

## ENVIRONMENT NEWS – JUNE 2016

Dr Roz Jessop, Environment Manager and Jarvis Weston, Ranger in Charge

### Environment strategies 2012-16

The key values of the Nature Parks need to be protected within the framework of an increasingly urbanised and recreation driven environment. Ecosystems can be fragmented over time due to the pressures from development and decreased amounts of open space close to townships for recreation as well as changes in agricultural practices. Increased urbanisation on Phillip Island is perhaps the most persistent form of environmental modification affecting the Nature Parks' values and can significantly alter the Island's landscape both visually and in structure. Invasion by pest plant and animals caused by disturbance and the Nature Parks' high 'edge to area ratio' is one of the main contributors to fragmentation of natural areas and ecosystems on the Island. In order to protect the Nature Parks' environmental, social and economic values, including the visual landscape, island-wide strategies as well as area based plans and strong partnerships between management agencies and the community are essential.

### PEST PLANTS

During May, 106 hours of weed control was undertaken by rangers. In addition the *Ecoblade* contractor John Baulch spent a week on Cape Woolamai mainly slashing Inkweed *Phytolacca octandra* L. while following up on African Boxthorn *Lycium ferocissimum* and Inkweed. Winter weed work began in earnest following the departure of the Short-tailed Shearwaters. This year marks 10 years of concerted weed management on Cape Woolamai. Work continued on Boxthorn, Inkweed, Apple of Sodom *Solanum linnaeanum*, Horehound *Marrubium vulgare*, Capeweed *Arctotheca calendula*, Buffalo grass *Stenotaphrum secundatum*, Kikuyu *Pennisetum clandestinum* and thistles using techniques from hand weeding, bagging seed heads, cut and paint, spraying and the *Ecoblade*. The work is on a landscape scale and there has been good progress on two of the worst weeds



namely African Boxthorn and Apple of Sodom. Kikuyu still poses a great threat on the Cape as well as other shearwater habitat and will require continued large scale effort. This year the main kikuyu infestation was treated with the *Ecoblade* in preparation for spring spraying.

Marram grass *Ammophila arenaria* and Sea Spurge *Euphorbia paralias* removal continued along the Cape Woolamai Surf Beach foreshore.

African Lovegrass *Eragrostis curvula* has been followed up at Flynn's Beach car park and the old 'Quik Spray' unit has been replaced.

*African Love Grass in Flynn's car park 2008*

**Meeting the Nature Parks' strategic direction - 2.2 Facilitate co-operative approaches to island-wide environmental management**

## **REVEGETATION/VOLUNTEERS**

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Planting season is in full swing.

RACV members and staff have helped us get over 4000 grass mixes in at Berry's Beach. They also helped us put in over 1000 plants at Fishers Wetland.

International Student Volunteers have helped us put in trees throughout the Summerland Peninsula, Moonah *Melaleuca lanceolata subsp. Lanceolata*, at Scenic Estate Conservation Reserve and a diverse range of species out at Berry's Beach. They also had a few days out at Cape Woolamai, where they "bulked up" last year's re-vegetation site with a couple of thousand grasses.

So far plant numbers in for this financial year stands at just over 46,000 grasses, shrubs and trees – a great effort by volunteers and staff to get them all in the ground!

Friends of Koalas have planted some eucalypts out the front of the Koala Conservation Center.

Surf Beach - Sunderland Bay Coast care Group have had a productive day cutting and painting Gorse *Ulex europaeus* and various other weeds along the south coast of the island.

More information on volunteering with the group and projects can be found on their Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Surf-Beach-Sunderland-Bay-Coastcare-Group/1537561176526761>

*Meeting the Nature Parks' strategic direction - 2.2 Facilitate co-operative approaches to island-wide environmental management and 2.6 Raise awareness and encourage shared responsibility for conservation*

## **PEST ANIMALS**

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### **Foxes**

Monitoring for foxes on Phillip Island continues using detection dogs, cameras, and spotlight surveys. The investigations of several fox sightings from the community have not found any physical evidence to date but further surveys will continue in sighting "hot spots". Due to the difficulty of detecting foxes at low densities, a precautionary fox baiting program is planned to commence next month in order to maintain pressure on any remaining individuals which have not been detected during surveys.

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

### **Cats**

To date in 2015/16, 146 feral cats have been removed from habitat in and adjacent to Nature Parks managed habitat. Cat trapping at Cape Woolamai over April and May removed 34 feral cats from shearwater habitat prior to their migration northward and a second trapping program is planned in August/ September to afford further protection.

## Rabbits

A new Rabbitscan app for Phillip Island is currently being developed to allow community members to map rabbit activity and control activities on Phillip Island. Collated data will map hotspots and allow land managers to plan broad-scale control activities such as warren ripping.

Spotlighting and targeted baiting through Fishers Wetland has been occurring to remove remaining rabbits.

Community members interested in participating in rabbit monitoring are encouraged to contact Robbie Gray at Bass Coast Landcare Network on 0448 386 724 or [robbie.gray@vic.chariot.net.au](mailto:robbie.gray@vic.chariot.net.au)

***Meeting the Nature Parks' strategic direction - 2.2 Facilitate co-operative approaches to island-wide environmental management and 2.6 Raise awareness and encourage shared responsibility for conservation***

## **HOODED PLOVER (EASTERN) *Thinornis rubricollis rubricollis* (EPBC listed as Vulnerable)**

### **2015-16 Phillip Island Hoodie breeding season snapshot:**

40 nests, 18 pairs, 93 eggs, 51 chicks, 17 fledged. This is the highest fledge total ever recorded and greater than the average 15.5 hatched total each season for the previous twenty three years (1992 and 2015). The highest previous fledged total was twelve, with an annual average of just six - a fantastic boost for the species recovery program. Thanks to all the Nature Parks, BCSC staff and volunteer for their help.

### **Island wide Hooded Plover and Gull count results:**

There were 43 Hoodies recorded for the April Hoodie and Gull count on 20/04/16. (The average for the previous 16 years for April is 39). There were 38 adults and 5 juveniles (only 1 banded juvenile: YLF 28 from Smiths Beach). There were a few small flocks  $\leq 5$  at KMB, Woolamai and Thorny Beach. The main winter flock was 13 at Forrest Caves where OLF 'BR', the only fledgling from the Mornington Peninsula for the 2013/14 season and YLF '28' juvenile from Smiths Beach were seen. There were only 9 hoodies on the north coast beaches which is the same as this time last year and Red Rocks OLF 'PX' and Anchorage Rd Gm/YLg were seen at Forrest Caves. Winter is a great time to observe flocked 6+ Hooded Plover at beaches such as Cape Woolamai, Forrest Caves, Surf Beach, Berry Beach and Summerland Beach.

Next Hooded Plover/Gull Count: Monday 18th July 2016.

***Meeting the Nature Parks' strategic directions - 2.1 Strengthen the protection of natural assets, 2.2 Facilitate co-operative approaches to island-wide environmental management, 2.5 Build conservation criteria into decision making and 2.6 Raise awareness and encourage shared responsibility for conservation***

## KOALAS

Last year, as part of a rehoming program being run by DELWP, we were able to acquire four orphaned joeys. Three required supplementary milk formula feeding for many months before they could be weaned. Unfortunately, the only male in the group developed scoliosis and was euthanized in March. The remaining females have all now been weaned, and are sharing a pen over the cooler months. A decision on where in the Koala Conservation Centre (KCC) they will ultimately be housed will be made towards the end of the year.

In order to house these koalas during the early days, extra pens were constructed by Nature Parks' staff, which will now improve the facilities available to house sick and injured koalas into the future.

The 'Friends of the Koalas' continues to support us with their monthly count of the koalas in the KCC 'woodland', and monthly habitat day activities. Recently, both events have been particularly constructive in terms of koalas found, and jobs completed. In June, trees were planted as part of the annual silver spade day to recognize generous donors to the FOK habitat fund, and the passing of Max McConchie, a great servant of FOK and Bushbank.

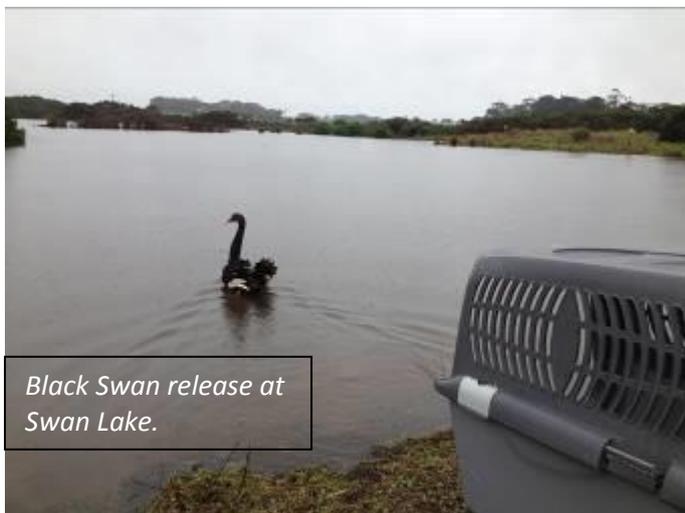
**KCC Environment Rangers welcome reports of koala sightings on Phillip Island and are particularly interested in the colour of any ear tags seen. Phone: (03) 5952 1307**

Koalas that live in the wild on Phillip Island cannot be caught and moved to another location. DELWP is responsible for the management of wildlife. Nature Parks' Rangers can provide advice on protecting koalas but will only attend if the koala is sick, injured or in danger. Koalas that are removed due to health reasons are returned to the vicinity of their capture once they have recovered, and those that need to be moved due to being in a dangerous situation are moved to the closest safe place. Koalas have home ranges that they inhabit where they know the best trees that provide for their needs throughout the year, so they need to remain in their home area.

*Meeting the Nature Parks' strategic direction - 2.2 Facilitate co-operative approaches to island-wide environmental management and 2.6 Raise awareness and encourage shared responsibility for conservation*

## **WILDLIFE REHABILITATION AND ANIMAL WELFARE**

The wildlife rehabilitation rangers have been caring for a range of different wildlife during April and May such as – Brush-tail and Ring-tail Possums, Swamp Wallabies, Short-tailed Shearwaters, Hoary -



*Black Swan release at Swan Lake.*

headed Grebe, a microbat, Purple Swamp-hen, Crested Tern, New Holland Honeyeaters, Laughing Kookaburra, Spotted Pardalote and a Black Swan. We have also cared for over 30 Little Penguins and responded to many calls regarding Australian Fur Seals, one of which required a drive to Corinella!

We had a young Black Swan with us for a while with an injured foot. The swan was found at Smiths Beach car park by a member of the public, unable to walk. The bird had a lot of fishing line wound around his/her foot, buried quite deeply into the skin. This was removed by the vet and

after some care and attention by the Nature Parks' Rangers, and many a swim in the seabird pool was able to be successfully released (see above).

Nature Parks' Rangers responded to 155 calls to the wildlife hotline during April/May.

Currently there are five Little Penguins in care at the Wildlife Clinic.

*Meeting the Nature Parks' strategic directions - 2.1 Strengthen the protection of natural assets, 2.2 Facilitate co-operative approaches to island-wide environmental management, 2.5 Build conservation criteria into decision making and 2.6 Raise awareness and encourage shared responsibility for conservation*

## **SHORT-TAILED SHEARWATER RESCUE PROGRAM**

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We haven't had a chance to work through all the data yet, but it looks like this year's fledging season was pretty successful. 360 Short-tailed Shearwaters were rescued alive and released back to the colonies for another chance at fledging and 152 birds were found dead on the roads (predominantly in the mornings). This compares to last year's figures of 365 birds rescued and 267 found dead on roads. The majority of the birds handled by the rescuers this year were good weights and in good condition which was great to see.

A big thank you to everyone who helped out over the season. The Enviro team did a great job in this all-consuming task over the three week period, as did the volunteers. Thanks also to all the Nature Parks staff and the community for helping to raise awareness and taking care on the roads during this period.

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## **EXERCISE BUNKER OIL – Oiled wildlife rescue and rehabilitation field exercise**

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Exercise Bunker Oil was conducted on May 31st and June 1st. Targeted areas for the exercise included volunteer management, safety and chain of command. The business continuity response team also had an opportunity to test their plans. The exercise will help the Nature Parks identify areas for improvement, further discussion and thinking, and plan for a real response.

Thanks to staff from the Gippsland Region of DELWP, the Environment Protection Agency, Patrick Ports, and the Port of Hastings Authority for acting as observers and collecting feedback.

Thanks to Parks Victoria staff, SES, AMOSC and wildlife volunteers for giving up time to participate in the exercise – it was greatly appreciated and will lead to a better response should we ever need one.

Thanks to the staff from throughout the Nature Parks for their willing participation and getting into the spirit of the event.

The consultant is now collating feedback and preparing a report for our CEO and the Board.



*Environment staff setting up a corral at Cowrie Beach to capture and inspect penguins for "oiling".*

*Thanks to the SES for helping out with the lighting for pedestrian safety at night.*



*Thanks to AMOSC (Australian Marine Oil Spill Centre) for providing their portable wildlife washing facility. The container usually lives in Geelong and was transported to Phillip Island for the exercise. AMOSC's contractor Dwyer Technologies and the Nature Parks Construction and Maintenance Staff assisted in setting up and dismantling the container. It was a fantastic opportunity to learn about needs for setting up the container – power, pressure of water supply, electricity, waste management as well as integrating it with our Wildlife Clinic to increase our capacity. One of the most important factors in wildlife's successful integration back into a normal life is getting the oil off them as soon as possible.*



*Thanks to the Coastal Ambassadors (supervised by Nature Parks Education Rangers) for making hundreds of noodle penguins for swim testing.*



*Thanks to all participants – seen below at the debrief after the exercise.*



## **Training**

Thanks to volunteers and Nature Parks' staff for setting the time aside to attend the course ACMGAS305A *Rescue animals and apply basic First Aid*. The Phillip Island Nature Parks in conjunction with DELWP and Federation University presented this course twice in 2015/16. Further opportunities to attend the training will be advertised locally once DELWP provides dates for 2016/17. DELWP have advised that completion of this course will be a prerequisite for volunteer and staff attendance at oiled wildlife response events.

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## COASTAL MANAGEMENT

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Environment Rangers have been working on a marram grass removal project centred around the Cape Woolamai Surf Lifesaving Club. This project provides an opportunity to engage with National Surfing Reserve members to improve coastal habitat. Help is needed to assist with the removal and control of marram grass as it changes the shape of the fore-dune making them much steeper and trapping more sand thereby altering natural sand movement.

We hope to encourage the naturally occurring Hairy Spinifex to be the dominant binding grass in our dune system. Hairy Spinifex dunes are lower in profile and will allow for a more natural flow of sand in the beach/dune system.

Recent king tides and large swell have resulted in early closure of Churchill Island due to flooding of the roadway and erosion along the coast – one example was captured by a community member. The sand should return from offshore over the rest of the winter and spring period.



Photo taken from stairway, Forrest Caves. 03\_06\_14 (Alison Oats)



Photo taken from stairway, Forrest Caves. (Incipient dune in 2014 photo eroded away)  
07\_06\_16 (Alison Oats).

***Meeting the Nature Parks' strategic directions - 2.1 Strengthen the protection of natural assets and 2.5 Build conservation criteria into decision making***

## FIRE & WOODLANDS

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Autumn planned burn prescriptions for Oswin Roberts have not occurred due to the cooler wet weather. Following recommendations in the Woodlands Bushfire Management Assessment report to create Asset Protection Zones (APZ) around residential properties abutting the Nature Parks, we have planned several burn piles in Oswin Roberts to thin out dominant vegetation. Also following the guidelines of the report, we have created several burn piles around the property at Conversation Hill to thin out over-dominant vegetation and lower fuel loads. New coops and gardens will be established with fire tolerant vegetation following CFA vegetation guidelines.

Rangers and contractors have also been implementing APZ behind residential properties on Broadbeach Road in Cape Woolamai as recommended in the Cape Woolamai Fire Management Plan now that the Short-tailed Shearwaters have left their burrows. The works involve thinning over-dominant vegetation and removing weeds, and burning this vegetation in several small burn piles.

Over winter we have planned to burn a number of other burn piles at Pyramid Rock, Koala Conservation Centre, Penguin Parade worksyard and Churchill Island.

Terramatrix are currently reviewing our Fire Management Plan 2010 – 2014 and the ‘Planned Burn – Plan of Operations’ document with a completed draft report expected shortly.

The Nature Parks’ Fire Operations Plan 2017 – 2019 will be developed over winter.

For further fire activities, see the current Nature Parks’ Fire Operations Plan 2016-18 at the following link: <http://www.penguins.org.au/conservation/environment/conservation-programs/fire-management/>

Other works being carried out in woodlands include:

- Completing the last of the firebreaks inside the new boundary fence at Five Ways Reserve, kikuyu spraying, cat trapping and Friends of Koalas have a day planned for coop planting and maintenance
- Cat trapping has also occurred in Oswin Roberts
- Possum tracking in Ventnor Koala Reserve
- University of Melbourne students are sampling leaf membranes in once dominant koala habitat zones to look at changes in koala habitat

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## GRANTS AND PROJECTS

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- **Melbourne Water 2016** – We have received a grant for \$24,970 to be used in 2016 for works on 4 wetlands. Works will begin in late autumn/winter focusing on woody weed control and weeds of national significance (WoNS) including Bridal Creeper.
- **Port Phillip and Western Port Catchment Management Authority (Caring for our Country, Ramsar Grant)** - Weed and vermin control along the Phillip Island Ramsar coastline (from Fishers Wetland to Observation Point) has continued as part of this grant to address the threats to flora and fauna communities along this coast.
- **DELWP Coastcare Community Grants 2014/15** - Weed control projects on Cape Woolamai and at Kitty Miller Bay to protect Short-tailed Shearwater habitat will be finalised this year and the grant closed out.

- **DELWP Coastal Environment Program 2015/16** – We have received funding to upgrade boardwalks at Forrest Caves and the Nobbies to mitigate risk, to be completed by October 2016. See report on Risk Management below.
- **DELWP Wildlife Shelter Grants 2015/16 (\$26,180 inc GST)** - This grant supported the field exercise for oiled wildlife response, oiled wildlife response training, desktop exercise for wildlife bushfire response and upgrading the Wildlife Clinic to support oil and fire response. Exercise Bunker Oil was completed as part of this grant, see above report.
- **Penguin Foundation 2015/16** - Funding from the Penguin Foundation is being used to conduct a research project on the post-release survival of hand-raised possums from the Wildlife Clinic. We have received Animal Ethics Committee approval.

## RISK MANAGEMENT

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On Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> June the lower section of the Nobbies boardwalk that led to the rock platform, the management only section, was removed by Nature Parks’ staff and contractors with the aid of a helicopter. The boardwalk was chopped into sections and removed by slings attached to the helicopter, and deposited safely in the cordoned off Penguin Parade overflow car park. This boardwalk was deemed to be near the end of its life and unsafe according to an engineer’s audit of the parks infrastructure. This project is part of grant funding from DELWP under the Coastal Environment Program 2015/16.

The Berry’s Beach to Pyramid Rock walking track has recently been resurfaced in some sections, and the Fishers Wetland to Churchill Island trail network is currently being upgraded with tracks resurfaced, new boardwalks built and a new bird hide constructed overlooking the wetland.

New risk management signage will soon be installed in certain locations around Cape Woolamai where recent issues have arisen.



*Helicopter removing sections of the boardwalk from the Nobbies.*

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## Eastern Barred Bandicoot Update

(*Perameles gunnii* – Victoria -listed as extinct in the wild, Commonwealth – EPBC Act listed as Endangered).

The good news continues for the Eastern Barred Bandicoots at Churchill Island after our Research Department completed another round of monitoring last week. The population has continued to grow with 101 captures of 40 different individuals. This is up from a total of 30 different individuals back in April. Those we captured last week were in good condition and most of the females were



carrying pouch young. What's more, 10 months after their release, three quarters of the original founding individuals were recaptured, indicating survival rates are high on the island.

Next time we monitor the bandicoots on Churchill Island will be in August 2016 which will mark the first anniversary of this trial release. This will be a great achievement, both for the bandicoots and for our team, and worthy of

celebration. My thanks go again to the wonderful volunteers and staff who have embraced this project to help recover this species. (by Dr Duncan Sutherland)

<https://www.penguins.org.au/conservation/research/eastern-barred-bandicoots/>

### ***Meeting the Nature Parks' strategic directions - 2.1 Strengthen the protection of natural assets and 2.6 Raise awareness and encourage shared responsibility for conservation***



Damian Prendergast accepting the award from the Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change

#### **PRESS RELEASE**

##### **New Penguins Plus Viewing Experience Wins World Environment Day Awards 2016**

Phillip Island's new penguin viewing experience at the Penguin Parade has won the category of 'Infrastructure Innovation' in the United Nations World Environment Day Awards.

The national award was accepted by Damian Prendergast, Phillip Island Nature Parks' Major Projects Manager, at a ceremony held in Melbourne on Monday 7 June.

The new Penguins Plus experience won the inaugural 'Infrastructure Innovation' award category that recognises excellence in sustainable infrastructure. The other finalist was fellow Victorian entrant, RMIT University's 'Sustainable Urban Precincts Program'.

Phillip Island Nature Parks' new innovative, sustainable and unique penguin viewing experience, Penguins Plus, provides

Australia's only underground beach viewing opportunity within the world's largest colony of wild little penguins.

"We believe the project demonstrates excellence as it was motivated by sustainable practice and backed by world-leading scientific research, environmental management and ecotourism principles," said Phillip Island Nature Parks' CEO, Matthew Jackson.

"This project was made possible through a major partnership with RACV who, along with the Penguin Parade, have a long history of providing exceptional experiences and service to Victorians. It is fitting that these two iconic Victorian tourism organisations joined together to create an innovative experience within a natural setting with little impact to the environment and wildlife."

Netta Griffin, RACV Director who opened the facility in November 2015, applauded the achievement.

"We are honoured to be partnered with Phillip Island Nature Parks for the development of the Penguins Plus viewing platform. This prestigious award illustrates the achievements and benefits that can be gained through community partnership programs.



Since the partnership announcement we have seen a large number of RACV members visiting this iconic tourist destination. We are also conscious of the environmental impact around the parade and are holding volunteer days to assist maintenance of the environment."

More than 40 schools, environmental organisations and individuals were named as finalists across 12 categories in the 2016 UN Association of Australia World Environment Day Awards, which have been running since 2000. The awards celebrate innovative and outstanding environmental

programs and initiatives from across Australia, and the important work of Australian environmental leaders.

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**Meeting the Nature Parks' strategic direction - 4.1 Increase the frequency and depth of communication with the local community**