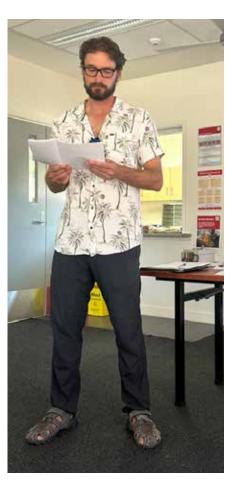


# Friends of Eastern Otways

Celebrating and caring for the Eastern Otways environment

# **AUTUMN 2024**

# Peter Crowcroft



Last year, 2023, was without question the busiest year for FEO that I have experienced during my five years on the committee. Well done team! I find myself constantly impressed that for a relatively small group we punch above our weight, and as such are well regarded amongst the land managers and achieve a lot both in terms of conservation and environmental advocacy for this region. We're fortunate to have such passionate members

who have been willing to put in their time and effort to achieve the projects we committed to this year. While these included a number of extraordinary and large-scale projects, let's start with a quick reflection of our regular activities, which many of us enjoy each month.

Removing weeds continues to have significant positive onground impacts for the Great Otway National Park. Likewise, the ongoing partnership with MacKillop College (see p. 11) is such an effective project both for the students participating and also for the removal of coastal tea tree infesting Moggs Creek.

Our camera-trapping surveys of the mammal populations in the park had some great successes last year: the amazing finds of pademelon and bandicoots in Aireys Inlet give us a beacon of hope that the small mammals, which for thousands of years thrived on our coast, are still hanging in there despite the great pressure from introduced predatory species and changing environmental conditions.

Good enough weather for our events was hard to come by, with many during the early months of 2023 cancelled for one extreme or another. The muddy waterfall walk was a highlight along with a successful koala count. The experiment for a nocturnal koala count using infrared

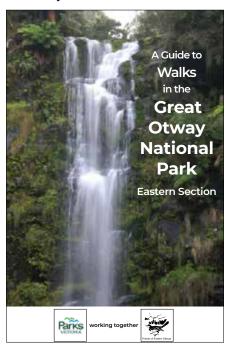
sensory equipment perhaps needs some tweaking, but the true grit showed by Craig, Keith and Lesley to have a go in the wind and rain after dark on Grey River Road deserves some recognition.



In 2023 FEO updated the website, which now includes guides to many of the spectacular walks in the national park. This included a self-guided walk around the Distillery Creek nature trail, where walkers can find out more about our local areas and see a gallery of the local flora and fauna. This was funded the Geelong Foundation philanthropic organisation and was the their group's

environmental grant. The logistics of delivering this project meant much toing and froing with third-party web designers and Rod Brooks, who solved the majority of the problems and made sure we were able to successfully complete the project.

The grant also provided for the printing of *Guide to Walks in the Great Otway National Park*, an update of the original popular walks book. Many members of the committee and general membership worked very hard to get this together and printed off in time for the ANGAIR wildflower show. Thanks and well done to each of you.



For the second year in a row, we partnered with Rapid Ascent as volunteers during the Surf Coast Century running race during September. We designed informative signs that were placed on the trail for runners to learn something about the environment during their epic and gruelling journey. We got some good feedback from runners who showed up at the wildflower show the next day.



This partnership resulted again in a considerable donation for FEO, which has been used to purchase fauna-monitoring equipment and contribute to the printing costs for *Guide to Walks in the Great Otway National Park*.

Our newsletter transition from the amazing efforts of Jane Shennan to myself went reasonably well but I am glad to hand that editorial role over to Nan McNab whom I greatly thank and congratulate for stepping up into the editor's role.

Given all this 'busy-ness' I am sure no one will mind if we have a year to recover from this intensely productive year and focus on basics in 2024, with our regular weeding and events schedule taking place as usual. Perhaps we'll take on fewer grant commitments and large-scale projects.

So, my term as president has come to an end and I'll also be stepping away from this committee and other volunteer commitments to ensure that I have the capacity to finish off some study that runs the risk of dragging on a little too much.

Thanks to Marg for getting me onto the committee five years ago and I do intend to return in the years to come. I'm confident that, with the fantastic new recruits and the experience of the continuing committee members, FEO will continue to be a strong force for positive change in the region for many years to come.



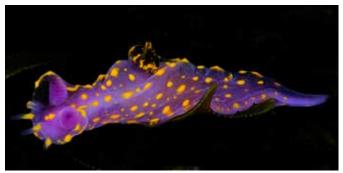
#### **Activities**

## **Rock-pool ramble**

A rock-pool ramble will be held on 16 March from 9.30am to 11.30am. We will be exploring the Eagle Rock Marine Sanctuary on a fantastic low tide. No bare feet please, and thongs don't give great grip! Sandals, reef-walkers or old runners are best. Bring sunscreen, hats and water bottles. Contact and RSVP to Pete (SMS 0412 044 127). Meet at the Painkalac estuary mouth in Aireys Inlet.



Have you explored the rock pools lately? Our first event for the year will explore the beautiful and biodiverse Eagle Rock Marine Sanctuary beneath the Split Point lighthouse. There is a lot to see, many species of crabs, sea snails, marine plants, fish and even octopus are sometimes seen in the pools at low tide. There are sea stars too, and if we are extremely lucky, we might find tiny and colourful sea slugs the nudibranchs! Pete has spent a lifetime exploring this area, and has found seventy-five different species in the sanctuary, but there is way more to find! Join us and we'll see if we can make it to 100!









## Spotlighting at Moggs Creek

Night walk on 20 April – join us at 5pm for a barbecue and 6pm for a walk around Moggs Creek, which takes about 1.5 hours. We'll be staying later into the evening surveying moths and invertebrates. Contact Craig (SMS 0428 884 821).

Easter marks the end of daylight saving and it begins to get dark at a reasonable hour again! So, it is time for us to check out the nocturnal life that can be found in the national park.

Join us at Moggs Creek Picnic Ground for our night-time wildlife survey. We'll be walking around the circuit looking for the gliding marsupials, then returning to the picnic ground where we will have the insect-attracting lights on to survey the after-dark invertebrates that really demonstrate the incredible biodiversity that exists in this area.









**Activities 2024** 

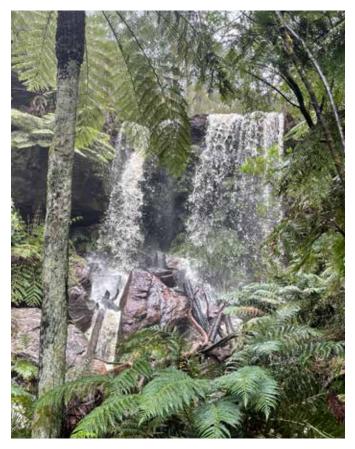
Friends of the Eastern Otways monthly events occur on the third Saturday of each month (unless otherwise advised) and are family-friendly events. Activities for 2024 include exploring our rock pools at low tide; searching the forest after dark for yellowbellied and sugar gliders; using remote cameras to monitor mammals; experiencing our magnificent wildflowers; and the annual koala count at Grey River Road. We encourage all members to participate and discover the diversity and excitement of your park. Times are subject to change but any change will updated via email, the FEO website or FEO Facebook page. An experienced local leader will lead the event. Please contact the activity leader (below) or the FEO President (Keith McLean 0448 810 646) for details.

Activity	Date	Leader	Description
Annual General Meeting 2024	11 February	Pete Crowcroft 0412 044 127	2pm CFA rooms; the 2024 FEO AGM and election of committee.
Rock-pool ramble	16 March at 09.30am. Meet at the Painkalac estuary mouth in Aireys Inlet.	Pete Crowcroft 0412 044 127	A rock-pool ramble will be held on 16 March from 9.30am to 11.30am. We will be exploring the Eagle Rock Marine Sanctuary on a fantastic low tide. No bare feet please, and thongs don't give great grip! — Sandals, reef-walkers or old runners are best. Bring sunscreen, hats and water bottles. Contact and RSVP to Pete (SMS 0412 044 127). Meet at the Painkalac estuary mouth in Aireys Inlet.
Things that go bump in the night	20 April at 5pm (for barbecue) and 6pm for walk at Moggs Creek Picnic Ground	Craig Grabham 0428 884 821	Join us at 5pm for a BYO barbecue and 6pm for a walk around Moggs Creek which takes about 1.5 hours. We'll be staying later into the evening surveying moths and invertebrates. Bring your own supplies for the barbecue and bring warm clothing and a torch. Spotting torches will be supplied.
Jamieson Creek to Separation Creek walk	18 May at 10am starting at Jamieson Creek Camp Ground. Car sharing is encouraged and those who wish to do so should meet at Airey's Inlet Community Hall at 8.45am. A car shuffle will be organised at the end of the walk.	Rob Shepherd 0438 070 051	Walk 36 in our recent <i>Guide to Walks in the Great Otway National Park: Eastern Section</i> is a 6 km walk on a well-constructed path along the Great Ocean Road with a few short, sharp climbs. It passes through regenerating forest, with ocean views and opportunities to see and hear birdlife. A car shuffle will be organised.  The walk should take around 2–2.5 hours so please also bring a picnic lunch. Strong footwear, appropriate clothing, insect repellent and sunscreen are suggested and walking poles may be appropriate for some participants. Reminders and updates will be shared via email, our Facebook page or website <www.feo.org.au> Further information from Rob Shepherd.</www.feo.org.au>





Koala count	15 June at 10am at Grey River Road, Kennett River.	Kaye Traynor 0408 551 667	The annual koala count is a fixture in the FEO calendar. A gentle walk through the forest on the Grey River Road provides opportunities to count and observe koalas.
Waterfall walk	20 July at 10am at a location to be advised.	Keith McLean 0448 810 646	There are over 200 waterfalls in the Otways. This will be a chance to visit one of our iconic waterfalls and observe nature along the way.





Heathland walk

17 August at 10am at a location to be advised.

Alison Watson 0400 5709 229 A short walk through our amazing national heritage heathland.











ANGAIR Wildflower Show	21–22 September at MacMillan Street, Anglesea	Colleen Miller 0401 645 468	The ANGAIR Wildflower Show is a highlight of the year. Friends will be active participants and showcase our activities.
Wildflower walk	19 October at 10am at a location to be advised.	Margaret MacDonald 0412 652 419	The Anglesea Heath is spectacular in October and this walk will showcase the colours of spring through our many native wildflowers and orchids.
Mammals on film	16 November at 10am at a location to be advised.	Craig Grabham 0428 884 821	The Friends of Eastern Otways have a regular program observing the park's mammals using fixed cameras. On this walk we will participate in setting cameras and understanding how data is collected and used.
End of year picnic with ANGAIR.	14 December at a place and time to be advised.	Kaye Traynor 0408 551 667	A short walk and a barbecue to finish the year.



# Autumn weeding program

Second Tuesday of the month

9.30 to 11.00am followed by coffee at a local cafe.

12 March, 9 April, 14 May
O'Donohue Heathlands – focus on removal of Coast/Sallow
Wattle.

12 March and 9 April – meet at Guvvo's Car Park 101 W Great
Ocean Road at 9.30

14 May – Meet at The Gulch
(Gap) Car Park
Great Ocean Road at 9.30
Contact Margaret 0412 652 419

## **Annual General Meeting, February 2024**

The AGM was held on Sunday 11 February. Thirty-three people attended the meeting at the CFA Rooms in Anglesea.

Peter welcomed all guests and also acknowledged traditional custodians of the land, which the Friends will continue to care for and respect.

## President's report

Peter reflected on the activities of the past year, which has been extremely busy. For such a small group the Friends have achieved much in terms of conservation and environmental advocacy in this area.

Peter expressed his thanks to the committee and will be devoting his energies to his other commitments as he retires from the committee and his role as president.

#### Ranger's report

Unfortunately Matt was not able to be present to report on the rangers' activities over the year. The Friends very much appreciate the help and support provided by Parks Victoria. (See pp. 15–16.)

## Office bearers and committee - 2024

President Keith McLean
Vice-President Rob Shepherd
Treasurer Ellen Doxey
Secretary Colleen Miller
Assistant Secretary Kaye Traynor

**Committee Members:** 

Margaret MacDonald Alison Watson Craig Grabham John Lenagan

Paul Wright

We welcome Colleen Miller, Secretary; Rob Shepherd, Vice-President; and Paul Wright as a committee member. Thank you to retiring President Peter Crowcroft.

Following the meeting, there was a presentation from two guest speakers.

#### **Cocos and Christmas Island**

First guest speaker was Keith McLean. Keith gave a most interesting account of a recent visit with Lesley to the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Christmas Island. The main purpose was a bird-watching tour but it developed into a much broader appreciation of the local flora and fauna, including sight-seeing and snorkelling.

The first part of the tour was the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, a remote series of coral atolls comprising twenty-seven islands. The area has an interesting history of settlement by a Scottish family. Of most interest is the amazing diversity of birdlife, which Keith and Lesley were able to observe, as well as many small terrestrial forms of wildlife.

The many beautiful photographs taken during their stay on these remarkable islands were very educational.



#### Tasmania's Central Plateau

Peter and the family spent a wonderful holiday in the Central Plateau area of Tasmania, at Lake Aire and Walls of Jerusalem National Park. It is a place of stunning scenery, mossy understorey, stands of Myrtle, *Nothofagus cunninhamii*, and waterfalls including McCoy's Falls.

Peter was able to make good use of his photographic skills on an amazing assortment of wildlife, fungi and plant life without impeding the other members of the walking group.

We were all delighted to be able to view images of this beautiful area of Tasmania. Thank you, Peter, for sharing them with us.



## End-of-year joint celebration with ANGAIR

Marg MacDonald



Peter thanking people

Well, it wasn't to be the planned celebration at Moggs Creek Picnic Ground for the annual combined barbecue with ANGAIR members. We awoke on the morning of Saturday 10 December to find that the weather forecast was proving accurate. There was already light drizzle falling and looking at the radar with rain looming. we decided that we would switch venues to the nearby Tallawalla Girl Guide Camp. How fortunate we are to have this marvellous facility in our area. It is not quite as good as enjoying the environment at the picnic ground, but nestled within the same environment this facility enabled us to enjoy the bushland under cover from the rain. We do apologise that the possibility of a changed venue in case of inclement weather was not included in the information circulated to members.



Sally, Alison, Chris, Ellen and Marg (photographer) brave the elements

Just five brave people fronted up for the planned walk at about 10.30am, and donning wetweather gear, Sally, Alison, Chris, Ellen and Marg set off to walk some of the Moggs Creek Circuit Trail. We were hopeful that we might find the Tall Potato Orchid, *Gastrodia procera*, that had been flowering there beautifully just

a few weeks previously, but the hostile weather conditions on Friday had seen the last flowers shrivel away. However, the buds of the smaller species, Cinnamon Bells, *Gastrodia sesamoides*, that we had been observing previously had opened and Ellen was able to capture the beauty of this orchid, making sure to keep her camera sheltered from the rain. As time was against us we decided not to

walk the length of the trail and reluctantly we made our way back to the Guide Camp shelter.



Tall Potato Orchid (above) Cinnamon Bells (below)



The fire that had been kindled within the shelter was a welcome retreat and we soon had managed to dry off enough to chat with friends as they arrived at about Despite the weather noon. conditions twenty-one members and two Parks Victoria rangers joined in the activity. The covered shelter with tables and seating enabled people to keep dry but still look out on the beautiful environment. Pete, Wendy and Matt soon had the barbecue provided by Parks Victoria up and running and the smell of food





Cat, Alison and Ellen by the fire (top); the chefs (above)

soon permeated the atmosphere. There was plenty of time to catch up on people's news as many had not seen each other recently. It wasn't long before we were able to fill our plates from the spread of salads and sweets.

As people were finishing their meal, Peter thanked everyone for coming along and thanked the Friends members for their support during the year. Matt responded on behalf of Parks Victoria, stressing the important combined role of Friends of Eastern Otways and ANGAIR in caring for the environment.



#### The elusive Southern Emu-wren

Rob Shepherd

One of the iconic birds of the Surf Coast is the Southern Emu-wren (*Stipiturus malachurus*) is with its rich, streaked, buff-brown plumage highlighted by a lavender-blue eyebrow and throat in the male and a striking tail that is nearly twice the length of the body.



Southern Emu-wrens, male (above), female (below) Photos Rob Shepherd



Yet few people within our community have observed or are aware of these delightful birds. Although some populations across their range of coastal southeast and south-western Australia are vulnerable or endangered, they are locally common along the Surf Coast. As noted in eBird, they are very shy and are unlikely to be seen unless you are actively looking for them. They are found in family groups in heath, grasslands and light woodlands. They fly short distances low to the ground and prefer to feed and socialise in sunny, low-wind environments. Their call is a much higher pitch than fairy-wrens and is best described as insect-like. I find recognising

their call is often a key to observing them; if they are calling to one another they are very likely to be moving about on top of the heath – sit down with binoculars and wait! There are many good sites for observing Southern Emu-wrens including the Anglesea cliffs along the walking track south-west of the Water Treatment Plant; Coogoorah Park among the grasses and heath on the western side of the river north of the car park; among the heath along the southern area of O'Donohues; amongst the heath along Red River Track and the heath within the Painkalac Creek nature reserve.

For more information and to hear their call visit: <a href="https://ebird.org/species/souemu1">https://ebird.org/species/souemu1</a>

# MacKillop College Outdoor Educational Program

Margaret MacDonald



MacKillop College is a co-educational secondary school based at Werribee with a high intake of students from many cultural backgrounds. The college has been bringing Year 8 students to camp at Moggs Creek as part of their outdoor education program for a number of years. Since 2019 the Friends of Eastern Otways, Parks Victoria 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. The results are spectacular. It has been a delight working with the children and we have been impressed with their enthusiasm and the cooperative relationships that they have extended to the volunteers, the rangers and to their fellow students.

We will be continuing this conservation work



during 2024. There are approximately three hundred students in Year 8 with fourteen classes. Each class has the opportunity to spend three days at Moggs Creek (two classes at a time) carrying out a variety of outdoor activities. Our part of the program takes place on a Friday morning for approximately two hours. There are two groups of approx. twenty students for a one-hour activity from 9.30am to 10.30am and a second group from 11am to 12 noon.

The program will commence in the last week of autumn and continue throughout winter. The sessions are scheduled for 31 May; 7, 14 and 28 June;19 July; and 2 and 16 August. We are hoping that some of our members will be available to assist on some of these dates and times. It is a very rewarding experience. Please phone Margaret on 0412 652 419 closer to the time of the activity if you are able to help.

### Saunders Case Moth

Keith McLean

Over the last few months holidaymakers have been travelling in campervans or with caravans as part of their summer travels. It's not only people who travel with their home as I witnessed in the Eastern Otways recently. Literally dropping out of a tree was a Saunders Moth (*Metura elongatus*) caterpillar inside its very own mobile home. The caterpillar lives inside a silken sack, several centimetres long, covered in small twigs and leaves which provides camouflage and protection from predators (Photographs 1 and 2). The caterpillar is responsible for the incorporation of the twigs, which it cuts itself, into the sack which has an opening at each end. The opening at the head end can be quickly closed in periods of danger. The



1 Case Moth Caterpillar in its protective home (above) and 2 camouflaged on a messmate (below)





3 Case Moth Caterpillar

caterpillar is black with orange stripes (Photograph 3) and pulls itself along using sharp, strong legs on the thorax. The larvae live in their mobile home for up to two years before pupation. The emerging

male moth has an orange hairy head, black wings and a striped abdomen while the female adult is white with a brown head, has no wings and remains within its protective bag where it mates and lays its eggs before dying, after which the life cycle begins again. Look out for the twig-covered cocoons, which can often be found on walls and fences around your home as well as in our forests.

# Midge orchids in the Eastern Otway National Park

Keith McLean and Margaret MacDonald



1 Sharp Midge Orchid

After the proliferation of orchids during spring, our summer and autumn orchids are rather less prolific and harder to find, with the exception of the Rosy Hyacinth Orchid, *Dipodium roseum*.

During February three species of Midge Orchid in the genus *Corunastylis* (*C. ciliata*, *C. despectans* and *C. morrisii*) have appeared. The Sharp Midge Orchid (Figure 1) is locally extremely rare, the Fringed Midge Orchid (Figure 2) rare, and the Bearded Fringe Orchid (Figure 3) is uncommon, but if you tread very carefully you may see these rather small orchids in the Eastern Otways. Further information can be found in Margaret MacDonald's Book *Orchids of the Anglesea District*, fourth edition.



2 Fringed Midge Orchid



3 Bearded Midge Orchid

## **Environmental weeding**

Marg MacDonald

Our summer weeding program came to an abrupt end on 13 February with the declaration of an Extreme Fire Danger warning for our region and therefore the cancellation of the proposed activity on the coastal heathlands at Moggs Creek for that day.



The group (above)
Isabelle and Chris getting watsonia (below)



This meant that we only had one session for the summer months and this was a very successful activity where the Friends group worked on the Moggs Creek coastal heathlands. Walking carefully through the area, the weeders were able to remove small Bluebell Creeper, Coastal Tea-tree and other small environmental weeds that had grown in the area where the MacKillop College students had been working for the last few years removing larger



Workers spread out amongst heathlands (above)
Well-earned break at the café (below)



invasive vegetation. This activity is not a suitable one for the students as it needs the eagle eyes of experienced weeders to find the intrusive plants amongst our indigenous species.

Isabelle and Chris were also able to remove an infestation of Bulbil Watsonia that was observed amongst the heathland plants. It is such a beautiful coastal heathland and well worth conserving.

Following the session we made our way to Mishkas café at Aireys Inlet where the Friends provided morning tea to farewell Eathorne who was moving from the district in January. We would like to thank Eathorne for the invaluable contribution she has made to the Friends' weeding program over so many years. We will certainly miss her and we wish her all the best in this new stage of her life.

# Annual membership reminder

If you haven't renewed for 2024, we would appreciate your payment. Membership is still \$15 and can be paid in the following ways:

- 1. Bank transfer Anglesea Community Bank BSB 633 000 Account no: 150830826.
- 2. Cash deposit to account (150830826) at the Anglesea branch.

(Please identify yourself on these transaction.)

3. Cheque to Treasurer, FEO, PO Box 502, Aireys Inlet 3231.

# Ranger report February 2024

Hello everybody,

A summer ranger report is always a great chance to reflect on our busy time in the Great Otway National Park. Also, thank you to all the Friends who attended the AGM; sorry no Parks Victoria representatives were able to attend. Once again, I would like to thank everybody in the Friends of the Eastern Otways for your valuable work and passion over the year. We have been able to complete some good projects together, and I would like to thank Isabelle, who has been able to help the Friends in my absence while I have been in other roles within Parks Victoria.



#### Summer crowd numbers

At last year's AGM I shared some of the data from our track counters that we have hidden in the Great Otway National Park. This is always a good indication of what summer was like. At Erskine Falls we had 4,610 visitors from 1 to 9 January 2024. Last year in the same period we had 12,488 visitors access the top platform at Erskine Falls. This also lines up with what our rangers saw more generally in the national park. With everything that happened over the last five years, I think we are back to a

state of normality with park visitation. I think that COVID and post-COVID sent a lot of people out into regional Victoria visiting new areas; now we may be back to our normal lives.



The photo above, is of the St George River on 27 December in Lorne. Our walking track bridge is completely swallowed by the river in this photo. These wet conditions may have turned a lot of people away from the coast during the busiest time of the year. It's a reminder that we did start off with a wet summer (hard to believe now as I look at the paddocks near Colac).

### Fuel-reduction burning and bushfire response

Fuel-reduction burning will most likely begin again soon – depending on where you are you may have already received a notification letter. In the La Niña years we recently experienced, we had, and may have again, the weather conditions to safely conduct a fuel reduction burn earlier than normal. However, February has seen a couple of total fire bans and major bushfires that will be certainly considered by Forest Fire Management Victoria before committing to any fuel-reduction burns in the Otways. I believe the team have several burns prepared and planned for completion in the next few months, which may affect recreational activities around townships in

the Otways. This may be especially the case around Lorne as this is the priority for the State of Victoria. Added to this, there are a few burns planned in partnership with Wadawurrung and Eastern Maar which will focus on cooler mosaic-type burning over the winter months.

Once again, I would like to remind you to give our crews space during the fuel-reduction burns, and most importantly until the area is opened again. Whilst there might not be any visible fire and smoke around after the burn, our crews go to a great deal of effort to make sure that the area is safe for park visitors. Once our crews feel that the area is ready they will open the area for use again. If you would like to know more about fuel-reduction burning, this website is a great resource: <a href="https://plannedburns.">https://plannedburns.</a> ffm.vic.gov.au/> Alternatively, google 'FFMV' and 'Planned burning' to find this website. The information on this website may interest Friends, plus you can zoom in on your location and find out what fuel-reduction burns are planned for your local area. And, very importantly, it is good to remember these spots for future orchid hunts!



Also, with summer still demonstrating a bit of sting, we may see a couple more Total Fire Ban days. Our fire team has asked that the Friends make sure to keep personal fire plans current. Personally, I know with the wet years I have let my fire plan lapse

and seeing what has happened in Western Victoria has been a good reminder. The CFA website has some really good material on how to prepare a fire plan; again just google 'CFA' and 'Fire Plan' to find some really good tips.

Exciting news: DEECA, ANGAIR, and Parks have been exploring mechanical treatment of woody weeds within the Scrubby Hill area near Anglesea township. DEECA have recently purchased a state-of-the-art 100-horsepower mulcher and are keen to control some of the Sallow Wattle areas through nonchemical means. I hope that in the next ranger report I can provide a bit more of an update.

Finally, I would like to thank the Friends for their understanding this year. Our ranger team has had a lot of movement with people taking up new tasks, and a reduced team on the Surf Coast. We were lucky to have Evie Lopes and Niki Donovan join the team recently and I hope, as they find their feet, they will be more involved with Friends activities in the coming year.

Thank you once again, and see you at the next weeding activity. Matthew.russell@parks.vic.gov. au or 0439775880

