



FriendsNET

Newsletter of the Victorian Environment Friends Network

ISSN 2206-5709 (Online)

Number 98 February 2017 email: friendsvic@hotmail.com

See our new web site at <http://friendsvic.org/>

From your Committee

Happy New Year to all of our readers of FriendsNET. Your committee has met twice since the AGM in November 2016 and is progressing on a number of fronts.

We welcome Andrew Kelly to the committee. Andrew is currently the Yarra Riverkeeper and Vice president of the Yarra Riverkeeper Association. The full VEFN Committee is shown in the box below.

Victorian Environment Friends Network 2017 Committee

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

The committee has given active consideration to the **form and content of a new Constitution** following discussion at the AGM in November 2016. Subject to consideration of a full draft constitution at our next meeting on 27th March, this will then be available for a period of consultation and feedback prior to formal consideration at a special meeting.

During December and January, VEFN has worked to **develop our web site and a Facebook page** which can be found here <http://friendsvic.org/> and here <https://www.facebook.com/VictorianEnvironmentFriendsNetwork/>. It is early days for both our web site and Facebook page and we will develop and refine further as we add and expand content. Feedback about what you might like to see on the web site would be most welcome.

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Westgate Park opens new path

In early December 2016, about 40 people attended the opening of a new pedestrian and cycle path in Westgate Park. The Hon Martin Foley, Member for Albert Park and Minister for Housing, Disability & Ageing (among other portfolios), Cr. Bernadene Voss, Mayor of the City of Port Phillip, and Jason Price from the Port of Melbourne celebrated the opening of the new pedestrian/cycle path from Todd Road through Port land and into the Park through the Southern Wetlands and on to the Yarra river.



The Hon Martin Foley speaks to the gathering at the opening of the new path

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- Value of Parks in UK & Scotland
- Norman Wettenhall Foundation grants
- Friends in Indonesia

From your Committee - continued

VEFN has also been active in developing a series of **portraits of member organisations**. Eleven groups participated in this and the final document can be found on our website here [add link when uploaded]. The portraits have been provided to the office of the Minister for Energy, Environment & Climate change, Lily D'Ambrosio as a part of ongoing discussions to help document the contribution of Friends groups to parks and reserves in Victoria. The portrait of BERG Mt Martha is featured in this edition – see later.

The committee has continued working on issues related to the **Parks and Reserves Trust Account**, commonly known as the Parks Charge (see FriendsNET #91 May 2015 and #92 August 2015 for example). VEFN has now developed some practical recommendations for the Minister to consider, which include an **independent review of the basis of collection and spending for the Parks Charge** and the establishment of a **special fund specifically to support and recognise environmental volunteer groups**. VEFN notes that the 30 year infrastructure strategy released by Infrastructure Victoria in December last year recommended a review of the Parks Charge. Infrastructure Victoria recommended that the basis of the Parks Charge be reviewed, among other things, to implement a 'pricing, funding and expenditure regime for national parks, state forests and other protected areas as well as urban parks within 0-5 years, which ensures that funding and revenue for land management reflect an evaluation of the ecosystem services provided where possible and enables assessment of return on investments' (p189). The report by Infrastructure Victoria and associated documents can be found here <http://yoursay.infrastructurevictoria.com.au/30-year-strategy/>. The report also includes several other recommendations about Victoria's natural environment and adopts the approach that the environment is a vital part of the state's green infrastructure.

The need to review the Parks Charge was acknowledged by the government on 26th February when it released its **Yarra River Action Plan**. See <https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/policy-and-strategy/yarra-river-protection> for details of the plan and related documents. Recommendation 15 on p36 of the Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC) final report states:
Review the Melbourne Metropolitan Parks Charge to define the strategic goals/services it delivers and identify the funding available for supporting priority projects identified in the Yarra Strategic Plan.

Although the recommendation is specific to the Yarra River, Recommendation 17 on p39 is to expand the approach taken with the Yarra River to 'other major Melbourne rivers and their open spaces such as the

Maribyrnong and Werribee rivers.' The MAC report is critical of the governance and management of the Parks Charge:

The Parks Charge is currently not subject to any regulatory oversight and the allocation of funds is not transparent so it is unclear what strategic goals drive the investments and services it supports. P36.

It is understood that the review of the parks charge is to be undertaken by DELWP and a report to government prepared by the end of 2017. No further details of the review are available at this stage.

VEFN has also been reviewing who gets what in terms of **grants provided by DELWP** and has analysed grants to Landcare and Friends groups over the past three years – 2013-14 to 2015-16. The following data have been extracted from information published in the Annual reports of the Department.

Group	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	3 Year Total
Friends groups				
\$ amount	\$ 309,694	\$ 629,780	\$ 372,570	\$ 1,312,044
No. of grants	14	22	14	50
Average grant	\$ 22,121	\$ 28,626	\$ 26,612	\$ 26,241
Landcare groups (incl FTLA)				
\$ amount	\$ 3,727,021	\$ 4,266,846	\$ 4,307,824	\$ 12,301,691
No. of grants	82	104	80	266
Average grant	\$ 45,451	\$ 41,027	\$ 53,848	\$ 46,247

Over the three years shown in the table, Landcare groups have received almost ten times as much in funding as Friends groups. Not only do Landcare groups receive far greater numbers of grants, the average value is also much higher. This imbalance is despite the fact that there are ~600 Landcare groups and ~500 Friends groups in Victoria. VEFN will discuss the availability of grant funds further with DELWP as it may that Friends groups should be made more aware of and actively encouraged to apply for available funding.

Westgate Park opens new path - continued

The new path starts just north of the Bridge on Todd Road, takes in sweeping views of the Saltwater Lake and Bridge and then passes under the bridge and on through the Park. Importantly, it connects the Port Phillip Bay trail very directly through the Park to the River and on to Lorimer Street and the CBD or via the Punt to Newport/Williamstown and beyond along Bay Trail West.



Those who walked through to the river were in time to see a massive ship slide under the Westgate Bridge. At first glance, it did not look as if the ship would fit under the bridge!



Friends of Westgate Park (FoWP) has transformed the area over the last 15 years, from a run-down neglected park to the biodiverse habitat it is today. Westgate Park is on the eastern banks of the Yarra River, around and under Westgate Bridge and is in close proximity to the City of Melbourne. The 40 hectare park offers spectacular views to the mouth of the Yarra and the city skyline and opportunities to walk or cycle along the Yarra River or the Port Melbourne foreshore.

Friends of Westgate Park have worked with many parties to develop this new path and particularly thanks: the state government through DELWP for making the land available; Port of Melbourne Corporation; neighbouring councils, Melbourne Water; Parks Victoria and many other groups and the volunteers whom made it all happen.

New Child Safe Standards

New Child Safe Standards apply in Victoria from 1 January 2017

Organisations operating in Victoria that provide services or facilities where children are involved are required to meet new Child Safe Standards from 1st January 2017. The Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP) will oversee these requirements. See <http://ccyp.vic.gov.au/aboutus/index.htm>. **These requirements apply to community-based organisations where children are involved.**

More information about the Child Safe Standards can be found here <http://ccyp.vic.gov.au/aboutus/news/child-safe-law.htm> including a downloadable guide to help your organisation assess how child safe it is and practical advice about how to meet the standards. There is a specific section of advice for community-based organisations here <http://ccyp.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards/resources-support/sector-support.htm>.

If you wish to contact CCYP for advice or more information, telephone (03) 8601 5281 or email: childsafestandards@ccyp.vic.gov.au

Parks Victoria appoints new Chief Executive

Matthew Jackson is the new Chief Executive of Parks Victoria. Mr Jackson was the Chief Executive Officer at Phillip Island Nature Parks for the past six years.

It is understood that he commenced his role in mid-February 2017.

At the announcement of his appointment, Mr Jackson said "The diversity of the parks offering we have in Victoria provides such an amazing platform for education, conservation and recreational activities. I am excited and humbled to have this fantastic opportunity."



Photo courtesy LinkedIn

Source: Parks Victoria Media Centre, Tuesday 20 December, 2016

VEFN Friends Groups Portraits 2017

During December and January, VEFN worked with many Friends Groups to develop portraits of their groups, activities and key achievements. Together with an introduction by Janet Bolitho, Member, Best Friend Award Panel and Member, Friends of Westgate Park, VEFN forwarded a compendium of 11 group's portraits to the office of the Minister for Energy, Environment & Climate Change to continue our dialogue about the contribution and importance of Friends Groups. Below is the introduction by Janet and the profile of BERG Mt Martha. All 11 profiles can be found on our website at bit.ly/friends-portraits.

Introduction to Friends Groups Portraits

Friends groups see opportunities where other people see only the challenges. A degraded landscape, a neglected patch, a weed infested corner – these are grist to the mill for Friends groups. It is this dogged determination which has led to the transformation of places, large, small, and in between.

Friends groups bring the attributes of friendship to care for places. Getting to know places and their requirements closely, being committed to them over time, standing up for them are some of the qualities Friends groups demonstrate. Their willingness to go above and beyond what is expected is routine. Friends groups work respectfully with the management authority.

Friends groups are versatile – drawing on the experience and expertise of their members and learning new skills that might be required. Because Friends groups stay with places over time, they learn to observe them closely, their seasonality and requirements.

Friends of groups seek out additional resources – both financial and in kind.

Not only do places and their surrounding communities benefit, but so do the people involved. Friendships between people are strengthened and new relationships formed. There is a role for everyone in a Friends group. There is the benefit of physical activity but there is also the growing importance of communication within and beyond the group. The beauty of the Friends model is its adaptability. There are Friends groups of the tiniest urban bush fragments to the largest metropolitan parks. Friends groups vary in their governance and organisational structures but are imbued with an ethic of care for places.

Places, like people, benefit from care. Following removal of litter and weeds, and revegetation, places respond by becoming more rewarding as birds and more diverse insects return. Land managers have limited time and budgets which mean they are not able to care for places to the level of detail that Friends groups can. However, they can provide frameworks that facilitate rather than inhibit volunteer involvement. I hope you will enjoy reading the attached Friends Groups Portraits.

Janet Bolitho

Panel Member, VEFN Best Friend Awards

Member Friends of Westgate Park & Yarra Riverkeeper Association

Balcombe Estuary Reserves Group (BERG) Mt Martha Inc.

A Friends Group caring for the Balcombe Estuary Reserves

BERG Mt Martha (BERG) is a bushland Friends Group established in 1997 to care for the Balcombe Estuary Reserves in Mt Martha. Our mission statement is to preserve and restore the precious ecology of the Balcombe Estuary and Reserves through best practice habitat management techniques, passionate volunteerism and community involvement. Mt Martha is a town about 60 km south east of Melbourne in the Shire of Mornington Peninsula



Balcombe Creek is the most extensive waterway on the eastern side of the Mornington Peninsula and with its tributaries, drains an extensive catchment into the largest intact estuary on the eastern side of Port Phillip. This system helps to form a linking habitat corridor for indigenous flora and fauna. Balcombe Creek, with its estuary, is the last unspoilt waterway entering the eastern side of Port Phillip Bay. The Reserves cover 44 hectares of natural bushland along the creek's lower reaches.

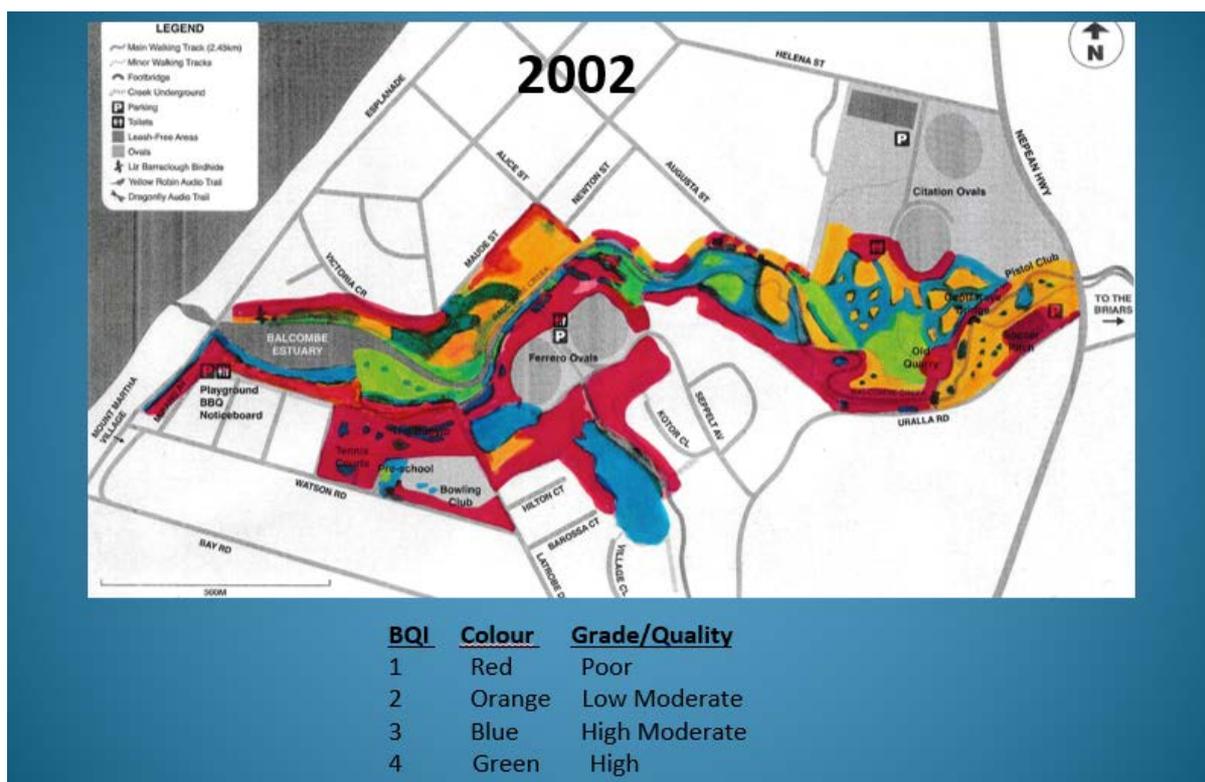
The estuary and creek are protected and reliant on the long linear ecotone of riparian vegetation of regionally significant Swamp Scrub (Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC) 153) and Grassy Woodland (EVC 175) which are endangered. Fauna species are of local, regional, state and national significance and recent surveys have exposed declining populations and diversity.



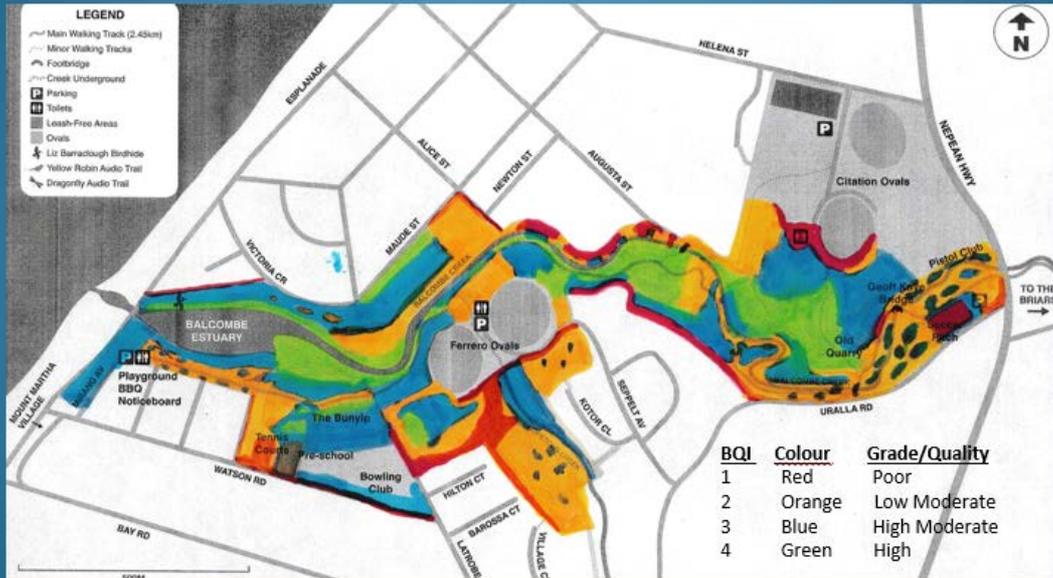
BERG's vigilant Waterwatch program has also revealed a 'marginally' healthy waterway.

The 44 hectares of the Reserve are a natural asset, widely used and highly valued for ecological status, aesthetic and social benefits by both the local community and visitors. The condition of the Reserve has been substantially improved over the last 14 years as the pictures below demonstrate.

Overall changes in the Reserves 2002 - 2015



2015



BERG Mt Martha’s volunteers

BERG’s membership is approximately 500 with over 100 active volunteers who are involved in on-ground work at our monthly working bees on Sunday, Tuesday and Wednesday as well as a weekly Friday group. On-ground works consist mainly of weeding and planting indigenous species. The majority of our volunteers are of retirement age. However, BERG works closely with local primary and secondary schools and students are also involved in mulching and planting.

BERG Mt Martha’s key supporters

BERG’s key supporters are Melbourne Water and Mornington Peninsula Shire Council with whom we work very closely. We also have the support of 20 local traders, including major support from Mt Martha Community Bank and Bonaccorde Property Services.

BERG Mt Martha engages with other local community organisations including the Rotary Club of Mt Martha, Mt Martha Yacht Club, Mt Martha Lifesaving club, Birdlife Mornington Peninsula and The Briars.

Family day at the Estuary, pictured below, was BERG’s major community awareness event in 2016 which was attended by over 500 people – mainly young families. Art, craft and other environmental activities made this a community celebration of the unique environment of the Reserves.



Family Day at the Estuary 2016



Primary school students create murals

In 2015 BERG Mt Martha volunteers won a Community Placemaking grant. This was used to engage a local artist to work with four local primary schools to create murals depicting aspects of the local environment which were installed at the rotunda in the “Old Campground” of the Reserves. In 2016, BERG Mt Martha was a finalist for the state Tidy Towns awards for this project.

How the group achieved these outcomes:

Major support for our activities comes from grants from Melbourne water and Mornington Peninsula Shire (MPS). We have also benefitted from the Green Army program. All works are conducted under a Memorandum of Understanding with MPS. In addition to work by BERG Mt Martha volunteers, grant monies are used to engage outside bodies such as Naturelinks to undertake some of the work. In 2016 BERG Mt Martha was also successful in attracting funding from some philanthropic organisations to fund aspects of our work.

Note. The above is slightly shortened version of the BERG Mt Martha portrait. The group’s full portrait can be found on our website with the other group portraits.

Balcombe Estuary Reserves Group Mt Martha Incorporated is a Charity registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission.

For more information: <http://www.berg.org.au/> .

Understanding our feral cat conundrum by Richard Faulkner

Feral cats have a devastating impact on native Australian fauna. More than half of the earth’s mammal extinctions in the last 200 years have been in Australia and feral cats are a prime culprit. Each day we are losing millions of mammals, birds, reptiles and invertebrates to these alien predators.

Why is this happening? When Europeans settled in Australia they brought cats with them. When you let these little beasties go wild they are resilient and become highly efficient predators. Feral cats now cover the entire land mass of Australia, with the exception of a few small off-shore islands and fenced areas. Australia has a whole suite of unique wildlife that evolved without the pressure of these specialist predators. Along with the pressures of modified landscapes and other invasive species, Australia’s small to medium sized native fauna simply can’t cope, and sadly, some of them are gone forever.

What’s being done about it? Recent research from RMIT University looked into the ‘National effort going into feral cat control’ This research suggests that many within the broader community recognise the threat feral cats pose to wildlife and are doing something about it, or at least are very willing. Results from this research indicate that: as a nation we are culling between 130,000 and 290,000 feral cats a year; those active in feral cat control understand the threat feral cats pose to wildlife and that that is their reason for action; the effort put into feral cat control by private citizens hasn’t changed over time; and that there is a strong stigma attached with demonising feral cats and those trying to control them. This research from RMIT sets a good baseline for understanding feral cat control at a

national scale and will hopefully help to seed further research and policy change regarding effective feral cat control.



Cat with native bird. Picture from agriculture.vic.gov.au

What do these results mean when considering the bigger picture? Although there is undoubtedly a lot of effort going into feral cat control, it does not necessarily translate to benefits for species threatened by feral cats. For example, if current feral cat control efforts do not keep up with the rate at which these cats are reproducing, feral cat numbers may continue to increase. Furthermore, the survey results suggest that feral cats are not necessarily being culled in areas where some of our most threatened species persist. Finally, this research did not discriminate which feral cats are being culled. Other recent research suggests that the stronger feral cats, which have the most devastating impact on native

wildlife, are unlikely to be caught using traditional hunting, trapping and baiting methods.



Cat with Phascogale (A rat sized carnivorous Australian Marsupial).
Credit Fredy Mercay

It's not all doom and gloom though; there is the energy and scope to move forward positively. Firstly, we need to know how effective our efforts are and make sure we are using the right techniques; we then need to align our efforts with where it will be most useful; and, most importantly, we need to send out the right messages and build up the public awareness and understanding of feral cat control to change perceptions.

Beyond this, there are many scientists exploring the impact of feral cats and how best to manage them. Indirect management techniques may also prove to be effective: maintaining habitat and refuge for wildlife makes it more difficult for feral cats to hunt; supporting dingo populations can suppress feral cat activity populations; guardian dogs could be employed to assist; and feral free fenced areas and islands will provide safe havens. Other new technologies and techniques are also being investigated. A grooming trap that specifically targets and kills feral cats is being trialled and toxic implants inserted into likely prey could also provide a novel technique, these would especially help to control those evasive high impact cats.

What can you do? If you and your group are concerned about feral cats, and the threat they pose to wildlife, there are things you can do to help. If you are a pet cat owner, be a responsible one. At the very least, minimise your cats' potential to interact with wildlife by keeping your cat inside at night, or build a cat run at home to contain your cat at all times. You can encourage other pet cat owners to be responsible too and have your cat desexed and microchipped. You can help by maintaining good habitat as refuge for wildlife and look into control techniques that are suitable to the environment you are in. This might include re-vegetation, weed management and fire management regimes. You can work with your

local Rangers and land managers on this. Finally, education and communication will be the key elements in the war against feral cats. Getting the community on-board to support efforts to control feral cats will be the greatest help. Share your knowledge and build support.

This article was written by Richard Faulkner. Richard carried out the related research with Dr Georgia Garrard and Associate Professor Sarah Bekessy at RMIT University. Richard is now employed by Phillip Island Nature Parks as the Vertebrate Pest Ranger. The initial research to determine the number of feral cats culled across Australia was funded by the Australian Government National Landcare Programme.

Endnote

For readers interested to find more information, the following may be useful:

A good article about mammal extinctions in Australia and their causes is '*Ongoing unraveling of a continental fauna: Decline and extinction of Australian mammals since European settlement*' which can be found here

<http://www.pnas.org/content/112/15/4531.full?sid=1d1855c9-b101-44ae-9b52-6389aae180bc> .

For information about the numbers of feral cats in Australia see this recent article 'Enumerating a continental-scale threat: How many feral cats are in Australia?'. The full article can be downloaded here <https://euanritchie.org/publications/> .

For general information, the following web sites are a good place to start.

<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive-species/feral-animals-australia/feral-cats> .

Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre <http://www.pestsmart.org.au/pest-animal-species/feral-cat/> and the Australian Wildlife Conservancy

<http://www.australianwildlife.org/field-programs/feral-cat-research.aspx> .

Value of Public parks in UK & Scotland

As Friends of Parks it is probably a statement of the obvious that parks bring great benefits to people and communities.

A recent British Parliamentary Committee report, published in early February, has attempted to provide more specific evidence of the value of Parks, not just in anecdotal feelings of wellbeing, but through detailed evidence.

The **Communities and Local Government Select Committee Inquiry on Public Parks** collected evidence by written submissions, survey, tweets (very modern) and verbal evidence. They were focussed largely on urban parks in England, which are mostly managed and funded by Local Government.

One of the most interesting submissions however came from a Scottish Non-profit NGO called **Greenspace Scotland**. They detail the benefits of available parks and green spaces for individuals and communities as follows:

There is a substantial body of research which demonstrates the positive impact that parks and greenspace can have on our quality of life and particularly on health and wellbeing: people who live near greenspaces tend to be more active; greenspaces can help reduce stress and blood pressure. The benefits of greenspace far outweigh costs. Health is vitally important but the consequences of neglected parks and greenspaces go much wider and could impact on Scotland's economic recovery. The quality of the local environment sends a powerful signal. Places that are well-cared for, attractive and well-used project a powerful image of energy, confidence and success – signalling to investors, entrepreneurs and skilled workers that this is a 'good place to do business'. Run-down, neglected and tired spaces send a very different message – depressing investment prospects, blighting people and places. Parks and greenspace are a classic example of 'preventative spend' where spending now saves money later.

They also cite a study published in The Lancet which showed that 'green recreational services were the only neighbourhood service that had a link with reducing inequalities in mental wellbeing.'

At the same time it is clear that across the UK pressures on funding are making the maintenance of Parks increasingly difficult, and the fragmentation of management leads to very inequitable access. 'But park budgets have been falling year on year. As the spiral of decline continues it will become exponentially more difficult to recover from. The impact of budget reductions

extends far beyond the infrastructure, fabric and staffing of our parks.'

Problems with which you will all be familiar!

The Parliamentary Committee stopped short of recommending that a statutory duty should be imposed on local authorities to provide and maintain parks and instead recommended:

That other mechanisms are more likely to achieve the outcomes we all want to see – greater recognition of the value and benefits of parks, and appropriate prioritisation in local authority planning and funding decisions.

The report recommends that the Parks Minister establishes a cross-departmental group, park managers' forum(s) and 'online hub', and issues guidance to local authorities encouraging them to work collaboratively with Health and Wellbeing Boards, and other relevant bodies, to prepare and publish joint parks and greenspace strategies. The Committee note that fundamental service transformation may be required and calls on the Minister to work with local authorities that are pioneering alternative management models and funding arrangements.

Many of the challenges and issues documented in these report are of direct relevance to parks in Victoria. The full report of the parliamentary Committee can be found here <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/communities-and-local-government-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/public-parks-16-17/> and the submission by Greenspace Scotland and the Park Managers Forum (Scotland) here <http://greenspacescotland.org.uk/select-committee-reports-on-public-parks-in-england.aspx>.

Norman Wettenhall Foundation grants

The Norman Wettenhall Foundation (NWF) has provided grants to many Friends groups over the years and encourages people to get in touch and discuss ideas and possible projects.

More information about the grants and conditions can be found here <http://nwf.org.au/grants/grants-conditions/>.

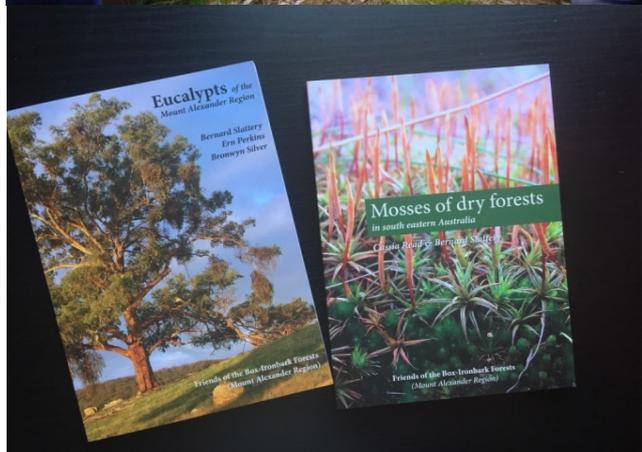
The next round of grants will be held in May and applications will open on 21st March 2017.

Friends groups that have benefitted from grant support from NWF in the past include:

Friends of the Grey Crowned Babbler
Friends of Werribee Gorge and Long Forest
Friends of the Grampians
Friends of the Lederderg

Friends of Organ Pipes National Park
 Bayside Friends of Native Wildlife
 Friends of Wilson Reserve
 Friends of the Box Ironbark Forests

The pictures below show Members of Friends of the Box Ironbark Forests undertaking citizen science and some of the publications they have produced with assistance from NWF.



The Norman Wettenhall Foundation is one of the few philanthropic groups in Australia that focuses solely on biodiversity conservation for small environment and community groups. These grants have supported the publication of books and other flora and fauna resources, as well as paid for consultants to help with collecting data, or for training volunteers to collect data on a whole range of species. Producing resources and undertaking citizen science should be activities that are part of a larger project, and applicants need to indicate what outcomes they are trying to achieve for particular flora and fauna species.

The Norman Wettenhall Foundation supports flora and fauna conservation projects. Our Small Environmental Grant Scheme is open for applications four times a year. We look for research, monitoring, community education and citizen science. *No DGR required.* All the details are on our website www.nwf.org.au

Friends groups in Indonesia by Merrin Butler & Paul Strickland

On a recent holiday in Indonesia, we had the opportunity to visit three national parks and gain some insight into the many issues faced by park rangers and the volunteers who work alongside them.

All the parks we visited had Friends groups. What we found fascinating was that the issues they faced were so similar to those we deal with in our parks back home. Commitment expressed by governments to protect parks but, at the same time, lack of resources, unwieldy bureaucracies, balancing the demands of tourism with the need for conservation and striving to convince the general population of the long-term economic value of national parks.

The first park we visited was Tanjung Puting in southern Kalimantan, made famous by the Orangutan Research and Conservation Program based at the Camp Leakey research station (<http://orangutanfoundation.org.au/>).



Female orangutan in Tanjung Puting National Park, Kalimantan

While seeing orangutans in the wild is the main drawcard for visitors to the park, it is the preservation of habitat that is the key issue facing park rangers and their associated Friends groups. Providing employment for local communities is essential in order to deter poaching of wildlife or over-fishing in protected areas. Promoting the enormous tourist potential of these places is often seen as at least part of the solution. But that brings with it problems of balancing conservation with tourist development. The enormous amount of plastic and other

rubbish we saw lining rivers and beaches is evidence of that balance not yet being reached.

While Tanjung Puting covers an area of over 3,000 km², the numerous threatened species it contains continue to be under pressure from the encroaching palm oil plantations. Even during our short visit, the effects of this were obvious. A palm oil concession had been granted for the peat rainforest on the other side of the Sekonyer River from Tanjung Puting NP. It was in the process of being drained, prior to the timber being harvested and the remaining vegetation on its peat base being set on fire. Our guides told us that the land can sustain only two cycles of palm oil production; totalling approximately 50 years. After that, the land is exhausted and laid waste.

The second park we visited was the Thousand Islands Marine National Park, which is a conservation and tourism zone approximately 45 km north of Jakarta, an easy boat ride away. We stopped at Pulau Harapan, where we were met by two young park rangers who showed us the Hawksbill turtle conservation program. They then got us involved in planting corals as part of their reef rehabilitation project.



Tying corals onto a metal frame before it is placed out on the reef as part of the rehabilitation project on Pulau Harapan

Balancing tourism and conservation was clearly in the forefront of these particular projects. Several of the small islands in the marine conservation zone provide accommodation for visitors from Jakarta, other parts of Indonesia as well as international tourists. For those who are interested, there are plenty of opportunities to get involved in turtle conservation, coral reef transplantation and mangrove restoration. This is aimed particularly at educating urban Indonesians in the need for protecting their marine environment. It also helps local communities to get actively involved in repairing past damage to their island's ecosystem. Many of the houses we passed had trays of mangrove seedlings which they were raising to assist with the mangrove restoration. Some of these households offered homestays for visitors to the area.

Finally, we visited Ujung Kulon NP on the western tip of Java. This is home to the critically endangered Javan rhinoceros. While seeing one of these rare animals is the drawcard for visitors, again the aim is to protect the habitat for the rhinoceros and the numerous other endangered species of animals, birds and plants that find protection within the park. There is an active Friends group with volunteers from around the world visiting the park to assist with conservation efforts.

For those who would like to know more about Friends of the National Park Foundation (FNPF) in Indonesia, visit their website at www.fnpf.org.

Merrin Butler & Paul Strickland, Friends of Mt Worth State Park.