

WINTER 2017
Newsletter No.50



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Melbourne Water's Community Grants Scheme

Newham & District Landcare Group



Working towards a
healthier environment

Address – PO Box 314, WOODEND, 3442



'Bulldozers' at rest

see page 14

DIARY OF EVENTS

SEPTEMBER

Monday – Sunday 4 – 10

NDLG display in Woodend Library for Landcare Week.

Friday 8

Create a frog pond or turn your dam into habitat. Evening presentation and discussion with Damien Cook, Rakali Ecological Consulting. A selection of water-loving plant species will be available to purchase on the night.

OCTOBER

Planting at Hanging Rock Reserve, details tbc.

NOVEMBER

Saturday 11

Chilean Needlegrass workshop, at Carlsruhe, details tbc.

Wednesday 22

Native Grassland reconstruction with Dr Paul Gibson-Roy at Newham Hall, details tbc.

Friday 24

“What can we learn from listening to nature?” Andrew Skeoch will talk on birds and birdsong. Newham Hall, 7.00pm for 7.30pm.

DECEMBER

Saturday 2

Christmas games and BBQ.

Group contacts

President: Nick Massie. **Vice President:** Karl Kny. **Treasurer:** Hilary Roberts.

Committee members: Doug Dalgleish, Penny Roberts, Jim Sansom and Howard Stirling.

Please consider nominating for the committee as there are spaces vacant.

Secretary: Helen Scott.

New members, general queries: Penny Roberts; 5427 0795.

Roadsides: Sue Massie; 5427 0065.

Newham Primary: Jenny Waugh; 5427 0408.

Animal pests: Replacement to be confirmed. *Thanks to John Luckcock for his contribution to the rabbit eradication and Indian Myna programs. We wish him all the best for his move to Barwon Heads.*

Wesley Park: Fran Spain; 5427 0661.

Flora, library, small tools, grants: Penny Roberts; 5427 0795.

Spray trailer: Currently held by the Roberts family. Contact Penny on 0418396837.

Website: <http://www.newhamlandcare.info/>

The committee meets on the first Monday of the month (February to December) between 7.30 – 9pm in Newham. All members are welcome to attend the Committee meetings to become more involved or raise specific matters. Please advise a committee member if you wish to attend. Meetings start and finish on time... and we enjoy them!

NEWHAM Primary School – SUSTAINABILITY DAY

On the 2nd of August, the CERES Community Environment Park team from Melbourne came to our School to teach us about sustainability for a student organised Sustainability Day.

Tom from the CERES came to school with the Mobile Classroom and taught each class about electricity, sustainable energy and unsustainable energy in an engaging and interesting lesson.

We thought it was interesting to find out how you can use human energy, solar energy, wind energy and water energy to power machines and reduce our reliance on fossil fuels.

We also had our Grade 3/4 class present their videos on rubbish and waste, and offered all students a healthy 'energy neutral' smoothie at lunchtime.

Thankyou to Landcare for helping fund the CERES team to come to Newham Primary School, and to Tom from CERES for sharing your knowledge on sustainability.

**Maddie, Heather and
Savanah-Lei.**



pH Kitchen Garden Session



On June 15 the 4/5 and 5/6 classes learned about pH so we know which soil we need to grow a new plant called exploding cucumbers. In our classroom we mixed cabbage juice and other substances like, shaving foam, apple cider vinegar, red bull and lemon juice to test the pH and see what colour it changes when the pH is different.

First, we mixed the cabbage juice and red bull and it turn out to be a light pink, meaning that it is an acid. Then we mixed shaving foam and the juice and it became a green foamy mixer, showing alkaline. We moved on to the soil testing station. We tested different soils so we could grow exploding cucumbers in the right soil.

We used soil testing kits that Mr Harrison brought to school. All of us had different soils. One group had blueberry soil, Carol's soil from home, kitchen garden soil and Mr Harrison's soil from home. The blueberry soil was 6 to 6.5 and that was the best for the unusual plant we're going to grow.

It was a fun session, Alice said 'I really liked it. I learnt about pH and I didn't know there was such thing as pH!'

Thankyou Newham and District Landcare for funding this session and to Carol for helping and bringing her soil.

Alice and Astrid.

Bush Rangers on Rural Roadsides

This is how two of your members have been described, by Ross Colliver from Riddells Creek Landcare at an introduction to their AGM on 13 August 2017.

Alice Aird and Helen Scott from over the hill at Newham and District Landcare (have) been campaigning to get residents and the Shire to look after roadside vegetation. I think of them as Bush Rangers, a species of citizen scientist, out on the ground, keeping a look out for what's happening, ringing bells and insisting that people think a lot harder about the impact they are having on this beautiful place we live in.

Thanks Ross – what better for a retirement career!

The invitation to present to Riddell's AGM followed from our presentation to a Landcare Professionals Forum run by the Victorian Landcare Council in June (again instigated by Ross, who is on the Management Committee of the VLC). The topic we were given was "Getting Local Government to lift its game on managing roadsides". With some trepidation Alice and Helen put together a Powerpoint presentation outlining the history of our involvement in trying to do exactly this.

Imagine our delight when the room of about 40 Landcare facilitators from all over Victoria erupted into applause, asked questions and took our handouts. The Executive Secretary of the VLC Dr Kaye Rodden said she was not aware of NDLG's activities, but would certainly be taking note in future. She shared a story that really struck a chord with us about her passionate meltdown in response to destruction of her neighbouring roadside verges. It is often feelings that ignite action, as it did for both Alice and Helen. Alice says



It was the pain of losing a more natural bit of roadside that I had been enjoying, but not actively being a custodian of, that made me become more active to conserve these irreplaceable overlooked places. I've discovered that I care deeply about these small patches of "unmanaged" ecology, grateful that my love for these places has been revealed to me. I don't have to go far away to be in nature that is unregulated, wild, still what it is and has been for a long, long time. But I also feel pain, because these exquisite places are mostly unappreciated and therefore unprotected.

Our presentations started with the premise that "Bit by bit, the last priceless fragments of rich and significant biodiverse roadsides in the Macedon Ranges are being lost".

We described how and why this is happening, with slides of good and poor roadsides. Timelines outlined the history of NDLG involvement – acknowledging the work of the Weedies under Sue Massie, and Penny Roberts' fantastic work on the Campaspe-Maribyrnong Headwaters Biolink project (she has secured and administered some \$500,000 in funding grants since 2005 for on-ground works within the Biolink area). We described our educational and information functions and displays, roadside tours with politicians and Shire staff from operations and environment departments, submissions to the Shire's Roadside Management Plan, posters, reports and articles... and the work done by Ranges Citizens for Open Government, Forum for Democratic Renewal and others in the election of more environmentally sympathetic Councillors in November 2017.

For those who have followed the roadside story in our NDLG newsletters much of this will be familiar. All the resources are listed on a page on the website at <http://newhamlandcare.info/roadsides.htm>

The second slide presentation, less provocatively titled *Can we save our rural roadsides? Lessons from the Newham Landcare Experience*, was a good opportunity to refine our thoughts, reflect on lessons learned and speculate – where to now?

There have been some good outcomes recently. The Shire leaflet called *Managing Roadsides*, available at Shire outlets, at last provides good information. We would like to see it in packs for every new resident to the shire and on the Shire website. Penny's constant observations and communications to the Shire about poor practices, plus our work with the officers, is resulting in more collaboration on protocols dealing with roadside practices, and alerts on forthcoming work.

In August several of us drove with Michelle Patrick (MRSC's Environmental Planner, Strategic Planning and Environment), to discuss the least destructive way to control native tree growth close to road edges that poses a safety hazard. A group of NDLG volunteers spent a morning on 31 August undertaking this work on Whitebridge Road, significant for its biodiversity. It's exciting to be part of developing a new protocol for such work for the Roadside Management Plan.



On-site with Michelle Patrick and Helen.

Michelle updated us on the progress of the Roadside Management Plan. Surveys of 50% of Shire rural roadsides are almost complete, mapping is commencing, consultations continue with some Landcare groups and other bodies, and a draft report will be written in the 2017-2018 financial year.

We have learned to capitalise on any opportunity to promote and talk about our cause, for example

- writing to every new councillor in January 2017 asking for support for better resourcing and management to protect rural roadsides across Macedon Ranges Shire (not a lot of response, we need to nudge them again),
- advocating for roadside protection via surveys and submissions (e.g. MRSC's recent tourism draft plan), and consultations (eg VicRoads Regional Roads, and Victorian Environment and Assessment Commission community drop-ins in Woodend in July).

Alice identifies three attitudes contributing to destruction by both individuals and agencies:

- 1 A lack of awareness and concern for the intrinsic values of the assets being lost (particularly of small, visually modest species) and their irreplaceability. – **'It doesn't matter'**.
- 2 The belief that road and fire safety, and cost considerations, come first and are impossible to reconcile with conserving remnant native vegetation on roadsides. – **'It's impossible to do'**.
- 3 Those that do understand the values feeling powerless to change the forces that are resulting in continuing losses and turning away from roadsides as a lost cause. – **'I/we don't have any power to change the status quo'**.

From our experience and that of others we've met through these talks, we have learned that it is when our emotions are stirred we move into action; love for these places and sadness at their destruction can become stronger than a sense of powerlessness.

How could more locals have their own heartfelt moment and take on being custodians of the small wildernesses that remain along some of our rural roads?

What if more people care enough to see a way, however small, that they could individually contribute to the conservation of significant roadside remnants?

Small scale local projects for individuals and groups should be feasible, including mapping, reducing weeds, propagating and planting indigenous species.

What new opportunities might a bigger community of custodians for roadsides see, to influence how roadsides are handled?

Some ideas so far...

How about a photo diary of a favourite 'tiny wilderness'? Citizen scientists recording over time a small portion of a favourite roadside as a place of natural wonder. Such a diary would be both a scientific record and maybe a work of art. Which leads to another idea...

What about getting our artists involved? Roadside remnants are a perfect example of a natural wonder that needs the eyes, ears and hearts of artists to show us their beauty and value.

There are already examples of art that inspires people to become custodians:

- Remember Peter Dumbrovkis's wonderful photographs of the Franklin River? The iconic *Morning Mist*, *Rock Island Bend*, arguably played a part in Bob Hawke's victory in the 1983 federal election. It changed the nation.
- Another magnificent example of how a work of art can change you is the Bob Brown Foundation's film *Tarkine in Motion*.

The Tarkine is a vast wilderness ... of cool temperate rainforest, spanning wild windswept beaches, extensive buttongrass plains and pristine wild rivers. It is of great significance to Tasmania's indigenous people and a relict of the ancient continent of Gondwana and related to temperate forests in Patagonia and the South Island of New Zealand.

One way to experience for yourself how works of art can change how you feel about a wild place is to watch this movie. We have a copy and are willing to lend it out. (Even better, buy your own copy online for only \$22 at http://www.bobbrown.org.au/product_catalog#!/DVD-Movies/c/18970044/offset=0&sort=normal).

Wouldn't it be lovely to have our own inspirational artworks to inspire more custodianship of the wild places in the Macedon Ranges, even the tiny ones left on our roadsides?

Helen Scott and Alice Aird.



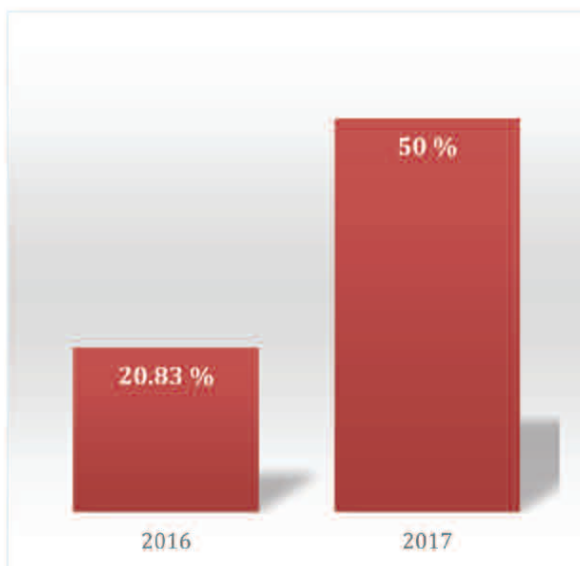
Nestboxes at Hanging Rock Reserve

Background

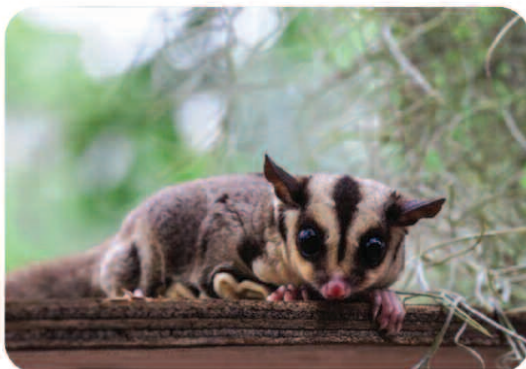
Nestboxes have been installed to monitor two arboreal mammals in Hanging Rock Reserve. Council in partnership with Newham and District Landcare Group installed 24 specially designed nestboxes for monitoring Brush-tailed Phascogale and Sugar Glider in the reserve. Nestboxes were installed around Smokers Creek near the tennis courts and in the northern section of the reserve. Nestboxes have been installed for two years with checks undertaken in April to May each year.

Nestbox activity

Sugar Gliders are the only species using the nestboxes. Phascogale are yet to be detected.



Percentage of boxes being occupied



BLOGS

Blogs are useful online alerts and conversations you can subscribe too.

Here are some of my favourites, along with some good Facebook pages on local environmental groups.

From Forest to Forest <<https://tanyaloos.wordpress.com/>>

Since 2014 Tanya Loos has recorded her nature observations and nature moments – her blog has gorgeous photos, interesting plant sightings, animal behaviour, and other naturalist tidbits.

Tanya is a biodiversity consultant who lives on a bush block near Daylesford; she is currently ornithologist for Connecting Country.

Have you noticed an increase in wombat sightings? I have, in Waterworks Road and Macedon Regional Park behind us. Take a look at Tania's post on 23 June – *Wombats arrive on my street*.

“Those wombats that manage to avoid all the threats (posed by animals, fire, permits to kill...) may find themselves afflicted by sarcoptic mange – a hideous parasite that they catch from foxes. The mites cause the most severe mange affected skin and swelling around the eyes – and the wombat gets very sick indeed, and eventually dies. Happily, wombat lovers and advocates have discovered that they can add a pesticide ointment to a flap on an affected wombat's burrow and this treatment saves the wombat without it having to be captured and taken to a shelter.”

I'm chasing the ointment for one of “my” wombats with mange.

You can also record sightings on a website called WomSAT <<https://www.womsat.org.au/womsat/>>. It encourages people Australia-wide to record their wombat sightings. It has an easy to use map, and you can note whether the wombat was dead or alive, if it suffered from mange, and record burrows.

In 2013 Tanya published a delightful book *Daylesford Nature Diary; six seasons in the foothill forests*, a collection of nature diary articles, set to a specially devised local calendar, and illustrated beautifully throughout – search to buy online.

Nuts about Nature <<https://nutsaboutnaturercl.blogspot.com.au/>>

This is the newsletter of Riddells Creek Landcare which invites sightings, little known facts, species and identifying skills. It has entertaining or timely musings by Ross Colliver – this one struck a chord as we composed our submission this month to the Victorian Environmental Assessment Commission about better protection for the Cobaw State Forest!

“The hills are alive with the sound of chainsaws. They're coming from Sunbury, they're coming from Romsey and Gisborne, with their “go anywhere I want” attitudes, to get firewood and most recently, to camp out. I like these guys (typically, they're guys). They like getting out into the bush. They're not slumped in front of a screen. But with Sunbury set to double, we have a problem! As visitors increase, so does the rate of degradation in Barrm Birm, this year, by an order of magnitude.” (14 July 2017).

Australia's Best Ecology Blogs

Ian Lunt from Charles Sturt University has “put to sleep” his great blog *Ecology for Australia – one blog at a time* which I wrote about in 2015, but left its great articles online at <<https://ianluntecology.com/about/>>.

He then created *Australia's Best Ecology Blogs*, which showcases the best blogs on nature and ecology by Australian scientists and naturalists. It has been taken over by a new site manager and you can follow it on Facebook – <<https://www.facebook.com/Best.Ecology.Blogs>>.

Connecting Country

<<https://connectingcountry.org.au/>> and on Facebook at <<https://www.facebook.com/connectingcountry>>.

CC is a community-based not-for-profit organisation that operates at a landscape scale to increase, enhance and restore biodiversity across the Mount Alexander Shire and surrounds in Central Victoria. I subscribe to their e-news and get regular posts about interesting events, news and projects, and love looking at the photo gallery.

Wombat Forestcare

<<https://www.facebook.com/wombat.online/>> and <<http://www.wombatforestcare.org.au/>>.

Wombat Forestcare is an indefatigable community group dedicated to protecting and enhancing the natural ecosystems of the Wombat Forest. They have a wonderful newsletter, great photos and events.

Woodend Landcare <<https://woodendlandcare.wordpress.com/>>.

A record of Woodend Landcare's and other events, plus news, tips and guidelines. See what they do along Five Mile Creek. They have a Facebook page too – <<https://www.facebook.com/WoodendLandcare/>>.

And just to show I'm potty about native plants (and used to do blogs) here is a link to my plant pics from outback travels, in Google's archive. Go to <<http://orseda4.blogspot.com.au/>> and look for Helen's plant photos in Links.

Would you be interested in following a NDLG Facebook page? Do let me know if you think so – maybe volunteer if you would like to do one!

I also promise to make our website at <www.newhamlandcare.info> more colourful and interesting when I learn some new software and invent more time.

Helen Scott.



A
Drop
Of rain is
Like a sudden
Knock on the door.
Unexpected, yet often.
Welcomed with a smile. It
Can brighten your day or ruin
Your plans. It can make you laugh
Or make you sad. Weather the raindrop
Is moving fast or slow, or is big or small
It always gets everyone's attention. A rain-
Drop contains many secrets. It is a bubble of
Anticipation and surprise. It cleanses the earth
It feeds the flowers and fills the holes. The
Raindrop is never silent. It bangs on the
Roof, splatters on the window, or
Splashes in to a puddle.
Raindrop.

Elisha Larter – Grade 6. Newham Primary School

Mowing guidelines

Courtesy of Woodend Landcare <<https://woodendlandcare.wordpress.com/>> their attached article reminds us that wildflowers and grasses will be surfacing soon after winter, putting on new growth and flowering during spring, then setting seed in early summer. We remind Landcare members and locals of the importance of letting native plants drop mature seed and of a sensitive and minimalist approach to mowing remnant native areas.

Don't mow too often, too low, too early.



Mowing within remnant vegetation

Mowing undertaken by Landcare and some locals is valued by many in the community, with the obvious benefit of beautification of the areas and opening up access for walking. The enhanced fire safety for the town is also appreciated by locals and CFA alike.

But within our maintenance of public reserves, walking tracks and vegetation corridors, Landcare also has goals of improving habitat value for native flora and fauna and enhancing biodiversity. We must be careful to retain what pockets of remnant vegetation we have through a sensitive and minimalist mowing regime.

These tips aim to remind Landcare members of the basic do's and don'ts of mowing as part of bush regeneration. Adopting these guiding techniques can assist with the long-term sustainability of preservation and restoration projects in our natural areas, particularly where there is remnant understorey vegetation, significant wildflowers and grassland such as along roadsides, the rail reserve and near Five Mile Creek.

DO

- Value biodiversity in the natural environment
- Avoid mowing entirely in any marked or known high conservation value zones
- Always mow using the highest setting on the mower
- Consider the timing: most plants need to grow until at least early summer if they are to set seed and survive. Limit mowing during spring.
- Only mow access paths or firebreaks that are carefully planned out – keep width to a minimum
- Leave large swathes of high-quality grassland unmown
- Permit untidiness, as it would be in nature and within any healthy grassland
- Avoid mowing of small shrubs, groundcovers and emerging tree seedlings

DON'T

- Mow indigenous grasslands any lower than 100mm, or too frequently. They do not adapt well to repeated mowing and over time will be replaced by more rampant introduced grasses
- Mow areas where wildflowers are known to exist so they have a chance to flower and set seed
- Don't mow unless it is for fire prevention or access
- Add to soil compaction by mowing when the ground is very wet
- Poison around the base of trees with non-selective herbicides just to make mowing easier

Created 2014, updated July 2017

Blue Pincushion (*Brunonia australis*) that thrive in our local landscape if allowed.

Annual General Meeting, Friday 18 August 2017

At a great turnout on a cold night, starting with party pies, nibbles and wine, the AGM was conducted in an exemplary brief time by President Nick Massie. He welcomed the nearly 50 people present, particularly Councillors Natasha Gayfer, Helen Radnedge, and Bill West.

The Committee for 2017-18 was elected as follows: Nick Massie President, Karl Kny Vice President, Hilary Roberts Treasurer, Helen Scott Secretary, and Committee members Doug Dalgleish, Penny Roberts, and Jim Sansom. The rules allow for up to 8 Committee members so further nominations are invited – do consider joining to help NDLG have another successful year. Meetings last about an hour on the first Monday of each month followed by a cup of tea “on the hill” chez Roberts.

Following the AGM, Dr Sophie Bickford, Executive Director of the Central Victorian Biolinks Alliance, gave an informative talk about new scientific research on biolinks and their role in “linking landscapes for conservation at a time of climate change”. Take home messages are that we can all play an active part to strengthen biolinks, and that collaboration is a key. Think for example of scattered paddock trees, waterways regeneration, conservation of roadside vegetation, “messy mosaic links” rather than linear corridors.

A summary will be included in the next newsletter.

VEAC

NDLG made a submission to the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's investigation into public lands in the Central West. VEAC's stated purposes in reporting to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change are to

- a) identify and evaluate the condition, natural and biodiversity values and cultural, social and economic values and the current uses of public land in the specified area
- b) make recommendations for the balanced use and appropriate management arrangements to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural values.

The unique and beautiful environment of Macedon Ranges Shire with high biodiversity values is under constant threat from development pressures, proximity to Melbourne, destructive practices, and inappropriate tourism strategies.

Our submission addressed the Cobaw Forest, Macedon Regional Park and Hanging Rock Reserve, stressing their importance within the Campaspe-Maribyrnong Headwaters Biolink. This is a key area within Victoria as a whole, enabling connectivity between the Wombat Forest and the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative. The Biolink project is a major strategic focus for NDLG – since 2005 funding grants in the order of \$500,000 have been secured and administered to support on-ground works within the Biolink area.

Our major recommendations were that both the Cobaw State Forest and Macedon Regional Park be given higher protection under the *National Parks Act* 1995, to reflect their high conservation values and as part of a vital link of landscape connectivity in central Victoria's fragmented landscape. We recommended a change in the classification of Hanging Rock Reserve, and supported arguments and recommendations made in Friends of Hanging Rock's submission. Full details are in the submissions to be online soon at <<http://www.veac.vic.gov.au/investigation/central-west-investigation>>.

Shrubs for Fodder Workshop

Shrub grazing is a farming practice that gives farmers the potential to carry more stock.

A workshop on the topic, run by the Port Philip & Westernport Catchment Management Authority, was attended by one of our members Ian Rennie, who reported that the speakers (Dr Jason Emms) and the landowner (Jake) were both engaging and informative and provided the following information.

Financially speaking, the major point of the day was that the **inclusion of perennial forage shrubs at about 10-20% of farm area can increase whole farm profit by 15-20%.**

Benefits of adding shrubs to an animal feed system include:

- Increased shade and shelter, as shrubs provide cover and reduce wind speed
- Added stability to the feed system (they fill the gaps when pasture is less abundant, generally in autumn) and enable savings on expensive supplementary feeding which is also labour intensive
- Added diversity to diet by supplying nutrients and minerals that are not be present in pastures
- Shrubs are high in protein, which complements the dry autumn feed which is high in fibre
- Shrubs aid in the control of salinity, water logging and erosion and boost productivity of poor areas
- Shrubs have deeper root systems and so are able to mine nutrients and minerals held in sub soils

Initially, there is a low acceptance of shrubs by the animals and it takes time for them to learn to eat the new plants and for their dietary systems to adapt. Once they gain this experience, they remember it for later years and seem to be able to pass it on to others in the group.

For more detailed information, Jason recommended the following booklets which can be downloaded in PDF form from the internet

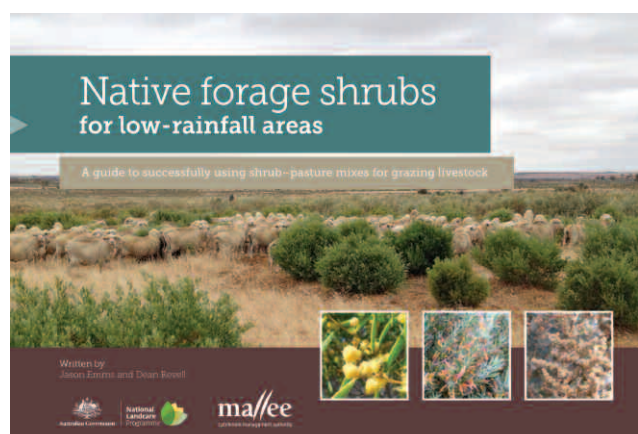
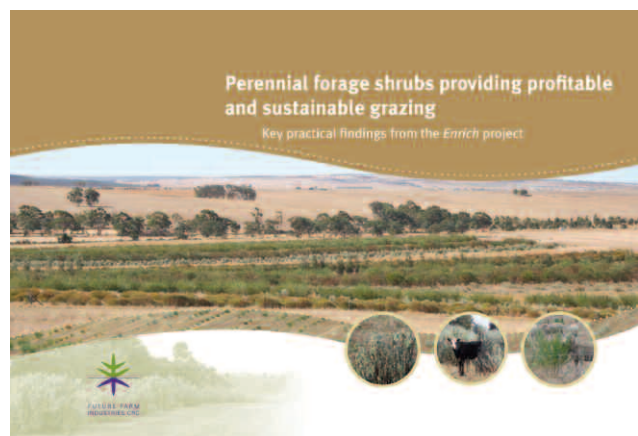
<revellscience.com.au/resources>:

- Perennial forage shrubs – from principles to practice for Australian farms
- Perennial forage shrubs providing profitable and sustainable grazing
- Native forage shrubs for low-rainfall areas – Mallee CMA

Jason also suggested these youtube videos for further information:

- “Enrich forage Shrubs” – an option for problem soils
- “How to” Guide for perennial grazing systems – Dr Dean Revell

A big thank you to Ian Rennie for attending this workshop and providing information for this newsletter.





Penny Roberts received a well-deserved Commendation for the Australian Government Individual Landcarer Award, presented at Government House on 1 September.

Pictured is Penny with Hilary, and nominators Jim Sansom and Helen Scott.

WILDFLOWER WALK

Conglomerate Gully, Riddells Creek

NDLG's Roadside Management Group invites members and guests on Sunday morning, 19 November 2017 to spend a couple of hours in the Conglomerate Gully at Riddells Creek. We will discover wildflowers in a contrasting environment to that typical of the Macedon Ranges.

Starting at 10.00am, the walk will conclude with tea and cake. Dogs are welcome on leads only. Sturdy footwear is essential. Please indicate if you are interesting in attending by emailing <smassie@ozemail.com.au> for directions.



Brigitte's Wildlife Blog

While Karl and I might claim some sort of responsibility for increased wildlife activity in our area through the rehabilitation of orphaned and injured animals over several decades – I would like to remind you all that we couldn't have done it without the enthusiastic support of the Newham community.

Your fundraising efforts and financial support enabled us to build a fabulous wombat enclosure which is known in half of Victoria and is in constant demand, so much so that I am taking bookings up to a year ahead.



And here is how it all started:

Willow Wombat joined our family as a boisterous teenager weighing a whopping 15 kg. Her mother was killed by a car when Willow was a mere 175 gram and she was hand-raised for over 10 months by a human mum. And when we got asked to guide Willow through another lengthy process of teaching her to be wild and independent it seemed a great idea at the time to agree.

Wombats are also called 'bulldozers of the bush', an adult wombat weighs around 40 kg. They are very smart, stubborn, strong, tough, playful and individual characters. In the wild they dig burrows, sharpen their ever-growing teeth on logs and their powerful muscular body just pushes through obstacles – however all these normal traits makes them having in the house a rather challenging experience.

Designing a suitable outside enclosure for Willow was the next challenge. It had to be totally escape-proof – meaning dig-proof, without corners which would be potential weak spots and any gate or entrance had to be thoroughly camouflaged. Choice of building material was limited to products which would not injure the animal by damaging claws, teeth or body. The enclosure had to be big enough that Willow would not get bored while in there for a year or so, had to have some sort of set-up for eventual soft release and be predator safe. Plus it had to look good.

Eventually the design took shape: a big oval of corrugated iron dug into the ground 1.2m deep and clad on the outside with natural timber. The artificial burrow would be a concrete pipe which could be opened eventually to the outside. The gate would be unusable as it would have on the inside corrugated iron as well and screwed onto the walls. Entry to the enclosure would have to be via an A-frame ladder.

Karl's careful planning suffered a minor set-back when I organised a local lad with an excavator to dig the trench which ended up so wide and deep that nobody dared to jump over it, and it was called 'The Moat'. Another startling aspect was the size of the future enclosure: 550 square meters.

At last, with the help of our son, the architectural and construction design was finalised, two trucks delivered various building materials and e-mails and phone calls went out to city and country friends asking for help.

The 'Wombateers' build the enclosure in one action packed, muscle and team building weekend and on Sunday late afternoon Willow was lifted into her new territory where she would stay until her release.

.... to be continued.