

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.

Our amazing lyrebirds

The lyrebird is unique for its extraordinary ability to mimic both natural and artificial sounds from its environment and for its striking appearance, with the male bird's spectacular tail that fans out during courtship display.

Many a child who has first heard the name is unsure whether the birds are actually **Lyre-birds** (the correct term, based on the lyre shape of the mature male's tail) or **Liar-birds** (as they can pretend to be almost anything else from chainsaws to cameras to almost any other bird species!). Lyrebirds are commonly found in rainforest and bushland areas of the Yarra Ranges and indeed much of eastern Australia. While considered to be shy, the songs of this beautiful bird can be heard for endless hours, especially during the winter months at the peak of the breeding season. With an incubation period of over 50 days, the lyrebird does not reach maturity until around 5 years and birds are capable of living for up to 50 years.

Alex Maisey has a special interest in lyrebirds and, since his early teens, has been a member of the Sherbrooke Lyrebird Survey Group. For almost all his childhood, Alex lived next to Sherbrooke Forest in Kallista. In his last years at The Patch Primary School, he began spending weekends in Sherbrooke Forest, monitoring the resident lyrebird population. For the

duration of his secondary schooling, Alex was home-schooled, allowing him to spend several hours in the forest every day. Throughout the ensuing years, he developed a deep passion for the environment and its ecosystems and his accumulated knowledge of the wildlife in the forest, together with a love of aesthetics, led inevitably to wildlife photography. Alex went on to study photography at university, but after some time decided to pursue a career more focussed around environment, completing a double diploma in Sustainability and Conservation and Land Management.

Friends of Hoddles Creek have invited Alex to come and share his wealth of knowledge on lyrebirds and environment. His presentation will make particular reference to his experience with the Superb Lyrebirds in Sherbrooke Forest, also bringing into focus the importance of the management of forest corridors for biodiversity, a significant issue given the ongoing fragmentation of the landscape due to agricultural and urban development in the Yarra Valley.

You are invited to attend Alex's presentation at the Hoddles Creek Primary School on Monday May 6 at 7pm. The talk will be about one hour and there will be opportunity for questions and discussion over a cuppa afterwards.

Lyrebirds are also regular inhabitants of Hoddles Creek. FOHC members Ray Turner and Jennifer Seabrook found out just how regular a couple of years ago when a female lyrebird constructed her nest on the top of a stone pillar in the wall of their house just 10 feet from their back door. They watched bewitched as the nest was completed, the egg cared for and the chick safely hatched, finally being led by its mum into the forest. In a repeat visit last year, mum produced an egg, but then sadly disappeared, possibly the victim of a fox.



Mum and dad near the nest site. You can see more photos of them, the chick and the nest on the FOHC website at www.provender.com.au/fohc.

A walk in the forest

Bat's Wing Fern
Histiopteris incisa

I am looking across the Eucalypt canopy of a small, but significant corner of Kurth Kiln Regional Park, which adjoins the property where I have lived for most of my 50+ years. While the canopy of mottled green looks no different to that of the surrounding hills, in these past weeks I have made an exciting, though disturbing discovery.

Google Earth has enhanced our perception of the world, providing a bird's eye view of our environment. Looking at this area on the map, one can clearly see the veins of what are small unnamed tributaries of Hansen Creek, appearing as distinct lines of light green fern foliage compared to the darker hues of surrounding Eucalypt canopy.

Discovering a forest wonderland

Curious to discover what lay within, one cool misty autumn day I walked into one of these gullies and entered a magical world of ferns and rainforest plants that I had never imagined so close to my own back doorstep.

Along the length of a small trickling stream, I find myself in another world compared to my usual bushwalk meanderings. Large Peppermints and Messmate Stringybarks emerge from the steep gully banks, while Blackwoods and Silver Wattles stretch tall and straight from the gully floor to provide an upper storey canopy. Soft Tree Ferns and Rough Tree Ferns create a mottled cover for the many smaller ferns below, as well as hosting abundant epiphytic ferns, such as Veined Bristle Fern, Common Finger Fern and various Filmy Ferns.

From where I enter at the base of the stream, Fishbone Water Fern creates a carpet of green on the flat gully floor, but as I make my way upstream, the canopy filters out sunlight and more exotic ferns take its place. Strap Water Fern, with its clumps of slender dark green fronds clings to the banks of this small waterway the entire length of the gully. Lance Water Fern, Kangaroo Fern, Leathery and Shiny Shield Ferns are just a few more that I am able to identify. Tiny brightly fluorescent fungi and larger polyporoid types provide rare splashes of colour and an air of fantasy to this verdant green wonderland.

Tracks observed on the muddied banks of the stream and scats spread amongst the leaf litter of the forest floor suggest there are native animals here going about their secretive nocturnal lives and there are certainly enough large old growth and dead messmate tree-houses for these animals to hide. Amidst this forest of ferns, fungi and fauna, understory trees and shrubs such as Banyalla, Austral Mulberry, Musk

Daisy Bush, Blanket Leaf and Muttonwood have grown tall to impressive heights. Scrambling throughout, the Twining Silkpod in all growth stages creates a tangle of vines like the snare of a trap set to catch intruders. The magic of this forest has captured me in its spell and I am frequently drawn back. I feel overwhelmed by the unique beauty of this area and responsible for its protection and this is now where my main concern lies.

Ecological burn = ecological risk

Unfortunately, my discovery may have come too late for others to appreciate this small rainforest world. Significant scarring of the surrounding area has already impacted on the main gully with recent containment lines carelessly carved through the forest, created for what is a prescribed ecological burn this autumn. This includes one line severing a small tributary from the main gully,

From my own understanding, an ecological burn is supposed to maintain or enhance the existing vegetation. I fail to be convinced that burning this forest would do anything to enhance, but rather it is likely to have a devastating effect on the ecology of what is clear to me to be a highly fire sensitive environment.

While I do not profess to be a professional ecologist or environmentalist, I have a deep love of nature and a high regard for its ability to evolve without human interference, as it has done until relatively recent times in the history of our world. **This area of forest demands and deserves protection** and I will endeavour to do all I can to achieve this. Fortunately every shower of rain as autumn progresses comes as a blessing to this special forest world that it may be deemed too wet to burn today or tomorrow and perhaps in the end the forest will have its way.

Friends of Hoddles Creek have since been researching the area in an attempt to learn more about this special ecosystem. Parks Victoria, the land manager for Kurth Kiln Regional Park, the Department of Sustainability and Environment (responsible for the ecological burn) and Melbourne Water (in charge of waterways) have all been invited to visit and make their own assessment on the conservation significance and fire sensitivity of this area. With expert advice, something like a plant inventory has now been created and you can find this posted on our website and facebook. Friends of Hoddles Creek hope to ultimately secure the protection of what they believe to be an environmental asset for our Hoddles Creek community and future generations.

Text: Meryl Knoll, Photographs: Andrew and Meryl Knoll, FOHC members

Fishbone Water fern showing reproductive fronds

Twining Silkpod
Parsonia brownii

Mother Shield Fern
Polystichum proliferum

Veined Bristle Fern
Crepidomanes venosum

Fishbone Water Fern with bipinnatifid fronds
Blechnum nudum

Lance Water Fern
Blechnum chambersii

Polyporoid fungus

Strap Water Fern
Blechnum patersonii

Mycena leaiana australis

Hoddles Creek history

Part Two

Hoddles Creek School

As the early population of Hoddles Creek expanded, the need for a school became evident. In 1872, the local mining population erected a small school with slab walls and a bark roof. In 1875, an official school opened and operated on a part-time share basis from separate buildings in Hoddles Creek and Warburton, with the teacher being required to travel between the two schools on foot!

In 1880, a portable wooden building was erected in Hoddles Creek on a new site with five acres of Crown Land. In 1886, Hoddles Creek School was renumbered S.S. 2541 and the association with Warburton gave way to a similar half-time arrangement with S.S. 2599 Launching Place. Attendance at the Launching Place school was never above fifteen and reached only twelve at Hoddles Creek. In 1892, due to declining population, the Hoddles Creek school was closed and the portable building was removed.

The school reopened in 1910, using the Church of England hall opposite the current school site to house the 14 pupils. The old hall was in poor repair, with cracks in the walls and floor and no linings. It was reported to be cold and draughty

in winter and hot and uncomfortable in summer. After much lobbying from residents, a new school building was finally constructed, at a cost of £396, and officially opened at the end of 1915. Electricity was installed in 1962.

Pioneer Families

Many names of pioneer families are honoured in the district – some by street names such as Willis, Staves, Grover, Thonemann, Eacott, Teeses, Parkinson and Worley – and others by landmarks like McCrae Creek, Hansen Creek, Speer's Gully, Shepard's Creek and Ewart's Park.

Perhaps Hoddles Creek's most famous resident was Sir Harold Massey, who attended the school from 1913 and went on to graduate from the University of Melbourne with first class honours in physics and mathematics. Massey became an acclaimed scientist in England, working under Lord Rutherford at the Cavendish Laboratory, Cambridge and chairing the British National Committee on Space Research. On an enthusiastically received return visit to the school in 1937, he planted a pine tree in the school grounds.

(Extracts and photograph from 'Hoddles Creek, the School and District', written and financed by D. Burville, in celebration of the centenary of Hoddles Creek Primary School in April 1975. The complete publication can be viewed on the FOHC website).



Hoddles Creek Primary School pupils with teacher Mr Vivian Roadknight, in 1916



The handsome flower of the Hill Banksia

***Banksia spinulosa*: a local plant to grace your garden**

All banksias can be recognised by their cylinders of tightly packed flowers. One of our local species is *Banksia spinulosa*, the Hairpin or Hill Banksia. Both names are appropriate as the plant usually grows in hilly places and the rows of hooked black wiry styles resemble hairpins. The Hill Banksia flowers from early autumn, through the winter months, with some blooms lasting into early spring.

It is an excellent food source for bees and for nectar feeding birds, as the flowers are strong and rigid enough to allow birds such as honeyeaters to land on them.

The Hill Banksia is an easy plant for the home gardener and, being indigenous to our area, requires minimum care

and is rarely troubled by pests. Good cultivars for the home garden include *Banksia spinulosa* 'Honeypots', 'Coastal Cushion' and 'Birthday Candles'.

Come on and join FOHC

The Friends of Hoddles Creek are always on the lookout for new members. 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.

See more at our website (www.provender.com.au/fohc) or on Facebook – just search 'Friends of Hoddles Creek' or 'FOHC'.

