

#### NEWSLETTER OF THE LAND FOR WILDLIFE SCHEME VOL9 NO.1 2012

### Woodland Birds In Trouble -What You Can Do To Help

Why are woodland birds in this image absent? Woodland birds are reported to be in decline. See page 4 to find out how you can help . Cover image: Peter Johnson.





Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria, Australia

INSIDE

Letter from the Editor

**Blue Wrens and Netting** 

**Connecting Country** 

And the eyes have it -A vital win for an

endangered bird's future

**The Regent Honeyeater** 

Attracting native birds to your property

Using Maremma Sheepdogs to Protect Little Penguins

Landscaping for bushfire

**Creating habitat corridors** 

**Biological Barriers:** 

for wildlife

Program

Contacts

Knox City Council "Gardens For Wildlife"

Properties for Sale Recent Publications

**Events and Field Days** 

**Woodland Birds in Trouble** 

2

3

4

5

6

8

10

12

13 14

14

16

16

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### Letter from the Editor

#### Welcome to the 2012 Land For Wildlife Newsletter!

In March 2012, an event to celebrate 30 years of Land For Wildlife was held in central Victoria, with interstate LFW Coordinators, Victorian Extension Officers, and landholders attending. The event included a workshop/forum, celebration dinner with guest speakers, and a visit to the LFW property "Tye Estate", owned and managed by the noted children's author and teacher, John Marsden.

Many thanks go to all of the Victorian LFW Extension Officers, interstate coordinators and landholders who travelled to help make the event a success. We also had a small representation from New Zealand where the Forests and Birds Association is exploring the possibility of starting Land For Wildlife – the first step to the Land For Wildlife program being adopted internationally!

At the beginning of 2012 the organisation which helped start LFW merged with Birds Australia. BOCA (Bird Observation and Conservation Australia) joined Birds Australia to form Birdlife Australia, with 95% member support for the merger. Consequently, the BOCA logo traditionally appearing on the cover on LFW Newsletters will no longer appear.

In this 2012 edition we look at several aspects of woodland bird conservation and how new members of LFW from NEVictoria were rewarded with some rare visitors to their property. Not long after signing up, Briony and Ty Boulton discovered recently banded Regent Honeyeaters utilising their patch of woodland habitat. Briony and Ty are fine examples of LFWers who are passionate about their commitment to protecting and enhancing wildlife habitats. Indeed, from our last survey of members, all of you are dedicated to nature conservation, believing it is your responsibility to take action, and that people should take more action. Congratulations!

Over the last decade, increasing evidence of the decline of woodland birds has been a concern for conservation practitioners. Understanding the causes for the decline in woodland birds can assist us to change the ways in which we manage land so that we make a positive contribution to the conservation of these important birds, whilst looking at better ways of managing land without harmful side-effects. Wildlife conservation in general and wise land use are compatible and can be complementary. For example, encouraging woodland birds can reduce pasture insects, thereby improving overall productivity.

BirdLife Australia in partnership with Land for Wildlife and Trust for Nature, is setting up longterm survey sites across Victoria's woodlands and box-ironbark regions to provide ongoing information about how woodland birds are faring. You can read more about this important work and how to be involved on page 4.

The CFA has produced a valuable guide on how to design gardens and make appropriate plant selection in high bushfire risk areas. It provides details about how garden design can be used to minimise the risk of a garden contributing to house loss in a bushfire. With winter half-way over, it's a good time to be planning for the bushfire season. The CFA publication: "Landscaping for Bushfire" is the perfect tool to start your planning with. Read more about this guide on page 11.

Landholders are always coming up with ingenious ways of managing wildlife on their properties. Keeping feral predators away from threatened species is one of the highest priorities for wildlife managers. On page 10 you can read about how a project on Middle Island near Warrnambool in South-west Victoria is using Maremma Sheep Dogs to protect Little Penguins from fox predation. The program is a community partnership between the Warnamabool City Council, local DSE officers, veterinarians, voluntary community members, university staff and students.

I hope you enjoy this 2012 edition of the Land For Wildlife Newsletter.

Peter Johnson, Editor and Statewide Coordinator, Land For Wildlife Victoria.

#### Land For Wildlife Property Statistics at 2012

LFW	Total Property	Habitat Being	Habitat Under	Total Retained and
Membership	Area	Retained	Restoration	Restored Habitat
5,690	533,556 ha	144,660 ha	22,519 ha	167,179 ha

Please Note: Membership and property area figures are indicative of the total number. We attempt to contact as many members as possible when mail is returned without valid addresses. Due to phone numbers and email addresses (sometimes) not being current in our database or members moving without advising LFW, it is not always possible to keep owners registered as current members. Please advise us of any change of address or if you no longer own the registered property. Sometimes when a property is sold, the new owner assumes that the green Land For Wildlife sign on the front gate/fence "goes with the property." The sign must be returned when a change of ownership occurs, as it does not stay with the property. We can contact the new owner with an invitation to join, if we have been notified of the change. If you know of a Land For Wildlife member who is registered but is not receiving the newsletter (eg due to Australia Post returning RMB mail), please either contact your local Extension Officer (see last page for details), or email the Coordinator: peter;johnson@dse.vic.gov.au or phone (03) 5430 4358.

### Blue Wrens and Netting

#### Hello Peter;

I've attached a photo of a blue wren caught up in bird netting. This was bundled into bags and destined for the tip but a bird still became entangled in it. Luckily I found it before it was too late. This photo says it all really.

Many home gardeners use the white bird netting to protect fruit trees or vegetables from birds or possums during the food growing season. This photo illustrates how easy it is for birds to become entangled and die a slow painful death. Small birds like this wren and larger birds such as parrots and bower birds can all fall victim to this type of netting. If it is hanging loose it will entangle birds. The heavier, more robust black netting tends to be less lethal than the finer white, but unless they are kept fairly tight on a frame, they can both cause much suffering and death of our native birds.

Thanks, Iill



#### Peter Johnson

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See page 16 for a list of Land for Wildlife Extension Officers and Contacts.

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37

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Printed on recycled paper to conserve wildlife habitat.

#### DSE Customer

Service Phone the freecall number if you have any questions relating to natural resources and the environment. 136 186 Ed. Many thanks Jill for your letter. Your suggestion for using the heavier black netting is good. White netting is used extensively in the protection of fruit trees in commercial orchards and vineyards – mainly as it is cheaper and therefore more economical. The extent to which birds become entangled is unknown and difficult to report on.

### Woodland Birds in Trouble

It is well known that woodland bird species have declined in south-eastern Australia – such as the Grey-crowned Babbler, Diamond Firetail, Superb Parrot, Hooded Robin and Bush Stonecurlew – just to name a few. But recent research shows that we need to be concerned about an even wider range of bird species using our woodlands.

In 2009, three research groups combined the results of their independent woodland bird studies that covered a 30,000 km<sup>2</sup> area of northern Victoria. Their studies showed solid evidence of a serious collapse in the bird fauna that use eucalypt woodlands in south-eastern Australia. The results indicated that around two-thirds of all species had declined in numbers from 2002 to200. The declines occurred across all groups of land birds - including nectar-feeders, insect feeders, ground feeders and shrub feeders - irrespective of species' conservation status or their sensitivities to other factors, such as habitat fragmentation.



Map of Victoria showing the woodland bird districts

Of great concern was the fact that woodland birds had declined in large forest patches as well as from small woodland patches, suggesting the decline is not just due to a lack of habitat. Instead, researchers think the declines are linked to changes in climate, which is leading to significant declines in habitat quality and the abundance of food for woodland birds.

The fact that eucalypts failed to flower in three out of six years between 2002 and 2007 was seen as the most likely cause of the decline in birds that forage for nectar such as the Red Wattlebird, Musk Lorikeet and Yellow-tufted Honeyeater. Lower soil moisture and loss of understorey vegetation are thought to have decreased the food available for birds that eat insects, such as the Red-capped Robin and Rufous Whistler. The loss of plant understorey also impacts on the breeding success of many birds as it reduces the number of available nesting sites.

#### Solutions

Researchers have suggested a range of ways to improve woodland birds' ability to cope with climate change. These options may include managing existing parks and reserves so that they provide more suitable habitat for woodland birds. For example, retaining large old trees; thinning excessively dense stands of vegetation to encourage the growth of more understorey species and increase the amount of fallen wood; and reducing grazing impacts on native shrubs and groundcover plants. However, the greatest gains for woodland birds are likely to be achieved through targeted restoration of woodlands on more fertile, predominantly private land such as the plains and floodplains. Faster growth rates of plants in these fertile areas lead to a greater abundance of food and a more rapid rate of habitat development. Programs that increase the protection of fertile habitats on private land are vital to the future of Victoria's woodland birds.

#### New Monitoring Program

How do we find out if woodland birds are getting on better at more fertile sites? Or how can we be sure that these management approaches work? We can do this by monitoring the population trends of woodland birds at a range of sites on public and private land.

Trust for Nature, BirdLife Australia and the Land for Wildlife program are setting up about 160 long-term fixed survey sites across Victoria's woodlands and box-ironbark districts to provide us with ongoing information about how woodland birds are faring.

The project will involve repeat surveys twice a year at sites on public and private land. The sites will include a sample of properties protected with a Trust for Nature conservation covenant and some Land for Wildlife properties. Twenty minute, 2ha surveys will be conducted along fixed routes at each of the sites, once during autumn/ winter and once in spring/summer. Our intention is to continue with the surveys for a minimum of 10 years and then look at the results.

If you would like to participate as a bird observer, please contact Jenny Lau at BirdLife Australia on 03 9347 0757 or consider establishing a Bird Atlas site on your property.

# Connecting Country

Connecting Country is a community-based organisation which aims to increase and enhance biodiversity across the Mount Alexander shire and immediate surrounds (in central Victoria), leading to a healthy, connected and productive local landscape.

Since 2009, they have been working with the North Central Catchment Management Authority to deliver an innovative landscape restoration project. This project, supported through the Federal government's Caring for our Country initiative and Victorian government's Natural Resource Investment Program, is improving Yellow Box Woodlands and habitat for the threatened Brush-tailed Phascogale using a 3-pronged approach. (1) Hosting educational events on topics relevant to the management of Yellow Box Woodlands; (2) Undertaking scientifically rigorous monitoring for phascogales, birds and vegetation; and (3) Establishing stewardship agreements with landholders and groups over areas of Yellow Box woodland under their management. Each of these involves extensive community involvement, and an effective and efficient team approach to their implementation.

Community engagement has been the key to the success of the project as a whole.

Workshops and field days have been held regularly throughout the course of the project, using the technical experts to provide private landholders with the skills to identify and manage environmental features on their properties (e.g. soils, waterways, eucalyptus identification, vegetation mapping).



A series of free evening educational talks during the first three years of the project has included topics such as woodland birds, bats, cultural landscapes, fungi and fire. Most talks have had more than 50 attendees, with the talk on birds in Newstead attracting over 180 eager listeners (from a town population of ~500!).



Other activities supported by Connecting Country include a locally-produced Swift Parrot DVD, a grass identification CD, nest-box monitoring workshops, a field guide on local plants, the development of local area plans and coordination of a major Family Nature Day event. The Connecting Country website is also a hub for the dissemination of relevant information, and has more than 180 subscribers, and regularly receives more than 100 'hits' per day. The organisation also hosts a Landcare Facilitator that supports over 30 groups in the area and also employs a project officer to assist a local Landcare network control woody weeds along Barkers Creek.

Largely as a result of the education and monitoring program, over 50 landholders and groups have signed five-year agreements with Connecting Country to undertake habitat enhancement projects across more than 3000ha of priority vegetation during the first three years of the project. These projects have led to the delivery of on ground works such protective fencing, grazing regime change, weed control, pest animal control and strategic revegetation, and have indirectly contributed to sustainable agricultural outcomes. Many more projects are in progress.

For the remainder of this project and for future projects, Connecting Country will continue striving to achieve great outcomes for both the Mount Alexander region community and for the management of the natural environment.

### And the eyes have it - A vital win for an endangered bird's future

The value of the Land for Wildlife scheme, some vital information given to landholders and keen eyes and ears were recently demonstrated with the report of a critically endangered Regent Honeyeater (Anthochaera phrygia) in the Indigo Valley, south east ofWodonga

Ty and Briony Boulton are newly signed up Land for Wildlife members, having only recently purchased their Indigo Valley bush property. The Boulton's were prompted to enquire about the Land for Wildlife program because of their keen interest in the plants and animals of their local area, and because they were moving into an area with a strong Land for Wildlife presence."We picked the property because it was in such a great location with lots of bush and it ticked all of our boxes. We also noticed that so many neighbouring properties had Land for Wildlife signs on their gates in the area, and we both felt it was important that we signed up to the program as well" Mrs Boulton said.

The Boultons were visited in September by Stuart Roberton, Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE), Land for Wildlife assessor. Soon after the visit Stuart provided the Boultons with a registration kit including the all important gate sign and a list of the flora and fauna species on their property. A list of all species reported within 5km of their property was also provided, including photos and fact sheets for the threatened species that may occur in their area, one of which was the Regent Honeyeater. This information struck a cord with the Boultons when only three weeks after Stuart's original assessment Ty Boulton made the all important Regent Honeyeater sighting – and decisively reported it immediately.

"The next day DSE confirmed the identification (Regents are sometimes confused with other species including New Holland Honeyeaters) – and that a pair of birds were present. However, at the time (in heavy rain) one significant feature was missed, said Glen Johnson DSE Senior Biodiversity Officer."It was only a couple of days later (once the weather had finally cleared) that the illusive female was confirmed to be wearing leg bands. The unique left and right leg colour band sequence demonstrated it was one of our captive-bred Regents, released in May 2010 approximately 10 km away in Chiltern. The most significant aspect was that while over 70% of the 44 released birds were routinely recorded for over four months post release, this female "Orange Green" had gone missing early - and we presumed had not survived. So finding it paired with a wild male and nesting was a real surprise and a great bonus.

The fantastic news got even better when it was discovered that the pair proceeded to occupy the nest and successfully fledged one young. This is a momentous outcome for the National Regent Honeyeater Recovery Team as it marks the first documented successful wild breeding from a captive bred and wild Regent pairing. It also 'ticks the last box' of the breeding & release program objectives: to demonstrate the potential for captive released birds to integrate with and add new genes/numbers to the wild population.

"Orange Green" brings to six the number of captive bred Regents that we've recorded well over a year post release - so with this recent find we expect there's more out there waiting to be detected."

Birds Australia National Regent Honeyeater Recovery Co-ordinator, Dean Ingwersen said "The sightings are great news for the recovery of this threatened species. There's so much we are still learning about Regent Honeyeater movements and habitat requirements and each detailed sighting adds to our knowledge. Most importantly, finding a captive bred bird nesting with a wild bird so long after it was last seen, shows they can survive long-term in the wild and successfully integrate into the depleted wild population," Mr Ingwersen said.



The Box-Ironbark Woodland in this image is typical habitat for the Regent Honeyeater.

Image courtesy of Terri Williams, Land For Wildlife **Extension Officer, DSE Bendigo** 

All captive bred and any wild captured Regents have four unique colour coded leg bands fitted to enable identification of individual birds in future sightings (see attached pictures). "The banding system means no two birds have the same combination and resightings help to track individual movements across the landscape. Recently (October 2011) a Regent that Mr Ingwersen banded in Dec 2009 in Gippsland was positively identified nearly 600 km away in the Capertee Valley NSW. What's more this bird was breeding (with a different female to that recorded with in Gippsland) and successfully raised two young. The nomadic nature of the Regent Honeyeater makes them a difficult species to study particularly when there are so few of them, and once again highlights the value of releasing captive-bred birds and of colour banding as a research and monitoring tool." Mr Ingwersen said.

### The Regent Honeyeater

#### Description

The Regent Honeyeater is a boldly patterned black, yellow and white bird, growing up to 23cm long. The head, neck and upper breast is black with a distinctive warty skin patch around the eye – this feature distinguishes it from other lookalike honeyeaters. The lower breast and belly is pale grey to white with black scallops. Flight feathers have broad yellow stripes, which provide flashes of yellow when birds are in flight. There is little difference between males and females.

#### **Similar species**

There are a few similar looking honeyeater species in Australia. The species most often confused with the Regent Honeyeater is the New Holland Honeyeater – the best way to distinguish the two is the Regent's warty patch of skin around the eye. People also sometimes mistake wattle birds to be Regents; however the wattle bird is a much larger grey bird and doesn't have the black and yellow colouration.

#### Habitat / range

Regent Honeyeaters occur mainly in Box Ironbark open forests and woodlands west of the divide and a variety of coastal

forests in south eastern Australia. In Victoria, a large proportion of their time is spent feeding on nectar from a few of their favourite eucalypts – winter flowering Mugga Ironbark and White Box, and spring flowering Yellow Box, Yellow Gum and Blakely's Red Gum. They are highly mobile birds, and rarely remain long in one place unless breeding, or if profuse flowering events are present. During winter, Regent Honeyeaters disperse widely in small groups depending on the availability and flowering of nectar-producing eucalypts.

#### Threats

A large proportion of the Regent Honeyeater's preferred open forest/ woodland habitat has been cleared for agriculture, leaving only patches of native vegetation in a predominantly cleared farm landscape. The remaining remnant patches are often growing on poor fertility soils and have been heavily harvested for timber in the past. Fragmented remnants that remain are often dominated by large aggressive native species such as the Noisy Miner and Noisy Friarbird, with Regent Honeyeaters being displaced from potential forage and breeding habitats. There are no simple solutions to the

By Stuart Roberton and Glen Johnson – DSE Wodonga

If you see a Regent Honeyeater please contact (free call) Dean Ingwersen on 1800 621 056 or email Dean at: d.ingwersen@birdsaustralia.com.au

Land for Wildlife members and other nature enthusiasts are encouraged to monitor and report threatened species sightings on their property and adjoining district. If you would like to find out about threatened species that might be occurring in your area, or if you want more information on the Land for Wildlife program, please contact your local DSE office or call the customer information centre on 136 186.

This kind of positive outcome shows just how valuable programs like Land for Wildlife can be, by establishing relationships with wildlife enthusiasts across the country and fostering their interest with site visits, extension material and regular updates through communications like this newsletter.



Image courtesy of Dean Ingwersen, **Birdlife Australia** 

problems causing the Regent Honeyeater's decline. Only well planned long term changes to land management, on both public and private land, will lead to a significant improvement for this species.

#### Status

Regent Honeyeaters were formally found along the south east of Australia from Brisbane to Adelaide; however the species is no longer found in South Australia or Western Victoria. The Regent Honeyeater is now listed as Endangered nationally, and classified as Critically Endangered in Victoria. There are believed to be less than 1000 birds remaining in the wild.

### Attracting native birds to your property





Having a variety of birds visiting your property adds colour, action and beauty to the landscape, as well as providing important environmental services such as pest control and pollination of plants. When considering ways to attract birds onto your property, be it an urban garden or a bigger scale farm environment, it is important to recognise every bird has its own niche – a certain set of requirements that it needs to live, shelter, feed and reproduce.

Diversity is an important factor when considering revegetating or enhancing bush areas to attract birds. The single most important factor, however, is the need to plant locally sourced (indigenous) native plants, as it is these plants which local native birds have evolved with over hundreds of years. For advice on suitable plants for your property, contact your local native nursery or a Biodiversity Officer from DSE.

Here are some basics tips for designing a bird-friendly garden or farm:

**Diversity** - Try to develop diversity in the number of species present, and in the physical structure or "layers" present in the bush area. Plant a mix of canopy species including small and medium trees (larger trees too in a farm situation), especially the strong flowering Eucalypts such as Ironbarks and Box Gums (if appropriate for your area). Plant understorey species such as medium and large shrubs, plus some prostrate groundcover plants. Look at native bush areas near your property (with similar aspects, soils etc) for ideas on what species and densities might be appropriate, and get advice from a local expert for customised species recommendations.

Patchiness - Nature is not uniform. Areas of our native bush are naturally diverse and patchy, so try to create a natural pattern when planting out larger areas of bush. Clump some areas with a range of trees and shrubs, and leave some areas with less dense plantings. Also consider planting native grasses if they are available from your local native nursery. Again, the degree of patchiness depends on the vegetation type that was there before European settlement seek advice from DSE if you are unsure of what vegetation type was previously there.

**Balance** - Nectar rich plants such as grevilleas and bottle brushes are important (in some regions) for honeyeaters, but planting too many may result in encouraging unfavourable and aggressive species such as Noisy Miners or Wattlebirds to take up residence and chase other desirable birds away. This is why it is important to find out what vegetation type, and thus species types, occurred in the location before it was cleared or degraded. By putting back the right species, in the right spaces and densities, you will ensure you provide the habitat required by local native species.

Missing pieces - Quite often, as a result of past land clearing and other degrading processes, the presence of large trees with hollows in bush areas will be greatly reduced, or in some cases, will not be present at all. Many of our native birds, arboreal mammals and some





reptiles depend on hollows of various sizes to survive. Look at your property and consider the need to replace some of the missing hollows with specially constructed nest boxes. Take care to ensure the correct dimensions and hole size are used to attract desirable species, while preventing the undesirable species to take up residence (large possums can sometimes cause issues in urban areas). For advice on creating nest boxes, consult your local Landcare or 'Friends of' group, or contact DSE.

**Keeping tabs** - Once you have constructed a native-friendly garden, sit back and enjoy the beauty and enjoyment it brings to your property. Get hold of a field guide to help with identification of birds that you see, and keep a running list to monitor what comes into your garden at which time of year.

Dean Ingwersen, Birdlife Australia

9

### Biological Barriers: Using Maremma Sheepdogs to Protect Little Penguins

Livestock Guardian Dogs have been used to protect livestock from wild dogs and foxes in Australia for at least 150 years. Maremmas (a type of Livestock Guardian Dog) have been a popular choice in protecting sheep, goats and poultry for the last 30 years. Some training and familiarisation from a young age is usually required so they imprint and bond to the livestock with which they are raised, guarding them against predators such as wild dogs, foxes and cats.

Training Maremmas is very different to training your pet dog or kelpie to work with sheep or cattle. Putting dogs into a paddock without imprinting or training them and then ignoring them creates problems, such as puppies playing with livestock, dogs wandering, and the owner being unable to access paddocks or livestock due to unfavourable dog behaviour. For successful bonding and livestock guarding to occur, training is required to encourage favourable behaviour. For example, learning to recognise non-threatening situations is important if the owner needs monitor livestock or to have the dogs checked by a vet.

In a twist to the traditional practise of using Maremmas to protect sheep or goats, and some clever lateral thinking, Maremmas are being used in south-western Victoria to protect Little Penguins from fox predation. By 1999, the colony of Little Penguins on Middle Island near Warrnambool had been under serious threat from human interference and predation by foxes and wild dogs, reducing the population from 600 to less than 10 in 2005. In 2006, a successful trial with Maremmas and penguins was conducted, halting fox predation almost overnight, allowing the penguins and other birds to return.

The program is a community partnership between the Warnamabool City Council, local DSE officers, veterinarians, voluntary community members, university staff and students. Volunteers from the Warrnambool Coastcare/Landcare Group had already been monitoring the penguin population on a regular basis before the Maremmas were introduced. Currently, there are two Maremmas protecting the penguins, with no penguin deaths observed due to predation and the breeding colony is slowly improving. The program has since been extended with ongoing monitoring and research into its possible use for other projects.

Similarly, at Point Danger near Portland, Australasian Gannets attempting to breed were mostly unsuccessful due to foxes. Since 2007, after the Maremmas were introduced there, the Gannets and other birds have flourished.

Directly and indirectly, Maremmas can influence the return and protection of wildlife to local areas when other methods are less effective. Other control methods (such as baiting) when used on their own usually have short term outcomes, and treatments need to be repeated. For example, in the absence of Maremmas, when a local fox population is treated and "removed", it allows outsiders to move-in and take-up residence. This requires ongoing control and expense, it is a temporary method, creating a void for others to re-occupy,

thereby establishing a no-win scenario. Maremma dogs are able to maintain an ongoing presence and prevent new foxes from coming in and preying on the species affected.

The Maremma is a type of Livestock Guardian Dog (LGD) and is becoming popular in areas where wild-dog or fox predation are a constant threat, and baiting has not been effective on its own. The relatively large size of LGD's makes it easy for them to bluff and displace a predator. However, they are usually calm, placid and trustworthy with any species (such as Little Penguins and Australasian Gannets) they have grown up with.

Maremmas are known to deter wild dogs and foxes by scent marking boundaries and barking to advertise their presence. Wild dogs and foxes can recognise the scent of Maremmas and will avoid trespassing on the Maremma's territory. If necessary, Maremmas will run down and kill predators that invade their territory but usually their presence and body language is enough to repel them. Although LGD breeds are not considered ferocious, they are unlike farm and domestic dogs and may recognise them as a threat if not introduced to them in a non-threatening manner. When reared as guardians they are independent and do not seek human company. Maremmas can have strong herding instincts to keep their 'flock' together but will never chase the species they are bonded with. For some dogs, any amount of training may not influence the development of favourable behaviour. For example, just as all kelpies are not suitable for stock work, not all Maremmas are trustworthy with the livestock they are protecting.

Thanks to David Williams DSE Biodiversity Officer, and Jane Harvey for their valuable comments on the initial draft for this article. For more information about the Maremma and Little Penguin project (and Livestock Guardian Dogs in general), visit: http://www.janedogs.com/big-dogs-save-little-penguins/

### Landscaping for bushfire

CFA's Landscaping for bushfire provides guidance for industry Although it is true that all plants burn under the right conditions, professionals on how to design gardens and make appropriate some burn more readily than others. There is a section in plant selection in high bushfire risk areas. It provides detail about the booklet that outlines the characteristics that affect the how garden design can be used to minimise the risk of a garden flammability of plants. The design principles set out how to contributing to house loss in a bushfire. ensure an effective defendable space through

The publication and online information form part of CFA's response to Recommendation 44 from the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission and have been developed in conjunction with a team of industry experts.

This information can be used when preparing landscape plans for new houses in the Bushfire Management Overlay as well as informing garden design when retrofitting or redesigning existing gardens. Landscaping for bushfire includes information about how to landscape an effective defendable space, characteristics that influence plant flammability, a 'Plant Selection Key' and important advice about garden maintenance.

Whilst the focus of the document is how to locate and arrange plants to minimise the risk of fire spreading throughout the garden, plant selection is another key component. The Plant Selection Key provided both in the document as well as online, is a tool that provides a consistent method for assessing the flammability of plants. This is important when choosing plants for a garden but is also useful for assessing the flammability of existing vegetation in established gardens.





# Weeds of National Significance

The Australian Weeds Committee website has information relating to national weed policies, regulations, current issues, national initiatives, research, extension, training and personnel. Anyone involved in weed management will find this site useful. The site is low tech to enable access via slow, remote telephone lines and on computer systems that may not be at current technology standards.

It is their policy to provide links to any weed management site in Australia, be it a community group, government, commercial or private individual and provide access to other information.

The Australian Weeds Committee recently declared an additional 12 Weeds of National Significance (WoNS). They are:

- African boxthorn
- asparagus weeds (multiple species)
- bellyache bush
- brooms (Scotch, Montpellier & Flax Leaf) • madeira vine

You can search for information on weeds of national significance relevant to your region by visiting the website: http://www.weeds.org.au/

location and arrangement of plants and other flammable objects.

The publication contains four example gardens which include rural, hilly, coastal and suburban garden design. These gardens demonstrate the design principles for Landscaping for bushfire as well as providing a list of species that have been selected for their low flammability using the Plant Selection Key.

Landscaping for bushfire is consistent with CFA's bushfire safety advice and provides detail about what to do within the garden as part of the holistic approach to bushfire preparation. Recognising that garden design

should not be relied upon in isolation, other bushfire protection measures are also outlined. These include house construction, water supply, access and having a Bushfire Survival Plan.

Other key messages include recognising that in areas of high risk, fire behaviour will be driven by landscape scale vegetation and although landscaping can help reduce chance of house loss on Code Red Days the safest option is to leave early.

The publication Landscaping for Bushfire and the online version of the Plant Selection Key can be found on the CFA website www.cfa.vic.gov.au.

- cat's claw creeper
- opuntioid cacti (multiple species)
- fireweed • gamba grass
- sagittaria
  - silverleaf nightshade
- water hyacinth

### Creating habitat corridors for wildlife

#### Why create habitat corridors?

The fragments of natural vegetation remaining in the landscape are often small and isolated from one another by man-made environments, such as open pasture and housing, which can act as barriers to wildlife movement. Wildlife is constantly on the move. The search for food, dispersal of young to new home ranges and annual and seasonal migrations are essential wildlife movements. But wildlife in a habitat 'island' may have no adjacent habitat to forage in, or disperse along.

Animals in an 'island' situation are vulnerable to catastrophes such as disease and bushfire, and to gradual changes like inbreeding and variations in climate.

Single 'islands' may not provide all the resources one species requires for food, shelter and breeding. Each habitat `island' is thus not reaching the potential it could have if connected to other natural areas which may contain these resources.

Links between isolated stands of vegetation can allow migration to replenish a declining wildlife population or recolonise an area where a wildlife species has become locally extinct.

Habitat corridors, or strips of natural vegetation connecting 'island' habitats, have been proposed as a means of reconnecting isolated populations of wildlife. A system of corridor links is more likely to sustain wildlife populations throughout the fluctuations and catastrophes that they inevitably undergo. Thus, habitat corridors can increase the value of existing isolated habitats.

#### Where?

A habitat corridor may exist across any landscape and between habitat `islands' of any size but they are best designed to follow natural environmental contours. The Murray River forms a natural corridor of forest vegetation where it passes through the mallee region of north-western Victoria. Remnant corridors of native vegetation exist along many of our country roads, disused stock routes and railway reserves; and planted corridors, like farm shelterbelts and windbreaks, have been created by humans.

#### What a corridor should include:

Important components of a wildlife corridor are:

- I. that the corridor be continuous and link areas of wildlife habitat:
- 2. that the corridor provide a diverse natural vegetation.
- 3. All forms of vegetation (trees, shrubs and ground cover, including fallen logs and leaf litter) should be represented where these are natural to the area;
- 4. that the corridor be wide enough, and have suitable habitat, for the animals to live in as well as to move through; and
- 5. that the corridor is managed in a way that maintains the habitat requirements and other resources required by wildlife (see LFW Note No.4).

#### Some steps you can take:

Streamsides, disused stock routes and areas adjacent to roads, rocky hilltops, along fencelines and disused railways are all places where habitat corridors might be created in cleared land. Co-operative action between several landowners may be necessary to link habitat areas. The exact location of corridors on a property should fit in with the overall plan for the property having taken into account the various management options for each area.

Where possible, improve the value of roadside reserves to wildlife by not grazing or cultivating these areas and by placing firebreaks inside the fenceline. Consider the value of replacing an old fence with a new fence inside the existing one to allow for natural regeneration from seeds thrown by natural roadside vegetation. This technique can double the width of the vegetated corridor with minimum effort. It also provides a potential wood supply and shelter for stock in extreme weather. It may be necessary to lightly scarify compact paddock soil.

Shelterbelts and windbreaks can also act as habitat corridors for wildlife. Try using local native species and planting a wide range of plants including trees, shrubs, and ground covers. Remember that tree and leaf litter, and topsoil are all elements which enhance suitability for native fauna. The more diverse

> your shelter belts can be in this regard, the better the chance of them withstanding extreme conditions or natural disasters without special management, Planted corridors can extend existing strips of natural vegetation, or they could provide links across open farmland between patches of bushland.

# Knox City Council "Gardens For Wildlife" Program

In Alice Springs, Tasmania and Victoria, various "Gardens For Wildlife'' programs have emerged, where land-owners are enhancing or developing habitats to attract wildlife. The objectives of each program vary, but all essentially share the same basic approach of supporting and acknowledging those who are taking responsibility for protecting and managing habitats for wildlife. The Alice Springs and Tasmanian programs are both affiliated with the Victorian Land For Wildlife program. However, the Knox City Council developed their own special

brand of Gardens for Wildlife program, including a "Kinder-Gardens For Wildlife" program currently being trialled. The Knox City Council is celebrating the success of their "Gardens for Wildlife" program, as committed residents design and develop their gardens for wildlife.

The City of Knox is located approximately 25kms (towards the Dandenong Ranges) from the Melbourne GPO, and is one of the most populous municipalities in Victoria with almost 151,000 residents. Knox residents are very protective of the nearby foothills and other special places of biological significance, where raptors can be seen hunting low over grasslands, where parrots come down to birdbaths to drink, blue wrens nest in a quiet grassy corner of backyards, or where small native bees and butterflies visit daisies for nectar.



The Knox City Council's "Gardens for Wildlife" program encourages owners or occupiers of any suburban block to consciously set aside an area of their garden to provide habitat for local native wildlife: insects, birds, and other animals to ensure that the magic of the wildlife experience in Knox will not only continue but be enhanced.

The "Gardens for Wildlife" program is a partnership between Knox City Council and the Knox Environment Society. Officers and volunteers visit the participant's garden and provide



If you would like to have your article, interesting images of flora or fauna, or other snippets, please send them to us and we will consider them for publication. Any solution to a problem, or a new approach, are all welcome.

They can be hand-written or emailed - any format is ok. We look forward to hearing from you - including "letters to the editor".



practical advice and a report on indigenous plant species to put into the garden as well as identifying environmental weeds to remove to add value for local wildlife habitat.

There are now over 400 participants across Knox that are actively involved in the program, which also offers a regular newsletter on local biodiversity issues and workshops throughout the year such as frog ID, platypus and rakali (native Water Rat) information and butterflies in Knox.



The program is free to join and once registered, an assessor will visit to provide advice and answer any questions about how to attract wildlife to their property. After the visit, applicants receive a 'report pack' containing a written assessment, a Certificate of Achievement, a Gardens for Wildlife booklet, a letterbox plaque to help promote the program and further garden and local wildlife information.

For more information on the program visit www.knox.vic.gov.au and do a search for "Gardens For Wildlife".

### Call for Articles and Contributions

13

### Properties for Sale

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#### Lifestyle Property: "The Bunkhouse", Dunkeld.

Situated within the Dunkeld township, this property of 7,487 sq.m features a creek frontage, native vegetation areas, two road frontages and views to Mount Sturgeon, Ideal lifestyle/holiday cabin accommodation provided by open plan living area dwelling with 6 bedrooms. \$265,000 Contact the agent directly on (03) 5571 1497 or the owner on (03) 9561 6863.



#### **89 Canopus Circuit, Long Forest** 45 minutes to either Melbourne or Ballarat

This Land for Wildlife property on 5 1/2 acres is set in the middle of Long Forest Conservation area and is less than 10 minutes to either Bacchus Marsh or Melton.

Timbered mainly with Yellow Gum and Grey Box and with over-the-road access to the Long Forest Reserve walking trails, it is ideal for those who appreciate wildlife in all it's diversity.

Sunsets over the Long Forest are just magic. Comprises 3 bedrooms, study, 2 bathrooms, lounge with OFP, dining room, family room, timber kitchen, in-ground pool and spa, garage, carports and ample shedding. Asking price \$569,000. Contact Courtney Thompson (03) 5367 8388 or 0438 879 128



#### 216 Emerald-Monbulk Rd Monbulk (Dandenong Ranges)

Three bedroom, two bathroom western red cedar home with mains gas and water, and within walking distance to Monbulk shops. Half an acre of Mountain Ash Wet Forest (EVC 30) with few environmental weeds and including all strata with species too varied to include here. Tall trees with hollows and additional nesting boxes provided. Many small birds enjoy the mid and lower storey vegetation. The property has Land for Wildlife status and is a site of zoological significance as part of the Butterfield Wildlife Reserve and Sassafras Creek. For further information contact Sharon on 0417526234 or visit www.realestate.com.au



#### The Victorian Butterflies and their Food Plants on CD-Rom (VBFP)

This is an easy-to-use guide to the butterflies of Victoria and the plants that they require for their caterpillars. It contains descriptions and identification aids to all species that live in the wild in Victoria. There are four basic functions in VBFP:

#### Look up a butterfly species

The VBPF shows the names, classification and conservation status of all 128 butterfly species recorded for Victoria. Names can be viewed in alphabetic order of common or scientific name.

#### Find the distribution of any species

Once you have found the species you are looking for you may plot its distribution on any one of a series of maps of Victoria.

#### Find all butterflies species for any area

You may load any of the maps and determine an area on that map to search. Once the area has been defined a single mouseclick will find all the species recorded for that area and the date of the most recent record.

#### Identify the food plants used by butterflies

There are 235 species of Victorian vascular plant that are utilised by the food-specialist butterfly caterpillars. There are photographs, descriptions, ecological information, identification aids and much more for all species of food plants.

#### kitchen area. There is 8000 gallons of water for the house. Adjacent to the house is a stone garage and studio for the writer or artist plus a $20 \times 40$ shed with power

"Bon Accord" 40 acres.

21000 gallons of water storge.

13k from Stawell on a quiet side road.

This unique hide away has a great blend of bush, cleared

production, serviced by an in ground watering system with

The Mt. Gambier stone house has big windows so you can

watch the views and birdlife, a large open plan living area with open fireplace, 2/3 bedrooms, a wood stove in the

areas and just out of sight over 200 olive trees nearing

The established native gardens require very little water, there are separate tanks for the garden.

Classified "Land for wild Life" seasonal Goanna's. Kangaroos and the occasional Echidna's and birdlife enhance one's enjoyment. A great retreat. Contact Matt Philip 0412 327 519 \$350,000.00

#### 449 Earls Road Yarragon South, Gippsland

Unique craftsman built 2 storey Cape Cod style home on 7 acres with spectacular, expansive northern views of the Baw Baw ranges. Private setting in park like garden with 4 acres of natural bush and dam attracting abundant native bird life and animals. Situated 120 kms from Melbourne CBD between the villages of Yarragon and Trafalgar only 3 kms off the Princes Hwy. A 12 year old home with 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, approximately 35 squares. Stunning lounge featuring huge cathedral ceiling and Cheminees Philippe fireplace. Double glazed windows and doors. Upstairs consists of Master bedroom, spacious ensuite, walk in robe and parents retreat/ office. Beneath the home double garage, laundry with 3rd toilet and work shop. Additional implement/ tool shed with studio/ office/ 4th bedroom attached. 45,000 lts rainwater storage for the house and a treatment plant septic system provides water for the garden areas. \$ 645,000. Contact owners Rod and Lorraine Dixon (03) 5633 2737 or 0428 663 553.

#### The Plants and Animals of the Box-Ironbark on CD-ROM

This is an easy-to-use guide to the plants, animals and vegetation maps. The resolution of the data centred on Bendigo. It contains descriptions and identification aids to virtually all the vascular plants, mammals, birds, reptiles and frogs that live in the wild in the area.

All records in the databases have been summarised in a grid while the software maintains the system with individual grid cells of dimensions I minute longitude simplicity and ease of use of Wild Plants × I minute latitude, which, in the Box-Ironbark area, translates of Victoria (WPV) and Wild Animals of Victoria (WAV). to grids which are  $1.5 \times 1.8$  km (an area of about 2.7 km2). Both the Victorian Butterflies and their Food Plants and Plants There are about 7300 of these grids that cover the area with more than 82,000 records in the current botanical database and and Animals of the Box-Ironbark can be obtained from Viridans 58,000 in the animal database. Biological Databases by visiting their website and ordering online, emailing (flora.fauna@viridans.com), or calling them on Plants and Animals of the Box-Ironbark has been developed to (03) 9557 5988.

provide access to information about the region's plants, animals and vegetation with detailed distribution data on 1:250,000 scale



Publications

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is commensurate with their front line databases, the Victorian Flora Information System (FIS) and the Victorian Fauna Database (VFD),



15

Land For Wildlife Extension Officers and contacts are at the following Department of Sustainability Offices:

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16

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### Events and Field Days

#### **Box Ironbark Ecology Course**

At Nagambie, between the 29th October and 4th November, 2012: The Box Ironbark Ecology Course brings together leading researchers and experts to share up to date knowledge and thinking about this landscape. It is field based and participants will work in small groups. It emphasises ecological understanding and relationships and techniques that improve observation and data collection skills which can then be applied to other areas.

Participants will gain:

- A better understanding of the distribution, natural values and ecological processes of Box Ironbark landscapes, past and present;
- an understanding of the impact of human use on the ecosystem, past and present;
- practical skills in observation, description, survey, analysis, interpretation, map reading and ecosystem monitoring of flora, fauna, geomorphology and soils;
- opportunity to apply new skills and to collate and communicate information collected from the field; and
- resources to help plan for enhanced ecologically sustainable management outcomes for Box Ironbark remnants on private and public land.

For more details and to obtain an application form contact:

DSE Benalla Phone: (03) 5761 1611 Kate Stothers Email: kate.stothers@dse.vic.gov.au Tel: 03 5761 1572

#### We Got It Wrong...

The image attached with the article on page 12 in the 2011 edition of Land For Wildlife News mis-represented the work done to restore the wetland, by closing the drainage line, excluding stock and revegetating. The image showed a shallow freshwater marsh from a different part of Victoria the Challicum wetland is located in south west Victoria, and is a different type of shallow freshwater marsh. The following two images show the actual wetland "before" and "after" transformation as a result of work done with the current owner, Mr Doug Hopkins. Apologies to Peter Homan! For further information, email Peter Homan: peter.homan@rmit.edu.au

#### **Field Naturalists Club of Victoria**

For all FNCV events Phone (03) 9877 9860 Email: admin@fncv.org.au Website: www.fncv.org.au

#### Wimmera Biodiversity Conference 2012

Dimboola 6th September 2012

Theme: "Nature's Canvas" Location: Dimboola Bookings: "The Wimmera Hub" Phone: (03) 5381 6702 http://www.hub.org.au/contact/general

#### Winter Swift Parrot & Regent Honey-eater Surveys

4th -5th August

For more information or to register your assistance/receive a site allocation please contact Chris Tzaros (Swift Parrots) 0409 235 263 or Dean Ingwersen (Regent honeyeaters) 0409 348 553 or email them: c.tzaros@birdsaustralia.com.au or Dean Ingwersen (Regent Honeyeaters) d.ingwersen@birdsaustralia.com.au, or call (03) 9347 0757.

#### **Birdlife Australia Events**

For a full list of events, contact Birdlife Australia on (03) 9347 0757, email info@birdlife.org.au or visit their website: http://www.birdlife.org.au/

# "Challicum" May 2009.

"Challicum" May 2006.



#### Statewide Coordinator

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