

BEND OF ISLANDS CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION INC. NEWSLETTER

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WHAT LOCAL PLANT IS FLOWERING?

Botanical name: *Eucalyptus macrorhyncha*
Common name: Red Stringybark
Family: Myrtaceae

A medium to large tree of the dry and valley sclerophyll forest, 12 to 20 m. high with up to 10 m. rounded canopy spread of dark green leaves. It is common on the drier, well drained, hilly sites, usually in association with other eucalypts such as the red box, yellow box and longleaf box.

Red Stringybark and the other stringybark eucalypts, are easily identified by the deeply fissured, long fibred bark, which is retained on the trunk and smaller branches of the tree. The bark weathers to grey on the outside and is red brown on the inside.

The juvenile leaves are ovate, shortly stalked, hairy and with wavy margins, up to 30 mm. to 30 mm. The adult leaves are 60 - 150 mm. x 30 - 50 mm., thick, glossy and dark green on both sides. The leaf veins are conspicuous with the marginal vein set inside from the edge of the leaf. The leaf is less oblique than most stringybarks i.e. the base of the leaf blade is not as asymmetrical to the mid vein.

The 6-12 buds are arranged in clusters on a flattened stem in axils. The axil is the upper angle between the leaf stalk and the stem that bears it. The buds are diamond shaped with long conical caps which open to reveal white to creamy honey scented flowers in Summer to Autumn. The flowers are followed by domed top, globular capsules, 9 - 12 mm. across, with protruding valves.

Prefers dry, well drained, clay loam soils and full sun. Tolerates moist, well drained soils and semi-shade though is sensitive to poor drainage. The roots of the tree are particularly sensitive to compaction of soil and the tree is susceptible to Cinnamon fungus and eucalypt dieback.

The tree is a good source of honey and has durable wood.

Provides food for butterflies and caterpillars as well as the seed, nectar and insect eating birds.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

It's been a long hot summer with the threat of the Kinglake fires. Thankfully the weather turned at just the right time to relieve the threat and refresh the bush. How sweet that downpour of rain was on the evening of January 26th 2006.

Over the last month we have been subject to a most wonderful display of blossom on the Red Stringybarks (*Eucalyptus macrorhyncha*) that has brought with it the constant drone of bees. Unfortunately a swarm has once again taken up residence in one of our Tuan (Phascogale) nest boxes but it is interesting to watch them ooze out of the hole on hotter days. Time to contact a bee removalist.

Since the last report in December we have been kept a little busy. Alan and I attended a tour of the proposed aqueduct trail, an inspection of Melbourne Water land in Henley road, Nillumbik Volunteer party, Danielle Green Xmas picnic, printing of the special news-sheet about the amendment, attendance at Council meeting where Mayor Greg Johnston was re-elected and the new Deputy Michael Young instated, joined with Janet and Frank to take Council Officers for a tour of the Bend of Islands to highlight potential impacts.

In amongst these duties we had a fabulous turn up to the December Christmas Café Benders. It was great to see Danielle Green and Councilor Warrick Leeson singing Christmas carols along with the children. Will keep them in mind for the Night Event. On the Café night we drew the BICA Dozen Raffle which was a great success thanks to the selling skills of Barb Whiter and Peter Gurney. What a team! Thanks to all those who purchased tickets and supported BICA's only fundraiser. The 2006 BICA calendar promises a year of great events. I hope you can participate in as many as possible.

See you 'round.

CAROL BONNY

AUSTRALIA DAY AWARDS

From Alan Bonny

The Bend of Islands was well represented in 2006. At the Jenny Macklin Jaga Jaga awards our President Carol Bonny and volunteer extraordinaire Wolfgang Krause were awarded Community Service Awards. At the Nillumbik awards Mick and Margaret Woiwod were named as the 2006 Nillumbik Citizens of the Year for their outstanding local contribution to the environment, community and education. On the larger stage part time resident George Hampel, QC, was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for introducing advocacy training of barristers and solicitors in Australia and overseas.

Congratulation to all recipients.

REPORTING FIRES

Neill Kamminga, Captain, Christmas Hills Fire Brigade

The recent fire alerts had us all a bit tense and a local call out with sirens blaring caused some residents concern. The CFA web page (www.cfa.vic.gov.au) or their 1800 240 667 Bushfire Information line can advise of any current activities. If you don't have a computer then the 1800 number is the only CFA option with radio 774 as a back-up.

During a recent local event a caller could not get through to the 1800 number so no assurances could be obtained. Your local Fireguard group may be structured to provide information but the best advice is that if in doubt you put your Fire-plan into action. If you have any reason to suspect a fire incident is close then use sight and smell to inform yourself. Only use 000 to report a fire issue that you can confirm by smoke sighting or flame sighting.

THUMBS UP AND THUMBS DOWN

Dylan Osler



To Wolfgang for coming out late on a hot Sunday evening after attending to fires during the day, to remove a large tree across Henley Rd and thus allowing a number of stranded Bend of Islanders to return home. Thanks Wolfgang!



To Melbourne Water and Winneke Treatment Plant for the discharge of aluminium sulphate into Sugarloaf Creek and Watsons Ck. You may have noticed that Watsons Ck turned the colour of a chlorinated swimming pool for a number of days late last year. Aluminium sulphate is used as a flocculant in water treatment and in small amounts is quite benign. But in larger quantities will turn a tannin stained creek blue and remove all the oxygen from the water. This in turn has had a significant impact on the fauna of this stretch of creek, with a number dead fish being observed during this time. The EPA is continuing investigations into the matter and continuing fauna surveys. If anyone observes the creek turning blue again (Watsons Creek should be a nice tannin stained colour) please report to the EPA because it has not occurred due to the creeks good health! (When the EPA saw Watsons Ck they wondered why they hadn't been bombarded with calls!)

I will keep BICA informed with any updates on this matter.

NOT BIRD FLU – AGAPANTHUS BUSH VIRUS!

Peter Gurney

Bird flu is spreading across the continents. Thankfully our continent, at least for the short term, remains untouched by this pernicious avian disease.

However, this article is about the continued spread of a plant that is increasingly popping up through our bushland and will degrade our native flora, just like bird flu may one day degrade our native fauna. In this case we can take action to help our bushland deal with the threat but we need to start now.

Agapanthus is quite an elegant plant. It originally comes from South Africa, is well suited to our climate and in the summer has long flower stems with large purple or white flowers. The leaves are long and shiny and the tips droop towards the ground. The plant spreads by dropping seeds after flowering, and by division of the bulb under the soil. Local evidence suggests that the seeds are also being spread over distance by birds as young plants are appearing at considerable distance from any established plants.

As agapanthus spreads it forms dense clumps that completely exclude other plants. It consumes moisture and nutrients in the soil and is a winner in the plant survival stakes. In the bush it particularly affects our small shrubs, ground covers and delicate wildflowers. It provides good cover and habitat for introduced animal pests, particularly rabbits and foxes.

Agapanthus was planted on a number of properties in the Bend of Islands long before it was understood what a bushland pest it would become. Agapanthus is now a declared 'environmental weed' in Victoria. This means that it affects natural systems rather than agricultural systems which are affected by the better known 'noxious weeds'. Local evidence is that agapanthus is now spreading from the original plantings and dispersed plants have been found both close to the original plantings, downstream/down slope from those plantings, even 100 or more metres from those plantings.

What can we do to stop agapanthus becoming a problem beyond our scope to deal with as individuals or a bushland conservation orientated community?

Firstly, every year in late summer (i.e. NOW) landowners with agapanthus on their property need to remove the flower heads immediately after flowering. The flower heads are easily removed with secateurs and can be disposed of in the green-lidded bin provided by Nillumbik Council. It is strongly recommended not to leave the seed heads on the ground or pile them up for burning, but to bin them immediately.

Throughout the year seedlings around parent plants and elsewhere on the property should be dug out. When small they come out easily; try and get the bulb and all the

fleshy roots too. Mature plants are not so easy to remove but it is strongly recommended that where there are not many plants they be dug out. When there is a dense planting it may be better to use other methods. See below.

As a community we all need to be able to recognise agapanthus and to remove any plants discovered when out walking around the area. Young plants are appearing on the road verges and in some of the gullies near agapanthus infestations. It takes only a few moments to dig around each small plant with a stick and to pull it out and hang it upside down in the fork of a bush. If identification is a problem advice is available.

Our community landcare working bees carry out work on agapanthus both on public land and private land, and everyone is welcome to join in at all monthly working bees. From time-to-time BICA Landcare has used contractor support to carefully spray large infestations with an effective herbicide. Nillumbik Council, through the Biodiversity Enhancement program funds projects such as agapanthus removal to the tune of \$500 per property. Grants can be applied for by landowners and also by BICA Landcare when requested by land owners. Biodiversity Enhancement grant applications are called for in June/July each year.

BICA Landcare is very prepared to work with landowners to eliminate and contain agapanthus. We can provide free labour, advice and assistance for grant applications, advice on removal and replacement planting. We can also provide local provenance replacement plants at no cost or very low cost.

By removing and replacing agapanthus we will provide improved habitat for our indigenous fauna, help to reduce habitat for pest animals and will greatly reduce the opportunity for agapanthus to spread through our bushland and to dominate indigenous plant communities. If you need advice or assistance to recognise agapanthus, or to clear agapanthus from your property or at least contain it to small areas, please get in touch with me (9712 0408).

However, right now please get out and remove the flower heads from any agapanthus on your property and enjoy our diverse birdlife while you do so!

AMMENDMENT UPDATE

Alan Bonny

The C25 Amendment that was distributed in the December BICA Newsheet has progressed through the council process and is moving through the next stage of State Planning incorporation. We wait and watch with interest. As previously stated this amendment incorporates definitions that are required to correct and complete our Environmental Living planning zone.

CREATION OF THE NEIL DOUGLAS NATURE CONSERVATION RESERVE

The Deputy Premier John Thwaites, who is the Minister for Water and the Minister for Environment, attended an opening function for the creation of **The Neil Douglas Nature Conservation Reserve** at Gongflers Drive on 4/11/05. Attendees included local member, Danielle Green, and representatives of Melbourne Water, Nillumbik Shire Council, Department of Sustainability and Environment, the Press and a few BICA representatives invited by Melbourne Water.

The reserve, locally referred to as the **Neil Douglas Sanctuary**, is about 4Ha at the end of the Gongflers Peninsula. It is intended for the land to be a passive reserve with no public activities or facilities. This is a fitting preservation of a special piece of land as a tribute to Duggo, the visionary whose concept of Residential Conservation has become the ELZ as we know it today.

The following are transcripts of the speeches made at the opening by Frank Pierce and Carol Bonny on behalf of BICA.

from Frank

"Thank you Minister, I would like to respond on behalf of BICA.

This morning at 6.30 I arrived back to Melbourne from a remote island, North West of Australia, where I saw my 700th bird in Australian Territories. I can confidently say that this would not have happened had it not been for Neil Douglas. This is one of a 1000 spin-offs from the fantastic legacy left to this area by Neil.

It was Neil's vision and inspiration that was the motivation for the formation of the Environmental Living Zone. It is the quality of environment of the ELZ that entices the residents to develop a strong bond with nature. I am lucky to have been one of those residents for some 22 years and it was here that my interest in birds became more than casual.

Neil was a charismatic character. He motivated the environmentally minded to come & live here and work for the establishment of the ELZ. More than this, he was also adept at using the media and influencing the politicians of the time, regardless of their political allegiances, to gain support for his farsighted plans for an area of 'residential conservation'.

A brief outline of the Melbourne Water land in the area goes as follows:

- In the early 70's MW bought land in the area for the Yarra Brae Dam project.
- After an EIS and community action, this proposal to dam the Yarra was scrapped.
- MW then built Sugarloaf Dam and started to sell off its excess land here.
- Because the original subdivision of the land had been inappropriate, for such a significant environment, DSE placed an embargo on further MW land sales pending the results of a study of this area.
- A study group was formed comprising S of Healesville, S of Eltham, MW, DSE, & BICA. This study concluded, in 1986, that the ELZ was working well and also recommended that most of the remaining MW land in the area be transferred to DSE.
- In 1987 we received a letter from Evan Walker, then the Minister for Environment, confirming that the transfer was approved but may take a few months.
- That was 18 years ago!

In 1985 I had a few 'çuppas' with Neil, not long before he left the area, and he worked his magic on me. His challenge was that the ELZ was well established as an entity but there was a need to create buffer areas to maximise the long term viability of this special environment. The BICA committee has been working towards this ever since and, let me say, the road has been far from smooth.

The current transfer of MW land to DSE and the application of appropriate planning protections and environmental remedial works to the few blocks that are to be sold, means that we have come a long way to meeting this challenge.

No doubt there will be new challenges for the local community, but this transfer of land represents a significant step forward for the ELZ.

In fact the creation of this Sanctuary today, is the icing on the cake. It is the end of a peninsula of land, physically isolated by the geomorphology of the Yarra, and surrounded by Warrandyte State Park across the river. It epitomizes the role of the ELZ as a vital part of the KLNP/WSP habitat link. It is fitting that it will also be a lasting tribute to Neil Douglas and the realisation of the vision.

Neil's vision was turned into reality by the hard work and dedication of many members and supporters of BICA. I would like now to hand over to our president Carol Bonny."

from Carol

"I only met Neil Douglas once at Point Smythe some years ago when he was about 80.

It was easy to see why he inspired others with his enthusiasm and wisdom and the Environmental Living Zone is a living tribute to him.

On 25th Oct 2003 Neil passed away and in December of that year the Bend of Islands Community had a gathering to celebrate his life.

It was at that event that I raised the possibility of a Neil Douglas Reserve with Danielle Green.

The ongoing resolution of the Melbourne Water lands provided an opportunity that was too good to miss and after almost two years of emails, meetings and lobbying, I know that we are all delighted with the result.

Reserving this piece of the Bend of Islands for the flora and fauna is a fitting memorial to Neil Douglas and I feel sure Neil would have approved.

On behalf of the Bend of Islands Community I would like to thank Minister Thwaites, all those involved from Melbourne Water, from the Department of



Sustainability and Environment and from Nillumbik Shire Council. And special thanks to Danielle Green.

Thank you to all who have participated and supported the creation of the Neil Douglas Conservation Reserve."

Carol Bonny

LIVING IN RURAL NILLUMBIK

Janet Mattiske

As residents of the Bend of Islands we enjoy a very special corner of the Shire. Our plants, trees and animals are highly valued by us and there seems to be a genuine community interest in learning more about the ways in which we can preserve and enhance the biodiversity of the place.

The Council does quite a number of things to assist residents to address land management issues by providing courses and other advice as well as financial assistance through our BICA Land care Group.

Council also has a number of Local Laws designed to protect the amenity of our rural lifestyle.

However there are still a number of actions that we may wish to carry out for which we may need a permit.

Illegal works can attract substantial fines so always be sure before you act and ring the Council's Planning Services 9433 3343.

Did you know that Council has a number of local laws that are effective Shire wide?

For example, in order to ride a trail bike on private property a permit is required from the Council. The application process requires notification of neighbours.

If you are being annoyed by trail bikes ridden near your property, contact Council's Municipal Laws Section 9433 3231

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Make sure that you have these events in your calendar!

April 2	Flora Walk
April 8	Cinema Pompier Saturday night at our fire shed.
April 9	Bird Walk (8:30 am)
April 15	Café Benders
April 16	Canoe Run (Easter Sunday)
April 30	Landcare (2 pm)
May 7	Flora Walk
May 7	BICA General Meeting (2 pm Sun)
May 14	Bird Walk (8:30 am)
May 20	Café Benders
May 21	Landcare (2 pm)

IS YOUR NUMBER UP?

The Rural Road Numbering System is used by emergency services to find your gateway. Is your number correct and visible? In the CFA Summer News from our Brigade there was an item explaining the Rural Road Numbering System and we reproduce that item for your information.

How the Rural Road Numbering System Works

The system is based on the distance along the road from its beginning to the gateway concerned and gives anyone looking for a particular address in rural areas an indication of how far it is to the property. The number 100 signifies a distance of 1 kilometer from where the numbering starts. So 300 means 3 Kilometres, 260 means 2.6 Kilometres and 48 means 480 Metres. As with urban numbering systems, the odd numbers are on the left and evens on the right, facing in the direction of travel from low to high numbers. Each gateway or entrance is supposed to have a unique number; this means that your property might have one or more numbers associated with it. Only one of these will be your 'official' address.

BURNING MOUNT LOFTY

Peter Gurney

Parks Victoria, who manage Warrandyte State Park of which Mt Lofty is an important area, intend to burn a sector of Mt Lofty this autumn. Mt Lofty is on the southern side of the Yarra River opposite Henley Rd extension, upper Catani Blvd and Gongflers Drive. Ranger-in-Charge, David van Bockel advises that the purpose of the burn is to reduce Burgan infestation and to generate other plant species. The burn will be preceded by preparatory works to cut or flatten Burgan so that it dries somewhat before the actual burning. The area to be burnt is about 7ha in size and is in the north west section of Mt Lofty. See Melways map 279, A2. The burn will take place when conditions are right. This could be any time between late March and late May. The following link might be useful www.dse.vic.gov.au/fires Follow any links to fire planning and operations information.

David van Bockel has been asked to advise our community when the burn is actually to take place but there is unlikely to be more than a day or two's warning. If you are not on the BICA email list contact Alan Bonny to get listed (bica@rabbit.com.au). You might also join a fireguard group.

Parks Victoria burnt another nearby area of Mt Lofty two or three years ago. This was well planned and well executed.

A LETTER FROM LONDON

I read about BICA in a book: Landprints by George Seddon (ISBN 052165999-X) last year, and then searched the internet and emailed with Alan Bonny about the community.

I'm originally from Victoria, but lived in London, England for years. At the time of writing I'm back in Melbourne on long service leave until 4th March, and recently came to visit BICA at the Cafe benders event on 18th Feb. Everyone was very welcoming; thanks to those of you I spoke with. I'll be back in Victoria (the final move!) in September or October of this year.

If anyone is interested in a house swap I'll be keeping my very beautiful apartment in London for a year or so. Or I'd love to rent in Bend of Islands. I'm on vicky@grosser.clara.co.uk

Cheers! Vicky Grosser

(if you would like to see Vickys pottery visit www.potsbyvicky.com)

WEHRE HAS ALL THE GROUND COVER GONE?

Dylan Osler

With the number of planning overlays, permits and processes one has to go through to do most things within our beloved area you would think that our indigenous vegetation would be in a good state of affairs. I don't doubt that it has ensured that we have more trees than you could poke a stick at, but are we ensuring our bushland maintains its diversity?

While the Bend of Islands (BOI) has some nearly intact examples of different vegetation types, particularly in the gully lines, escarpment shrub land along the Yarra and Box/Ironbark on the Co-op, these vegetation communities represent only a small area of the BOI.

The vast majority of area is made up of an Ecological Vegetation Class called Dry Grassy Forest (DGF); this is the dominant vegetation of the upper slopes and ridgelines of the BOI and dominated by Red Box (*Eucalyptus polyanthemos*) and Red Stringybark (*Eucalyptus macrorhyncha*). Only relatively small pockets of good quality DGF occur within our area, the vast majority of this community has been depleted of its species diversity and has been reduced to the most hardy and non palatable species. These are the bare bones of this plant community.

This modification of species diversity has occurred due to long and varied history of disturbance. The last fifty years representing some of the most intensive changes to the management of the area's bushland (whether for conservation or other purposes). In that time our bush has suffered the very intense 1962 bushfires, shortly after which large tracts of the BOI were bulldozed into windrows (evidence which can still be seen throughout the bush and often the source of the rabbit burrows), periods of erosion following these intrusive management techniques, different types of animal husbandry including goats and cattle, weed invasion and unrelenting grazing pressure by mammals. Since the formation of the ELZ some of these factors have been reduced or removed, but the bush is still recovering from this legacy. In many places within the BOI this history of disturbance has been so intense that it has never had the opportunity to properly regenerate due to continued grazing pressure.

During spring as we walk or drive through our area we may see a number of different Wattles and Peas in flower and be given the impression that all is good. But when you stop to look at what is flowering it is actually only a small number of different plant species. While this is nice, it is at this time that I highly recommend visiting a reserve such as Professors Hill in North Warrandyte or Boomers Reserve near Pantom Hill. These high quality reserves have the similar vegetation, geology, topography and

represent good reference areas for us to visit to gain an image of what much of our area should look like in regards to the diversity of species. After visiting areas such as these you begin to see how much of the ground storey structure and diversity we are lacking. Whether it be the diverse assemblage of grass species that will vary depending on where you are on the hill and the aspect or the array of "paper daisies" and other wildflowers such as lilies, you will realise what we have lost and are continuing to lose from our DGF. While many of these species are present within the BOI; it is their abundance that is the real concern. The majority of these species should be ubiquitous within this EVC and are not just species that represent an interesting disjunct occurrence. Large areas of the Bend of Islands DGF will continue to decline in quality with the ongoing depletion of species. We need to recognise this issue and realise the need to manage our pieces of bushland.

While we try to ensure that any planting that occurs uses local provenance seed; we are at the same time in the process of losing the local populations of a number of species. An example of this is Grey Everlasting (*Ozothamnus obcordatus*), this medium sized shrub is generally quite common within Box/Ironbark forests across the state and is by no means an endangered species and even regionally it is quite common. But within the BOI this plant has been reduced to approximately six mature plants. These plants are genetically isolated and no longer produce viable seed, let alone have an opportunity to flower (although two plants on the Co-op now have individual guards). Species such as *Ozothamnus* belong to the Asteraceae (Daisy) family; this group of plants will often produce an abundance of seed each year but this seed will not persist in the seed bank¹ for extended periods of time. Therefore the species relies on the continued recruitment of plants to ensure the survival of the populations.

What is occurring in the BOI with Grey Everlasting and many other species is that they are either;

- No longer able to produce viable seed due to isolation between parent plants
- Are grazed before the opportunity of going through their ecological processes
- Are grazed as recruitment of young plants occur
- Seed bank is becoming exhausted of seed

It is particularly alarming when these issues are also occurring to species that do have hard seed that will persist in the seed bank. A number of wattles species found in our area have been reduced to a handful of parent plants.

These species that I am referring to aren't some rare orchid that certain members of the community get excited about; they are very standard structural species of DGF that should be EVERYWHERE.

As someone who works with remnant vegetation I am continually saddened by stories from the boffins of how things used to be, the abundance and diversity. Now often it is only the skerrick left. I don't want all the littlies that we have now to miss out or look at the BOI species list and say "Dad where can I go to frolic amongst the *Chrysocephalum semipapposum*" and I will have to say "Well you will be dangling off the edge of the escarpment at Ma Henrys house"

It is important to acknowledge that our area has established itself as a unique place to live in regards to the provisions that protect the bush; much of this has been achieved through SUZ2. This has meant that many people who now live here identify very strongly with the area both as a community and with the bushland. But with this comes the responsibility to gain some understanding about the flora and fauna of the area and the issues that it is facing. There are many ways in which you can enhance your understanding of our bushland, whether it is coming along on a fauna or flora walks held in the area or involvement with the Friends of Warrandyte State Park. Both the councils (Nilumbik and Manningham) and organisations such as Greening Australia or the Field Naturalist Club regularly hold talks that encourage the community to foster a greater understanding of our bushland.

Remember many of these issues are not unique to our area. Even good quality bush will generally require some management, let alone bushland with the issues that we are facing.

1. Seed Bank- seed that has accumulated in the soil over long period of time. Works exactly like a bank; if you take money out and don't put any back into the bank, you can't expect there to be anything in there next time you need to pay the bills. And if every one is working on the same principle generally there will be an issue. While there may be every chance you might win on the Pokies you don't want to become reliant.

A MUSK SEE

Carol Bonny

While partaking of an evening Ouzo out next to the birdbath and watching the comings and goings of our regular visitors I became aware of birds moving above me in the Stringybark. With the naked eye I could make out two parrots that were not quite the right shape for the usual Crimson Rosella. I determined that they could be either Rainbow or Musk Lorikeets but was hesitant to get up to get the binoculars in case the birds took flight. After a while, with my neck just about at breaking point and needing a stretch, I decided to risk it and when I returned I was pleasantly surprised to see the birds still there.

To save my neck I took up a horizontal position on the bench and observed in comfort with my binocs and bird book at hand. The red forehead, cheek and tip of bill and a yellow patch near the shoulder stood out on the green body and after consulting my Slater Field Guide To Australian Birds I confirmed they were Musk Lorikeets. How exciting! This confirmed a new sighting for our property.

I continued my observation for at least half an hour and for all this time the birds were silent as they caressed the blossom with their tongue to remove the nectar. Much neater than the Crimsons who chew small branches off and drop them all over the place. Over the last month flocks of up to twenty of these birds have been flying over but they are so fast that I hadn't been able to get a positive ID. No doubt they have been attracted by the prolific flowering of our beautiful Red Stringybarks.

MORE CREW NEEDED

The recent fire season has highlighted the importance of our brigade. If it is to function efficiently it needs our support. Available firefighters are the core of the service and willing and able volunteers are invited to contact our Captain Neill Kamminga for details. 9712 0621

SUZ2 AND YOU

Alan Bonny

In the December Newsletter I focused on the requirement for a council planning permit for any construction and earthworks carried out in our Environmental Living Zone. Since then a BICA member asked about small structures such as a carport etc. and on a visit to the council offices discussed the issue with a planning officer. The advice is that in some areas of the Shire small construction may not need a building permit but may require a planning permit. In our zone however, you will require a planning permit for any construction and works. Our SUZ 2 provisions override any other general planning guideline and specifically require planning approval to "construct a building or construct or carry out works". As previously I suggest that you contact the council before you start ANY works to establish the planning scheme requirements and ensure you don't incur an embarrassing penalty.

SUMMER FIRES

Neill Kamminga

The week of the 22nd to the 29th of January was a very busy one for the Christmas Hills community and the Brigade. With large fires already burning in Gippsland (Moondara) and the Grampians and with hot, dry weather prevailing, the potential for a major fire in our area was significant. To reflect CFA's concern with the conditions, 2 Total Fire Ban days (TFB's) were called in this time – Sunday 22nd and Thursday 26th. ABC Radio 774 was constantly broadcasting updates on the fire situations across the State. It was also during this week that three fires in the Kinglake area joined up posing an immediate threat to the township of Kinglake and a potential threat to Christmas Hills. Many people in the area reported ash falling around their homes; not an ember attack but a sure sign that the threat of a fire was real.

The Brigade was also busy behind the scenes. All 23 active volunteer members were involved in some way with the events of the week:

Two members spent five days between them at the Moondara fire; four members attended the Steel's Creek fire; four members attended the Rifle Range Rd fire; three members were on a strike team and one in a communications van overnight at the Glenburn fire; two members were on a strike team to the Kinglake fire; and seven members were involved in the planning and incident control functions at the Kangaroo Ground Incident Control centre. In the midst of all this there was a turnout to an alarm at Yering Gorge pumping Station (false alarm as it turned out).

Everyone made phone calls.

On Australia day we had 5 members on standby at the South station and 5 at the North Station from 2pm till 5pm to ensure that if a call came in we would be able to get the trucks on the road in the shortest possible time. All this takes a lot of co-ordination, phone calls, pager messaging, and calling in of favours. The Brigade officers shared the bulk of this for the operational effectiveness of the brigade.

But the public meeting preparation broke new ground. On Wednesday 25th at approximately 4pm we were informed by CFA Region 13 office that they were going to conduct a public meeting the following day at 7pm at Ridge Park, Sugarloaf Dam. Due to the late change in weather conditions on the day the meeting was moved from the park to the Christmas Hills Hall.

In the next 24 hours we had to get the word out to as many people in Christmas Hills as possible to attend the meeting. At one point we even thought the meeting would be to discuss recovery after a fire rather than information on what was approaching. Despite their involvement in the on-going operational events many of our members were involved in hand delivering notices of the meeting well into the Wednesday evening and early Thursday morning.

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Numerous phone calls were made to try and get the message to at least one person in every street. We asked people to phone their neighbours or pass the message verbally to anyone in the area. Fireguard groups were contacted and their telephone trees utilised to get the message out.

The community responded to all our requests and, thanks to these sterling efforts we had an estimated attendance in excess of 200 at this very important meeting.

Through the efforts of the Brigade and particularly the wider community (that's you) we managed to get in touch with a heck of a lot of people in a very short time.

As it happened, the Kinglake fire didn't turn into the Christmas Hills fire, the rain came, it got cooler, and the risk has reduced for now, but the fire season will continue for a couple of months yet. Thanks for your help this time round, I'm sure we can count on it again. And yes, the Brigade is always looking for new people both on and off the trucks.

A SPECIAL PLACE

Tess Roberts-Hook

Tess and her family lived in the Bend of Islands for a while. She wrote this piece as as part of her work requirements for VCE last year.

I listen carefully, the first thing I notice is the thudding of my own feet on hard, compacted dirt, but then as that becomes a routine, my mind automatically ignores it and I hear other things; a stick breaks off and lands with a small clatter on a bed of leaves. A kookaburra laughs loudly in a thin tall gum tree. A bellbird calls out and another answers.

It's so peaceful out here, with no artificial sounds polluting the air, with only nature around me.

The thudding of my own feet gets louder, as does the puffing of my breath as the road becomes gravel and begins to slope upwards.

I see a branch lying half across the road; I bend down and drag it to the side, leaving skid marks on the gravel.

As I struggle upwards, a huge concrete tank looms ahead "For fire fighting purposes only," it reads, in bold letters. I wonder how often that tank is used. I hope not very often. Nothing can be perfect and the downside of natural bush is fire. The bush is always threatened; we can take precautions, like the tank but nothing can guarantee safety.

I keep going.

Suddenly I hear a car engine breaking what you could call a silence, but then, it's not a silence because there are so many sounds if you listen to nature; maybe it's a silence from man-made sounds.

It has gone now, and it becomes quieter again.

I keep going and get into a rhythm again, thud, thud, thud.

Suddenly out of the grey, green, trees hops a group of kangaroos. I stop letting my breath slow, and watch; there are three, two females and a large male; he turns around and looks at me, I look back, I notice a movement behind him and take a step to the side; a large Joey hops slowly over to its mum. She leans over and suddenly head first, he jumps into her pouch. I see his shape struggling beneath her skin, and then his head pops out.

They're off again, as quickly as they came, and disappear, mingling with the colours of the bush.

I continue on my way the hill ends and the road flattens.

I look up at the sky: it's cloudy. I expect it will rain. A tiny flock of birds soars into the distance, going the same direction as the clouds, but so much faster.

I turn into my drive and the sound of my feet changes again: slap, slap, slap, as they hit the bricks. A flock of choughs stand around a large tree; they look like a group of friends chatting animatedly, all trying to have the loudest voice, all trying to have the attention on them. I slow to a walk, and look up at the house; it's big and made from mud-bricks. I compare it to the bush; nature could never make anything like it, but its home.



COMMUNITY FIREGUARD

Kay Hawkins

Community Fireguard is a bushfire safety program designed by CFA to reduce the loss of lives and homes in bushfires. Community Fireguard helps residents to plan for the threat of a bushfire and to manage their own fire risk.

This summer has presented residents in this area with an opportunity to put into practice a number of scenarios discussed in local Community Fireguard (CFG) groups. From anecdotal reports there have been a number of challenges thrown out for residents to now discuss further:

- Radio stations especially 774, CFA's website www.cfa.vic.gov.au and CFA's information line 1800 627 broadcast that there was a fire in Kinglake and that residents in our area needed to implement their bushfire safety plans. Some CFG's activated their phone-trees, others didn't for what ever reason. Although there was plenty of opportunity for people who were interested and proactive about their safety to know what was going on, there was still a tendency for some to want to rely on others to tell them.
- Many people realised that despite 20 years of thinking about fire safety that they were not necessarily as prepared as they could be (or would like to be) on the day.
- Some also realised that, given their level of knowledge, how much it may help to share that knowledge with people new to the area or who haven't written a fire plan. It is reassuring for all of us to be able to talk over concerns with people prepared to share their knowledge and experience.
- Another revelation occurred for some partners of fire brigade members. There is an assumption that they will have a level of knowledge, just because they are indirectly connected to the brigade. What happens when their firefighter partner is off at a fire and they are at home to face a fire on their own? Does the bushfire plan actually cover a number of different scenarios? What do you do with visitors who know nothing about bushfire?
- For other Community Fireguard members there was a feeling of satisfaction that the plans they had written and practised worked for them.
- Some have expressed gratitude for the ideas provided in the Fire-guardian Newsletter which CFA sends to Community Fireguard members.

If you have any queries or would like to participate in Community Fireguard please contact Kay Hawkins 9712 0300.

BIRD NOTES

Frank Pierce

Lyrebirds- Further records reported are as listed below:

13/11/05	K. Kamminga	4pm Heard near house towards north-east
30/11/05	N. Kamminga	Heard near house towards north-east
14/12/05	R Laughlin	8am Heard below house
14/12/05	J and M McCallum	8.30pm Saw flying across Catani Boulevard from Fisher/McCallum to e
19/12/05	F Pierce	8.30pm Saw flying across Skyline Rd (100m n of Henley Rd) w to e
22/12/05	N Kamminga	5.10am heard near house 1 @ w and 1or2@ nne responding
25/12/05	J and M McCallum	9.30-10.30am and 5.30-6pm Heard n of house
26/12/05	M Krause	7.45am-rest of day on and off Heard calling ne of house
27/12/05	M Krause	6.15am Saw m? ne of house
27/12/05	N Kamminga	5.15am heard nne house
2/01/06	J and M McCallum	Am to pm - heard n of house
28/12/05	M Krause	9.15am Heard calling s of fire shed on Petersen's
29/12/05	N Kamminga	5.15am heard nne house
2/01/06	M Krause	8.45am-rest of morning on and off Heard calling in gully e of house
2/01/06	J and M McCallum	9.30am heard n of house
3/01/06	N Kamminga	5.15am heard nne house
3/01/06	J and M McCallum	6.15am heard n of house
4/01/06	N Kamminga	5.15am heard nne house
4/01/06	M Krause	7am Heard calling on Petersen's s of driveway

4/01/06	M Krause	4.40pm Heard calling in gully e of house
5/01/06	J and M McCallum	Am - pm heard n of house, sometimes very close.
6/01/06	N Kamminga	5.15am heard nne of house
12/01/06	J and M McCallum	7 to 8am heard nw of house (distant)
13/01/06	N Kamminga & FP	6.15 to 6.45 Heard nne of house (n of Stephenson's Ck)
13/01/06	P Gurney	7.40am Heard in gully Fisher's to Petersen's
14/01/06	P Gurney	All Day Heard in gully Fisher's to Petersen's
15/01/06	J and M McCallum	8 to 9am heard n of house
15/01/06	P Gurney	9am Heard in Gurney's to Krause's
16/01/06	M Krause	8.30am Heard calling s of fire station
16/01/06	J and M McCallum	8 to 9am heard n of house
16/01/06	M Krause	11am Heard calling in gully e of house
16/01/06	M Krause	12.15pm Heard and glimpsed in gully e of house
16/01/06	M Krause	6.15pm Heard calling in gully e of house
17/01/06	J and M McCallum	8 to 9am heard n of house
20/01/06	N Kamminga	6.30am heard n of house
21/01/06	M Krause	7.00am Heard calling s of fire station
25/01/06	J and M McCallum	8 to 9am heard n of house
26/01/06	M Krause	6.45am Heard calling in gully e of house
26/01/06	F Pierce	7am Heard nw of house (distant)
26/01/06	N Kamminga	8am heard nw of house
26/01/06	J and M McCallum	8 to 9am heard n of house
26/01/06	P Gurney	am Heard along river cliff Gurney's to Krause's

27/01/06	J and M McCallum	8 to 9am heard n of house
1/02/06	J and M McCallum	8 to 9am heard n of house, extended repertoire
6/02/06	J and M McCallum	8 to 9am heard n of house, various calls
15/02/06	N Kamminga	5.30am heard n house
15/02/06	F Pierce	8.15am, 10am & 1pm Heard mnw of house (distant)
26/2/06	D Osler	10.15am heard in gully at Taylor's under powerlines

The records in bold type indicate that there is more than one bird in the area. The birds may be setting up permanent residence in the ELZ. Reporting of records is essential to confirm these indications. Please record the details of each encounter you have with Lyrebirds and pass them on for the database.

Powerful Owls- Several sightings have been reported. At least one pair bred successfully in the ELZ last season raising two chicks.

Other Interesting Records and Sightings...

A Peregrine Falcon was seen flying over Yanakie with prey in its talons on 7/12/05.

A Brush Cuckoo was seen in the northern section of the Coop on 23/10/05.

White-throated Nightjars returned and were 1st heard in the northern section of the Coop on 23/10/05.

A spotless crane was seen at the large dam on Yanakie on the January Birdwalk along with Australian Reed-warbler and Mistletoe Bird.

Musk Lorikeets were recorded for the 1st time on the bird survey on the February Birdwalk

A pair of Rufous Fantails was seen just north of the Coop.

Ern Mainka photographed a King Parrot on the Co-op in November, this was a new record for the Coop.

Could you please record the details of any unusual sightings you make and pass them on to Frank Pierce (97120237) or email – fpandjm@netspace.net.au -especially Lyre-birds and Powerful Owls.

All are welcome to join us on the bird walks on the second Sunday of each month. Times are as per the BICA Calendar.

A chance encounter by Bruce and Matthew McCallum in late February resulted in the disturbing of a Boobook Owl during a hot afternoon on Gongflers peninsula. The bird had been roosting in an abandoned shed and, judging by the amount of guano had been doing so for some time. A not too careful entry to the shed caused the bird to fly. We beat a hasty retreat and hoped that the owl would return to its roost.

WEEDS ARE EVERYONE'S PROBLEM

Nilumbik Shire is holding a seminar on weed problems and details are provided for anyone who is interested.

Saturday 1 April. Two Sessions

Session 1: 1pm-2:30pm

Do you have a bush block, pasture or a creek that is being invaded by weeds? If so, come along to find out what weeds are and why they are such an important issue. Learn about weeds in Nilumbik and how they are affecting us and, most importantly, what we can do about it. Ideal for those people with little or no knowledge on the topic.

Presenter: Randall Robinson

Session 2: 3pm-4pm

What are the new and emerging weed threats to be aware of? Is the plant growing in the back corner of your garden a new weed? Learn which species to keep an eye out for and what to do when you think you have discovered a new weed. Find out about the State Government's Weed Alert Rapid Response Plan for new and emerging weeds in Victoria and the Weed Spotters program. Ideal for those people who want to know more about weeds and how they can help.

Presenter: Michael Hansford, Department of Primary Industries.

Book in for just one session or both, light refreshments are provided.

Time: Session 1 - 1pm-2:30pm & Session 2 - 3pm-4pm.

Bookings: 9433 3210 - Megan Andrews

For further information please contact:

Marie Haw

Community Weed Control Facilitator

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

Suzanne Whitten

I have been noticing how quickly our driving habits cut two well worn grooves into the roads and yet in some areas where the road is wider and we 'stray' all over the road it is perfectly flat e.g. on the mid section of 'upper Catani'. So I started to experiment with my driving in lower Catani & stayed to one side or the other & did not cut corners. Over time the loose stones in the middle & sides have flattened & I have not added to the degradation in the usual tyre tracks.

Maybe if we all tried driving on different parts of the road we may see the following benefits;

- Lessen the impact on the roads & go longer between gradings;
- Less gravel being imported into our area;
- Less fuel & oil being used to tidy the roads;
- Ease erosion, as the rain will drain evenly not 'river' down the tyre tracks;
- Fewer pot-holes;
- Safer roads in the interim, if you do need to pull over quickly due to oncoming traffic, you will not slide in loose stones;
- Safer for cyclists, runners & prams [I have slipped running & cycling – but maybe I'm un-coordinated!!].

Happy driving & see you on the 'other side'.

Not accelerating too aggressively on uphill sections can also reduce wear and tear on the road surface. Wherever you drive don't forget to keep to the left and drive at a speed to allow for appropriate action if another vehicle appears unexpectedly. (Ed)

CLEAN UP THE BEND DAY 2006

Mike Pelling

On Sunday 5th March a dedicated group of some 27 people rallied at the Fire shed, at the inhuman time of 9.30 am, with the sole intention of cleaning up, what amounts to, other peoples rubbish. Two visions occupied our minds, a traditional roadside sweep that could include Deadly Nightshade weeds and a concept that we could remove the fences that had artificially constricted all forms of access to the Melbourne Water block at the end of Ironbark road. We were well prepared with the clean up kit, lent tools and a trailer.

Accordingly one army went into the Henley Road hinterland past chook hill to the corner so that in a classic panzer formation they could sweep back into the Bend collecting all before them.

The other, armed with fencing tools of mass destruction, crashed through the tea tree and cut, pulled and rolled the netting then despatched it to a waiting skip. Most of the boundary and internal fencing was demolished, with only the odd lonely post left as a symbol of past intelligence.

After this creative frenzy there was but one solution, a late morning tea at the fire shed where de-briefing and any counselling could occur.

Thanks to all who participated, with physical input, the tools, trailer, skip organization and the morning tea.



BICA CONTACTS: YOUR COMMITTEE FOR 2006

President	Carol Bonny	9712 0648
Vice President	Janet Mattiske	9712 0237
Treasurer	Neil Harvey	9712 0462
Secretary	Alan Bonny	9712 0648
	Tom Fisher	9712 0451
	Cric Henry	9712 0547
	Val Himmelreich	9712 0029
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	Michael Pelling	9712 0286
	Graham Peterson	9712 0071
	Jenny Taylor	9712 0614
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