

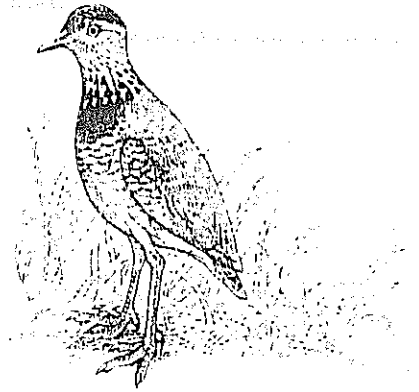
# INDIGENOTES



Tawny Crowned Honeyeater, by Lynlee P. Smith



# THE PLAINS WANDERER



*A regular series by botanist Ian Lunt on native grasslands and grassy woodlands.*

## VICTORIA'S (endangered) RAILWAY GARDENS

As everyone knows, lowland native grasslands and grassy woodlands are among Australia's most threatened ecosystems<sup>1</sup>. Some of the best native grasslands occur as narrow strips on rail-lines. They have survived because rail-lines have not been grazed or cropped for over 100 years.

However, even on the rail-lines, intact grasslands are few and far between. Well over 90 percent of most lines support introduced pasture grasses and weeds, due to inappropriate management by the railways over the past century. Activities such as soil dumping, ploughing, bulldozing, drain digging and burning piles of old sleepers have destroyed many irreplaceable grassland remnants on railway easements.

This damage continues unabated. Hundreds of hectares of invaluable grasslands were destroyed by V/Line in a fit of bulldozing for "fire control" after the 1983 bushfires<sup>2</sup>. Many of these bulldozed strips are now choked full of *Phalaris* and other exotic grasses, which are far more flammable than the original native species.

Public outcry over this destruction led to the preparation in the mid-1980's of the "Railway Reserve Vegetation Management Plan", which is a co-operative plan between V/Line and the Department of Conservation and Environment (DCE).

Under this agreement, remnants that contain threatened species and communities are to be fenced, signposted and burnt by the Department of Conservation and Environment, not V/Line. Many of these sites have been signposted in recent years.

It has become increasingly obvious however that this "agreement" is of limited value: not because it is intrinsically flawed, but because V/Line staff flaunt it outrageously, and the Department of Conservation and Environment has allocated virtually no funds to protecting endangered grasslands on railway lines.

Meanwhile, every year, as V/Line undertakes its

rail-line management, another chunk is carved off remaining remnants. An example from the Bairnsdale railway line immediately springs to mind. Last year, a new orchid species, the Gaping Leek-orchid, *Prasophyllum chasmogamum*, was described<sup>3</sup>. It is one of Australia's most endangered species, and occurs at two sites on the Bairnsdale rail-line and a couple of roadsides in western Victoria.

Soon after it was described, the local Field Naturalists notified V/Line and DCE and requested that the two rail-line sites be fenced. Subsequently, V/Line agreed that DCE would manage the most important site at Munro, and that V/Line would leave it alone. After all this, V/Line rotary-hoed a firebreak through parts of both sites. Both sites are irreparably damaged. Such destruction continues throughout Victoria, year after year after year.

But why does this damage continue to occur? Three reasons are immediately obvious: (1) V/Line doesn't take seriously its obligations under the rail-line agreement and the FFG Act to protect remnant vegetation and endangered species, (2) neither site was fenced (in fact, only 2 remnants on the entire Melbourne to Bairnsdale rail-line are fenced), and (3) both sites are poorly signposted.

Part of the problem lies in the signs which DCE uses to mark the start and finish of vegetation remnants. These signs are tiny - less than 30 cm long and 20 cm wide. It is easy to miss seeing them, particularly if one travels along the railway track rather than along the edge of the easement.

Why are they used? For two reasons. Firstly, they are cheap. Historically, DCE has allocated virtually no funds to grassland conservation and this is reflected in their choice of signs. Secondly, a sub-culture seems to exist in DCE which is antagonistic to signposting remnant vegetation. Signs are supposed to invite intentional destruction. This view conveniently forgets that most grassland destruction is by institutions, such as V/Line, some CFA branches and Shire councils,

not by crazed individuals. Much damage could be avoided if important remnants were fenced and signposted with large, clearly visible signs.

DCE proudly signposts all entrance roads to our National Parks. But hardly any lowland grasslands occur in National Parks. How do we inform people of the existence of grassland remnants? At the moment we don't.

The small, yellow signposts which are currently used to mark grassland remnants on rail-lines are inadequate. They are easily missed by railway staff (or so the staff claim), and they don't publicise important grassland remnants to train travellers. We need large, routed wooden signs to proudly proclaim "Remnant Native Grassland" to every train traveller in Victoria.

DCE is currently preparing a "Conservation Strategy for Native Grasslands and Grassy Woodlands". Whether such a document will provide a springboard for action or a pile of promises and platitudes remains to be seen.

But the Department doesn't need another "strategy" to save the last of the rail-line remnants. The Minister merely has to provide the cash to do three things: (1) fence all important (Category 1 and 2) vegetation remnants on rail-lines, (2) signpost each of these sites with large, routed wooden signs that can easily be read by train travellers and railway staff, and (3) transfer total control of these sites from V/Line to DCE.

Incredibly, these are all old promises. Five years ago, the State Conservation Strategy promised to fence all rail-line sites containing rare plants<sup>4</sup>, but virtually no action has occurred. The V/Line - DCE agreement and the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act cover the remaining demands.

In a fit of unbridled optimism, perhaps I could add one final, positive action for rail-line conservation. Suppose every country railway station proudly displayed a poster depicting "Victoria's Railway Gardens", the native grasslands that tenuously survive beside the rail-lines. The posters would provide a great advertisement for remnant grasslands, and would draw attention to V/Line's role in their protection.

My only worry with this idea is that, on current performance, glossy posters are about the only thing that the Minister is likely to fund.

## References

1. Specht, R.L. (1981). Conservation of vegetation types. In *Australian Vegetation*. (Ed R.H. Groves) pp. 393-410. (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge).
2. Lunt, I.D. (1988). Native grasslands. *Parkwatch* September, pp. 13-15.
3. Jones, D. (1991) New taxa of Australian Orchidaceae. *Australian Orchid Foundation* 2, 1-208.
4. Government of Victoria (1987). *Protecting the Environment. A Conservation Strategy for Victoria*. - see page 31.

## The extinction vortex and grasslands - will the government act?

James Ross from Victorian National Parks Association reminds us in their newsletter that in launching the Action Plan for Melbourne's Grasslands and Grassy Woodlands in May 1990 the Minister, Steve Crabb, stated that "We are determined to see this fragile ecosystem survive" Recent events, he reports, have called this determination into question.

Cabinet has approved the granting of a permit to BHP Petroleum to develop a part of the William Angliss Grasslands in Laverton North despite evidence that the grasslands are of outstanding conservation significance. The site supports many rare or threatened plants as well as a population of the Striped Legless Lizard.

DCE's Melbourne Action Plan proposed that the Government acquire the Evans St site in Sunbury through purchase or exchange. After several years of negotiation and lobbying the fate of this unique grassland is in the balance following statements by Ministers Crabb and Spyker that purchase or exchange are not applicable!

Road and rail reserves shelter some of the most valuable grassland remnants in Victoria. In recognition of this, V-Line and DCE have signed an agreement on managing such sites. However, this agreement has not prevented V-Line 'works' damaging two grassland sites supporting rare orchids in Gippsland. Further damage could be prevented to these and other small remnants throughout Victoria by fencing, signs and education.

Twenty of the twenty-one mammal species which are extinct in Victoria occurred in the grasslands and grassy woodlands that once covered one third of the state. Recent surveys of the Eastern Barred Bandicoot, a species dependant upon grasslands, only located three animals in the wild. Captive breeding programs may enable the species to hang on but where will re-introduction programs occur if we don't conserve large grassland sites?

The plight of the bandicoots is just the beginning; dozens of other grassland plant, mammal, bird, reptile and invertebrate species are poised to enter the extinction vortex. Will the government, with the help and encouragement of the community, implement a grassland conservation strategy before it is too late?

Source: VNPA Newsletter 11(1) Feb 1992.

# Proposed tip threatens Euroa bushland

The Euroa Shire at present is in the process of developing a new tip site, as the present one is full. They purchased a piece of land in 1990 which they considered would be appropriate for the purpose.

Unfortunately the piece of land they bought on Drysdale Road is 160 acres of remnant native vegetation, with few introduced plants. The list of native plants occurring on this piece of land includes well over 100 species. One of these is a vulnerable species (*Goodenia macbarronii*) and another an as yet un-named *Hibbertia* species which appears to be unique to Euroa. The *Goodenia*, which has been recorded from only 5 sites in the state, 2 of which were on roadsides and therefore not secure habitats, has been recommended by the "Scientific Advisory Committee" of the Flora and Fauna Guarantee for listing under the Victorian Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act.

The area supports a complex community of plants and animals that is large enough to remain viable if left alone. Also it connects with five corridors of vegetation on little used road reserves which increases its value vastly.

The soil that it exists on is formed from metamorphic rock instead of the granite and alluvial deposits of most of the local area. As a result it contains plant species that do not occur anywhere else locally.

If this piece of land is used as a tip site, then the existing community of plants and animals will be disrupted, even if all the site is not actually used as a tip. Rubbish brought in will contain weed seeds and will also encourage rats and wild cats. There will be increased pressure on native plants and animals. The small creeks running through the block will be diverted away from the tip site. To divert these creeks a sizeable channel would have to be dug through an area of vegetation which is particularly rich in native lilies, peas, grasses and orchids (Wax Lips, Blue Caladenias, Tiger Orchids, Onion Orchids and two species of Sun Orchids).

The creek diversion will also dramatically change the conditions where the vulnerable *Goodenias* are growing and will effectively wipe them out, as they require sites which remain wet all winter and spring. Plans to extend the tip in future years would affect other colonies on the site similarly.

While the Department of Conservation and Environment, Benalla, recommends "that Council

retain ownership of the property and manage it to meet the needs of the community for rubbish disposal, as well as for the conservation of flora and fauna", the Euroa Environment Group considers the two uses to be incompatible.

The Department's current concern is to preserve what little remnant vegetation is left in this country. They are urging farmers to plant native trees and fence off bushland, creeks and waterways, so the proposal to use this piece of land, which has all of these characteristics, is inconsistent with this policy.

A recent development was a visit to the site by two botanists from the Department's Flora and Fauna Branch, Melbourne. Their survey confirmed the accuracy of the botanical/ecological information which we had supplied back in March 1991 and it was recommended that the tip should not be sited on the area, which is deemed to be of state conservation significance. Despite the evidence, Euroa Shire has reaffirmed its intention to proceed with the tip.

As something has to be done about Euroa's rubbish it seems that the possibility of a recycling centre is worth considering. The state government's Resource Recovery Bill offers financial incentives to recycle more effectively, and it seems a good opportunity for Euroa to move in this direction. It could either retain the Drysdale Road property as a reserve or sell it to the Victorian Conservation Trust to administer and preserve for all Victorians. The Shire could then use the money to set up a recycling plant.

Both these problems are world-wide problems - the loss of native vegetation and the disposal of vast amounts of rubbish produced by modern societies.

If the Euroa Shire could find a way of dealing with these important issues, they would be seen as an innovative shire prepared to come to terms with the problems of the current age. It seems they are locked into their present course by outmoded attitudes which view the land as a "bit of scrub", and by the political advantage in avoiding another land purchase.

Euroa Environment Group has sought out a number of alternative sites, and is pursuing the option of a state-wide fund-raising effort to purchase the present site. I wonder how IFFA feels about such things and whether it may be able to bring some pressure to bear on the relevant decision makers.

- Ray Thomas, (057) 952429

# BOOK REVIEW:

## **The Flora of Melbourne**

Society for Growing Australian Plants Maroondah Group,  
paperback, 300pp, 1991, RRP \$39.95.

**Reviewed by Lincoln Kern**

This long awaited book is finally out and available. It should certainly prove extremely useful to anyone who works with indigenous plants. The first part of the book contains articles that cover the essentials of many crucial topics, from the vegetation and soils of Melbourne to environmental weeds, bush regeneration, seed collection and plant propagation. The contributing authors are acknowledged experts in their respective fields and have done an excellent job of presenting the important information in an easily readable manner. They have also presented an extensive bibliography for further reference. It is wonderful to finally have all this information in one volume where it is easily accessible.

The section on indigenous plant communities is especially detailed and useful. The Melbourne region is broken down into four major ecological zones: basalt plains, Silurian-derived sedimentary hills, tertiary sands and coastal areas. The major plant communities within each zone are then described including the most important tree, shrub and ground flora species. It is also very specific about where, which creek valley or suburb, these communities were once found so that anyone can get a clear idea of what originally grew in their particular area.

The second section comprises plant descriptions for over 1,000 indigenous species within the Greater Melbourne region, from the tallest trees to the smallest herb. Each description includes a detailed line drawing with information on the size of the plants' foliage and flowers and details of its' native habitat, moisture requirements and where it is found within the Melbourne area. The locations are detailed by number; specific reserves and suburbs are listed in a separate chapter. This enables the reader to know exactly where this plant has been found already, by habitat and location.

The plant descriptions are a valuable resource but they have their shortcomings. The plants are organised by genera in alphabetical order (within separate sections for dicots, monocots and ferns) and there is no key to enable the reader to identify a plant that they don't know to that level. However, the descriptions are probably detailed enough to differentiate species within the genus, once you get there. It would be hard to use this book alone for basic plant identification but it

would still be immensely useful for working with existing lists for specific reserves or in combination with the other plant identification books that are available.

The Flora of Melbourne was definitely worth the wait and it is destined to be a standard reference book for many years, despite any shortcomings. It is certainly an excellent resource for anyone working with indigenous plants, from home gardeners to any user or manager of public land. It contains the basic information necessary to determine what indigenous plants used to grow or still do on any block of land within the Melbourne region. It is also a basic yet comprehensive resource to learn about the skills and methods needed to restore or reestablish indigenous plant communities. Yet another excellent and possibly essential addition to your library, especially if you live in the greater Melbourne region.

Available at the Greens Bookstore and other good book retailers. IFFA will be buying copies wholesale and reselling them for \$32 (\$7 off the recommended retail price) to IFFA members only. Contact Graeme Lorimer (03) 7285841 after 26 March.

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### **A new Minister at last.**

It is with great relief that we say goodbye to Steve Crabb as Minister for Conservation and Environment. He has been replaced in the Victorian Cabinet reshuffle by Barry Pullen. The new Minister moves across from the Education portfolio, and has a long-standing interest in conservation issues. He is said to have a completely different style to the previous Minister who was confrontational at best. One of Barry Pullen's first acts in his new position was to talk to and meet his new staff and already has spoken with conservation groups. He has also had the office walls removed which symbolized so well the barrier between the previous Minister and his staff.

IFFA welcomes the new Minister.

Unfortunately Steve Crabb retains Water Supply in his portfolio, along with Tourism. There is plenty of damage that can be done to these departments (and by them).

# Coming events:

## BARWON REGION ENVIRONMENT FESTIVAL

On Sunday, 15 March, a large number of environmental groups from all around the Geelong region (that is, from the Bellarine Peninsula to Apollo Bay) will be meeting together for the first time at the scenic Bellbrae oval in Torquay. The groups cover a broad spectrum of environmental interests with each group setting up information displays for the public. Guest speakers start at 11.30am and include:

**John French**, Senior Principal Research Scientist, CSIRO Division of Forest Products - "Termite Biology and Control".

**Mary White**, President of Angair - Opening address "Caring for the Environment".

**Brendon Edgar**, Department of Conservation and Environment - "Land for Wildlife".

**Geoff Carr**, Director of Ecological Horticulture; President of IFFA - "Environmental Weeds".

**Dewey Buttonshaw**, Earthworm presenter - "International Ecological Awareness".

**Rob Gell**, Australian Conservation Foundation Councillor; Channel 9 television personality - "Environmental Networking".

**Joan Lindros**, President Geelong Environment Council - Discussion / resolution.

Environment group information displays start at 9.30 am. The program is followed by music from 4.45 pm - 7.30 pm, featuring **Blue Earth Band**.

For further information contact Graeme Stockton of **SANE** - Surfers Appreciating Natural Environment, phone: (052) 48 6528.

## THE VICTORIAN WILDFLOWER SHOW AND PLANT SALE.

Theme is: **Plant in Autumn, using native plants and let nature do the watering.**

April 4 & 5, Sat-Sun., 9.30am-4.30pm on both days.

At the National Herbarium, Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne. Birdwood Ave, Sth Yarra.

Organised by the Society for Growing Australian Plants - Victoria.

\$2.50 adults, children under 14 free.

Contact Nicky Rose, (SGAP - Vic.) (03) 763 8904, or (03) 698 4301 (BH).

## 1992 ANNUAL FERN SHOW

4 & 5 April. Nunawading Horticultural Centre.

Organised by The Fern Society of Victoria. Contact Bob Lee (03) 836 1528.

## Conferences

March 23-27. **Catchments of Green**. A National Conference on Vegetation & Water Management, Adelaide. Organised by Greening Australia. The conference will address the role of vegetation systems in line with themes: catchment planning, community action, groundwater, irrigation, streams and wastewater. For more information contact: Mr Ted Allender - Convenor, 'Catchments of Green' Conference, Greening Australia, PO Box 232, Kensington Park, South Australia, 5068. Fax (08) 332 8810.

July 12-18. **International Congress of Arachnology**.

This congress will be held in Brisbane. For more details and registration forms contact The Secretary, XII International Congress of Arachnology, Queensland Museum, PO Box 300, Sth Brisbane, Qld 4101.

## Lectures/Talks

Thursday 20 Feb, 7.30pm. **Fern Propagation Methods Other Than From Spore**. Speaker: Chris Goudey. Main topic at General Meeting of the Fern Society of Victoria. At the National Herbarium, South Yarra. Bernadette Thomson (03) 399 1587.

Friday, 21 Feb, 8pm. **Victorian Entomological Society**, General meeting. **Talk by Dr Don Dahlsten**. Clunies Ross House, 191 Royal Parade, Parkville. Ken Walker (03) 419 5200.

Monday 2 March, 7.30pm. **Fungi** by Tom Sault. Organised by the Southern Peninsula IFFA (SPIFFA). At the Waterfall Gully Community Centre, Melways map 170, Ref G4, corner of Nixon St & Bayview Rd, Rosebud South. Mark Adams (059) 85 1122.

Tuesday, 3 March, 8pm. **Forestry and its Effect on Wildlife**. Talk given by Richard Loyn. Part of the Annual General Meeting of the Fauna Survey Group. National Herbarium, Birdwood Ave, Sth Yarra. Felicity Garde (03) 808 2625.

Monday, 16 March, 8.00pm. **Vegetation of Victoria's Wetlands** - an illustrated talk by Doug Flood. Organised by the Society for Growing Australian Plants - Victoria. Herbarium Hall, Birdwood Ave., Sth Yarra. Enid Bowman (03) 882 5297.

Thursday 19 March, 7.45pm. **Restoration of Herbs**, by Keith McDougall. Keith will be describing the work he has done with Kangaroo Grass restoration at Organ Pipes. Also he will be discussing the restoration of herbs which now only survive at a few remnant sites on the Kellor Plains. Followed by a talk on the Park work plans for 1992, by Head Ranger: Matthew LeDuc. Organised by the Friends of the Organ Pipes. At the Information Centre, Organ Pipes National Park. Carl Rayner (03) 337 4936.

## Excursions and field trips

29 February. Fauna Survey Group, **Leadbeater's Possum Survey**. Ray Gibson (03) 874 4408. Also on 14 & 28 March.

7-15 March. **Seven day tour of Lord Howe Island**.

Leaders: Ian Hutton, naturalist and author of three books on Lord Howe and several scientific papers on the flora and fauna. Ross Pearson, TAMS Tour Manager, walker, historian and birdie. This tour is part of the Australian Museum Society's "Going Places" program. Cost: \$1,770 per person, all inclusive. For bookings and enquiries, (02) 339 8225.

7-9 March. **Wilson's Promontory post-fire study**. Fauna Survey Group. Anne Casey (03) 380 8290.

A large range of activities such as bushwalks and "Friends" activities are published by the **Victorian National Parks Association** in their newsletter. For details contact VNPA (03) 650 8296.

## Restoration Activities

### February

- 22 Sat 4pm. **Mt. Eliza Assoc. for Environmental Care** project day. Anne Read (03) 787 2034. Also on Sun 23, 10am & the 4th weekend of March.
- 22 Sat 9.30am. **Friends Of Sherbrooke Forest.** Weeding. Vivien Freshwater (03) 754 3093. Also on 28 March.
- 22 Sat 10am. **FO Hanging Rock.** Seed collection - meet at the tea room. Barbara Strange (054) 26 1687.
- 23 Sun 11am-4pm. **FO Royal Park West.** Mel 29, C12. Seed collecting and weed removal. Adam Muyt (03) 386 7491.
- 23 Sun 2 pm. **FO Victoria's 1st Settlement site - Sorrento.** Stuart Sherrin (059) 84 1953.
- 23 Sun 12-3pm. **Earthcare St Kilda & St Kilda Council - every Sunday.** Neil (03) 536 1491.
- 23 Sun 10am. **FO Wildlife Reserves - La Trobe Uni.** George Paras (03)479 2871.
- 23 Sun 10am-1pm. **Nunawading Indigenous Plants Project.** Margaret Witherspoon 878 5998.
- 26 Wed 10am-3pm. **FO the Yarra Galatea Pt, Mel 2D, D7.** Judy (03) 347 2252. Also Sun 8 March.
- 27 Thurs. **FO Warrandyte SP** propagation day. This event takes place every Thursday. Other revegetation activities on weekends. Ian or Margaret Burke (03) 844 2659.

### March

- 1 Sun 9.30am. **FO Buckley Falls.** Tony Woolford (052) 43 6340.
- 1 Sun 10am-1pm. **FO Braeside Park.** Meet at visitors centre, car park no. 1. Working bees every 1st & 3rd Sunday. Andrew Graystone (03) 551 1640.
- 7 Sat 10am. **Green Link Box Hill.** Working activities day. These events are also held every Monday and Tuesday morning. Council Nursery in Nelson Street, Box Hill, but confirm with Minette (03) 898 1364.
- 7 Sat. **FO Gellibrand Hill Park.** Jenny Caddaye (03) 744 6093.
- 7 Sat. **FO French Island.** Jus a smidg o work t b done! Fay or Clive (03) 772 9668.
- 8 Sun 10am. **FO the Helmeted Honeyeater** work group. Meet at the Yellingbo store. Mark Ashby (059) 66 2681.
- 8 Sun 9.30am. **Stony Ck weeding group.** Mark Gardner (03) 844 3799 (H), 844 2659 (W).
- 8 Sun. **FO Brisbane Ranges N.P. & Steiglitz Park.**

Nola Haines (052) 29 6388.

- 8 Sun 3-5pm. **Green Link Camberwell.** Meet at the corner of Dion St & Welfare Pde. Dianna Burgess (03) 809 2092.
- 14 Sat 9-9.30 start. **FO Organ Pipes** work day. Robert Bender (03) 499 2314.
- 15 Sun 10am **Men of the Trees.** Deep Rock, Yarra Bend Park. Minette Russell Young 898 1364.
- 15 Sun 10am. **Friends of Eltham Copper Butterfly.** Meet at Eucalypt Rd. Elaine Braby (03) 439 9015, or Ranger (03) 844 2659
- 15 Sun. 10am-12noon. **Brunswick Tree Group** Moonee Ponds Ck. Eric Ward (03) 388 2123.
- 21 Sat. **FO Churchill N.P. & Lysterfield Lake Park.** Neal Smith (03) 873 2635.
- 22 Sun 10am-1pm. **Nunawading Indigenous Plants Project - OPEN DAY.** Nunawading Council Horticultural Centre, 82 Jolimont Rd., Forest Hill. Margaret Witherspoon 878 5998.
- 23 Sun 11am-4pm. **FO Royal Park West.** Mel 29, C12. Seed collecting and weed removal. Adam Muyt (03) 386 7491.

The **Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers** coordinate plantings and other restoration activities throughout most of Australia. They take place throughout the week and on week-ends, usually a specified number of volunteers is required and most plantings are indigenous. For further information contact ATCV :

National Headquarters in Ballarat: (053) 33 1483.  
**State Offices:**  
 Melbourne (03) 532 8512. Bendigo (054) 41 6666.  
 Wodonga (060) 241 061  
 NSW (02) 411 4254  
 South Aust. (08) 207 8748  
 ACT (06) 290 1756  
 Tasmania (003) 41 5413  
 Queensland (07) 210 0330  
 NT (089) 812 848

## Queensland

**Get to know your Native Plants - Identification and Pressing.** Sunday 15 March, 9am-11am. Beryl Roberts Park, Cooper Plains. Part of Bushland Care Program. Please RSVP if attending, Maureen (07) 353 3707.

**Toohy Forest Protection Society.** Meets first Monday of the month. Confirm details with Shirley Walton (07) 848 1036.

**Thank you to all the people who contact us regarding on coming events their groups are organising. If other people wish to have their events covered, please get in touch with Dimi Bouzalas, (03) 386 0264**

**Visitors/participants are welcome to all events listed in Indigenotes**

# from the chronicles of early Melbourne:

## **Black Thursday**

Here continues extracts from 'The Chronicles of Early Melbourne', a compilation published in 1882 based on extracts from early papers by Edmund Finn, writing as Gary Owen.

"The day following the Easter Sunday of 1351 is commemorated in English History as "Black Monday" because, in the language of the quaint old chronicler Stowe, it "happened to be full dark of mist and hail, and so cold that many men died on their horses' backs with the cold", and by an extraordinary providential contrast, five hundred years after (6th February 1851) there was a Black Thursday in Port Phillip, so called from the country being overwhelmed with fire and smoke, as if a destroying angel had winged its way through the air, scattering firebrands far and wide; its wake lit up with flaming forests, the fire and smoke, as if waging a war with each other, spreading consternation and dismay throughout the length and breadth of the Province.

From an early hour in the morning a hot wind blew from the north-north-west, and as noon approached, vast gusts of dust enveloped the town to such an extent as to obscure the rays of the sun. The atmosphere became so dense as to render outdoor life almost intolerable, for every mouthful of air was like flame puffing out of a furnace, which, added to a strong stifling smell of smoke, reduced anything in the form of physical work or exercise to nearly an impossibility. Short, hot, blinding spurts of wind whizzed into the wayfarers face, so stunning in their effect as to make him imagine himself ablaze, an illusion dispelled only when he felt and found his clothes unburned and his hair unscorched; and when the dust got a chance it half-choked him. Not only out-door, but mostly all in-door avocations were suspended for three or four hours in the midday, and the Supreme Court was compelled to strike work by adjourning the business, and giving lawyers and suitors a half-holiday. At 12 o'clock the thermometer of Fahrenheit was 110 degrees in the shade and 129 degrees in the sun at the shop of Brentani, a jeweller in Collins Street. In the evening a reviving southerly breeze began to blow, before which the pestilential exhalations of the day vanished, and a grateful feeling of relief was the result; whilst later on some showers of deliciously refreshing

rain fell like manna from the heavens.

There was then not only no electric telegraph communication, but scarcely any communication, unless a slow and scattered course of post, so that it was not possible for the townspeople to obtain any intelligence from even a few miles in the country until next day, and the citizens accordingly strayed forth in small groups to the Flagstaff and Batman's Hills to look about them, in the expectation of beholding some distant indications of anything that might have happened in the interior. All that was observable was a reflected glare from the south and south-east, and an occasional temporary illumination - a sudden flare of light like a house on fire a few miles from town which immediately disappeared. This was afterwards ascertained to be about Dandenong, where great preparations had been made for a Race

**"every mouthful of air  
was like flame puffing  
out of a furnace"**

meet that day; but a bushfire rushed the course, causing both sport and sportsmen to decamp without ceremony, and doing such general damage that the inn was about the only house left standing in the neighbourhood. Three newspapers were issued the next morning, and, singular to record, only a tame six-line paragraph referring to the day before appeared in the Herald, the Argus observed a solemn silence, whilst the Daily News exploded in the following hyperbolic style: "Yesterday was the most oppressively hot day remembered in the colony. The sirocco that prevailed during the day was as hot as the blast of a furnace - really scorching; clouds of dust accompanied by stifling heat penetrating every building in the city. People going out on business were like millers dealing in very dirty flour. If readers can imagine the atmosphere of dust, ashes, steam, heat and suffocation that one might experience in looking into Mount Etna immediately after its being extinguished by a waterspout, they can form a tolerably fair idea of Melbourne on the 6th February, 1851." If the volcanism and waterspouting be excised from above, there is a strong substratum of reality in it.

But it was not long before accounts of woe and desolation came trooping into town, and for a week after every wind that blew

bore upon its wings tales of general ruin, individual losses, and suffering that harrowed those who listened to them. East, west, north and south joined in the same refrain of the ravages caused by the bush conflagrations. Amongst the Plenty Ranges the calamity was hardly capable of description. The fire had, it was said, originated in that quarter through the carelessness of two bullock-drivers, who had camped on the Wednesday evening by the Diamond Creek, and left some logs burning when they went away next morning; these setting fire to the long drought-parched grass, the flames spread everywhere, and fanned by the hot winds fired the bush in every direction. The conflagration sped along to the surrounding ranges, and the whole country side was so rapidly turned into a billowy ocean of fire, that the few settlers looked on half dead with fear, and, in the words of one of them, "thought there was no end of the world." The fire kept enlarging its orbit, rolling about like some huge monster, destroying everything it touched, its track marked by charred timber, embers and ashes, cries and lamentations. Not content with dashing along the ground, it ran up the highest trees, and the flames leaped in monkey fashion from tree to tree. The scrub and brushwood were ignited as if by the wind, which acted as an avant courier in piloting the course of the fiercer element. The fire also glided swift as lightning along the margins of the several creeks up one side and down the another, and some of the people ruined by its operation, never even saw it until it crashed in about them with a crackling and roaring clamour positively astounding. A shepherd in the employ of Dr. Ronald saw a large column of fire appear suddenly on top of a hill opposite to where he was, deploy, and make rapidly towards him, when he rushed to his hut to warn his wife, who, who with their child, had just time to save themselves by taking refuge on some burned ground over which the blaze had passed. All the chattels they recovered was half a blanket, and some of the personal effects which sought to be rescued were burned in the man's arms. The damage done in the Plenty district was considerable. An unfortunate settler named M'Lelland lost his wife, five children, home and 1100 sheep. Mr. John Bear suffered much loss of cattle, and more than 100 persons were left homeless and penniless. A farmer named M'Pherson left home on the Thursday morning to borrow a threshing-machine, but on returning in a couple of hours he found all

## Snippets:

his worldly property a heap of ashes. Everyone about there was more or less a loser, and there was nothing talked of but the fire and its horrors. Mr. John Harlin was nearly quite burnt out. Every inch of the fencing at his place was destroyed, and four men in his employ only saved themselves by plunging into a waterhole. One Edward Doversdale was with a mate herding cattle when the flames encircled them. The mate escaped to an eminence clear of timber and grass within a short distance, and Doversdale jumped into a creek, where he was afterwards found so

### **"From the Plenty head to Diamond Creek was one vast area of desolation"**

mained that he was conveyed to the Melbourne Hospital, and died after lingering in excruciating agony for a week. Every place was a scene of misery and lamentation; the dead carcasses of sheep, horses and cattle blocked up the waterways and thoroughfares; and an excursion such as I made in that quarter two days after was a sickening trip to take. ...Another remarkable occurrence was the finding in several places hundreds of dead opossums and snakes, some of the latter several feet long. From the Plenty head to Diamond Creek was one vast area of desolation; and had not the wind changed at a critical period of the day, many believed that the ruin would have travelled along the Yarra to Heidelberg, and thence by the Merri Creek to the Moonee Ponds. The country between Geelong and Ballarat suffered extensively, and much property for miles around Geelong, especially on the Barrabool Hills, the western side of the Moorabool, and the Leigh. ...Ballan, Bacchus Marsh also suffered, and Buninyong forest was for several days in a furious blaze. ...Mount Macedon was lit up in numerous places in a style that would gladden the hearts of the Druids of antiquity, whose worship the old Baal-fires were instituted, and three men were known to perish there; whilst along the overland route to Sydney commencing at Campbellfield, and on by Kinlochewe and Donnybrook, much injury was done. ....No quarter of the district escaped, for the conflagration might be said to be general, from Gippsland to the Murray, and from the Plenty to the Glenelg. At the Pyrenees, for a distance of fifty miles, the fires skipped in every direction, playing

## **Blackberry Rust finally released**

After twelve years of research at the Keith Turnbull Institute the long awaited Blackberry rust has been released by DCE in the Alps and East Gippsland. The Department has targeted a number of areas including the Snowy River and Alpine National Parks as well as sites around Orbost and Cann River. They expect to release more when further quantities become available. They also ask bushwalkers planning trips in known blackberry areas to assist the spread of it. To find out how call Kim Robinson or Neville Byrne on (03) 412-4011.

The rust does not affect commercial or indigenous species of berries. The fungus causes major defoliation, prevents tip rooting, kills young seedlings and reduces the amount of berries produced. This will make it easier for competing vegetation (indigenous and exotic?) to regenerate, thus crowding out the blackberries. It is not expected that the rust will completely eliminate the blackberry problem. But hopefully, less toxins will be going onto the land and into our waterways.

**Source: Potoroo Review No. 127 January-February 1992 and VNPA Newsletter Vol.1 No. 11 February 1992**

some curious pranks, skirting a marked-out road or small creek in their courses, and not crossing them; then suddenly jumping over, disdainingly to meddle with small trees, and when they were impeded by one of uncommon height or width, clutching it without mercy, and chocking it off with an explosion like a gun-shot. The Loddon country was fire swept over a large portion of its superficies, and for six days the conflagration held high revel on the Wimmera. Colac was not spared, and disastrous intelligence was received from the "far west". Over what was then known as the "Portland country", the bush was on fire in every direction, and creeks and waterholes were never known to be so low.

## **Roadside Environment Awards**

Many readers will be familiar with these awards organised by the Victorian Roadsides Conservation Committee Inc. They aim to promote the conservation management of road and rail reserves, as well as historic, cultural and landscape features.

Individuals and community groups involved in tree planting and revegetation are encouraged to have their efforts recognised by nominating for an award.

There are five categories in the 1991/92 awards. The categories of Natural Environment, Promotion and Publications, and Schools and Education would be of most relevance to readers of *Indigenotes*. Projects which are about restoring degraded land, or part of a revegetation strategy in a recharge area or aim to protect, manage or enhance indigenous vegetation are particularly suitable.

For more information and an application form, contact Anne Dennis, Executive Officer, RCC Inc. P.O. Box 41, East Melbourne 3002. Phone (03) 412 4653.

The Western Port District and the wild Gippsland country, then nearly terra ignota, were not spared. The Dandenong division was devastated by fire in such a manner that every vestige of tillage or verdure was burned from off the ground."

*This is the last extract from the Chronicles of Early Melbourne. Indigenotes readers are welcome to submit extracts from other historical material for publication in Indigenotes.*

## Snippets:

### **Ecology of Sydney Plants Project**

Conventional floras and handbooks provide descriptions for identifying species, but give relatively little ecological and biological data. Yet such data is becoming increasingly relevant to researchers in many fields and to natural area managers, who have the task of trying to predict the ecological consequences of management regimes such as fire frequency, on native vegetation. Such data are also important for environmental impact assessment and for predicting the effects of changes in drainage, water movement, wind exposure or nutrient conditions on plant species and communities. The Sydney region is interpreted broadly, being defined here as by Beadle, Evans and Carolin in the Flora of the Sydney Region. Information provided will be largely complementary to taxonomic descriptions.

The project will be based at the New South Wales National Herbarium and will involve gathering material from published and unpublished sources as well as herbarium records and field observations. Much of the information is difficult to obtain because it is either scattered through a wide range of publications, both scientific and general, or simply not available in written form, but held in the capacious memories of field and herbarium botanists. Direct field observations will therefore supplement the review of literature. The emphasis in the first instance will be on providing information that is available, and the project will inevitably demonstrate a lack of knowledge about many plant species. Collaboration with other ecologists and botanists as well as with other interested people will be sought.

The types of information to be gathered includes: Growth form, longevity, growing season, vegetative spread, time to first flowering, pollen vector, time to first fruiting, fruiting time, time of seed dispersal, seed production, appendages on dispersal unit, seed size, seed weight, seed longevity, dormancy mechanism, dispersal mechanism, germination requirements, interaction with other organisms, distribution, locations, botanical subregions, habitat, typical abundance, vegetation, substrate, soil nutrient, soil drainage, moisture supply, soil salinity, soil ph range, shade, exposure, altitude, annual rainfall, response to fire, seed bank, conservation.

Contact: D.H Benson, National Herbarium of NSW, Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney, Australia 2000. Source: *Cunninghamia* Vol 2(3): 1991.

### **New Yellow Gum subspecies**

In *Muellaria* 7(3):389-403 (1991), Kevin Rule has described a new subspecies within *Eucalyptus leucoxylon* F. Muell. The depleted population of the species around Melbourne and Geelong has now been classified as ssp. *cornata* K. Rule. The name is based on the connation (union of the bases of the leaf blades) of juvenile leaves that is regularly seen in the subspecies. This is the only subspecies of *E. leucoxylon* found near Melbourne. It is plentiful and populations are secure in places like the Brisbane Ranges and Studley Park but there are remnants elsewhere, from Sunbury to Anglesea that aren't.

Source: SGAP-Victoria Newsletter September 1991

### **Fewer fish as Seagrass disappears.**

In August 1991 The Age featured an article on falling commercial fish catches coinciding with the decline of seagrass beds of Westernport. The author of the article, Sheena Maclean reports this as a part of a report issued in August by the Land Conservation Council.

The decline from 250 to 72 square kilometres has occurred in 11 years from 1973 to 1984. Records show a decline in bird life as well as fish species. King George Whiting decline was used as an example.

Seagrass beds provide habitat for juvenile fish species, and although the causes of the seagrass decline remain unproven, the report suggests sedimentation and drainage from settlement as the most plausible explanation.

The 400 page report was released for public comment by the Chairman of the Land Conservation Council, Mr. David Scott. The council will present proposals to the State Government after public discussion. It is available for \$16 through Information Victoria Bookshop and the Department of Conservation and Environment's city, Dandenong, Traralgon and Alexandra regional offices.

Source: *Marine News*, 119, November 1991, and *The Age* Mon 26 August, p. 6.

## Recent articles of interest

Phillips, A. and Watson, R. **Xanthorrhoea: Consequences of 'Horticultural Fashion'** *Vict. Nat.* Vol. 108 (6) 1991 PP. 130-133 This article explores the ecology of Grass-trees and their exploitation within the horticultural industry. The authors question if there can be "sustainable" harvesting of the various species and find that regulations within the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act requiring permits and tags for nursery sales are clearly not enforced.

Adams, R. and Simmons, D. **The invasive potential of *Genista monspessulana* (Montpellier broom) in dry sclerophyll forest in Victoria** *Vict. Nat.* Vol. 108 (4) 1991 PP. 84-89 Many people won't be surprised at the premise of this article but it may still provide some good information about the weed's ecology and control.

### **Growback '91**

This publication was mentioned last month but it deserves more attention. It is meant to be "a forum for the exchange of information and ideas relating to managing remnant vegetation and re-establishing native vegetation in the Australian landscape." The first edition evolved out of several smaller publications and appears to fulfil the editors' intentions quite well. The first half of the book includes detailed articles on a diverse range of topics such as rural dieback, the role of revegetation in salinity control, agroforestry, growing better seedlings and monitoring regeneration. The second half is brief notes from various organisations around Australia, a diverse sampling of inspiring activities with plenty of addresses to find out more. This book was meant to dispel the sense of isolation that people working in the field can easily have and it works. \$10 from Growback Publications P.O. Box 4306, University of Melbourne, Parkville 3052.

**Restoring the balance without killing kangaroos - a look at the mismanagement of Hattah-kulkyne National Park**, Australian Wildlife Protection Council, September 1991. \$5 from AWPC, 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne 3000. An animal rights view of a very complicated issue.

**Have your say - our central highland forests of Victoria**, Australian Wildlife Protection Council, 1991. \$5 from AWPC PO Box 212, Lilydale 3139. Calls for measures which would improve the management of our forest resource, and particularly focusses on Leadbeaters Possum.

**Beach Plants of South East Australia.** By Roger Carolin and Peter Clarke. Sainty & Associates. Box 1219, PO Potts Point, NSW, 2011 or Phone: (02) 332 2661. Cost: \$18.95+\$6.50(p&h).

**Victorian Urban Wildlife**, Ed Jane Wilson, paperback, RRP \$16.95.

Our urban environment contains a variety of wildlife habitats - including wetland, grassland and woodland - which survive today and continue to provide a home to a wide range of birds, mammals and reptiles.

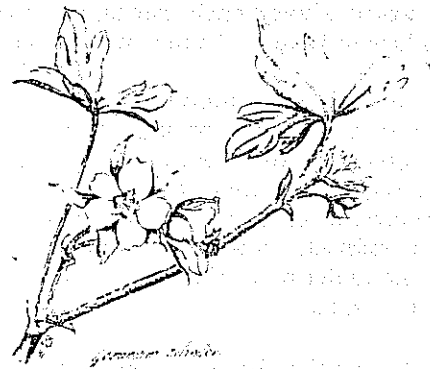
This book is the result of Urban Wildlife Watch, a community recording scheme sponsored by the World-wide Fund for Nature, the Australian Bicentennial Authority, the Victorian Department of Conservation and Environment, and the Board of Works in Melbourne.

With contributions from natural science experts - John Molenaar, Raymond Brereton, Martin Schulz, Harry Breidahl, Andrew Corrick, Alan Reid, Wildlife Watch Coordinator Jane Wilson and Graham Pizzey, this useful guide details the results of Urban Wildlife Watch and includes information on feeding habits, distribution, and breeding patterns of the many mammals, reptiles, birds, fish, frogs, insects and spiders that live among us. The illustrations will help identify native animals and aid wildlife watchers committed to their survival.

Available from DCE or Greens Bookshop, 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne.

William J. Lines 1991, **Taming the Great South Land - a history of the conquest of nature in Australia.**

"A powerful and pioneering study combining environmental, social and political history to record 200 years of implacable exploitation of nature." Available from Greens Bookshop and The Wilderness Society Shop.



# IFFA activities:

## **IFFA Vic**

### **Raffle tickets**

IFFA has received the 30 books of raffle tickets which it is selling as part of the Great Victorian Raffle, organized by the Conservation Council of Victoria. IFFA earns \$750 for itself if it sells all 30 books. Generous prizes. Please help sell tickets. Contact Michele Arundell ASAP on (03) 867 4173.

### **February meeting**

Tuesday 25 February, at 8 pm at the Herbarium Hall, Birdwood Ave, South Yarra 3141. (Melways map 2G 12a). A meeting of the Indigenous nurseries network will be held a 6pm, before the main meeting starts (Contact Murray Ralph for details)

## **IFFA NSW Meeting**

Monday 6 April, 7.30 pm - 10 pm.

At the National Herbarium, Mrs McQuarries Rd, Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney.

Indigenous Flora and Fauna: How ya gonna keep 'em down on the farm. A talk by Greg Stone, rural revegetation consultant and founder of Woodlands Revegetation - Moss Vale. Beyond Sydney's sandstone lie vast areas of agricultural land where indigenous plants and animals are struggling to keep a toehold. Greg will describe the work he does helping to make agriculture and the preservation of indigenous flora and fauna mutually inclusive.

Contact Dante Olbrich (02) 953 7461.

## **Assistant/trainee editors required**

***Interested in helping edit part of Indigenotes on a regular basis? Interested in learning how to create a newsletter on computer, and actually helping to do it?***

Editing Indigenotes requires about 35 or 40 person hours worth of work each month, and the editors would love to have assistance with its production.

We are happy to give training in the use of the computer in exchange for ongoing voluntary help on a segment of the newsletter. Alternatively people might be interested in being 'reporters' for indigenotes, in their local region, or on a particular issue or subject. Reporters need not be Melbourne based, as material, preferably on floppy disk, can easily be mailed.

Contact Tony Faithfull (03) 3860264.

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**Contributions to Indigenotes should be sent to the editors — the deadline for the next issue will be 5 March.**

**The views expressed in Indigenotes are not necessarily those of the Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association.**

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