

FRIENDS OF HODDLES CREEK NEWSLETTER



FOHC Newsletter is also on line at www.provender.com.au/fohc.

Thanks to Yarra Ranges Council for generously printing the Newsletter.

Owls in decline: Our local vulnerable owls impacted by bushfires, logging and prescribed burns

Earlier in the year, we were privileged to have Ed McNabb of *Ninox Pursuits Environmental Education* to provide a presentation on owls. Ed McNabb is a well known and extremely knowledgeable



Powerful Owl (*Ninox strenua*) photo © Ed McNabb

wildlife ecologist with a special interest in nocturnal fauna. He began recording wildlife calls in the 1970's during a long-term study of the Powerful Owl in Victoria's Dandenong Ranges. Spending long hours in the bush at night, he became intrigued by the many mystery night calls and found the best way to memorise the calls was to record them.

Ed's interesting and informative talk –

including film, recordings and anecdotes – enabled all who attended to identify local nocturnal wildlife by their calls. We heard recordings of the Powerful Owl, Barking Owl, Sooty Owl, Masked Owl, Barn Owl,

Tawny Frogmouth, Southern Boobook, Spotted Nightjar and Australian Owlet Nightjar, amongst others. It became clear that the ability to identify birds by their calls is very useful – Ed's photographs showed just how hard it is to see many of them, as they are so well disguised.

Extensive research and recordings of owls and their prey within the Bunyip State Park and Kirth Kiln Park (with the Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research, Department of Sustainability and Environment) has led Ed to some disturbing patterns that can be linked to the recent drought and bushfires in Victoria. Studies in 2008 and 2009 found significantly lower numbers of Powerful Owl *Ninox strenua* (down by 50%) and Sooty Owl *Tyto tenebricosa* (down by 70%), compared to sightings in 2001 and 2004. Both of these species are currently listed as vulnerable in Victoria. Sooty Owls and Powerful Owls nest in large old trees with hollows and prey mainly on arboreal mammals, like possums, which are also

dependant on tree hollows for their nests.

In an Age newspaper article published in June 2010, Ed McNabb described what he thinks may have happened to these impressive owls. While he believes that the drought played a major role in their decline, the Black Saturday bushfires (which burnt around 50% of the Bunyip State Park) destroyed many of the old trees with large hollows that are required for

Owls in decline

(continued from page 1)

nesting, impacting on the ability of the owls to successfully breed. Additionally, the fires would have incinerated many possums – a predominant prey for the owls – and destroyed their nesting sites, with those that survived the fires being exposed and vulnerable and soon a depleted



Ed McNabb deep in conversation about owls

food source for the owls. As a result, owls may have relocated to other areas with suitable nest sites and prey,

but this would have them competing with previous occupants who often have a home-ground advantage. A resident bird has better knowledge of the territory and greater capacity to defend it. For the owls, flying long distances in search of food also saps their strength and may cause starvation.

In April this year, a female sooty owl was found in a paddock in Toolangi and taken to the wildlife health centre for native animals at the Healesville Sanctuary (see the link to Millie the Sooty Owl, below). She was very thin and, while she was able to stand, she was unable to fly. Blood tests were found to be normal with no signs of infection and there were apparently no signs of trauma. She is a possible victim of relocation due to loss of habitat.

The preservation of habitat for the Powerful Owl and Sooty Owl is imperative to their survival. Habitat for the owls also means habitat for their prey. Old tree hollows large enough for nest sites can take 150 - 200 years to develop. In urban areas and parkland, such trees with suitable hollows are often felled, as they are deemed dangerous to humans and buildings. Bushfires, prescribed burning, logging and irresponsible firewood collection can also destroy such trees. According to Ed McNabb, artificial nest boxes may facilitate breeding in areas where suitable natural hollows are lacking, provided that the habitat also has sufficient food, vegetation and water. However, the use of nest boxes requires considerable research into the construction design, as well as maintenance and long-term management.

If you are interested to learn more about owls, their habitat and/or nest boxes, you can find information at the following websites:

www.ninoxpursuits.com.au

www.latrobe.edu.au/wildlife/nursery/nestboxes

www.zoo.org.au/news/saving-millie-the-sooty-owl

<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/something-is-knocking-the-states-owls-off-their-perches-20100612-y4s0.html>

Spring photo competition

Spring is well and truly here and, for this edition of the newsletter, we're asking you to send us a photo depicting Spring. Ducklings and young birds hatching, trees shooting with their new growth and orchids emerging from the ground are just a few examples of what you might capture on your camera or phone.

Please send your entries via email to friendsofhoddlescreek@gmail.com before the end of December. The winning photograph will be published in our next newsletter and the winning entrant will also receive an A4 enlarged and framed print of their picture.



You can help save sick wombats

Sadly, we have all seen the sad sight of a blind and mangy wombat on the roadside, or wandering around a paddock during the day. But did you know that there is a simple and effective treatment and you can help?

These wombats are suffering from an infestation of mange mite – the same mite that causes mange in dogs and other animals and scabies in humans. The mites burrow under the skin, causing scab-like plaques, which crack and become infected, resulting in a slow and agonising death. The eyes and ears are also affected, leading to blindness and deafness.

While easy and effective treatment has limited or eradicated the disease in dogs and humans, the wombat has not been so lucky. But now, the Wombat Protection Society has developed an ingenious device which you can set up so the wombat actually treats itself each time it enters or leaves its burrow.

This “Burrow Flap Device” is made from an ice-cream container lid (the “flap”) and a bottle cap (see photo at right). A dose of mite treatment is placed in the cap which is mounted in the flap. The burrow flap is then suspended from a simple wire frame which has been positioned at the entrance to the burrow. As the wombat enters or leaves, the burrow flap tilts and the treatment solution trickles onto the wombat's back. The solution needs to be checked and replaced once a week for 8 weeks, then fortnightly for another four treatments.

Mange Management, a group of concerned volunteers, has obtained Department of Primary Industry Animal Ethics approval to administer a three year trial of this treatment.

For more information, you can check out:

www.mangemanagement.org.au

www.wombatprotection.org.au

<http://wombatprotection.org.au/MangeCanBeStopped.pdf>

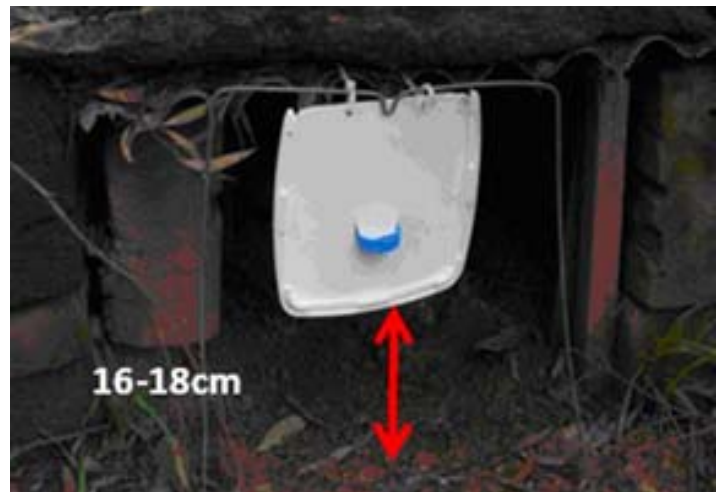
To participate, just email info@mangemanagement.org.au for full instructions, including a power point presentation showing how the “Burrow Flap Method” works.

Phone support is also available on (03) 5942 8518.

Your free treatment kit will be made available to you.



Let's keep them cute and healthy like this little one



Speed limits on Gembrook Road: update

Three months ago, Friends of Hoddles Creek made a formal request to VicRoads for review of the bewildering number of speed limits along Gembrook Road and the unsuitability of the 100 km/h limit that applied to several sections between Warburton Highway and Lusatia Park Road. We suggested that the number of speed zones be reduced and the maximum speed limit be lowered from 100 km/h to 80 km/h. We have just received a response from Louie Chuson, Traffic Operations Engineer for VicRoads Metro South East region, that our proposal is to be submitted to the speed limit panel, which includes various departments, including Councils and Victoria Police, for review. It may not be a rapid process, but at least it's under way. We will keep you informed.

Come on and join FOHC

The Friends of Hoddles Creek are always on the lookout for new members. We keep an eye on local development projects, aim to increase awareness of general environmental issues and have several 'hands on' projects. There are no age limits; all you need is an interest in helping to maintain the special environmental aspects of Hoddles Creek – your home. To join, just contact us with your name, address and phone or email details. You can mail these to FOHC, PO Box 298 Yarra Junction, Vic 3797, or email us at friendsofhoddlescreek@gmail.com.

You can see more at our website (www.provender.com.au/fohc) and we're also on Facebook – just search 'Friends of Hoddles Creek' or 'FOHC'.

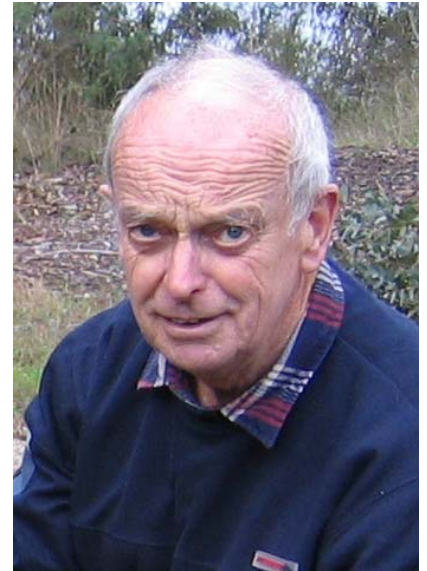


Long-time FOHC member awarded 'Best Friend'

Founding President of Friends of Hoddles Creek (FOHC), Peter Mauger, has been recognised by the Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA) with the prestigious Best Friend Award. This award, inaugurated by the Victorian Friends Network in 1991, recognises outstanding contribution through exceptional dedication as a Friend. This usually involves constant honorary involvement in the work of the group for at least 10 years. Nominations, which can only be made by Friends groups, are referred to a panel of distinguished people in the fields of conservation, science and community service, ensuring the integrity of the Award. To date over fifty Friends have been honoured with the Best Friend Award.

Peter's longstanding involvement with the Hoddles Creek community is well known. His tireless work with FOHC has seen sections of Blackleather Creek transformed and roadside plantings in Lusatia Park Road and Yellow Gum Road emerge and flourish, providing wildlife corridors and windbreaks and showing residents how native plants can be used. Peter, an ex-school teacher, has also been keen to instill a love for the natural world in new generations, through his efforts to source plants and organise tree plantings at Hoddles Creek Primary School. He was also a champion of the push to create an outdoor classroom at the school.

Congratulations, Peter, on a well-deserved honour.



Recipient of the Best Friends Award, long-time Hoddles Creek resident Peter Mauger

The magic of Coranderrk

In July FOHC members were given a tour of Coranderrk Reserve by the Biodiversity Manager Mark Cairns.

Coranderrk is an important landmark in the colonisation of Victoria. Coranderrk Aboriginal reserve was a station where many dispossessed Aboriginal tribal members were 'relocated' after losing their lands.

The bushland reserve, which consists of 142 hectares of land next to Healesville Sanctuary, has been an isolated pocket of remnant habitat for over half a century. It is the largest intact valley floor forest remnant in our region and, in some respects, Coranderrk is a time capsule of what our landscape was once like. The reserve is home to around 10% of Victoria's plant species and 264 species of birds, mammals, reptiles, frogs and fish.

Mark Cairns gave the FOHC group a detailed account of his work to understand this isolated landscape remnant and the steps being taken to preserve and enhance it.

[For more information on Coranderrk go to: www.zoo.org.au/about-us/vision-and-mission/our-projects/coranderrk](http://www.zoo.org.au/about-us/vision-and-mission/our-projects/coranderrk)
[info:http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coranderrk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coranderrk)

Friends of Hoddles Creek members with Biodiversity Manager Mark Cairns in the Coranderrk Reserve

