PEST PLANTS

A total of 1692 hours has been applied to weed management so far this financial year (excluding contractors). The goal is 3000 hours this financial year.

Weed control during late spring has included work on chilean needle grass, pampas, thistles, capeweed, angled onion, hemlock, fat hen, sea spurge, horehound, pittosporum, gorse, boneseed, polygala.

The Monash Biological Society visited in late November and assisted to remove polygala and pittosporum from Newhaven Swamp and polygala, pittosporum and boneseed from the Summerland Estate.

REVEGETATION/VOLUNTEERS

The Penguin Foundation Open day on 23 November 2013 was a great success with over 100 people attending various talks and activities including visits to the Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre, penguin box building and revegetation.

National Australia Bank volunteers recently assisted Rangers with planting at Fishers Wetland and revegetation work near the Nobbies.

Thirteen Monash Biological Society volunteers assisted Rangers with various activities across the island including weed control work at Newhaven Swamp and in the Summerlands Estate, revegetation work at Fishers wetland (1620 plants) and working in the Wildlife Rehab Centre and at the Penguin Parade.

PEST ANIMALS

Foxes

Fox baiting continues across the island and will conclude on the 23rd December 2013. A trapping program is also underway at Swan Bay in response to a recent photo of a fox. Spotlighting continues but will soon intensify to locate young foxes emerging from their dens. A highly qualified dog trainer will be appointed shortly to train two fox detection dogs for the Fox Eradication Program and a dedicated dog handler will also be recruited with funding from the Penguin Foundation to manage and deploy the dogs in the field.
Photos of dog trainer Steve Austin from his website http://www.steveaustindogtrainer.com/

Please call 0419 369 365 if you have seen a fox on Phillip Island

Cats

A total of 57 feral cats have been removed from the Park to date, including two at the Penguin Parade precinct recently.

Rabbits

Rabbit control continues at Fishers Wetland to attempt eradication inside the fenced area, and to also reduce immigration onto the rabbit-free Churchill Island. Rabbit baiting programs will be conducted in February in conjunction with Landcare at Forrest Caves and Surf Beach to protect orchids.

WILDLIFE

Hooded Plover

It has taken 12 years but the population has doubled from 22 to 44 between 2001 and 2013.

The November island-wide count is the best indicator of base population numbers being at the start of the breeding season. There were 43 adults and 1 juvenile.

The first nest was at Surf Beach (Park St) on 07/10/13 which is a fairly normal start.

To the start of December there have been 10 hoodie nests, 27 eggs and, 5 chicks. There are 2 chicks each at Saltwater Creek (Anchorage Rd) and Elizabeth Cove (Ventnor west). The 4 chicks are due to fledge early December.

The pair at Surfies Point laid their 3 eggs outside the temporary roped-off refuge area (see photo). The eggs were way out on the beach where they could be stepped on, so the

Hooded plover nest at Surf Beach
fence and signage was extended. Unfortunately the nest only lasted a few days before it was predated. Check the MyHoodie Portal for all details at http://portal.myhoodie.com.au/

**Koalas**

Our annual catches were carried out between the 4\textsuperscript{th} and 8\textsuperscript{th} of November 2013. The number of koalas caught over the five days was twenty one. In addition there were four koalas seen but not caught (three of them positively identified). This gives us a confirmed population of twenty five koalas, however there are a further five koalas that should be in the woodland, so a potential population of thirty. A population of thirty koalas is at the lower end of our ideal parameters (30 – 40 koalas). It should be noted that one of the koalas caught had not been seen for two and a half years, and another for one year, so it is possible that some of those koalas we expect to no longer be around may possible be somewhere at the Koala Conservation Centre (KCC).

The most disappointing aspect of the catches was that no young were found. This means that the last three breeding seasons have yielded only one female from eight births. This is a situation we need to monitor carefully.

Chlamydial swabs were taken from the koalas in the pens and boardwalk areas and some woodland males that were considered candidates to become involved in our breeding programme (such that it is). Of the seventeen Chlamydia tests carried out, only two produced positive results. This would indicate that Chlamydial infection is not a significant problem within the KCC.

Interestingly one three year old male had almost no chest gland, very small testicles and unstained white fur on the chest and rump. It is to be hoped this is not indicative of a genetic problem within our population.

This year we were accompanied by researcher Elizabeth Neilson and her field assistant Rebecca Neale. Elizabeth is investigating the browse preference of koalas and whether their highly toxic and low nutritional diet is actually influenced by the chemicals in the leaves they eat, how they metabolise these chemicals and whether (and if so, how) they use them. Koala researcher Kath Handasyde (Melbourne University) has had a long association with the KCC (a Nature Park’s Board member for many years during the 1990s and 2000s) also attended for one day and enabled us to take penile Chlamydia swabs from some of our male koalas.

Managing a small, essentially wild, koala population has many challenges and the annual catch gives us much detail on our koalas and how our population is faring. Data collected also contributes to the overall knowledge of koalas.

*Annual Koala health check draws a crowd during the first week of November*
WILDLIFE REHABILITATION AND ANIMAL WELFARE

The following animals are currently in care:

- Nine ducklings (black, shell and teal), and two magpies. They were all orphaned/abandoned and are doing well. We will be able to soft release them from the Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre within the next month.
- Three brush-tail possums, which were raised by foster carers. They are due for release early next year.
- A whistling kite, which was rescued from a property in Rhyll. It was very underweight and had a swollen eye. It has recovered well and is due for release in a few days.
- A white-headed petrel, which was found in Cowes, and is very underweight. Hopefully he recovers well.
- Two shearwaters, one little penguin chick and a blue-tongue lizard.

We recently released an arctic jaeger which was transferred to us from Melbourne Zoo. It had a broken wing, which healed well.

We are continuing to improve the rehab centre, by fixing shade cloth and keeping on top of the weeds. We are undergoing a sand change in the penguin pen in preparation for the busy penguin season.

We have been hosting vet students from Melbourne University, who have been very helpful.

RISK MANAGEMENT

A quarterly risk audit was conducted in November and subsequent works have been carried out on walking tracks and infrastructure around the entire Park. Hazards are being mitigated or put into the works plan, most to be completed by Christmas.

Recent severe weather events have resulted in continued vigilance by Rangers and works crews in repairing washed out tracks, clearing fallen trees and closing sections of reserves due to extreme climatic conditions or until necessary works take place. Work has been completed on the tracks at Oswin Roberts, Conservation Hill, Surfies Point, Berry’s Beach and Forrest Caves.

As our summer patrols commence, assessing and mitigating any immediate risks will be priority for our rangers.

FIRE

- The Nature Parks has undertaken recent works to widen and maintain fire breaks and tracks within Oswin Roberts Reserve. Further work will be undertaken to tidy up the works by moving piles of timber and limbs further into the reserve out of sight.
• Planned burns for the season (weather permitting and following guidelines of the prescription) are Kitty Miller Bay and Berry's Beach.
• All fire breaks and tracks have been slashed around the park.
• Environment staff undertook fire refresher training with DEPI and Parks Victoria staff at the KCC in late November.

DEPI staff Matt and Nick from the Foster office going over their fire vehicle with Nature Parks staff

• Personal protective equipment (PPE) has been audited, and service of slip-on units is in progress (to be completed in December).
• Some staff attended a fire ecology course at Winchelsea in late October.

Fire ecology expert Dr Kevin Tolhurst from the University of Melbourne with DEPI staff discussing fire behavior on site in the Otways

GRANTS

There is one Melbourne Water grant currently underway with a local contractor spraying tall wheat grass over summer 2013/14 adjacent to Fisher’s Wetland. A new Melbourne Water grant application has recently been submitted and we should know within the next two months whether or not we have been successful. This grant will again focus on the wetlands we have worked on in the past but with the inclusion of Newhaven Swamp where we hope
to remove woody weeds and spray bridal creeper with Nature Park staff, contractors and volunteers.

Construction of the staircase at Aussie Track has stalled while we await Coastal Management Act consent, which is due on 16th December 2013. Construction will most likely begin in the new year after the busy period.

The Port Phillip and Western Port Catchment Management Authority have been successful in obtaining a grant for the Western Port Ramsar Project of $700,000. The Nature Parks is one of the delivery partners for this grant. Preliminary funds have been received by the park to continue weed control programs.

The Nature Parks recently secured a grant through the Western Port Biospheres Growing Connections project to follow up revegetation and weed control works on the Summerland Peninsula for $38,000 with the completion date being 30th June 2014.

**STAFF RETIREMENT**

The Nature Park would like to take this opportunity to thank Scott Campbell for his services over the last 17 years. Scott’s passion and expertise has been huge asset to the park, particularly at Churchill Island where he eradicated rabbits and boxthorn, and helped restore the island to its beautiful setting today. Scott will be sorely missed by the Environment team where he has imparted his wisdom and shared many stories of his adventures and travels. We wish Scott all the best in his retirement, and for his new adventure – sailing to Scotland!

*Scott saving an Echidna off the track at Cape Woolamai*