



The Understorey

Conservation News, Views and Interviews in the
Dandenongs, Yarra Valley and adjoining areas.

May, 2013

No. 163



Wombats with mange.

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We now have our own website. It features up to date news about events and deadlines for submissions that will not be current for the next edition, and an archive of past editions plus much more.

www.the-understorey.com

Contaminated Land

Recently at a reserve near Norwood preschool in Ringwood soil testing indicated arsenic levels, fortunately not at very high levels.

Croydon Conservation Society has over the past few months been contacted by people wanting to find out the history of the land on which they now live, and wanting to grow uncontaminated food for consumption on their block. CCS has been working on this information and is pleased to announce that this information (as much as we have been able to determine) is now on our webpage. There are links to specific sites through the EPA.

Look under "Living Healthy" then "land contamination". Should you be aware of something we have omitted from this, feel free to contact us with details. Obviously we cannot be aware of the practices of previous residents with regard to garden herbicides or sprays or burying other contaminants.

To be sure of clean food growth, it is best to use elevated beds, with new compost, soil and other "clean" organic materials.

Liz Santaro

Croydon Conservation Society

You can help Leadbeater's Possums now!

We will need to prompt Minister Tony Burke to act - he's moving, but clearly needs the extra impetus. **Everyone** needs to get to their friends and colleagues to write a [letter to *The Age*](#). Not just today, keep them flowing from here on. This is how we can put the pressure on the powers that be. Politicians NEED TO SEE LETTERS!

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/letters/submitletters@theage.com.au>

Suggested topics:

1. Come out with the recent Victorian government LBP survey findings Ministers Walsh/Smith! This is NOT enough to secure species.
2. It has taken DSE six months to write survey standards to permit logging and six years to review an Action Statement that controls logging - still being stalled.
3. Big Tree Crisis, we can't waste time... old habitat trees are being lost to logging and burning, 150 years before it becomes useful to LBPs. VicForests is destroying 45% of retained habitat of ash forest logging coupes (VicForests AFS Audit 2012)
4. Stalling saves Reflex paper's future but reduces our faunal emblem's future.
5. Not acting is sanctioning extinction! We have 30 years of science to underpin what needs to be done!
6. Our forests and wildlife have not been allowed to recuperate since Black Saturday - mention the fires.
7. Loggers have had millions of taxpayers' dollars in grants and broad access to these damaged forests. Unchecked they have now OVER-LOGGED the mountain ash forests.
8. This matters to the people of Victoria - where is Tony Burke?
9. How can this species be allowed to go extinct under the EPBC Act? It means the Regional Forestry Agreements are failing the nation's forests.
10. We need Direct Action on wildlife NOW!

And many more reasons.....

You are all creative, just keep the letters going, for weeks if we must. The newspaper editors will appreciate the passion.

ALWAYS make reference to a politician - it is their fault this species is going extinct.

Pick and choose and add your own ideas.

Denis Napthine, Peter Walsh, Ryan Smith, Cindy MacLeish, Tony Burke, Tony Smith, Greg Hunt, Daniel Andrews, Tony Abbott

Latest News from the Victorian Government... Proposed variations to the Code of Practice for timber production (updated March 2013)

Public submissions on the proposed variations to the Code of Practice for timber production were invited between November 2011 and February 2012. A large number of submissions were received and referred to the Minister for consideration.

After reviewing public submissions, the Minister decided to withdraw the proposed variation of the Code of Practice for Timber Production 2007 and to develop an alternative option to deliver biodiversity management reform.

It has been determined that the Victorian Government intention outlined in the [Timber Industry Action Plan 2011](#) to 'appropriately balance the conservation of biodiversity with the supply of timber and other commercial forest products to generate socio-economic benefits for Victorian communities' will be met through the 'New strategic approach to biodiversity management' project.

<http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/forests/publications/code-of-practice>

Thank you to all those good folk out there in "Letter Writing Land" who wrote to the Victorian government criticising the proposed changes!

See... the squeaky wheel does get heard!

*Pam Miskin, President
Friends of Leadbeater's Possum*



JOB VACANCY:

Environmental Co-ordinator (part time) Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater Inc.

Location: Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve,
Woori Yallock, Victoria

Salary/Conditions:

Part-time (64 hours per month)

The [Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater](#) (FOHH) is a volunteer organisation established to promote and work towards increasing the numbers of Victoria's state bird emblem - the Helmeted Honeyeater.

The FOHH work closely with many stakeholders to improve the habitat and monitor the numbers of this critically endangered species. Two essential parts of this program are public education and volunteer activities such as revegetation projects.

This important part-time role involves public education, volunteer induction and supervision in revegetation. The work is undertaken at the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve in conjunction with Parks Victoria. A degree of flexibility is required in the role due to the nature of the work involved as some periods of the year are more busy than others (e.g. planting time).

The position is nominally 64 hours per month; Tuesdays and Thursdays of each week are the preferred days of attendance with a degree of flexibility depending on work demands.

A position description may be requested by phoning David Howell on 5964 8341 and leaving your name, address and contact details.

Closing date: 9 May 2013.

Interested applicants must apply in writing to:

David Howell

*President, Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater
PO Box 13, Woori Yallock VIC 3139*



Karl Williams
continues his regular
series of dispatches.

THE ENDGAME COMETH

You've seen those old westerns, I'm sure, where the locals are all on edge in their quiet little town, knowing that the storm (the Baker Boys, the gang that shoots up the town regularly) are soon coming to town. That's Tecoma at the moment.

The countdown to the big showdown is ticking down to the day (or perhaps a sneaky attempt in the early hours of the morning) when an effort will be made to demolish the old historic Hazelvale Dairy and the cottage next door that has been Saffron Cottage. It's all in the cause of the never ending expansion of McDonald's, and their accursed outlets that discharge food-like products.

But the good folk of the Hills are waiting for them – in fact, much of the world is watching. Over Easter, our campaign went viral – globally. CNN picked up on the story of the little mountain village of 2000 people that has been battling McDonald's tooth and nail for over two years. Over 100 foreign news agencies subsequently picked up and carried the CNN story (which at one time was their second most prominent international story!), translated into at least nine languages.

The would-be franchisee of McDonald's Tecoma has been shown what will be waiting for him in the Hills, with a daily demonstration of 10 or so (up to 16) people in front of his Boronia store. There are dozens of placards, banners, flags and animated reverie as we urge passing motorists to give us a toot (to which we reply with our air horn – that's how we get our jollies).

On Sunday April 21 we held a packed (almost 300 people) Extraordinary Community Meeting at Tecoma Primary School Hall, at which almost 150 people signed up to the Rapid Response SMS system that will alert them to slide down the pole and into their cars to race down to the site to put into action our creative, determined and non-violent resistance to any demolition. We're well aware of the expected close media scrutiny and we trust there'll be no footage of ugly local resistors – au contraire!

With the viral media coverage lionizing our campaign, McDonald's finally emerged from their fuhrerbunker to actually request a meeting with our representatives – six of their delegates and six of ours (leaving all guns at the door). They got a foretaste of what to expect when they make their move, both on the ground and in the all-important media coverage. They've never deigned to meet with any community group like this ever before in Australia and they admitted they've never encountered so much ferocious resistance before, either. By the end of the three hour meeting they well and truly knew that they've hardly begun to see us fully fired up, with immense shock troops on whom we can now call and with short supply lines to bring reinforcements. The Endgame has started.

Working bees - Agapanthus



At Ruskin Park Primary School

Removal of agapanthus in preparation for indigenous planting. At the rear of the site, using tube-stock from Candlebark local community nursery, increasing the density of existing planting. Sunday mornings between 9 and 12, whatever time span you can manage. Gloves & trowel helpful. The hope is to complete before the end of Autumn.

Contact site co-ordinator Jonathan 97259333 or Mobile 0408096099

Locals Awarded 2012 Best Friends Award



Maureen Bond (above), Healesville Environment Watch: Maureen Bond has been the Secretary for Healesville Environment Watch for the past ten years, and has been a strong advocate for the group, creating and maintaining strong working relationships with the Healesville Primary School, the Council, Melbourne Water and the *WaterWatch* Program.

Maureen was on the Environmental Reference Group at Yarra Ranges Council, and is a strong advocate for action on Climate Change - organising community based activities to raise awareness on the issue with local

Council, State and Federal Government. She was also awarded the Local Environmental Achiever of the Year in 2004.

Peter Mauger, Friends of Hoddles Creek:

Since this group was formed in 1999, Peter Mauger has steered it gently but strongly, encouraging achievable projects which benefit the wider community. He brings great energy to all the group's projects, including substantial revegetation and weed control programs, lobbying and advocacy on various local environmental issues.

Peter has always been passionate about environmental education at the Hoddles Creek Primary School and was largely responsible for the much loved "outdoor classroom" as well as revegetation and weed control works at the school.

Who's your Best Friend for 2013?

Having just announced the 2012 Best Friends Award winners, it's already time to consider nominating at least one hard-working person in your group for the 2013 Best Friend Award. This is more significant than most awards, as it involves recognition by one's peers rather than by an outside panel of judges. The Award is also not limited to only one "winner."

To qualify for the Best Friend Award, a person needs to have made an outstanding contribution through exceptional dedication as a Friend. This will usually involve constant honorary involvement in the work of the group for at least ten years.

The nominee doesn't have to be of high profile or an office bearer, but the contribution must be outstanding and involve exceptional dedication over a long period. It will need to be accompanied by three references, one of which should be from the managing organisation or Council.

Nominations are considered by an independent panel of three appointed by the Friends Network Committee and Awards are made on its recommendation. The Award is in the form of a certificate, which may be presented at a Friends Network or Group function at the option of the Group.

There are bound to be people in your group who qualify, so send your nominations in before Wednesday 31 July by email to friendsvic@hotmail.com or by post to: Victorian Environment Friends Network, c/o VNPA, Level 3, 60, Leicester St Carlton 3053.

Victorian Government Reshuffle - 'Agriculture Eats Environment'



Victorians [heard](#) recently that the Victorian Government Department of Sustainability and Environment will be [merged](#) with the Department of Primary Industries to form 'DEPI' – the Department of Environment and Primary Industries. According to *The Age*, it's agriculture eating the environment (an alarming visual).

What will this mean for the environment and nature? It's not yet clear exactly how the Department will be structured and what its functions will be, but the clear message is that agriculture and resource use will now be the focus rather than environmental protection. The Government has told bureaucrats that the merger will 'ensure more productive landscapes and better environmental protection across the state'. Sadly more productive landscapes means less natural landscapes and rarely goes hand in hand with better environmental protection. Victorian environment groups are calling it [antiquated](#) and a [green light for dirty coal](#).

Even if the environment functions are largely retained, an environment department subsumed by DPI means that environment will be looked at through a new lens. I worked in government for a number of years in a number of different agencies. As any bureaucrat or former bureaucrat knows, the culture of a department has a huge impact on how it functions. When I moved from the environment department to the water department in Western Australia the cultural difference was striking – the former had a dedicated focus and mandate of environment protection, while the latter viewed the environment solely as a resource to be exploited to the maximum extent possible.

The dominant culture in this new entity may be one that regards the environment as a resource to be used, not an asset to be protected. Without a stand-alone environment department there will be no one with the sole responsibility to ensure that environmental protection is championed. The Environment Minister and environment bureaucrats will have to work hard to ensure that conservation is valued as much as 'use'.

Are there upsides? If done right there could be benefits – most notably better resourcing and better integration of environmental priorities into agriculture, forestry and fisheries policy.

What may prove to be the biggest concern is the new Department for State Development, which now includes the energy and resources portfolio - i.e. mining, including coal and coal seam gas. With its new arrangements for fast-tracking major projects we could see much faster approvals of damaging projects with much less scrutiny.

Nicola Rivers
Environment Defenders Office

The thrust of the above is unfortunately borne out by the following letter from The Weekly Times dated 24 April 2013. Apiarists have long wanted unfettered access to our National Parks.

Merger such sweet news for apiarists

The announcement of the amalgamation of the Department of Sustainability and Environment and Department of Primary Industries into one mega department ("DPI-DSE in shock merge," WT, April 17) is positive news for the bee-keeping industry.

While being a primary industry within DPI, we rely on DSE for access to public lands for the placement of our beehives.

Access to native flora also ensures the industry's service to horticulture and broadacre pollination contracts for seed set by providing the necessary nourishment to enable sustainable populations of bees within hives to

perform their task.

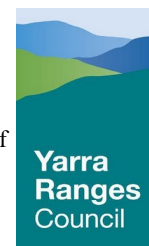
We have been working in full co-operation with our agriculture team, but in dealing with another department we have encountered a cross-over of philosophy, which has shown a perception that commercial beekeeping in our native forests and on public land is an environmental threat.

Several scientific studies into the effects of honey bees in the natural ecosystem have proved that honey bees have a benign effect.

This amalgamation is a positive step in to the future providing more meaningful dialogue with DSE towards our ongoing difficulties with excessive red tape, which is inhibiting any real progress in the growth of the apiculture industry in Victoria.

Bob McDonald
McKenzie Hill

Biodiversity Offset Program wins award - Yarra Ranges Council



The Yarra Ranges Council Biodiversity Offset Program has received an Award for Excellence from the Institute of Public Works Engineering Australia (IPWEA), Victoria Division.

The award was in the category of Innovative Practice/ Service Delivery. Yarra Ranges Council has developed the Biodiversity Offsets Program to resolve issues with the existing state-wide vegetation offset process. The program provides a new service by developing local and strategic vegetation offsets for developments and Council projects requiring a planning permit to remove vegetation. The program pools vegetation offsets into larger local areas to achieve quality ecological outcomes whilst streamlining the process. Offset sites are selected strategically to provide habitat for threatened species and improve landscape connectivity.

For more information on this program please contact:

Marty White: 9294 6289

Co Ordinator Biodiversity Conservation

Demise of UYDEC

After 35 years and some substantial wins for the environment UYDEC (Upper Yarra & Dandenongs Environment Council) is dissolving due to falling membership.

At a time when the environment is under greater threat than ever past members have lamented its passing whilst saluting the many dedicated souls (& groups) that were a part of its success; the likes of which included Ian Noble dec., Michael Willis, Jean Edwards, Dr. Malcolm Calder, Betty Marsden OAM, D. Beryl Phillips dec., Kieran Martin, Mark Burns, Karen Alexander, Bob O'Neil, Louis Delacretaz, Dr. Dennis Gratton, Darcy Duggan, Maureen Bond, Jenny Saulwick, Jo Tenner, and Assoc. Prof. Michael Buxton - to name just a few.

Our final hoorah last year was to organise a weed tour for the Dandenongs which was marvellously run by Karen Alexander, which included five Parliamentarians, several Government agencies and the Yarra Ranges Council highlighting the work of numerous local volunteer groups at various sites.

Thank you all, we can only hope that the vacuum will eventually be filled by some of today's younger environmentalists.

Ian Johnston
Outgoing Secretary

How to Help a Mangey Wombat

The plight of wombats with mange has been an ongoing concern for many years.

Mange is not a disease but an infestation of the mange mite. The mites burrow under the skin where they deposit eggs, which causes intense discomfort and over time thick plaques that look like scabs and ridges form over the wombat's body. These plaques become dry and split open, then the wounds become infected and flyblown.

Mange is an animal welfare issue, and unless treated the infestation progresses and eventually the wombat is so severely compromised it dies a slow and agonising death.

It is not known exactly where mange came from. It may have been introduced by early settlers as scabies or during settlement with the introduction of foxes and domestic dogs. What we do know is that it has spread throughout our wombat population.

These photos show various ways that mange can affect wombats. If the wombat is emitting a putrid dead smell and is flyblown this usually indicates secondary infection. At this stage it is kinder to euthanise.

If You See a Sick Wombat

Mange Management would like to be advised of any sightings of wombats which may be suffering from mange infestation throughout Victoria.

Please include:

- Location, with Post Code
- Send a photo if possible
- Sighted day or night?

Mange Management is a group of dedicated and concerned individuals from varying backgrounds intent on treating and reducing the impact of mange on free living wombats.

To date there has been no funding and no undertaking by any government department to try to eradicate mange or even to humanely euthanise these animals which are left to die a slow and agonising death. It has been left to volunteer wildlife carers and landowners to deal with this unpleasant task.

Maryknoll Wildlife Shelter in Victoria together with local Landcare groups has become increasingly concerned about the incidence of mange in the wombat population. After attending the Wombat Conference early in 2011 wildlife shelters in Victoria became aware of the "Wombat Protection Society's Burrow Flap Device" which has been used in parts of NSW since 2007 with positive results.

The Department of Primary Industries Animal Ethics have approved a three year trial program which was granted in February 2012. Mange Management now has the treatment program up and running.

Contact Details

Mange Management Inc.
C/o Maryknoll Post Office 3812,
Victoria, Australia
Phone 5942 8518
Email: info@mangemanagement.org.au
President: Reg Mattingley

Treatment Kit pick up points: (Phone or email for details)

Bairnsdale, Clonbinane, Dixon's Creek, Emerald, Foster, Healesville, Jindivick, Koorrumburra, Noojee, Pakenham, Trafalgar, Traralgon



INTERVIEW OF THE MONTH

Ruth Hanson has lived in rural East Gippsland for 30 years. She moved there from Melbourne with her husband and first child to pursue a self-sufficiency lifestyle. Initially the family lived in tents whilst a one-room hut with bark walls was constructed, followed by a single-room mud-brick extension. She worked in wood design and sculpture to showcase the beauty of the local native timbers, and then initiated the Australian Wood Design Exhibition and co-ordinated funding for the Orbost Exhibition Centre and managed it for five years, later continuing as a volunteer. The Hansons grow organic garlic which she sells at markets. Over the years Ruth has been a strong campaigner for the environment on a number of issues. Her eldest daughter is the Greens Senator for South Australia, Sarah Hanson-Young. She was interviewed for *The Understorey* at her market stall in Mallacoota by Kieran Martin.

Ruth, what was your motivation to start a new life in what must have seemed like the wilderness in the mid 1980s?

My husband and I wanted to live in a clean place and be self employed.

Did you consider yourself to be a hippie?

I do now! I thought that I was just normal then, a product of that era. We weren't involved in communes and those aspects of the alternative lifestyle. Our family life was simple and challenging being owner builders come self sufficient lifestylers. We enjoyed our young family and had a good support network. My husband and I are fairly well grounded in science with parents in science and mathematics fields; my Mum worked as a water biologist / microbiologist before she had a family, and my Dad was an accountant. My husband's father was a physicist.

How did you cope, and what livestock did you keep?

We were naïve but passionate so we got through OK.. We learnt heaps and we learnt the need to work together especially in remote regions.

We had goats for the blackberries, a milking cow plus a few for eating, as well as horses – I'd always wanted one, and chooks and children are always a good marriage.

Did you have any experience at growing vegetables and fruit before the move?

I wasn't very experienced, but I followed my Mum's example – she was a very keen gardener.

Did you have any backup support from family or neighbours?

Thank God for my Mother and family! She was fantastic – I was living her dream. She visited when she could and was always on the phone. We also had on the ground support from our neighbours in the Goongerah community - similar young families building lives for themselves, doing the owner builder self sufficient thing as there was little accommodation. Our family together with a handful of young families worked together as you do in the country. We resettled the Goongerah - Martins Creek area as this area was abandoned in the seventies when the remote town saw-mills closed to move into Orbost.

Do you still have a similar lifestyle?

I wish! I still grow vegetables – the Orbost area has very good soil and is great for gardening, but I'm not chasing cows now.

What sort of environmental campaigns have you been involved in, and how did you initially become involved?

Mainly in forestry issues, as is inevitable when you live in East Gippsland, but also with the Very Fast Train Project and the Women of the Snowy River returning a flow to our neglected Snowy River.

When I moved there I didn't know what a Greenie was, but I was soon labelled one due to my age and the way I dressed. As I was interested in education and was home-schooling my children I soon became aware of what the environmental problems were and became involved in trying to rectify them, along with a lot of like-minded people here in East Gippsland and in our urban areas.

What do you think of the Victorian government's environmental record, and do you think it will change for the better now that Baillieu has been replaced by Napthine?

Their environmental record is very poor, particularly with our forests which should be left to provide good water for farmers, town environments, etc.

The industry has become so desperate for volumes of chips. As the years tick on it is getting harder to source this high volume. It is proving to be unsustainable - taking inappropriate water catchment trees or old growth. Too many young trees are not allowed to reach their potential in order to fill the woodchip quotas.

So the logging has intensified in recent years going into places that were once protection zones. More water catchments are being encroached upon and there is no mosaic affect now. For example, a local creek catchment that is no more than a foot wide and spring fed, had five coupes on both sides of it. When this is repeated

across the RFA(regional forest area) it has to have a severe impact on the water catchment.

The state government allows the contractors, who have big loans for their machinery, to keep flogging the forests, not even trying to high value-add to them. Climate change is not being taken very seriously – they don't want to take the hard decisions that are now needed.

I don't really know if the change of premier will improve things or not. I'm just gob-smacked along with so many others Australians at the level of deforestation that has continued in light of so much

evidence of climate change impact and how our planet needs as many trees to restore the carbon balance that we have disrupted with our pollution.

The recent federal government shake-up has seen the demise of the pro-mining industry and anti-environment Resources Minister Martin Ferguson, but he has been replaced by the former-climate change denier Gary Grey who worked for Rio Tinto in Western Australia for six years. Do you have any hope for the future direction of the government?

Well that says it all! Can we afford to have a climate change denier setting public policy on our country's resources?

Who would you prefer to be leading the ALP?

Hard question since I have lost interest in Labour doing what's right



Ruth Hanson and her group Mama and the Cabbage Tree Kids, including Scott Campbell-Smith, Greens candidate for Gippsland in the September Federal Election and his wife Susie Bady.

by our environment. I think Penny Wong has been a leading light for Labour on environment. Greg Combet seems genuine and Tanya Plibersek is a good communicator, but whether they can lead a dinosaur is another question. I feel for anyone being a politician in such challenging times as this climate change era. The Federal government needs to step up to the plate and protect our forests and rivers and not leave it up to the States to continue to over-cut the forests to help balance their budgets. With forest protection it's a national and international issue and has long-lasting consequences for generations.

Did Bob Brown do the right thing by retiring as leader of the Greens?

Thank God he held on for as long as he did. He inspired people but had to hand over the baton at some stage. Bob will be even more effective now - he will continue to lead and inspire whatever he is focused on.

What have been the biggest influences in developing your environmental thinking?

Moving to the country for the first time and seeing things with fresh eyes. The destruction of the forests in East Gippsland was shocking, and subsequently learning about the damage done to water systems really made me want to do something.

Who are the environmentalists you most admire?

Bob Brown, Jill Redwood, and I really admire some of the younger generation who literally put their life on the line in the forest protests. They put their life on hold, voluntarily camped out for three years while doing surveys of fauna in the forests, for example Brown Mountain which was eventually saved. Providing critical evidence that DSE can't do or doesn't want to do.

What are your thoughts on vegetarianism and veganism?

This will be the debate of the century! This will have to be seriously considered on the grounds of sustainability. Also, there is no question that some animal farming can be very cruel. Society will have to really grapple with this one sooner rather than later as our climate changes.

Can animal rights advocates be considered to be part of the environment movement?

This is an interesting question. We are all feral from somewhere or other - it's evolution. The survival of the fittest and smartest animals, including us, has traversed the globe since the dawn of time. In my family's own case we no longer have cows any more, but eat deer (killed by neighbours) that wander on to our farm and are in large numbers in state forests and parks.

Is there a spiritual dimension to your love of nature?

Yes, you can feel it if you are doing something good and positive for your environment. Help comes from all directions and people can unite for the common cause. We reconnect when we speak up for the underdogs, or in this case the trees that cannot represent themselves.

I do not understand why organised religion hasn't embraced the environment movement and helped protect God's precious planet. The environment itself is spiritual. When we reconnect we relearn respect for our neighbours and fauna and flora. This respect can have deep and wide consequences that can bring a balance for how mankind manipulates the land the gives us so much, fostering positive relationships for all concerned.

What are the main things you do to limit your environmental footprint, and is there anything else you would like to do?

We have always composted and done those obvious things. I try not to drive very often. I like public transport, and when I do drive I have as many in the car as possible. Reduce our consumption, keep it simple. I really enjoy recreating found objects - I'm fairly creative. We will recycle whatever we can. I'm currently working on an organic wholefoods and produce shop called Morganics East

Gippsland in Orbost, working with younger people. I enjoy their enthusiasm and their creative solutions. I let them lead and take their responsibility seriously - after all it is the next generation who have to fix up what we have left them.

Both locally and globally what do you consider to be the greatest threats to the planet?

I think that the deforestation of native vegetation world-wide is the biggest problem. Some poor countries seem to be doing better than we are in gaining carbon storage credits for their forests, retaining as many trees as possible. It must be recognised that the forests are the air and water purifiers, and absorb carbon. Trees are for all life on earth. Trees are on the front line for climate change. We need to reforest our planet.

I know there are many issues at crisis point that are currently occurring. Extinction levels are the highest ever in history. Mining uranium, depleted uranium weapons used for the past 25 years spreading minute uranium where ever the wind takes it. What a time to be alive!

Are you more of an optimist or a pessimist about the future?

I suppose that generally I am an optimist, but I get frustrated at the lack of urgency. Why are we still opting for the 'big' things and not using micro systems? This is proving to have bigger consequences and ramifications. Big ain't so good after all - small is more than beautiful - it's more sustainable, caring and flexible for adaptation and is planet friendly.

We are all now feeling the impact of consuming life-styles and living beyond our means - fires, floods, storms, tornadoes, etc. I live in hope that sustainable changes come from the grassroots. People power is where it's at and it must lead the way while governments usually play catch up.

Where are your favourite places in Australia?

Mallacoota is one of them. I love how it is ideal for families to come to. I enjoy camping there and looking at the inlet. It's a special place - everyone feels that.

I still think that East Gippsland generally, with the beauty of the Snowy River and the greenness of the Erinundra Plateau, is my favourite place.

What makes you angry?

Complacent people who know what is going on but do nothing. I include myself in this. I get annoyed with myself and my conscience starts to get at me. We are and have truly been the future-eaters and that bothers me because we can't take it with us. It is what we leave behind that counts.

What gives you the greatest pleasure?

Seeing others learn, become excited and inspired. I teach woodwork and art and really love it when I see others excel in their new found confidence and skills, sharing in their excitement and energy.

I'm always creating either with my hands or as a singer/song writer, and love it when people enjoy it and share the vibes of my creations - that's a good feeling when others get it too.

I love the way music goes straight to the heart of all art forms; I love how art communicates. Working with my hands, with my heart and my head fully engaged - that is when I'm happiest.

I love watching the way kids communicate and create.

Simple things like veggie gardening and seeing forest systems, in particular old growth forest survival.

The natural landscape just amazes me, and natural designs inspire me.

Controlling Feral Cats



A recent program on SBS in the *Insight* series was called *Do cats have a place in Australia?* The studio audience was made up of cat lovers, Cat Protection Society members, a representative of the RSPCA, conservationists and researchers working with endangered species and other native wildlife, plus a couple of "cute" kittens.

The damage done to our native wildlife – birds, mammals, frogs, lizards and snakes – is well documented and was not challenged by any of the participants. For example in a protected area of Arnhem Land it is estimated that 4,000 cats eat 20,000 natives a day! Even young wallabies have been found in the stomachs of cats. It is estimated that there are five million domestic cats and 16 million non-domestics, that is ferals, strays and so-called 'colony cats'.

Colony cats were something I hadn't heard of before. It was explained by several members of a group called Cat Rescue that people go out to a specific area where abandoned and feral cats are found and trap them. They are then neutered by a vet and when they have recovered they are **released in the same area they were trapped in!** I found this absolutely amazing, not to mention highly irresponsible. They said they believed that it was OK for strays to roam as long as they were desexed.

One conservationist described this practice as "disgusting", and the RSPCA official said that "re-abandoning cats could be illegal", and pointed out that once a cat had been trapped it became trap-shy and could not be caught again if it needed veterinary care. He urged that suitable cats be taken into the trappers home and not be released again.

One of the Cat Rescuers was adamant that feral cats shouldn't be shot because "they're killing to eat". Her solution was to feed them. When the subject of how the millions of cats in wilderness areas and deserts could be fed she was silent.

The Cat Protection Society members did not agree with the Cat Rescue people. Some of them had gone to great

lengths to net their backyards or to erect cat rooms that allowed their cats to freely access areas attached to the house but stopped them roaming and coming into contact with wildlife. Others simply kept them inside all the time where they were perfectly happy, and safe from traffic and fights with other cats or dogs.

Several of the Cat Rescuers stated that they were "passionate about all animals" and "love(d) all animals". The subject of all the animals that are killed for cat food was not raised.

Those concerned with protecting wildlife readily admitted that shooting and trapping was not the solution but at least held the line until something better came up. Well, it seems that another control method has now been developed.

In the latest edition of *Landscape*, a parks and wildlife magazine from Western Australia, an article called *Controlling cats: the work continues* details how the WA Department of Environment and Conservation has developed a bait suitable for cats.

Previous attempts to find an effective toxin for cats had failed. They are very fussy eaters and would not touch the usual 1080 baits used for foxes and wild dogs (*Foxoff*). After much trialling *Eradicat*® has been developed. It consists of 70% kangaroo mince, 20% chicken fat, and 10% digest and flavour enhancers. They resemble chipolata sausage, and are injected with 4.5 milligrams of sodium monofluoroacetate, commonly known as 1080. This compound occurs naturally in a plant native to WA, the gastrolobium pea, and native WA animals have a built-in tolerance to it. Unfortunately eastern Australian fauna does not so its use here is not possible.

However in conjunction with their WA colleagues, DSE in Victoria and the Federal Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Populations and Communities have developed a modified version of *Eradicat*® called *Curiosity*®. It is not known when this will be available for use by Parks Victoria and DSE here.

In the meantime Bush Heritage Australia together with Edith Cowan University and Earthwatch Australia has been involved in hand-baiting at its Charles Darwin reserve on the northern edge of the WA wheatbelt. If you would like to assist in this expensive but necessary defence of the native wildlife there please donate by contacting BHA on 1300 628 873.

Kieran Martin



Volunteers: getting them younger

Clare Wynn, Parks Victoria

Through the *Healthy People Healthy Parks - Active in Parks Program*, Parks Victoria has been addressing some of the physical, social and psychological barriers that can make visiting a park difficult for some people in the community.

The Youth and Parks Engagement project is an activity of the *Healthy People Healthy Parks - Active in Parks Program* and is the result of a partnership between Parks Victoria and the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria. The project has a focus on strengthening and increasing the involvement of people aged 12 to 25 years with parks. This includes exploring new opportunities for young people and developing the capacity of existing systems, structures and groups to include young people. One of the groups, of particular importance to Parks Victoria, is Friends groups.

Parks Victoria recognises the important contribution that volunteers with Friends groups make to the conservation and protection of parks and protected areas. Parks Victoria is also aware that for many Friends groups there is a concern about the aging membership base and the impact this may have upon the future of the group, a challenge experienced by many volunteer-involving groups. One strategy to address an aging volunteer base is to engage and involve young people.

Involving young people with volunteer-involving groups presents both opportunities and challenges. Parks Victoria was interested in hearing from volunteers with Friends groups about the work being done and the areas of which more support might be helpful. In order to do this, volunteers were invited to complete an online survey. The survey was completed by 46 volunteers representing 32 Friends groups. The results of this online survey have been compiled into a report called 'Getting Youth Friendly: Results of a consultation with Friends Groups 2012'.

The findings from the online survey indicated that there was a general interest amongst respondents in strengthening the involvement of young people in the work and activities of Friends. The report details some of the factors that enabled young people's involvement as well as identifying some of the barriers. The report concludes by posing a series of recommendations that would continue to build the capacity of Friends groups to involve and engage young people.

Getting Youth Friendly: Results of a consultation with Friends groups 2012 can be found on the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria website:

<http://www.yacvic.org.au/policy-publications/yacvicotherpublications-and-resources/101-youth-volunteering/409-getting-youth-friendly-results-of-a-consultation-with-friendsgroups-2012>



Myrtle Rust: the facts

Many Councils have produced leaflets or newsletters announcing the urgent effort to contain this recently arrived and very nasty weed. A team in the Department of Primary Industry has produced a set of brochures and a CD to inform people about the issues, how to recognise the rust and safely remove it, which plant species it attacks and where it has spread to. At the September 2012 AGM of the **Invasive Species Council** there was a lecture about the effort to map and control it.



Sentinel sites were set up to watch for the arrival of the rust from the north, in the expectation that it would arrive along the Hume and Princes Highways and probably settle in Melbourne, on which most traffic is focused, so they were located at Vic/NSW border villages, Melbourne and the Otways.

It has become established mainly around the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. When it was first found spreading around the world, there were only five known host plant species. Now there are over 200 species, all in the Myrtaceae family, which includes eucalypts. Some plant species are more susceptible to the rust than others. One outbreak was spotted and sampled in central NSW in April 2010. At first it was thought to be eucalypt rust, but was soon identified as Myrtle Rust (*Uredo rangelii*). A week later another site eight kms away was spotted, by which time it was obviously spreading to many unknown sites and no longer possible to eradicate. Host plants were destroyed on all infected properties, and intensive study of possible host plants began. Legal restrictions were quickly placed on interstate movement of known host species, surveillance of nurseries was set up, especially those specialising in Myrtaceae, 100 "sentinel" monitoring sites were established and a major public information program got under way along with mapping the spread of the disease. At the time the only fungicide pack available on the market targeted big nurseries, so they were 30 kg packs. A domestic pack was developed more suitable for residential gardens.

An expert committee has decided eradication or even containment are now impossible and the best to be hoped for is management. To mid-2012 it was confined to a few areas but potentially could spread all along the east and south coasts and devastate the eucalypt forests of the Great Dividing Range. The Department of Primary Industry has produced a CD of resources to help people identify the rust, be aware of the host species, and understand what actions are needed if an outbreak is sighted. Worth getting a copy.

Robert Bender – from a presentation to the AGM of Invasive Species Council in Sept '12

MONSANTO



One mega-company is gradually taking over our global food supply, poisoning our politics and putting the planet's food future in serious danger. To stop it we need to expose and break up Monsanto's worldwide grip.

Monsanto, the chemical giant that gave us poisons like Agent Orange and DDT, has a super-profitable racket. Step 1: Develop pesticides and genetically modified (GM) seeds designed to resist them, patent the seeds, prohibit farmers from replanting their seeds year to year, then send undercover agents out to investigate and sue farmers who don't comply. Step 2: Spend millions lobbying government officials and contributing to political campaigns, get former Monsanto bigwigs into top government jobs, and then work with them to weaken regulations and push Monsanto goods into markets across the world.

As long as US law allows corporations to spend unlimited sums to influence policy, they can often buy the laws they want. Last year, Monsanto and biotech giants spent a whopping \$45m to kill a ballot initiative that would have labelled GMO products just in California, despite 82 percent of Americans wanting to know if they are buying GM. And just this month, the company helped ram through the "Monsanto Protection Act," that blocks courts from stopping the sale of a product even if they've been wrongly approved by the government.

Monsanto's power in the US gives them a launch pad to dominate across the world. But brave farmers and activists from the EU, to Brazil, to India and Canada are resisting and starting to win.

We're at a global tipping point. If enough of us pledge just \$4 now, we can join forces to break Monsanto's grip on our politics and our food and help stop the corporate capture of our governments. Avaaz will only process the pledges if we get enough to make a real difference: https://secure.avaaz.org/en/stop_monsanto_rend3/?bUOxFdb&v=24379

Monsanto is driving an industrial farming takeover -- trampling small farmers and small businesses as vast 'monoculture' farms of single crops leech the land of nutrients, diminish genetic diversity, and create dependency on fertilisers, pesticides and other chemicals. The irony is, it's not clear that the decimation of natural, sustainable farming has brought any boom in crop yields. Just more profit for the corporations. Our governments should step in, but Monsanto's lobbying obstructs them.

Monsanto's near monopoly is breath-taking, with patent rights over 96% of the GM seeds planted in the US. And despite concerns about health and safety, the same patents allow Monsanto to prevent any farmer or scientist from testing their seeds! Still, a few countries have banned or restricted Monsanto products.

They claim their products cost less, but often farmers are lured into multi-year contracts, then seed prices rise, and they have to buy new seed each season and use more herbicides to keep out 'superweeds'. **In India, the situation is so dire that one cotton area has been called 'the suicide belt', as tens of thousands of the poorest farmers have taken their lives to escape crippling debt.**

But farmers and scientists are also fighting back -- and winning. One group in India has helped win three patent battles against the corporations, and in Brazil five million farmers sued Monsanto for unfair collection of royalties, and won a \$2 billion payout! Scientists are campaigning for sustainable agriculture models, and just last week 1.5 million of us joined the fight against conventional patents in the EU.

Only a massive, global, united force can stand up to Monsanto and the corporate capture of our governments.

Let's expose this dominance of our democracies, help farmers speak out, challenge unjust laws and patents, and go head to head with the corporate lobbies. **Pledge \$4 to support action now:** https://secure.avaaz.org/en/stop_monsanto_rend3/?bUOxFdb&v=24379

We are running out of time. As we confront massive environmental, climate and food crises, we need sustainable agriculture and innovation, but that is best done by multiple farmers and scientists who know what works best in different ecosystems, rather than one monolith driven by their own profit, taking control of our food future.

This corporate Goliath is increasing in power across our world. But if our strong community stands together, we have a chance. Avaaz members have repeatedly stood up against the world's biggest bullies, and won. Now it is time for us to go big to save our policies from special interests, protect our food supply, and get justice for poor farmers.

With hope and determination,

Alice, Oli, Joseph, Ricken, Pascal, Chris, Michelle, Emily, and the whole Avaaz team

MORE INFORMATION

Seeds of discontent (Texas Observer):

<http://www.texasobserver.org/seeds-of-discontent/>

Monsanto sued small farmers to protect seed patents, report says (The Guardian):

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2013/feb/12/monsanto-sues-farmers-seed-patents>

Political contribution disclosures (Monsanto):

<http://www.monsanto.com/whoware/Pages/political-disclosures.aspx>

The Real Monsanto Protection Act: How The GMO Giant Corrupts Regulators And Consolidates Its Power (ThinkProgress):

<http://thinkprogress.org/health/2013/04/10/1832621/monsanto-protection-act-power/>

Monsanto Protection Act put GM companies above the federal courts (The Guardian):

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/blog/2013/apr/04/monsanto-protection-act-gm>

Biodiversity for food and agriculture (UN Food and Agriculture Organization):

<http://www.fao.org/sd/EPdirect/EPRe0040.htm>

Monsanto's harvest of fear (Vanity Fair):

<http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2008/05/monsanto200805>

Wikileaks shows US pushes GM on EU (The Guardian):

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jan/03/wikileaks-us-eu-gm-crops>

USDA Greenlights Monsanto's Utterly Useless New GMO Corn (Mother Jones):

<http://www.motherjones.com/tom-philpott/2012/01/monsanto-gmo-drought-tolerant-corn>

Crop Scientists Say Biotechnology Seed Companies Are Thwarting Research (New York Times):

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/20/business/20crop.html?_r=0

Additional sources (Avaaz):

http://www.avaaz.org/en/stop_monsanto_sources/

Keep Australia Beautiful and Coca Cola

The 2013 grants program brings the investment by Coca-Cola to \$1.2 million in partnership with the Keep Australia Beautiful Network, to encourage **public place recycling**.

A total of \$409,000 in grant funding is available for this year's program.

If Coke supported Container Deposit Legislation instead of taking the Northern Territory to court to prevent it they wouldn't have to pay anything!

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Any groups wishing to publicise their activities for the coming year please send details as soon as possible, preferably from the whole year.

May 2013

5	Field Naturalis of Vic. Fungal Foray: Cathedral Range	9560 7775
12	Field Naturalis of Vic. Fungal Foray: Noojee-Toorongu Falls Circuit	9560 7775
16	Yarra Ranges Council - Environmental Discussion Group - Silvan	9294 6497
18	Friends of Ferny Creek – working bee	9755 1402
18	Yarra Ranges Council - Environmental Discussion/Community Engagement Forum - Healesville Memorial Hall	1300 368 333
19	Monbulk Landcare - working bee	9751 1587
21	Healesville Environment Watch - meeting	5962 1224
25	Friends of Glenfern Valley Bushlands - working bee *	0411 111 830
26	Friends of Hazel Vale Valley Tecoma – working bee *	0401 325 156
26	Friends of Wanderslore - working bee	5941 8672
28	Manningham Council Nature Walk - Koornong	9840 9124

June 2013

5	World Environment Day "Think Eat Save"	9670 7878
15	Friends of Ferny Creek – working bee	9755 1402
16	Monbulk Landcare - working bee *	9751 1587
16	Friends of Picnic Hill - working bee	0439 614 270
22	Friends of Glenfern Valley Bushlands - working bee *	0411 111 830
23	Friends of Hazel Vale Valley Tecoma – working bee *	0401 325 156
23	Friends of Wanderslore - working bee	5941 8672

*** These groups have not confirmed dates so please check**

Candlebark Community Nursery Every day except Friday and Saturday between 9am and 3.30pm, Sundays between 10am and 2pm. More details: 9727 0594/0448 011 604

Chandler Hill Parkcare Group every Tuesday and every fourth Sunday, 10am – noon, weeding in Dandenong Ranges National Park. Phone 9762 8227 for details.

Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater nursery activity days every Tuesday and Thursday 10 am – noon. More details: 5964 8341. For Revegetation days phone 9720 4062

Knox Environment Society Community Nursery Open Sundays and Thursdays 10am – 4pm. Ferntree Gully Recreation Reserve (Mel 74 A5) email: info@kes.org.au website: www.kes.org.au

Southern Dandenongs Community Nursery Tuesday - Friday 9am -4pm; Sunday morning, 9 am – noon. Activities include setting up germination trays or cuttings, pricking out seedlings, weeding or sorting of stock etc. Volunteers can learn about propagating indigenous plants and their unique importance to our local environment. More details: 9754 6962; website: <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~sdcn/>

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