

66  
AUTUMN 2022

# Newham & District Landcare Group



Working towards a  
healthier environment

Address – PO Box 314, WOODEND, 3442



# Committee Activities

Your committee has been discussing plans for the future with a new committee.

## ***It is time for a Changing of the Guard.***

This was the title of an article on the front page of Newsletter no.17 in Autumn 2008, about Penny Roberts stepping down as President after 3 years as required by the then rules. We are once again in the same situation with President Howard Stirling, Vice President Karl Kny and Secretary Helen Scott due to step down this year with all positions declared vacant.

### **The Committee wants to ensure a smooth changeover and will be inviting expressions of interest from our members prior to the AGM on 24 August for all positions on the Committee and in particular for Office Bearer roles.**

Howard, Karl, Helen, and other members (eg Penny, Doug, Sue and Rob, currently Treasurer) will continue to be involved in projects and tasks, but it is time for others to have leadership opportunities. A considerable level of support will be available for new Committee members – please do talk to any of the current Committee about the opportunity. Read Helen's article on page 7 about how inspiring she has found Newham Landcare and her time as Secretary.

## Coming events

**Friday 17 June:** Snow Gum project – hear local ecologists Karl Just and Tim D'Ombra present their findings. 6pm followed by supper. Register at <https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/snow-gum-project-presentation-tickets-334947225167?>

**Saturday July 30:** Member dinner, welcome new members. Details to follow by email.

**Wednesday August 24:** AGM 6pm, followed by dinner and Zoom in the Hall on the big screen to watch the national Landcare awards 7-10pm - we are a nominee.

The Weedies group continues to organise working bee mornings to pull or cut and plant roadside weeds. We encourage any member to come and help, chat to others and learn techniques and repair afterwards to the store for refreshments. Future locations will be advised by email to all members and also on the website under Events. All tools and protective equipment are supplied from our new shared trailer but wear suitable clothing and boots.

## Group Contacts

**President:** Howard Stirling 0432 809314. **Vice President:** Karl Kny 0409 543061

**Treasurer:** Rob Lawrence 0409 204909 **Secretary, Website:** Helen Scott 0412 582 526

**Committee Members:** Sue Baker 5427 0805, Doug Dalglish 0428 571465, Natasha Gayfer.

**New members, general enquiries:** Penny Roberts 0418 396837 and Helen Scott 0412 582526.

**Roadsides:** Sue Massie 5427 0065 **Pest Animal Co-ordinator:** Sue Barker 5427 0805

**Library:** Held at Kny property, contact Karl 0409 543061

**Small tools, equipment, cameras:** Rob Lawrence 0409 204909 and Howard Stirling 0432 809314(cameras).

**Spray trailer:** Howard Stirling 0432 809 314

**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!

# Platypus Talk



NDLG members were treated to a wonderful presentation by Geoff Williams on this iconic animal on May 20 in Newham Hall. Geoff was co-founder of the Australian Platypus Conservancy in 1994, a non-profit environmental organization set up to conserve the Platypus. We learned much about the species and the waterways it lives in, and how each of us can help in its survival - the species was listed in 2021 as 'vulnerable' in Victoria in 2021.

Geoff introduced us to Patrick – a stuffed Platypus found dead in a net 20 years ago.

They had both visited Newham Primary School on the same afternoon where, like us adults, the children were able to feel his fur and investigate the spur on his hind leg.

Aboriginal people had various names, and according to Dreamtime legend, “the platypus originated when a young female duck mated with a lonely and persuasive water-rat. The duck’s babies had their mother’s bill and webbed feet and their father’s four legs and handsome brown fur.” British scientists could not believe their eyes when looking at specimens; Dr George Shaw in c1799, believing it to be a hoax, took to the preserved specimen with scissors to see if the bill was attached with stitches. Finally the specimen was renamed *Ornithorhynchus anatinus*, with the first word meaning “bird-like snout”.



The preferred plural (name is derived from the Greek) is either “platypus” or “platypuses”, depending on which dictionary you consult, but definitely not “platypi” – a Latin plural.

## Why is the Platypus special?

It is a monotreme mammal, as is the Echidna, distinguished from all other mammals by having a single opening in their body that is used to excrete solid and liquid waste as well as for reproduction. This causes them to be classified as monotremes, meaning “one opening”.

Other distinguishing features for the Platypus:

- it lays 1-2 (maximum 3) eggs, large at 1½cm, soft and leathery like reptiles;
- the young when hatched feed on thick rich milk very high in iron which oozes from pores in the mother’s stomach - ie there is no pouch, or nipples;
- adults lack teeth and have an unfurred bill with grinding pads. The lack of true teeth means a generalised diet. They need to eat 20-40% of body mass every 24 hours so have a large territory of 1-7km in length;

- the bill contains receptors capable of detecting electrical fields produced by their small invertebrate prey, as both eyes and ears are shut while hunting underwater - they feed only in the water;
- the fur is very thick – 600-900 hairs per square millimetre, and traps an insulating layer of air for buoyancy so the animal is able to dive up to 1600 times in a session and have the energy to dive deeply. They typically remain active searching and feeding for 8-16 hours per day;
- a spur on each hind leg ankle of adult males is used for fighting in the breeding season (you can see this on a UTube video). It is connected to functional poison glands, a reptilian feature; the venom causes extreme pain;
- the front feet are used for propulsion underwater, and have big blunt claws for digging burrows when out of water – so river banks are very important habitat. The back claws are used for grooming.



The Platypus is a habitat generalist in freshwater environments – living in lakes, rivers, creeks, even drains. It is not a remote animal, within 10km of most people and happy as long as we let them be.

They are long lived, up to 25 years, on average females live 12-14, males 10. They mature at 2 years and have litters of 1-3. Mating is in Spring (August to October), with the eggs hatching a month after mating, in November-December. The young disperse in Autumn.



### How is the platypus doing in the wild? Threats

As mentioned earlier, the species was listed as ‘vulnerable’ in Victoria in 2021, and internationally as “new threatened”. Some of the threats are as follows.

**Habitat degradation** – erosion, sedimentation, bank compaction, vegetation loss, introduced species such as Willows, Carp, water weeds.

**Unreliable or intermittent water flows** and loss of natural flows due to draining, water over-harvesting; flooding.

**Predation** by foxes, dogs, birds of prey, Murray Cod.

**People** cause the highest mortality by irresponsible fishing, fish and yabby nets and traps, discarded lines and hooks, and litter – in Melbourne waterways 40% were found tangled with some sort of plastic hair ties. Traps cause the highest mortality and despite being made illegal in 2019 they are still used and found in many sheds.



## How do we monitor numbers and changes in abundance?

Geoff outlined the pros and cons of the following methods, details are on the website:

- live trapping surveys - technique of choice if detailed biological information is needed and done by qualified biologists;
- camera technology - time lapse is best;
- environmental DNA (eDNA) - overspruiked but will get better as more is learned;
- reports of sightings are best choice for cost-effective platypus mapping and monitoring but can be subject to non-standardised or innacurate recording;
- we can all be citizen scientists and watch our waterways -a five minute scan should be sufficient. The APC's Platypus Group Watch can provide an information kit, and you can keep track of local populations through APC's citizen science initiative, the Australian Platypus Monitoring Network (APMN) - <https://platypusnetwork.org.au/home>;
- details of sightings can be reported online to the Conservancy at <http://.platypus.asn.au>, and even better, to the national biodiversity database at Atlas of Living Australia – [www.ala.org.au](http://www.ala.org.au).



There was enthusiastic applause at the end of Geoff's presentation followed by **questions** such as:

**Is there an estimated number in Victoria?** – no. Work is done catchment by catchment. NDLG is on the borders of Maribyrnong and Campaspe catchments which have not recovered since the millennium drought, with less water especially in the tributaries vital for young Platypus, plus the effect of dams; the species is near threatened here. There are maybe 200 in the Jackson's Creek section, and very few in Deep Creek section. There are very few in the Campaspe above Eppalock. With climate change these small catchments are at risk but are a crucial area. There are high numbers in the Goulburn River.

**What about burrows?** Platypus can have many in the banks along their large territory, where they sleep and camp. The burrows are hard to spot, hidden beneath an undercut bank or overhanging vegetation. They move every few days unless nesting, possibly to avoid build-up of ticks. Females and their offspring shelter in a nesting burrow for several months: it is typically 3-6 metres long (measured in a straight line from the entrance to the nesting chamber).

The APC website <https://platypus.asn.au/> has a wealth of information – check it for further detail and photos. The site also has information on Rakali, or Water-rat - Australia's "otter", which Geoff is also passionate about.

*Helen Scott*



*Opera house nets can still be purchased on line from Queensland.*

*Wildlife conservation society of Queensland is campaigning to have them banned there as well.*

# Indigenous Plants Propagation Workshop

On Saturday 26 March 2022 a group of 20 plus Landcare members attended this wonderful and insightful propagation workshop held at Darraweit Guim. Our enthusiastic Presenter/trainer Jim Robinson, formerly of Greening Australia, provided us with a hands-on workshop introducing us to all aspects of propagating indigenous plants, both theory and practice. Jim grew up on a farm near Wallan and has many years of experience propagating indigenous plants and implementing revegetation projects using local seed.

Members of the Newham and District Landcare Group, Deep Creek Landcare Group, and the Upper Maribyrnong Catchment Group were in attendance which was organised by UMCG and DCLG.

## What was the workshop all about?

Would you like to grow your own indigenous plants? The workshop attendees were introduced to all aspects of propagating indigenous plants, both theory and practice.

## Plant propagation techniques:

We learnt the three main techniques for propagating indigenous plants:

### 1. Seed, 2. Cutting, and 3. Division.



This included learning about:

- Propagation equipment and materials needed, including seed raising mixes and containers to use,
- Methods of (pre-germination) treatment of seed,
- Seed sowing steps, including germination, and pricking out,
- Collecting cutting materials and types of cuttings,
- Demonstrating techniques for preparing and planting cuttings,
- Root formation, nutrition, and fertilisers,
- Hardening off indigenous plants and growing them on,
- Propagating plants by division.

The covered open air space was enhanced by wonderful warm weather and a very enthusiastic bunch of participants. We all left the day with a sense of purpose, knowledge and confidence to give it a go! Oh and did I mention a full box of 50 propagated plants.

*Howard Stirling*

# *My Landcare Journey*

**I grew up on 1000 grazing acres in North-east Victoria, where my father set aside a timbered paddock for conservation. In our late 50's, Ian and I did the tree change and moved from Williamstown to the beautiful Macedon Ranges in March 2004, after building our sustainable house on a bare 6 acres of degraded pasture and only 4 trees in one corner.**

One of my sisters trained as an agricultural scientist and became a botanist. She gave me the best advice – *“Helen, sit back and watch what is going on in the district before you decide where to put your energies – listen and learn!”* It did not take long to see that Newham Landcare was where the action was.



So began my adventure with an organisation which has taught me so much, and made me feel part of a vibrant community of friends and like minds. Since joining NDLG in about 2006 we have regenerated our block – much of it now revegetated with trees, understorey, ground covers, plus some native grasses as an ongoing project. In 2011 I was tapped on the shoulder by an outgoing committee member who saw my enthusiasm, so I joined the Committee, becoming Secretary in 2016.

Through NDLG's many events, working bees, projects etc I have learned about habitat on private land and roadsides, propagation, weeds, soils, wildlife, pest management, and the importance of building community networks. There have been so many memorable social dinners over the years. Covid has dented these but we will be back on track soon.

I find it fascinating to see the different skills and interests Landcare members bring. Trained as a librarian, much of my working history was in non-profit organisations, being involved in policy and information management and developing research and communication skills. I feel as if these have really come together in the most meaningful way as a retiree working in Landcare! Community ownership and grass-roots organization are cornerstones of Landcare, and that is appealing to me. Did you know it is now the biggest environmental management movement in the country?

My work with Landcare fuels my environmental activism, and I argue that a healthy environment is a prerequisite for a healthy economy and the well-being of society. Not everyone will want to write submissions and lobby politically as I have, but golly it does keep the brain active! Given that the state of our environment in Australia is in decline, and inadequate environmental policies fail at federal and state levels, it is wonderful to feel that we can make a difference in our local area - especially when we are recognised for it by winning awards and partnering in shared projects.

So after 6 years of being Secretary, it is time to take a step down, though I will continue managing the website and the newsletter as an ordinary Committee member. So do step up, you committed clever people out there; nominate to join our flexible and supportive committee, follow your interests, learn heaps and have fun!

*Helen Scott, May 2022*



**Growing up in Germany on the fourth floor in a big city did not really prepare me for a career looking after wildlife. Of course I pestered my parents for a pet but basically I was never exposed to anything bigger than a hamster and two zebra finches (fancy that, zebra finches from Australia). And anything larger I only knew from picture books.**

While knowing what horses, cows and sheep looked like, I had no idea of their food habits. And of course, when once during a night walk I got stuck in a barbed wire fence I thought that a cow would eat me. It took quite some terrifying minutes to realise that it was the scout leader trying to disentangle me and only later I found out that cows eat grass and not kids.

I became fascinated by our Australian wildlife as soon as I arrived here. It sure helped that nothing tried to eat me (as long as I didn't go for a swim in the ocean or in the NT). But the gentleness, weird and wonderful facts, odd looks, amazing facts of our marsupials – all this captivated me.

And oh my – are they special and have individual character and quirks. Take for example Oliver our brush-tailed possum that was in care with us. While I know that most people are not particularly fond of brushies – they certainly are cuddly on their terms and have a lovable stubborn character.



Oliver's mum got hit by a car and it took some time before he was found and ended up with us. He was a scrawny tiny little joey and unlike other orphaned marsupials was never fearful of his new human mum and never stressed about his changed housing arrangement from living in a pouch to suddenly calling a woollen beanie home.

And he was needy!!! Just like his namesake Oliver Twist he demanded MORE – more food, more love, more more more. And while all possums like to attach themselves to hand and arms, Oliver took this to an absolute new level.



Quite often it took a second person to pry loose his razor sharp claws and Velcro tail from sleeves - or if you were unlucky – from your bare arms, nose or the top of your head. (Us wildlife carers call it the “Velcro tail”, as the scientific description of their very sticky bushy tail is *‘adapted to grasping branches, prehensile at the end with a hairless ventral patch’* is quite a mouthful).

While this was sort of cute in the beginning, it became rather bothersome once we opened up Oliver’s outside pre-release cage so that he started to fend for himself. For a very long time he spent the early evening hours prowling around the house, waiting for us to come out and then either run up our legs or pounce from a tree onto our shoulder. And he was getting pretty big by then!!!

After a month-long stand-off where the family was stuck in the house after dusk and this needy possum circled the premises, Oliver eventually got the hint and moved on to raiding the rose garden I had at that time as well as checking out my newly established veggie patch.

We raised a few more brushies, ringtail possums and sugar gliders after Oliver, but eventually I stopped taking them in once a pair of powerful owls moved into the area again.

Making hand-reared animals fit and capable to survive in the wild is a long process and I flatly refused to raise easy picking take-away for the owls as much as I admire them.



# Natures Playmate's success!

Facilitators were Charlotte Roberts and Jess Szigethy

The 'Nature's Playmates' workshop held as part of the NDLG Landcare grant was held on Sunday 15 April and enjoyed immensely by all involved. Children came rugged up for the weather and the event proceeded outdoors as planned.

The aim of this group workshop was for primary-school aged children to explore meditative bush art, movement and sound rituals to connect to self, others and place. It was an opportunity to listen, sense, feel, move, sound, and co-create in relationship to the natural environment, self and others.



## Feedback:

Jess (co-presenter): "It was terrific to lean into Charlotte's expertise in holding workshops & guiding kids to express in an authentic and joyous way."

Billie (age 7) said: "I think nature is really beautiful and it is important to all people. I loved that we got to walk around in nature and I loved making the mandalas" (and Penny's slice apparently- one of hr Ottolenghi specials! 😊)

Quinn (age 9): "I really enjoyed it and I would love to do it again if I could. I loved that we could get connected in to nature and not be on any screens. It was fun to make up the songs and dances."

Iris (age 10): "it was a great opportunity to get outside and it expanded my imagination. I liked being creative, and I learnt that every piece of nature can be described in more ways ie has its own song."

Ingrid (mother) Thank you so much for today, Benji had a wonderful time. In his words

"It was so fun using sounds and actions, not words, to communicate. It was a bit of a challenge making the mandala, finding the right things. I loved making the mandala though. I would totally do it again mummy!"



# *Snow Gums and Eucalypt identification in the Macedon Ranges*

**On a lovely Sunday afternoon on April 10 a group from Newham Landcare and the Macedon Ranges Field Naturalists gathered at a property on Hennerbergs Road to learn how to identify some of the species of Eucalypts, especially Snow Gums (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*).**

The event was part of Macedon Ranges Shire Council's research project 'Adapting to Climate Change – Monitoring Snow Gum Health', already featured in previous newsletters and emails to members. Tanya Loos, the Shire's new Biodiversity Project Officer, and Darren Tinker, Environment Programs and Engagement Officer, guided us on a walk over part of the Moore property to look at some magnificent specimens.

Tanya is a keen field naturalist who enjoys birdwatching, mammal, frog, and reptile watching, plant spotting – and sharing this knowledge; the link to her writings and lovely blog is below.



So who better to explain to us how to use bark, leaves, flowers, and fruit/nuts to identify different Eucalypt species?

She showed us some excellent resources that can help with photos, diagrams and measurements, such as Leon Costerman's classic book *Native Trees and shrubs of South-eastern Australia*, (there is a 56 page extraction from it called *Indigenous trees and shrubs of the Macedon Ranges area*, some copies available from NDLG).

Two books: *Eucalypts of the Mount Alexander region* (a small regional guide), and *Eucalypts of Victoria and Tasmania* (see links at end of this article).

We started near the house in a cluster of small trees, and studied leaves to see if they had the characteristic parallel veins and larger nuts of Snow Gums – most did.

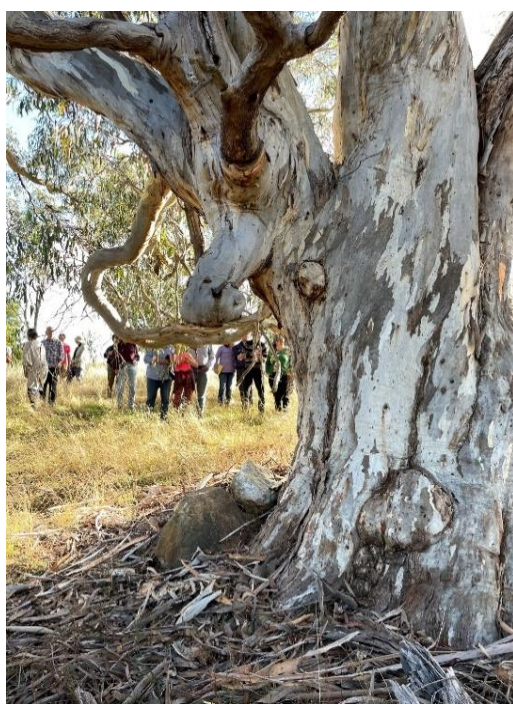




We wondered if this larger one nearby (below) was a parent. Apparently DNA testing could prove it or not.

We then walked about a kilometre to see the day's highlight, what I call "the old whopper". (on front page) Since photographing it in 2019, June's storms this year blew out its top. Its girth was measured at 4.2m chest height, surely the largest yet found.

A large Broad-leaved Peppermint (*Eucalypt dives*) next to the whopper had blown down but was still alive, to enable identification by its characteristic smell, and leaf shape. We debated whether other nearby large trees were Messmates (*Euc. obliqua*) because of the rough bark but due to the wavy leaves characteristic of Swamp Gums (*Euc. ovata*) we felt perhaps they were hybrids.



Tanya also shared lots of information about the habitat values of trees, such as bark for bats and insects – note for example on the "old whopper". She argued that trees with hollows should be protected both for their age and the extraordinary value and increasing rarity as nesting sites and shelter for mammals and birds. Isolated paddock trees are very important as refuges for fauna and flora and in providing connectivity in the landscape.

Landholders were invited to send in records of Snow Gums on their properties by April 17. I have had a great time clambering fences with a tape measure and camera to record some terrific specimens on various properties and roadsides.

Thanks to Simone and David Moore for sharing with us their beautiful 140 acre property. It was inspirational to see how they have transformed it over 10 years by revegetation and stock removal. They have planted over 12,000 shrubs and trees, with the help of Newham Landcare.

## Further Reading

<https://www.mrsc.vic.gov.au/Live-Work/Environment/Biodiversity> - details of the Snow Gum project with printable brochure

<https://www.fobif.org.au/eucalypts-of-the-mount-alexander-region/>

[https://dn.com.au/Eucalypts\\_of\\_Victoria\\_and\\_Tasmania.html](https://dn.com.au/Eucalypts_of_Victoria_and_Tasmania.html)

<https://www.facebook.com/macedonrangesfieldnaturalists/>

<https://tanyaloos.com/>

<https://newhamlandcare.info/>

Helen Scott, May 2022

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Since this visit, you will have received notice about the event at Newham Hall to learn the results of the community Snow Gum project on Friday June 17, 6pm followed by supper. Register to hear local ecologists Karl Just and Tim D'Ombrian present their findings. Supper will follow.

<https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/snow-gum-project-presentation-tickets-334947225167?>



# Book review

**Grow Wild: Gardening to Sustain Wildlife in the Hepburn Shire** by Jill Teschendorff

1st published 2020 by Wombat Forestcare, reprint 2021. 71p. \$15. Thanks to Clare McKenna, Aesop's Attic bookshop in Kyneton, for this review.

Jill Teschendorff 's book contains some of the highest quality photographs I have seen in a small production book. It is set out in very helpful sections with detailed information and full colour photographs - most were taken by Gayle Osborne of Wombat Forestcare.

## **Section 1**

- Why preserve the bush?
- Bush food web
- Wildlife visitors and residents
- Birds
- Other creatures
- Unwelcome visitors
- Are snakes welcome visitors?
- Preserving habitat in a changing rural setting.
- Create habitat
- Offer protection
- Provide water
- Supply nourishment

## **Section 2**

- Creating a wildlife garden
- Designing the garden
- Creating habitat in exotic gardens
- Controlling weeds
- A note of caution about Australian plants
- Soil preparation
- Maintenance
- Bio regions

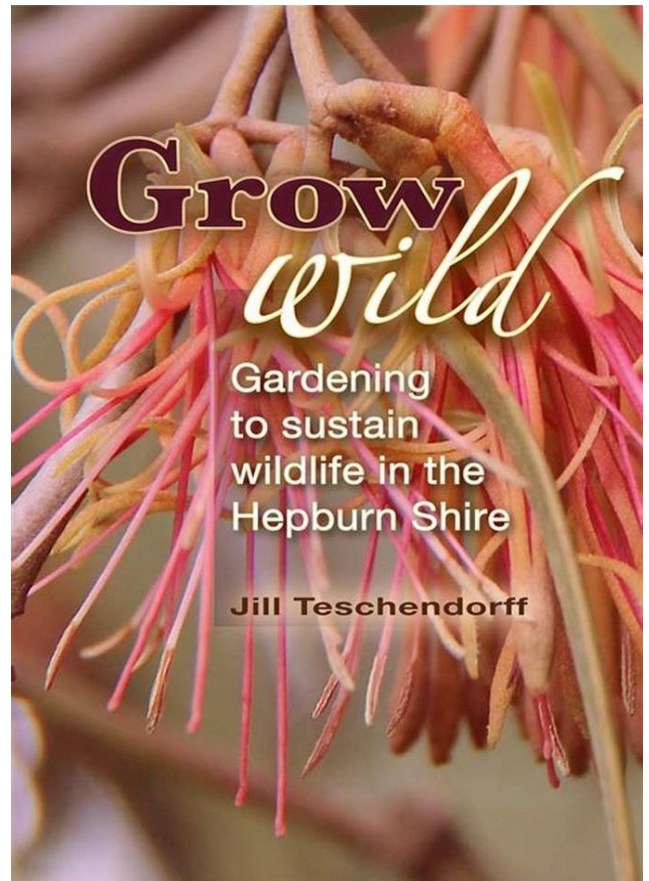
## **Section 3**

- Recommended indigenous plants ground covers, small plants, grasses, rushes, sedges and wetland plants.
- Small and medium shrubs and large trees.
- This section contains close up photographs of the plants also including both botanical and common names, with planting details including shade, full sun, partial shade, bird or butterfly attracting.
- Bio region details

## **Section 4**

- Resources - Indigenous plant suppliers - this is detailed and really useful
- Organisations -Reference and further readings – an extremely comprehensive list.

**I would highly recommend *Grow Wild* by Jill Teschendorff – it would suit the novice as well as the experienced gardener. It is a wonderful resource crammed full of details covering every area you would need to know for your gardening project.**





# Newham rainfall report

**Bruce Hedge**

Co-ordinates: 37° 16' 22"S 144° 35' 50"E June 2022

Another interesting quarter! After the last glorious burst of rain at the end of January, the tap stopped. Here at Newham we had only 1.4mm for the whole of February and I thought La Nina had well and truly fizzled out. But along came a lovely burst of 41.6mm on March 5<sup>th</sup> which contributed to a total of 61.4mm for March, and we breathed a sigh of relief at the easing of the fire risk.

La Nina waltzed back to us in April with 88.6mm including 47mm over the 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup>. Year to end of April totalled 227mm here at Newham. So the long range Elders forecast back in Nov '21 was actually quite accurate, which is not always true. Elders long range forecast predicts above average falls for all months until April next year. I've never seen a whole year of predicted above average monthly falls. Bureau of Met's (usually more conservative) predictions say the La Nina event is likely to stay for a while. We may be in for another benign fire season.

Time to buy another tank! We will see! Comments welcome to Bruce Hedge on 0427888122.

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## Climate future plots

Relevant to our Macedon Ranges Snow Gum project, Connecting Country has secured funding through for a 'Future-proof our forests' project to establish two climate future plots of 500 plants in Mount Alexander region between 2021-23. They are focusing on two key species from our local area: Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*) and Sweet Bursaria (*Bursaria spinosa*).

"Climate future plots aim to enhance the resilience of natural landscapes to the changing climate. They are areas of revegetated land incorporating plant species that already occur naturally in the area. These plots include both locally-sourced plants, as well as plants of the same species from other provenances that have hotter and drier, or cooler and wetter, climates. The plants from the different provenances breed and produce 'climate-adapted seed'. Plants grown from this new seed are potentially more resilient to changes

to the changing climate.

More at <https://connectingcountry.org.au/volunteer-with-connecting-country-nest-boxes-and-climate-future-plots>

