



# Friends of Eastern Otways

Celebrating and caring for the Eastern Otways environment

AUTUMN 2024

## President's report

Keith McLean



Welcome to the Friends of Eastern Otways Newsletter! This is my first president's report and I want to thank everyone for their support on being elected. I have very big shoes to fill taking over from Pete Crowcroft and I wanted to start by thanking him for his outstanding leadership of the Friends Group. Pete not only has remarkable knowledge of our local flora and fauna but also has an ability to encourage and educate others with his passion and infectious enthusiasm. We thank Pete and hope that he will return to the committee in the not-too-distant future! I'd also like to thank Craig Grabham for his work as vice-president although luckily Craig is staying on the committee. I am excited to work with a new committee including three first-time members in Colleen Miller, Rob Shepherd and Paul Wright.



Since moving to the area permanently after twenty years of weekend commuting, the value of 'our park' and the passion I have developed for it have only grown. We are remarkably lucky to have a National Park of amazing and diverse landscapes, flora and fauna and cultural heritage. I read recently a quote from Sir David Attenborough who on multiple occasions has been asked, 'When did you develop your interest in the natural world?' to which he invariably replies, 'When did you lose yours?' I have always had an interest in nature inspired by my father in Scotland who had a great eye for, and knowledge of, natural history. As I write this I am in Scotland and have been revisiting the natural places of my childhood and reacquainting myself with some old friends.

(Photographs 1 and 2)

Guillemots (top); Puffin (right)



Of course, there are some considerable differences and some similarities (thistles, blackberries, rabbits and foxes to name a few) between Scotland and the Otways. The control of weed species is an important part of what we, as Friends, do in the Eastern Otways and I encourage any of you who can help to come along to weeding on the second Tuesday of each month or to attend some of our upcoming

weeding sessions with the students from MacKillop College. The committee is planning a Community Weeding Event later in the year.

The first few months of the year have been rather dry but this has resulted in some birds and animals being more easily spotted around some of the remaining standing water. In particular, the Distillery Creek picnic ground has been a great spot to see not only birds but also fellow FEO members and big cameras. (Photograph 3 and 4)



Creek and the only night I haven't spotted either a Yellow-bellied or Sugar Glider has been the evening of our Friends walk in April. Over twenty members and guests attended this event.



including the upcoming annual koala count at Grey River. We also own several spotting torches which are available for all members to borrow if you want to do your own night spotting. I encourage all of you to report interesting sightings and put photographs on our Friends of Eastern Otways Facebook Page or our FEO website.

One of my aims as president is to encourage wider participation in the group and its activities. We are planning a members night in July in addition to our regular monthly outings. If you have any suggestions for new initiatives or events please get in touch.

Enjoy this newsletter and enjoy winter in the Otways National Park!

Top left: Painted Button Quail  
Left: White-naped Honeyeater  
Centre: Fringed Hare Orchid  
Above: Bearded Midge Orchid



I recently received from one of our Friends a remarkable video of a Southern Brown Bandicoot in the Anglesea area. You can watch the video on our Facebook page. The use of our FEO fauna monitoring cameras has resulted in sightings of Long-nosed Potoroos. As a result, the committee has recently invested in new 4G cameras which will be used to further enhance our observations of the potoroos and other native (and unfortunately non-native) fauna. We also plan to undertake joint fauna monitoring with the Friends of Point Addis. Look out for your opportunity to participate in Friends fauna monitoring events



The dry conditions have been less conducive for our late summer and early autumn orchids but careful observation has resulted in some sightings. (Photographs 5 and 6)

I have spent a few evenings looking for gliders at Moggs





## Rock-pool ramble

'Possum' Pete Crowcroft

The March walk was a rockpool ramble through the impressively biodiverse Eagle Rock Marine Sanctuary in Aireys Inlet. Twenty-two Friends attended and together we were able to find crabs, stars, and Pete's new favourite target, nudibranchs! These tiny sea slugs are often brightly coloured to warn off potential predators of their nasty taste. This can help us to find them when they are against brown seaweeds!

An alternative way to avoid predation is to camouflage yourself with the environment. Finding nudibranchs that are both tiny and incredibly well camouflaged ... forget it! Enjoy the pictures taken from the day and keep exploring, treading lightly while walking through these fantastic natural places.

Top left: Shell tower with *Pseudamycla dermestoidea*

Bottom left: *Verconia heliclona*, Pink Sponge Nudibranch

Below: *Dumea latipes*, Velvet Crab

Bottom: Wandering Anemone



## Autumn moths

John Lenagan

We have finally had some rain and with just that little bit of moisture in the soil the magnificent Ghost and Rain Moths from the Hepialidae and Oxycannus families have shown up; twelve different species have been recorded in the area in recent years. When they come out in large numbers, they are more often noticed when crashing into windows trying to get to your inside lights. This event each autumn provides a vital nutrient supplement for the various gliders and possums who feast on them along with bats and many insectivorous birds. The Rain Moths, which emerge from underground leaving their empty brown chrysalis shell poking out of the earth, have been feeding on eucalypt roots for up to six years. After emerging they mate and disperse their 10,000–30,000 eggs, scattering them across the forest floor before dying approximately two days after emerging.



Sugar Glider with Rain Moth

The image above taken by Zak Atkins shows a Sugar Glider eating a large female Rain Moth.





Top left: *Abantiades labyrinthicus*  
 Top right: *Oxycanus australis*  
 Above: *Abantiades hyalinatus*,  
 Mustard Ghost Moth

I had the good fortune to witness the Sugar Gliders chasing the moths in the Messmate trees after recent rains on a night when there were hundreds of moths coming in to the lights and mothing sheet.

Just before the heavier rains came through we were visited by the large and magnificent Batwing Moths or White Stemmed Gum Moths – *Chelepteryx collesi* from the Anthelidae family. They are the second largest moths in the district, their caterpillars feeding over summer higher up in the eucalypt trees, emerging from their cocoons after the first wet in autumn, to mate and lay their eggs on the eucalypt trees and then die after seven to ten days. Like the rain moths, they also have no mouth parts to allow them to feed.



Batwing Moths – *Chelepteryx collesi*  
 Male – 110mm WS (above)  
 Female – 130mm WS (below)



Their cousins, the smaller White Stemmed Wattle Moths *Chelepteryx chelepteryx*, often visit in early May before the Batwings arrive; they are distinct with their brightly patterned red and orange hind wings.



White Stemmed Wattle Moths:  
 Male – 70 mm WS (above) Female –  
 85 mm wing span (below)



Above: *Abantiades atripalpis*, Bardi  
 Ghost Moth

## Frogs

Walking adjacent to the Moggs Creek track recently on our glider outing we heard a chorus of frogs serenading, including the newly described species *Geocrinia sparsiflora*. We heard no Eastern Banjo Frogs, *Limnodynastes dumerilii*, in this area.



Otway Smooth Frog, *Geocrinia sparsiflora*



Brown Tree Frog, *Litoria ewingii*



Common Eastern Toadlet, *Crinia signifera*



Striped Marsh Frog, *Limnodynastes peronii*





### Things that go bump in the night

After several postponements last year and then another due to a proposed fuel-reduction burn, we were glad to be able, finally, to explore the magnificent habitats of the Moggs Creek Picnic area in the Great Otway National Park.

We started the evening with a barbecue at the picnic ground. Twenty-one people attended and it was great to be joined by Jhon and Camille, from the Venezuelan refugee family, who attend the Aireys Inlet Primary School.

Whilst enjoying a perfectly cooked snag I played the not so dulcet call of the Yellow-bellied



Glider – an iconic Australian animal (in my humble opinion). I love watching the expression of those who are not familiar with the ‘moan, gurgle and shriek call’ of the Yellow-bellied Glider (aka Fluffy Glider). True that it is probably not one of the more melodic calls heard in the bush, but most certainly one of the most memorable calls and one that most people don’t forget. Yellow-bellied Gliders, like many Australian arboreal mammals, are often noticed because of their distinct vocalisations, so I only thought it fair to also play some common calls from other species including the Boobook (‘boo-book’). Pete Crowcroft and sons also did their best to mimic the Powerful Owl (deep, slow ‘woo-hoo’) and Sugar Glider (repeated ‘yip’, like yapping of a small dog).

After a short chat about the animal night life of the Moggs Creek Picnic area we broke up into two small groups and walked the Moggs Creek Circuit Trail (Walk 21: Moggs Creek Circuit Trail – Friends of Eastern Otways <feo.org.au>). Upon starting the walk we heard a pair of Boobooks call

in the distance. Not long after we heard our first Yellow-bellied Glider call at 6:36pm, just after the Kookaburras stopped calling. The call was from the north, in the direction we were heading. Of course you would think that we would hasten and get closer to the source of the call, however, there was too much to see and hear along the way, including several juvenile Ringtail Possums within 2 metres of the track, and unfortunately the frequent call of feral deer (beating, alarm call). The sometimes barely audible sound of the Tawny Frogmouth (a soft, deep and continuous low oom oom oom) was also heard in the distance, or perhaps it was close? I always find it hard to identify the direction of the call for this species.

Less than ten minutes after hearing the first glider we heard another calling, and within seconds we were able to locate the Yellow-bellied Glider in a Manna Gum. The area we spotted the glider has many well-used feed trees (smooth gum trees with V and horizontal notches that the gliders gnaw into the bark to encourage sap). The glider kindly allowed a viewing of five or so minutes before we decided to leave it to its nightly foraging activities. Whilst observing the glider we also heard two others calling from the west within 50 metres of our position and to the north-east at approximately 200 metres or more from our position, meaning we could note that at least three gliders were active in the area during our survey. Just before the group decided to walk back to the picnic ground we heard a Powerful Owl calling in the distance to the north. Fantastic results!





A Yellow-bellied Glider on a Manna Gum. Note the recent chew marks to the right of the glider – possibly the start of a sap feast

### Spectacular wildlife

The Moggs Creek area never fails to deliver a spectacle of spectacular wildlife. A total of ten native species were recorded, including a bold Brushtail Possum at the picnic area foraging on the barbecue leftovers and a brief sighting of a Sugar Glider, followed by its characteristic yip call near the picnic area. Other species observed but not confirmed included a small dasyuridae (possible Agile Antechinus), native rodent (possibly Bush Rat) and many insectivorous bats enjoying the insects attracted to the moth lights kindly set up by John and Pete. If you want to see some great shots of the many invertebrates recorded, please refer to our website article, <https://feo.org.au/things-that-go-bump-in-the-night/>



Above: lunchtime, Separation Creek

## Jamieson Creek to Separation Creek walk

Rob Shepherd

Walk 36 in *A guide to walks in the Great Otway National Park Eastern Section*

On 19 May 2024, eleven FEO members enjoyed a delightful walk from Jamieson to Separation Creek in delightful autumn sunshine. After driving to Jamieson Creek and organising the car shuffle at Separation Creek we gathered at the Jamieson Creek Camp Ground to admire the facilities. There were a relatively large number of campers enjoying this beautiful section of the Otways.

Although 3 mm of rain was recorded in the area overnight, the track was fortunately not slippery. As we walked we could hear many birds calling, however, most remained hidden in the undergrowth, which included Snowy Daisy Bush, Dusty Miller and Prickly Moses. As expected when walking in the Otways in May, we observed a wide variety of fungi, including the attractive but invasive species Orange Pore Fungus (*Favolaschia calicera*).



Orange Pore Fungus, *Favolaschia calicera*)

Wine Glass Fungus, *Podoscypha petalodes*

Brittlestem, Psathyrellaceae family



The walk was on a well-maintained track that runs parallel to and above the Great Ocean Road, providing excellent views of the coast at several lookouts along the track. While evidence of the fire that swept north from Wye River in Christmas 2015 was clear, the ongoing revegetation is returning the forest to a healthy state.



Above: descent into Bogalley Creek  
Below: morning tea



We had a late morning tea in delightful sun next to the dry Bogalley Creek. It's always fun to see the array of food that emerges from backpacks – from dreary old dry biscuits and water through to fruit cake and coffee! The break also allowed us to review our bird list, which included Little Raven, Red-browed Finch, Eastern Yellow Robin, White-browed Scrubwren, Grey Fantail,

Thornbill species and New Holland Honeyeater.

As we rounded the headland to view the small township of Separation Creek we paused for a group photo with wonderful views towards the Wye River point and beyond. The three-hour walk concluded with lunch in a sunny spot next to the beach. We reflected on a very pleasant morning in sunny conditions with great company exploring a lovely section of rejuvenated bush.

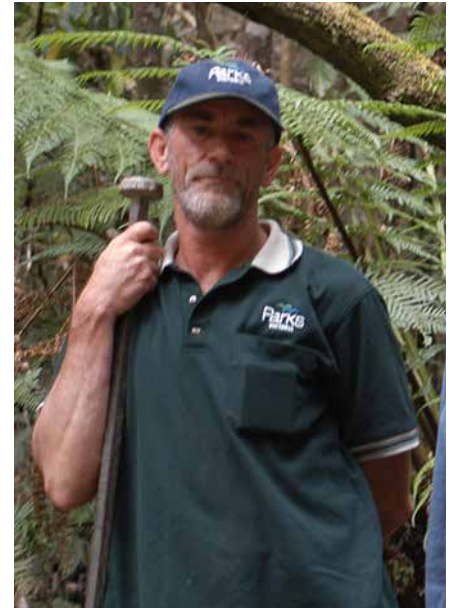
After lunch nine of the group enjoyed coffee at the Wye River General Store while Deborah and Conrad gained extra steps by walking back to Jamieson Creek.

Participants: Marg, Lynne, Dermot, Deborah, Conrad, Ellinor, Patrick, Paul, Merryn, Doug and Rob



End of the walk with Wye River point in the background.

## Lindsay Murnane remembered



Friends were saddened to hear of the death of Lindsay Murnane on 16 March. Lindsay was the liaison ranger for the Friends group with Parks Victoria from February 2000 until February 2008. During those eight years he participated in many of our Friends activities. A local man from the Lorne area, Lindsay shared his extensive knowledge of the district with us and joined in many of our walks where he took us into places that were off the beaten track, often with some historic interest. He participated in our mammal surveys, suggesting and leading us to different areas to survey where we would never have ventured.

He was responsible for creating the popular Lemonade Creek Track, convincing Parks Victoria personnel that this beautiful area should be made available for walkers to enjoy. A person who worked alongside him at this time wrote:

Lindsay was such a calm, gentle leader who managed to keep an

entire crew motivated when we were constructing the Lemonade Creek walking track. We dug that entire track in by hand using rake hoes. Lindsay was always comparing us to the men digging out the Great Ocean Road. 'The more we dig in today means more walk we get to enjoy tomorrow'.

The Friends were given the privilege of walking the track before it was open to the public in 2003. It was an adventurous expedition led capably by Lindsay. We were awed with the beauty of the area.

Lindsay made the following comment when he gave his report at the Friends AGM in February 2008.

Unfortunately this will be the last report from me as I have decided to step aside and let someone else with new and refreshing ideas take over. I plan to take time off during the year to try and recharge the batteries and hopefully motivation for my job. It has been a real pleasure to work with this group and I will miss being involved in some of the ongoing projects. I wish you all the best.

Lindsay was indeed 'A great friend of the Friends'.

RIP Lindsay.



## Annual koala count

Saturday 15 June 2024



The annual koala count will take place on Saturday 15 June. People are invited to enjoy a walk and participate in a survey of the koala population.

Meet at Aireys Inlet Hall at 9.30am. We will arrange car travel then depart promptly to Kennett River for morning tea. Following a short break, we drive to Grey River Road to the starting point just inside the National Park boundary.

Wear sturdy shoes and appropriate clothing depending on the weather. Carry lunch, drink, etc., also binoculars. We have lunch on top of the ridge overlooking the coast and return to the car park about 1.30pm.

If you wish to join in this activity, please contact Kaye 0408 551 667.

## Waterfall walk

Saturday 20 July 2024



The Otways are home to more than two hundred waterfalls ranging from the iconic Erskine and Sheoak Falls to smaller,

unnamed falls deep in the valleys. Our Friends of the Eastern Otways walk on Saturday 20 July will visit one of our local waterfalls with the exact location to be determined closer to the date, dependent on weather conditions. The distance, degree of difficulty and duration will also be communicated closer to the event.

Bring: morning tea, lunch, water, raincoat, suitable walking shoes, possibly a walking pole.

The walk will be led by Keith 0448 810 646.

## Bush walk

Haggarts - Allardyce tracks



Saturday 17 August 2024

This 7 km walk with impressive views across the heathland, is one of the additional walks in our updated walks book. At this time of year, we hope to see the rare winter-flowering Juniper Wattle and we will look for other early flowering spring plants. There are some good patches of the Anglesea Grevillea in this area which might be starting to flower. Some hilly, and possibly muddy sections may mean a walking pole is advisable. The walk will include a car shuttle.

Meet: at the corner of Forest Rd and Gum Flat Rd

Time: 9.30am

Bring: morning tea, lunch, water, raincoat, suitable walking shoes, possibly a walking pole.

Contact: Alison 0400 570 229



## Environmental weeding

Margaret MacDonald



The autumn weeding program was most successful with the removal of many invasive plants from the Anglesea coastal heathlands along the Great Ocean Road. The weather was kind to us on the three occasions, and it was very pleasant working in the heathlands with the magnificent seascape in the background. Although we made a great impact there is still an extensive patch of both Coast Wattle and Coast Tea-tree that needs to be brought under control. We will return to the site possibly in August. It is interesting to note the succession of these two invasive species. The wattle responds very quickly following a burn, and the Coast Tea-tree comes up much later. On our last session in May we were able to hand pull thousands of tea-tree seedlings following the recent autumn rain.

### Winter weeding program

**11 June, 9 July, 13 August**

Second Tuesday of the month 9.30 to 11.00am followed by coffee at a local café.

**11 June** – meet in O’Donohue Rd near corner of Fifth Ave. We

will be concentrating on removal of Coast Wattle and Boneseed, which are both invading the area where the extremely rare Striped Greenhood, *Pterostylis striata*, grows. The orchid should be flowering at this time.

**9 July** – meet in Harvey St near intersection of Noble St at 9.25am. We will then drive out along Mt Ingoldsby Rd to weeding site – focus on Coast Wattle/Sallow Wattle and Coast Tea-tree.

**13 August** – meet at The Gulch (Gap) Car Park, Great Ocean Road at 9.30am (to be confirmed).

Contact Margaret 0412 652 419



Park rangers Isabelle and Nicki help out

## MacKillop College Outdoor Educational Program

As included in our last newsletter, the conservation program with MacKillop College Year 8 students will commence in the last week of autumn and continue throughout winter. The students and staff stay at ‘Tallawalla’ Guide Camp at Moggs Creek and are keen to participate in hands-on conservation activities in the area. The program takes place on a Friday morning for approximately two hours. There are about twenty students for a one-hour activity from 9.30am to 10.30am and a second group from 10.45 to 11.45am.



We invite you to come along to Moggs Creek and help us in working with the students on a Friday morning on any of the following dates – for one or hopefully two sessions. Working with Children Check required. We do need your support to enable this program to be successful.

Dates: 31 May; 7, 14, 28 June; 19 July; 2 August and Wednesday 7 August. Meeting place for initial sessions – west end of Robyn Road, Moggs Creek.

If you can help, please contact Margaret 0412 652 419



## Beauty in nature

Margaret MacDonald

Terrestrial orchids are some of the most beautiful and amazing plants in our heathlands. They vary so much in size, colour and shape. Sometimes they are easy to find as they grow tall with their bright colour standing out amongst the other heathland plants.

However, often they are a challenge to find, and Rob Shepherd recently managed to track down two of our smaller species that are presently in flower – the attractive Fringed Hare Orchid *Leporella fimbriata* hiding



amongst grasses and other low-growing vegetation, and the Tiny Greenhood *Pterostylis parviflora* standing on the edge of a walking track. On his early-morning walks where he often encounters various bird life he was enthralled to find tiny dewdrops on both of these flowers, giving them a magical



quality of their own. With his advanced photography skills Rob has captured this splendour and we thank him for sharing his observations with us.

## The ghost fungus *Omphalotus nidiformis*

Rob Shepherd

As the weather cools, many of us turn our attention to another exciting fungi season in the Otways. Recently John Lenagan pointed out a new season ghost fungus growing on a stump. These fungi are named for their characteristic glow-in-the-dark or bio-luminescent properties.

Photographers can't let an opportunity like this pass! We photographed it in daylight and at night. The fruit body glows continuously for few weeks after it emerges. While it is possible to observe the glow under dark conditions at night, the long exposures obtained with a digital camera capture the bio-luminescence very clearly. In the example below, the exposure time was over 350 seconds!



Images of ghost fungi in daylight and at night

Photo credits: John Lenagan and Rob Shepherd

The most intense region of bio-luminescence appears in the gills of the fruiting body. The evolutionary benefits of the glow of the ghost fungus is unclear.

There are over one hundred bio-luminescent fungi worldwide. All are white rot fungi that play an essential role in global carbon cycling by breaking down complex carbohydrates in wood and releasing nutrients into the soil.

A biochemical reaction catalysed by an enzyme, luciferase, promotes the oxidation of compounds called luciferins and generates bio-luminescence. Other examples of bio-luminescence include fireflies and glow worms as well as the sparkling phosphorescence produced by some algae in sea water.

Although similar in appearance to the common edible oyster mushroom, ghost fungi are poisonous, although not lethal. Their scientific name is derived from the Greek omphalos, 'navel', and the Latin nidus 'nest' and forma 'shape', i.e. 'nest shaped'.

*Omphalotus nidiformis* is found in two distinct regions in Australia: the south-west of Western Australia and from eastern South Australia to coastal Queensland.

Winter is an exciting time to walk in the Otway National Park observing our wonderful fungi species. If you come across a ghost fungus, return in the evening with a torch and camera to observe the light show!

### References

[https://www.mq.edu.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/1216382/Fungus-of-the-week-Ghost-Fungus.pdf](https://www.mq.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1216382/Fungus-of-the-week-Ghost-Fungus.pdf)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omphalotus\\_nidiformis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omphalotus_nidiformis)



## Myrtle Rust

### Threat to our ecosystem



If you're time poor, here are the essential points about the threat posed to our entire ecosystem by Myrtle Rust, which was found and then eradicated from Otways Indigenous Nursery (OIN) with no known further spread. Learn to recognise it and report any sightings on iNaturalist. But if you have time, please read on and raise your awareness of this dangerous fungus.

- Myrtle Rust is an introduced fungus from South America which affects the Myrtaceae family (a keystone floral family including Eucalyptus, Leptospermum, Angophora, Melaleuca, Callistemon, Corymbia, Sygium and many other important genera).
- Identify it by bright yellow spores or purple-brown spots on new growth (possible other causes, but could be an early sign); affected plants may die back or appear scorched; don't touch the plant, but photograph stems, fruits, flowers and leaves (top and bottom) and upload to iNaturalist.
- First detected in 2010 in Australia, it is controllable on a small scale such as in a nursery but not on a landscape scale.

- It typically affects new growth and a plant's ability to reproduce and has driven at least two species close to extinction in New South Wales and Queensland. It is widespread in many locations along the entire east coast of Australia and in other more localised areas in other states and also in and around Melbourne and the Bellarine Peninsula.
- Practise good hygiene when travelling from known locations where Myrtle Rust is present or suspected (see first link below). Wash boots before and after in 70 per cent methylated spirits and water to arrive clean and leave clean. Wash hands, clothes and equipment too, all of which can carry spores.
- Please sign up to iNaturalist to learn more about the spread and locations of Myrtle Rust outbreaks and log sightings or suspected sightings.

These links provide more information about Myrtle Rust.

- <https://invasives.org.au/how-to-help/keep-gear-clean-wild/>
- <https://invasives.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Case-Study-Myrtle-rust.pdf>
- <https://www.anpc.asn.au/myrtle-rust/>
- <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/invasive-species/diseases-fungi-and-parasites/myrtle-rust>
- <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/biosecurity/plant-diseases/shrub-and-tree-diseases/myrtle-rust/about-myrtle-rust>
- <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/biosecurity/plant-diseases/shrub-and-tree-diseases/myrtle-rust/myrtle-rust-host-plants-and-symptoms>

Myrtle Rust has the potential to destroy ecosystems and has been particularly devastating in warmer, more humid northern parts of Australia. Multiple La Ninas have increased the rate of spread and a couple of species once widespread in New South Wales and Queensland are now nearly extinct. The number of host species continues to grow, including *Melaleuca lanceolata*, on which we first detected the pathogen.

Myrtle rust can be treated on a smaller scale with a range of control measures, including fungicides, in the wider environment this is not possible. OIN immediately recalled any plants in the Myrtaceae family that had been sold in the weeks leading up to the discovery, destroyed all affected plants and ceased to sell plants vulnerable to infestation until Myrtle Rust was confirmed, biosecurity measures set up and successful treatment undertaken.

OIN don't know how Myrtle Rust came to be in the nursery, but it's likely present in local parks, gardens, nurseries and potentially in other areas and entered via airborne spores on the wind or on someone's clothing.

There is very little local knowledge about the fungus and little monitoring; it has been declared an established disease in Victoria. We can't afford to be complacent, given that Myrtaceae is a keystone family for our Australian flora and Myrtle Rust has such devastating potential. Improved monitoring and awareness are crucial if we are to protect our iconic flora for the future.



Other strains of Myrtle Rust not yet known to be in Australia have had devastating impacts on eucalypts overseas.

You can now log potential sightings of Myrtle Rust on iNaturalist, using either the website or the app, which can also help with identification and provide information about its whereabouts and spread. Citizen science can play a role in monitoring and tracking pathogen movements.

Nick Day of OIN has kindly offered to share what he's learnt if Friends see anything they're not sure of or would like some extra help or advice. He'll do his best to help out or point you in the direction of those who can. Thanks, Nick!

## Rangers report, May 2024

*Isabelle Kielbaska*

Winter is upon us and even this week a chill is already in the air. The sunlit days are becoming shorter and the temperature is dropping. However, it's not all doom and gloom. There's the smell and slight haze of chimney smoke through the cold winter mornings and nights. I can only imagine many people are enjoying the serenity of a fireplace with a steaming mug of cocoa in hand... and perhaps readers are doing this as I write.

The last few months have been eventful in the Great Otway National Park (GONP) with many conservation, management and maintenance activities undertaken including the valuable contributions devoted from everybody in the Friends of Eastern Otways.

## Parks Victoria projects

As fellow Ranger Matthew Russell indicated previously, the Tali Merri Campground could not go ahead as previously envisioned. However, the funds have been put to good use for the Anglesea Heath Project led by the Anglesea Ranger Team. Activities include resurfacing Yan Wurring Mirr Walk; replacing and re-purposing old signage around the Anglesea Heath (including directional bollards and interpretation signage) and track maintenance along selected tracks. Parks Victoria Ranger Niki Donovan has been pivotal in orchestrating the sign work along the Yirripa Yan (Wadawurrung Cultural Walk), Ironbark Basin Circuit and Koori Cultural Walk, working closely with the Friends of Eastern Otways and Friends of Point Addis for local input.

The Erskine Falls VGO Project is well underway, where on-ground works began in early May, with the carpark fence replaced. Contractors are now constructing the fence extension down Erskine River from the lower viewing platform. Works will then move on to the Lemonade Creek pedestrian bridge repair and then head down towards the falls with post and rail repairs on the access steps.



This April, work began on replacing the Wye River Bridge. The existing bridge will be demolished and a new public lighting pole and lantern installed at the Wongarra Drive and Great Ocean Road intersection. These works will cause minor traffic disruptions. Over the next few months, bridge piles will be installed and the new bridge constructed.

## Conservation activities



The Parks Victoria Ranger teams have been working closely with Marine Park Ranger Mon Bregman from Queenscliff in developing an intertidal Rapid Health Assessment (RHA). Over the last few months, a few sessions have been held out at Point Danger, Cosy Corner, Point Addis and Eagle Rock Marine Sanctuary.



The aim of an RHA is to complete a minimum of one survey per location each year or, ideally, a survey each season depending on staff capacity. An RHA is a snapshot of the health of the intertidal zone for the duration of one hour. The assessment lists sessile invertebrates and mobile

macroinvertebrates; noting any threats such as people, dogs, marine pests, oil/fuel presence, fishing/poaching, litter and observation of the fragmentation and health of Neptunes Necklace *Hormosira banksii*. Parks Victoria hope to do both RHA and sea search assessments regularly across our marine parks.



A significant achievement was made to Parks Victoria’s Marine Protected Area Management Program with subtidal rocky reef monitoring undertaken at four sites related to Point Addis Marine National Park on Monday 13 May. With help from experienced Parks Victoria divers across the state, the Reef Life Survey method was used which involved divers recording fish and invertebrate species seen along underwater transects using underwater pencils and paper. Photographs were also taken of coral or seaweed cover on each survey. The methods targeted the majority of plants and animals greater than 2.5 cm in length that make up the life of rocky and coral reefs. The surveys are part of a long-term program to collect data to assist with managing the Marine National Park by monitoring the health of the reef and identifying any changes or emerging threats.

On 13 May Margaret MacDonald led a nature ramble



in the GONP out the back of Aireys Inlet. The area underwent a controlled burn in March 2023 and the focus of the activity was to identify emerging heath plants post-fire. The morning was a large success with many attending (Parks Victoria and many volunteers took part including a few younger people) and a diversity of healthy flora emerging, which delighted many familiar faces.



Parks Victoria Ranger Matthew Russell has lent a helping hand accompanying Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (WTOAC) with phosphite spraying vulnerable

plant species such as grass trees, banksias and isopogons in the Anglesea Bushland Reserve as part of Managing Country Together. We are hopeful that these efforts will result in positive impacts such as aiding vulnerable species recovery.

### Weed works



Parks Victoria highly appreciates the consistent and valuable weeding efforts of many Friends members which continues to be an important conservation activity. Over the last few months, the Friends members have tackled a few areas at O’Donohues Block using manual pulling or cut and paint methods to tackle numerous priority weeds such as Sallow Wattle, African Boneseed, Bluebell Creeper and Coast Tea-tree. The latest weeding event took place on 14 May and culminated in a pulling of over 1,000 Coast Tea-tree seedlings in a small patch! I cannot thank the members enough for their passionate help. The time and dedication Friends members provide in supporting Parks Victoria in conservation management by tackling transformer weeds is incomparable. We are all so grateful for their work to maintain healthy heathlands in the GONP.

Parks Victoria and DEECA Team Leader Pat O’Shea have collaborated to identify dense



areas of priority weeds such as Sallow Wattle, African Boneseed and Sweet Pittosporum to enable detection of weedy areas that are hard to access by foot. Since early March, Geospatial Science Analyst Steven Shelley has been using an aerial photography program called Planet to monitor areas of interest using remote sensing data and imagery. A day was reserved to test detected archetypes on the ground, which provides insight into whether particular plant attributes can be detected from imagery. A lot of work has been put in by the likes of Steven Shelly, Erin Nash, Matthew Russell and Pat O'Shea to obtain accurate data. These efforts just might prove useful for weed assessment methods, particularly during future flowering periods in the GONP.

At the start of the year, Parks Victoria Regional Conservation Project Coordinator Erin Nash and Team Leader Matthew Russell engaged a contingent worker named Corin Adams to support the various and important environmental conservation projects on a part-time basis. One of these projects includes the Protecting Biodiversity Program. Corin has been instrumental in assisting Isabelle Kielbaska, Matthew Russell and Claire Miller, with sorting important monitoring camera footage; on-ground weed assessment and treatment works; and identifying beautiful invertebrate, flora and fauna species such as Red Beak Orchids and the Australian Golden Orb Weaving Spider (see above).



### Autumn fuel-reduction burns

The FFMV team have been very busy planning, preparing and executing many successful strategic fuel-reduction burns around the townships of Anglesea, Aireys Inlet, Moggs Creek and Lorne over the last few months. This autumn, stable weather has enabled these burns to be delivered in a safe manner. As Matthew Russell has previously indicated, Friends members and fellow Parks Victoria colleagues have a valid reason to be excited to see what type of heath plant diversity (including orchids) will pop up in the months to come.



Lorne-based PFF Maggie Gent has kindly shared some of her insights and learnings while deployed on various planned fuel-reduction burns around the GONP, including Mount Meuron, Kennett River, Lorne, Red Hill Track, Cecil Track, Woodlands Track and Gentle Annie Track. Maggie was deployed for 1–4 days over a 10-week period in different roles including lighting crew,

patrolling, blacking out and aerial drip torch (ADT). She was lucky enough to be deployed in the far south-west to help the local crews in Portland and Casterton also as an ADT support. She appreciates learning new skills and taking on responsibilities such as DEECA's role when responding to wildfire, but also in other organisations such as the CFA and SES; learning new skills in ADT; understanding differing lighting patterns on country and how to read fuel types properly and the critical importance of fatigue management.

### Upcoming events and activities

Parks Victoria will continue to work closely with DEECA in the mechanical management of dense weed sites, particularly in areas interfacing the GONP and townships. Areas will be discussed over the coming months to align expectations and the role mechanical treatment could play for future areas. Parks Victoria will continue to work closely with DEECA and social community groups, especially regarding recovery and effectiveness of previously mulched areas.

Parks Victoria look forward in supporting the Friends of Eastern Otways members with the planned conservation activities with the students from Mary MacKillop College over the next few months. The Moggs Creek Heathland is a special part of the world and we look forward to collaborating in efforts for this important and long-standing program.

Thank you once again! And see you at the next weeding activity. *Isabelle.Kielbaska@parks.vic.gov.au* or 0439 082 303.