

63
AUTUMN –
WINTER 2021

Newham & District Landcare Group



Working towards a
healthier environment

Address – PO Box 314, WOODEND, 3442

Cypress considerations



Our Community

Organising events has proved a juggling act with the ever-present threat of another Covid lockdown but the recent successful *Dinner for new Members*, on 17 April, proved it can be done.

It was so good after the lack of social events during the Covid lockdowns of 2020 to be able to finally meet and introduce members who had joined our Landcare group in the last year. Operating under Covid protocols 'old' members brought wonderful dishes of food and served it to everyone who then sat at tables in the Hall. Doug Dalglish's Mulligatawny soup was a great hit, served in mugs while people mingled before dinner.

Between courses we officially launched the video *Linking the Landscape – the Cobaw Biolink*, Helen Scott telling the story of how it came about. *Wildflowers of Newham and Woodend* also had another run.

Judging by the levels of noise and interactions the evening was a great success. We have plans for another Member Dinner when feasible.

Other events are reported in this issue – the Fauna monitoring project report launch on 24 March, and the Habitat workshop at the Stirling property on 25 April.

Membership for 1921-22 is due by 1 July, still the same \$20 per family it has been since 2004. You can pay via the form on the website to NDLG's bank account, or cash to a committee member.

Coming events

13 August: AGM, with guest speaker(s).

28 November: Field day at *Kolora*. A repeat of the very successful 2019 event looking at works undertaken on the Kny property over the past 20+ years.

4 December: Christmas BBQ and games.

Do let us know if you have a suggestion for an event.

Our community has rallied to help one another with chainsaws, food, showers, battery charging and generators. The clean up will take time and we thank the tireless workers of the SES, Powercor, CFA, Telecoms, and the Shire in assisting us.

Group contacts

President: Howard Stirling 0432 809 314. **Vice-President:** Karl Kny 0409 543 061.

Treasurer: Rob Lawrence 0409 204 909.

Secretary, Website: Helen Scott 0412 582 526.

Committee members: Doug Dalglish 0428 571 465, Natasha Gayfer 0467 770 009, Stephen Mahon 0407 027 352.

New members, general queries: Penny Roberts; 0418 396 837 and Helen Scott 0412 582 526.

Roadsides: Sue Massie; 5427 0065.

Library: Held at Kny property, contact Karl 0409 543 061.

Small tools, equipment, cameras: Rob Lawrence 0409 204 909 and Howard Stirling 0432 809 314 (cameras).

Spray trailer: Stephen Mahon 0407 027 352.

Website: <https://newhamlandcare.info/> Keep checking the website for other updates under *What's New*.

The committee meets on the first Tuesday of the month (February to December) between 7.30 – 9pm at the Newham Hall. We invite anyone else interested in our activities to put up your hand for a Committee role. 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!



Male Drooping Sheoke, heavily releasing pollen.

She-oaks or sheokes

Casuarina or Allocasuarina

Thanks for this article to David Cheal, a friend of NDLG and Communications secretary of Campaspe Valley Landcare.

Although eucalypts are the dominant trees in Australia, they're not our only trees. Casuarinas are also part of the Victorian landscape and were once dominant and widespread thousands of years ago.

In Victoria, we have six species of casuarina trees, and a larger number of shrubby casuarinas, these latter mostly in heathlands.

They all belong to the family Casuarinaceae (the ending '-aceae' is applied to all plant family names – yes, 'the family Casuarinaceae' is a tautology...). This family has traditionally been considered a major outlier in plant classification. We just could not see what its relatives were. It seems so odd, not like any other plants, just a weirdo, out on its own. All species are functionally leafless. The work of photosynthesis is done by modified stems, with the (true) leaves reduced to microscopic scales circling the stems. Although not a conifer (the group that includes pine trees), it seems to have cones to hold its seeds. Plant classification is largely based on the flowers, but the casuarina flowers are so reduced that they don't look like anything else.

But with advances in genetics, we can now investigate them in depth and it turns out that the Casuarinaceae is part of a larger cluster of families that includes Oak trees, Beeches, Elms and other trees familiar to Europeans. Indeed, the nearest relatives are in the Birch family. With the benefit of hindsight, we can now see that when you look very closely at the papery 'fruit' of Silver Birch trees we find their similarity to the cones of casuarinas.

Are casuarinas she-oaks or sheokes? 'She-' is an old English prefix that once meant 'not as good as' or 'lesser'. So a she-devil was a lesser devil, not the main game. The timber of casuarinas was seen as reminiscent of oak timber, but not quite as good or useful, hence 'she-oak'. However 'she' is also the feminine pronoun and that use is now so entrenched that 'she-devil' has come to mean a female devil, a shrew or harridan. Perhaps it's time to recognize that, almost universally, 'she' now refers to women and the older meaning of 'inferior' should be relegated to history.

Furthermore, we quite happily use made-up names for Australian animals or plants. Wombats were initially referred to as 'badgers', because they were short-legged, dumpy and lived in holes, like European badgers. When Europeans discovered lyrebirds they were called 'Native Pheasants'. We now have better and more useful names that recognize the distinctiveness of the Australian flora and fauna. Sometimes these names are adaptations of older names from elsewhere. 'Goanna' came from 'Iguana', a Spanish-Mexican name for a large lizard. But 'goanna' is now a perfectly useful and good Australian English innovation. Surely it's time to use our own words for our flora and fauna; words such as 'sheoke' and 'buloke' (not bull-oak). The Shire of Buloke has settled on the uniquely Australian spelling.



Allocasuarina luehmannii (Buloke) Woodland from Wyperfeld National Park.

The scientific name for all sheokes was once *Casuarina*. All the members of this distinctive group of plants were lumped into '*Casuarina*'. With better genetic understanding, we now realize that there are distinctive groups of species within this wider *Casuarina*. So, we now have some species still in *Casuarina* (such as *Casuarina pauper* or Belah), while many more have been moved into the related group usefully named *Allocasuarina* ('allo-' is a Greek prefix meaning 'other'). The local Drooping Sheoke is scientifically *Allocasuarina verticillata*, and the Black Sheoak is *Allocasuarina littoralis*.



Casuarina pauper (Belah) Woodland from the far north-west Mallee.

What's in a name? As has been said before, 'That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet' (W. Shakespeare from *Romeo and Juliet*). But names indicate (evolutionary) relationships, shared characteristics. Sheokes improve soil fertility by fixing nitrogen to nitrate in their roots (horticulture in highland New Guinea requires a fallow period of *Casuarina oligodon* to restore soil fertility for the next crops, and provide one of the best local timbers for



Allocasuarina verticillata with fruit.



Both varieties.

building and firewood). Nitrogen fixation has not been thoroughly investigated for all species of *Casuarinaceae*, so we extrapolate from the few to the many, because each species is a variation on the same theme.

The most common local species is Drooping Sheoke, which relies on wind pollination. Like many species of casuarina, it has separate male and female plants. The females have the cones. The males release pollen (*pic. page 3* – the orange tree crown is a male Drooping Sheoke, heavily releasing pollen).

David Cheal. *Honorary Research Fellow*, Centre for Environmental Management, School of Health & Life Sciences. Federation University Australia. PO Box 663, Ballarat, Victoria.



Six of the 17 *Casuarina* species and all 59 *Allocasuarina* ones are endemic to Australia. The local ones tolerate dry spells, heat, frost and neglect, and make lovely groves. We love outback camping under

groves of Desert Oak (*Allocasuarina decaisneana*) listening to the characteristic whispering of a soft breeze through the foliage. It has the largest fruit in the whole family and is the only species found in our central deserts.

The exhibition – *She-oak and Sunlight: Australian Impressionism* – at NGV Australia in Federation Square until 22 August, highlights the status of this family.

There is another interesting article on Drooping Sheoaks by Stephen Murray at <https://www.recreatingthecountry.com.au/blog> – March issue. It points out that *Allocasuarina verticillata* was a prominent tree throughout the southern part of Australia before white settlement, because they were cultivated for their many values by the Traditional Owners. There is a lovely story by Frances Bodkin, a D’harawal woman from Sydney called *How Sheoaks came to be*.

Stephen’s website and blog is a treasure trove of information and entertainment, with stories about our indigenous plants and animals, articles on environmental issues and ways of designing landscapes that mimic nature and brings biodiversity back to our gardens and back paddocks. It was flattering to be asked to contribute my photo essay on Snow Gums (in NDLG Newsletter 60) as a guest blogger for the latest issue.

His companion text, *Recreating the Country: a blueprint for the design of sustainable landscapes*, is in the NDLG library, or can be purchased at <https://www.recreatingthecountry.com.au/rtc-the-book.html>

Helen Scott.



Desert Oaks on the Gary Junction Road near NT/WA border.



A tale by new members

Dear Reader, imagine if you will, an adventurous Canberra couple whose children have finally stirred their stumps and left the family home. They are sad to see them leave but relish the opportunity to do whatever takes their fancy. Do they seize the opportunity of their new-found freedom to travel the world, walk the Camino, or indulge in sampling gastronomic delights and theatre packages? No, they buy a neglected 170 acre rural conservation property on the outskirts of Woodend, abundant with wonderful natives but also infested with lavish amounts of the *Holy Trinity* – gorse, blackberry and English broom. Yes, Dear Reader, we are that couple – Andrew and Tina!

We bought our beloved property in 2018 and tried to attack the *Holy Trinity* from afar for several years, travelling south six or so times a year. But last year, we finally admitted defeat and agreed we had to move to Victoria if we were ever going to make inroads. So late last year, we sold up our family home in Canberra, moved to Yarraville and started spending most weekends on *The Farm*. Note: We somewhat wistfully call it *The Farm*, as one day soon we will surely build our farmhouse and be ready to plant or graze something. For the moment though,



Heading for the cover of the ridgeline.

our produce only extends to a fine line in woody weeds.

And boy have we got serious. We had already been mulching with Baxter (our tractor) but that method was only good for the open paddocks. And we had been spraying with backpacks, but we weren't making much of a dent. So we bought a 300L spray unit to tow behind Rhonda (the Honda side-by-side) – agile enough to move between the Narrow-leaf Peppermints on our ridgeline. We also started to cut and paint the broom – a



Baxter (the tractor) mulching one of the smaller patches of gorse.

tedious, excruciatingly-slow process (as many of you will know). But our amateur efforts were starting to show results.

Enter the indomitable Helen Scott! One glorious sunny day, she beetles down our driveway resplendent in her high-vis vest from roadside weeding, to congratulate us on making so much progress and had we sprayed the blackberries she had picked to eat? And by the way, would we like to join the Newham Landcare group? How could we refuse? We knew we needed help, Helen's expertise was evident, and her enthusiasm was infectious.

No sooner had we paid up, Helen invited us to the New Members' Welcome Dinner in April. We were greeted with open arms, showered with publications, and fed till we burst. At last, we were surrounded by people who were tackling, or had tackled, similar challenges.

So what does being a newbie of Newham Landcare mean to us? We no longer feel overwhelmed by our 2m high gorse bushes or English broom so thick you can't walk through it. We no longer believe we are naïve lunatics who have bitten off way more than we can chew and we no longer believe we have to do this on our own – expert advice is only a phone call away.

Tina Mathewson.



Rewild your garden

Many people round the world are discovering that small things matter – an antidote to feeling impotent about climate change. Rewilding gardens is one way: *'You know, 100 gardens are not going to address climate change or offset in any calculable way the massive rate of extinction happening globally but they'll make a hell of a difference to thousands of species that are now inhabiting that site. When you have migratory birds coming through your site, when you've got a healthy lizard population, a diversity of bugs coming to your diversity of native flowers, you've done something. It's not small, it might just seem small to you'* – David Newsom of Wild Yards Project in USA. I read about this, and other projects such as We are the Ark in Ireland, in a new journal called *Wonderground*. Our local Pollinator project run by Upper Campaspe Landcare Network is another example.

Wonderground is a new Australian biannual print journal dedicated to nature writing. Published by The Planthunter team it features essays, long-form interviews, poetry and profiles by local and international emerging writers, big thinkers and unexpected experts, e.g. Bruce Pascoe on farming futures, Georgina Reid on Charles Massy's regenerative farming. This first issue is already out of print but Helen Scott has a copy she is happy to lend. <https://theplanthunter.com.au/wonderground-print-journal/>



A troubling thing for Helen and me, as we move around the shire, is Cypress trees, the trees and where their owners have decided to plant them. We had recently finished the Biolink video and the lessons and goals of that programme were foremost in mind. We realised that while we are going to be encouraging land holders to plant native species to promote the easy movement of fauna and flora across the land, the reality is that many new plantings seem to be Cypresses (genus *Cupressus*, from temperate regions of Northern Hemisphere; the most commonly planted is Monterey Cypress, *Cupressus macrocarpa*). So here comes the next project we thought, what's with these trees and why are they so often the default boundary plantings as hedges? With land ownership changing more rapidly, getting the best trees on boundaries is increasingly an issue.

What came to mind straight away is that these trees are a hurdle and stand in the way of improved movement of native species. Below ground where the mycelia try to connect trees with one another, and above ground where there is no understorey, and higher still where few birds shelter and no possums, gliders nor phascogales care to go, at any level these trees are a problem.

Much has been said about the importance of providing shelter belts to mitigate wind and to cause a delaying effect with grassfire. But from what we have gathered so far Cypresses are of questionable value, and some studies (not yet sighted) claim increased risk due to downdraft in the lee and a flammability index higher than native species that can be selected instead.

Which brings us to where they are so often planted, along roadsides. When you drive around our lovely shire, enjoying the sweeping views and distant ranges, remember that although we have all sorts of regulations telling us what we can put where, and planners will get exercised over views to Hanging Rock, or the view from Hanging Rock to potentially 'unsightly' development, recognising in law that we live in a lovely place and want to preserve it, none of us can claim a particular view as 'ours'. When we see a newly planted row of Cypress (it nearly always is a row) planted the length of the road out of this village or that, our hearts sink. You have at best five years to enjoy that stupendous heart lifting view then it will be gone for your lifetime or more.

There is another thing. Not only will your view have been 'stolen', as the trees mature you could be



paying for their regular canopy lopping through your rates and taxes because they will overhang public land, interfere with mowing and threaten powerlines. They will require constant thinning and clearance of deadwood close to the ground where nothing else can grow, maintenance that most landholders are reluctant to pay for. Deadwood that native critters are unlikely to want to call home.



How so? And if so, is there a remedy? We have a sort of plan and we are interested to hear what members think about this. We want to do some exploration and get a gallery of pictures together that would illustrate what the impact of this type of planting is. Pines are perhaps less of an issue but could be in the same category of 'troublesome'. We think it would be helpful to understand why people select Cypress, and a questionnaire might be the way to go with that one. We think we should get a better grasp on the science behind these trees in fire situations, so we should talk with the CFA and look for well informed studies that would give us a solid underpinning. We believe there are excellent native tree and shrub planting options that would meet the Biolink goals and do a better job as a shelterbelt, so we need some research to show what that would look like.

The common factor in this is just where the trees are placed, often as close as only a metre from a fence line with public land. The tree will reach maybe five metres out across that fence if left to do its thing. Is that OK? You can say that the canopy of mature cypress could be ten metres, a dead zone effectively. We would want to encourage better planting but if a land holder wants to plant Cypress (and steal the view entirely) we cannot just ban them. But we could very reasonably say (by way of a by-law if needs be) '*Cypress trees must not be planted closer than five metres to a fence line with adjacent public land*'. We could add '*a selection of native species such as listed below, may be planted within that five metre zone instead*'. The landholder could achieve a better result in a shorter time (we believe), and effectively have five metres more land to make use of productively.

So here we are at the start of what might turn out to be an interesting project, one that could work to help nature out, provide safer enclosures, and maybe even safeguard our precious roadside vistas. If anyone thinks as we do and they think they could help in any way, get in touch... please.

Ian Scott

scottian70@outlook.com

Editor's note. Letters or comments are welcome for the next newsletter, which will follow up with an article on Shelterbelts.

You may be despairing of hearing more about **climate change**, but here is an article worth reading. Quoting from *The Conversation*, it involves a class action brought against Environment Minister Sussan Ley led by a group of young people and octogenarian nun Sister Brigid Arthur, acting on behalf of all Australian children and teenagers. Their bid to prevent Whitehaven's coal mine expansion in NSW did not succeed. But the Federal Court nonetheless made a historic ruling: the environment minister owes a duty of care to Australia's young people not to cause them harm from climate change, the judge describing it as 'the greatest inter-generational injustice ever inflicted by one generation of humans upon the next'. An independent expert witness in the court case conservatively calculated the cost of climate change to today's young people at between A\$125,000 and A\$245,000 per person. The estimate took into account property loss, reduced earnings and other economic impacts. And frighteningly, the expert found one in five of today's children will likely be hospitalised due to heat stress in their senior years. Read the details at

<https://theconversation.com/in-a-landmark-judgment-the-federal-court-found-the-environment-minister-has-a-duty-of-care-to-young-people-161650>

Media

At the request of Wombat Forestcare, NDLG is one of over 40 signatories from local, state and national organisations to an open letter to the Victorian Government. Called *It's time to act for nature in Central Victoria*, it was published in regional newspapers across the central west of Victoria, including a full page one in the *Midland Express* on 27 April 2021. The letter asked the Government to act immediately to protect the Wombat State Forest, along with the public forests of Wellsford, Mount Cole and Pyrenees Ranges, with national park status. This was recommended by the VEAC report (NDLG submitted to the VEAC investigation) tabled over 18 months ago, yet the Government has found time to approve mining exploration leases and logging coupes in sensitive wildlife habitat while ignoring the recommendations. A decision is now 12 months overdue, and meanwhile, Victoria's long list of threatened species has increased.

Some of you may have seen the front page article in the *Midland Express* on 11 May with a local firefighter advocating that roadsides should be cleared of all vegetation from fence to fence to reduce fuel loads. This of course is a one-sided view contrary to all that Landcare works for, but sadly no alternative views were sought by the newspaper. Thankfully there were alternative views supporting the values of roadside vegetation and habitat published in the following two issues in *Letters to the Editor*, our NDLG letter being the lead. A pity pages 22 and 36 are not as powerful as the front page!

Your committee has submitted to the Shire's *Draft Roadside Conservation Management Plan*, with suggestions to support a balanced discussion of the issues surrounding the ecological values within roadsides, fire risk mitigation and road safety.

An open letter to The Andrews Government:
It's time to act for nature in Central Victoria

We write to you about the importance of implementing recommendations for new central west National Parks.

In 2017 the state government requested the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) to undertake an investigation into public land in central Victoria. The areas include the public forests of the Wombat, Wellsford, Mount Cole and Pyrenees Ranges.

The purpose of the investigation was to identify the natural and cultural values, and make balanced recommendations about how to best conserve and enhance them. Following the two-year expert investigation, VEAC recommended large areas of these forests become National or Regional Parks to:

- Provide vital habitat for over 350 rare and threatened animal and plant species
- Store millions of tonnes of carbon, significantly helping our efforts to mitigate climate change
- Create critical water security for farms and communities, by protecting the headwaters of rivers that flow from these forests
- Support rural and regional visitation and nature-based tourism
- Support joint management of new parks with Traditional Owners

It is now four years since the VEAC investigation began and in that time the long list of threatened species in Victoria has increased. The VEAC report was tabled in parliament over 18 months ago, yet the Victorian Government has found time to approve mining exploration leases and logging coupes in sensitive wildlife habitat, while ignoring the recommendations and missing legal requirements to respond. A decision is now 12 months overdue.

Creating new National Parks isn't just about saving wildlife and safeguarding beautiful places. It's about clean air and water, a liveable temperature and people's livelihoods.

These recommendations present an incredible opportunity for the Andrews Government. Communities would have new parks to explore. Wildlife would have security and protection. Instead we're losing valuable time, and some of the most unique and vulnerable nature in our state.

The organisations listed below, representing hundreds of thousands of Victorians, call on the Andrews Government to protect these natural areas of central Victoria and immediately accept and implement the VEAC Central West Investigation recommendations.

ADP Community Bendigo District	Environmental Justice Australia	Newham & District Landcare Group
Australian Plants Society (Victoria)	Eureka Environment Group	Project Platypus
Banika March Platypus Alliance	Field Naturalists Club Ballarat	Save our Sherrin Forest
Bakara Environment Network	Friends of the Earth	St Leonards Field Naturalist Club Inc.
Bendigo Family Nature Club	Friends of the Bee Iron Bark Forests	Stanthorpe Ranges CMA
Bendigo Field Naturalists Club	Friends of the Brindara Ranges	Stanthorpe Sustainability Group
Bendigo & District Environment Council	Friends of the Carisban Gorge	The Wilderness Society (Victoria)
Bendigo Sustainability Group	Friends of Chuska Reservoir & No. 7 Park	WWF Australia
Boulder Alliance Inc.	Friends of Worlesford Gorge & Long Forest Mallee	Woolford Forest Conservation Alliance
Birdly Australia	Hepburn Wood	Wentworth River Association
Barkly Castlemaine District Branch	Humane Society International Australia	Wombat Forestcare Inc.
Bush Heritage Australia	Maribyrnong District Landcare	Victorian National Parks Association
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.	Moorabool Environment Group	
Doctors for the Environment Australia Environment Victoria	The National Trust Australia (Victoria)	

QR code:

Add your name www.createnewparks.org.au

Fauna monitoring project on roadsides event



On 24 March a great turnout at the Newham Hall came to hear ecologist Karl Just present the results of the joint project between Macedon Ranges Shire Council and NDLG which conducted nocturnal spotlight surveys across ten roadsides at Newham and surrounding districts during autumn and winter 2020.

After drinks and nibbles and Welcome to Country, Krista Patterson-Majoor (MRSC Biodiversity Projects Officer) introduced new members of MRSC's Environment team – Stephanie Grylls (Roadsides Conservation Officer) and Josh Gomez (Environmental Engagement Officer), and updated us on the Shire's Roadsides Conservation Management Plan.

The project's surveys found four times as many animals on the roadsides than during similar surveys at nearby Mount Macedon. During the research period, observers saw a total of 27 fauna species, made up of 683 individual animals. Species of note included a Brush-tailed Phascogale (*Phascogale tapoatafa*) which is listed as vulnerable in Victoria, and a Feathertail Glider, which has not often been recorded in the area.



The study 'clearly highlighted the importance of roadside vegetation for native fauna populations...The roadsides also serve as critical habitat links between larger patches of bushland.' Karl outlined the essential actions needed to achieve ongoing protection and management of the roadsides in order to maintain their significant zoological values.



Photos by William Terry –
Sugar glider, top
Phascogale, above
Southern Boobook, right.

Before the usual splendid supper, Macedon Ranges Citizen of the Year Amanda Gauci launched Karl's report – *Newham roadside nocturnal fauna surveys*, which is online at <https://newhamlandcare.info/submissions-reports/>.



Understanding Habitat – 101

On a lovely Sunday the 25th April we held this event for 17 members and some of their children.

The event was led by Sam Harrison, known to many of us during his time at Melbourne Water and then as science teacher at Newham Primary School. Penny Roberts was our NDLG primary motivator utilising the Stirling property in Monument Road as our base. An aerial image of the property with a 50m x 50m land segment prescribed for our on-ground work area.



Sam also provided live exhibits of the 'critters' that live in these environments, including yabbies, stick insects and various other leaf litter dwellers.

We held a discussion session initially, covering the components of habitat, how to assess its value and determine what is needed to improve it.

Key questions:

- What do native animals need to survive and thrive?
- What can we do to help prevent local extinction of species?

We were then able to put this learning into practice on the property as we assessed a number of different areas of land for their habitat value.

We learnt how to use information gathering tools such as assessment of trees to gather data on number of trees, native or exotic, dead or alive, circumference, visible holes and height of tree. Further learning involved understanding Biodiversity. Explaining habitat and ecosystem, types of biodiversity – species, ecosystem, genetic and understanding why it matters.



We then took this further to understand engaging with nature via linking food, water and shelter, along with the core parameters.

We finished the day in customary NDLG style with a great food and beverage buffet.

30 May; frosty morning at Bruce's dam.

Weather report March – May 2021

Hi, all. Well, it's the usual up and down at Newham as we move into Winter. (Although I prefer to think the seasons start at the equinoxes and solstices). March was moving towards a nice Autumn Break, with 58mm, concentrated towards the end of the month... we all breathed a sigh of relief having had a benign fire season, and then April kicks us back down with a paltry 10mm and distinctly dry conditions until a mid-May easing of conditions. 61mm for the month – slightly above average.

A rain system coming down from the Northwest gave us 22.8mm on the 26 May and cleared just in time to provide a clear view of the Lunar eclipse on that Wednesday night.

So the short answer is slightly above average rainfall for March, well below average for April, and back to slightly above for May. But two consecutive minus 4 frosts in mid-late May knocked all the delicate garden plants to pieces, didn't they!! I lost a tamarillo inside the greenhouse, sadly.

The 12 month long range forecast (which I've found to be only slightly better than chance) is for average to near average rainfall throughout North Central Victoria for the next year. No drastic droughts on the horizon in the forecast period. Here's hoping they're on target.

Bruce Hedge 0427 888 122

30 May; frosty morning at the Scott's property.

In 2019 the United Nations declared 2021–2030 the ‘Decade on Ecosystem Restoration’

We can each play our part by planting habitat on our properties, whether they are small and urban or large and rural, and on that note here is an NDLG contribution!

Linking the Landscape – the Cobaw Biolink



I think most of you are aware of our 5 minute video <https://vimeo.com/528031290>, with shots of the filming process in the previous newsletter. It was produced with funding support from Macedon Ranges Shire Council and Melbourne Water and the invaluable support of Krista Patterson-Majoor of MRSC and others mentioned in the credits.

The video promotes the important role of the Cobaw Biolink in enhancing the landscape connections between Mount Macedon and the Cobaw Range on both private and public land. Protecting existing high quality native vegetation and creating connectivity in the biolink will help native plants and animals adapt to climate change. Spotlight surveys on habitat-rich roadsides round Newham found more animals present in the Cobaw Biolink than during similar surveys on Mount Macedon.

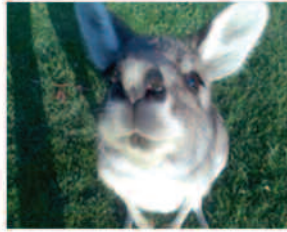
It aims to engage landholders and residents and make them aware that their contribution, no matter how big or small, is environmentally vital. Landholders can help contribute to the biolink through enhancing waterways, undertaking weed and pest control, protecting remnant vegetation, revegetation and encouraging native grasslands on their properties.

Along with our other video *Wildflowers of Newham and Woodend* it is a contribution to the on-line version of the Macedon Ranges Sustainability Festival at <https://mrsg.org.au/environment>

It has had very supportive feedback and been shared on many sites. Melbourne Water for example has asked to feature it as a case study in their upcoming 20-21 Annual Report for their Healthy Waterways Strategy.

As Penny Roberts of NDLG says in the video: ***‘The Cobaw Biolink is really big. Its bigger than all of us. It’s a model that can be used anywhere in Victoria. It builds connections between remnant and it builds connections in community’.***

Brigitte's Wildlife Blog



End of last year Melbourne Water had planned to do some eDNA testing at our little stretch of Garden Hut Creek. While I am not 100% familiar with the whole process – it sounded like if an animal crosses the creek, drops either a hair or some faeces, those bits then mix with water and leave traces of their DNA. One then sucks the creek water into a big syringe, squeezes it through a little filter test tube and then send the filtered stuff to get analysed scientifically and thoroughly.



To say that I was excited is a bit of an understatement. I was mentally going through a checklist of all the rare, endangered, unusual, and remarkable Australian animals that might live at the creek. And Karl would finally believe my claim that I had seen platypus and rakali (native water rats) there.

Due to covid lockdown nobody from Melbourne Water could come here and the eDNA kit arrived in our mail with detailed instructions how to sample. The package also contained a return pouch complete with its little cooling package. It all looked very impressive and professional. As we had only one syringe and filter set and could only do sampling at one spot, I tried to decide which might be the best area while Karl carefully studied the instructions. We did our sampling, packed all up per instructions, mailed it and then waited for the results.

And recently we got them. Now if you want my honest opinion – this new scientific approach has a long way to go before it can replace eagle-eyed people with binoculars and camera in gumboots and carrying macroinvertebrate sampling nets and buckets. Bit of a flop really.

On the list of detected species – dogs, cats, foxes and mosquito fish were no surprise, I don't need an expensive lab to tell me that. Neither were ducks, eels, redfin and tench. But chicken?! Unless the fox had just eaten one. And Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater? We have been doing the bird survey now for several years and this bird has never been spotted and recorded. And I haven't heard its very distinctive call, ever. And we have recorded



Southern pygmy perch.

around 25 different bird species at the creek. Where is their DNA? While I don't necessarily expect that little thornbills and wrens leave a lot, surely the Sulphur-crested Cockatoos would.

And how vague is 'genus that includes pygmy perch'? I can be more precise than that. We have the southern pygmy perch (*Nannoperca australis*) down there. And where is the mention of the powerful owl in this eDNA analysis? A breeding pair has currently their day-roost down there and I am pretty certain they do a lot of droppings.

No mention of wombats, koalas or even kangaroos or wallabies. They all hang out near the creek and regularly cross it. Surely they would lose some DNA.

There must be a simple explanation for those disappointing results, I am pretty sure of this. Maybe I picked the wrong spot. Maybe Karl didn't read the instructions often enough and did something incorrect and stuffed it up. Hopefully Melbourne Water does think so too and will organise another eDNA testing again soon. In the meantime I'll try to locate the Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater. A photo or sound recording to go with the eDNA analysis report would be so fantastic.

But despite all the frustrations it has made us focus even more on the biodiversity and health of our little stretch of creek. Thank you Melbourne Water for your ongoing support.