

FRIENDS OF HODDLES CREEK
NEWSLETTER



Reading the climate

How we need to rethink our ideas about the weather

Sometimes our sense of *what is going on* – our intuition – is a reliable guide to what is actually happening in the world. For example, we are usually pretty good at reading the weather: we wake in the morning hearing the birds twittering and with the sun streaming in and know that it will be a good day for gardening. We can often *sense* when rain is coming – we note the sudden drop in the wind or hear the cry of the magpie in the tree tops as a storm approaches. We shudder with foreboding in summer with the arrival of hot north winds.

However, our intuition is not always right. Most of us would say that this last winter overall was bloody cold and wet. And yet, according to official figures from the federal Bureau of Meteorology, as a whole, **south eastern Australia has just been through its warmest, driest winter on record!**

You might think “That can't be right”. We might reflect on how our personal sense of the weather is no longer a good guide to the bigger picture. And we might also note, with growing unease, that something is up with the weather – that things are not as they once were – that the climate is changing (climate being the pattern and parameters of weather, over a much larger time scale).

Too hot to handle?

Climate Change or Global Warming is one of those things that is simply too big to easily comprehend and perhaps too scary to want to comprehend. Every other day we hear nay-sayers making the claim that it is all a fraud – that the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is a socialist conspiracy concocted by the United Nations to take what is rightfully theirs (the right to pollute perhaps). Often, they cloud the issues (perhaps deliberately) by misrepresenting the nature of the science – and indeed the scientific method. The fact that 97% of all research ever published on Climate Change confirms the reality of global warming should have alarm bells ringing. Like many, you could shoot the messenger. Or you could acknowledge that (a) science is a very serious business that provides the most

authoritative evidence on the nature of the world and (b) we are indeed facing global disruption of a type never witnessed by humans before. Even if you are not completely convinced, you might see that the potential risks mean that we have a moral obligation to act on this knowledge.

Too important to ignore

Across the community, we can develop a better understanding of the science and knowledge base behind climate projections. To understand for example, how ice samples from the Poles and Aboriginal dreamtime stories corroborate each other and speak of rapid climate change and sea level rise some 10,000 years ago.

Most critically though, we need to anticipate how climate change will begin to impact upon our communities. Are we prepared for more extreme 'weather', in which some regions will suffer deeper and extended droughts, while others will experience bigger and more frequent bushfires? Are we prepared for the impacts of sea level rise on coastal communities? And can we anticipate how climate change will impact plants and animals – both native and introduced.

Reading the weather is an ancient art form that connects us to nature. We have a deep cultural memory of past weather events. We can slowly begin to read our climatic future from changes that have already begun. We need to create a culture that respects the weather, takes note of what science can tell us and that *listens* to the climate.

Useful references:

BOM: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-09-01/australia-winter-2017-was-hot-dry-and-a-record/8862856>

Climate Council: <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/2017-weird-winter>

NASA: <https://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus/>
The Conversation: <https://theconversation.com/its-true-97-of-research-papers-say-climate-change-is-happening-14051>

Institute of Physics Publishing: <http://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/8/2/024024/meta;jsessionid=4D5794429198C5BADE118AFA9E3A3DFD.c2.iopscience.cld.iop.org>

Aboriginal Stories: <https://theconversation.com/ancient-aboriginal-stories-preserve-history-of-a-rise-in-sea-level-36010>

The Forest and the War on Nature

Remember Summer? Ah, for those carefree days when the heady scents of the forest's eucalypts made one dizzy. Dragonflies buzzed lazily along the streams and rivers and the air was shrill with cicadas. Well, I'm sorry to jolt you from any kind of sentimental reverie, but it's time to get real. Summer is gone. Over. Finished. It no longer exists. The *govement* stole it, perverted it and renamed it. It is now officially the *fire season*. We're no longer allowed to look forward to summer, but rather, we're supposed to feel menaced by a sense of dread at the possibility of another *angry summer*, aka *fire season*.

Australia's naturally highly variable climate makes it difficult to isolate the effects of global warming, but there is no question that Australia is getting hotter and drier. Droughts increase in intensity and extent. Extreme heat and catastrophic fires are no longer the exception. High-intensity blazes have exceeded all Australian records with fire temperatures reaching 1000°C. Fires generate their own weather systems with winds over 200 km per hour.

There's lots of big numbers. Heatwaves are the *new norm* and there's a heightened level of vigilance around their life-threatening dangers. Anyone who has experienced wildfire first hand viscerally understands its power and terrifying ferocity. No-one mucks around with the *fire threat* but rather we obediently *plan and prepare* to be *fire ready*. Fires are commonly described as *unprecedented* and *catastrophic*. We have *firestorms*. They are real.

The language of fear

Back in those balmy summer days, we also used to have weather. Remember that? And fire for that matter. Rain and floods. While I was dangling my toes in the river, they got stolen too. This time, they all got turned into *events* – *fire events*, *weather events*, *rain events*, *storm events*, *flood events* Presumably the *event* bit allows us to anticipate the arrival of a defined *happening*, so that we can *strategise*, *action* and *debrief* accordingly. Weather no longer just *is*. It no longer just happens and we accept it and get on. These terms have been revamped and repackaged into *tangible*

targets so that we can better manage and control them, or rather, kid ourselves that we can.

The *fire season* is one of those insidious bits of jargon surreptitiously implanted into our brains and, before we know it, the same words are spewing forth from our mouths, as that thing called *summer* fades into the distant past. It is unscrupulous spin to which we have become disturbingly immune. So why am I getting all hot under the collar about the use of a few old words? Because doublespeak affects the way we think about nature, about the forest. Because, in the eyes of the *authorities*, fuelling the *fire season* is our forest of *fuel*.

Not only has summer become the enemy, but so has the forest.

My aim is simply to expose how language can be manipulated to set us up against nature. Doublespeak removes us from nature. It fosters the fantasy that we are somehow separate from it; as if we have no connection, no dependency, no need to assign it any concern.

Recasting summer as the *fire season* sets it up as a deadly enemy against which we must collectively, even heroically, fight. Fight, paradoxically, the very thing that sustains us. Fuelling the fervour is the hackneyed narrative of the Aussie battler, braving the perils of our dangerous land, waging a war against nature. Over time, the *fire season* becomes normalised. Repeated often enough, it triggers the desired response of public acceptance of a command-and-control management approach, rather than fostering the innovative and imaginative thinking that is so desperately needed. Gradually we become more reluctant to accept the variable and extreme nature of our land and less willing to work with it, opting instead to join the noble battle against it.

Reclaiming summer

Rest assured that as you dream of summer, our politicians will be *making commitments* and developing *strategic delivery channels* for our *natural capital*, to minimise the chance of nature *impacting* on us (insert jargon of choice). But don't despair. The people have the power here. Management rhetoric only gains clout if we comply. We can resist. We can wrestle summer back from the *fire season* and



The delights of summer, like this cicada (*Cyclochila australasiae*) emerging from the leaf litter, have to contend with the threat of the next controlled burn.

reject the scare campaigns that instrumentalise nature and language and rob us of the freedom of thought and expression. I'm not suggesting being foolhardy or negligent or taking unconsidered risk. This is not to be artless or irresponsible, but on the contrary. I'm just asking how we became so deeply locked in a language of crisis, where nature became the enemy enumerated by its human victims, where events are described by their potential for destruction. Sounds awfully hope-less to me.

Today's children no longer have summer. That was

Living in the bush

Birdsong, behaviour and breeding

Living in the bush goes hand in hand with living close to, and with nature. Birdsong and behaviour abounds, but how often do we stop to enjoy these moments? Birds have been the subject of enthusiasts for centuries and so, compared to some creatures, there is a wealth of knowledge out there, based on observation as well as scientific research.

On a recent trip to the Northern Territory I spent some time observing a large flock of Budgerigars. They swarmed in a constantly moving, weaving black cloud against the clear blue sky. Is there a pecking order I wonder, for who takes the lead to turn? As far as I know these birds don't eat insects, so what is the reason for such behaviour? Occasionally they would all descend to perch in a tree, then down to the dam, and then they were off again.

Settling back into the lush, green landscape of the Yarra Valley, the birdsong and behaviour is more apparent after several months absence, and perhaps also because spring is in the air. Friends of Hoddles Creek members have been observing a pair of white ibis, who decided to build their nest in a tree along a local road. Several snaps have been taken of these camera-shy birds and the latest picture taken this week reveals two fluffy, black and white chicks (see photo).

Some may wonder why we're so excited about a pair of ibis in a nest. White Ibis are commonly regarded as scavenging pests stalking towns and suburbs, parklands and gardens for food waste. You might think from their abundance in numbers that they are thriving as a species. But according to Dr John Martin, wildlife ecologist with the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney, their numbers are declining in some habitats. Like many Australians, it seems these birds are deserting nature and rural landscapes for life in the city. Martin maintains, in an episode entitled **Hated and misunderstood, the ibis brings an important environmental message**, by Ann Jones for the ABC's **Off Track** program: "The gift of the Australian white

something from the *olden days*. Instead, they have the *fire season*. The succession of controlled burns in the forest means that blackened trunks are the norm. How could they know any different in a forest of *sliding baselines*?

Let's retrieve our language for what we cherish and give them back the forest and the summer.

Text and image by Alison Pouliot

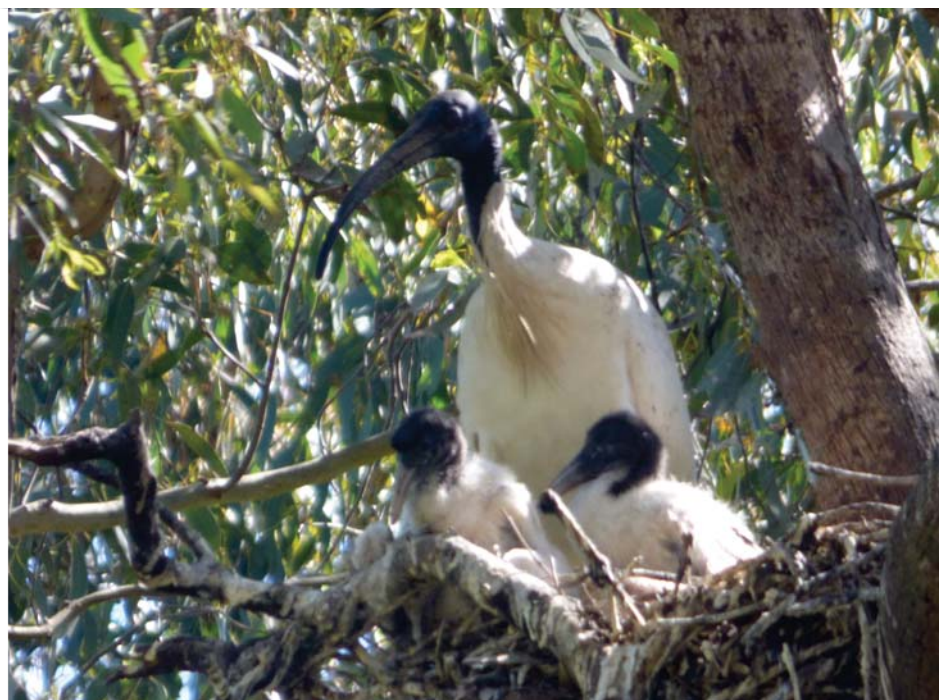
This article is a modified version of the original that first appeared in the Wombat Forest Newsletter, Issue 41, September 2017.

ibis to other birds, plants and animals is the message it brings: *'I am here because my home environment is no longer adequate for my needs.'*" Read the full story at www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/offtrack/behind-the-ibis-invasion/6842242.

Another bird that seems to have adapted to being around humans is the Welcome Swallow, *Hirundo neoxena*. Both its species and common name refer to people welcoming its return as a herald of spring in southern parts of Australia. Another suggestion is that the term 'welcome' comes from sailors who knew that the sight of a swallow meant that land was not far away. During winter, the welcome swallow migrates towards the north of Australia, closer to the equator and warm weather. In spring, they return to southern Australia to breed.

Welcome Swallows are known to be monogamous and nest sites are often reused, being refurbished from one breeding attempt to the next. Swallows typically build their mud nests on manmade structures, e.g., beneath bridges, on the walls of buildings. I have a pair flitting about the house and woodshed clearly looking for a place to build a nest. They have nested around the house in the past, but not in recent years.

Friends of Hoddles Creek would like to hear your bird stories, too. Please send us your stories and/or photos to FOHC, PO Box 298, Yarra Junction, Vic 3797, or email us at friendsofhoddlescreek@gmail.com.



Please tell us what you think

This edition of the Friends of Hoddles Creek Newsletter contains two articles that address big issues for our world. They are individual opinion pieces that unashamedly wear their hearts on their sleeves. Their points of view are also shared by members of the group, who believe that decisions made by individuals, corporations and governments within the next few years, will profoundly affect the world we live in and the world that our children and grandchildren will inherit.

Do you share our concerns about climate change? As individuals, can we act to make our local environment – and our world – a better place? We'd love to hear your thoughts on these topics. Have you taken steps to reduce your greenhouse gas production? What recycling or conservation activities are you involved in? Or, do you think we are concerned about nothing? You can contact us at friendsofhoddlescreek@gmail.com or leave a comment on our Facebook page (just search 'Friends of Hoddles Creek' or 'FOHC') with any thoughts for inclusion in our Summer edition.

Invaluable Invertebrates: a postscript

Earlier this year we were privileged to experience a presentation on terrestrial invertebrates and biodiversity from Max Campbell, President of the Field Naturalists Club, Victoria. We were blown away by his insightful knowledge and fascinating slides and videos depicting the small and often microscopic world of creatures that make up around 95% of all living species.

For those who missed Max's talk, the following is a summary taken with thanks from his notes.

The impact of humans

Human impact on biodiversity is increasing at an astounding pace as a result of deforestation, urbanisation, mining, infrastructure development, pest control methods, agricultural practices, antibiotic use and chemical pollution.

Even simple everyday activities, that many of us participate in without a second thought, can be a problem. This includes the overuse of do-it-yourself external exterminator kits, or 'bombs' – readily available at supermarkets and hardware stores – in addition to the usual arsenal of household insecticides and weedicides, and the mistaken belief that using more is better.

Planting of introduced vegetation, which does not usually support native species of invertebrates (some leaf litter may even be toxic to native species), increased use of plastic grass (producing toxins and restricting access to soil), covering soil with concrete rather than plants, and overuse of garden fertilisers and soil conditioners may all impact on invertebrate populations.

Deliberate and accidental introduction is also a cause for concern. Introduced species can be aggressive competitors and predators, threatening the survival of local species. A good example of this is the European wasp, which will attack and eat just about anything.

We need knowledge, not fear

Learned phobias, where misleading and high impact advertising and profiteering lead to fear, with the notion that all arthropods need to be controlled if not killed,

together with scare campaigns by some authorities have probably already impacted on invertebrates and vertebrates alike, causing unknown reduction in numbers and leading to an irrational fear of nature.

No organism lives in isolation – this includes plants and animals. Symbiosis and interdependence means that one cannot exist without the other. For example, did you know that the human body contains just as many microbial cells (bacteria, fungi) as human cells? We contain around 1-2 kg of bacteria alone, with over 2000 species, and their role in keeping us healthy is only just beginning to be appreciated.

There is variable diversity of native invertebrates in the rural/urban environment. Some are more persistent than others in the face of aggressive invaders. Others are seasonal blow-ins with variable persistence. Many have been lost through urbanisation and development; often assisted by invasive species.

There are many reasons for the demise of species in the changed environment, but the main driver of species extinction today is human activity in one form or another. Appropriate plantings, retaining leaf litter and protecting remnant vegetation will all improve the chances of survival of native species. Biodiversity is the result of at least 3.5 billion years of evolution, through a succession of complex processes and convenient circumstances in fortuitous order. Once destroyed, the chances of restoring it are remote, if not impossible.

Like to join FOHC?

The Friends of Hoddles Creek are always on the lookout for new members to add new ideas, new helpers and new friends to our group. If you'd like to join, simply 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 new website (www.friendsofhoddlescreek.com) or on Facebook – just search 'Friends of Hoddles Creek' or 'FOHC'.

