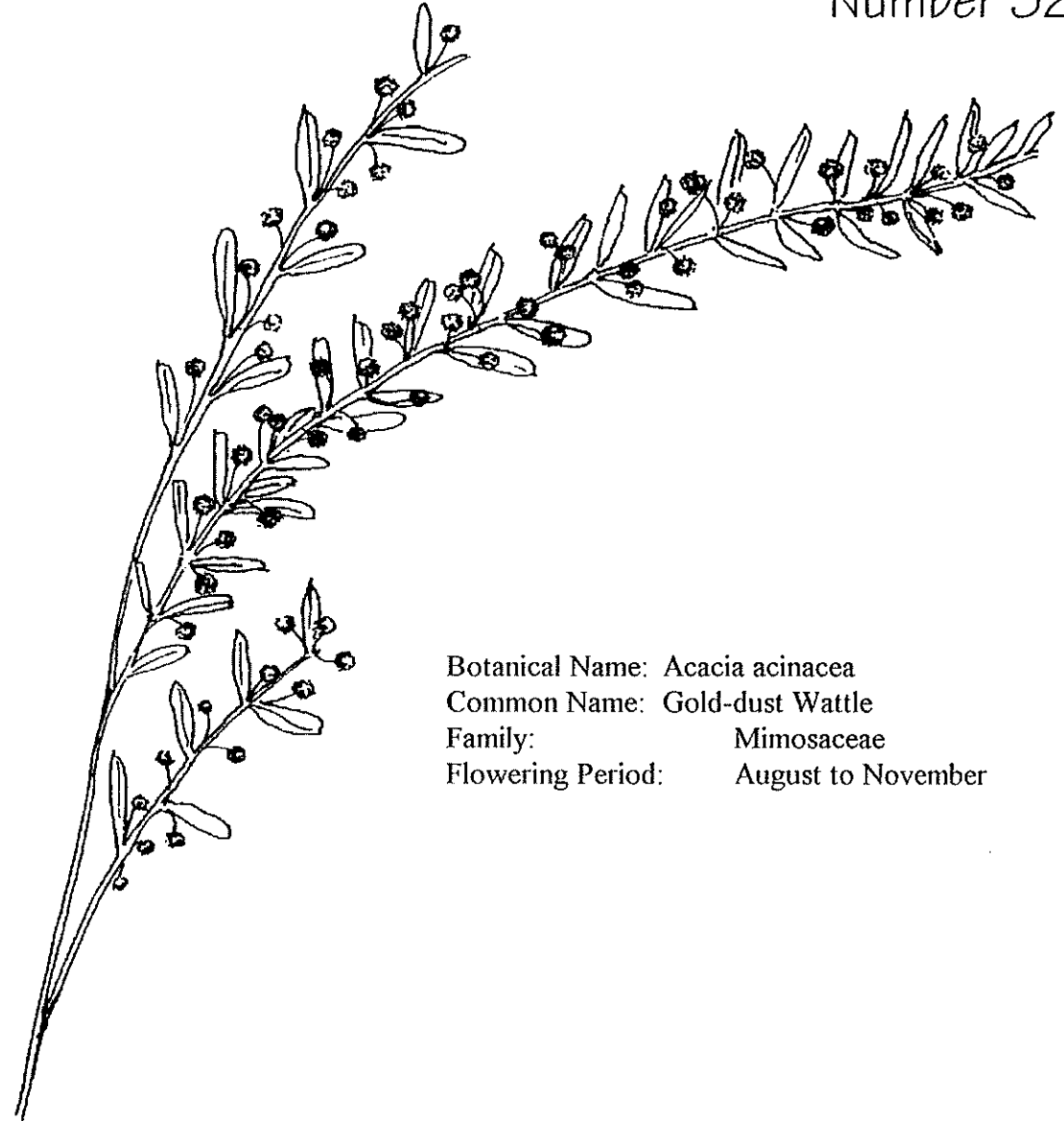
WHAT NATIVE'S FLOWERING?

A slender lightly branched small shrub up to one metre high, with arching branches crowded with small, oblong, dark olive coloured phyllodes. (A phyllode is a leaf stalk enlarged or modified to act as a leaf and found in many wattle species.) The phyllodes are up to 10mm. long and are blunt or notched with a soft point at one corner.

The flowers are held on short stalks, strung out all along the arching branches at each leaf base. When in flower the shrub looks quite spectacular with the flower stalks holding the many flowers out on display. The shrub does look like it has been dusted with gold, as its common name suggests. The flowers are bright yellow and consist of 10-20 heads clustered in a ball with 1-4 stemmed flowers per leaf base. Once flowering has finished seeds develop in curved or coiled seed pods which hang down from the stalk.

Acacia acinacea is well adapted to the dry shallow and clay soils and is a good selection for planting on embankments, left over from the excavation of driveways or houses. The roots spread into the soil and help stabilise the soil, preventing erosion by wind and water. This small shrub is very useful as a low screening hedge or as a low windbreak, as well as providing valuable shelter and food for many seed eating and insect eating birds. Once established it will tolerate dry conditions and will often self seeds itself or may produce suckers i.e. new shoots develop from the roots. Propagation method is by seed, which needs to be treated by immersing in boiling water and soaking for 24 hours.

Cric Henry.



Botanical Name: *Acacia acinacea*
Common Name: Gold-dust Wattle
Family: Mimosaceae
Flowering Period: August to November

REPORT ON VEGETATION CONTROL UNDER POWERLINES IN THE ELZ

Residents of the ELZ enjoy the benefits of electricity, however, the distribution lines delivering that electricity pose a bushfire threat if the vegetation is not kept sufficiently clear of the lines. As well as local distribution lines there is also a pair of 500 kV transmission lines crossing the ELZ.

This report outlines the background and current status of agreements negotiated with the SEC for control of the vegetation under the powerlines in the ELZ.

1. Distribution Lines (66kV, 22 kV and 415 V)

BICA has been negotiating with the SEC for many years to achieve the following objectives:

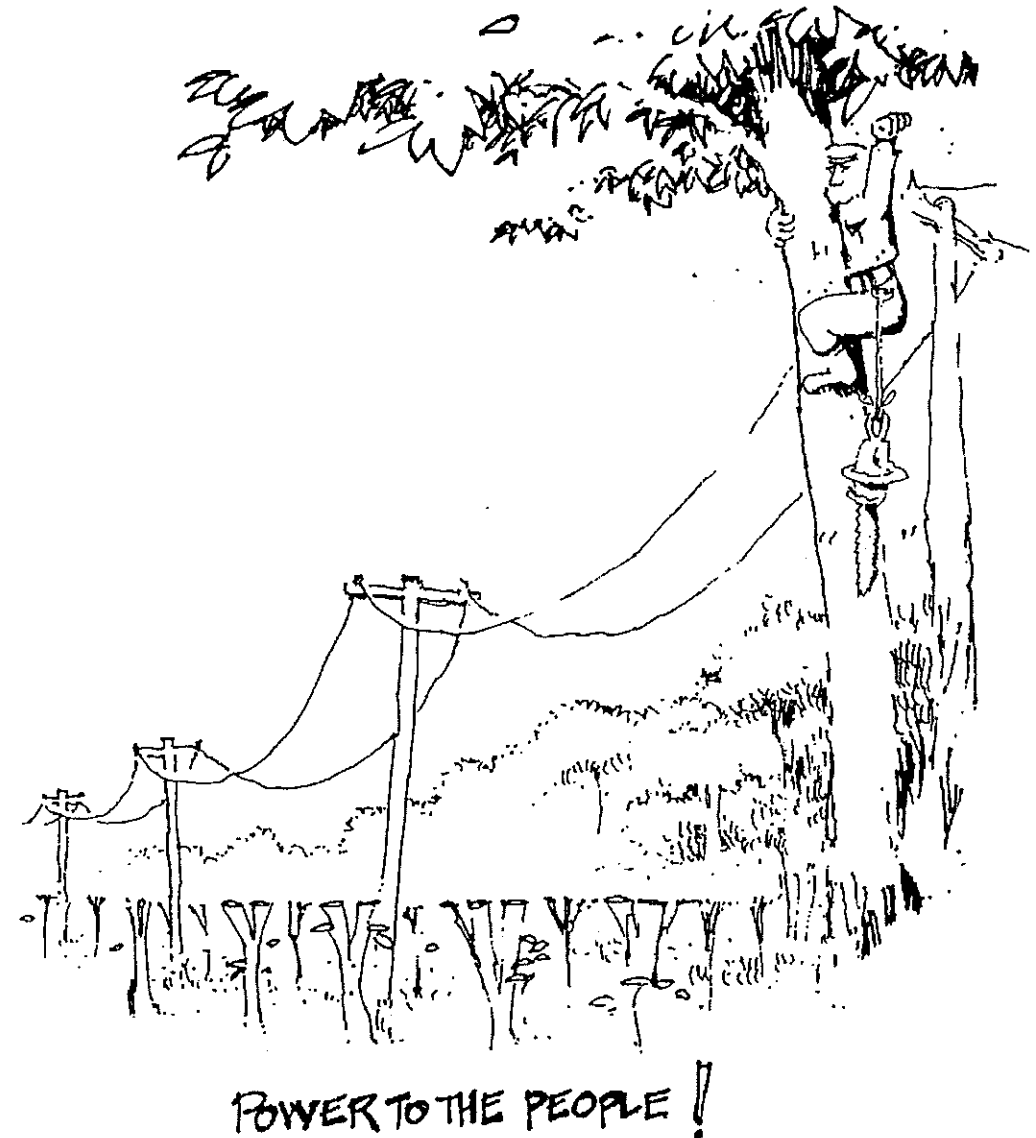
1. Vegetation must be trimmed to maintain specified minimum clearances to avoid fire damage.
2. The ELZ is an area of State Significance and trimming must be done in a way to minimize the aesthetic and environmental impact on the area; even if this means adoption of less economic methods than are used in less environmentally significant areas.

The following cyclic cutting program has been established and is executed on a 3 yearly cutting basis.

- (a) Trees within 1.5m of the lines are cut at ground level.
 - (b) Trees with 1.5 to 3 m clearance from the lines are cut to create 4 m clearance from the line.
 - (c) Trees more than 3 m from the line are not cut.
- This program has been developed to achieve a constant regrowth from ground level and to maintain as much vegetation as possible consistent with maintaining satisfactory clearances.
- Negotiation commenced in 1986 when the SEC general policy was to cut all vegetation under the lines at ground level and poison the roots. Considering this we have generally been very successful at minimizing the loss of vegetation and the agreed cyclic cutting program is now well established. It is accepted by the SEC as being more expensive than their normal practices but appropriate for this special area.
- On some occasions a special 'speed' cut has been necessary to trim a small proportion of trees at the start of the fire season prior to when the cyclic cut is due.

On-site meetings held prior to each cut and attended by the SEC, BICA and the UYVDRA. The UYVDRA has been particularly helpful to BICA in the negotiations. They are the statutory authority responsible for the Regional Strategy Plan which formally recognizes the ELZ as an area of State Botanical & Zoological Significance.

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One difficulty is that the Skyline Road powerlines are controlled by the Lilydale Branch of the SEC whilst the rest of the area is controlled by the Greensborough Branch. This doubles the number of meetings required.

Another difficulty is that the SEC representatives change each 3 years so that the agreed scheme has to be presented to someone new each time. This, combined with a similar change in contractors used by the SEC, has lead to a couple of instances where cutting has not been as agreed. This problem is deminishing as the program becomes more established.

The attitude of the SEC has developed into one of co-operation over the years to the extent that they are currently planning to replace a section of line in lower Catani Boulevard with bundled conductors. This will avoid the need for vegetation trimming in an area where difficult access causes greater impact on the environment.

2. Transmission Lines

There are a pair of 500 kV transmission lines crossing the ELZ. Earlier this year the newly formed Authority in control of these, National Electricity, proposed to remove all vegetation and poison all root stock in the 100 metre wide easement containing the lines.

After lengthy negotiations with National Electricity, the following agreement was reached.

- 1 A relatively small number of eucalypts were cut at ground level and not poisoned (each tree was marked and agreed by all parties prior to cutting). Trees were cut and left on the ground, along contours, so that no vehicles were required to access the easement.
- 2 Burgan was reduced by 50%, where this was predominant in the easement, by cutting at ground level and poisoning the roots.
- 3 Trees on the roadside where the easement crosses Skyline Road were reduced by 25% and these roots were poisoned. NE has financed the supply of plants and guards for planting of screen plants on the roadside areas by BICA.

One strong negotiating point was reference to the EES which was produced prior to the installation of the 2nd line in 1984. As a result of BICA's submissions at that time, the EES contained specific guide lines for the vegetation control in the ELZ which assisted our case.

As the negotiations proceeded the attitude of the National Electricity Representatives changed to one of co-operation as they came to realize that the ELZ was a special area and that what we were trying to achieve was in fact quite practical. In fact, due to the slow growing nature of the trees on the dry slopes and ridges of the easement, the agreed method was much more economical than what was originally proposed.

In these negotiations BICA was assisted by UYVDRA, the Shire of Healesville and DCNR. We have managed to avoid a potential visual and environmental disaster for the area.

This is an example of how BICA is continually working with the various authorities to maintain and enhance the ELZ environment. Another example is the control of roadside vegetation by BICA through regular working bees. We do this in preference to the job being done by the Shire, who would need to use mechanical methods which would have greater environmental impact. The support of the community is vital to enable BICA to continue with these activities.



FIRE MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE

The Victorian National Parks Association is running a conference on fire management in October. The conference, entitled Biodiversity and Fire, runs on the 8th and 9th of October, 1994 and covers fire behaviour, effects on plants and on animals. It will be held at Footscray and all of the right people including Dianne Simmons and Andrew McMahan will be speaking. If you are interested we have one or two brochures and application forms or they can be obtained from the VNPA office, phone (03) 650 8298.

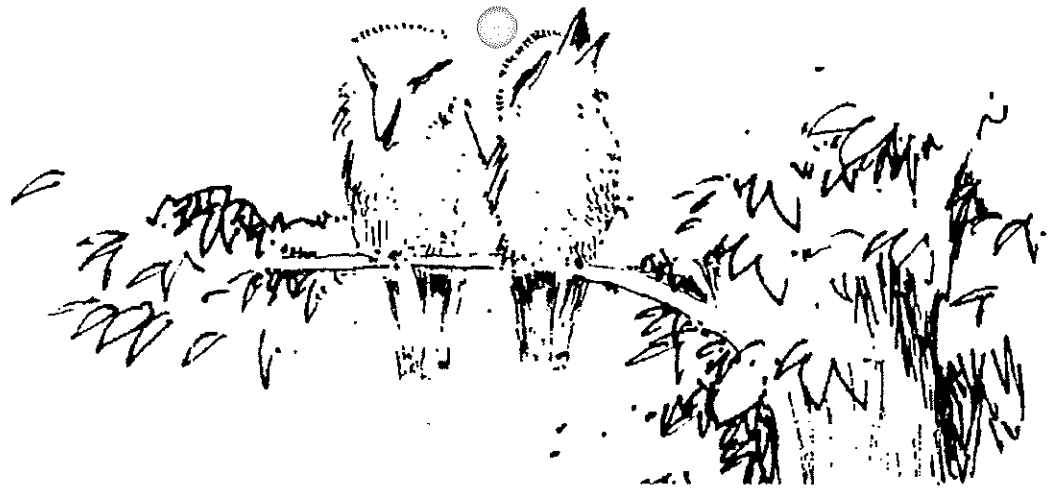
CLEAN UP DAY, 1994

We had another very successful National Clean-up Day on Sunday 16 March. This was the fourth year that Bend of Islands residents and friends have got together to join other members of the community on National Clean-up Day to help get rid of the huge amount of litter in this country. This concerted effort over four years has greatly reduced the rubbish in the local area and now we believe that there are no significant accumulations of litter on public land in or around the Bend of Islands. If there is, please let us know and we will target them next year.

On 16 March, 'seventeen cleaner uppers' gathered to clean up a number of sites in the local area. Litter was collected from along Skyline Rd and Henley Rd, dumped car bodies and parts were removed from the bush near Oxley Bridge and Westering Rd near Watson's Creek and old rubbish dumps were cleaned up on Gongflers Drive and Ashmore Rd. The seventeen of us collected thirty five bags of loose rubbish, two and a half car bodies and a huge amount of other litter all of which has been collected by the Shire of Healesville. It was good fun and good work. Thank you to everyone who helped.

Next year we will probably tackle the river bank again and a few other perennial spots but we will need more help than seventeen stalwarts if we are going to pick up all the litter along our side of the river from the end of Henley Rd to Watson's Ck. Would all locals please plan to help on National Clean-up Day in 1995!

Dave Bradley and Peter Gurney



WEEDS STOP PRESS

The Shire of Healesville has provided funding for the purchase of a 15 litre knapsack spray unit to be used by the Bend of Islands residents on community working

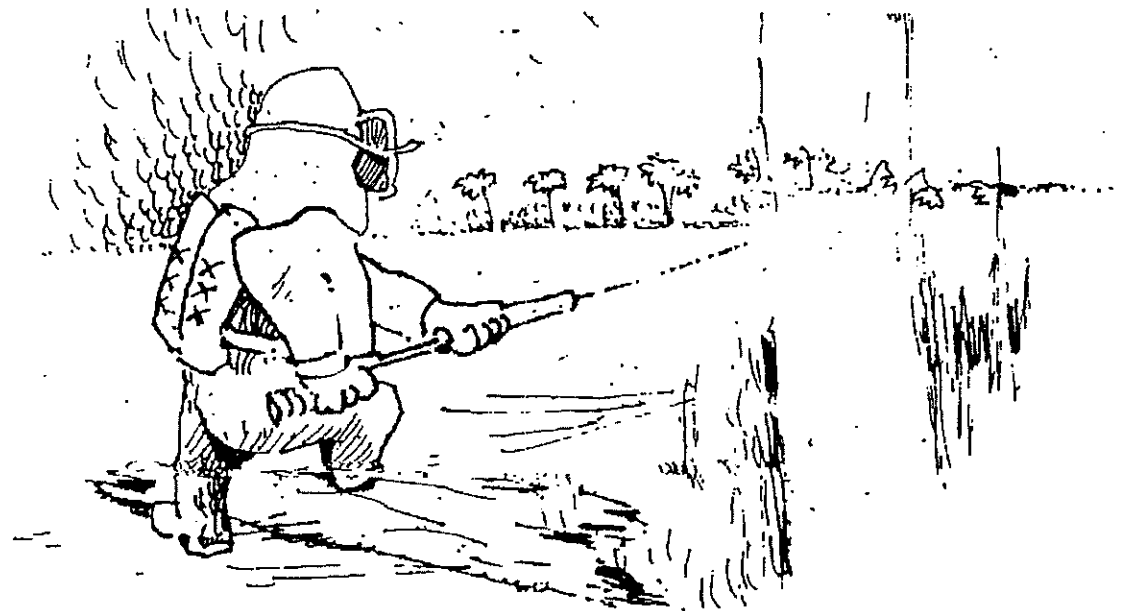
bees and by individuals to treat weeds on their own land. The unit is held by the BICA weeds sub-committee on behalf of the community but is available to all residents whether they are BICA members or not.

If you wish to borrow the spray

unit please contact me on phone 712 0408.

Herbicide is not provided but I am happy to provide advice on herbicides, the best ways to treat various weeds and any other matter to do with weed control.

Peter Gurney



WORK ON WEEDS

I am very worried about the spread and diversity of weeds now being seen in the area. For example, Patterson's Curse is encroaching from the chook farm and neighbouring properties, there is St John's Wort on Melbourne Water land near the Hill's property, Blackberry is coming into the area largely from Melbourne Water land to our east (Mt Lofty), from our north (along the aqueduct) and from our west (Yanakie). Small blackberry plants are springing up in many areas. Also worrying is the spread of ivy, largely from properties in the ELZ and now being seen along the roadsides and in the bush. Blue Bell Climber (*Sollya heterophylla*) and Bridal Veil Creeper have been seen along Gongflers Drive and Catani Boulevard.

I urge everyone to keep an eye open for weeds, especially St John's Wort (or Tutsan), Patterson's Curse, blackberry and ivy. Pull out small plants. Please report infestations on public land to Pamela or to me. As members of the Shire of Healesville

Noxious Weeds Committee we will co-ordinate action, provide help or get assistance from the Shire. Last summer and autumn we had some weed working bees on thistles, St John's Wort (more to be done this coming summer), Flat Drain Sedge and blackberry. Wolfgang and I have begun work with Heinz Gerlach to eradicate Patterson's Curse from the chook farm hill and I have written to Melbourne Water to take action on the weeds on their land opposite Gerlach's chook farm.

The battle against pine tree invasion also continues with a number of trees being detected and felled or poisoned. Thank you to Thomas Block who readily gave permission for a large pine tree to be killed on his property on Catani Bvde, to Meryll and Russell Triggs who consented to their two large pine trees being felled. These two trees were removed on Anzac Day by an enthusiastic team of workers. Mark and Sally Nihill have made a good start to removing the pine trees on their property on Henley Rd. The work continues.

Although we are doing well against pines, they

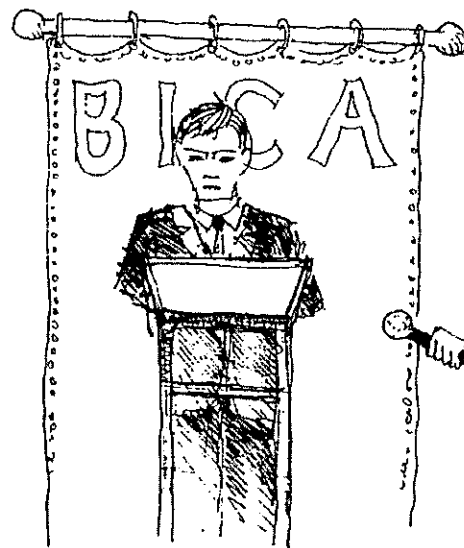
continue to spread in the area. If you have pines on your land and would like some help to either poison or remove them, please let Tim Ealy or me know. Pines are regarded as environmental weeds and the long term effect that they have on bushland is disastrous. Certainly Black Cockatoos eat the seeds but pines are not a major food source for them. It is far better to remove pines and replant with indigenous species.

Please learn more about our local weeds and how to treat them. We all have to improve our knowledge and work on this problem if the weeds invasion of our bushland does not get further out of hand. As mentioned above, Pamela and I are both members of the Shire of Healesville Noxious Weeds Committee and we can report that the Shire is keen to do as much as it can about weeds and is putting more resources into this work. For those who need a trailer or utility mounted spraying system the Shire has one for loan and may even provide the herbicide!!

Peter Gurney

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

1994 is indeed proving to be a year of change as we proceed toward the resolution of the council amalgamations and perhaps a new realisation of the uniqueness of the ELZ. After all it has been in operation for some twenty years and based on the concept of residential conservation and community involvement. It has become a model that we can be proud of and one that we can all participate in democratically. This implies two way communication and this Newsletter is one of the ways in which the BICA committee does so. Apart from the regular and some



specific issue news-sheets, we have varied the diet with night meetings, additional special issue meetings, field days and working bees. This variety has catered for all ages, all levels of interest and all degrees of involvement. One could hardly ask the question "why don't they" with this level of communication and opportunity to participate. It's your association and your committee and you have a unique chance to help maintain an environment different in all ways from the all-engulfing suburban sprawl which seems to have no identity or objective. Thus when the Local Government Board's interim report comes out, probably in September some time, we will all have a better chance than most to determine what we want.

Michael Pelling

CHANGES

It would have to be sixty years ago that my first memories of driving up to Kanga from Middle Park surfaced the other day. Through Collingwood, Heidelberg and then a break in the journey for a cut lunch in that park on the corner of Rosanna Rd and Burgundy St. A thermos of tea and high tin Procera ham sandwiches with yellow pickle followed by some fruit cake. Substantial slices of crusty bread and real ham!

Then on through the paddocks of Rosanna with the dozens of horse riding schools. Eltham was a tiny country town with one milk bar called the Blue Gum. I remember a grain store and a butcher and near the North Eltham medical centre was an old private hospital.

Then it was further on until Henley Rd. That was just a one vehicle track which rutted very badly after rainy weather and I don't think I ever saw anything as useful as a grader. The bridge across Watson's Creek was a pretty basic affair placed awkwardly on a steep sloping curve across the water and was pretty tricky for the old cars to cross. At the top of the hill where the big old pine trees are in Barb's property there was a gate leading into the Oxley area. A road

wound through the trees there and made a track where Barb's and my houses are now. From there it roamed down to about where the Wonder's house is today. This was where Grandma Oxley's house was then.

The bush was so much thicker and there is still the dying remains of a great old Red Gum just on the boundary of Barb's and my land. Grandma had a little bush house built on the side of the hill near my place for when she had her afternoon walk! She would sit there and watch the river and I remember once she was very excited because she was able to watch a family of black swans bring up a family.

In 1934 I think it was, there were huge floods right throughout Victoria. The land across the river from me was inundated and after the water level fell we were left with a moonscape of pitted clay from the Bend of Isles to my corner of the river. That's when the island which divides the river in two was formed and it certainly provided quite a few adventures for us kids.

That riverside land at the bottom of lower Catani, being river flats, had reasonable soil which fed some pretty large trees. I hate to say it but I know that one of my uncles tended to sell these off to wood cutters

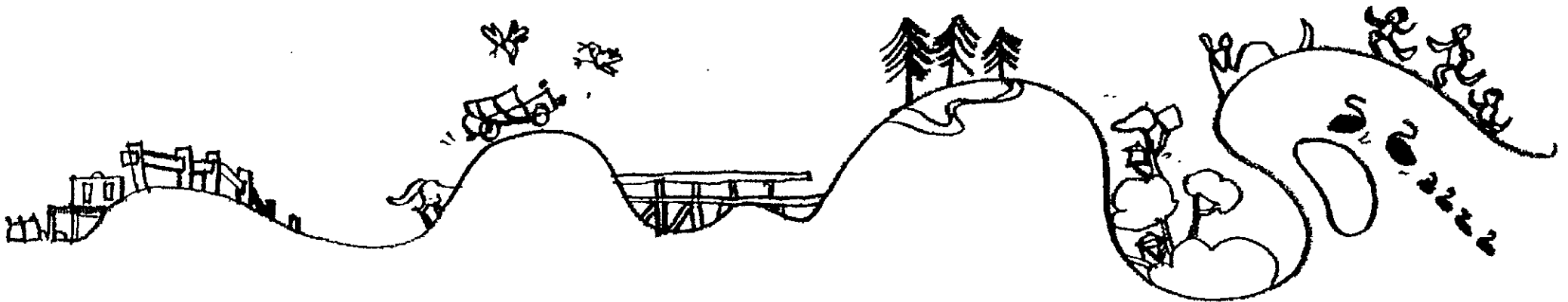
a quick bob and I'm afraid we lost quite a few important trees.

The paddocks surrounding Stevenson's oak and the old plum trees haven't changed that much but further along up towards the aqueduct the bush was so much thicker then. We used to reckon that there were kangaroos in there but we never saw them. How we would have loved to see then the mob that live there today. Often when we were wandering around we thought we could hear them jumping but didn't quite believe it.

Roughly where Oxley Rd is now there was a very pretty walk which we called the Lower Track. This meandered along through a grove of wattles and mossy glades often turning into a small creek after rain. A good place to dig worms and find tadpoles in the spring. A place for mushrooms and a boggy places to get into with gum boots!

I think I've mentioned this before, but when we were young we were forever building cubbies among the trees. After the '62 bushfires these showed up with their complements of broken crockery and bits that had survived the years and the fire. Quite a bit of social history there.

Shela Dixon



FIRE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The guest speaker at the August general meeting was Dr Dianne Simmons. Dianne is well known in the community as a long serving member of the Christmas Hills Fire Brigade and is currently the 1st Lieutenant. Professionally she is a botanist and her special areas of interest are habitat fragmentation and fire ecology. Dianne currently lectures in environmental management at Deakin University, Rusden.

Dianne covered two main aspects of fire and the environment and the following is an account of her talk and the discussion that followed.

A: FIRE AND SURVIVAL

General Observations

We cannot prevent fires from occurring in the bush nor can we stop the passage of wild fire, no matter how much fuel reduction is carried out. Futile attempts to do this often lead to massive environmental destruction. We **can** however survive the passage of bushfire.

What We Know

We know a lot about fire behaviour and because it is a physical (not "supernatural"!) process we can predict what it is likely to do in different circumstances. Rate of spread of the fire front, heat output, flame height and spotting distances can be easily calculated if you have the appropriate data about the fuel conditions and the weather.

We know a lot about house survival in fires. We are able to identify factors which will contribute to the survival or otherwise of a house and these are widely publicised in CFA and other literature which the fire brigade is able to supply. For a given fire intensity, such factors include the slope and aspect of the site, the finish of the house and the levels of fuel immediately around the building.

We know a lot about the survival of people in fires. Statistics from bushfires tell us about the kind of person who is likely to die in a bushfire; age, health and the involvement of alcohol all enter into this overall picture.

Fire behaviour, building survival and personal survival are **not** random events.

What We Do

From our knowledge of these we recommend a number of measures. Since about 50% of the "risk" is produced by fire intensity we attempt to reduce it by planning of the areas surrounding our houses. Steps to take include the reduction of fine fuels, the strategic placing of lawns, watered garden plots, tennis courts, pools and other "cleared" areas. Distances for fuel reduction and other factors to do with the structure of the house as well as procedures to adopt are again well covered in the available literature.

If fine fuel reduction is to be carried out by burning then it needs to be done every three years. This is because litter builds up to the level it was at before the fire in about this time. Such a burning regime will have certain effects on the bush. These include simplification of the flora (species disappearing from the area) and facilitation of weed invasion, particularly the latter because the area would probably have suffered from physical disturbance also.

Most of us who live in the bush do so because we like it (the bush!) and strike a compromise between the aesthetic values of "undisturbed" bush and the protection of our buildings and other assets. In other words we decide what degree of disturbance to the bush and what degree of risk we are prepared to accept. If we strike a balance too far to one side we are probably being foolish and if it is too far in the other direction we probably should not be living in the rural-urban fringe at all!

B: MAINTAINING THE BUSH

General Observation

If you intend to use deliberately lit fire to manage the bush on your property you should have some idea of what you want to achieve. Is your aim to promote maximum floral diversity (most species)? Do you want to favour particular species or groups, eg., orchids, grasses or shrubby species? Do you want to provide habitat for particular animal species?

You have to decide because if you don't you could end up with just exactly what you don't want!

How Plants Respond to Fire

Plants that are adapted to periodic fire respond (survive) by either of two main

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strategies.

1. Resprouting in which case the individual plant survives the fire and grows leaves after the fire.
2. Germination of stored seeds in which case the individual plant doesn't survive the fire but the species is perpetuated in the area.

Resprouters show a number of variations on an overall theme. Grass or sedge tussocks often produce new shoots within days of the fire and some, like our local grass tree species, *Xanthorea minor*, are also stimulated to flower soon after regaining their foliage. Heathy shrubs such as *Leucopogon* (Beard Heath) and Cranberry Heath send up new shoots from a woody underground root. Plants with underground tubers, such as the yam daisy also survive and regenerate by resprouting. Smooth barked eucalypts, if they survive the fire, respond by sending up new shoots from a woody underground tuber. Rough barked eucalypts are stimulated to sprout from shoots on the trunk and branches if the leaves are removed by fire or any other means.

For plants that rely on the germination of stored seed to maintain their foothold in an area it must be remembered that there must be a store of seed to germinate! This has implications when we are deciding on the frequency (how often) of management fires. Seed may be available (stored) from a number of places. In some species, eg., *Hakeas*, *Banksias*, *Leptospermums* and *Melaleucas* the seed is stored on the living plant in woody fruits which open after a fire. Some have explosive methods of dispersing the seeds. In other species such as *Acacias* and many members of the pea family the hard seeds are stored in the ground and last for many years. The fire and the post-fire conditions promote their germination and the species remains established in the area. Sometimes seeds survive in unburnt parts of a plant, eg., at the tops of eucalypt trees. Seeds can also come from adjacent unburnt areas and burned areas can be recolonized in this way.

It is worth noting that some weed species use the "soil storage strategy". Examples include Boneseed and Montpellier Broom (present along Henley Rd. near Nicholas Lane)

What We Do

When we want to apply fire to manipulate the bush it is necessary to view fire as

part of the history of the area both past and future. In order to decide on a regime and to establish expected outcomes we need to consider a number of factors.

1. The frequency of burning.

This is particularly important when considering the effect that you are after with respect to seed regenerating species. If the fires are too far apart in time it may be that soil stored seeds (wattles and peas) have long passed their viability. Adult trees will have died (wattles tend to be relatively short lived) and the burn will stimulate little regeneration. On the other hand too frequent burning will kill regenerated plants before they are old enough to set seed. Again this will result in the removal of that species. (Don't forget that this applies to weed species as well!) It would seem that somewhere between ten and twenty years between burns, probably about fifteen years, is a figure to work with in this area.

2. The season in which burning is carried out.

The seasons in which it is possible to burn are in reality limited to spring (before Christmas) and autumn (March/April). Spring burning tends to favour resprouters. Seed regenerated species don't do so well because plants that result from the burn have to survive the potentially hot, dry summer and they will not have developed extensive enough root systems to do so. Autumn burning is theoretically best for seed regenerators and for this area is probably the best time for "regeneration burns".

3. The intended intensity of the burn.

A high intensity is not needed and can leave areas of bare ground because **everything** including soil stored seed is destroyed (therefore no regrowth other than by the slow process of recolonization from outside the area). Further, if rain follows soon after an intense fire then serious removal of topsoil can occur because no litter remains to reduce the impact of the raindrops on the bare soil. With the often shallow soils in this area and the nature of our flora a medium to low intensity fire is desirable. This can be achieved by choosing the conditions under which you burn. Time of day is about the most negotiable of these and it works like this. One of the factors that affects fire intensity is fuel moisture content. If you choose to burn late in the afternoon (say 3.00 to 4.00 pm) when the air humidity is still low enough for the fuel (ground litter) to burn, soon after

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this the litter will begin to absorb moisture from the air and the fire intensity will drop drastically. If on the other hand you light up at lunch time, the fuel moisture level may continue to fall producing an increase in fire intensity.

3. The area of the fire

If the area is too small all you might achieve is to produce a nice little lunch spot for the wallabies, kangaroos and rabbits! Larger areas do not suffer from such significant grazing pressure from mammals. On the other hand there is less opportunity for recolonization from outside the burned area if it is too large. This might be important in the regeneration of some species and bare patches are a prime opportunity for weed invasion, particularly if there has been disturbance to the soil. In this area a size of about 1 acre is probably the minimum and considerably more is desirable.

4. The post fire conditions

What you get is what you get! Ideally you would want rain straight away to set off the germination of seeds and then intermittent water as the seedlings grow but you can't predict or manipulate this one. Nevertheless, post fire conditions are extremely important in determining the outcome of any burn and you might not get what you intended even if all other factors were "ideal".

Summing Up

It is worth noting that most of the bush around here, although it doesn't carry many exotic species, has been disturbed (eg., logged or cleared) at some stage in the past. This makes it very difficult to predict the results of burning or even to decide on a desirable outcome of a burn. However, using our knowledge of fire ecology we can set up a regime which is likely to produce a given outcome that we have decided on. If we want to preserve the "status quo" ie., what we have here now, then some kind of burning will be needed and to meet some of the criteria such as size it may be necessary to set up a community burning regime (ie., burns which are larger than can be carried out on one property).

Discussion.

• Jeph Neale, captain of the Christmas Hills Fire Brigade observed that burning in controlled conditions as described above can help to raise the confidence of people who have had little experience of fire. They could see that a fire is usually quite slow in moving and not always of high intensity. This practical experience could

help to prepare people to cope with a bushfire.

• Jeph also elaborated on the legal responsibilities of a landowner who intends to burn off for any reason. Basically they are:

You can't burn at all during the declared Fire Danger Period.

You must give due notice to all of your neighbours.

The Summary Offences Act says that you are responsible for damage caused by any fire that moves from your property to an adjoining one, even if it did not originate on your place!

• The question of roadside burning by the Fire Brigade was raised. It was noted that burning roadsides for fire breaks was not of much use given the nature of forest fires. Burning roadsides for other purposes such as regeneration could be carried out and would be subject to the criteria for burning on private or other public land.

• Destruction of animal habitat during regeneration burns was discussed. There would of necessity be destruction of some habitat but probably creation of more (dead trees, hollows) in the long term. Animals (mammals) probably would die but most likely the population would return to pre-fire levels or even higher if the habitat was enhanced. This would require colonization opportunities and over a large area a mosaic pattern where the regime was varied would allow for this. Small burns on private land should not be a problem. It was noted that in the absence of fire habitat would degenerate and populations would decline anyway. Animals that shelter in the litter layer, in logs or in the soil, usually survive medium intensity burns.

• The question of atmospheric pollution from regeneration burns was raised. It was explained that large scale burns such as those carried out by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) are often on days when temperature inversions are in place. This is because such days are common in autumn and they also provide good conditions for controlling a burn. Such pollution is therefore inevitable. For a small burn on private property the atmospheric pollution produced would disperse fairly quickly and would not be significant. A landowner would have to make up her or his own mind on whether to burn or not.


• The Fire Brigade is willing to offer advice on burning for any purpose and is prepared to help in the actual burn.

And now for the Lyrebird Survey.

The lyrebird is one of our larger birds and has the most incredible ability to mimic calls and even sounds like chain saws and lawn mowers. Their repertoire is quite amazing. Their populations have been threatened since Europeans arrived in this country particularly since they introduced animals like foxes, cats and dogs. We have them in the rain forests surrounding Melbourne, the closest being a mere 20 minutes away from us although the population there is severely threatened if it hasn't disappeared already. As you got further afield there are still birds around. The survey I joined in was being held in the King lake National

Park area, which would probably be about 30 km from the Melbourne GPO north east, about 1.1/2 hours from our place. The idea is that first thing in the morning, the male birds have a mating song which lasts about half an hour at dawn, and volunteers are spread throughout the park and plot the directions from which the songs come from. From these, maps are drawn and an estimate can be made as to how many males are in the area. So first thing I had to learn was to read the compass, which I can proudly say I can do now ! Orientation was on Saturday afternoon when we were marshalled and taken to our sites. We had to put bands of fluorescent tape on markers to ensure we could find our spots in the darkness of the following morning. I was located in the Brocks Spur Track and Banksia Ridge Track, all in all a 6 km walk. There were about 19 of us manning this area, about 20 minutes from the main camp. We had to go into the park on a track and walk a substantial distance before getting to the sites. In the morning we were taken in by four wheel drive vehicles - pretty scary at times as the track was very wet and slippery in places. We were positioned 200 metres apart and I was at the second last post on top of a hill. I didn't realise till the next morning when I had to run up the hill just how steep



it was - y and get to my post at the required 6.30 am time, in pitch darkness, and having no idea of just how far 200m


was in those conditions.

The group I was with were really great people. Two rangers from the Metropolitan parks in Melbourne, a Conservation officer from a local council who had spent a year in Malaysia and spoke in that language to an Indonesian youth, an English couple who nearly got left behind because we went back to the cars another way and they were waiting where we had originally gone through, a Norwegian lady with her Australian daughter in law who live near us in Wantirna, and a couple of others.

Actually, this business of the group splitting up and people going back to their vehicles as we trudged to the end caused quite a dilemma for us at the end. We returned to the main road and

my car and the leader of our group's car were still parked there, and one other. The driver of the other car had made it quite clear that she wanted to get home early and we pondered as to why the car was still there. Had she had difficulty starting it and gone back for assistance, or had she run out of petrol? Time wise, if any of these things had happened she would have been back before we reached the cars. There was also the question of why the English couple who had come with the leader had not waited, but a presumption could be made that they had hitched with some of the others to get back to base camp earlier. To give credit to Steve, he decided to go back to where we had just walked through by car, and luckily so. The English couple and the car owner were patiently waiting, although it was getting darker. Just as well I wasn't in charge - I was sure my presumptions were correct.

We went back to base, and a picnic area where a bring your own (BYO) barbecue was in progress with an open fire in one corner. A very dark night, with a heavy mist about. A possum prowl was arranged, and was most entertaining. The leader has a very strong torch and seeks out nocturnal animals, mainly possums, as you stalk around the bush. Every so often he stopped to let us participate in an exercise to test

sensors - touch and feel with bits of prickly and tickly wood; sound with a game of two bats (blindfolded) catching insects, acted out by a couple of people who had to call out "bat bat" or "moth moth" depending on which they were; smell with handfuls of bark or dirt; and finally each of the 75 or so of us picked up a stick, had to shut our eyes and pass the stick around until we found our stick again. Surprising most of us did locate our sticks at the end.

I shone the torch upwards and all I could see were little droplets that looked to be coming down. It was the mist. We turned in very early, and I slept in the information centre along with about 20 others - all sizes and ages. A most uncomfortable night. Although indoors I was cold and ended up putting a jumper over my track suit top, and the floor was also very hard. Nevertheless, I almost 'slept in' - we were meant to catch our lift at 5.30 am. It was pitch dark, but ever so companionable.

Whilst I was up there I wrote the following notes:

A very dry mild morning, north westerly. At post at 6.35 am. At 6.45 could very vaguely hear what could have been one bird - too far and not worth reporting. Steve had said you wouldn't hear anything till around 7.00 am. The walk up to the post nearly killed me. Heard a thud thud to the right but couldn't see anything. Possibly a wallaby. Lot of traffic noise, roosters and dogs barking.

Moon shrouded by mist. 6.58 - I heard him; a variety of calls, getting closer at 320 - 300 degrees. Getting colder. Could hear three birds, 300, 340 and 40. Hands are frozen but can't manipulate torch, pencil and card with gloves on. It was terrific when we tallied up notes - the others depending on their positions had also heard up to 3. One of our group had one real close. Their repertoire is amazing and before Sunday I had only heard it on tape. In nature it sounded fantastic.

Next year John, my husband, has no choice - he just HAS to experience this. The clown side of this weekend occurred when we turned up for breakfast - all the porridge had been eaten. Still, we possibly had one of the best sites (or so we told ourselves) and a great group of people.

Last word: My husband escaped - he is visiting relatives in the UK and comes home at 5.30 am on the Sunday of the lyrebird count. My dilemma is, do I go counting and leave him waiting at the airport?

Nicky Rose

THE WONDERS OF THE ELZ

The first in a series of profiles by Alan Bluhm of people who live in the ELZ.

John and Anne Wonder met at a dance in Preston Town Hall an undisclosed number of years ago. When they began courting, if John missed the last bus at night he had to walk from Reservoir to Preston. "Did you ever miss the last bus then?" I asked him. "He always missed it!" laughed Anne.

Both John and Anne were born in Melbourne. Anne also spent parts of her childhood in Ballarat and Clunes. John grew up in Preston where his father owned Bill Wonder's Electrical Store. He can recall the large crowd blocking the footpath as they watched the Olympic Games on one of Melbourne's first televisions in the window of his dad's shop.

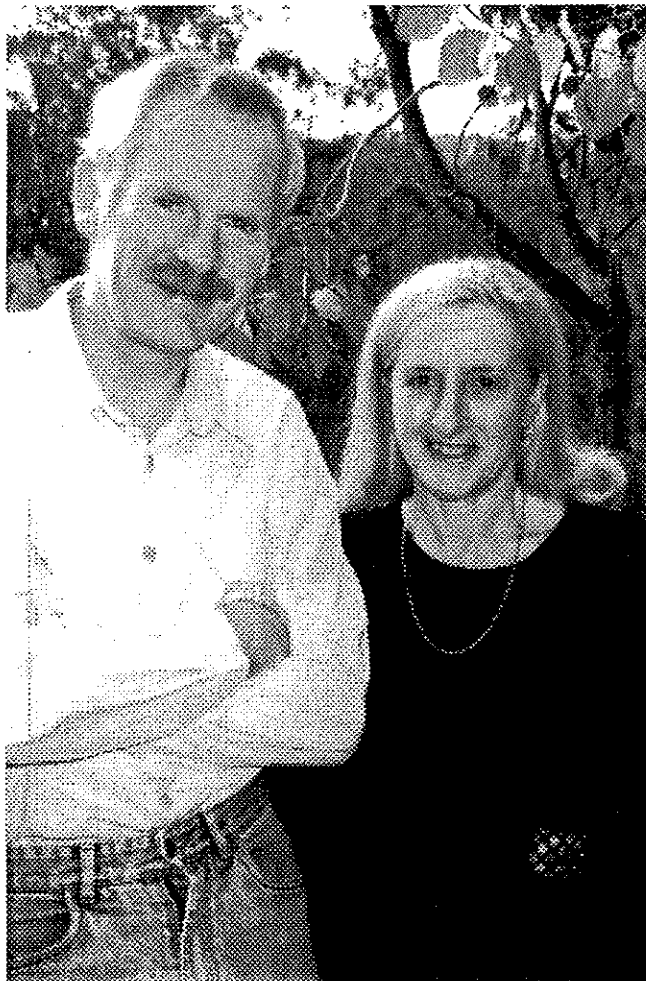
Each has memories of growing up in the World War Two years; of hurricane and pressure lamps, backyard toilets and radios in their wooden cabinets playing Spike Jones, Johnny Ray and *Blue Hills*, of fathers being away at war and bomb shelter dug-outs. Anne sometimes had nightmares that the enemy were chasing her. John remembers his dad bringing home a used ammunition shell for him as a souvenir. His father wasn't impressed a week later when John swapped it to a mate for a cap pistol!

Perhaps we can blame John's first job for the forest of TV antennas which form a canopy over Melbourne's suburbs! For several years he was kept extremely busy installing that new technology, as owning a television set became every Melbourne family's dream (except my family, but that's another story). As the valves in radios and TVs inevitably aged and died, John became an expert at repairing these devices. Anne's first job was serving in a cake shop while still at school, then she later worked for

the Motor Registration Branch until devoting her time and energy to raising a family.

They married early and had three children. Their daughter is now a flight attendant, one son is a technical officer with a pharmaceutical company and the other works with John in his gas appliance business, Gasmart in Greensborough. (Incidentally, John says there are gas installations suitable for country living, and would be happy to advise anyone who is building or renovating in the area).

When deciding to build a new house John felt



like moving beyond the suburbs and Anne dreamed of a house with lots of light. A friend told them of an *avant-garde* architect who might be able to design what they wanted. As they drove down Oxley Road to meet Hamish Knox, little did they know that he'd already built their house for them! His own place in the ELZ was up for sale. John and Anne immediately fell in love with it and bought it.

Since settling in the ELZ they have enjoyed the company of kangaroos, a black(swamp) wallaby, echidnas, wombats, brush and ringtailed possums and a large variety of birds, including the occasional flock of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos. As I interviewed the Wonders a number of tiny Firetail finches flitted about on the ground below us. An empty liquid feeder hangs in a tree close to the house. They explained that when it was in use the Bell Miners took over to the detriment of other species, so they've stopped putting nectar in it and Rosellas have come back, with Bell Miners now in a minority near the house.

John and Anne both say they have been lucky to enjoy good health all their lives. Anne has always played tennis (you may see her on the local circuit soon) and John has played his share of golf. They plan to stay in the ELZ indefinitely, and in their leisure time have been improving the backyard with drainage and planting. Two of their children have recently had their weddings on this picturesque property.

As the interview drew to a close I thought I may want to mention in my article the decking we had been relaxing on, with its magnificent view of the Yarra. Unsure whether to refer to it as a balcony or veranda, I asked them what they called this part of the house. "Paradise!" replied Anne. I could see what she meant.

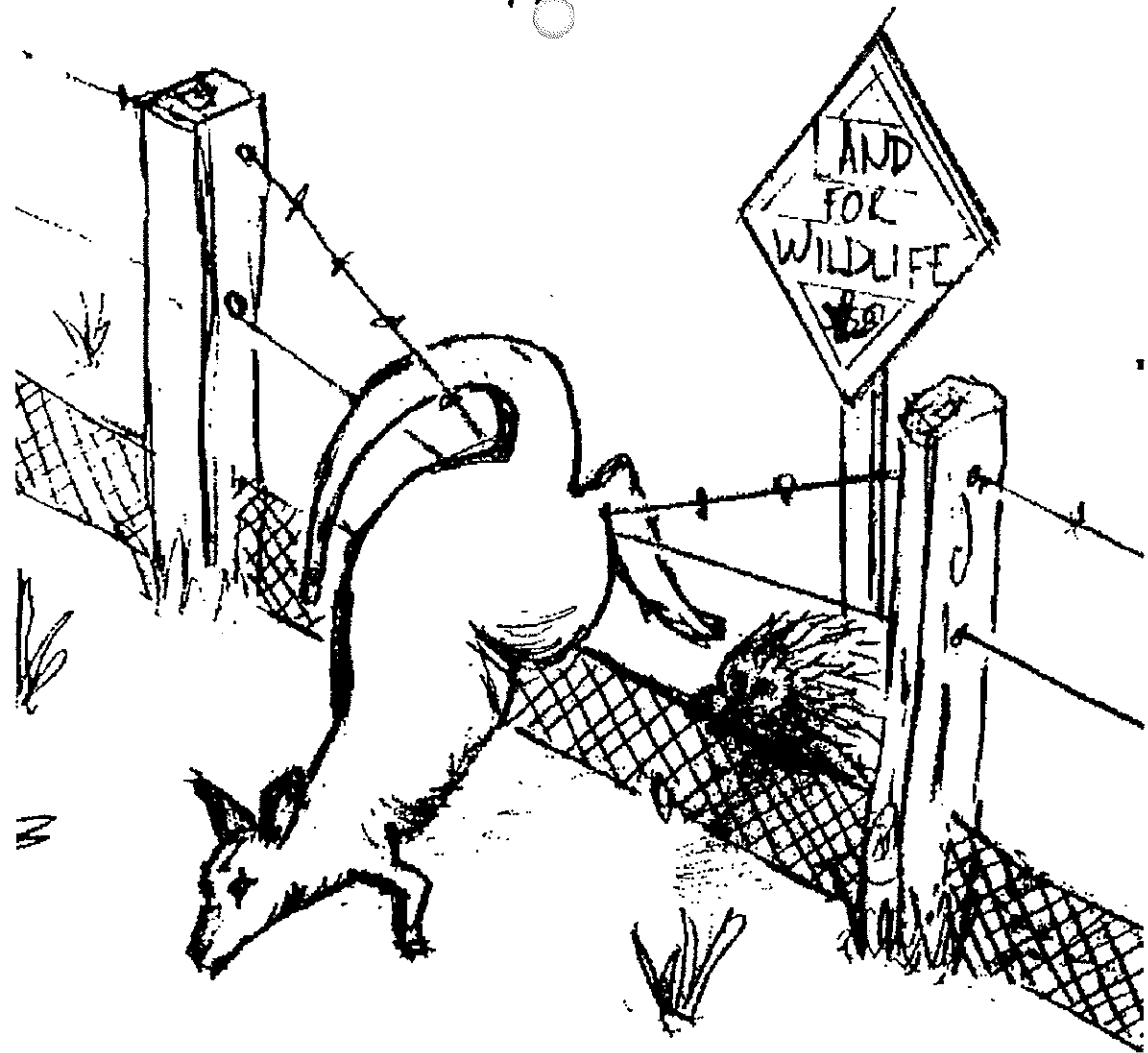
DONT FENCE THEM IN

I'm sure all of us living in the "Bend" have encountered a kangaroo on the road as we meander to and fro in our vehicles. You slow to give the roo time to get away and it starts along the road ahead of you. You stop, it stops. You go, it goes. Half a kilometer down the road it finally moves off the road into the bush. We all know that the kangaroo is a bit flighty and unpredictable but it may be staying on the road because of fencing limiting the escape routes. For most of us living in the "Bend" fences provide no useful function except as reminders of the suburban possessiveness or the rural intrusion. Seeing a kangaroo bound into a fence in panic as it tries to join its parent or mob is not a sight I enjoy.

When we acquired our site there was a remnant of old fencing along the front boundary similar to that on a lot of the properties in the area. I promised myself that "one day" I would take it down. "The day" arrived after a friendly reminder from our neighbour that my fence may be restricting the free movement of the beastsies. It took only a short amount of time to get rid of the offending wire to provide free range for the animals and a nice feeling that we had done something constructive.

If you have an old fence keeping the fresh air on your block please accept this as a friendly reminder that you may be restricting free movement of the wonderful beasies we share the area with and maybe with just a small amount of time you too can feel you have contributed.

Alan Bonny



From the Editor

Once again, thank you to all contributors to this newsletter. Special thanks are due to the people who provided the illustrations. Garry Patterson, Hilary Jackman, Carol Bonny, Cric Henry. We hope to produce another issue before the end of the year. Any contributions are welcome in any format. We take PC or Mac formatted documents on floppy disc, typescript or manuscript. If you are desperate we will take dictation!

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