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SUMMER 2025

# Newham & District Landcare Group



Working towards a  
healthier environment

Address – PO Box 314, WOODEND, 3442



*Champions one  
and all!*





Autumn will soon be upon us

## Group contacts

**President:** Karl Kny, [karl@kolora.com](mailto:karl@kolora.com), 0409 543 061

**Treasurer:** Howard Stirling, [howardjanine01@gmail.com](mailto:howardjanine01@gmail.com), 0432 809 314.

**Ordinary members:**

Paul Carter, [millhouse@aussiebroadband.com.au](mailto:millhouse@aussiebroadband.com.au), 0407 271 199 (Platypus and Koala project, newsletter).

Bruce Hedge, [bruceahedge@gmail.com](mailto:bruceahedge@gmail.com), 0427 888 122.

Penny Roberts, [penroberts@bigpond.com](mailto:penroberts@bigpond.com), 0418 396 837 (new members and general enquiries).

Helen Scott, [orseda@outlook.com](mailto:orseda@outlook.com), 0412 582 526 (website).

Jess Szigethy-Gyula, [info@jess-szigethy.com.au](mailto:info@jess-szigethy.com.au), 0408 678 355. (CFA liason).

Trish Thorpe, [trishthorpe49@icloud.com](mailto:trishthorpe49@icloud.com), 0403 920 828.

Jane Trikojus, [trikojus\\_j@fastmail.com](mailto:trikojus_j@fastmail.com), 0413 499 252 (Wesley Park and Jim Road).

**Other Contacts**

**Roadside Management Group (the Weedies):** Sue Massie, 0407 029 392.

**Anderson Road Triangle:** Karen Hunt 0408 135 243.

**Spray trailer and cameras:** Howard Stirling, 0432 809 314.

**Website:** <https://newhamlancare.info> Keep checking it for Events, and other updates under *What's New*.

The committee meets on the first Tuesday of each month (February to November) between 7.30–9pm at the Newham Hall. All members are welcome to attend to be 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!

Any articles you wish to submit to the newsletter, or even suggestions for articles, please email to Paul Carter at [millhouse@aussiebroadband.com.au](mailto:millhouse@aussiebroadband.com.au)

# Our Christmas get together

Saturday afternoon, 7 December saw the annual N&DLG Christmas get together at Wesley Park. The weather was kind and it was extremely well attended, and thoroughly enjoyable. The number of people who attended is a testament to the strength of the Newham Group. It was an excellent opportunity to socialise and renew friendships.

The food was excellent and President Karl Kny did a sterling job on the barbeque, and later in the day gave a talk about the future of the group.

When everyone had been wined and dined, traditional games were played: the egg throw (in which Gill and I got knocked out in the first round) and the boot throw (in which Helen Scott tried so hard that she threw herself on the ground). As a first, both of these events were won by Jenn and Barry Toll. They were duly presented with their trophies, but I am not sure that they would want them on their mantelpiece. Perhaps straight to the pool room!



# Caring about our land today

By **Jim Sansom**. Foundation president of our Group in 2004

Back in the late 1980s Joan Kirner was the Minister for Conservation Forests and Lands in the Victorian Government. Later she became the first woman Premier of Victoria. With Heather Mitchell, who was the President of the Victorian Farmers Federation, Joan was far sighted and saw that the land needed caring. In the big picture of the Victorian landscape she could see vast tracts of land losing productivity because of rising salinity especially on the northern plains; she was aware of the loss of valuable top soils in agricultural areas both wind-blown and washed down drainage lines in times of heavy rainfall; unstable gully erosion was evident in many farming areas; extensive removal of trees from hills and steeper slopes in the mistaken belief that this would lead to increased farm productivity; the nibbling away of valuable areas of native habitat and the need to coordinate some excellent work being done by some land holders but in a rather haphazard manner.



Joan Kirner and Heather Mitchell were certainly not the first to be aware of such problems in our countryside. For many years our ailing landscape was of concern to thousands of people but the insight to formalise and integrate many wonderful initiatives led to the establishment of what became a nationwide organisation – **Landcare**. By 1989 Bob Hawke had come on board with Federal money to aid the developing program. It was not long before the Victorian program became national.

Landcare in Newham and surrounding districts began in May 2004 and there is a lot to be proud of over the past twenty years. Early on we received lots of support from Council officers Lachlan Milne and John Robinson. Right from the start the drive of Penny Roberts and the financial wisdom of Hilary Roberts enabled the group to gain significant grants to tackle problems on private and public land. Many properties benefited from the Melbourne Water Stream Frontage Program which enabled

riparian zones along creeks and streams to be fenced off and stock watering troughs established away from main water courses. The benefit was significant and immediate. Muddy waters and increased stability of stream banks plus the filtering effect of increased planting along fenced off riparian zones addressed some of the glaring needs for land caring. Invasive willows extended along our drainage lines. Grants of many thousands of dollars enabled the removal of willows along the Newham branch of Deep Creek from the primary

school northwards to Three Chain Road and beyond. Talk began of the return of the platypus in the clearer waters. Richard Akers of Melbourne Water led a program to promote the return of the Yarra Pigmy Perch to the clearer waterways. He also emphasised the importance of a healthy frog population.

Professor Ian Rutherford, a river and stream specialist from

Melbourne University spoke at one of Landcare's evening events emphasising that our plantings along streams must be not only of indigenous material but designed to be long lasting and self-perpetuating.

Hilary and I attended a public lecture by Ian Rutherford where he lay on the floor and pretended to be a log in the bed of a stream impeding the speed of water flow! – a valuable lesson in helping people to understand that in the Australian environment the aim is to promote gently flowing clear streams rather than gushing torrents of erosive muddy water.

Over the past twenty years Newham Landcare has been very active in public places. Hanging Rock has been a major focus with many planting days along Smokey Creek and other places in the reserve. The Hall surroundings and native gardens owe much to the efforts of Landcare members. Nick Massie gave hours of time overseeing adequate

watering of trees along the approaches to Newham during dry periods. Constant work along roadsides by the 'weedies' group especially in places like Sheltons Road and Jim Road, is widely appreciated. It is a delight to see the recent beginnings of the development of the triangle of land on the corner of Boundary Road and Anderson Road. This is especially exciting with a large input from Newham Primary School ably guided by Karen and Penny as well as teachers from the School. A little pond and some seating will make this site a pleasure in years to come.

The Landcare Group has been associated with the School right from the beginning. Plantings around the school dam, 'water bug' discovery days and Waterwatch programs have been integrated into the curriculum over the years. Jenny Waugh gave much to these initiatives. Paul Carter has recently refreshed in the minds of students the importance of linking habitat by encouraging biolinks.

One overarching theme for Newham Landcare has been the maintenance and restoration of habitat. Plantings along fence lines linking with vegetation along road verges and around dams providing connectivity for birds, animals and insects. Stephen Murphy, a guest speaker from the Ballarat region explained the importance of these plantings being generous (some ten metres either side of a fence) and designed to have a canopy layer, a shrub layer as well as ground cover.

The original founders of Landcare also wanted the organisation to promote social cohesion within a rural community. Newham Landcare can be proud of its record. There have been many dinners hosted by Penny and Hilary to welcome new members and in the early years a themed 'Winter Dinner' was held in the Hall. The Scottish evening and the Wildwest evening are standout memories. Our recent well attended AGM with an excellent speaker Tom Griffith and lavish supper is maintaining the Newham tradition of keeping the community together and appreciating the land itself. The Christmas barbeque with the famous egg throwing competition is always a highlight.

Also of great importance is our quarterly Newsletter. I have kept every copy and it is becoming a very

fat folder! Editing the Newsletter is a skilled and sometimes thankless task and we have to recognise the effort and achievement of Helen Scott in this regard.

But what next? As we approach the second quarter of the 21st century what do we see? What aspects of our Newham landscape are in need of care?

Despite the wonderful achievements so far there is still work to be done! With a changing climate the dangers of wild-fire are becoming significant and Tom Griffiths' recent talk and planned field days show that our Landcare is well aware of the problem. Enhancing biodiversity through habitat restoration and looking after riparian zones is a continuing commitment.

Plato identified human virtues of Truth, Beauty and Justice. I think that in our Landcare work we don't



mention 'beauty' often enough! We only have to view the wonderful landscape developed around President Karl and Brigitte's home; or the bushland/productive garden where Howard and Janine live. Paul and Gill's carefully created garden is becoming part of a beautiful setting for Newham! Penny and Hilary's mountain top retreat oversees the development of a grand garden/landscape with a magnificent view. To the South under the brow of Mount

Macedon Helen and Ian have also landscaped an uplifting view to the North-West! And Bruce and Alice have developed a fire-safe highly productive haven close up to the Cobaw forest.

What a gift of beauty from some of our current Committee. Other Committee members no doubt have developed similar living environments, but I have yet to visit them.

We live in a beautiful part of Australia.

Apart from all the wonderful work that our Landcare Group has achieved, I would like to see it expressed that we also value and want to enhance the beauty of our region. I think Joan Kirner and Heather Mitchell would approve!

The Newham and District Landcare Group is robust in so many areas, and we can be justly proud. Long may it continue.



# The Triangle Update, January, 2025

By Karen Hunt

It's hard to believe it's actually 2025! This means that in April the Anderson/Boundary Road Triangle project will be entering its 3rd year. From a 2-acre forest of noxious weeds to a rather smart piece of land boasting hundreds of trees and shrubs happily growing to provide future habitat.

Our first working bee in April 2023 saw a dozen or so members working hard to cut, drag and pull out dead gauze, Blackberries and a plethora of other disagreeable species into large piles which were burned. This led to our first planting that saw students from the Newham Primary School being involved thanks to a grant they received from Earth Watch. This was a valuable first step in the Triangle's journey to recovery. Around 300 trees and shrubs were planted with the help of the students and members.

Since then, 100s more plants have made this area their home and I am happy to say the success rate is just brilliant!

Just a couple of months ago, a dozen very hardy members turned out on an extremely hot November morning to plant 300 trees and shrubs along the Southern Boundary along Anderson Road. A big planting in November you ask? Well, the plants were well watered in and mulched, but the Gods were with us as over the following days we received over 100ml of delicious rain... it was planned that way of course!

Going forward we will continue to plant out but our main goal is to combat the Hemlock which is causing a huge headache to my husband Trevor who is continually spot spraying, brush cutting and mowing to try and beat it.

If anyone would like to assist in the ongoing war against the weeds, they are quite welcome to join us. Please contact me via this email: [karenhunt405@gmail.com](mailto:karenhunt405@gmail.com)

I try and get down there once a week to tend to our babies but have to accept that it will be an ongoing fight for some time thanks to the seed bank underground.

I have been both humbled and delighted since starting this project as I have met so many lovely locals who really are interested in what we are doing and so able to spread the good word on just what Landcare is all about. A special thanks to my husband Trevor who has come on board and supported my passion in this project. Also, thanks to Michael O'Connor, who has turned up with his machinery and cleared out Blackberries etc and taken them all away. He also fitted the gate for us to deter unwanted visitors dumping their rubbish! And last but not least a big thanks to our neighbour, Chris Barker who mows the large areas and also assists with his front-end loader moving mulch to where it is needed... a true community project all round!

# You can manage biodiversity as well as bushfire risk on your property

By Jess Szigethy-Gyula

On 25 and 26 October 2024, N&DLG collaborated with CFA's Statewide Vegetation Management Team and local Fauna and Fire Ecologists to learn how to manage properties for both bushfire risk and biodiversity conservation. It was a great opportunity to explore this question in depth as every property, property manager and fire scenario is different.

The events kicked off on the evening of Friday 25th at the Newham Hall with a gathering of over 30 locals. The evening presentation and discussion was run by the CFA Statewide Vegetation Management Team (leader, Daniel Idczak and officer, Andrew Govanstone). First off, Greg Snart, CFA Mt Macedon Group Officer, gave a history of local major fires and a bushfire outlook for the 2024/25 season. It was particularly interesting to hear about the high number of Total Fire Ban days and drought history leading up to the 1982/83 Ash Wednesday wildfire in our district.

Daniel and Andrew then discussed the CFA's publication *Landscaping for Bushfire, garden design and plant selection*. Landscaping is important as well chosen and located vegetation can protect houses from increased levels of radiant heat and flame contact as well as reducing wind speeds and, deflecting and filtering embers. The *Landscaping for Bushfire* publication is available as a hardcopy booklet or downloadable from the CFA website and outlines bushfire behavior and aspects of garden design & management. It outlines garden planning & management actions in 3 distinct zones.



- HOUSE ZONE: 0-10m from the house,
- INTERMEDIATER ZONE: 10-30m from the house, and
- BUSH ZONE: over 30m from the house.

Some attendees later told me that plant selection based on garden zones was particularly helpful and over subsequent weeks had removed half-dead native shrubs adjacent to their house and replaced them with succulent plant

species, some of which grow quite tall to over a metre in height. After the presentation, landscape fire behaviour and larger property management issues were raised including a spirited discussion about the pros and cons of Cypress Pine shelter and wind breaks and their values for livestock shelter, and biodiversity (very little) and issues of flammability. There was a good cross-section of community members including CFA and Landcare members as well as interested landholders.



THE CFA Vegetation Management Team presented the SIM table which is a blend of old school and high-tech gadgetry. The table holds almond shells ground to the consistency of sand which

attendees moulded into the Mt Macedon/Hanging Rock/Cobaw/Woodend topography. Then the computer simulation of different fire scenarios was projected onto this 3D landscape. Simulation 1 was a bushfire starting in Pipers Creek and travelling SE through Newham with wind speed and ember travel variables being manipulated to show different bushfire impacts. Simulation 2 was a fire originating from Ashbourne and travelling NE across the Mount and into the Hanging Rock valley. This applied the site-specific information presented earlier into a landscape and hands on context which people really appreciated.

## Putting the evening theory into practice with a field day

On Saturday 26 October, 26 participants attended the bushfire risk and biodiversity management field day on a local property. It was run by N&DLG, CFA's Vegetation Management team and fire and biodiversity ecologists. The field day was held at Helen and Ian Scott's 6 acre/2.5-hectare property on the northern foothill of Mt Macedon with continuous native vegetation adjoining the Macedon Regional Park to the south and cleared farmland and rural residential properties to the north, east and west. Big thanks to Helen and Ian for hosting

us and answering a myriad of questions. They have been on the land for 20 years, building a house and developing a bare grassy paddock into an extraordinarily beautiful, well designed and managed garden that can be divided into 3 zones.



1. The HOUSE ZONE has a concrete paved terrace and low wall reaching out approximately 20m west and north from the house with pot

plants, water feature, low flammability plants and a lovely wide deciduous Chinese Elm providing shade. White pebble paths surround this zone.



2. The TRANSITION ZONE, approximately 20 to 50m from the house, features grass paddock (mown by kangaroos and mower) with many mulched

“islands” of medium height native vegetation which also retain their sticks and leaf mulch underneath. The design of this transition zone means that native vegetation and fauna are in proximity to the house which immerses you in nature without having a solid block of native vegetation close to the house. It also cools the garden, slows windspeed and lifts the heart!



3. The BUSH ZONE is approximately 150m south of the house and is contiguous to the south with Crown land Clyde Avenue next door and the

Macedon Regional Park beyond. Helen and Ian manage it (and Clyde Avenue!) by removing weeds, revegetating with native grasses, and retaining native vegetation, leaf litter and sticks since they delight in the flora and fauna and know that the distance from the house means that this vegetation doesn't pose a significant fire-risk. However, despite having a fire bunker, on Code Red days their plan is to leave early.

The CFA's Statewide Vegetation Management Team leader Daniel Idczak, and Officer Andrew Govanstone ran the day in conjunction with local Fauna Ecologist, Tanya Loos (science writer and naturalist) and independent botanist and Fire

Ecologist David Cheal (ex-Natural Resources Department and ex-Federation University). N&DLG's Jess Szigethy-Gyula organized the day and did her best to keep everyone to schedule. An introductory discussion from each of the presenters set the scene, including our relationship with fire, the range of views and values about fire (including how fire is “packaged” and discussed) the basics of fire behaviour and ecology, as well as the local context (ecological features, threatened species).



Presenters L-R top row: property owners Ian and Helen Scott, CFA's Andrew Govanstone and Daniel Idczak. Bottom Row: Fire Ecologist David Cheal, Fauna Ecologist Tanya Loos, N&DLG event organizer Jess Szigethy-Gyula

Andrew and Daniel guided a walk around the three Zones on the property which enabled the group to explore and reflect on their own properties, marvel at the Scott's garden and to pause and discuss issues such as how native fauna use the space, plant characteristics, flammability issues. For example, ecologist Tanya Loos explained that she lives in a bushland area which comes to within 10m of the house. Her family consciously chose to retain the vegetation biomass and structures since biodiversity is of such importance to them and as her husband is in the local CFA, they are prepared and open-eyed about the fire risks. They accept that they won't be able to defend the house from bushfire and their fire plan is to leave on high-risk fire days. Tanya explained how small mammals such as Sugar Gliders will find it increasingly difficult to survive the increasing occurrence of very hot days in succession. A recent study has found that deciduous trees can provide a cooling refuge for them to survive the heat. She noted the placement of multiple bowls of water, at low and tall heights with nearby shelter at different places around the garden. This importantly caters for species, particularly birds, who might find close-to-the-house or out-in-the-open water sources dangerous to access. Tanya also stressed that preserving litter under native plants, as Helen and Ian do, provides great biodiversity values and habitat for animals such as lizards and invertebrates like butterflies. Daniel advised Helen and Ian to



move logs and branches piled around the two original large *Eucalyptus obliquas* (Messmate) in the southwest corner further away to avoid any future fire overheating the roots or ascending the trunks. They were also advised to clear all bark and leaves along the outside walls of the house which could trap embers.



David Cheal identified the various plants and talked about their features and properties, noting that plants with volatile oil are more fire-prone such as

Correas, Mint Bushes; but as these were east of the house they are less of a risk. The Lavender hedge and Bay tree closer to the house however are of more concern.

We planned in the afternoon to break into groups to undertake practical assessments of the three garden zones. However, on the day, we didn't do this as several people needed to leave early, others really wanted to continue conversations with the presenters and owners and explore the extensive garden further. So instead, worksheets were handed out for people to take home and conduct assessments on their own properties.

Since no single "guideline" or approach fits all properties or landholders, the worksheet can help people methodically assess their properties to help guide decision making using the following categories

1. Define your property characteristics, and management objectives
2. Level of fire risk in each garden zone and as it relates to the wider landscape,
3. Measure fuel levels and arrangement using the *Overall Fuel Hazard Guide, Fire and adaptive management guide* referenced below
4. Define biodiversity values, and priorities (eg. what are you managing for – is it a particular orchid, or marsupial, or stand of old growth trees, or...?) and,
5. Outline potential actions to manage the zones, considering both fire threat and biodiversity.

## Conclusion

In summary, it was a terrific day that equipped participants with information, practical skills and enthusiasm to apply their own decision-making processes to their land. People commented on how valuable it was to listen to discussions between the

experts who respectfully expressed their perspectives even when they disagreed with each other. Attendants varied from recent arrivals to generational property owners, and all were interested in balancing managing bushfire impacts with preserving native lifeforms which are a source of great wonder, solace and joy. Comments such as "I feel empowered and confident to design a garden that looks after wildlife", "I am not so scared of bushfires now" and "I want to share this field day information with my neighbours" indicated how transformative the field day was for many. As a future suggestion, I would love to secure funding for a support person to assist workshop participants/Landcare members and locals to complete these worksheets on their own property. The CFA Vegetation Management Team, said they had submitted a funding proposal but it was denied for the 2025/26 financial year unfortunately. Such a project would assist landholders to develop a tailored vegetation management plan which could accompany a fire plan, equip them to discuss with others and, pass on to the new owners if they sell the property.

Special thanks to Helen Scott and Penny Roberts from N&DLG for assisting me to organize the event and for Penny's catering for the field day. I'd like to thank "Connecting to Country", a NGO based in Castlemaine, for allowing us to recreate the field day that they ran in 2015. And a big thank-you to Helen and Ian Scott for hosting the field day.

## Resources and Links

- Booklet: *Landscaping for Bushfire, garden design and plant selection*, CFA, 2011, updated 2024. Downloadable as a 4.1 MB pdf from the CFA website <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/how-to-prepare-your-property/landscaping>
- Book: *Living with Wildlife, A guide for our homes & backyard*, by Tanya Loos. CSIRO, 2024
- Worksheet: *Bushfire Risk and Biodiversity Management* Worksheet, developed in association with CFA Vegetation Management Team and sourced from a Connecting to Country field day, Aug 2015. (N&DLG, Oct. 2026)
- *Overall Fuel Hazard Guide, Fire and adaptive management* (DSE, 4th edition, 2010) Downloadable from the Victorian Forest Fire Management (FFM) website [https://www.ffm.vic.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/21110/Report-82-overall-fuel-assess-guide-4th-ed.pdf](https://www.ffm.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/21110/Report-82-overall-fuel-assess-guide-4th-ed.pdf)

**Bushfire Risk and Biodiversity Management - Saturday 26th October 2024 Field Day**

**My property is:**

- bush
- bush & cleared
- mostly cleared/pasture
- pasture regenerating into bush

**When I think about managing fire risk on my property I feel ...**

Informed & capable & developing competence  
on preparation - & a bit scared, too.

**My objectives for my property are:**

Manage for farming and conservation,  
Very conscious of Ecological & Fire-risk  
connectivity across the landscape. Love garden  
and biodiversity around house

**The main vegetation communities on my property are:**

30% EVC Herb Rich Foothill Forest *(Central Victorian)*  
*(Upland/Uplands)*  
70% GRAZED PASTURE w. Scattered trees & patches

**My trees - what are the bark types on my property?**

20% STRINGYBARK → long-leafed Peppermint (*E. radiata*)  
→ Messmate (*E. obliqua*)  
80% GUM BARK → Candlebark (*E. rubida*)  
→ Manna Gum (*E. viminalis*)  
→ Swamp Gum (*E. ovata*)

**Taller shrub layer - what % of elevated fine fuel is there on my property?**

(see page 25 Overall fuel hazard assessment Guide, DSE, 2010)

- <20%
- 20-30%
- 30-50%
- 50-80%
- >70%
- Don't know yet

**Low shrub layer - what % of near-surface fine fuel is there on my property?**

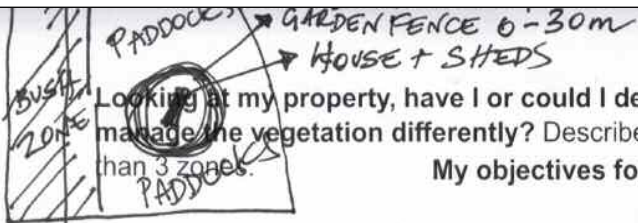
(see page 29)

- <20%
- 20-30%
- 30-50%
- 50-80%
- >70%
- Don't know yet

**Leafy litter - leaves, twigs, bark** (see page 32)

- <low
- moderate
- high
- very high
- extreme
- Don't know yet

BUSH ZONE 30%



Looking at my property, have I or could I define specific zones in which I would manage the vegetation differently? Describe or map each zone. You might have more than 3 zones.

My objectives for this zone are:

Bush zone > 200m from house. Manage for biodiversity (nesting boxes & pest/weed control)  
 Fire mnt - keep 4WD access track accessible - high ground level fuel & gum bark & steep N-facing slope.  
 Biodiversity values med-high b/c dam & creek & continuous forest to Macedon R.P. Mnt → build leaky weirs  
 → add indig. shrubs.

(Paddock) Other zone 30-200m+ from house - GRAZED PASTURE

**Biodiversity**  
 Rotationally grazed paddocks to preserve soil health & native-grass species - allow to seed → me harvest seed.  
 Scattered trees (native & exotic) to provide stock shade/shelter. Add blocks of native shrubs food and quail-birds  
 Fire mnt - keep grass slashed 0-50m from house

Transition Zone (GARDEN) 10-30m from house.

**Lower flammability but cool winds filter embryos**  
 Mown grass scattered w. deciduous trees (Acacia dealbata) & silver wattle regrowth & (blackwood & sheoaks)  
 patches of native shrubs (bursaria & coprosma - spiky havens for wildlife.)  
 Multiple sources of water (high & low) for birds/reptiles/echidnas/kangaroos etc.  
**FIRE RISK ACTION**  
 1 Remove blue gums  
 2 THIN SILVER WATTLE

House Zone 0-10m from house

**Low fire flammability**  
 (\$800) house from S to West to N concrete + gravel paths with pot plants & water features & low flammability veg. eumodnas snakes/lizards  
 Value superb wrens/magpies/tree-creepers/wrens/currawongs  
 (Fauna NE) and small deciduous trees & perennial low-flammabul shrubs & herbaceous plants to East & South-east.

Look at each of your zones - or parts of your zones and ask:

- HIGH FROM SW + WEST**  
**NO EXPOSE FROM NORTH**
- What is the level of risk here? Why? What is at risk? } BIG Forest Fire from SW & WEST
  - What are the fuel levels here and how are they arranged? } Or smaller Northern Fire across farmland
  - What are the biodiversity values? } AND NATIVE (ind. SPIKEY SHRUBS)
  - What actions might you take to manage this zone considering both fire threats and biodiversity? } MAINTAIN bushzone as is AND NATIVE (ind. SPIKEY SHRUBS)
  - What actions would you avoid? } PLANTING LINKS \* GROSS PADDOCKS to link house to biodiversity → fauna
- NO CATS**  
**DOGS TRAINED TO LEAVE BIRDS/LIZARDS/KANGAS** SOURCES MANY OF WATER for FAUNA

# Rainfall observations 2024

Met. Station Cobaw 87175. Egans Lane, Newham 3442

by Bruce Hedge

2024 was a year of averages and extremes. The total rainfall of 633mm overall was about 88 percent of the average of 40 years of observations at this site, (720mm), but many of the months were within 15 percent of average. The year started with a bang, when 122mm fell in January, and we all breathed a sigh of relief that the immediate bushfire threat was somewhat diminished. Then it stopped raining.

February and March each had only one day of "rain/drizzle" when less than 4mm fell. Then, on 1 April, a dump of 65mm saturated the parched gardens, and the Autumn break arrived. May was close to average at 54mm, but June ended slightly dry with only 35mm. Winter started getting wet when 78mm on 17 days of rain fell in July, and August followed with 55mm on 10 days. September and October are usually the wettest months in this area, but Spring became dryer than usual with only 88mm total in those two months. November was slightly above average at 67mm, and December ended the year at 50mm.

Peter Yates' ever reliable Woodend total was 712mm only 11 km away as the crow flies from us. 12 percent more is an interesting difference, indeed. The rain systems coming down from the North tend to deliver slightly more rain here at Cobaw, and the more abundant winter Southerly systems drop their rain on the Mount Macedon divide (Woodend included) and fizzle out a few kilometres North.

Anecdotally, Spring arrived a week earlier than usual with my datum Cox's Orange pippin apple tree's first flower emerging on 29 September. This is earlier than the long term average, but nowhere near the record earliest of 21 September in 2021. The Bureau of Meteorology is tentatively signalling a move towards a "La Nina" event for 2025, which delivers wetter than usual conditions for Australia's East Coast. I've stopped recording or reporting Elders' 12 month rain forecasts, since for the last two years, predictions have been little better than chance, and distinctly wrong on numerous occasions.

*Here's to a damp, productive growing season!*

**It is time to look after the roadsides again. So why not join our biggest clean up ever and help celebrate 35 years of making Australia more beautiful**

**Sunday 2 March 2025  
10am - 12 noon**

**Meeting at the Newham Store**

I have already registered our area for the Clean Up:

Site Number: 53284. Site Name: Newham

Site URL:

<https://register.cleanup.org.au/fundraisers/paulcarter/newham>

If you wish to participate either do so via the link above, or simply message Paul Carter on 0477 271 199.

Protective gear and equipment will be supplied to all volunteers.



# Echidnas

by Helen Scott, aka Phyllis the Echidna



There are only five known egg-laying mammals, or monotremes in the world – the Platypus, three species of echidna found only in New Guinea, and the other in Australia (and also New Guinea) – *Tachyglossus aculeatus*, the Short-beaked Echidna.

The most widespread Australian mammal, it occurs in almost all Australian environments (and on the reverse of the Australian five-cent coin), from the snow-clad Australian Alps to the deserts of the Outback – essentially anywhere ants and termites are available. They are usually found in open heathland, forests, woodlands, scrublands and grasslands, among vegetation, rocks, in hollow logs and holes among tree roots. In places they are regarded as prize food and medicine.

With an acute sense of smell, using their sharp claws and strong snouts to crack into mounds, nests, and tree logs, Echidnas then slurp up prey with a long, sticky tongue which is inside a rigid and hard tubular snout. With no teeth, an Echidna

grinds its food between its tongue and the bottom of its mouth.

Easily identifiable thanks to its spines, these modified hairs cover the entire body as well as the short tail and range in colour from cream to black. Fur underneath can range from reddish to dark brown colour, and is denser in cold areas like Tasmania.



*You may often notice their distinctive circular 'nosings' on walks in the bush.*

Living mostly solitary lives, Echidnas are most active in the lead-up from May to early September for their winter mating period – this is time to slow down on roads. Echidna 'love trains' are males following a female in a line until she is ready to mate, and are on average around three to five, but up to ten, echidnas long.

Courtship can last up to a month, at which time the female will make her choice from the remaining males.

The females breed every 3-5 years. They do not have a proper pouch but the mammary glands swell up on either side of the belly when an egg develops and the single egg is laid directly into it.



*You may often notice their distinctive Echidna 'love trains' are males following a female.*

A blind, naked puggle about the size of a jelly bean emerges from the egg about 10 days later. Milk is secreted through special pores on the female's belly. Puggles are suckled in this rudimentary pouch for two to three months. When the puggle develops spines and becomes too prickly, the mother will build a nursery burrow for it.

Back in 2015 in issue no 44 of our N&DLG newsletter, Tanya Loos wrote an enchanting article on Puggles on page 3, with a warning to 'burn the leaf litter and branches in Autumn at the same time you are raking, and this way you avoid providing what is a perfect site for an echidna nursery (burrow)'. If burning after Winter, 'the only way to avoid a potential disaster is to set up another site near your existing pile, start a fire there and move your branches and litter to this fire. The pobblebunks, antechinus and skinks who may be living in the pile will also appreciate you taking the time to do this work.'

[https://newhamlandcare.info/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/44-NDLG-Newsletter-Autumn\\_Winter2015.pdf](https://newhamlandcare.info/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/44-NDLG-Newsletter-Autumn_Winter2015.pdf)



*The male has a hollow spur on his back leg but unlike Platypus cannot inject poison.*

The Echidna's life span can range from 15-40 years yet usually averages around 10 years in the wild. Unlike many other native animals, they are relatively unafraid of people and can pop up in the most unexpected places. The main threats to them are feral dogs and foxes. They are also vulnerable to habitat loss from land clearing and development, and are frequent casualties on roads.



*Our visitor at the back door found a way into a tub of water for a drink, or maybe the watercress!*

# Invitation to contribute

Junior Landcare enthusiasts, or schools, are invited to contribute a brief article on some topic that is important to them. The first of these has been written by Amelia Clark of Riddells Creek.

## Plastic use everyday

By Amelia Clark

As a young teenager I have been well educated by my school and parents about the use of plastic we humans do almost every single day. A lot of those things we do without thinking of the significance of our actions

Some of the most common things are: buying clothes without checking if the materials are sustainable; using plastic bags instead of paper or reusable ones when shopping; buying coffee in take-away cups that are non-biodegradable instead of a reusable one; using balloons at celebrations which will break at some point usually falling into the ocean or wilderness which animals can confuse with food and try to eat which can kill them, when you could use lanterns, poms poms etc.

Almost all these habits have got better options for the planet so why not use them instead of creating more waste.

**A small change can change a lot**

**Things you can do to make a difference:**

**Use reusable products as often as you can**

**Think about what you're buying before you buy it.**



## Advance notice

I am delighted to announce that Jaclyn Harris, the MRSC's new Biodiversity Officer, who is replacing Tanya Loos, will be giving a presentation to N&DLG on 4 April. Further details to follow.

*Jaclyn joined the MRSC team after recently submitting her PhD at Monash University. Her research focussed on fire ecology and reptiles, but she loves all things nature! She loves spending time in the outdoors and sharing the excitement of finding interesting animals or plants. Jaclyn is excited to be joining the Environment Team and working towards supporting biodiversity in the region.*

