

A New Guide to Indigenous Plants of Castlemaine and Surrounds

Castlemaine Field Naturalists have produced an excellent and practical fold out guide to local plants with the assistance of FOBIF, Connecting Country, the Norman Wettenhall Foundation and other local organizations. It will be launched by John Landy, AC, CBO, MBE on 22 July in Castlemaine.

The information guide was produced as a resource for small block holders, farmers, town residents, schools, tourists, bushwalkers and anyone who loves the land.

It contains nearly a hundred illustrations of local flora, most in full colour, and can be carried easily in the pocket. It will be distributed among Landcare and other groups, and will soon be available at a very modest cost.

FOBIF members are invited to the launch, at the Ray Bradfield Room, on Thursday 22 July at 5 p.m. Refreshments will be provided. Please RSVP to Denis Hurley on 5472 2753 by 19 July.

Diamond Gully Development Proposal

Various community groups, including FOBIF, have been represented in consultations concerning proposed residential development at Diamond Gully, near Castlemaine.

A draft Structure Plan has been proposed for this area, but before Council has been able to consider this, developers have proposed two subdivisions, one for 61 lots and one for 7 lots.

We are disappointed at the timing of these applications, and the fact that they appear not to be concerned to blend with the landscape of the area. We do not, however, object to the 61 lot application in itself. We have nevertheless objected to the two applications insofar as they constitute a package, because the 61 lot development has a direct influence on the 7 lot application which is situated in high quality bushland.

'Now Look Here' Mamunya Photo Exhibition

The **photo gallery** at <www.fobif.org.au> has been extensively expanded in the last six months with contributions from a large number of members and participants in our monthly walks.

The point of the gallery is to honour and celebrate the bushlands of our region, in the tradition of the Mamunya festivals we ran in 1999 and 2003. The name is part of a Dja Dja Wurrung chant: 'pata, mamunya, jirarunga' meaning 'wait a while, don't touch it, growing up.'

As members will be aware, we have been unable to restage Mamunya in recent years for lack of funding. In order to keep the name alive, however, we have decided to mount exhibitions of our website photos in Newstead in August and in Castlemaine in October. The exhibitions are titled *Now Look Here*, to emphasise that apparently modest 'scrub' can reveal wonders when you look closely.

The Newstead exhibition will be at the Dig Café, from 4 August. A dinner to launch the exhibition will be held at Dig on Saturday 7 August at 7 p.m. The set menu costs \$25.00, and includes a glass of champagne. Contact Bronwyn 54751089 by 23 July to make a booking.

The October exhibition will be held in the Castlemaine Market Building, and we still have not finalized photos to be exhibited, so if you have any, we'd be keen to see them: they can be emailed to <info@fobif.org.au>. We can't pay for photos, but those selected for the exhibitions will be framed by us, and you will receive a free enlargement of your photo.

Wattle Gully Restoration Program

FOBIF has received a grant from the Mount Alexander Shire to continue its restoration program at Wattle Gully, Chewton.

The site is on the south side of the railway line on the Chewton-Fryerstown road, and can be clearly seen from the train. In 1999, as part of the Mamunya Festival, sculptor Brigitte Heller installed a stone configuration there, now surrounded by wattle trees.

Our efforts over the years have been to concentrate on controlling weed infestations, allowing native vegetation to return opportunistically.



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Nature Blogs Workshop

The keeping of nature diaries has a long tradition, harking back to Victorian times and beyond. In the Internet age this tradition has been maintained through a growing interest in environmental blogging. A blog is really just a dynamic diary and notebook on the Web but with powerful ability to share information, photographs, experiences and ideas with others. As we live through a time of rapid environmental change the value of recording and sharing environmental observations can be an extremely important way to understand and value our surroundings. For example, records of nature observations such as bird migrations and flowering events from earlier times are now proving of enormous value in understanding climate change.

Geoff Park has been writing a successful environmental blog, *Natural Newstead* <http://geoffpark.wordpress.com/> for the past couple of years. He will be running a workshop on how to set up and maintain your own nature blog at Castlemaine Community House, 27 Lyttleton Street, Castlemaine on 21 August between 10 a.m. and midday. The workshop is free and there will be a limit of 18 participants.

For more information or to register for the workshop: email <info@fobif.org.au> or ring Geoff Park: 0418 138 632

Box-Ironbark Walks

FOBIF walks for the year have been well attended, groups generally ranging from 12 to 25 participants.

As we are entering the planning stage for next year, volunteers to guide walks are urged to contact us at <info@fobif.org.au>, or ring Bronwyn Silver at 5475 1089.

Walks for the rest of 2010:

18 July

The Rise and Shine Bushland Reserve

This reserve is a small area of public land south of Newstead renowned for its rich diversity of birds and understorey. The Newstead Landcare Group with assistance from Parks Victoria has developed a fascinating nature trail in the Reserve that highlights its flora and fauna, geological and cultural history. Short easy walk, 2 hours. For more information visit the Natural Newstead blog at <http://geoffpark.wordpress.com> or ring Geoff Park 0418 138 632.

15 August

Walmer

A walk through the diverse and rapidly evolving landscapes of Walmer taking in revegetation sites, remnant bush and farmland in transition, farm forestry projects, heritage places, high value roadsides and a nature reserve. c. 10 km. For more information ring Paul Hampton 5474 2189.

19 September

Mount Alexander

We will travel to the Toilet Block/Picnic Area adjacent to the old Koala Park on Mount Alexander. The walk will follow the southern end of the West Ridge Walking Track, a section of the Great Dividing Trail and tracks inside the old Koala Park. The walk features glorious views, many huge eucalypts and marvelous granodiorite boulders (and also a detour to an amazing grassy valley). c. 9 km. For more information ring Richard Piesse 0448 572 867.

17 October

Fryers Ridge Nature Conservation Reserve

A range of native plants, creekline vegetation, interesting rocks in the bushland behind Taradale. c. 8 km. For more information ring Barbara Johnson 5423 2773.

Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission

FOBIF has made two principal submissions to the Commission. The first, in July last year, dealt with the matter of housing in fire prone areas. The second, in April this year, dealt with fuel reduction burning.

Both submissions can be read in full on <www.fobif.org.au> under Documents. In our April submission we argue that fuel reduction efforts should be concentrated strategically around settlements, and that different environments should be treated differently in fuel management programs. In sum, we argued that the Commission should:

- make a strong recommendation opposing new settlements in dangerous areas;
- strongly emphasise that fuel reduction programs should be conducted with appropriate regard for ecological values;
- refrain from making a global recommendation for fuel reduction, but treat the different ecological zones of the state according to their distinctive values.

Wewak Track management burn

In early April FOBIF representatives went down to the Wewak Track to look at a fuel reduction burn conducted by DSE two weeks before, in mid Autumn. The burn operation took place ten days after rain, and was followed a week later by a further rain period. The area is marked Zone 3, 'broad area reduced fuel mosaic', in the Bendigo Fire Protection Plan. 'It is aimed to treat approximately 65% of each burning unit in any burning operation' in this zone, according to the Plan. We have been told recently, however, that the aim is now to 'treat at least 70%' of each unit.

Our readers will remember that we had taken some interest in a burn in the same area in 2009, because of the particular richness of wildflowers in this part of the Diggings Heritage Park. We had successfully argued for the exclusion of a small section of the area from burning because of its spectacular cover of Matted Bush Pea (*Pultenea pedunculata*). We also argued for care in the conduct of the operation because of the presence of the rare Fryerstown Grevillea and Scented Bush Pea.

In our view the burn conducted last year was mild, but this year's effort was more like a full on bushfire. We will be monitoring recovery on this site over the next few months. Photos of the fire site can be found in the gallery at <www.fobif.org.au>.

Fire Preparation Works

In response to a DSE invitation to community groups to suggest works the Department might undertake to reduce fire risk before the upcoming fire season, FOBIF submitted a detailed list of works we think would be of use. We prepared the list with the Bendigo Fire Protection Plan map in front of us, and believe that our suggestions are consistent with the aims of the plan as they relate to asset protection, and that they would be of serious ecological benefit as well.

1. The feral pines which infest our woodlands should be removed.
2. The pines in the Moonlight Flat plantation south of Clark's road should be removed.
3. Pines should be removed south of Specimen Gully Road to widen the firebreak effect.
4. Vegetation, mainly weeds (gorse etc.) along the Castlemaine town boundary in Kalimna Park should be groomed.
5. Weed control measures along Forest Creek in Chewton and up to Expedition Pass reservoir should be followed up.
6. Wattle Gully flat should be cleared of highly flammable pampas grass.
7. Road verges should be cleared of flammable weeds.
8. Crown land north of the railway in Chewton, adjacent to the Castlemaine Diggings NHP, needs to be fuel reduced. This would strengthen the effect of the asset protection zone south of the railway line.

In our letter to DSE we stressed that we believe that vegetation management can and should be compatible with biodiversity conservation. As we have repeated many times in this newsletter, we are not confident that the Department has the same belief.

Fire and the Moonlight Flat Pine Plantations

Proposals 2 and 3 above relate to the plantations managed by Hancock Victorian Plantations, a company jointly owned by Australian and US superannuation funds. In the matter of fire management these plantations are effectively the responsibility of the company and the CFA, not DSE. This is one of the demarcation issues which has troubled the Royal Commission, and on which it may make recommendations in its report later this year.

The plantations are a significant source of unease in summer around Chewton and Castlemaine. In the light of this fact, we have forwarded the above list of suggestions to Hancock Plantations and to the CFA. At the time of writing we have not received a response.

Alien invasions: What is the Truth?

At the end of May the State Auditor General released a report entitled *Control of Invasive Plants and Animals in Victoria's Parks*.

The report 'examines the effectiveness of invasive species programs in national and state parks.' Its conclusion:

'How well Parks Victoria manages the invasive plant and animal threat in national and state parks is generally unclear. Its planning is not robust, its data is inadequate and increasingly out of date, and its park management plans are also outdated and lack sufficient detail. In addition, monitoring and evaluation of invasive species management activities is inconsistent.'

Among its other findings:

'Recent policy emphasises a landscape scale approach – one that disregards boundaries based on land ownership and use – to manage pervasive threats, such as invasive species. While progress has been made, Parks Victoria (PV) is yet to apply this approach consistently, and no agency is clearly responsible for balancing local and regional issues with statewide management priorities. There are no detailed outcomes that the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) expects PV to achieve nor is there a performance framework to assess how effective PV has been in managing invasive species.'

'Around 75 per cent of all plant data and 57 per cent of animal data is over 10 years old, while around 30 per cent of plant and animal data is over 20 years old.'

There is nothing in the report to surprise FOBIF members. Local rangers have done some serious work on the ground, but the Auditor General is spot on in highlighting the lack of an overall attack on the problem. The report can be found by googling Victorian Auditor General and clicking on Reports by year.

Alien Invasions: What is the Truth? Part 2

Coincidentally, a week after the release of the AG's report, FOBIF received a document from DSE called *Weeds and Pests Initiative: making a difference on public land (2007-2011)*. The document contains summaries of six regional projects, but does not counter any of the Auditor General's critical conclusions.

The State Opposition has highlighted the damaging nature of the AG's report. We enquired of the shadow minister for the environment as to coalition policy on weeds, and were referred to <http://www.tedbaillieu.com.au/files/policy_announcement.html>. This site contains a general run of coalition policies, but to judge from it, the Opposition has even fewer initiatives than the Government on pest plants and animals. Its only policy directly attacking the feral problem is a proposal to reintroduce the fox and wild dog bounty. On the other hand, the Opposition proposes to reintroduce bee keeping into national parks, without any apparent interest in the feral dimension of this proposal. The Opposition appears to have no policy on weeds.

Weeds along the Loddon

Participants in FOBIF's May walk along the Loddon were entranced by the extremely picturesque, gorge-like valley of the river in its upper reaches south of Glenluce.

We were also appalled by the invasion of English Broom, a weed that is depressingly rampant in the wetter areas around Daylesford and Creswick, but not so common in Box Ironbark woodlands. We have enquired of DSE as to the Department's approach to this problem, and have been informed that an ongoing weed control program at the Glenlyon end is moving downriver towards the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park.

It will be a welcome sight to see some weed reduction in this area. The river between Vaughan and Glenluce is grossly infested with blackberry, something we have been raising with Parks Victoria for some years.

Getting the Goats

FOBIF members have observed a herd of about fifty goats in the Columbine Creek area of the Fryers Forest in recent weeks.

Goats have been a problem in this area for many years, and we suggested to DSE over a year ago that shooters should be brought in to the area to remove the herd. They have informed us that shooters were sent to the area in recent years, and found nothing. Goats, of course, have the inconvenience of wandering about.

Members who see numbers of goats in the forest should contact DSE in Bendigo, or us at <info@fobif.org.au>.