

FRIENDS OF BRAESIDE PARK NEWSLETTER

February 2009, no. 1



BRAESIDE PARK

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Lower Dandenong Road
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Friends' corner

Join The A Team

A dedicated group of Friends is having a great impact on Braeside Park. The 'A Team', also known as 'The Project Group', gathers at the Park Office most Wednesdays at 9am. The group accomplishes a wide variety of tasks.

For instance, this week the team was helping to control rabbits in a Park revegetation area. Other weeks, the team attack weeds, build fences or do planting. Always, they have pleasant companionship and the satisfaction of visible achievements on the Park environment.

All are welcome to join in. Just turn up at the **Park Office at 9am on Wednesdays.**

Community Garden progress

Lots of work has been done on the Garden landscaping and the Frog Pond is being developed. All we need is some rain.

The new shed is a great amenity for everyone who works in the nursery. Watch for open days soon to be scheduled.

A home amongst the rafters



One laid-back Brushtail Possum. *Photo: VL*

Some of the wildlife in Braeside Park has become very blasé about the presence of humans. The Park sheds are nice sheltered places to rest, never mind the constant coming and going of people and vehicles.

At least two Brushtail Possums had taken up residence in one of the sheds at last inspection in mid January. Not nearly as exciting as the Barn Owl that sheltered in a shed corner a couple of years ago.

Greenhouse gas by transport mode

The *Ecologist* magazine (July/Aug 2008) compiled figures on CO₂ produced by various transport modes.

Grams of CO₂ per passenger kilometre

1611	Ocean-going cruise liner
300	Domestic short-haul aircraft
248	International short-haul aircraft
210	Average petrol car
201	International long-haul aircraft
199	Average diesel car
107	Motorbike
89	Bus
60	Rail
20	Coach (intercity long-haul bus)

Reprinted from *Green*, issue 26, Spring 2008.

Ten Intermediate Egrets

Recently while doing her survey for the Bird Group, Bev Bancroft spotted ten Intermediate Egrets in the Park wetlands. It's unusual to see only one Intermediate here, let alone ten! Let's hope that this is an indication that the water in our wetland may be improving in quality.

Thanks To The Helpers
Those who helped produce the newsletter:

Elsie Anderson
Bev Bancroft
Ian Parsons
Park Rangers

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Friends of Braeside Park

ACTIVITIES CALENDAR

Activity	Time/Day	Feb	Mar	Apr
Committee Meeting	4th Monday, 2:00pm at the Visitor Centre	23	23	27
Community Projects Weekday	9:00 - 12:00 noon Wednesday at the Park Office	11 18 25	4 11 18 25	1 8 15 22 29
Plant Propagation Nursery Facility	10:00 - 12:00 noon 1st Sat & Mon 3rd Wed & Sun	7 15 18	2 7 15 18	4 6 15 19
Seed & Cutting Collection Meet at Robin Car park	10:00 - 12:00 noon The Fri. before the 1st Sat. of the month	6	6	3
Water Quality Monitoring Meet at the Park Office	9:00 - 12:00 noon 3rd Tues	17	17	21
Community Projects Weekends	9:00 - 12:00 noon, follow the signs			
Special Activities				Advance notice Bird walk in Heathland Sun. 3 May Visitors' Centre 9am Morning tea too!

Wedge-tailed Eagles in the Park again

On the 3rd of January, John Chapman and his family were chatting to English travellers during their regular visit to the Park. John glanced up and saw a very large raptor overhead. As you can see from John's photo, the bird was a Wedge-tailed Eagle. The sighting was at the Governor Road end of the Park

Then, in mid-January, David Stabb was doing his Bird Group wetland survey and in the southern end of the Park, he spotted *two* Wedgies! Wouldn't it be wonderful if the eagles nested here?



Look out for this bird in Braeside Park!

Flying ants in your pants:

By Kaye Proudley

...and up your trouser leg, in your ear, down your shirt, so be careful to keep your mouth shut! Have you been the victim of these flights of ants, with this warm burst of weather of late?

I was out in the garden the other day and was totally inundated with flying ants, everywhere I looked. The birds of course thought it a bountiful harvest – just at the right time, easy pickings to feed their newly-hatched young, but I thought otherwise as I tried to remove them from bra and hair and above-mentioned places. Our swimming pool received a new liner on top of the water; a shimmering sea of ant wings is all that could be seen. If there are tadpoles in there presently then they'll be growing fat.

But hang on, I hear you say...ants don't fly. Well they do actually. Not all the time. Just at mating time. When the season is right, the males grow wings, as do the queens, and all take to the air for the mating flight.



Flying ant. Photo: UnExCo

Mating actually takes place in the air as they fly, with a queen accepting advances from several males. She will store their sperm in her body and it will last for the rest of her (up to) 20-year lifespan so that whenever she lays eggs, she can fertilise them with the stored fluid. After mating she will cut off her own wings (ouch!) and seek a life underground, setting up a new colony by laying eggs of worker females and feeding them till they grow enough to go hunting food to feed her and her young, then settling down to being "egg-factory supremo."

The poor old males die soon after their one pleasure in life.

The ants that we see out foraging for food or rebuilding nests or their surrounds are sterile, wingless females, similar in look to the queen, but smaller. Males often look like wasps but are usually smaller again.

An unwelcome addition to our ant fauna—the introduced and very obnoxious Argentine Ant. Photo: © BBC



The life cycle of an ant is in four stages. First, eggs in a white colour; then larvae (a grub or maggot shape, also white in colour) that moult three times as they grow larger; then pupae in a spun cocoon; then the fourth and final stage of becoming an adult. As a newly hatched ant, it is white in colour but after a short time it turns a light brown. It will also be smaller and weaker than an older adult ant. It will frantically dig to the surface to obtain food.

Australia has about 1,300 species (with more possibly yet to be discovered) of the 15,000 species found worldwide so far. It amazes me that our scientists have not yet documented all life on our wondrous continent, but of course it happens around the world too. Or doesn't.

Ants and other invertebrates like termites and beetles are an indicator of an ecosystems' health – if the invertebrates are in good shape then it is thought that the ecosystem should be in similar shape. Mine rehabilitation is thought to be successful if ants recolonise revegetated mine workings; and fire and grazing management is seen to be successful, if ants return after fires or grazing regimes are implemented.

Of course we are all familiar with many of our ant species – who hasn't been bitten by a Bulldog ant or a Jumping Jack? You know the remedy if you're out in the bush? Grab a fresh young stem of bracken, pull it from the ground, split open the stem and rub the juices onto your bite. Guaranteed no-sting, no-pain remedy with immediate relief. You may need a second application; depending on how well or how many times you were stung.

And if we haven't at least experienced their bite and their spraying of formic acid into the wound area, we've probably heard of this performance. But how many other types of ants can you name? There are only another 1,298 to remember!

Braeside Park Bird Group Survey Report

By Ian Parsons

The regular bird survey of the Park's wetlands continues, despite the wetlands being under considerable stress with lack of water inflow; surrounding soils are so dry that any rain is readily soaked up. Also less water from the surrounding suburban area flows in from drains, due to increasing use of rainwater tanks.

However the team still regularly does its twice a month survey when practical. The reeds and weeds that have proliferated along the track, in spite of low rainfall, sometimes make the way impassable. Surveys of the Heathland birds also have been very disappointing. One bright spot on the November Wetland survey—a White-bellied Sea Eagle was seen roosting on a stag in the Wetlands (photo published in the November 2008 issue), but was chased away by Sulphur-crested Cockatoos.

Our survey results are summarised in the table below.

	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct
Species	50	42	33	30	37	45
Numbers	560	252	269	177	361	281

Advance notice: Bird walk in the Heathland and morning tea Sunday 3rd May, meet at Visitors' Centre 9am.

Braeside Park bird banding then and now

By Malcolm Brown



Red-browed Firetail
in Park. Photo: VL

1 Blackbird
1 Red-browed Firetail

Whew, that must have been a busy day. White-plumed Honeyeaters are still about at Braeside but not in the same numbers when we first started banding. No idea why. Interestingly no Superb Fairy Wrens then.

It's the start of a new year and so for the January banding we set the nets in a new section. The old "Practice fairway" in the Park Heathland was revegetated many years ago and we thought it would be interesting to give this area a go. There were lots of birds but most were busy Noisy Miners. However, we did catch 11 birds, the results as follows:

5 Superb Fairy Wrens, one was a re-trap, (2 imm. 3♂)
4 Noisy Miners
1 White-browed Scrub Wren
1 Blackbird, which was a re-trap, (10 months ago)

Nothing startling, so let's look at what we caught on the very first banding session we did at Braeside Park on the **13th of March 1994**.

42 birds of which:

37 were White-plumed Honeyeaters
2 Brown Thornbill
1 Golden Whistler

Homemade insect repellent

Recipe from Betty Le Fevre, Moorleigh U3A

This recipe makes a repellent that is ideal to use on sensitive skin and on young children. The mix repels mozzies and sand-flies especially.

Three parts baby oil
Two parts eucalyptus oil
One part Dettol™

Shake well together and store in an airtight container. Shake well before applying to skin.

A search on the internet for homemade insect repellent yielded many variations of the above recipe.

It is the aromatic compounds which confound insects' ability to home-in on our scent. Thus, you can use anything from tea tree oil, peppermint oil, or even vanilla extract in your own version of repellent.

Nursery News—lots of Lobelia

From the report by Marj Seaton

Blooming highlights: the *Viola hederacea* are aglow with flowers in the igloo and the hardening-off area, as shown in the photo below.



We don't normally grow many *Lobelia anceps*, but this year we've accumulated quite a collection. These plants require moist, shady conditions—which are not prevalent in the Park this time of year. These Lobelia would look great near a suitable pond.

Igloo covers ready for hot weather: now all the igloos have their new outer covers to help keep out heat.

Summer jobs: the Nursery volunteers continued working through the Christmas/New Year period and there was lots to do. The grasses have been growing like crazy, so they needed a hair-cut. The igloos are so full of plants that as many as possible are being moved

into the hardening-off area. First, this area had to be sprayed for insects, to prevent caterpillars, etc. chomping away at our plants. We've also been harvesting lots of *Lomandra longifolia* seed lately. This hardy tussock-plant thrives in harsh conditions.

Watering system: improving the water system is still a work in progress; some areas are receiving too much water. This is not only wasteful but results in a slime of algae growing in the plant tubes.



Marj Seaton-'This grass needs a hair-cut!'
Photo: VL

Park Report—bushfire impact

From Ranger in Charge Des Lucas's monthly reports

Staffing news

Des Lucas is back at Braeside Park following three months at Dandenong Valley Parklands. Ranger Digger's fire-tank expertise has been on call for the recent bushfires. As always, all Parks Vic staff need to be available to help in bushfires. This has an impact on staffing and planning of park activities during the hot months.

Grants

The Friends group grant applications totaling over \$11,000 have been approved. Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority support the Red Gum Grassy Woodlands Project. The Federal Volunteer Grants approved a small equipment grant request.

Pest Animal Program—Rabbits

Baiting programs plus ripping and fumigation of rabbit warrens are ongoing, as the rabbit numbers build up during dry conditions.



Nursery stocktake

A stocktake of plants being grown in the nursery has revealed a few gaps. Damage from insects and the severe heat-wave in January have not helped the propagation efforts.

Habitat 141—connecting the Outback to the ocean

From Park Watch June 2008 and the Greening Australia website

Now and then a project inspires the imagination. Project Hindmarsh, which achieved a bush corridor between Victoria's Big and Little Deserts, not only inspired all who are labouring at revegetation in their own patch. This monumental work, which was initiated by the Hindmarsh Landcare Network, has generated an even greater idea: Habitat 141.

A vision for the next 50 years, Habitat 141 seeks to restore the links between major national parks and nature reserves over a 700 km stretch straddling the SA, NSW and Victorian border region. (The 141 in the project name refers to Longitude 141 which is at the centre of the project area.)

This area encompasses an important range of ecosystems including rangelands, heath, mallee, Red Gum forests and floodplains, grassy woodlands through to the limestone coastal plain. Some of southeast Australia's biodiversity hotspots are encountered along the way: the floristically diverse Grampians, the magnificent floodplains of the Coorong, and the Murray and Wimmera Rivers.

Clearing for agriculture has left most of this vast area devoid of native vegetation, endangering such birds as the Victorian population of Red-tailed Black Cockatoo and the Bush Stone-curlew.

Greening Australia is leading Habitat 141 and has forged links with government agencies, Natural Resource Management authorities, non-government organisations and philanthropic sponsors to maintain the long term commitment necessary to achieving a vision of this scale.

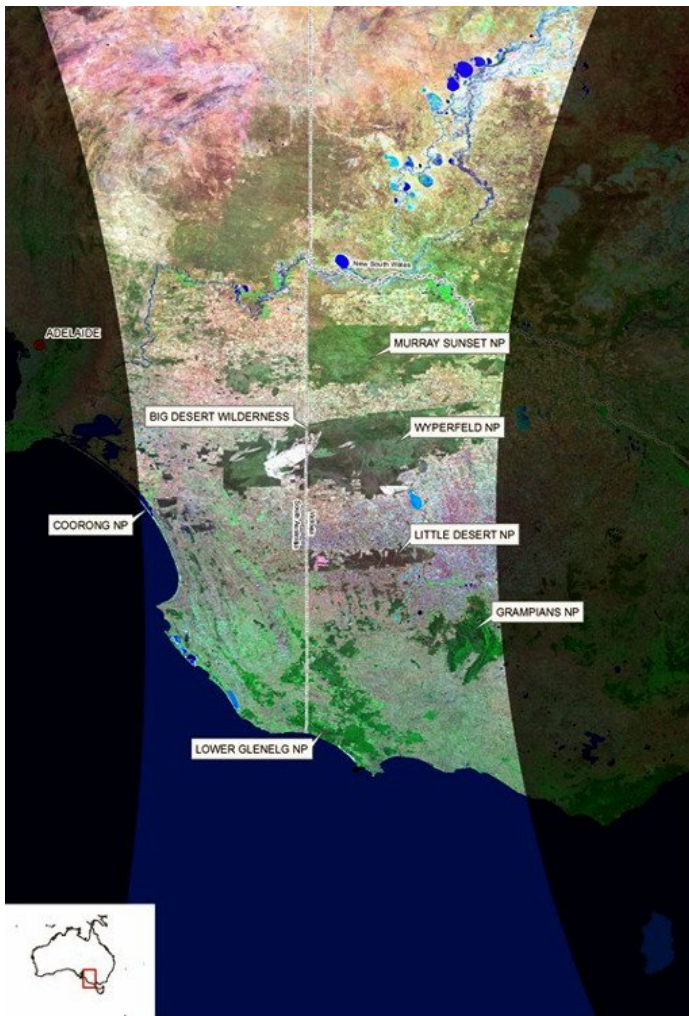
Habitat 141 is the largest reclamation project ever undertaken in Victoria. Restoration activities focus on linking patches of existing vegetation through direct seeding and tree planting. These landscape scale works are guided by the latest conservation planning expertise and science, and will build on the work of the Project Hindmarsh project, also led by Greening Australia, that connected 100km of vegetation between the Big Desert and Little Desert National Parks.

Project achievements to date:

- Greening Australia has developed strong partnerships with a range of agencies, catchment management authorities, conservation and philanthropic groups to ensure long term support for the project.
- A Conservation Action Planning Workshop has been held to provide the scientific rigour needed to support landscape-scale revegetation activity.
- Works have commenced on reconnecting large nature reserves: over one million trees have been planted and direct seeded.

For more information, or to be involved in this project, contact Greening Australia (Vic) on 9450 5300 or you can sign up on the Victoria Naturally website:

www.victorianaturally.org.au



Habitat 141 location map. From: www.greeningaustralia.org.au