



FriendsNET

Newsletter of the Victorian Environment Friends Network

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

VEFN 2017 Best Friend Awards

Three awards were presented at this year's Best Friend Awards ceremony on 14th October which was held at the Darebin Creek Environment Centre. Jim Stranger, from Friends of Tyers Park, received a Best Friend Award, while Spencer Unthank, from Penguin Study Group and Pat Jeffery from Churchill Island were Highly Commended. Details of the outstanding contribution these recipients have made to the environment and their volunteer groups are described in the profiles included later in this newsletter. (Continued on page 3.)



Jim Stranger (second from left), Friends of Tyers Park receives his Best Friend Award and Spencer Unthank, from Penguin Study Group, receives a Highly Commended certificate from Nina Cullen (right), Executive Director of the Biodiversity Division of the Department of the Environment, Land, Water & Planning and Paul Strickland (left) Convenor of VEFN.

In this edition: See Notice of AGM and early notice of 2018 Best Friend Award on the next page. Friends of Westgate Park win the VEFN Poster competition. VEFN's Mentoring Forum to be held in conjunction with the Yarra Riverkeeper Association in March 2018. Merrin Butler writes about Park Connect and we celebrate the Blackburn and District Tree Preservation Society winning the inaugural Victorian Urban landcare Award as well as Les Smith being awarded an OAM.

Victorian Environment Friends Network Incorporated Annual General Meeting

VEFN's AGM will be held on Saturday 24th February 2018. VEFN has delayed the AGM to allow time to complete the revision of our Constitution. An agenda and papers will be finalised at the committee meeting in January and circulated by 24th January. The principal focus of the AGM will be to consider a revised Constitution. We will also review VEFN's activities; discuss further options for change and consider how best to make Friends' voices heard and appreciated.

This is an important meeting for VEFN, so if you want the organisation to continue to be a strong advocate for Friends groups, come along and have your say. We need more committee members, so if you are interested to nominate for the committee and/or one of the Executive positions (Convenor, Treasurer, Secretary), send your nomination to The Secretary at the email below.

Details of the venue will be decided as soon as possible, but will be at an accessible venue. A light lunch will be provided. Come along to the AGM and have your say.

Please register your attendance by email to The Secretary at ecosystems@bigpond.com.

Victorian Environment Friends Network 2018 Best Friend Award

VEFN's 2018 Best Friend Award will kick off earlier next year. VEFN is in the process of appointing a new Judging Panel in conjunction with Chair, Janet Bolitho. Details of the new Panel will be available in February 2018, together with revised selection criteria and nomination form. Nominations will close in late June and the Award ceremony will be held in late August.

VEFN's Best Friend Award is designed to recognise volunteers who make an outstanding contribution through exceptional dedication as a Friend. For those who receive an award, it has particular significance knowing that nominations are made by your peers; members of your own Friends group, who know better than most the personal dedication that is required.

If there is someone in your Friends group who deserves special recognition for the dedication and service they have shown over at least 10 years, start your nomination process now.

Friends of Westgate Park wins inaugural VEFN Poster competition

Congratulations to Friends of Westgate Park, winner of the poster competition that was run in conjunction with this year's Best Friend Awards. The winner has received \$100 prize money. Their poster, shown below, was on display at the Best Friend Award ceremony held at Darebin Environment Centre. The competition will be run again in 2018. All Friends groups are invited to enter.



Friends of Westgate Park



Friends of Westgate Park is made up of enthusiastic people, passionate about Westgate Park; the 40 hectare park under the Westgate Bridge in Port Melbourne.

Our vision is to transform the park into a bushland setting for locally indigenous plants and animals — a place where visitors can appreciate richly diverse, natural ecosystems in a beautiful landscape.

SINCE 1999 OUR GROUP:

- Has planted over 280,000 plants in 9 distinct vegetation areas.
- Contributes around 1,500 hours per month of voluntary work.
- Engages with schools and teaches young people about biodiversity.
- Operates an indigenous plant nursery and provides skills in horticulture, and flora, fauna and fungi identification.
- Partners with Landcare Australia, business and employment agencies in organising and supervising work teams.
- Has provided planning and taken responsibility for all revegetation and maintenance work in the park.
 - Was instrumental in having over 8ha of land added to the park.
 - Raised funds for and managed several major projects in the park.
- Encourages volunteers and citizen scientists to be involved in water quality measurement and bird, fungi and pollination surveys.



Building partnership capacity with Friends groups

Second notice of Mentoring Forum March 2018



VEFN, in conjunction with the Yarra Riverkeeper Association is planning a full day Mentoring Forum for members of Friends Groups to be held on 17 March 2018, *Building Partnership Capacity with Friends Groups: Stories from the Yarra catchment*.

The Forum will provide an opportunity to learn about forging partnerships to deliver and secure resources that make a difference. Come along to network and build relationships. Members of Friends and other environmental groups, government agencies, councils, and funding trusts will give tips and examples - primarily from the Yarra catchment - that can be applied elsewhere. Each session will feature a panel of speakers, followed by Q and A: bring your questions! International speaker Kirsteen Thomson of Greenspace Scotland will share insights from innovative approaches in Scotland. The Forum will focus on ways to strengthen connectivity – across the landscape and with our communities.

The forum will feature:

- Case studies from Friends Groups of successful partnering, including challenges of getting started, securing resources, and working effectively as partners.
- State and Municipal Agencies discussing potential resourcing opportunities and how they might be developed/obtained.
- A panel of Funding Organisations.
- Opportunities to network with agencies and Friends group members.

Key note and panel speakers are being finalised. Kirsteen Thomson, Board Member of Greenspace Scotland will be one of the keynote speakers. Greenspace Scotland is social enterprise and an independent charitable company that works to improve the quality of life of people living and working in urban Scotland through the planning, development and sustainable management of greenspaces as a key part of the green infrastructure.

Kirsteen will talk about Greenspace Scotland's approaches to fund raising and building capacity and how this applies to Friends groups in Victoria.

The Mentoring Forum is being supported by funding provided by the Department of Environment, Water, Land and Planning. It will be held at the Lilydale Senior Citizens Centre in Lilydale and will run from 10am to 4.30pm. Morning and afternoon tea and lunch will be provided. VEFN will organise bus transport to the venue from Southern Cross station and return. For people who catch a train to Lilydale Station, the venue is a 10 minute walk.

Further details, including full list of speakers and panels will be available in early February 2018. Please let us know now of your interest in attending by email to Roger Parker at Parker.roger@bigpond.com so that we can ensure adequate facilities and keep you informed of details. You can also book your place here <https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/building-partnership-capacity-with-friends-groups-stories-from-the-yarra-catchment-tickets-41034371911?aff=es2>.

VEFN 2017 Best Friend Awards - continued

For the second year in a row, the Best Friend Awards were supported by the Minister for Energy, Environment & Climate Change, Lily D'Ambrosio. VEFN warmly thanks the Minister for her generous support in the form of a \$5000 grant. The Minister had planned to present the awards but, at short notice, was unable to attend. She was well represented by Nina Cullen, Executive Director of the Biodiversity Division of the Department of the Environment, Land, Water & Planning. Nina brought her young family with her so they could hear at first hand about the contribution made by Friends groups throughout the state.

The diversity of Friends groups and the broad range of activities they undertake became a general theme highlighted by speakers at the ceremony. Paul Strickland, Convenor of VEFN, opened by saying, "This year's awardees demonstrate the diversity of Friends volunteers, with one group working to protect cultural heritage, another focussed on a species, and a third working to enhance the natural environment of a park and engage the community through such basic things as upgrading walking tracks and introducing interpretive signage." He went on to say, "This illustrates the difficulty Friends groups face in relating to government. We are too diverse to fit neatly into departmental silos."

VEFN 2017 best Friend Awards - continued

Guest speaker, Kirsteen Thomson from Greenspace Scotland spoke about the need to provide a focal point to make it easier for government, councils and other statutory bodies to interact with Friends groups at a state level.



Guest speaker, Kirsteen Thomson, from Greenspace Scotland, spoke about the work this charitable organisation has done to improve greenspaces in urban Scotland, through establishing partnerships, finding innovative sources of funding and supporting Friends groups.

Kirsteen described the role that Greenspace plays in establishing networks and forming partnerships across all levels of government and with all types of organisations. Greenspace is an independent, charitable company, who work to improve the quality of life of people in urban Scotland through planning, development and management of greenspaces. It acknowledges the value of parks to the overall health and wellbeing of people as well as their environmental and economic benefits. As in many places, budgets for parks are being cut and Friends groups are struggling to find other sources of funding. Greenspace provides a framework for engaging with a broad range of partners to resource projects and support the work of volunteer Friends groups. Kirsteen gave the example of working with the supermarket chain, Tesco. When they introduced a payment for use of plastic bags, Greenspace negotiated part of the payment be channelled into resourcing greenspaces. This provides a valuable source of funding for parks while at the same time lending credibility to Tesco's claim of supporting the environment.

Nina Cullen spoke of the 'amazing work and tireless efforts' of Friends groups and other volunteer environmental groups before presenting the award certificates.

After the awards presentation, James Garriock, President of the Darebin Parklands Association, thanked people for attending and invited them to take part in a guided walk around the Darebin Parklands to see, at first hand, the work undertaken by the Friends group. Eve Recht, from

Friends of Darebin Creek led the walk, providing an insight into the transformation that has taken place there. Given the warm, sunny weather, this was an excellent way to conclude the event.



After the Best Friend Awards ceremony, people enjoy a walk around the Darebin Parklands, led by Eve Recht from the Friends of Darebin Creek.

VEFN would like to thank James and all members of Darebin Parklands Association for use of the Darebin Creek Environment Centre and for their hospitality in organising the guided walk. It was greatly appreciated by the many people who attended.

Profiles of the winners and their group follow.

Best Friend 2017

Jim Stranger – Friends of Tyers Park



Jim Stranger (left) with Joe van Beek, FoTP member, and Stacey Podmore, Health Promotion Officer Latrobe Community Health Services, on a reconnaissance for a Heart Foundation Park Walk at Petersons Lookout within the Tyers Park

Jim was instrumental in establishing the Friends of Tyers Park (FoTP) in May 2007 and has been President/Convenor of the group since then. He has been successful in applying for approximately \$100,000 in funding through various grants. This has enabled FoTP to improve walking tracks, develop and install interpretive and track signage, remove willows and other weeds from the Tyers River and provide first aid, chainsaw and construction induction training for members of the group.

Jim has expanded the work of FoTP to include maintenance of the Wirilda Walking Track, which extends beyond the park through DELWP and Gippsland Water managed land into the Wirilda Environment Park. He has established strong cooperative relationships with all the relevant authorities including Parks Vic, DELWP, Gippsland Water and the Wirilda Environment Park Committee of Management. He arranged for the Green Army to be involved in upgrading the walking track, providing them with valuable work experience. As part of an earlier project to remove willows from the Tyers River, Jim liaised with the relevant parties, including Gippsland Water, Latrobe City and Baw Baw Shire to alleviate any concerns about the impact on water quality of the willow eradication program. Jim also established an on-going Water Watch program, which involves FoTP taking and analysing water samples on a monthly basis from the Tyers River and reporting the results to the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority.

Jim has established a network of contacts with people who have an interest in environmental volunteering, including other Friends groups, historical societies and field naturalists. He has led guided walks in the park for bush-walking clubs, schools and community groups. He has arranged for guest speakers to talk on topics of general interest about the local environment and has undertaken monitoring of rare and endangered species, including the Peregrine Falcon. He has engaged with bushwalking clubs to assist with track maintenance, and

worked with four-wheel drive clubs to remove rubbish from the park. He also helped supervise a group of young international people working with Conservation Volunteers, who did track maintenance and conservation work in the park.

In addition to being a strong advocate for Tyers Park and the Wirilda Walking Track, Jim is an active member of other community groups. He is a regular contributor to a variety of projects aimed at benefiting the broader community. He is selfless in sharing his knowledge, skill and expertise gained in a long career in Primary Industry and Natural Resource Management.

Highly Commended

Pat Jeffery - Churchill Island



Pat Jeffery (centre), standing outside Churchill Island's Heritage House

Pat started volunteering at Churchill Island in 1997 as the primary caretaker for the heritage home. Since then, she has developed into the role of Volunteer Team Leader, responsible for the engagement, involvement and management of around 30 volunteers, who undertake a variety of roles in maintenance, gardening, visitor experience and helping at the farm.

Pat is dedicated to preserving the heritage of Churchill Island. She has a wealth of knowledge about its history and previous management, which she shares with staff, visitors and volunteers. Her passion for the place enables her to attract and retain a large group of volunteers. Everyone is welcomed, inducted and made familiar with the site. She organises off-site visits for volunteers to learn from other heritage areas. She holds regular morning teas and an annual Christmas party and works hard to ensure everyone is included in these events.

Pat goes above and beyond her role as a volunteer. She spends more than 20 hours a week at Churchill Island managing and supporting the volunteers, while also cleaning, inspecting and identifying any maintenance issues in the heritage house. She has built strong relationships with the Friends of Churchill Island group, including their Curator, who does all the cataloguing for the heritage homes. She is held in high regard by the staff of Churchill Island and by everyone who comes into contact with her.

Highly Commended

Spencer Unthank – Penguin Study Group



Spencer Unthank (left) with members of the Penguin Study Group

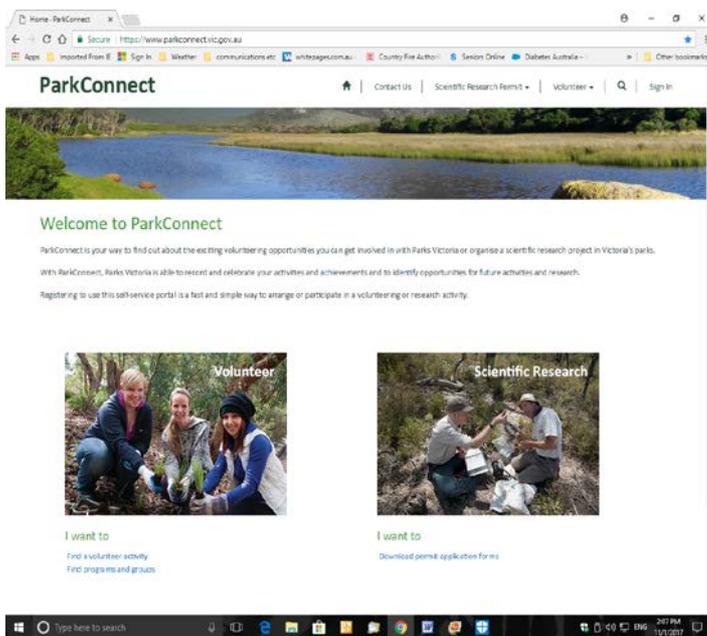
Spencer joined the Penguin Study Group in November 1974 and has been President since 2006. The group meets every 4 weeks and has done so since 1968. It began recording data about the Little Penguin before the establishment of the Phillip Island Nature Parks and worked tirelessly to get appropriate management of the population in the face of declining numbers. This long-term data is used by researchers today and can contribute to understanding the effects of climate change on Little Penguins.

As leader of the team monitoring and maintaining the original study site, Spencer shares his extensive knowledge of the Little Penguin and trains new volunteers in handling the birds and recording data. He has established a strong partnership with the Research Department of the Phillip Island Nature Parks and recently worked with them to introduce Volunteer Role Descriptions. The Research Department recognises the work Spencer and the group have done for the conservation of the species.

Every month, Spencer contributes a Little Penguin update to the Victorian Ornithological Research Group. He is always willing to provide input into scientific publications when requested. He often assists students to gain hands-on experience for their environmental science or animal veterinary studies.

Spencer is described by members of the group as a quietly-spoken, humble, unassuming man. His dedication over 43 years to researching Little Penguins, his vast store of knowledge and the support and encouragement he offers to volunteers are an inspiration to the people he leads. Together with other members of the group, Spencer is looking forward to celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Penguin Study Group next year.

Park Connect: a user's perspective



Last July, two members of our Friends group attended training for Parks Victoria's new volunteer system, Park Connect. Since then, our group has been using the system to list our activities and report on achievements. While it is early days and we are still getting used to it, it seems timely to make a few observations about our experiences of the system so far.

To begin with, the training was very helpful; small group, hands-on, with lots of opportunity for questions and answers. We were able to set up our group's own page with a photo, brief description of what we do and contact details. Well-illustrated notes were provided to remind us of the processes we need to follow to perform the basic functions, such as creating a volunteer profile, listing an activity and reporting on the results of the activity. Leesa Riley and Ashlee Hope ran the training sessions and since then have responded promptly to any questions or problems we have encountered. In response to feedback from Friends groups, Ashlee has already made some minor modifications to the system.

So, as the leader of a group, how useful am I finding the system? The answer is: not very. Part of the reason is that most of our existing members are not signed up to Park Connect. For that to happen, I need to do more to offer training and encouragement for them to register. One or two will probably never register. The reality is there is no particular benefit to them in signing up to Park Connect. They already receive my regular emails about our forthcoming working bees and other events. I will continue to send these out because I can personalise them in a way that is not possible through Park Connect. For example, asking members to bring specific tools like a long-handled spade or a cordless drill, or simply making observations about the weather forecast for the day. The

result is that for existing members of our group, Park Connect is *just another thing for them to do*. Why go in to sign up for an activity when they've already told me they'll be there?

Where Park Connect could be useful is in attracting new members. It provides a central contact point for anyone interested in volunteering in parks throughout the state. As such, our group has already added the address, www.parkconnect.vic.gov.au, to the contact details on our promotional materials. So far, I have had one new person 'joining' our group on Park Connect although they have not yet attended any of our activities. Even if it helps to generate a bit of additional interest and support, that will be a benefit. I suspect this will happen in urban areas more than in regional Victoria. Here, most new members come as a result of word of mouth, through a neighbour, friend, work colleague or simply by visiting the park and seeing information about us on the noticeboard.

The catch is that the more Park Connect gets used, the more useful it will become. From looking through the groups and activities currently listed, there would appear to be a lot more happening with Friends groups in parks than is being displayed on Park Connect. To some extent, it is therefore up to Friends groups to ensure they list their activities and that their members register as volunteers. Having said that, Parks Victoria can do more to attract users to the website. As a self-acknowledged troglodyte, I am not the best-credentialed person to critique a website. However, I do find Park Connect somewhat clunky and slow to navigate around. In comparison with many other websites, it is static and dull to look at. This is not helpful if we are trying to attract more young people to volunteer in parks. Between Parks Victoria staff and their many Friends groups, we must have thousands of beautiful photographs of the parks and of the people who love them. It would be so uplifting to have a process where a small selection of these photos could be uploaded on a regular basis to the home page of Park Connect. It would be a reason to go there to see photos of a variety of activities being held in many of our favourite parks around Victoria.

An important function of Park Connect is to record the number of volunteer hours and details about the type of activities that have been completed. For example, rather than simply saying that 8 volunteers attended for 3 hours to do track maintenance, the system asks you to specify how many metres of track was restored. 'm certain Parks Victoria will be hoping to generate more accurate and complete data about the economic value of the work volunteers undertake every year in parks. This is a positive step forward and something all Friends groups would welcome. It might also be of interest to see what benefits for Friends will arise from this information. From the perspective of our own group, when completing the

activity report, the choices listed under ‘achievements’ are somewhat limiting. Our group spends many hours each year, clearing fallen trees and cutting overgrown vegetation from walking tracks. There appears to be no box that covers that activity. I find myself listing most of what we do under ‘other’. (*From talking to Ashlee Hope at Parks Vic, he may be about to modify the system to add this activity under achievements.*) Another gap in the reporting function is there is no place to record the time spent on preparation and planning for an activity. Again, if our group is a guide, that takes from 6 – 8 hours every month, sometimes more. All of it is currently unrecorded.

I’m sure there are other observations to be made about Park Connect, but that is enough for now. If we, as members of Friends groups, consider Park Connect to be worthwhile (and I for one do) then we need to be more vigilant about using it. Let’s get our existing members signed-up, make sure we list our activities and, most importantly, report on the results of our achievements. At the same time, we need to be providing feedback to Parks Victoria about where we think the website can be improved. Having a system where only **some** groups and activities are listed is the worst possible outcome. It fails to display the full extent of choice that is open to new and existing volunteers and, by not recording the full amount of work that is being done, it significantly under-values the work of volunteers in parks.

Hopefully, if we review Park Connect at the same time next year, we will have an even rosier tale to tell. If any other Friends groups would like to send a story to FriendsNet about your experiences with the system, I’m sure they would be received with a great deal of interest.

Merrin Butler, President, Friends of Mount Worth SP

Blackburn and District Tree Preservation Society



It has been an eventful year for the Blackburn and District Tree Presentation Society which received the inaugural Victorian Urban Landcare Award, in recognition of the almost 60 years of environmental advocacy by the group. Les Smith, who has been involved with the group since the early 1960's was honoured with an Order of Australia Medal for service to the environment.

The following is extracted from the November edition of the Tree Societies newsletter.

Tree Society Wins Inaugural Victorian Urban Landcare Award

At the 2017 Victorian Landcare Awards in a lavish ceremony at Government House on 1st September, the Tree Society was presented with the inaugural Victorian Urban Landcare Award.

Secretary Ann Clayton & Chairman David Berry (both in the middle of the picture) officially received the Award on behalf of the Tree Society from the Victorian Governor, Her Excellency, The Honourable Linda Dessau AC (on the right) and the Honourable Lily D'Ambrosio MP, Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Victorian State Government (on the left).



Friends of Lower Kororoit Creek were also nominated for this award and were Highly Commended.

Ann (and husband John), David (and wife Sally) along with fellow committee members Les Smith OAM (and wife Helen), Mary Crouch and Anne Payne enjoyed refreshments and a tour of the grand building after the awards ceremony. We are all very thrilled to receive the award that marks almost 60 years of environmental advocacy by the tree society in Whitehorse.



The Committee after the award presentation David Berry, Ann Clayton,

Les Smith, Helen (wife of Les), Anne Payne and Mary Crouch

Les Smith OAM

Les is now 'Les Smith OAM', as he was honoured with an Order of Australia medal for his community service on behalf of the environment in the Queen's Birthday Honours in June 2017. Les was officially presented with his award by the Governor of Victoria, The Honourable Linda Dessau at a ceremony at Government House in October.

The tree society made a detailed submission in support of Les Smith's nomination for the award. An excerpt from the tree society history, *Fighting for the Trees*, about Les follows: *Eminent Whitehorse environmentalist, Les Smith, has been involved in the conservation movement for over 60 years, initially in England in the late 1940's and continuing when he moved to Australia from the 1950's until the present day. Les joined the tree society in the early 1960s and has served with distinction on the executive committee in many roles in the intervening years including committee member,*

president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, membership secretary and newsletter editor. Les was involved in the campaign to save the Little Desert from being subdivided for farming in the late 1960s. This campaign was instrumental in launching a wave of environmental campaigns throughout Victoria and also led to the formation of what is now Environment Victoria, an organization to which Les has contributed greatly since its inception.

Les was Nunawading Citizen of the Year in 1975.

Les was an active member of the following community conservation organisations for many years as a committee or executive member:

- Bungalook Nursery (Whitehorse Indigenous Plant Project)
- Antonio Park, Yarran Dheran and Wandinong Bushland Park Advisory Committees,
- Urimbirra Co-operative Society
- Friends of the Little Desert
- The Mullum-Mullum Festival.

To Les, the 'Godfather' of the environmental movement in Whitehorse, please accept heartfelt congratulations from the tree society committee and membership.

Articles for FriendsNET

Suggestions for articles for FriendsNET are welcome. Please email to friendvic@hotmail.com or to the Secretary, Stephen Derrick at ecosystems@bigpond.com. If you want to include photos, please send separately as high resolution jpeg images, preferably in landscape format if possible.