

FRIENDS OF HODDLES CREEK NEWSLETTER



Tall tales and tiger snakes

There are few people around who don't have a tale to tell about tiger snakes. I recall a neighbour many years ago telling my father his story of encountering a tiger snake when he was out ploughing the field. When he stopped the tractor and got down to investigate it "went for him" so he got back on the tractor and proceeded to plough over it. I have a memory of a souvenir piece of the snake that was as fat as a man's biceps.

It is illegal to kill a snake and doing so can incur a hefty penalty, but how many readers have killed a snake?

Tiger snakes are common in this area and are one of Australia's deadliest creatures (and one of the most venomous snakes in the world). Just the thought of one lurking at your back doorstep can conjure up feelings of fear and anxiety, especially at this time of year when snakes become active in their search for food (they love frogs) and a mate.

If they are lurking around your back door, then perhaps you are (indirectly) the source of food. Apart from frogs, they are known to feed on other reptiles, birds, small mammals, such as rats and mice, and fish. Farm sheds, haystacks, chook houses and garden ponds are probably all great places for a snake to find easy food.

If you don't want snakes around your house, your best option is to keep grass around the home short, remove piles of rubbish and wood and keep animal feed in secure bins to avoid attracting rodents.

Mating season for snakes is in the warmer months throughout summer. Unlike other reptiles, tiger snakes give birth to live young (in late summer and autumn) – usually

around 15 to 20 youngsters – who, once born, are left to fend for themselves. Tiger snakes are thick-bodied and have an average length of around a metre, but can grow up to 1.5 metres in length. Their head is slightly wider and distinct from their neck. Tiger snakes are named from their tiger-like stripes – a series of dark brown and yellow brown bands along the length of the back with the underbelly un-banded. However, not all tiger snakes have stripes!

Snakes are an important part of our natural environment and need to be respected and conserved. Be aware that if you are out enjoying the sun they may be too! Like all reptiles, they require the warmth of the sun to raise their body temperature, as well as helping to digest their food. It is not unusual to find them stretched out on the road or in a warm sunny spot. If disturbed, they will normally retreat rapidly to cover, only to emerge soon afterwards when the threat has passed. Tiger snakes will rarely attack a human unprovoked and the best way to avoid harm is to leave them alone.

Tiger snake venom affects the nervous system and an untreated bite can cause death in humans and animals. Symptoms include localized pain, tingling, numbness and sweating, followed by a fairly rapid onset of breathing difficulties and paralysis.

Treatment is the same for all Australian venomous snakes. Do not wash the wound as identification of the snake can be traced from the venom on the skin. Apply broad thick bandages over the bite, then down and back along the limb to the armpit or groin and finally immobilize the limb with a splint. This helps to prevent the flow of venom to the lymphatic system. Dial 000 and/or seek medical advice immediately.



A tiger snake heading towards a garden pond

Hoddles Creek health check

During our recent talk by Yarra River-keeper, Ian Penrose, we took a scenic and historic tour down the Yarra River, from its source in Mt Baw Baw to its mouth in Port Phillip Bay. Friends of Hoddles Creek were rather surprised to discover that our own waterway, Hoddles Creek, is not as healthy as we would have expected.

Hoddles Creek is considered to be one of the major waterways within the Upper Yarra River System, which provides around 70% of Melbourne's drinking water. As part of the Cleaner River and Bay program, Melbourne Water monitors monthly samples across 110 sites, one of which is Hoddles Creek, upstream at Warburton Highway in Launching Place. The water quality index (WQI) (see graph below) for the 2012-13 year is the result of combining ratings for six water quality indicators:

- 1. Nutrients** (nitrogen & phosphorus). These are essential for plant and animal farming, but overuse or misuse of fertilisers can lead to significant increases of nutrient levels in waterways.
- 2. Turbidity** (a measure of water clarity). High turbidity (low clarity) is mainly caused by sediments that wash off cultivated land and unsealed roads into streams and rivers.
- 3. Dissolved oxygen** (the amount of oxygen contained in water). This is a critical measure of the living conditions for oxygen-requiring aquatic organisms. Discharges of waste rich in organic matter, like sewage, can substantially reduce dissolved oxygen concentrations.

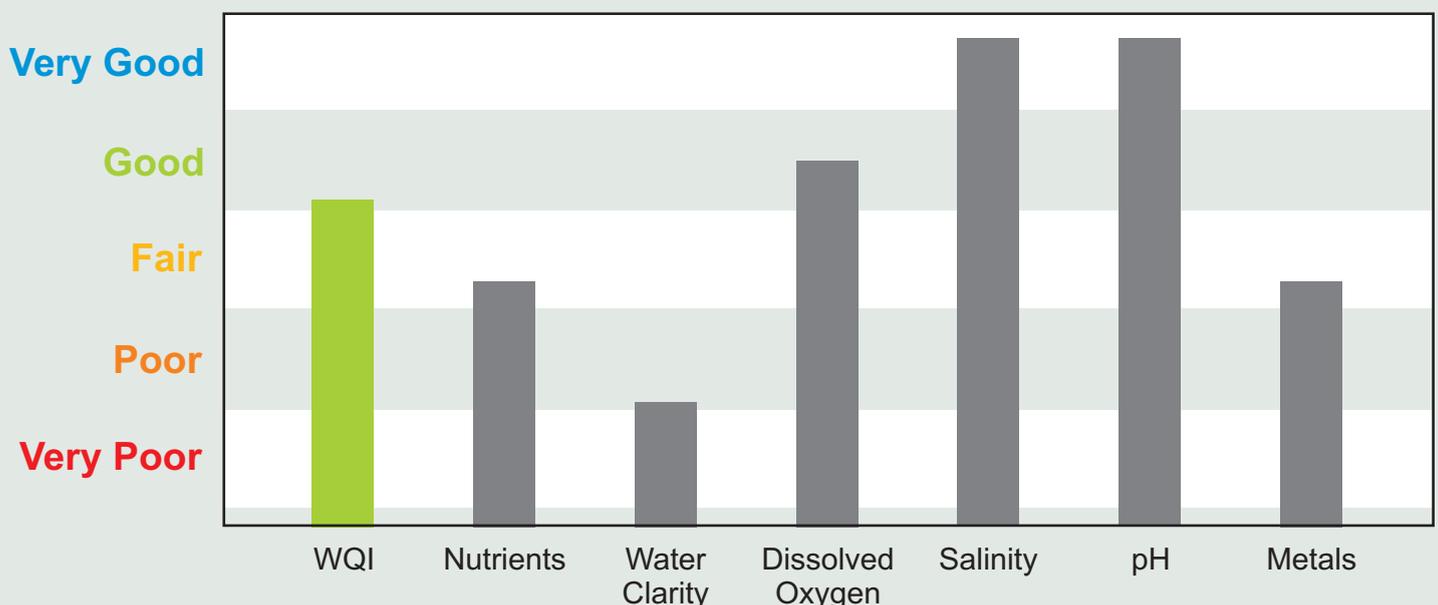
- 4. Salinity** (electrical conductivity). This measures how much salt is in water – water in rivers and streams is usually fresh.
- 5. pH** is a measure of the acidity or alkalinity of water, ranging from acidic (< 7) through to neutral (pH 7) and alkaline (> 7). While there are natural sources of alkaline and acid inputs due to local geology, changes are often due to chemical spills and mine waste disposal.
- 6. Metals** (arsenic, cadmium, chromium, copper, lead, nickel & zinc). These occur naturally in the earth, but human sources of contamination can include industrial & waste products, agricultural runoff and paints.

Scores of **Good** to **Very Good** mean the water quality indicators are at or above State Environment Protection Policy guidance limits. Scores of **Fair** to **Very Poor** reflect the impacts of human activity (like pollution, development and industry) on waterways.

So how can we, as householders and farmers, protect and improve the health of our waterways? Here's a few suggestions:

- Use organic instead of chemical fertilizers <http://www.organicfarming.com.au/>
- Have your soil tested and only add what is recommended <http://www.swep.com.au/>
- Avoid unnecessary spraying of pesticides & herbicides and follow manufacturer instructions <http://www.depi.vic.gov.au/agriculture-and-food/farm-management/chemical-use/publications/a-guide-to-using-agricultural-chemicals-in-victoria>

2012 - 2013 Water Quality Parameter Scores
Hoddles Creek upstream Warburton Hwy, Launching Place



Hoddles Creek health check

(continued from page 2)

- Use biodegradable detergents
http://www.epa.sa.gov.au/xstd_files/Waste/Information%20sheet/soaps_detergents.pdf
- Remove old car batteries and recycle other batteries (Battery Bank at Bunnings)
- Take unwanted chemicals & oil to designated depots
<http://recyclingnearyou.com.au/chemicals/YarraRangesVIC>
- Clean-up around the house and use the hard rubbish collection
<http://www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/Property/Rubbish-recycling>
- Take polystyrene to recycling depot www.olima.com.au
- Retain a green edge & avoid soil erosion along waterways
<http://www.melbournewater.com.au/getinvolved/applyforfunding/Pages/Stream-frontage-management-program.aspx>
- Avoid stock having access to waterways
- Use recycling depots for unwanted electronic equipment
<http://recyclingnearyou.com.au/ewaste-dropoff/YarraRangesVIC>
- Maintain farm machinery (tractors, pumps etc) to avoid oil & fuel leakage.



Melbourne Water testing station on Hoddles Creek at Warburton Highway, Launching Place.

Summer safety

As we move into the summer season, it's a good time to remember some basic rules to keep safe and happy during the warm weather ahead.

Fire Risk

Bushfire preparation requires an awareness of the fire risk and knowledge of what to do in a fire situation. It is important to have a contingency plan if the first plan cannot be carried out.

- Have a sensible fire plan.
- Take precautions to reduce fuel around your home. As noted in previous newsletters, research by Gibbons *et al* (2012) showed that all fuel treatments were more effective if undertaken closer to houses. Reducing the amount of trees and shrubs within 40 metres of your home is the most important effective action that you can take (There is a copy of this report on the FOHC website for anyone interested in learning more).
- Know whether you are physically and emotionally able to defend your property.
- Be alert at times of high fire risk. Go outside and have a look around. Check whether you can see or smell smoke. Don't just sit waiting for the CFA to knock on your door and tell you what's happening. If there is a fire, the hard working volunteers will be out fighting the fire.
- If you are in a situation where you have to battle flames, wear protective clothing. Wool and cotton are good choices. Make sure your body is covered. Singlets, shorts and thongs offer no protection. Wear sturdy footwear.

The CFA will advertise when Fire Ready meetings are to be held in our area. These are well worth attending as they provide information specific to our area as well as general fire safety.

Snakes

Watch where you walk and teach children how to scan the ground ahead.

Reference

Gibbons, P *et al* (2012) Land Management Practices Associated with House Loss in Wildfires. PLoS ONE 7(1): e29212. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0029212.

Website:

<http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0029212>

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.

Burgan brings a White Christmas

Burgan (*Kunzea ericoides*) provides a spectacular display at this time of year, with masses of tiny white flowers covering the bushes like snow. A tall shrub or tree, it grows rapidly to 5 metres in height and is widespread in south eastern Australia. Unfortunately, this prolific grower can wear out its welcome, out-competing other species and taking over areas where previously a more diverse habitat was present.



The delicate flowers of Burgan (*Kunzea ericoides*)

In common with our readers, Friends of Hoddles Creek are looking forward to Christmas and a chance to relax with family and friends over the holiday period. We hope that you have enjoyed our Newsletters this year and found some informative articles too.

Summer in the Yarra Ranges can also present some challenges, as the land dries out and the risk of fire increases. Please take a few moments to read our safety hints on page 3, so that your summer can be both happy and safe.

We wish all our readers a very Happy Christmas and look forward to providing you with more food for thought in 2015.

FRIENDS OF
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Focused on Habitat Conservation



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. Mail 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'.

