

## Mamunya Returns

The Mamunya Festival is returning in 2009 to give artists and the community the opportunity to celebrate the diversity of the forests and bushland of Central Victoria at major galleries and sites around Castlemaine. The success of Mamunya in previous festivals demonstrated the high regard in which the visual arts are held in this region and the significant role they have to play in forming community attitudes to the environment. The associated cultural activities and education programs stemming from Mamunya are not only a great source of inspiration for the artistic community but have drawn people from all over Australia to engage in and explore this dynamic and beautiful region.

To create an exciting festival in 2009, the Mamunya Steering Committee is gathering the seeds for sponsorship, funding and research to develop a diverse range of exhibitions, site specific and educational projects, volunteer working groups, and an interactive website to update and engage the community as the Festival grows. As in previous years the Festival organisers will engage an esteemed judging panel to offer awards for works that honour the Mamunya theme which comes from a DjaDja Wurrung chant: 'Pata, mamunya, jirarunga' (Wait a while, don't touch it, growing up).

The management and promotion of the Festival is undertaken by FoBIF and has the support of the Mount Alexander Shire, The Norman Wettenhall Foundation, Castlemaine Art Gallery, Parks Victoria, and many associated bodies throughout the region. Mamunya is not, however, a fundraising event for FoBIF but aims to promote the artists, galleries and environments of this region with works of high quality and content.

For further information or to discuss projects contact Zoe Amor on 0408 310 640 or zoeamor@hotmail.com.

## Walks Program

Welcome to new Walks Co-ordinator Bronwyn Silver. She'd like to hear your feedback on past walks and your ideas for future ones. Phone 5475 1089 or email bsilver@vic.chariot.net.au

## We have no strength except our members!

Subscriptions for 2008 are due in January, or even earlier to avoid lapses during the holiday season. Please return the enclosed membership form with your sub.

## We want your views

*How can FoBIF achieve more?*

Please help FoBIF by answering the questions below and returning to Box 689, Castlemaine, 3450 (or hand to a FoBIF committee member). Feel free to either remain anonymous, or to put your name and contact details if you'd like someone to get back to you.

- What do you like about FoBIF? (What does it do well?)
- What else would you like it to do?
- Would you like to be more involved? Doing what?
- What would it take for you to get more involved? (What's stopping you getting more involved?)
- Any other comments?

## Vagabond

Doug Ralph and Bernard Slattery have finished their research on the life of Charles Sanger, who lived in the Fryers and Upper Loddon forests in the decades up to 1953. Their book, *Vagabond*, will be launched in the new year.

## FoBIF Committee

Welcome to Eve Banks, who was co-opted onto the Committee earlier this year. She joins Doug Ralph, Bernard Slattery, Tami McVicar, Frank Panter and Marie Jones. Committee meetings are usually on the 2nd Monday of the month at 6 p.m. at Continuing Ed (30 Templeton Street, Castlemaine). Members are welcome to attend. (Ring Secretary Bernard Slattery beforehand on 5470 5161 to confirm details.) It would be great to get more new people involved.

## FoBIF Website

We are in the process of creating a website for FoBIF. As a point of contact for the public it will feature the newsletter, a resource base, a beautiful gallery of photos and other images from the region, a map or maps of the region and updates from the various projects that FoBIF is connected with such as the Biodiversity Blueprint, Bush Walks, Mamunya Festival, and any thing else relevant. There will be Links to Friends and Landcare Groups, The Norman Wettenhall Foundation, Trust for Nature, Mount Alexander Shire, Parks Vic, DSE and Land for Wildlife, National Heritage Trust, the Threatened Species Network, Conservation Volunteers Australia, and anyone else you can think of! We would love to have your input for a really dynamic (and hopefully interactive) website so if you want to contribute in any way or have pictures, ideas/notes, sketches, articles/writings, statistics or findings please contact Zoe Amor 5473 3339 or E:zoeamor@hotmail.com.



# Friends of the Box-Ironbark Forests (Mount Alexander Region) Inc.

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PO Box 689 Castlemaine VIC 3450 Phone 5470 5407

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## Wettenhall Biodiversity Blueprint Report

FoBIF has received a grant from the Norman Wettenhall Foundation to produce a Biodiversity Blueprint for the Mount Alexander Shire. The blueprint will be produced by a project officer under the direction of a FoBIF steering committee and in consultation with a reference group representing a wide range of Mount Alexander Shire environment and community groups.

The first Reference Group meetings were held in November and December in the Chewton Town Hall and were well attended.

We are hoping that the production of the blueprint will clarify the current situation in the Shire and lead to more effective action to protect and enhance biodiversity. The project will be based solidly on local knowledge as well as formal research.

The successful applicant for the project worker position is Julie von Platen. Julie has been in living and working in Tasmania and will be returning to Central Victoria ready to start in February.

Bernard Slattery and Marie Jones will be the contact people for the consultant to make the whole process simple and easy for everyone. We are all looking forward to getting started in February 2008 so keep jotting down your thoughts and ideas in readiness.

## A Good Community Event

In late October about 40 people attended the Chewton Landcare Group's Catchment Tour.

The focus of the morning was on catchment health for people, plants and wildlife. Although Forest Creek is quite local in scale, we gained a strong sense of its contribution to the wider catchment. In addition we saw its obvious role in enhancing the local landscape, acting as a corridor and focus of recreation. It was a heartening occasion, as we could see abundant, if early, evidence of success at all of the stops. And the frequent references to the vision of enthusiastic volunteers inspired us all to greater efforts.

At Expedition Pass, Chinamans Point, Argus Flat, White Horse Gully, Wattle Gully and Happy Valley Road where it intersects with Forest Creek we heard about the history of heroic times and of the massive disturbance and damage that has been the inheritance of this generation. At every site, progress has been made on redressing the imbalance and restoring the aesthetics, productivity and resilience of the catchment for conservation. This has involved thousands of volunteer hours in the removal of pest weeds (willows, gorse, pines) and their replacement with natives in places where the waterways need a bit of help in restoring or maximising flows. Lessons learned from past and recent experience were shared, in discussions about the resnagging of

rivers and creeks, the hazards of poorly briefed volunteers on plantings, the necessity for weed treatment first and the capacity of native bush to do the job itself with just a nudge along from 'friends'.

The presenters and organisers were drawn from Golden Point, Chewton and Castlemaine Landcare Groups, FoBIF, Wattle Gully Mine and NCCMA.

## Aerial Photos Exhibition

FoBIF has prepared a set of large aerial photos of the shire, taken in 1946 and 2007. We are hoping to display these in the Phee Broadway theatre foyer early in 2008. Watch this space.

## CDNHP Thinning Trials

David Major, Parks Victoria Ranger in Charge, informs us that the cutting and wood removal phase of this trial is complete. Scientific monitoring commenced three years ago as part of the project and is continuing. Any decision to extend the trial into other areas will be dependent on the interpretation of the results of the monitoring program. No such decision has been made to date.

## Free Advice

Pat Radi Mansbridge, from revegetation firm NativFocus, offers FoBIF members with bush on their land free site visits, with advice on what areas have the most valuable flora and fauna and what areas are the top priority for weed removal. Phone 0427 239 563.

## Fire and Ecology in Box Ironbark Forests

In August DSE published a study by the Arthur Rylah Institute entitled *Ecological Burning in Box Ironbark Forests*. The study was commissioned by the North Central Catchment Management Authority, and comes in two parts. Part One begins with a literature review. The following points 1 to 8 are quoted from the executive summary:

1. The review has not been able to shed light on historical aboriginal burning regimes. Some have suggested that seasonal burning was probably undertaken, but little direct evidence exists, and what evidence there is relates to landscape-wide observations that are not site or vegetation-specific. Fire has probably played a minor part in influencing the vegetation structure and faunal assemblages in Box-Ironbark ecosystems. Management should now be geared towards the needs of the forests as they exist today, not as they existed in some idealised pre-European state.
2. The response of the understorey to applied burning will depend heavily on the nature of individual remnants, season, landscape position, soil type, seed bank, disturbance history and susceptibility to edge effects. Some species, particularly leguminous shrubs and short-lived obligate seeders, will be promoted by fire in the short-term. Resprouting species that make up a large proportion of the flora will be little affected unless burning is frequent. Few species rely on fire for germination, and most species that are stimulated by fire will still recruit at a low level in the absence of fire. No species should be lost through burning provided the inter-fire period allows all species to reach reproductive maturity (a minimum of 10-20 years) but absent species are highly unlikely to reappear. Most species will persist even when the interval between fires exceeds 50 years. Further research is required into the germination requirements of Box-Ironbark shrub species, and the effects of applied burning (taking advantage of DSE's fuel-reduction program).
3. The response of the canopy will depend on the intensity of the fire. In most instances, fire in small remnants is unlikely to be of sufficient intensity to lead to canopy replacement. In any event, most Box-Ironbark species show continual recruitment in the absence of fire, and thus do not rely on it. In any one patch, the minimum inter-fire period for a fire that kills or severely reduces the overstorey and that allows full recovery of structure is likely to be around 60 years. Further research is required to determine the germination requirements for Ironbark

eucalypts.

4. Litter plays an important role in nutrient cycling, and provides important habitat for invertebrates and small vertebrates. Frequent burning (for example, 3-5 year intervals) will disrupt natural processes in the short-term and may eventually lead to a depletion of soil nutrients and loss of habitat.
5. Research into the effects of fire on invertebrates is confounded by high natural variability, and it is often difficult to determine the baseline or climax community. Short-term effects are intimately linked in many cases to burning of the litter layer, and burning at frequencies as high as every three years should be avoided. More research is required into the effects of fire on termites, known to be key drivers of secondary productivity in these forests.
6. The effects of fire on birds are strongly dependent on the severity of the fire and the structural components of the forest that are burnt, and recovery of populations is linked to the recovery of the vegetation. Some seed-eaters may be advantaged in the long-term if fire promotes new vegetation growth. Other species may be advantaged in the short-term by the availability of post-fire carrion or the reduction in protective cover for prey. However, species that rely on the ground layers for nesting or foraging may be disadvantaged in the short-term by low-intensity fire, particularly if it interferes with breeding. The minimum inter-fire period is likely to be similar to that which will allow full recovery of understorey structure (i.e. at least 25 years).
7. The effects of fire on mammals are also linked to the effects and recovery of the vegetation and the intensity of the burn. Some common herbivores take advantage of the flush of new plant growth, but small animals dependent on the ground layer will be disadvantaged in the short-term. Arboreal mammals are likely to be disadvantaged only if the fire is of high intensity. In general, it is believed that small mammal populations will not be disadvantaged, provided the minimum inter-fire period is at least 15-20 years. However, in isolated private remnants, recolonisation by small mammals after fire may be difficult. Further research is required, particularly in regard to bats and arboreal mammals such as possums.
8. Many reptiles and frogs are likely to be disadvantaged in the short-term by any burning due to their dependence on the litter and ground layers. Spring burning will affect the breeding of many reptile species, while autumn burning may affect

the breeding of some frog species. In remnants, isolation is likely to be a barrier to recolonisation after fire. Further research is required on this fauna group.

The report poses the question, 'Is there a need to burn box ironbark?' Its answer is cautious, but includes the comment: 'There is generally a lower amount of litter accumulation with age in Box-Ironbark forest compared to other forest types. An estimated 7-15 years is required to build up fuel sufficiently to allow a good burn. However, despite these forests being almost semi-arid, they will still burn very hot if conditions allow, even with little fuel on the ground.'

The report, written by Arn Tolsma, David Cheal and Geoff Brown, confirms the position frequently restated by FoBIF, that in the light of our inadequate understanding of the effects of fire in our forests, any use of fire by forest managers by way of reduction burns should be accompanied by careful monitoring and research as to their ecological effects. We are not at all confident that this is actually being done: our impression is that fire managers are hampered by lack of resourcing, and that in any case, many of them are uninterested in the ecological effects of their burns or, worse, think they already know everything there is to know on the subject.

## FOBIF Meets with DSE Biodiversity Manager

On 20 November some members of FoBIF met with Adam Muir, the DSE North West Region Manager, Biodiversity. Adam is responsible for the implementation of the Native Vegetation Framework in North West Victoria. We raised concerns about VicRoads plans for tree clearances where we felt the Framework was not being implemented correctly. Adam disagreed with us on some issues and had to get further info on others. He did agree with us that the Framework would not allow the subdivision of bush into small lots for housing where there was no room for offsets after the required 30m to 90m of understorey is removed for bushfire protection. Adam suggested we met again to continue the discussion.

## California Fires: a lesson for us?

The following comment appeared in a 15 November *London Review of Books* report from California on this year's disastrous bushfires:

'The loss of more than 90 per cent of Southern California's agricultural buffer zone is the principal if seldom mentioned reason wildfires increasingly incinerate such spectacular swathes of luxury real estate. It's true that other ingredients – La Nina droughts, fire suppression (which sponsors the accumulation of fuel), bark beetle infestations and probably global warming – contribute to the annual infernos that have become as predictable as Guy Fawkes bonfires. But what makes us most vulnerable is the abruptness of what is called the 'wildland-urban interface', where real estate collides with fire ecology.'

The article mentions McMansions with great ocean views, but surrounded by what foresters describe as 'diesel stands' of flammable bush.

The point made here illustrates the stand FoBIF has repeatedly taken in planning panels about housing developments in bushland. Such developments are either firetraps, or they require for safety reasons that the bush around them be effectively destroyed. It is for this reason, among others, that we welcome the Shire Council's recent decision to commence the long awaited Urban Forest Interface Study. The Council has agreed with FoBIF's argument that the interface study has to be done in conjunction with the \$100,000 Diamond Gully Structure Plan Study. This Study has just been put out to tender. The Study will investigate how the Diamond Gully area can be opened up to housing development while, amongst other criteria, minimising the damage to the significant native vegetation of the area.

## Fire Monitoring in Parks in the Bendigo Fire District

Parks Victoria Ranger in Charge David Major has offered the following clarification on monitoring of burns in this area:

'During 2007, PV (across the DSE Bendigo Fire District) developed a decision making matrix that is allowing us to target our ecological monitoring efforts. This year we have completed a significant amount of ecological monitoring across the region and it is our intention to continue this work as part of an on-going process. (The railway dam burn you ask about was not deemed a priority burn to monitor). We are also working hard on developing strong relationships with both BRIT TAFE and La Trobe University. The BRIT TAFE students have been involved with the ongoing monitoring program in the Kamarooka section of the Greater Bendigo National Park.'

We look forward to seeing the results of these monitoring programs.