

FRIENDS OF HODDLES CREEK NEWSLETTER



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

Thanks to Yarra Ranges Council for their generous printing of the Newsletter.

Learn to love our wombats

The wombat is an iconic Australian animal about which there are more questions than answers. Loved by many and hated by some (usually farmers and nursery people), their nocturnal habit means that many people have only seen wombats dead by the roadside, or asleep or blearily snuffling at a sanctuary or zoo.

Wombats are one of the least studied (scientifically) of Australia's unique animals, so much of the information available comes from observations by people who work with orphaned and injured wombats, individual animals in sanctuaries and zoos, or from people who live in close proximity to wombats and see them regularly. Information is now being gathered in areas of Victoria where groups



of volunteers are working to treat wild wombats affected by mange, as part of the treatment program involves observation and monitoring of individual animals.

12 things we know about wombats

- There are three species of wombats still in existence – the Northern Hairy-nosed Wombat (*Lasiorhinus krefftii*) the Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat (*Lasiorhinus latifrons*), both of which are now very rare, and the Common Wombat (*Vombatus ursinus*), sometimes referred to as the Southern Bare-nosed Wombat, on which this article focuses.

- Marsupials (pouched mammals) are believed to have evolved about 100 million years ago and fossil evidence suggests that giant wombat-like animals, which may have weighed up to 100 kilograms, roamed many parts of Australia millions of years ago.

- Wombats are marsupials, whose tiny embryonic young are born after only about 30 days in the uterus of the mother and then spend about 8 months in her pouch.

- The pouch of a wombat faces backwards, presumably so that it does not fill with dirt, or injure the young by the digging action of the mother.

- Wombats are nocturnal, spending the day asleep in underground burrows.

- Burrows provide protection from predators and the weather. The temperature in the burrow varies little between summer and winter, usually staying in the low to mid 20°C's.

- Like wombats themselves, burrows vary in site and construction. A burrow may be a simple hole only 1.5 metres long, or part of a complex warren that runs for more than 200 metres. Some may have a dip at the entrance (maybe to stop water flowing into the inner burrow), some may have a sharp curve within the first metre (perhaps to stop wind from heating or cooling the sleeping chamber), some have only one entrance, and some have multiple entrances/exits.

- Each wombat is an individual and wombat behaviour changes depending on the weather, number of other wombats around, locality and many other variables.

- Some wombats collect bedding to take into the sleeping chamber of burrows; others prepare beds of soft sand.

YOU'RE INVITED. Hear some of Pamela Wiencke's unique insights into wombat customs and behaviour, including the effects of mange and how to treat it, at the **Hoddles Creek Primary School on Monday Oct. 21st at 7pm.** Pamela's talk (about 1 hour) will be followed by a chance for questions and discussion over a cuppa.

Learn to love our wombats

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- Wombats have a very sharp sense of smell and it is perhaps the sense they rely on most – they see the world by smells. This may explain why they have not adapted to the danger of roads and traffic.

Wombats are intelligent but only use their intelligence when they need to or for their own wombat purposes. If there is lush food around a wombat will spend most of its time sleeping, but hand reared wombats learn many things, like how to open cupboards, refrigerators and doors, how to move a barrier out of the way, or even to climb it.

Some behaviour is instinctive, but baby wombats learn from their mothers, things like where to leave droppings, how to find food and what to eat, dust bathing, fighting, surrender and wombat manners.

- Like wombats themselves, their territories vary. Some wombats defend their land, or part of it, while others happily share with other wombats. Some share burrows with others, though they may not be there at the same time.

How far a wombat ranges each night varies, mostly dependant on the availability of food, water and hole digging sites. Some have been known to travel kilometres in



A wombat backing into its burrow with a ball of dry grass for bedding.

IMPORTANT WOMBAT INFORMATION

A licence is required to keep Australian wildlife, including wombats. While baby wombats are cute and full of personality, they are difficult to hand rear, and prepare for release into the wild, so should only ever be reared by a registered and experienced wild life carer. It can take months-years of dedicated care to rear a small wombat to the size where it is able to be released.

If you find an injured or orphaned wombat:

- **do not feed the animal anything**
- **keep it warm and somewhere quiet**
- **get it to a registered carer or vet as soon as possible.**
- **contact one of the following:**

Wildlife Victoria 13 000 94535 www.wildlifelifevictoria.org.au

Help for Wildlife 0417 380 687, or the nearest vet.

To report sightings of wombats which may be suffering from mange infestation contact:

Mange Management (03) 5942 85 18 email: info@mangemanagement.org.au

For general information on Mange Management visit: www.mangemanagement.org.au

a single night. They usually walk along the same tracks each night, except in grassy areas where they range as they eat.

- Wild wombats live to an average age of about 14. Apart from loss of habitat and road kills, mange is a large killer of wombats.



A young hand-reared wombat not quite ready for release.

***Pamela Wiencke** has a special interest and love for wombats. She was a registered carer for over six years and worked with many orphaned wombats. Now retired from regular wildlife care, she is a volunteer for the Mange Management Group, who work with landowners to treat wild wombats suffering from mange.*

Information for this article has come from Pamela's personal experience, 'The Wombat' by Barbara Triggs, and talks and writings on wombats by Jackie French.

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'.



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A (last?) walk in the forest

In our autumn newsletter, we took you on a walk in the forest to share our discovery of a small rainforest world right on our back doorstep here in Hoddles Creek. While the ground works were completed and all was in readiness for a planned ecological burn, the forest was fortunately spared at the time. Perhaps this was due to the continuous autumn showers, or perhaps some higher divine intervention, but we all breathed a sigh of relief.

Since our discovery, numerous people representing Parks Victoria, the land manager for Kurth Kiln Regional Park, Melbourne Water (responsible for waterways) and respected botanist, Dr Graeme Lorimer, have visited this proposed burn site. Unfortunately, no representative of the Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI, formerly known as Department of Sustainability and Environment, DSE), who are responsible for the burning, has yet been to visit. Now, in its draft Fire Operations Plan for 2013/14 -2015/16, this area of forest, commonly referred to as G55, has been listed again to be burnt in Autumn and this time not as an ecological burn, but as a fuel reduction burn!

Why is a burn planned for this area?

In his botanical assessment of the proposed burn G55 conducted in May this year, Dr Lorimer maintains that the type of vegetation, or Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC) previously mapped by the DSE is not consistent with his own findings. He describes the vegetation downstream of the main gully as EVC Swampy Riparian Complex, which is listed as regionally endangered. While its species are not sensitive to

fire, the minimum and maximum tolerable fire interval would be approximately 25 and 150 years respectively. Tolerable Fire Intervals are used in planning for deliberate burns and guide the appropriate frequency of fires to maintain plant species at a given site. Dr Lorimer believes that, before the maximum tolerable fire interval of 150 years was reached, the downstream vegetation would most likely become closer to that of the vegetation upstream.

The upstream vegetation he describes as being EVC Fern Swamp. **This contains many plants that are highly sensitive to fire (including four species of filmy ferns) and, according to Dr Lorimer, should never be deliberately burnt.** He finds this area to be biologically significant because of the heavy depletion of Victoria's rainforests and, with Fern Swamp being a member of the rainforest group of EVC's, it is regionally endangered and warrants a high level of protection from fire.

An ecological burn conducted in an adjacent area of the park, lit just two days before a declared day of Total Fire Ban in March this year, effectively burnt 100% of the vegetation, instead of the proposed 60%. Questions from Friends of Hoddles Creek have been raised with the DEPI – so far with no answers provided. If similar circumstances prevailed in the proposed G55 burn, what would be left of this small but significant rainforest world? You can find a copy of Dr Lorimer's report and his plant inventory on our website www.provender.com.au/fohc. Tell us what you think on Facebook.

Correas bring winter colour and birds to your garden

Correas are ideally suited to Hoddles Creek and make an attractive addition to any garden, with flowers from winter to spring. The genus includes 12 species of evergreen shrubs that grow in temperate regions of Australia, from forest to coastal situations in full sun.

Flowers range in colour from green, through cream, yellow, pink, red and even purple. Flowers are borne singly or in small groups, with the four petals usually partially fused into a tube, with protruding stamens. This flower shape gives rise to the common name of native fuchsia for *Correa reflexa*. *Correa alba* (white correa) has more open star-shaped flowers than other species. The genus was named by the famous botanist Sir Joseph Banks, in honour of his friend and fellow botanist from Portugal, José Francesco Correia da Serra.

A local variety, *Correa reflexa* var. *lobata*, commonly known as Powelltown Correa, grows to 2 metres tall, with dark green leaves and yellow-green flowers. It was first formally described by Paul G. Wilson in 1998 and is officially listed as "Rare".

Correas respond well to cultivation, preferring a friable, well drained, fertile loam. They are less reliable in hot, humid summer climates. Tip pruning immediately after flowering improves the plant's form and density. Species of *Correa* range from small shrubs to the Mountain Correa, which can grow to 8 metres. Several popular cultivars, such as Dusky Bells, are compact and heavy flowering. The colourful flowers are bird attracting.



Top: *Correa reflexa* (native fuchsia)
Bottom: *Correa mannii*

The trees that hold up the sky

The wonderful stand of giants in Kurth Kiln Park

Giants of Kirth Kiln

“The trees that held the sky up are cut down” wrote Ursula Le Guin in 'The Sun Going South'. These words remind me of the desolation of a bare roadside near Thorpdale, where a plaque commemorates a 115 metre Mountain Ash, felled there in the 1880s. I can only try to imagine the now treeless paddocks blanketed by forest monarchs approaching this size, dominating a lush rainforest understorey.

And yet, there is this cluster of eight trees over eighty metres tall, south of Hoddles Creek, on Tomahawk Creek in the Kurth Kiln Park. One, at 87 metres, may now be the tallest tree in Victoria. These trees are essentially teenagers – less than 100 years old – probably dating back to the fires of 1926, and they are growing like teenagers!

I will never see trees of the stature and girth of the giants we have lost, but I may see some of these reach 90 metres. And what might they become in another three or five hundred years, if they are allowed to keep growing?

Meredith Bryce

The Tallest Trees in the World?

It is usually accepted that the tallest trees on Earth are the redwoods of North America. Indeed, the tallest currently living tree is believed to be a 115 metre Coastal Redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) growing in California. Historically, heights of 130 metres have been claimed.

However, Bernie Mace of Toolangi believes that our own Mountain Ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*) have exceeded this height in the past. Bernie has painstakingly searched through historical records and catalogued a number of giants (usually measured after they were chopped down!).

One of the tallest was a fallen tree near Healesville. In 1872 surveyor William Ferguson measured this tree, which had the top broken off by the fall, to be 132 metres. The trunk was 90cm at the break, indicating that the tree had originally been much taller – estimated at 150 metres.