

FRIENDS OF HODDLES CREEK NEWSLETTER



You can help save a platypus

The platypus *Ornithorhynchus anatinus* is one of our more unusual native species and certainly baffled the European settlers of Australia when it was first encountered. What was described by them as a duck-billed, beaver-tailed and otter-footed creature was considered a hoax by some European colleagues.

Together with the echidna, the platypus is a very special type of mammal known as a monotreme, which lays eggs instead of giving birth to live young. Like other mammals, young platypus feed on their mother's milk for around four months. While they are born with teeth, these fall out at a young age, leaving horny plates which are used to grind their diet of worms, insect larvae, freshwater shrimps and yabbies.

Platypuses are found in freshwater streams and rivers of Eastern Australia, from the tropical rainforest of northern Queensland to the cold high altitudes of Tasmania. They can be observed feeding in the early morning and late evening, but when not foraging for food they spend much of their time in burrows, which they dig into the banks of waterways. I have been fortunate

enough to have observed a resident platypus at feeding time in a dam at the family farm on several occasions. When swimming, platypus can be identified by three small humps in the water formed by the head, the back and the tail. Unfortunately, they are very difficult to photograph outside of captivity.

An adult platypus can grow to a length of 40 to 50 cm and live for up to 20 years. Healesville Sanctuary has a resident platypus, Fleay, who turned 20 last October. Platypus have spurs on their feet, which, on the male, can produce venom powerful enough to kill a small dog and which is described as being excruciatingly painful to humans, so care should be taken when handling is required.

While its conservation status is considered "least concern", the livelihood of the platypus is affected by the health of the waterways in which they live. You can help preserve a healthy environment for platypus by using phosphate free detergents and reducing or eliminating the use of plastic bags, which can ultimately end up in our waterways and become a deadly trap for many aquatic animals.

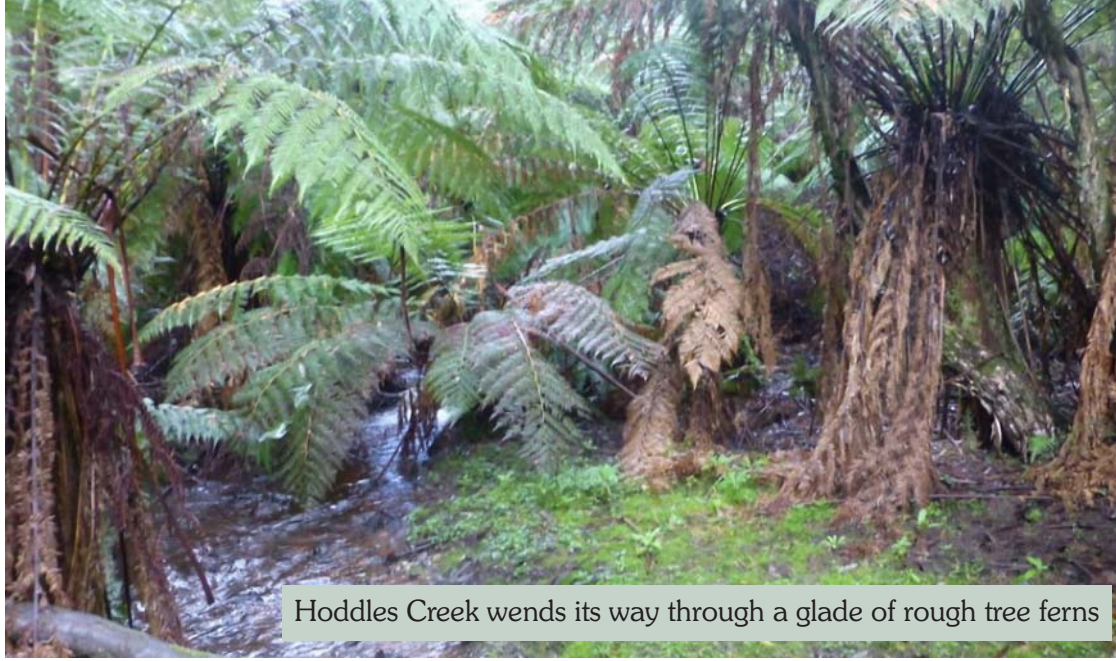


FOHC Newsletter is also on line at www.provender.com.au/fohc.

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

A close encounter with Hoddles

Recently I went for one of my many walks down along the part of the Hoddles Creek which borders our property. I have always had an appreciation of the many ferns and plants that grow abundantly along the creek – at times it can be a magical place. Some of my favourites are the rough tree fern, the king fern and the bat’s wing fern.



Hoddles Creek wends its way through a glade of rough tree ferns

The rough tree fern (*Cyathea australis*) thrives in this damp environment. Tree ferns are pteridophytes, which means that they grow from spores released from their fronds, rather than from seeds. The plants are tall and their spreading fronds shade the area below. As they grow, the lower foliage dies off, leaving a trunk covered with the bases of these fronds. At the base of the trunk, there are masses of wiry roots. Tree ferns are extremely hardy and the rough tree fern is probably the most common tree fern in south eastern Australia.



Masses of wiry roots on the trunk of a rough tree fern

The Austral king fern (*Todea barbara*), also a pteridophyte, has a massive fibrous trunk. The fronds are erect and up to 2m long. Along the creek the rhizomes are continuously bathed in running water, which makes for ideal growing conditions.

A particular favourite is the attractive bat’s wing fern (*Histiopteris incisa*). Sometimes referred to as an oak fern or water fern, there is a glaucous (bluish grey or green) tinge to the fronds.

Our own Hoddles Creek is a special place. The creek arises near the southern side of Sales Hill in Beenak and flows through a mix of cleared farm land and remnant native vegetation to its confluence with the Yarra River at Launching Place.

Due to recent winter rain there is quite a bit of water in the creek, which is flowing well and there is also quite a bit of silt. I have a very simple way of measuring depth. If I step into the creek wearing gumboots, I can easily tell whether the water just flows over the lower part of my boots or whether it threatens to flow over the tops. This is also an effective way to check how much silt is present - maybe not very scientific, but very straight-forward.

There have been several fish surveys over the years, though these have mainly been in the lower reaches of the creek. Native fish that have been identified are the short finned eel,



Fronds of the Austral king fern *Todea barbara*

river blackfish, mountain galaxias and south Victorian spiny crayfish. Exotic fish that have been identified are brown trout, roach and even a goldfish! A platypus was found in 2007. Melbourne Water has the environmental objective of restoring self-sustaining populations of native fish and maintaining flow conditions suitable for platypus.

Creek

Many factors affect the health of a waterway. These include land use within the catchment, the presence of native streamside vegetation, the level of disturbance, water quality and the harvesting of water from the creek.

Run off from roadways and farm chemicals all wash into the creek and impact negatively on water quality. Lorimer (2012) identified several environmental threats including introduction of environmental weeds and deer (which damage vegetation directly and their wallows, which damage ground flora and seedlings, inhibiting reproduction).



The graceful bat's wing fern *Hystiopteris incisa*

Bushfire and prescribed burning are both threats to rainforest and fern swamp and climate change is an on-going concern, given that we are likely to have increasing incidence of droughts, high temperatures and bushfires.

We have several copies of Graeme Lorimer's excellent report 'Assessment and Mapping of Hoddles Creek Riparian Vegetation (2012)'. If you would like a copy, please let us know.

Melbourne Water's River Health Incentives Plan may provide financial assistance to owners or managers of land adjacent to a river or a creek in an area managed by Melbourne Water. Projects under this scheme include streamside fencing, weed control, new planting or revegetation, off stream stock watering points, minor stream bank stabilisation and some on-going maintenance. If this could be relevant to you, you can contact Melbourne Water at melbournewater.com.au.

Diane Packer

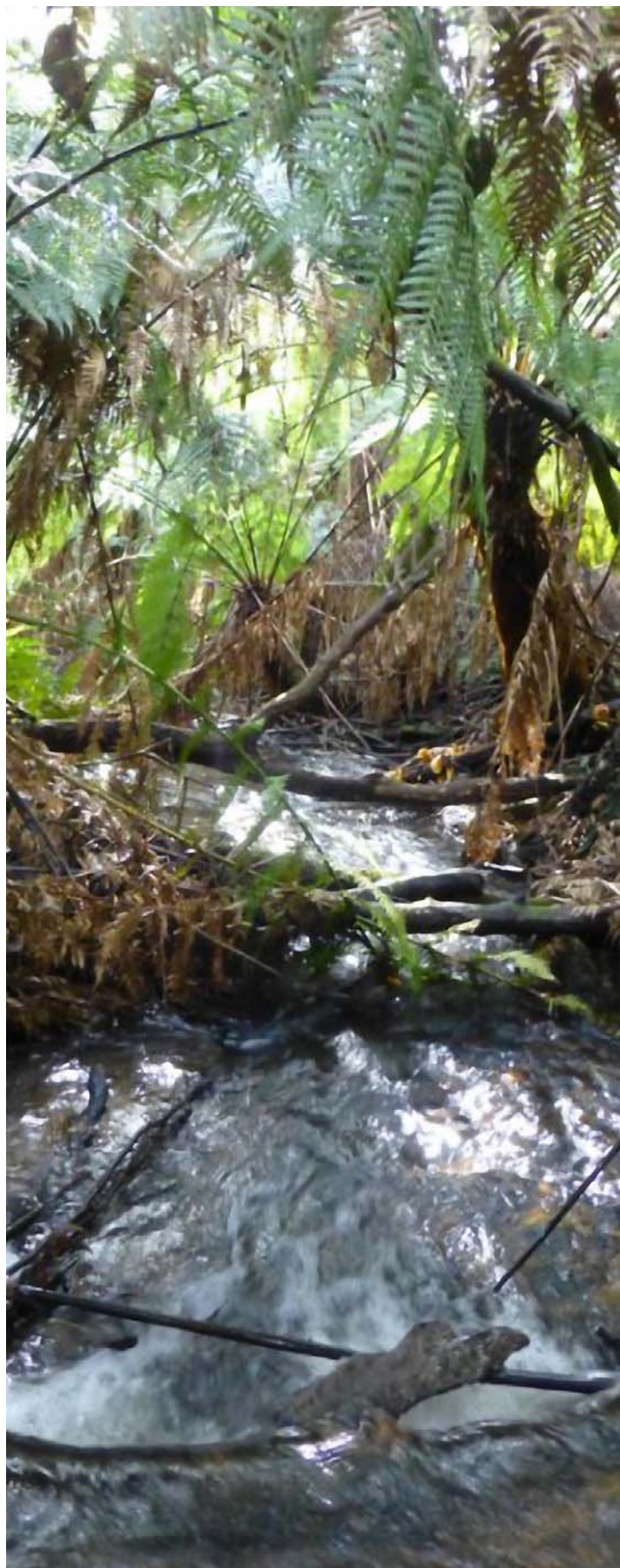
References

D.L. Jones & S.C. Clemesha. Australian Ferns and Fern Allies, 1976.

G.S. Lorimer, Biosphere Pty Ltd. Assessment and Mapping of Hoddles Creek Riparian Vegetation, 2012

J. McGuckin, Streamline Research Pty Ltd. Draft report prepared for Melbourne Water, 2012.

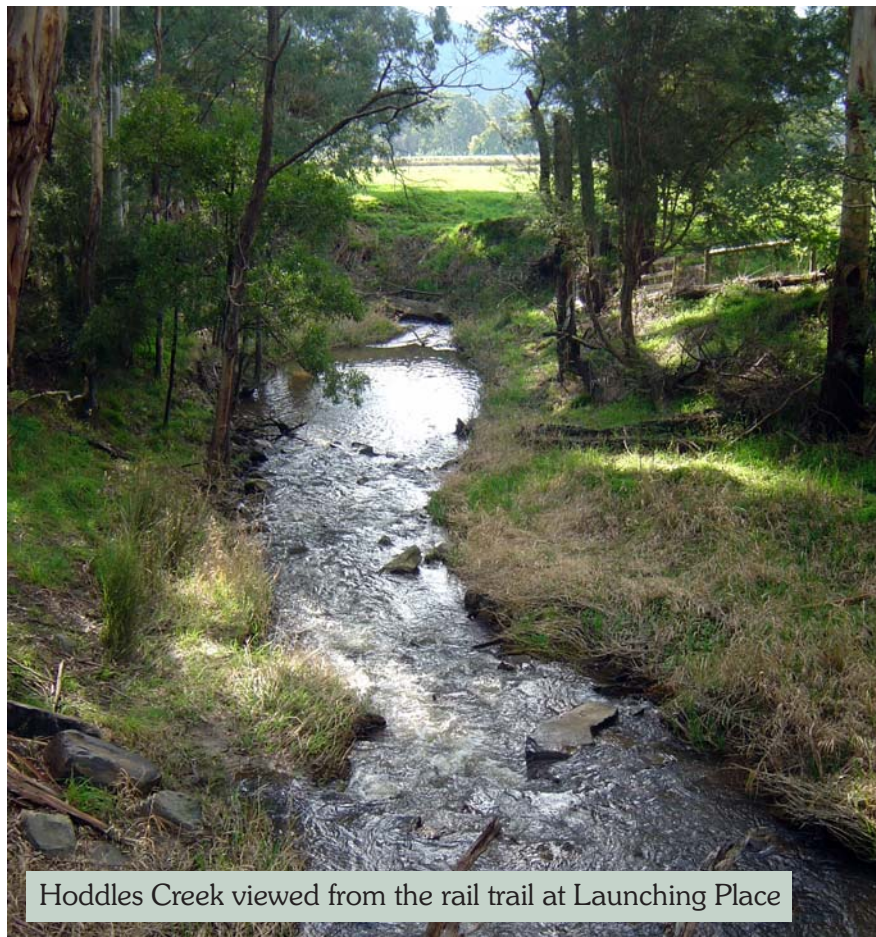
Melbourne Water. Hoddles Creek Water Supply Protection Area Stream Flow Management Plan, 2003.



Do you have a special place in Hoddles Creek that you would like to share with readers? We'd love to hear your stories about landmarks, trees, fern gullies, or wildlife habitats that you have discovered. Just mail us at Friends of Hoddles Creek, PO Box 298 Yarra Junction, 3797, Vic, or email us at friendsofhoddlescreek@gmail.com.

Watching over our waterways

Friends of Hoddles Creek was formed in 1999 and incorporated in 2000 by a group of concerned residents who wanted to ensure that the environment of Hoddles Creek would be maintained for future generations. The aim of our group is to preserve and improve wildlife habitat and biodiversity within this special region.



Hoddles Creek viewed from the rail trail at Launching Place

Our group is concerned about local waterways and, in particular, Hoddles Creek. We strive to protect these valuable resources, but in recent years our survey work has revealed pollution and degradation of the creek and minor (unnamed) tributaries that ultimately flow into the Yarra River, a major water supply for Melbourne.

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’.



The **Yarra Riverkeeper Association** is a not-for-profit community organisation, formed in 2004 by a group of citizens who love the Yarra River and care for its future. Their aim is to protect the Yarra River and its tributaries from source to mouth for current and future generations. Ian Penrose, a Yarra Riverkeeper, has this to say about rivers:

"Rivers are the arteries of the natural landscape, and they are the centrepieces for most human settlements. Their vital role in sustaining life is manifest in the rich biodiversity they support and the attachments that communities form with them. Yet, our dependency on rivers is not generally reflected in our care for them. In Australia, where clean flowing water is becoming scarcer, the case for greater care is pressing.

We may urge governments to do a better job. But a large measure of responsibility rests with the community. In this vein, a model of community care for our waterways...is growing in Australia. Communities are forming waterway "keeper" groups, not unlike Landcare groups, to take an active role in restoring and protecting their local rivers and streams. Their work includes education to improve awareness of river health issues, and advocacy to give their local waterway a "voice" at the table with governments and other water users."

Ian Penrose is qualified in science, operations research and commercial management and worked for Shell in the coal mining, natural gas and shipping industries, based locally and overseas. Later he headed the Victorian Government's program to restore the Snowy River and was a Commissioner with the Victorian Environmental Water Holder. He now works for the Yarra Riverkeeper Association in the role of "Riverkeeper" and is an acknowledged spokesperson for the Yarra River. The Yarra Riverkeeper Association is a community organisation that is giving the Yarra a "voice".

More information about the Yarra Riverkeeper Association can be found at their website www.yarrariver.org.au.

You are invited to a presentation by Ian Penrose at Hoddles Creek Primary School on Monday 15th September at 7pm. Hear Ian talk about our local waterways, tributaries of the Yarra River and their importance as a major drinking water source and wildlife habitat. Learn how you can better look after our waterways and become another voice for their protection. The talk will run for around one hour, followed by a chance for questions and discussion over a cuppa and supper.