

FRIENDS OF BRAESIDE PARK NEWSLETTER

May 2011, no. 3



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Nest Boxes in the Park

By Elsie Anderson

Should we have nest boxes for birds in the woodlands and wetlands?

Early in the Park's development nest boxes were erected to improve the habitat available to birds. The Field and Game Association put them into the wetland for the ducks and Friends helped rangers put some in the larger trees. No more have gone in recently, Why?

We found the ones in the woodlands were used more by possums than birds. Ringtails have even been known to build extensions on 'their' box. Possums are a natural part of our bushland but large populations in a fairly limited area can overgraze our eucalypts severely. Starlings and other introduced species have also used them.

Instead of nest boxes we now have many more trees for the wildlife and this is added to with each winter planting so habitat for birds is increasing, although it does take 80 - 100 years before these trees will start providing hollows suitable for nesting. The park also has a quantity of large old Stag Trees (mainly old growth Redgums that have died) that provide numerous hollows for nesting birds and of course possums.

Our wetlands are home for a range of waterbirds. Ducks did nest in some of the boxes but this upset the balance between these species in the way they used their habitat, so again it was felt natural conditions should be preferred. At the moment they all have excellent nesting sites in reeds and on islands.

A small additional benefit is that our over-stretched ranger staff no longer have to monitor the boxes

What do you think?

If you would like to forward your thoughts you can drop a note to the address below or email the editor at jane@stquintin.net

Editors note: during my travels and work I have also come across a lot of nesting boxes which have been taken over by bees as they seem to provide a perfect habitat for them to set up a hive.

Wednesdays with Ernie's 'A Team'

By Bev Bancroft

Still very productive even though Ernie has had 4 weeks Annual Leave.

Grasslands: Several mowing/ weeding days have maintained this area. Assistance has also been very welcome from Conservation Volunteers Australia & Green Gym.

Seed Orchard: This has been mown and weeded with some extra help from Mentone Girls Grammar.

Visitors' Centre: Weeding and the collection of frames and guards has tidied up this area. More guards and frames have been collected from an area opposite car park 4 in readiness for the community planting season.

Picnic Areas: The areas have been tidied and lots of chipping and mulching has occurred.

Community Garden: This was tidied in preparation for the "Open Day" which was held on the 15th May.

More help is always needed and everyone is most welcome.

- meet at the Park Office, Wednesdays 9 am
- 10.30 am morning tea provided

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	June	July	August
Committee Meeting	4th Monday, from 1.00pm at the Visitor Centre	27	25	22
Community Garden	9.30 - 12.00, 3rd Sun of the month at nursery	19	17	21
Community Projects Weekday	9:00 - 12:00 noon Wednesday at the Park Office	1 8 15 22 29	6 13 20 27	3 10 17 24 31
Nursery open for plant sales	10.00 - 12.00 3rd Sunday of the month	19	17	21
Plant Propagation Nursery Facility	10:00 - 12:00 noon 1st Sat & Mon 3rd Sun	4 6 19	2 4 17	1 6 21
Plant Propagation Nursery Facility	1.00pm - 3.00pm Wednesday	- - -	20	3 17 31
Water Quality Monitoring Meet at the Park Office	9:00 - 12:00 noon 3rd Tues	21	19	16
Community Projects Weekends	9:00 - 12:00 noon, follow the signs	Community Planting Day Sunday 26th	Community Planting Day Saturday 30th	Community Planting Day Sunday 28th
Special Activities	Times to be advised	-	-	AGM

First Community Planting for 2011 - Saturday 28th May

From the Editor

The first Community Planting for 2011 on takes place on Saturday 28 May between 9am - 12 noon. If you would like to attend, enter the park from Lower Dandenong Road and follow the signs. Gardening gloves and stout shoes or gum boots are suggested, plus warm and possibly waterproof clothing depending on the conditions. If you've been before you will know how much fun it can be and if you haven't then please come along and find out for yourself and bring some friends - the more the merrier, all are welcome. No experience is necessary, full instruction will be given on the day. It's a great opportunity to meet new friends and of course you will be rewarded for all your efforts with a hot drink and a biscuit.

Bird Sightings in the Park

From report by Steve MacDonald

There have been some exciting bird sightings in the Park during March and April, with some firsts for the season and others not having been seen in the park for many years.

Firsts for the Season included Five Black-fronted Dotterels (*Euseyornis melanops*) sighted on the wetlands and Flame Robins (*Petroica phoenicea*).

Birds seen after a longer absence were the Rufous Fantail (*Rhipidura rufifrons*) the third sighting here at Braeside in 22 years was sighted in the Heathland near the Barrier Ponds; the Square-tailed Kite (*Lophoictinia isura*) was sighted at the Birdhide after a five year absence.

Other exciting sightings included a Whistling Kite (*Haliastur sphenurus*) seen at the racecourse Dam; Wedge-tailed Eagle (*Aquila audax*) sighted at McMahons and a pair also sighted by Des Lucas a couple of weeks ago; 5 Royal Spoonbills (*Platalea regia*); a Yellow Spoonbill (*Platalea flavipes*) was sighted at the Barrier Ponds; a Spotted Crake (*Porzana fluminea*) sighted at the wetland; a Yellow-faced Honeyeater (*Lichenostomus chrysops*); a Brown Falcon (*Falco berigora*) sighted over the open area at the back of the ranger's lunchroom; a Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) seen near the racecourse Dam in the late afternoon and a Nankeen Kestrel (*Falco cenchroides*) was seen dive bombing a Brown Goshawk (*Accipiter fasciatus*) at the back of the wetland.

Editor's note: All in all quite an exciting list, thanks Steve for providing the information. I happened to be at the Park the day that Steve spotted the Royal Spoonbills and on my way home I also spotted 5 Royal Spoonbills feeding on Kananook Creek! The same ones? I have no idea but quite a coincidence! They were very accommodating and stayed around long enough for me to race home and get my camera although I did have to stalk them down the creek after they were spooked by a low flying aircraft. A couple of my pictures are below along with a picture of the Wedge-tailed Eagle provided by Des Lucas.



Nursery News

By Marj Seaton

Seed Collecting: there is not much to collect at present. However, last month *Bursaria spinosa* seeds were ready and also the drooping *Allocasuarina*, *A. verticillata*.

In May, Bill and Marj visited 'George's' tree, a massive *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* in the heathland, and picked some of its seed capsules, after which we walked to the area shaped by Melbourne Water two years ago into an overflow billabong from the Dingley waterway. The Friends planted this area and then waited for the rains to arrive. The billabong is now full of water, albeit muddy, and the plantings are thriving. We then trekked across country through an area cleared last season; many little passionfruit seedlings were pulled out and the odd inkweed. Burgan is rearing its ugly head again but not as thickly as before.

In the Nursery: we've been working hard at planting Eucalypts but sadly they aren't germinating. Whether it is because of the change of season or because the seeds have been too wet, either way we don't have the

number of redgums in particular that we need this year. We've now halved the amount of watering all plants are receiving so, hopefully, we'll also have fewer cuttings rotting.

Pests: Grubs are appearing again – hitting the *Indigoferas* now. We've had them on the gums and some wattles before, but now the little beasts are diversifying.

Grasses, etc: Grasses are growing well. We have *Microlaena*, *Themeda*, *Poa* and some *Austrodanthonia* species *Carex*, a sedge, was planted late but is coming along nicely. This plant is good for the wetter areas, eg near the Dingley waterway and at the edges of the carparks.

We've opened up the second hardening off area so we can store our better plants in preparation for the planting season coming up. Hopefully we'll see you at one of the planting days.

Large Potter Wasp (*Abispa ephippium*)

By Glen Oliphant

This wasp is very large with a body length of 30mm. Its head, antenna and legs are orange-yellow. Its thorax is black with orange-yellow triangle shoulder. Its abdomen is segmented with orange-yellow and black. This wasp was seen dragging a huntsman spider across the ground and down into a hole near the Visitor Centre. These wasps can vary in colour from orange/black to yellow/black. It is a large wasp with a powerful sting (although you will be pleased to know it is very rarely aggressive to humans) and is also known as the Australian Hornet and the Mason wasp. This species is solitary

Other wasps that have been seen are of course the introduced European wasp *Vespula germanica* and the less common English wasp *Vespula vulgaris* both these wasps are similar in appearance the distinguishing feature is that the European wasp has black dots on the yellow bands.



A Potter Wasp
Photo www.brisbaneinsects.com

Another interesting wasp that has been seen is the Spider hunting wasp *Auplopus sp* these wasps are black with orange/tan antennae and these wasps seek out spiders for food for their larvae. The wasp nests in rafters in buildings are usually the Mud Dauber wasp *Sceliphron laetum*, a slender solitary wasp. The nests often look like pots. These wasps have been recorded at the core and art shed.

Wasps are important to the environment as they pollinate orchids (Orchid dupe wasp *Lissopimpla excelsa*) and control other insects, including other wasps, beetles and spiders.

Reference

Australian insects and spiders a pictorial guide, Niki Horin

National Volunteer Week

By Bev Bancroft

National Volunteer Week 9-15 May was celebrated with morning tea and the presentation of some badges by Ranger in Charge - Des Lucas.

- Groups were Ernie's "A" team, Propagation, Community Garden & Karkarook Park.

More badges are to be presented at a later date.

Help is at hand for injured wildlife: call **AWARE** (Patterson Lakes Branch) on **0412 433 727**

The Good Side of the Floods - a Visit to the Kerang Region

By Val La May (former editor)

Imagine you are a farmer in the Kerang area who's bought a grazing property, only to find that a sizeable portion of it has become a lake. That's what happened to Craig, west of Kerang, during the floods this year. A depression on his farm has become a lake for the first time in the memory of nearby locals. Craig is philosophical about his new lake and indeed has closed it to duck-shooters, to the benefit of birders who gathered there on the 1st of May.

On the last weekend in April, three other birdos and I joined a four-day outing in the Kerang area, hosted by the Echuca Branch of Bird Observation and Conservation Australia. We shared accommodation at Peppercorn Cottage, a lovely 1920s vintage house in Kerang.

Driving around Kerang, it was hard to believe that just a few weeks ago the area was covered by an inland sea of flood-water. The town and local caravan parks had made a mighty effort to clean up in time for Easter. But there is still plenty of water in the area - all the local drains, channels, wetlands and any low-lying places are full of water. And happily for us, there were plenty of birds taking advantage of all that water.

Day One - Terrick Terrick National Park

While most of the birdos conducted a survey near Torrumbarry, Julie and I decided to go to 'The Terricks', a local birding hot-spot. Near Mitiamo an Australian Hobby was sitting on carrion in the middle of the road, not something one sees every day! The road to the campground was teeming with small birds—a foretaste of a great birding day.

We walked from the day-use area up to the top of Mt. Terrick, then around the western side back to the car. Two Brown Falcons were noisily chasing each other around the top and bushes were full of Southern Whitefaces, Chestnut-rumped Thornbills, Diamond Firetails and Superb Fairy-wrens. As we rounded the western side, a Gilbert's Whistler serenaded us with its insistent 'chop-chop' call. Unfortunately, the call is somewhat ventriloquistic and we managed to only glimpse a female. But we did find a Flame Robin while searching for the Whistler.

Having lunch at the day-use area, we watched Tree Martins investigate hollows near the car park, while Dusky Woodswallows soared above. We met up with our two companions who told us about wetlands to the north, one of which had Australian Avocets - one of my favourite birds.

We found the unmapped wetlands, which were teeming with Grey Teal and the gorgeous Avocets, as well as grebes (Aussie and Hoary-headed) and Black-winged Stilts. It being hunting season, the ducks retreated to the other side of the lake when we got out of the car, but the Avocets ignored us.

Day Two—Lake Bael Bael and Wanderers Plain

Our convoy headed west from Kerang, to the above-mentioned Craig's lake. A good start to the day with numerous duck species, lots of grebes, Whiskered Terns, and a possible Black Falcon in the distance. (This bird could have been a very dark Brown Falcon; it was too far away to be sure, even with the use of a telescope.)

We made our way via some more wetlands to a Trust For Nature property—Wanderers Plain. Here we surveyed a Buloke grove (where some saw Blue Bonnet Parrots) and also searched for Stubble Quail. A Spotted Harrier flying low over the grasslands distracted us from the quail search. Most of us had excellent sightings of a Stubble Quail which remained stationary only a few metres away. But the best view was yet to come.

Along the dirt track out of the property our lead car suddenly stopped in the middle of the road. Passengers emerged, mouthing the word 'quail'. Out we piled and looked down the road. There they were: a 'company' or 'covey' of quail. As many as twelve Stubble Quail were feeding or sitting in the middle of the road. We watched them for ages, marvelling at their comically short legs and undercarriage nearly dragging in the dirt; a glorious end to a great day of birding.



Avocet
Photo Graeme Chapman



Stubble Quail
Photo K Stockwell

Cont'd on page 7...

Mentone Girl's Grammar School Year 9 Students

By Elsie Anderson

Year 9 students from Mentone Girls' Grammar School help regularly in the Park as part of their work for the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

Parks Victoria has given us a tool grant of \$1,500 to help with their work. This will enable the purchase of a couple of wheelbarrows, some good secateurs, Hamilton Planters, potting mix, gloves and goggles. From this list you can see the variety of tasks they help with - propagation, planting, weeding and mulching.

Because they attend regularly they see the results of their work as they follow through from the germination of seeds to the plants flourishing in the garden.

Day Three—Ibis Rookery, Lake Boga and Goschen Reserve (cont'd from page 6)

On Monday we headed north-west to Lake Boga and beyond. On the way to Boga we visited the Southern Hemisphere's largest Ibis rookery, a few kilometres north of Kerang. Dry during the drought, this wetland is now thronged with breeding White and Straw-necked Ibises. Royal Spoonbills and Little Black Cormorants also had their own nesting sections amongst the Ibis throng. Unfortunately the water was too deep for crakes or rails.



While Lake Boga was not teeming with birds, we had excellent close views of several Great Crested Grebes (pictured left). We then surveyed a patch of mallee nearby and briefly stopped at Round Lake with more Grey Teal and Black-winged Stilts.

Further west, we came to the Goschen Reserve, a well-known patch of bush which sometimes has unusual inland birds. Our highlights here were a female Crested Bellbird and a troop of White-browed Babblers which were surprisingly well concealed in a small roadside tree.

A lovely yellow-flowering shrub attracted our attention; was it a *Persoonia* or a *Pimelea*? Research after the trip resolved the mystery: the shrub was *Pimelea microcephala*, often found in mallee areas.

On the way back to Kerang our driver Kathy pulled up at a promising channel along the highway. Imagine our pleasure at watching a Spotted Crake foraging nonchalantly as we sat in the car a few metres away. In this narrow strip of water we also saw a Little Grassbird and a Reed Warbler. So much for supposedly timid birds!

Day Four—birding around Kerang

Some of the group went to a few nearby lakes not yet visited. I returned to the Ibis Rookery hoping to spot a bittern somewhere in the reeds. No luck with the bittern, but I did watch a beautifully speckled skink forage near the bird hide.

Some of the other highlights during the weekend were watching two young Wedge-tailed Eagles fly low over a sand-dune near Lake Lookout. The birds seemed to be having a good time; they repeatedly locked talons in a mock-fight and kept dropping to the ground, possibly in pursuit of rabbits. We also saw Diamond Doves, uncommon for Victoria, and also Red-capped, Flame and Hooded Robins in the patches of bush. A total of 146 species of birds were observed.

In conclusion, now is the perfect time for a trip to the Murray River region. There's plenty of water, lots of birds and surprisingly few mosquitoes.

Community Garden Open Day

By Elsie Anderson

On May 15th the Friends and Community Garden Group had a most successful Open Day at the Plant Nursery. We lost count but we welcomed about eighty people who called in to see over the facility, to buy plants and to enjoy the sausage sizzle prepared by Ranger in Charge, Des Lucas.

We also did some planting, pricked out plants and washed pots for reuse, a very enjoyable day for all. Drop in if you haven't seen it lately. See the calendar for the times when we are working there.

Park Report

From Ranger in Charge Des Lucas' monthly reports

Pest Animal Program: - Rabbits:

SSAA Program:

Nearly twelve months of activities with the sporting shooters association has been completed with 1662 rabbits and 15 foxes being controlled throughout the park.

The Baiting program will not occur this year with activities now focusing on harbour removal, warren fumigation and destruction. This will be delivered over the next two months.

Pest Plants: Spraying of thistles is completed with a focus on blackberry and box thorn over the coming months. Several days have been spent removing Red Flowering passionfruit from the Heathland.

Climate Positive Planting: The remainder of the site has been grazed out and preparation will commence shortly for stage two plantings. Site preparation has commenced for the May planting scheduled for Mid May .

Burn Program: The Heathland burn has been postponed until next year.

Wetland: The main Wetland is still full but there have been many other wetlands throughout the park which have water in them such as the long swamp. See the photo below



Automatic Gate and Link Road: A new gate is coming for the park with the installation of a boom automatic gate. This work will be completed commencing the week of 16th May 2011. The link road will also be re-opened in the near future with the installation of in-ground spikes.

Heathland Gate: A new gate is to be installed into the Heathland to assist with Fire Access to the Park. Staff are currently obtaining quotes for this project.

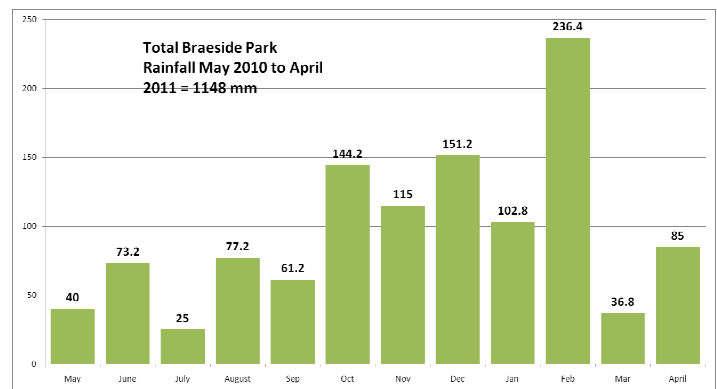
Cypress Trees: One of the large multi trunked cypress tress has fallen down with staff removing and chipping it. An assessment has been made on 5 other trees with the recommendation for their removal.



The fallen Cypress tree
Photo Des Lucas

Braeside Park Rainfall: Wow we thought things had been wet up to the end of January, February saw us with the wettest month on recorded with 236.4 mm of rain falling and 161.6 mm of rain falling during February 5th.

Wow rainfall from May 2010 to April 2011 has seen 1148 mm of rainfall.



Braeside Assess Damage: All the rainfall has been great for the plants but not for the parks trail system which has seen all trails suffer some form of damage. Photographs have been taken for insurance assessments and hopefully repairs can begin shortly.

Correction for Tiny Bird Article page 7 in Previous Issue

By the Editor

Distance for **Round Trip** should have read 27,000Km not 2007Km