

>>> NEWSLETTER <<<



FRIENDS OF EASTERN OTWAYS

Celebrating and caring for the environment of the Eastern Otways



WELCOME TO A NEW LOOK NEWSLETTER

THANKS SO MUCH JANE



Keith McLean - Secretary

Friends of Eastern Otways would like to thank Jane Shennan for the wonderful contribution she has made to the group with her editing of the Friends' Newsletters for the past seven years. We were very fortunate to have someone with her level of expertise and knowledge able to create a very readable and attractive publication every three months – and sometimes at very short notice.

As we all know the Friends of Eastern Otways are involved in a variety of environmental and related activities throughout the year and it has been a source of pride to be able to communicate with our broader membership, via Jane's beautifully presented newsletters for which we have received many very positive comments from readers.

We thank Jane sincerely for her contribution of time and effort over the years and extend our very best wishes to her.

Yes apologies all! For this edition you will have to suffer my efforts at editing the newsletter! Isn't AI supposed to be able to do it all by now!? If any members would like to volunteer for this job, we're short an ongoing editor, I appreciate your efforts all the more now Jane!

Between the storms one month and fire risk the next, we've struggled to run our activities over the last few months. Fortunately, a small group of Friends did manage to walk for the May activity and Marg gives her report overleaf. There has been success with the Hooded Plovers again at Red Rocks, and our environmental weeding program has been continuing. We have a report from Peter Hay about his time in Antarctica, he is the Lorne Ranger Team Leader and has been a great support to the Friends over the years. An exciting wildlife rescue at Pt Addis, and all of the usual reports of activities and weeding make up this edition. We are keen for volunteers for the Mackillop school program, and if anyone would like to sit on the committee, you would be most welcome! Thanks all and stay warm! *Inset photo is the moth Chelepteryx chelepteryx, nicely camouflaged against the brown leaf from a recent trip to Port Macquarie.*

PRESIDENT REPORT



Pete Crowcroft



HOODED PLOVER SUCCESS

RED ROCKS FLEDGES ANOTHER CHICK

By Marg MacDonald

Having lost one of their two chicks on February 18, the two Hooded Plover parents BY and PJ were very vigilant in protecting their one remaining chick over the next few weeks until it was finally called as fledged on Tuesday, March 12. It was exciting to see the young bird stretching its wings, taking practice flights and finally flying with its parents over the ocean. Congratulations are due to these two brave little birds who continually moved the chick around on the beach perhaps outwitting the foxes whose prints were so often seen on the sand.

The support given by Parks Vic through establishing a temporary Dog Exclusion Zone and the patrolling of the site by Parks Rangers and personnel from the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority to enforce the regulations certainly helped in the successful fledging of this young bird. The volunteers who warded the beach, informing the public about these vulnerable birds also assisted the success story. This site is a great one for the Hoodies as it does not attract the amount of visitors that we find at most of our other nesting sites.

Unfortunately the second nest at Urquhart Bluff that we mentioned in our last Newsletter was not successful. The little birds tried so hard. Extreme tides washed over the nest in Day 14 of the incubation, with the parents rescuing all three eggs and depositing them in a new scrape higher up the dune. Perhaps that was the reason the eggs failed to hatch, but hopefully if the adult birds stay as partners they will be more successful next season. They are young birds and will have learnt from the experiences of this year's efforts.

Fledging day at Red Rocks >>>



Marg, TJ, and Kaye meet some fungi while out walking

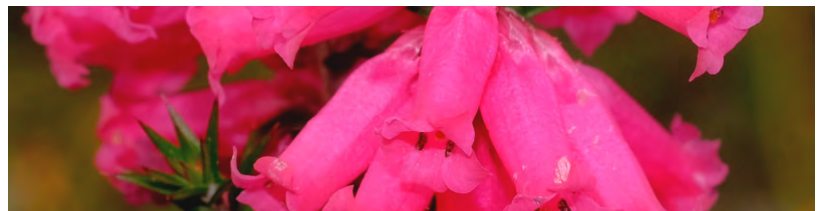


MAY FRIENDS WALK WEST OF MOGGS CREEK >>>

By Marg MacDonald & Kaye Traynor

Perhaps our smallest group for a Friends' activity with just four starters and lots of apologies from our regular walkers, this walk through the forested areas west of Moggs Creek was indeed a delightful experience. As we walked the narrow track through the tall Ironbarks and other eucalypts from the Moggs Creek Picnic Ground to the management track and then up to the ridge at the junction of Moggs Creek Track, we were treated to a great show from the local environment.

The tracks were lined with colonies of the familiar green heart-shaped leaves of Mosquito Orchids, *Acianthus pusillus*, - such a difficult little orchid to capture with a phone camera, but so exquisite with the tiny insect-like flowers glistening with recent raindrops. Many colourful fungi were emerging from the damp soil, especially amongst the bright green mosses and an interesting brown and white bracket type fungus was growing on the trunk of one of the dead eucalypts. It was soft and 'woolly almost furry' underneath. There were also plenty of fascinating lichens to admire – we thought perhaps "pixie caps and reindeer", but we're no experts!



WALK CONTINUED

By Marg MacDonald & Kaye Traynor

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On reaching the Moggs Creek track we could understand why the community of Moggs Creek was evacuated on March 18 this year when the fire team was endeavouring to control the fire emanating from the fuel reduction burn at Eastern View. It certainly was in close proximity to the Moggs Creek settlement. In fact as we walked what was almost the perimeter of the burn along Moggs Creek Track and then down Coalmine Track to the Great Ocean Road we were in awe of how the fire team had controlled this extensive fire. It was as we had heard within 80m of the Eastern View houses. The blackened forest with green undergrowth and the track edges of brilliant green demonstrated how resilient the Australian Bush is to fire, as within two months there was a green underfoot carpet. It will be interesting to see what eventuates in spring and summer – there are special plants that grow in the area including Wrinkled Buttons and Black-tongue Caladenias.

Calls of many forest birds could be heard along the walk. Grey Fantails, Grey Shrike-Thrush, Scrubwrens, Treecreepers and Wattlebirds were very vocal. The Ironbark blossoms also attracted large groups of honeyeaters and Brown Thornbills.

We did pause to observe a Scarlet Robin and his mate flitting through the understorey regrowth, which was a delight. Further along the track, the unmistakable sound, and a quick glimpse, of a Golden Whistler.



A mosquito orchid and interesting lichen

There were other interesting things to observe, large mushroom-type fungi on the edge of the burn, just glistening in the sunlight; a fascinating bracket-type fungi that looked like a bell on the trunk of a tree; ant nests that had obviously been built up to cope with on-coming rain; some brilliant patches of Victoria's floral emblem, Common Pink Heath, and buds of Tall Greenhoods appearing.

It was interesting to note that the management gate on Coalmine Creek Track has been moved to what seems a more appropriate placement as it was such a bottleneck where it was formerly placed.

So a walk with what seemed to have a cloud overhanging it with forecast for strong winds and showers, ended up with a perfect autumnal day for an 8 to 9 km walk and the four people who came along thoroughly enjoyed it.



ENVIRONMENTAL WEEDING >>>

By Marg MacDonald

Our three sessions for the autumn program were held in the eastern section of the Great Otway National Park off Forest Road. The first two sessions concentrated on the removal mainly of Coastal/Sallow Wattle that was scattered through the heathlands near Gundry's Road. There was quite a bit of walking that allowed us to enjoy the beauty of this area and there was time to look at Midge Orchids growing nearby. We felt it was a very worthwhile group activity as it would be extremely difficult and time-consuming for the ranger in charge of weed management to undertake such a wide-spread area on her own.

It was great to have Isabelle, Parks Vic Ranger, with us and also Sylvia, Seasonal Parks Ranger. They were appreciative of our efforts. We were also pleased to have a new volunteer at our April session, Geoff Tout-Smith, who had read about the activity on Park Connect. We were serenaded at Bowside café after our March session by Henry and Sharon, two travellers from Maitland, who were also appreciative of our endeavours.

The May Activity was focusing on the removal of small *Hakea sericea* seedlings that had germinated in the area where Parks Vic had used contractors to remove the large bushes of this environmental weed. Again there was time to look for orchids, and a few Brown-tipped Greenhoods were seen with some leaves of Red Beaks and Nodding Greenhoods. After the showery weather the seedlings were easy to pull up. There will be plenty more there for some of our winter activities.

WINTER WEEDING!
9:30 - 11AM FOLLOWED
BY COFFEE AT A LOCAL
CAFE

Add to Calendar!

Tuesday 13th June: Moggs Creek. Meet at the western end of Robyn Road at 9:30am.

Walking through coastal heath area removing small intrusive plants.

Tuesday July 11th and August 8th - Forest Road: Meet near Firetail Track just before Gum Flats Rd at 9:30am. Removal of *Hakea sericea* seedlings.

LUCKY DUCK, ARCHIBALD

DRAMATIC ANIMAL RESCUE

By Marg MacDonald



It was early on Saturday, March 11, when volunteers who had come down to Red Rocks to check the Hooded Plovers noticed a small Black Duck in obvious trouble on the edge of the ocean. It was being buffeted about by the incoming waves and was struggling to stand. Every time it got itself upright it was knocked over again. It was distressing to watch it as it seemed so very weak. We felt helpless but we knew there was something we could do.

A phone call was made to Jason Cichocki at Surfcoast Wildlife Rescue but unfortunately Jason was out helping with other injured animals. However not to be thwarted, Romaine, Jason's partner, came to the rescue. Ready to go for a run her plans were put aside and she and her two young boys, Luca, aged 12, and Malo, aged 8 soon arrived on the beach and the duck was easily captured by the rescue team. Romaine drove to Torquay where the vet assessed the situation and gave advice. It was thought the duck could have been attacked by a dog or a fox and had managed to survive and make its way to Red Rocks. The vet felt that if looked after the duck would recover. It was taken to their home at Wensleydale and was looked after by the caring family. We had regular progress reports telling us that the duck was no longer toppling or stumbling and that it was getting stronger each day. On April 16 Archibald (as the children named him) was released on to the big dam on their property.

"He's made it his home and also wanders up to the house from time to time to say "hello". We couldn't wait to release him until after duck season as he was getting depressed in captivity. He is absolutely safe here though and doesn't look like he has any plans for another lake or dam anytime soon. Thank you for calling us to help him on that day – if it wasn't for you it wouldn't have been a happy ending for him."

How lucky we are to have Jason, Remedios, Luca and Malo to help us with our wildlife problems. Make sure you have the contact for Surfcoast Wildlife Rescue in your phone **0422 048 557** so that we can have more happy endings for injured animals as we had with Archibald, the lucky duck.



KOALA COUNT - JUNE 17 2023

Add To Calendar!

Our Friends' activity for June will be the annual koala count at Grey River Road. We meet at Aireys Inlet Hall at 9.30 am then proceed to Kennett River where we will have morning tea at the picnic area. We then drive up to the National Park sign on Grey River Road and park the cars. The walk commences at this point, counting koalas from both sides of the road. We have lunch on the ridge overlooking grey River and the coast. It will be necessary to bring morning tea and lunch, and we recommend you have all- weather gear, and walking shoes.

Contact Kaye: 0408 551 667



CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

MACKILLOP COLLEGE COASTAL ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECT <<<

As mentioned in our autumn Newsletter we are looking forward to once again working with students from MacKillop College, a co-educational secondary school based at Werribee during the winter months. The Year 8 students have a camping experience at Moggs Creek each year as part of their outdoor education program. For a number of years now the Friends of Eastern Otways, Parks Vic Rangers and Friends of Moggs Creek have worked with the students and staff on a project of removing environmental weeds that have been invading the valued indigenous vegetation on the coastal heathlands at Moggs Creek. It has been a very satisfying involvement with the College as we have been impressed with the enthusiasm and the co-operative relationships that the students have extended to the volunteers, the different agencies and to their fellow students.

We would like to invite anyone who is available to come along and share in the activity as we do need help to make this once again a successful program. There may be a variety of activities but nothing difficult for the volunteers. There are two groups of approx. 25 students for a one-hour activity 9.30am-10.30am and a second group 11.00am to 12 noon.

Dates:

June – Friday 2 & 16, Thurs 22

July – Friday 28

August – Friday 4, Thurs 10

Sept – Friday 8

Add to Calendar!

**PLEASE CONTACT
MARGARET ON
0412 652 419 IF
YOU ARE ABLE TO
PARTICIPATE**



Some keen weeders on Forest Road!

Upcoming events

June 17 – KOALA COUNT (see above)

July 15 – FUNGI FORAY

August 19 – WATERFALLS

WANDER

details to come via email

Hello Friends,

- Matt Russell, Ranger, Lorne.

At this time of year in my ranger reports I always recommend heading out into the Great Otway National Park, particularly the wet forests of Lorne. My pick this year is the walk to Cora Lynn Cascades. I was working in there recently and noticed the Mosses, Lichens and Fungi are starting to be at their beautiful best. Just mind your step, the boardwalk near the viewing platform can get slippery in the wet. Remember to join in with the Friends' walks over winter, where the group will visit some excellent winter spots. Attached is a photo of a fungi I took along the way. Sorry I haven't had a chance to ID the specimen yet.

Just a quick note, seasonal track closures are coming soon for the Great Otway National Park. The 15th of June is the date this year, where we will shut the gates to our lesser used 4WD tracks and give them a much-needed rest for the winter. Parks Victoria and Office of Conservation Regulator staff will once again follow up this date with compliance and enforcement of the National Park Regulations. So, if the Friends members notice any damage to gates or misuse, please send me an email and we can follow it up.

The 2023 autumn fuel reduction burning season was a limited affair this year, especially compared to the previous seasons. This was mainly due to the weather, which meant that the right balance of conditions was not in place to burn safely or effectively. There will be however a focus on winter burning in the next few months, and at the risk of sounding like a broken record, I think is worth explaining the method used for this type of burning again. Friends members will be particularly impressed with the focus on leaving unburnt or 'patchy' areas within the burn boundaries. As a lot of members of the Friends group will be aware, current understanding suggests less uniform fire behaviour in the landscape means that there is a higher opportunity for a wider range of species. This was certainly one of my take-aways from Dr Tricia Wevill and Teah Coates at the Friends of Eastern Otway's AGM. Burning that can focus on better seed production, hollow forming, and habitat for our small mammals is better for the long-term health. From an operational point of view, this type of burning is hard to achieve when everything is dry. However, with wetter conditions in winter, it means a nice sunny day in winter makes it ideal for low intensity fire in the open heath. As the evening conditions bring in cool and moist air, the burning simply stops at a natural time and a highly complex mosaic like pattern remains. This also means that our staff are not working into the night looking after the fire, and we get to have dinner at home.



Jamieson Campground has been shut recently for some much-needed track repair work. The work includes an overflow parking at the bottom of the track, some over-taking or passing areas, and a general smoothing of the track. This work to the campground is needed for the simple fact that the campground has become very popular with campers. As a ranger it is a nice feeling to go to the campground and see it being booked out night after night in the busy season. Since we upgraded the campground after the Wye River Bushfires, we have seen a growth in visitor numbers, and it has become our most popular campground. I should mention at this point that camp bookings with Parks Victoria open on the 4th of July, and if anyone has ever tried to book in the busy times of year, you must get in fast. Especially for Jamieson Campground.

The Team from the Wild Otways Project have been busy with the long-term health of the Otway's Grasstrees to withstand Phytophthora dieback. You might recall from the Autumn Ranger Report that an aerial application of the chemical phosphite was trialled in several locations in the Otways. Well, in follow-up to this event, the Wild Otways Team have organised ground spraying. For those of you who need a quick catch-up, Dieback is a disease that causes the death of plants by preventing nutrients and water being absorbed by their roots. Iconic species like Grass Trees and Banksias are particularly susceptible to the disease. Phosphite is a salt-based compound that can help to slow the spread of the disease by boosting plant immunity so that they can fight off the disease. The latest application of Phosphite will be monitored and we hope to see these stands of Grasstrees long into the future.

The Ranger Team have been very eagerly hiking up and down the steep canyons of the Great Otway National Park, well despite the constant doubling back and near hourly leech attacks. Recently we received a report of a Tiger Quoll sighting from a trusted source. A big thank you to Claire Miller who led the expedition team that set up some trail cameras deep in the Otway Ranges finest canyons. For a bit of context, 2014 was the last confirmed sighting of Tiger Quoll in the Great Otway National Park. Tiger Quoll are considered endangered in Victoria and possibly locally extinct in the Otway Ranges. So, the chances of anything being on the cameras that we have set is minimal at best. However, the Ranger team had a lot of fun accessing these hard-to-reach areas of the park, I certainly learnt that I am not as fit as I once was. I will leave a cliff-hanger and say that I will hopefully have an update for the Friends next newsletter.



Thank you once again to everybody for helping us look after the Great Otway National Park.

ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION - PETER HAY

Ranger Team Leader, Lorne.

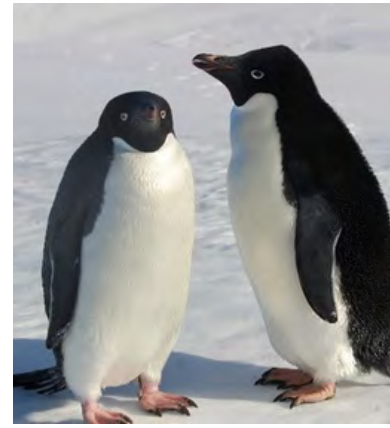
In August of 2022 I was fortunate to be offered a role as an Expeditioner with the Australian Antarctic Division to work the summer season at Casey Station in Antarctica. The recruitment process was long and drawn out but in the end I had only a short time to get ready and head to Hobart to start training.

I spent two and a half months in Hobart training with the Aviation Operations Team, a small team that were travelling to Casey Station, Wilkins Aerodrome and Davis Station to run all aviation operations for the summer season. The comprehensive training included a three-week Bureau of Meteorology course, half in Hobart and half at the BoM Training Centre in Melbourne, to become a qualified Aeronautical Meteorological Observer.

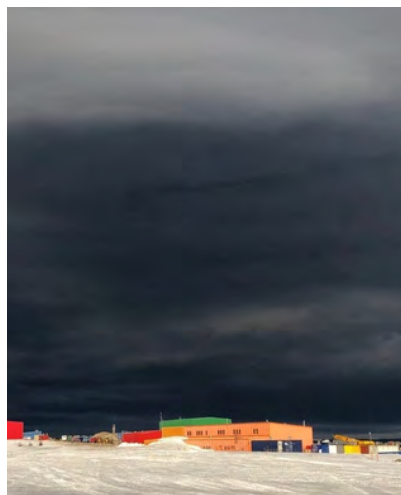
Other training included a seven-day Wilderness First Aid course, crash rescue training, using hydraulic shears and spreaders (Jaws of Life) and aviation fire and rescue training. We do this training because if there is a vehicle or aircraft incident, we are the first and only responders, no one else is coming. I then travelled to RAAF Base Amberley in Queensland to undertake training with the RAAF C17 Globemaster cargo aircraft as I was selected to fill the role of on ground airdrop team leader for an airdrop of supplies at a remote field camp at Denman Glacier.

While in Hobart we also got kitted out with all our personal gear and clothing for our expedition, a slightly daunting time as it dawned on me just how extreme the environment I would be working in was to be, with the amount of clothing issued!

The Australian air route into Antarctica was delayed in opening due to extreme snowfall over winter at Wilkins Aerodrome, meaning the blue ice runway was unable to be built with the resources available. After waiting in Hobart with the other summer expeditioners the decision was made to insert an aviation team of nine people and a medic through the US station McMurdo and onto Casey to assist with building the runway. Sounds simple right? Well after flying in a charter Airbus A319 to Christchurch, the next day on to McMurdo, then eight days at McMurdo, a weather window finally opened to allow us to be flown in two Basler aircraft (DC 3 airframe built in 1943!) across 3000km of Antarctica to Casey Station, a journey not easily forgotten.



Pete attempts to dance around the full Antarctic Circle, while some friendly Adele Penguins look on suspiciously, and the amazing Southern Lights - Aurora australis.



The chance to check out McMurdo was a real bonus for us, located on Ross Island with spectacular mountains and the huge Ross Ice Shelf adjacent. At the station there are views of the smoking volcano of Mount Erebus and the chance to visit the Discovery Hutt built by the Scott expedition in 1902. A huge operation with a population of 940 when we were there, the station is like a small town and services the other US Station at South Pole as well as being close to the NZ Scott Station and the Italian Zucchelli Station.

My role in Antarctica was Aviation Ground Support Officer that mainly involved building and maintaining a snow "skiway" that is used by the ski equipped Canadian Basler and Twin Otter aircraft to service field camps and transport expeditioners and gear between the three Australian Antarctic Stations. We are a small team of six AGSO's and are also responsible for transport of fuel to the skiway, refueling the aircraft and maintaining the 10 km ice road to the skiway from the station. Lots of pushing snow with dozers, loaders and snow groomers! Oh, and did I mention it's pretty cold most of the time!



Pete - complete with ice in the beard? Casey Station with some weather behind, a 'deep Antarctic low' - and the Basler aircraft on approach to Casey Skiway

During the season I was fortunate to spend time at a remote field camp close to the Denman Glacier where I assisted with the air drop of supplies and setting up a field camp for a major science campaign next season. I also worked as a watercraft crew member during re-supply of the station, assisting with pushing smaller ice bergs out of the bay to make transferring supplies from ship to shore safer. The last month I spent working at Wilkins Aerodrome, a blue ice runway 60 km from Casey where I lived and worked with a team of nine others on a glacier 700m thick!

My time in Antarctica was extremely rewarding and probably a lot harder than I expected. Working and living in such remote and extreme environment is both physically and mentally challenging, but also extremely rewarding. To experience living in Antarctica was an amazing experience, to be immersed in such a vast, wild, and untouched landscape is an experience like no other.



Pete with his summer ride, heading out on water operations, and an aircraft coming in to land at Wilkin's runway