



WHAT NATIVE PLANT IS THAT?

Refer: *Flora of Melbourne, 4th edition, p35 & 504*

Scientific Name: *Fimbristylis velata*

Common Name: Veiled Fringe-sedge

Family: CYPERACEAE (Sedges)

Sector: Found in the Yarra Sector (the Bend of Islands south of the powerline easement).

Description: The Veiled Fringe-sedge is a new local plant species to add to the BICA Flora List and was found by our local botanist, Dylan Osler, on the upper reaches of the Yarra River in the Bend of Islands.

Rare in Victoria with only 2 sites recorded within Melbourne, the Veiled Fringe-sedge is listed as "Endangered" (Flora & Fauna Guarantee Act 1988, Threatened List, Sept 2022). It lives on the flood plains and wetland depressions of billabongs from old meanders of the Yarra River.

Form: A densely tufted annual sedge. The flower stems are flattened, ribbed, to 1mm wide.

One to four hairy, leaf-like floral bracts (i.e. a leaf-like structure below a flower or equal in length to flowerhead).

Foliage: Foliage consists of a cluster of basal leaves, 0.3-1mm wide, shorter than or equal to the length of the flowerhead. Sheaths and sometimes leaves are softly hairy.

Flower: Flowering stems radiate from the base of the stem. Flowerhead consisting of two or more parts. The finger-like branches to 5cm long, ending in single ovoid straw-coloured spikelets to 4-7mm.

Size: 5-25cm high

Cric Henry



Fimbristylis velata Photo: Dylan Osler



Flower heads Photo: Kevin Thiele



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dear BICA Member,

I am constantly reminded of how lucky we are, to live in this beautiful ELZ environment, whether it is the gorgeous diversity of native wildlife just outside our windows, or because there is such an alignment with our neighbours who are all doing their best as custodians to look after and protect this special place, or that our home is a place of connection, grounding and rejuvenation - so close and yet so far removed from living in the suburbs.

So whether you are doing regular weeding, volunteering for the CFA, running things like; Cafe Benders, Fire Guard groups, Landcare, or picking up waste, lobbying the Council, recording the biodiversity, creating beautiful art, or any number of other activities, it is all contributing to looking after and promoting this Environmental Living Zone, and this makes us Benders, light years away from other suburbs in Melbourne.

With this in mind, I wanted to thank all who look after this land, especially those who never mention what you are doing, just because you know it is the right thing to do, or it just needs to be done...

Thank you.

I do need to give a special thanks to the BICA Planning Sub-Committee who have been incredibly busy this year with the specifics about the introduction of the Local Law.

Plus our BICA Committee has continued to regularly meet, and has now grown to 11 committee members after a fantastic response at our deferred AGM and BICA General Meeting.

Keep doing what you are doing.

Michael Dempsey - BICA President

BICA General Meeting

Sunday 28 May 2023, 2pm

Guest Speaker – Millie Scicluna

PhD candidate in Conservation Ecology

Loves Dunnarts!

Venue: Members will be notified.

INDEX

1. What Native Plant is That?
2. President's Report
2. From the Secretary
4. Bird Notes
5. Landcare
6. What Weed to Watch Out For
8. Nillumbik Landcare Network
8. Environment & Sustainability Advisory Committee
9. ELZ Flora and Fauna
11. Fire Brigade News
13. Frogs in the Bend
15. Poem – Save the Frogs
16. Poem – December in the Bend
17. Belonging in the Bend
18. Biodiversity Hotspot – A Story About an Eel
19. Termites – Small Rewards
20. Foxes and KFC
21. From the Archives

FROM THE SECRETARY

New Faces on Committee

A new BICA committee was elected at the deferred AGM held in March this year and with the doubling of members to 11 we hope to be able to expand our activities again, with a strong focus on Landcare. It's great to welcome some long term faces as well as some newer ones to committee.

We can all learn such a lot from each other and everyone is bringing lots of enthusiasm and ideas to the table.

We would like to extend a huge vote of thanks to Luke Doyle, who has stepped back from his role as Landcare co-ordinator after many years. Luke – you kept things going despite the challenges and we are grateful for all you've done.

Mal Chicksen has now taken this on. Thankyou Mal (and by default Gavin).



And New Faces in our Membership

Since the last newsletter we welcomed seven new BICA Members (family and individual), including three who have recently purchased property and moved to the Bend, two who are long time property owners, and two who are renting. Our membership now includes 73% of property owners in the Bend. Heartfelt thanks to all!

Next General Meeting – 28 May, 2pm

We're excited to let you know that the guest speaker for our next General Meeting is Millie Scicluna, a PhD candidate in Conservation Ecology. Millie has a particular interest in fat-tailed dunnarts. Part of her PhD research observed a population decline of this species, which led to her recommendation for fat-tailed dunnart recognition in the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act.

Working with Council at Oxley Reserve

Through the efforts of Frank Pierce, the NSC Environmental Works Officer and the new Council contractors responsible for the ongoing maintenance of Catherine Oxley Reserve, enhanced tree guards have been installed around 5 round-leaf pomaderris plants (*Pomaderris vacciniifolia*) to protect them against unwanted grazing.

Endemic to a few localities in Victoria, *Pomaderris vacciniifolia* is listed as "Critically Endangered". (Flora & Fauna Guarantee Act 1988, Threatened List, Sept 2022).

Common threats are grazing, weed invasion and road maintenance.



Rare and Precious

In compiling this newsletter I've been struck by the number of references to precious, rare and endangered species that exist within the Bend of Islands as well as newly recorded species.

Some of these you wouldn't necessarily see or even know that they are there, but they exist; the seen and unseen, known and unknown, the intricate interdependencies which make up the biodiversity of this place and the critical link it forms to other places.

Tread lightly, that's what we need to do - truly recognize and understand the fragile significance of our area, value it accordingly and do everything in our power to conserve it - from protecting fauna from feral and domestic predators to protecting flora from weed invasion, to minimizing our own human footprint and impact.

New Local Law

From 22 March the new Local Law came fully into effect. Whilst this law reads well enough, the implementation process that Council chose to take concerned us greatly; including the '3 month window' where some landowners could legally register a pet where no pet had been on the property for many years.

As you are probably aware, your committee has been active in trying to minimise the number of additional pets that are permitted to be in the Bend of Islands. Our efforts over the past months have included meetings and discussions with Council officers and commissioning detailed planning and legal advice from an experienced Planner, a lawyer and a barrister, both specialising in this area of law.

Our advice established that Council's actions regarding the '3 month window' could be interpreted as highly dubious in some respects. We wrote to our BICA membership outlining our position and encouraged landowners not to take advantage of this anomaly.

We also worked through our Ward councillor Ben Ramcharan who worked with Council to resist the opportunistic registration of new pets during the '3 month window'.

We are now working to confirm the final number of legally registered pets and how the new Local Law will be administered, and more importantly, enforced. However, it seems that our efforts may have been worthwhile and there has been a minimal number of new registrations.

Our long term goal is that all legal registrations will expire over time. Between now and then we intend to be diligent in ensuring that the owners of the permitted pets in the Bend adhere to the rules and minimise the impact their pet has on our environment.

To avoid any uncomfortable interactions with fellow residents, if you see any animal in the Bend and you're not sure of its status, please ring the council ranger 0428 643 105 and they will be able to tell you if it is a legal registration.

Council assures us that they will be strict on enforcing the new Local Law. One illegal dog has already been identified (and hopefully removed) as a result of a phone call.



BIRD NOTES

The following can be reported since April 2022.

Lyrebird Records

At least in the northern section of the ELZ, around Stevenson Creek, the local lyrebirds are increasing in numbers, with 2 or 3 birds regularly being heard calling simultaneously from different locations.

Details and analysis of records, from 2000 to the end of 2022, can be found on the Birds Page of the BICA website – [here](#)

With over 500 records, including local breeding; and the completion of a comprehensive report **The Return of the Lyrebird to the Bend of Islands** published in the Victorian Naturalist - [here](#) ; the detailed recording of every time a bird is seen or heard is no longer needed. However, it is useful to record any unusual observations, such as multiple birds or any interaction of birds.

Please pass on details of any 'unusual encounters' you are lucky enough to have with these iconic birds.

Bird Survey Highlights

Notable sightings for the period were -

- **November: Whistling Kite Breeding** at HGC
- **February: Peregrine Falcon chasing Wedgetails** at Yanakie

New Birds for the BICA List

None since 10/2022. The current BICA Bird List has **181** species.

Other Interesting Observations

- **Lewin's Rail**, at Yanakie. Jarrah Pauli recorded it on 27/1/23; this is the 3rd record in this location within 12 months.
- **White-throated Nightjars** were heard calling from October to February, but much less often than in most previous years.
- **Channel-billed Cuckoo** heard a couple of times in October
- **Eastern Koel** heard in December



Male Lyrebird displaying on its mound



Lewin's Rail Photo: Bindi Hillen

The Birds Page of the BICA Website has lots of links to information about the birds of our area, as well as a summary of our on-going bird survey. See <https://bendofislands.wordpress.com/flora-and-fauna/birds/>

Could you please record the details of any unusual sightings you make and pass them on to Frank Pierce, (9712 0237), or email – jmandfp@bigpond.com.

All are welcome on the bird survey walks on the 2nd Sunday of each month. See the BICA Calendar for start times; we meet at the upper corner of Henley and Catani.

Frank Pierce



LANDCARE

March Action

Landcare in March was done at Catherine Oxley Reserve. We had a poor to average turnout but the work planned for the day was accomplished. Thank-you to those who came out to help with the weeding and guard removal. Many of the plants had outgrown their cages and are hopefully tall enough and strong enough to withstand grazing pressure.

The protected patch of Clustered everlasting (*chrysocephalum semipapposum*) which has had a good growth season, as did the invading weedy grasses, was carefully weeded and we should see further recruitment of the species.

Clustered everlasting is a perennial shrub native to Australia.



Clustered Everlasting

Gavin removing tree guards



Wolf carefully weeding around the chrysocephalum

General Management Principles

This information is taken from our Bend of Islands Land Management Plan.

The principles can be applied at both the property and landscape scale, and can be used in association with the hierarchical approach of Retention, Regeneration and Revegetation.

When researching your site, consider the following:

- What vegetation types are supported by the site (communities, flora species, significant flora) and what is the condition of this vegetation (i.e. is it intact, is there a diversity of species are all structural elements present, are there mature specimens.)?
- What are the key ecological values (i.e. have any locally or regionally significant flora or fauna taxa been recorded; do these species have particular management requirements)?
- Are there any threatening processes (i.e. weed invasion, herbivory erosion)?
- What are the highest priority environmental weeds (which weeds should be targeted first where and why)?
- How and when should priority weeds be managed (hand weeding cut paint or spot spray spring/autumn)?
- Are measures necessary to assist in the regeneration of some species (protection from grazing or burning)?
- Should species be introduced to the site (why is the species not currently on site, is the introduction likely to be successful)?



- What is involved in managing these factors what sources are available (how much time is available, what level of expertise) and what will be the consequences of the actions on ground (will they be effective in controlling the threat or promoting the natural processes, or will they exacerbate the problem)?

Prioritise high quality remnants

High quality vegetation will typically have a higher cover of indigenous species and a lower cover of weeds, and therefore results are likely to be more visible over short timeframe. Ideally any management works should aim to expand out from these areas of the property, towards those of moderate and then lesser quality by working out from these areas you are more likely to gain an understanding of factors influencing vegetation composition and structure on site; factors that may warrant management attention and would be otherwise lasting more degraded vegetation.

Strategic target weeds

The nature, potential for expansion, and probable impact of weeds should be considered when prioritising species for control. Weeds should be prioritised based around the most appropriate time of the year for control, e.g. before plants begin to set seed, or if using herbicide (cut and paint) when the plant's actively growing and taking in the herbicide.

Follow up is essential

All environmental works are likely to require some level of follow up. When we attempt to influence vegetation composition and structure within bushland areas by the application of a given management technique, we are likely to promote a range of processes, which may have both positive and negative ecological connotations. Accordingly, when designing a works program consideration should be given to initial and concurrent treatments as well as necessary follow-up works.

Examples of processes that may be promoted by management intervention include:

- The removal of mature plants will inevitably lead to a recruitment event in the following seasons.
- Fire (controlled or uncontrolled) can potentially trigger massive recruitment cohorts. recruiting weeds may range from woody species such as *Acacia* spp. (Wattles) through two small herbs such as scarlet pimpernel.
- Controlling herbivore grazing (poisoning or exclusion) will often result in an increased abundance of exotic grasses and herbs.

WHAT WEED TO WATCH OUT FOR

BILLARDIERA HETEROPHYLLA (BLUEBELL CREEPER)

THE WEED

Billardiera heterophylla is also known as Bluebell Creeper. It is a Western Australian native but is now a seriously invasive weed across southern Australia including in Bend of Islands. As it grows it smothers and strangles native vegetation and threatens low shrubs and ground cover plants. It particularly likes disturbed habitats.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Bluebell Creeper grows as a twisting, evergreen climber up to a height of 3-5 m. The leaves are 3-5 cm long, shiny and oval shaped. The flowers form as small clusters of blue bells. The fruit is fleshy, oval-shaped and up to 2cm long. The berries start out green but ripen to blue-purple in summer and autumn. Each fruit contains more than 50 seeds. Roots are wide spreading and shallow. It can grow in partial shade to full sun.



Photo: Mark Imhof (Agriculture Victoria)



HOW DOES IT SPREAD

As an Australian native, this plant is a widely cultivated, popular garden plant, and has been available in nurseries since the beginning of the last century. It is a very popular ornamental and so is primarily in Bend of Islands due to being a garden escapee; as is the case with many of our weeds. The seeds are spread by birds, and animals such as foxes that eat the fruit.

HOW TO CONTROL

It can be controlled through:

- Pulling or digging out seedlings and vines, ideally when the soil is moist.

Once pulled out, plants can be left on the ground to die, however if there are berries on the plant they should be collected and disposed of so there is no reseedling.

If you are confident and aware, Bluebell Creeper can also be controlled by:

- Cutting/scraping stem and swabbing with a recommended herbicide.
- Spraying with a broad-leaf or non-selective herbicide where the risk of off-target damage to native plants is low.



Photo: Mark Imhof (Agriculture Victoria)

DON'T CONFUSE IT WITH

There are not many plants that look like Bluebell Creeper but do be careful of *Billardiera mutabilis*, Common Apple-berry which is very similar. This is a twining climber with brown stems (rather than reddish) and hairy rather than smooth leaves. Apple-berry has less vigorous growth, usually remaining in lower shrub level. It also has green not blue, berries and flowers.



If you would like some help identifying and controlling any weeds on your block please feel free to contact BICA at bicacomm@gmail.com



Photos: Gavin Masters



NILLUMBIK LANDCARE NETWORK

Not a great deal to report here, although across the shire Landcare groups remain very active. There are a few grants in the pipeline but probably not targeting the likes of the ELZ. For example the Bush Bank program and Birds on Farms Project are essentially aimed at habitat restoration, mostly via revegetation, so presumably have a cleared land focus

On the home front we had a couple of meetings late last year, with the intent of revitalising our Landcare group. Christine Cummings kindly hosted both meetings and attendees included Luke Doyle, Gavin Masters, Janet Mattiske, Tserin Wright, Michael Pelling and Michael Dempsey.

Ash Densham (NSC Network Coordinator) led the first meeting, and provided us with a workable structure to analyse the issues. This process is still mid-stream but several good ideas were floated including: fewer but larger projects, fewer but better advertised Landcare events, minimise clashes with other community activities, particularly CFA training, and hosting workshops on land management and in particular weed ID and management. All suggestions gratefully received.

Also the newly rebranded DEECA (formerly DELWP) has launched an online hub with resources to support environmental volunteer groups. It contains useful articles on attracting volunteers, and financial management, citizen science, indigenous knowledge and more.

Andy McMahon

ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE (ESAC)

A couple of important issues to report from the last two ESAC meetings.

Regional Trails Strategy

Frank Pierce, myself and others made submissions on this last September. By any measure this is a seriously flawed document: totally inadequate methodology, no mention of environment, biodiversity planning (eg SUZ2) and cultural heritage constraints, and at complete odds with Nillumbik Biodiversity Strategy and Climate Action Plan. And it is full of errors. Quite a stretch to call it a 'strategy'! I understand that Frank Pierce managed to get it redirected from the Melbourne Water aqueduct / ELZ boundary, and I gave a rundown on its inadequacies at the February ESAC meeting.

Apparently they wanted the flawed Strategy to be endorsed at the council meeting in March, but fortunately the meeting voted unanimously in favour of a resolution to council to get the whole thing – at least that portion in Nillumbik, properly assessed. Ben Ramcharan, who attended the ESAC meeting recently informed me that the process has been delayed for now. Ben has met with council officers, and they will be doing further work. I'll keep on top of this and hopefully get it on the agenda for the next ESAC meeting.

Revised Biodiversity Strategy

Second, and less urgent, Council are re-tendering for the (revised) Biodiversity Strategy. The first round apparently resulted in no consultants willing to take on the entire scope of work for the sum offered. This was unsurprising as the scope was extensive and the funding modest. ESAC did initially advise council that this could be an issue, so now the re-tendered brief has been split up and responses I believe are expected soon. There is quite a lot of detail behind these two issues, so if anyone wants further info, please get in touch.

Andy McMahon



ELZ FLORA AND FAUNA

Some additions to the ELZ Flora and Fauna Pages on the BICA Website

The ELZ Flora and Fauna Lists, on the website, are progressively updated, usually on an annual basis. The website can be accessed at <https://bendofislands.wordpress.com/>.

Here are some recent additions.

Eastern Rosellas successfully raised 6 chicks in 2022, in a tree hollow 2 metres from our house. They had previously bred here in 2016, 2017 & 2018, with chick predation by Sugar Gliders in 2016 and 2018. These photos were taken at 5-day intervals and show the amazing growth rate of the chicks.



We had our fingers crossed for this brood, and happily the Sugar Gliders stayed away. We were very relieved when 5 of the chicks fledged from nest on 14/12/22 – see a video of one fledging between rain storms [here](#).

Much to the relief of the parents, the last chick fledged from the nest on 16/12/22

A report detailing all the breeding events from 2016 can be seen [here](#). But be warned, there are some gruesome photos in Appendix 1.



Some other updates

Monarch Butterfly visits the Bend

The iconic Monarch Butterfly *Danaus plexippus* was recorded for the 1st time in the ELZ (on the Co-op) in late February.

For the last few years there has been a small population at Sugarloaf Dam, associated with a patch of Swan Plant, an introduced Milkweed which is a Larval Food Plant for this Butterfly.

Monarchs were seen near C Track on 3 days with northerly winds, and on the 3rd day, a brief landing enabled a substantiating 'record photo'. Our Butterfly List will now total 40 species, with this new addition.



Notched Onion Orchid

The unprecedented rain we had in 2022 caused havoc with the weeds, but on a positive note, it pushed up a fantastic array of orchids, including a group of Notched Onion Orchids, *Microtis arenaria*. This species is an addition to our Orchid List [here](#).



Lacewing News

A new species of Green Lacewing, *Italochrysa insignis* (left) was recorded on the Co-op on 16/2/23.

Our Lacewing List total will be 44 species, with this new addition.

Over 40 specimens of this Green Lacewing (right) have been recorded on the Co-op since 2016. Until now, its identification has remained a mystery, despite much research.

Finally it has been identified as *Mallada traviatus*. This is a 'first record for Victoria', on iNaturalist, which added to the identification difficulties. Previous records have been in NSW & Qld

If you record any unusual sightings, let me know.

Frank Pierce





FIRE BRIGADE NEWS



Another relatively quiet summer for brigade members and the Nillumbik Group area remained 'greenish' despite a dry January and February. The large bushfire in the Flowerdale area, caused by sparks from a grinder, was a reminder of how difficult it is to contain a going grass and scrub fire in tricky terrain with wind changes. The extensive use of aircraft including night flights helped quell the fire and demonstrated how useful that tactic can be.

By the time this newsletter is published fire restrictions will be lifted (April 11) and it is worth looking around your property at overhanging or nearby branches, scrub and vegetation and getting rid of it over the winter months. It is also worthwhile keeping up with leaf litter and twigs etc so they don't accumulate too much near your buildings. We have followed some locals advice and started composting down large quantities of leaves etc in old water tanks to help deal with the massive amounts of litter.

Long range forecasts look ominous for a return to an El Nino climate which could mean a drier and warmer winter, spring and early summer and a return to conditions that were a precursor to the disastrous 2019/20 Black summer fires which devastated large areas of eastern Australia. Take time in these cooler months to look around your property for vulnerabilities to ember attack, protection for your water and fire-fighting systems, review your plan(s) to leave and your defences if you get caught at home.

We are available for discussion about any of these matters and there are a range of articles and advice available through CFA and also the BRI website.

It has been great to welcome some new members from the Bend and from Christmas Hills and the new blood will help with our ageing group!! New members are always welcome! Please make contact thru our CHFB Facebook site or email Di Simmons at di.simmons@bigpond.com

Thanks again to all who have supported our fundraising over the last 12 years and our new ULT (Ultralight Tanker) has been ordered, though there may be some delay for the Toyota chassis on which they are built. We acknowledge the great support of the Warrandyte Community Bank especially in support of our ULT replacement. They are now celebrating 20 years of giving over \$4.45 million to local organisations. When you are thinking of loans or insurance or want to talk banking mention the brigade when you contact the Warrandyte Bank on their website or ring 9844 2233.

Community Resilience Activity Saturday February 18th

Over 70 locals turned up for a stimulating demonstration and get together at the South end fire station on Saturday February 18. This 'community resilience' activity was funded by Community Based Bushfire Management project and organised by local convenors and contacts of the Community Fireguard Groups (CFGs). Morning tea and coffee was provided by the Caf  Benders crew and a BBQ supplied for lunch afterwards.

We had a Burns Table demonstration to gain some understanding of how rapidly a fire can spread and a Phoenix Rapidfire bushfire simulation that showed how a fire could take off and spread in a time frame based on conditions similar to the previous day's TFB. Both of these simulations were thought provoking and enlightening and fostered discussion.





There were also some great hands-on/practical displays of how locals protect their houses: pumps, generator, hand held soakers, protective clothing and blankets, window screens, BRI website highlights etc.

Such was the interest that the displays were shown at a recent community CHILLS event at the Hall.



Many CFG members were present especially from the Lower Catani group, the Henley Rd group, the Gongflers group and from the Co-op group. Those convenors or contacts would be interested in talking with you as would others who would like to see the Upper Catani and Ironbark groups rejuvenated.

Community Fireguard can be a very valuable local resource for mutual support in any emergency and in recovery and also provides a great way for neighbours to get together socially. New residents into the Bend or those who are interested are welcome to make contact as follows:

Henley Rd Group:	Eleanor Fowler 0407 304 442	Co-op (and Skyline) group:	Lynne Johnstone
Gongflers group:	Pam McMahon 0409 233 422	Upper Catani area:	Julie Martindale
Lower Catani group:	Peter Mildenhall 0400 120 577	Ironbark area:	Mike Pelling 0456 008 040

Cheers

Peter Mildenhall (0400 120 577)
Community Safety Coordinator
Christmas Hills Fire Brigade

And Talking of Café Benders

Café Benders is hosted by volunteers from the brigade and other community members. So far this year Café Benders has raised over \$880 in donations to the fire brigade by community members. Thanks to all those who help support the brigade in this way.

If you'd like to join the Cafe Benders crew and spread the fun around, please speak to us next time – usually the 3rd Sunday in the month at the South Station.



FROGS IN THE BEND

Over the past few months, I've become interested in frogs. I've come to enjoy the idea of crawling around the muddy embankment of a dam, trying to locate the tiny songsters responsible for such a loud, boisterous chorus.

Frogs are nocturnal; their raucous choruses are best heard just after dusk. This means that the best chance of finding frogs is being near a dam (or stream) at around 9-10 o'clock.

It is safe to say that my parents weren't initially enthusiastic about me heading out into the bush by myself after dark, armed with just my camera and a torch, but after some persuading, I was allowed to go. After just one night, I was hooked. These adorable amphibians were a new passion, and I went out looking for them every couple of nights. As the summer holidays became busier and my free time dwindled, I lost time to look for frogs. It wasn't long before the school year started and my wild aspirations were once again restricted by the expectations of society (and my parents).

The typical stereotype of frogs is a small, green animal that hops along the ground and sticks out its long, sticky tongue to catch any flies that are unfortunate enough to wander past. Most of the frogs in the Bend do not conform to this ideology.

The only frog in the Bend that is a vibrant green is the Eastern Dwarf Tree Frog, a species introduced to Greater Melbourne from the East Coast of NSW through transport on bananas.



Eastern Dwarf Tree Frog (*Litoria fallax*).

At just 2.5cm, it is one of the only 'typical green' frogs recorded in the Bend.

Although frogs are insectivorous, I have seen many frogs with flies quite literally in their hundreds sitting on and around them, without being bothered. I also never realised how small frogs can be. The largest frogs in the Bend reach up to 10cm. The smallest, however, is only 2.5cm long. A combination of their size and their often quite drab colouration make some frogs extremely difficult to find.

Unfortunately, Amphibians have the highest extinction rates of any class of animal, with 41% of all species being at risk of extinction. For comparison, mammals are 27%, reptiles 21% and birds 13%. The only group higher than amphibians is Cycads, a group of plants including tree ferns.

This decline is for a number of reasons including habitat loss, pollution, introduced species, climate change and disease. In Australia, some frogs, such as the Southern Toadlet, are especially vulnerable to shifts in the rainfall cycle, leading to a decline in their numbers.

Since European settlement, at least four of Australia's extinct frog species (that we know of) are believed to have declined due to the Amphibian Chytrid Fungus (*Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* (Bd)). The fungus was spread around the world in the 1940's by African Clawed Frogs.

These frogs were used as a pregnancy test in humans for at least two decades – a woman's urine was injected into the female frog and if the frog released a clutch of eggs, then this indicated that the woman was pregnant. Due to the accuracy of the test, these frogs were exported around the world in their thousands.

African Clawed Frogs were immune to the Bd fungus, but could still carry it and pass it on. Other species of frogs, such as the Cane Toad became infected and hastened the spread of the virus throughout the world. The fungus entered Australia around 1970, but was not identified until 1998. Bd has since been responsible for the extinction of at least four species and has brought ten others close to extinction. The fungus is now widespread across most of Eastern Australia and has also been recorded near Perth. Knowledge of this fungus has led to an increase in captive breeding programs for many of the species at risk, but much work is still needed to ensure that the fungus is kept at bay.

Almost three months after my interest first started, my frog list now sits at nine species seen (including three from before I got into frogging), plus three that I have heard, but not seen. Of this total of 12 frogs, I have recorded seven in the Bend (two heard only). Some of these are below.



Peron's Tree Frog
(*Litoria peronii*).

Not all tree frogs climb trees, but this one certainly does. I've often found them around 30cm off the ground, but these frogs are known to climb right up to the canopy!



Eastern Banjo Frog (Pobblebonk)
(*Limnodynastes dumerilii*)

I have seen this species in the Bend, but my sighting was limited due to reed cover and distance. This photo was taken in Yarrowonga.



Spotted Marsh Frog
(*Limnodynastes tasmaniensis*).

I managed to find this frog living in the cracks in our concrete outside our back door.



Southern Brown Tree Frog
(*Litoria ewingii*).

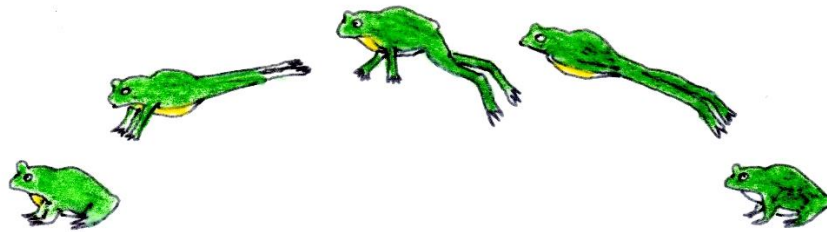
We found this individual in some silver beet from the garden!



Another Southern Brown Tree Frog.

This one was a juvenile, with my hand for size comparison. (Frogs are generally ok to handle, as long as you don't have any ointments or creams on your hands)

Jarrah Pauli



Save the Frogs

When the rain hits the bitumen,
The frogs start emerging and
You start screaming and swerving
To avoid crushing
The soft body of frogs.
Now, not just potholes,
deer & ditches to eschew
But fantastic leaping frogs too.
Caught in your highbeams
Making a courageous crossing
Like moist rare jewels gleaming,
With the sound of your screaming
As you're driving down Skyline Road.

Diana Gentu



December in Bend of Islands 2020

There is a hover of butterflies
A gold and bronze dancing constellation of filmy beating wings
Twinkling
cascading through the grasses
chasing and cavorting
in air thick with the early summer morning
Insistent cicada hum
And errant March fly whirr
Wattle bird chortle
Sulphur crested cockatoo shrieking *It's not fair ... It's not fair!*
And all the noisy while a procession of non-complaining ants
Three abreast
Make their way across the spindly stick stuck over the bird bath
Unperturbed even by the flycatcher's sudden dips and darts
Sending up a wee rain storm about them.
Hover flies in the Prickly Moses
Flycatcher's reflection on the water
all the business of the morning
work to be done before the shadows are swallowed
up by the brazen naked noon.

Liz Mildenhall



BELONGING IN THE BEND

I come from a village in Romania, deep in the heartland of Transylvania. I mean, I came here when I was 1 and 3 months, but that is my place of origin. And a significant transition.

Belonging as an immigrant has always been tricky, fraught, if not impossible. The love for landscape, the Australian landscape, was always tinged with sadness, longing for me. I imagine it's a feeling that white Australians feel too, as they do not essentially belong either, at least in an important sense. However, as a child it always seemed to me that the "skips" had a superior claim to belonging. They were more self-assured. More dominant. More relaxed. And more connected.

People who leave a place, a country, often want to leave many elements behind and my parents were no different. Their aversion to overbearing religious and moral codes meant we had few Romanian friends. Instead, they tried assimilating as best they could. But I always felt on the outer, and knew no way in.

Until I returned to my village of origin as an adult.

Finally, I breathed in deep draughts of belonging in spades and bucketloads. Everyone I met made me feel I belonged.

The catch cry, the greeting in the village, if you don't know a person, is "Where do you come from? Whose are you?" And they don't mean whether I'd travelled from Melbourne. They mean where and with whom am I staying. You give your location of residence and that tells them what they need to know.

Imagine my surprise, after living in the nearby township of Yarra Glen for 2 years, to find when I moved to the Bend a similar code of relating only fifteen minutes up the hill.

Here, everyone I've met has asked, "Where are you?". I answer and they know, they have ties and connections that place me in a web of information. They have passed my place hundreds of times. They offer their place of residence, sometimes with colourful detail and warmly welcome me to visit whenever I can. For the first time in my life here in Australia, despite all my prior efforts, I feel belonging.

There are, I know, long ties that bind the inhabitants to each other and also to the place. An intimacy of knowledge of the lay of the land and, more excitingly, the ecology. Which plants are where. Which creatures do what, when. How we can behave to respect the land. Humble stewardship.

The bush here is still slowly unfurling in a dialogue and relationship with me and each passing week I am filled with increasing fascination to know, to map, to engage, to learn, to listen. To walk, to weed.

I love the simple act of tending to "my patch", dutifully pulling out vagrant naughty weeds with a mania that is addictive, especially once you get going. I take pride in learning their names, and really it's only just a surface scraping. There's so much I don't know. The complexities and the interplay of native plants with place will take many years to truly intuit.

And there are people here who have those years, that deep-time knowing. The cataloging, archiving, diligently note-taking and observing. The fact that these people exist in my now community fills me with exuberance. (An exuberance you may have witnessed!).

Truth be told, I now find within myself a candid enthusiasm that I didn't know I could feel outside my village.

While we are all so different here, and maintain a respectable and healthy amount of privacy in our lives, there is a precious quality that unifies so many of the people I've met - a love of nature and a curiosity and kindness towards animals and humans too.

If any of you are jaded, I can make up for it for you with a long list of appreciations.

I know a fierce pride and integrity exists in maintaining the values of the place and in that I see people striving to do the honour justice. And that is a deeply earnest and touching endeavour.

I have had nothing but enthusiastic words to share with my friends who ask and their eyes light up to know there's a different way of being, so close to suburban Melbourne's dense expanse. To take away the elements that destroy a place's integrity, to take away fences, to add thoughtfulness and to maintain the ties that bind people: that is a new pathway to belonging to a land which we were all brought to.



OUR BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT HOME

A Story About an Eel

(An edited version of this article was first published in the February 2023 issue of the Manningham and Nillumbik Bulletin)

Consider the eel; consider in particular the short-finned eel; native to Australia, as well as to most of the South Pacific, they start their life as larvae in the Coral Sea, and from there they drift on ocean currents down the Australian coast, by which time they have become transparent little 'glass eels'. They haven't eaten yet, and don't, until they start swimming up a river, and become elvers, the name for immature eels. At this stage they are strictly gender neutral: their sex has not yet been determined, and won't be until they've got to be about a foot long. And then it will depend upon how many females are about: many, and it will be male; few, it will be female. Impressive, eh?

Why am I talking about eels? Could there one or more eels in our green wedge?

Planning is of course a government responsibility, and it was the Hamer government which in 1971 created the legislative and planning basis of Melbourne's green wedges, with the intention to protect the rural nature of the land between defined growth corridors. The green wedge zones therefore have purposes which emphasize conservation and restrict or prohibit urban development. The effect is to make individual landowners custodians of the green wedge. These regulations are by nature top down. We might support them for their intent, but maybe not so much for their impact upon us personally.

But the Bend of Islands is different. It is in the Nillumbik green wedge, but its zoning is not green wedge: it is much more restrictive. And this is the result of demand from the landowners themselves. Residents of the area came together in 1972 in the face of an existential threat – the MMBW's plan to create a large dam on the Yarra upstream of Warrandyte to augment Melbourne's water supply. The resulting reservoir would have extended almost to Yarra Glen and submerged most of the Bend of Islands.

Action by locals not only played its part in causing this plan to be dropped, but continued to create a planning regime for the area which mandated conservation of the environment in very specific terms, described by then resident conservationist Neil Douglas as a proposal to "develop housing and live with regulations much like in a National Park".

These new regulations were contained in a new 'Environmental Living Zone', put into effect by the then Healesville Shire Council in 1974. Today it is included in the Nillumbik Planning Scheme as 'Special Use Zone 2 - Environmental Living', SUZ2.

So, while all green wedge landowners are custodians, in the Bend of Islands caring for the environment is a very particular focus, involving the devotion of time and expertise to monitor, protect and restore the local environment. And it was monitoring by devoted residents which revealed the presence of the short-finned eel. A small female, it was observed in an isolated waterhole in Stevensons Creek over a period of nineteen days.

It is surmised that it had probably lived in one of the smaller upstream dams for about twenty years and is now engaged in its journey to the sea. Soon its stomach would shrivel, it would stop feeding and make its long journey to the Coral Sea to spawn.

I know about this because I read it in a newsletter from the Bend of Islands Conservation Association. [*Newsletter #84, April 2015*]

To appreciate something as big as biodiversity it is necessary to get very close. That's what ecologists do, and that's what many Bend of Islands landowners are doing.

Don Macrae



*Short-finned Eel in Stevensons Creek
Photo: Frank Pierce*



TERMITES Part 2

Small Rewards = Thanks to Termites.

The article in the last newsletter described some benefits that termite-hollowed trees provide to our local wildlife, which allows them to enjoy seasonal feasting on huge numbers of flying reproductive termites.

Of course, there is a risk of termites living close by - and you may be 'unlucky' as we know some residents on the Bend have been. There don't appear to be any statistics on the rate of infestation on the Bend so I am unable to give measured advice, but nationally it is estimated at 1 in every 4 homes over 25 years. So what can I suggest?

The guidance given by the Australian Standard recommends annual inspections of all residential buildings in Victoria. This is certainly sensible advice, but many residents in the Bend may wish to be more subjective and seek to balance the cost with their estimate of their individual risk. For these folks, the following generalities may assist.

While doing termite work locally, I have noticed a bit of a pattern amongst the buildings I am called to attend. While luck (or the lack of it) plays a role, there are building designs and on-going house-keeping issues that have a higher risk from termites and require particular care if the termite control technician is not going to darken their doors.

All building designs can be protected from termites, but some have a higher need for protection. This is especially so for buildings on sloping blocks where efforts should be made to keep floor framing timbers well clear of the sub-floor soil. In-fill concrete slabs must be carefully protected during construction and combinations of timber floors and concrete slabs can present dead ventilation spaces under the floor which may need special attention. If you are adding an extension to your home, try to maintain your design type throughout the building. i.e. all slab or all timber floors.

Nillumbik council require termite protection on all new building, and modern termite products are very effective if installed correctly.

Housekeeping for termites is simple in theory but sometimes a little harder in practice.

The golden rule is to keep the outside soil from building up against the walls of your home.

Let me explain. Termites live in the soil and the closer the soil (or sand under pavers) is to your timberwork, the higher is the risk that termites make the short journey into your home.

Here are some recommended "Do's" to consider in building design and construction:

- Brick homes with timber floors homes should have a finished ground level at least one brick course or 90mm below the bottom of air vents - all around the building. This includes the front entry doorway, so that you need to step up from the paving, one step into your home. Clearly, this conflicts with some other building preferences such as easy entry for the elderly and outside entertainment areas. Residents need to make their own decisions and perhaps have special termite protection installed into areas of high paving.
- Weather board homes should have at least one free air space between base boards all around. Brick or concrete paved entry steps should be avoided in favour of a timber framed step or patio.
- Big timber posts (such as for mud brick walls) should not have paving or soil in contact with their base. Since paving levels are perhaps already set and change can be difficult, it may be possible to remove small parts of the paving where it abuts the timber.
- Brick homes on concrete slabs should have those sadly named "weep holes" left clear above the garden beds or paving. They are those little slits in the brickwork at the base of an external wall and are a 'red carpet' to termites when covered by garden beds or pavers.

There are plenty of "Don'ts" on the house-keeping list including:

- Don't store wood, cardboard, or paper under the house.
- Don't irrigate close to your house walls.
- Don't allow your roof guttering to block or flood water against your walls.

I could continue with all this advice, but I am writing this article on a cold but sunny Autumn morning and my mind has wandered away to a particular nesting box that I made a couple of years ago. It was built from a small stringybark log 'piped out' by termites and fixed to a plywood box so as to provide the residents with a secure access tube into their ply box. It was wired to a tree just a few meters from my house.





Well, we had rosellas nesting in it last year which was nice-but this season it seemed to be unoccupied - that is until we started to hear a new bird call in the mornings, regular but brief.

I have just been out with my binoculars and seen for the first time an owllet-nightjar sitting quietly and basking in the sunshine at the entrance to the termite log. A small reward, but how good is that?

Tom Boschma



FOXES AND KFC

There's nothing quite so guaranteed to wake you up in the morning as extricating a wallaby from a soft-jaw fox trap! I was a bit hesitant about dealing with this on my own but there being no one else around I put an old cane stool between me and the claws, released the wallaby's foot and sent it bounding off into the bush with nothing bruised but its ego.

This is the third round of fox trapping we've done on the Co-op since I've been here. The first piggybacked on a Sugarloaf fox trapping grant. My night vision camera had captured a fox slinking past my house on a regular basis and Frank was able to organise a trap to be set along its route. Bingo, we got it the first night!

The second round also came up trumps and we were able to despatch an adult (and extremely smelly) dog fox.

But there are no guarantees in life and this third round proved fruitless. Perhaps because in high summer there's



just so much fresh, young food around for foxes (lizards, snakes, hatchlings, young creatures of all sorts).

It would be prohibitive to trap foxes on the Co-op if it weren't for us volunteers. Each trap needs to be checked every morning and we don't have the funds to pay for the fox-man to do it. So, one of us trudges out, before 8 each morning, takes a photo of the trap sites and messages the images back to Fox-central. It's quite a scheduling burden and can only sustainably be done if there are at least three people willing to take turns.

Foxes are lazy hunters and prefer whatever is relatively easy to catch. Hence their predilection for fast-food over fast food (if you see what I mean). So, the traps are baited with either a bit of venison or the fox favourite, KFC 'Wicked wings'. Apparently brushtail possums and even a wallaby are tempted by a bit of Colonel Sanders.

Each fox costs us about \$300 for the traps to be set, often re-set and re-baited over a two-week program, though as we've discovered to our cost this price needs to be agreed in advance.

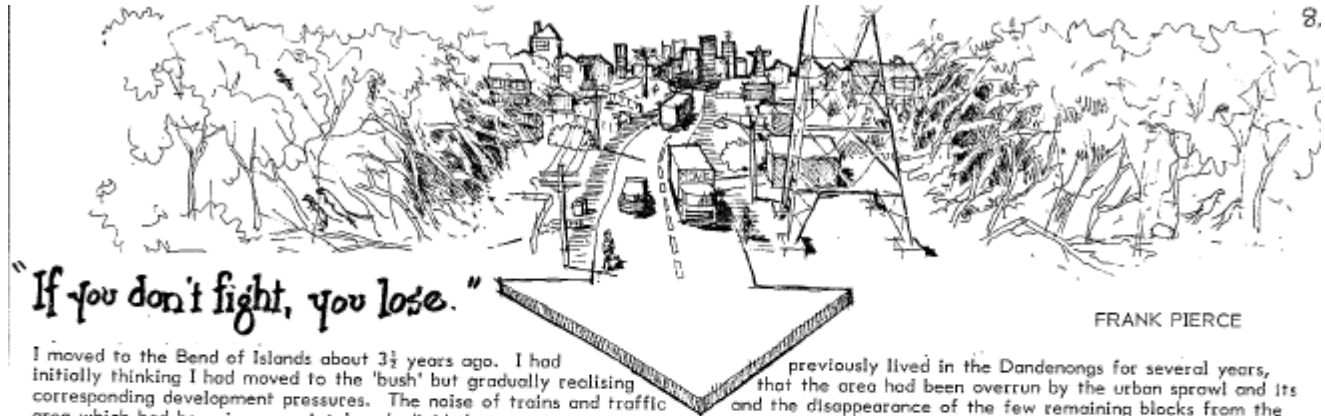
There's a view that as soon as you eradicate one fox, another will take its place. And there's truth in that. It's an easy view to hold and conveniently justifies a 'why bother, settle back, and do nothing' approach. You could just as easily substitute the word *weeds* for *foxes* in this argument. I prefer to look at it this way: foxes eat things, things that on a Conservation Co-operative with our Phascogales, White-throated nightjars, Lyrebirds, Dunnarts etc we would prefer weren't eaten. So if, for a small investment of our time and money we can do our bit to prevent them becoming fox food, we should!

Richard Laurie



FROM THE ARCHIVES

From Newsletter #16, August 1986. Does this sound familiar?



I moved to the Bend of Islands about 3½ years ago. I had initially thinking I had moved to the 'bush' but gradually realising corresponding development pressures. The noise of trains and traffic area which had been innapropriately sub-divided. previously lived in the Dandenongs for several years, that the area had been overrun by the urban sprawl and its and the disappearance of the few remaining blocks from the

I was delighted when I discovered the Bend of Islands area which had the bush qualities I was after plus the added attractions of the river and its proximity to the city where I work.

The Bend of Islands is the best area of reasonably intact natural bush within practical commuting distance of the city. This is what attracted me, and no doubt many others, to the area. It has a quality of undisturbed naturalness which is lacking in more urbanized or formed bush areas. There is no doubt that these unique qualities are under threat from the urban sprawl and continued pressure for development.

People often argue about 'freedom and rights'. As I see it, the real test of freedom and democratic rights is to have the facility for local residents to use the planning and legal systems of their country to determine the environment in which they live. We, the residents of this area, can prevent its transformation by the same development pressures which have sub-urbanized the other 'bush' areas of Melbourne's fringe.

If we were happy to live in an urbanized bush area we would have chosen one of those areas closer to Melbourne and avoided some of the inconveniences associated with this area e.g. lack of facilities for kids and the distances to travel to find those and other services. Having made the choice to live here, it seems very logical that we exercise our 'right' to preserve the character of the area rather than to allow the forces of progress to overrun us.

Just check this list of 'developments' which have occurred over the past 3 years with either direct or indirect effect on our area:

- * 3rd shed built in full view of the road on Gerlach's farm
- * installation of telecom lines in the Catani Boulevard area
- * severe trimming of trees near powerlines by SEC in E.L.Z & Henley Road

FROM THE EDITORS

Thanks to all those who contributed to this Newsletter. It is a great privilege to provide a platform to display the depth of knowledge, interest and creativity out there. We hope you enjoy reading it.

We have inserted an article from the archives, Newsletter #16, August 1986. This alerts us to the fact that some things don't change. The same issues present over and over and we need to remain vigilant to retain the integrity of this special place.

Please think on how you can chip in next time – we love fresh blood (figuratively speaking).

Thanks again

Cric, Ross and Julie

BICA Contact Details

Email: [BICA Secretary: bicacomm@gmail.com](mailto:bicacomm@gmail.com)

Website: www.bendofislands.wordpress.com

Post: P.O. Box 37, Kangaroo Ground, 3097