



# FriendsNET

Newsletter of the Victorian Environment Friends Network

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## VEFN Best Friend Awards 2016



Stanley Barker, Friends of Burke Road Billabong Reserve; Peter Somerville, Friends of Maribyrnong Valley; Minister Lily D'Ambrosio; Paul Strickland, Friends of Mount Worth State Park; Merrin Butler, Friends of Mount Worth State Park; Terry Lane, Friends of Organ Pipes National Park and Jane Hollands, Friends of Sassafra Creek with their Best Friend Award certificates.

Over 55 people attended the VEFN 2016 Best Friend Award Ceremony on 19 November in Docklands, Melbourne. Minister for Energy, Environment & Climate Change and for Suburban Development, Lily D'Ambrosio presented awards to 6 outstanding recipients at the ceremony.

Minister D'Ambrosio spoke very positively about the role and contribution of Friends groups to caring for the environment. The Minister indicated that she is considering a number of measures the Government might undertake to acknowledge and recognise their contributions.

Rod Mackenzie, member of the Best Friend Award Panel and former Victorian Minister for Conservation, Forests & Lands, introduced Minister D'Ambrosio. He spoke about the large number of Friends groups statewide and the significance of their contribution. Rod's suggestion of the need for specific acknowledgement by the Victorian



Government of the contribution made by each Friends group was noted favourably by Minister D'Ambrosio. Rod made special mention of VEFN founder Geoff Durham and

congratulated him for his continuing active involvement in caring for environment.

Janet Bolitho, who joined the Best Friend Award Panel this



year, spoke about the outstanding dedication and care the awardees exemplified for both environment and fellow volunteers. She spoke about the essence of Friends groups for her: people coming together to care for environment; to work to a shared purpose; to care for each other; and to have a positive impact on their health and well-being and that of their communities. Janet drew on her own experiences in the Port Melbourne area and, in particular, her work with Friends of Westgate Park. She too noted Geoff Durham's influence on her introduction to the environmental Friends movement.

Rod Mackenzie thanked the Minister for her attendance and presentation of the awards. Most people stayed to chat with Minister and friends and enjoyed a light lunch and refreshments.

VEFN warmly thanks the Minister for her generous support in the form of a \$5,000 grant that will be distributed among the Awardees Friends groups to further their environmental activities.

In the next section of FriendsNET we celebrate the six 2016 awardees with a short biographical article on each.

## Recipients of the VEFN Best Friend Awards 2016

In this section, we profile each of the Best Friend Award recipients for 2016 and their outstanding contribution to caring for the environment and that of their Friends groups.

### Stanley Barker – Friends of Burke Road Billabong Reserve



Stanley talking with Burke Rd Billabong volunteers.

Ten years ago Stanley noticed a derelict area of public land on the Yarra River in East Kew and went on to help form the Burke Road Billabong Committee of Management in 2008, serving as Chair since that time. The Burke Road Billabong Reserve, previously the Kew tip, is 10 hectares of one of the last remaining natural billabongs of the Yarra River.

**Burke Road Billabong Committee of Management was established in 2008 as a volunteer group and the Committee was formally appointed in September 2008. See <http://brbreserve.org/> & <http://www.herringisland.org/>.**

Through the efforts of the Friends, it is being rehabilitated with the introduction of thousands of indigenous plants, the control of wandering trad, blackberry and boxthorn. The area serves as prime habitat for owls, parrots, possums and frogs, forming part of a vegetation corridor of the Yarra linking healthy sections together. Stanley publicises the Reserve and opportunities to help through the Burke Rd Billabong Reserve website which he set up. Stanley also helped establish Friends of Herring Island, located in the Yarra River in Richmond Melbourne, 24 years ago in 1992, serving as the Secretary and Treasurer since then. The Friends of Herring Island and volunteers weed and plant native shrubs and grasses on the Island

throughout the year. Stanley also volunteers for the Victorian Indigenous Nursery Cooperative (VINC) and the Equipment Recycling Network (ERNI) in Ringwood.

## Merrin Butler and Paul Strickland - Friends of Mount Worth State Park



Paul and Merrin installing a song meter August 2016

Merrin Butler and Paul Strickland have been members of the Friends of Mount Worth State Park for more than 14 years, since 2002. Merrin Butler has been President of the group for the past six years. The Friends of Mount Worth are located 15 km south of Warragul in the western Strzelecki Ranges in Victoria, Australia.

**Friends of Mount Worth State Park was formed in 1981 and was incorporated in 1997. Mount Worth State Park was formed in 1978 and covers an area of 1040 hectares.**  
<http://www.mtworthfriends.org.au/index.html>

Amongst their activities, Paul and Merrin have been responsible for the group's securing 3 significant grants enabling the planting of hundreds of trees, the replacement of a severely degraded vehicle bridge, the upgrading of a walking track to make it suitable for wheelchairs, and installation of 12 new interpretation signs along the two most popular tracks in the park. Both Paul and Merrin regularly speak to various local groups, making the work of the Friends widely known and successfully recruiting new members and volunteers for the group's activities. Paul and Merrin are also involved with the West Gippsland Seedbank Association and Darnum-Ellinbank Fire Brigade and have planted more than 20,000 indigenous plants on their own property.

## Jane Hollands – Friends of Sassafras Creek



Jane joined the Friends of Sassafras Creek Inc. over 17 years ago in the late 1990s and is currently the Treasurer. The group began in 1991 and is passionate about maintaining and preserving the natural state of the Sassafras Creek Reserve. The group works along the Sassafras and Perrins Creek corridors and their activities include weeding, re-vegetation as needed, monitoring wildlife (including an annual lyrebird survey) and monitoring stormwater coming from the road drains that are causing erosion. Jane has overseen many projects including the restoration of a substantial part of the Perrins Creek headwaters area, and the top of the walking track behind Sassafras Community Hall, securing substantial grant funding. Jane has also championed the creation of the Community Weed Alliance of the Dandenongs (CWAD). Jane, working with the friends group and CWAD, supervised the door knocking of every property adjoining the Sassafras and Perrins Creek Reserve to promote and encourage participation in the Melbourne Water Stream Frontage Program. She also talks to local businesses and residents about their weed management.

**Friends of Sassafras Creek Inc. was incorporated in 1991. Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserve was established in 1997 and covers an area of 230 hectares.** [www.fosc.org.au](http://www.fosc.org.au) .

## Terry Lane – Friends of Organ Pipes National Park



Terry, with Don Marsh founder of Friends of Organ Pipes and inaugural recipient of the Best Friend Award in 1991, pictured at Organ Pipes National Park in 2012.

Terry first joined the Friends of Organ Pipes National Park 12 years ago in 2004, serving as Convenor since 2005. This national park is located in Keilor within the City of Brimbank and Hume councils in greater Melbourne. The Friends of Organ Pipes began in 1972, 44 years ago. Their work has transformed the park from weed scape to an area of botanical significance, an ongoing process that still continues today. A measure of its success has been the successful reintroduction of wildlife such as Sugar Gliders and the natural return of a range of bird species, kangaroos and wallabies to the area. As well as lobbying relevant organizations, the group holds monthly working days open to anyone who is interested in coming along as well as conducting Group tours for schools and university's. Terry co-led the organizing for the formulation of the Friends of Holden Reserve which has been well supported by Sunbury residents. Terry is also a Waterwatch volunteer, and was instrumental in re-establishing a sugar glider monitoring program in Organ Pipes Park as well as involving a local school (Gilson College) to become involved in a long term planting and plant monitoring project there.

Friends of Organ Pipes had its beginnings in 1972, shortly after the establishment of Organ Pipes National Park in 1971. The group was incorporated in 1991 and the park covers an area of 153 hectares.  
<http://friendsoforganpipes.org/> .

## Peter Somerville – Friends of Maribyrnong Valley



Peter giving a talk to seniors as part of Moonee Valley Council Heritage Week, April 2015, prior to a cruise on the Maribyrnong River.

Peter attended the first meeting 30 years ago in 1986 that formed Friends of the Maribyrnong Valley (FMV). He has been on the FMV Committee since that time and held all positions, currently serving as Vice President. Peter has worked tirelessly to improve and restore the quality of the Maribyrnong River and its surrounding parklands. In partnership with his son Warwick, Peter conducts cruises along the Maribyrnong River on the well-known vessel *Blackbird*. He has taken politicians and representatives of Councils and government instrumentalities up and down the river highlighting river management issues and the value of the Maribyrnong. Peter supports the FMV to raise public awareness all over Melbourne of the great resource and potential of the Maribyrnong River and to improve the habitat of the river and its valley. Peter was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 2012 for services to the environment and community of the western suburbs of Melbourne and was the Maribyrnong City Council Citizen of the Year in 2010.

Friends of Maribyrnong Valley was established in 1986 and incorporated in the same year. The group works on extensive areas along the Maribyrnong River and associated parklands, including Brimbank Park in Keilor.  
<http://www.fmvonline.com/> .

## The remarkable flights of the Bogong Moth by Marilyn Hewish

I've been interested in Victorian moths for about seven years and a question I'm often asked is, "Do moths move around much?" For many species we don't know but several moths in the family Noctuidae certainly undertake long-distance movements (e.g. Drake et al., 1981). The best-known and most visible example is the Bogong Moth.

Every year Bogong Moths make a remarkable migration through south eastern Australia. In most years they attract little attention, but occasionally vast numbers are attracted to lights in settled areas and we hear reports of moths invading buildings and clogging up light fittings, ducting and vacuum cleaners.



**Bogong Moths in a cave at Ramshorn, Victorian Alps.**  
Photo: Jeremy Tscharke. Copyright Parks Victoria/Museum Victoria.  
Copyright Parks Victoria / CC BY

What's the story behind this mass movement? Bogong Moths (family Noctuidae, *Agrotis infusa*) occur throughout southern and eastern Australia. In August and September each year, many adults leave their lowland breeding grounds and migrate to the highest elevations of the Snowy Mountains and Victorian Alps. Some travel thousands of kilometres. In late February, the return migration to the lowlands begins. This migratory strategy is thought to provide an escape from the hot, dry conditions in the lowlands in summer (review in Zborowski and Edwards, 2007).

I once witnessed a migratory movement in Bacchus Marsh. Standing on our porch just as the first glimmer of morning light touched the sky, I dimly saw fluttering movements in the almost dark space over the yard. As the light brightened, a cloud of moths was revealed, filling the view. There were certainly hundreds, probably thousands, passing in a constant stream and gradually drifting westward. I was struck by the fact that these small, fluttering, swirling, apparently fragile creatures could sustain a flight of thousands of kilometres. Gradually the

numbers in the air dwindled and I watched many individual moths land on our lawn and wriggle down out of sight between the grass blades. Presumably this was where they sheltered in the day before continuing the journey the next night. I managed to catch a few in the grass and confirmed they were Bogong Moths. I'm not sure about the whole group. There may be mixed migrations. It was sheer luck I happened on this as I rarely look outside at that time of day.



**Bogong Moth *Agrotis infusa* at Genoa Peak.** Photo: Marilyn Hewish

When the moths reach the Alps, they rest throughout the summer in rocky caves and crevices, which provide a cool, moist, sheltered environment. This strategy is called 'aestivation', from the Latin word 'aestas', meaning 'summer'. It's the summer equivalent of 'hibernation' over winter. During a Bioscan survey in the Victorian Alps in November 2013 (Museum Victoria, Parks Victoria), large, tightly packed clusters of Bogong Moths were photographed by Jeremy Tscharke in a cave on Ramshorn. Across the cave walls the moths crowded tightly together, heads down, in a neat, overlapping, 'tiled' surface. In narrow crevices they jammed in any old way. Reserves of fat in their bodies allow them to survive over the aestivation period and make them attractive and important as prey for other animals. Aboriginal people formerly used to harvest them<sup>1</sup>.

There are many exquisitely beautiful Victorian moths, but Bogong Moths aren't among them. With fat, furry bodies and brown or grey wings, they're like the general public's idea of a 'typical' moth. They're roughly triangular in outline when settled and have a wingspan of 45-50 mm (wings spread). On the forewing, two pale spots, one oval and one kidney-shaped, are joined by a black bar.

<sup>1</sup> Note from The Secretary VEFN. For interested readers, two recent books describe these Aboriginal practices in some detail. See Bruce Pascoe's (2014) *Dark Emu Black Seeds: agriculture or accident*, pp 108 - 109 and John Blay's (2015) *On Track: Searching out the Bundian Way*, pp 22-29.

## The amazing Pollination Pathways project by Ray Radford<sup>1</sup>



Bogong Moths in a cave at Ramshorn, Victorian Alps.  
Photo: Jeremy Tscharke. Copyright Parks Victoria/Museum Victoria.

Because they aren't very distinctive in appearance, there's been some confusion about their true identity. Sometimes people assume that any brown moths that come in big numbers are Bogong Moths. Several other Noctuidae, particularly agricultural pests in the genus *Persectania*, are similar to Bogong Moths and can easily be confused with them. However, in the talks on moths I give to naturalists' groups, I've learned that the most common moths mistaken for Bogong Moths are in a different family altogether - species of the large, grey or brown Hepialidae or Ghost Moths. They gather and flutter at lighted windows after rain in autumn. The rain brings about a sudden, mass emergence of moths from their pupae so numbers can be very high for a short time. Ghost Moths are generally larger and heavier than Bogong Moths and hold their wings in a tent shape while Bogong Moths usually hold their wings flat.

So some reports about Bogong Moths damaging crops or clustering at lighted windows may be misleading. As always, knowledge fosters our appreciation of the natural world. By any standard the story of the Bogong Moth is remarkable.

**Marilyn Hewish** is a volunteer at the Melbourne Museum and author and co-author of a number of books in the series *Moths of Victoria*.

### References

Drake, V.A., Helm, K.F., and Readshaw, J.L. 1981. Insect migration across Bass Strait during spring: a radar study. *Bull. Ent. Res.* 71: 449-466.

Zborowski, P., and Edwards, T. 2007. *A Guide to Australian Moths*. CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Vic.

**We were wrong! The August edition of FriendsNET #96 carried an article titled "A winter tale of marsupial & moth" on pp3-4. Page 4 included a picture of what we thought was a Bogong Moth. Within hours of the release of FriendsNET two eagle eyed readers informed us that the picture was NOT A Bogong Moth. Samantha Greiner, Newsletter Editor of BirdLife Hamilton was first to point out our error, followed by Marilyn Hewish. Marilyn kindly agreed to contribute this article to set us straight. Secretary, VEFN.**

Friends of Merri Creek ran an amazingly successful crowd-funding campaign called [Help the Blue-banded Bee](#) which raised \$25,073 - over 66% more than the original target of \$15,000. This qualifies the group to receive \$15,000 matching funds from the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, making a total of \$40,073 to fund a project, designed by Merri Creek Management Committee, to establish 'pollination pathways' between endangered Matted Flax-lily populations along the Merri Creek in Fawkner and Reservoir.

### What is a Pollen Pathway?

Plants rely on animals, wind and water to move their seeds to help colonise or recolonise distant landscapes. Animals and wind also move pollen between unrelated plants so they can produce viable seed. In this way habitat corridors for animal movement can also be the 'pathways' for pollen!

When we fragment the landscape, plants sometimes get left on islands of bushland with only a few possible mates,



A Blue-banded Bee approaches a critically endangered Matted Flax-lily (*Dianella amoena*).

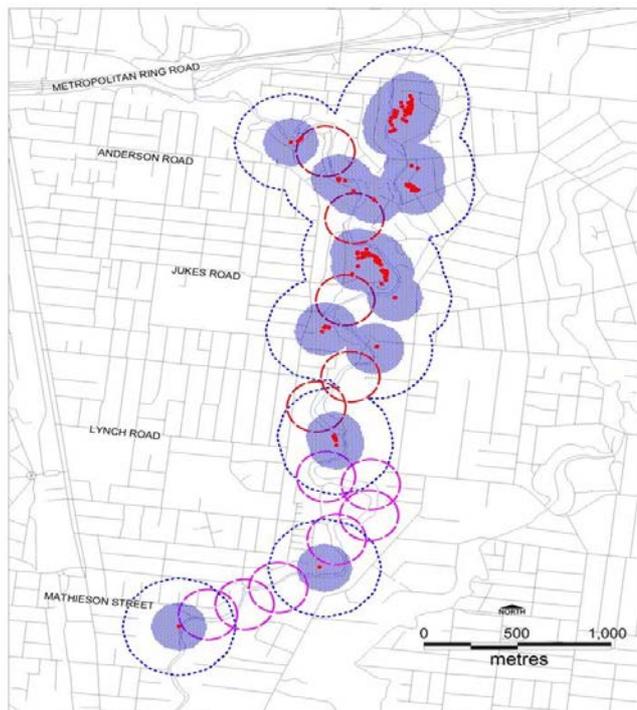
and, over time, all the plants end up being closely related and unable to produce much viable seed. It gets even more difficult when male and female flowers are produced on different plants. In the worst cases, a plant has no partners to cross-pollinate with at all!

Some plants, like Sheoaks and grasses, have pollen that is spread by the wind; while some seed, such as the berries of Tree-violets, are eaten by Silvereyes which then deposit the seed kilometres away. But many seeds are shifted only a short distance by wind, water or on less mobile animals. And, pollen is often moved by insects and birds that move it only a few hundred metres.

In the case of the critically endangered Matted Flax-lily (*Dianella amoena*), it depends on being pollinated by the Blue-banded Bee, which only has a foraging range of

about 300 metres. So only plants that are within 300 metres of each other have a good chance of exchanging pollen.

### The *Pollination Pathway* project



Map shows the known Matted Flax-lily plants (red dots) along Merri Creek, and the estimated 300m range of the bee. Note that some of the patches of Dianella are well connected, but others are isolated.

The Matted Flax-lily persists in patches along Merri Creek, in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. A map of known Flax-lily suggests that some of the remnant patches are well connected, but others are isolated, being several hundred metres from other lilies.

We don't see young Flax-lilies establishing, probably because the plants are too far apart and not cross-pollinating, or weeds choke out the places where the seeds might otherwise grow. The *Pollination Pathway* project aims to deal with these two issues so natural seeding can occur.

Cross-pollination between the Matted Flax-lily plants requires a specialised 'buzz-pollination' that is carried out by native bees, in particular the Blue-banded Bee, *Amegilla* sp. In 2017 Friends of Merri Creek aims to increase the number of reproductively viable Matted Flax-lilies to 400 plants to fill in the gaps in the bee's 'pollination pathway.' This will include weeding, propagating, planting patches of lilies as 'stepping stones' for foraging Blue-banded Bees, and monitoring of the pollinators.

**Find out more:**

The *Pollination Pathway* event will be posted on the Friends of Merri Creek website next year at [www.friendsofmerricreek.org.au](http://www.friendsofmerricreek.org.au) where you can also check out their great range of events, or contact them at [friendsofmerricreek@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofmerricreek@gmail.com)

1. This article is an edited version of one originally written by Brian Bainbridge, Ecological Restoration Planner, Merri Creek Management Committee. Ray Radford is Secretary of the Friends of Merri Creek and Editor of their newsletter, *Merri Growler*.

### VEFN Annual General Meeting

A new Committee was elected at the 2016 AGM with the task of reviving VEFN to meet the needs of members as shown in the recent survey.

The meeting was held after the Best Friend Award ceremony and 12 people participated. In addition to the usual consideration of minutes of the 2015 AGM; apologies; and financial report, the main agenda items were election of a new Committee and consideration of the proposed changes to VEFN's constitution.

The new Committee is shown in the box below.

### Victorian Environment Friends Network 2017 Committee

Merrin Butler – Committee member  
Stephen Derrick – Secretary  
Sue Hayman-Fox – Treasurer  
Roger Parker – Committee member  
Laura Mumaw – Co-Convenor  
Paul Strickland – Co-Convenor

The new Committee has an important agenda for the coming year. This includes: quantifying and valuing volunteer contributions; securing funding and support for VEFN and Friends groups; supporting Friends Groups to network and mentor and being a strong advocate for greater funding for parks.

The Committee is also considering possible changes to VEFN's Constitution to ensure VEFN and its future operations are meaningful to its current membership and priorities.

The AGM considered three propositions that could form the basis of a new constitution for VEFN. They are repeated here in order to encourage discussion among Friends groups which will assist the committee.

#### ***Proposition 1: Affiliation & membership.***

***Formalise voting membership as being only for Friends groups, who must pay an annual fee (say \$20) to be affiliated and have the right to vote at AGMs. Formalise a non-voting category of individual membership which may also apply to non-Friends groups.***

***Proposition 2: Seek registration as a charity.***

***That VEFN seek registration as a charity and develop its new constitution in a manner consistent with seeking approval as an organisation that can receive tax deductible gifts.***

***Proposition 3: Formalise eligibility and constitution of the Committee.***

***It is proposed that the committee be comprised of between 5-9 members. Office-bearers must be paid up members of a Friends group who are a current and paid up member of VEFN at the time of the AGM. Up to 2 members may be people from outside Friends groups, but with experience and capabilities that will contribute to the achievement of VEFN's aims and objectives.***

***Nominations will be accepted for the positions of office bearers, being Convenor/President; Secretary and Treasurer. Any eligible person may nominate for a position of office bearer).***

***Committee members would be expected to serve for a period of two years, but a maximum of half of any committee will have to face re-election at the AGM. No committee member may serve for more than 3 consecutive terms.***

The Committee has prepared a short discussion paper which was considered at the AGM. There was wide-ranging discussion about the proposed changes. A copy of the paper is available on VEFN's website on our newsletter page. Please take some time to read the paper and provide feedback as a continuing future for VEFN (or not) will depend on your responses. The Committee will consider possible changes further and the processes and timetable for implementing any changes.

The AGM also considered a short report on the activities undertaken by the Committee since the last AGM and a summary is included in the next article.

**Committee meetings:** The Committee met 7 times since the last AGM in November 2015. The composition of the Committee has changed significantly with Tony Woolford's death in March 2016, and the stepping down of Ray Radford, Michael Howes and Robert Bender. Since April 2016, Merrin Butler, Stuart McCallum and Paul Strickland have supported Stephen Derrick and Laura Mumaw on the Committee.

**VEFN Member Survey:** In March 2016 the VEFN Committee undertook an online survey, sent to subscribers of the FriendsNet e-list, to assist in reviewing the VEFN's purpose and setting new directions. 350 responses were received. A written report, analysing and summarising the survey results, was produced and widely distributed through FriendsNet and direct to survey respondents and others.

**VEFN Strategic Priorities:** Following the strong response to the survey, VEFN convened a strategy meeting to engage stakeholders in setting future directions for the network. At its meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2016, the Committee endorsed four strategic priorities arising from the strategy meeting. These are listed below:

- i. **Quantify, value and promote volunteer contributions.**
- ii. **Secure funding & support, including productive partnerships with agencies.**
- iii. **Support Friends groups to network and mentor.**
- iv. **Advocate for greater funding and support for parks and reserves.**

The Committee has referred to these 4 priorities to guide its actions since that meeting.

**VEFN Database:** A database format has been agreed and data collection on Friend's groups is underway to assemble a current database of all Friends and associated groups Victoria wide. The aim is to develop a mechanism to update the database annually.

**Friends Groups Data Collection Survey:** VEFN prepared a discussion paper about how best to collect data about Friends Group activities with input from Eileen Clark of Friends of Bogong. The aim of the data collection is to underpin and support the four strategic priorities as outlined above. Following review and consideration, a pilot survey commenced on 1 October 2016. To date, 113 groups have signed up to complete the survey, which runs until 31 December 2016. Pilot survey results will be analysed in January 2017.

**Discussions with VNPA:** Discussions with the Victorian National Parks Association are continuing to identify how the organisations can best work together including a review of website options.

**Best Friend Award:** The Panel for the Best Friend Award considered nominations and made its recommendations to the Committee, including future criteria and processes for the awards.

**Parks funding strategy:** Efforts have concentrated on reviewing the basis of the current Parks Charge and the operations and disbursements of the Parks & Reserves Trust Fund (PRTF). It is intended to develop a short position statement on this and seek discussion with the Minister in early 2017.

**Communications with the Minister & meetings with DELWP:** VEFN wrote to new Environment Minister Lily D'Ambrosio introducing VEFN and seeking a meeting. An initial discussion with the then Senior Adviser, Environment resulted in the Minister agreeing to present the 2016 Best Friend Awards and to provide a \$5,000 grant for award winners' groups to further their environmental work. VEFN has had several meetings with DELWP representatives during the course of this year centred on how Friends groups contribute to maintaining and improving biodiversity in Victoria and the ways in which the government could build on and support this.

**VEFN governance review:** Following a governance review, the Committee recommended several proposed changes to the VEFN constitution reported elsewhere in this newsletter.

**VEFN submissions:** During the year, the Committee made submissions to the government's Biodiversity Strategy and the Strengthening Parks initiative.

**FriendsNET:** Four editions were released over the year (FriendsNet 93-96) and the final edition for 2016 is scheduled for release on 27/28 November. A volunteer coordinator, Natassja Ruybal, has come on board to assist the Committee with the newsletter and other communication activities.

## Environmental volunteer groups in the UK

In September I was lucky to be able to visit with a number of environmental volunteering groups in the United Kingdom.

My first visit was with the **South West London Environmental Network (SWLEN)**, which is primarily based around the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames as well as surrounding Boroughs. The picture at right shows some of the beautiful trees and gardens spread along and beside the River Thames in Richmond. I met with Colin Cooper, SWLEN's Chief Executive and Community Projects Manager, Sue Palmer. SWLEN works with many local Friends groups and focuses on the following areas:

- **Parks and open spaces** – supporting local initiatives to protect and enhance local green spaces.
- **Species and habitat protection** – facilitating the preservation of local biodiversity, and promoting the conservation and improvement of the natural environment.
- **Sustainable living** – encouraging and educating local people and organisations to think and act sustainability, including saving energy/energy efficiency, raising awareness of the benefits of recycling and waste reduction, composting, food and water conservation, and air quality.



Banks of the Thames at Richmond south west of London, UK

You can read about SWLEN and many of the interesting projects they are involved in here <http://www.swlen.org.uk/about-us/blog/>.

In York, I met with representatives of **The Conservation Volunteers (TCV)**, which is one the major environmental volunteering organisation with operations across the UK. I visited with Glyn Levis, Operations Director for England-North at their regional office in York. The TCV York office is one of the larger offices of TCV and directly owns and operates equipment such as tractors, slashers, mowers and trucks which it uses for environmental works it undertakes. As well as working with a wide range of friends and other environmental volunteer groups, TCV also has its own volunteer programs and is able to train people in use of equipment and maintenance techniques. TCV had sources of funds of over 16 million British pounds in 2014-15. Read more about TCV here <http://www.tcv.org.uk/>.

**Friends groups seemed to be everywhere I went in the UK.**



Picture of the latest newsletter of Friends of South Cliff Gardens posted on a noticeboard on the beachfront at Scarborough, UK.

Every town I visited had Friends groups, looking after rivers and associated parks; metropolitan parks and gardens, country estates and even cemetery gardens. The Friends of South Cliff Gardens in Scarborough, a town on the North Sea coast of North Yorkshire are very active in looking after the beautiful gardens of the town.

Many Friends and environmental groups in the UK obtain funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, which collects a part of every pound spent on lotteries to spend on a range of environmental projects among others. The Fund will distribute about 430 million pounds in funding for new projects this year and 40% must be allocated to charitable organisations in health, education and environment.

You can read about some of the projects of Friends of South Cliff gardens here <http://www.friendsofsouthcliffgardens.com/Projects.php>.

Finally, I visited **Greenspace Scotland** in Stirling and met with Julie Proctor, Chief Executive. Greenspace Scotland is a social enterprise and an independent charitable company that works with a wide range of national and local partners to improve the quality of life of people living and working in urban Scotland.

The goal of the organisation is that that everyone living and working in urban Scotland has easy access to quality greenspaces that meet local needs and improve their quality of life. The picture at right is a view of the hills around Stirling taken from near the offices of Greenspace. It is easy to see why the organisation is inspired about the value of greenspace when surrounded by views such as

above. Greenspace Scotland is involved in many interesting projects of direct relevance to VEFN and Friends groups and you can read about some of their projects here <http://greenspacescotland.org.uk/our-projects.aspx>. The organisation has produced many interesting and valuable reports which can be found on their web site.



View of hills around Stirling, Scotland from near the offices of Greenspace Scotland.

The most interesting aspect of my visits was how much in common environmental groups in Australia have with those in the UK Attracting and retaining volunteers; finding funding and getting appropriate recognition and support for volunteer efforts are all common challenges that we know too well.

Stephen Derrick

## VEFN Submission to Strengthening Parks Victoria Initiative

VEFN submitted a response to the Strengthening Parks Victoria initiative in October. VEFN is pleased that the Minister and Parks Victoria have undertaken the review and hope that the results will lead to substantial improvements to the operation and future of parks in this state, particularly those managed by Parks Victoria.

In our response we noted our appreciation of the close relationship that VEFN has with Parks Victoria. While the vision and goals of the discussion paper are worthy, we felt implementing them needs closer attention and resourcing. We highlighted six key recommendations for harnessing the potential for Friends groups and community volunteers to enhance and extend the work of

Parks Victoria:

- 1) *Strengthen the presence of staff in parks and in the community to develop effective partnerships and maximise their potential;*
- 2) *Develop a culture that fosters volunteers and understands and values the broad knowledge and skills they have;*
- 3) *Establish formal relationships and practices with Friends groups that set out mutual objectives and expectations with appropriate sharing of risk and responsibility;*
- 4) *Provide reliable sources of funding to parks with a minimum 3-5 year forward commitment to ensure good strategic planning and implementation;*
- 5) *Recognise and financially support the community and visitor engagement work of Parks Victoria and the contributions of Friends groups to this work;*
- 6) *Work interactively with Friends and local communities to develop ways to foster the many parks that are not iconic but yet provide access to our natural and cultural heritage and make significant contributions to community and personal health and wellbeing.*

The discussion paper acknowledges the significant economic contribution that volunteers make, placing a value of at least \$6.6 million on this for 2015-16. We noted that while this is a significant contribution by any measure, parks and volunteering in them also make vital contributions to strengthening communities. This includes the many health and well-being benefits (physical, mental, cultural and spiritual) that come from being in, and helping to care for nature.

In summary, we stressed that the contribution of Friends groups and volunteers needs to be better recognised and harnessed by both Parks Victoria and the Victorian government. This requires a much greater degree of consultation and partnership than is usually the case. VEFN believes ongoing dialogue with Friends groups and community (regularly, and on site, not just in a periodic, high level review), may help point the way to fruitful local solutions.

Parks Victoria is currently collating the feedback and submissions received and will prepare a report that will outline key findings. This will form part of a larger report with recommendations on the future direction of Parks Victoria, due to be delivered to the Minister in December 2016.

### **Greening the West & Friends of Lower Kororoit Creek**

Facilitated by City West Water, Greening the West (GTW) is a partnership of western metropolitan councils, the Department of Health, Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria, industry and community representatives, and environmental volunteering groups including Friends of Maribyrnong Valley and Friends of Lower Kororoit Creek.

GTW aims to deliver positive health and social outcomes and enhanced liveability for communities in the western suburbs of Melbourne. It seeks to do this by taking a regional approach to urban greening, fostering projects

and activities that deliver increased vegetation, and access to and use of quality green space.

The hard working Friends groups associated with GTW play a big part in achieving some of the key targets with their volunteer works on-ground.

As an example of the sort of projects GTW supports, Friends of Lower Kororoit Creek (FOLKC) have been working for many years to transform what was an unkempt and hazardous drainage reserve into excellent cycling and walking tracks. Through FOLKC's efforts thousands of volunteers from many diverse cultural and industrial organisations have helped plant in excess of 50,000 trees, shrubs and understory plants along the creek within Hobsons Bay.



**A view along Lower Kororoit Creek**

FOLKC has recently received the prestigious Community Group Award for Melbourne Water's River Health Incentives Program (RHIP). This award recognises the extensive efforts of the group over 15 years to transform the Lower Kororoit Creek into a wonderful environmental corridor. Read more about the work of FOLKC and the award at

<http://www.folk.com.au/NewsItem/248/FOLKC-honoured-with-prestigious-Melbourne-Water-award> .

More information about Greening the West can be found at <http://greeningthewest.org.au/> .

