



NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2022

Larneuk

Season of nesting birds

Late July to late August



Quarterly Newsletter Friends of Grampians-Gariwerd Inc.

Editor **ben and Leigh**

*Gariwerd (including the Grampians National Park) is on the lands of the
Barengi Gadjin, Eastern Maar and Gunditj Mirring peoples
and we acknowledge them as the Traditional Owners.*

Dairy Dates

10th September Saturday
Wetland Wander (at 'Sheet of Water')
Bruce McInnes
Contact: Rodney Thompson

8th October Saturday
Orchid Walk
Neil Marriot
Contact: Alison Bainbridge

12th November Saturday
Bats
Yvonne Ingeme (tbc)
Contact: Margo Sietsma

10th December Saturday
Christmas break-up
TBA

PREZ SEZ Aug 2022

Chilly Greetings to all, in this 'Deep Mid-Winter' edition. But already it's (still Deep) Late-Winter, and spring is on the horizon: *Acacias* starting to flower, orchid leaves pushing up through the cold ground, cuckoos calling, birds exhibiting nesting behaviour, i.e., chasing each other energetically! ... and we've been told it's going to be warmer 'soon'. Unfortunately, creeks aren't flowing *en masse* yet, even though it's nice and wet. But wait: Mt William Creek started to flow two days ago.

Thank you to Darcy Truman, our Community Engagement Officer while Hannah was away. You've been great to work with Darcy, and very helpful & patient with all the issues that arose. All the best for your next step, and we do hope to see you around! AND, welcome back Hannah! Your 6 months in a different area sounded most enjoyable and worthwhile, glad it worked out so well.

We have had some great excursions so far this Autumn/Winter; activity reports follow. Highlights included

seeing all those Nankeen Night Herons in an old *Pinus Radiata*; thanks Neil Mac.; also a big thank you to Cameron Hope from Stawell Gold Mines, for a really interesting and positive presentation of the work being done to help the environment.

State of the Environment 2021 report

The State of the Environment 2021 report, recently released, shows Australia has suffered catastrophic losses of wildlife and habitat: for example:

17 mammal species,
17 birds, and
19 frog species

have been added or upgraded to the endangered/critically endangered list in the past FIVE YEARS! Massive increases in environmental spending are needed in order to make a difference, and we all have a role in keeping pressure on Government and legislation both local and federal (see cartoon below).

Meeting with Parks 2022-03-08

Present: Judith, Rodney, ben, Leigh, Tammy, Darcy.

The purpose of the meeting was for Parks to review our proposed calendar for 2022. Tammy was happy with them all, and wanted clarification of which activities we were happy to advertise to the wider community;

A discussion on **Red Gum walk**, following on from David Witham's (Tracks Volunteers) offer of help and complete funding for maintenance and the clearing of the track past the 'Big Tree', where trees felled by the bushfire lie across it. Despite this being one of the easier flat walks and the first – and one of only a few – wheelchair accessible walks and easy flat walks in the Grampians National Park, there are bureaucratic problems: a major one being that Parks isn't very interested. They have a lot of tracks more highly promoted and popular on their list of desired upgrades. Tammy is going to find out if the Red Gum Track was officially closed by Parks, several

years ago. If it was, the problems seem insurmountable.

We also discussed the failure of the **Peaks Trail Committee** to invite FOGGs to the opening of this trail – an affront we found difficult to understand. FOGG members, apart from being so actively involved in the Park since its inception, have actively shown the planners areas of potential inclusion into the walk; one of these being one of the more popular parts of the trail – that running from Troopers Creek campground up past the 3 Cascades Falls.

Re calls for **‘Running Tracks’** (timed and competitive runs up & down existing walking tracks), discussion around safety for walkers noted the problems of safety for walkers. Also, just because people are ‘doing it’ (timed and competitive runs up & down walking tracks) is no reason for Parks to support it, that would only give them ‘rights’ and increase the numbers: - and who would give way to who on a narrow track?

MEMBERSHIP

Membership fee of \$25 Family, \$20 Single was due on July 1st 2022.

If you are behind, or not yet a member, please make a payment now; see BSB details below.

Make sure you have your name there clearly, so we know who it is from, and why (membership). If you are giving cash or a cheque, make sure it’s in an envelope with your name on it, plus reason for payment. If your name is not attached, your money will be treated as a donation.

Direct deposit (preferred method):

BSB: 063 528

Account no: 10081737

Account Name: Friends of Grampians-Gariwerd Inc

Thank you to those who have paid!

Autumn Bird Surveys – summary (from Kailee)

Despite planned burns, Covid-19 and other unexpected challenges we managed to survey 30 out of 36 sites.

This equates to **124** surveys (plus one extra personal survey that was submitted on the GGBS Birddata account...whoops! But they saw a *Bassian Thrush* so that’s worth it!!)

We had **27** dedicated volunteers who contributed approximately **648** hours of effort to conduct these surveys! Together we spotted **65** different species of birds and **746** individual birds; —not bad for us!

So, to all of you, keep warm (or get warm), and see you in the fast-approaching Spring. *Leigh.*

Management Plan update (17 Aug)

Parks Vic’s priorities for the first year of implementations are:

- Refresh Brambuk, the N.P. and Cultural Centre.
- Revitalise McKenzie Falls.
- Provide “Trailheads” in key towns for the GPT.
- Continue partnership with the Traditional Owners.
- Restore and protect Culturally significant places like rock shelter and rock art.
- Assessing priority rock climbing areas.
- Create a rock-climbing permit system.

See

<https://engage.vic.gov.au/gariwerd-management-plan>

MacKenzie Falls Revitalisation

The Victorian Government is investing \$7.76 million to revitalise the MacKenzie Falls area and surrounds, including the Zumsteins (Bun-nah) trail and day visitor area.

The project is open for feedback at

<https://engage.vic.gov.au/mackenzie-falls-revitalisation>

A Note from Rhonda

As of Friday 18th August I start long service leave until March 2023. I have worked for 30 years in state (20+ years Parks Victoria) and local government and it is time for me to take a break and breathe. During this time I have been part of some amazing achievements in protected area management not only here in the Grampians but in Northern and Central Victoria. I have been lucky enough to revisit many of these worked from my earlier years during the last 6 months working as Manager Regional Delivery Northern Country.

Projects such as Semi-Arid Woodlands protection from over grazing in the Mallee and the protection of the Major Mitchell Cockatoo, over 25 years of long-term commitment and thinking. Barmah National Park and amazing floodplain management which means these beautiful Red Gums, which were on the brink of disaster when I first worked there in early 90's, are now flourishing. A joint management is now in place with the Yorta Yorta Community. Seeing Terricks Terrick Grasslands again and knowing that the Plains Wanderer as well as other species are continuing to survive and thrive in this amazing and unique landscape that I was so lucky to be part of bringing into the Parks estate.

So over the next 6 months my focus is on our family, as our children transition to tertiary education and work, our farm, and on myself walking and being creative, and hopefully not attending a meeting and doing as little computer work as possible. Not sure who will be in my role at the Park, but it will be advertised shortly and hopefully it will be someone who can enjoy and see the beauty of this remarkable Gariwerd landscape, and can help to start the process of implementation of the Management Plan.

OUR EVENTS

Peaks Trail (part)

19th March

Neil Marriott

What a lovely day was the 19th March 2022 when a group of keen FOGG members headed uphill from Mt Difficult Rd along the new Peaks Trail to Werdug Camp. Werdug is the Traditional Owners' name for Wartook –what progress it would be to simply use this original name in the future! Most of the Peaks Trail gradient is easily traversed by most ages and this section is no exception.

We immediately started finding lots of interesting Grampian's plants, including numerous endemic species. First, we found the listed vulnerable endemic Victorian Flat-pea *Platylobium alternifolium* right beside the track. It was not long before we came to the turn-off to Werdug Camp and this is where we headed for our lunch and exploration of more flora and fauna. There were good stands of Grampians Tea-tree *Leptospermum turbinatum* as well as Williamson's Bush-pea *Pultenaea williamsoniana* along the track while Grampians Trigger Plant *Stylidium soboliferum* occasionally occurred in small colonies in the shallow mossy soils along the track all endemic to the Grampians. The latter two species are listed as endangered under the Victorian FFG Act, and the *Pultenaea williamsoniana* is also listed as Vulnerable under the Federal EPBC Act.

A number of us wondered how many of these plants would have been destroyed to clear the walking track which in most places was around 1.5-2 metres wide. How was this allowed when these plants are listed as endangered and vulnerable? Was any approval sought for the plants' removal? Rather disturbing questions when you consider that this walking trail traverses some hundreds of kilometres and would undoubtedly run through many

Grampians endemic plants, some of which are even rarer and more endangered than those above!



Victorian Flat-pea *Platylobium alternifolium*
(Photo: Neil)



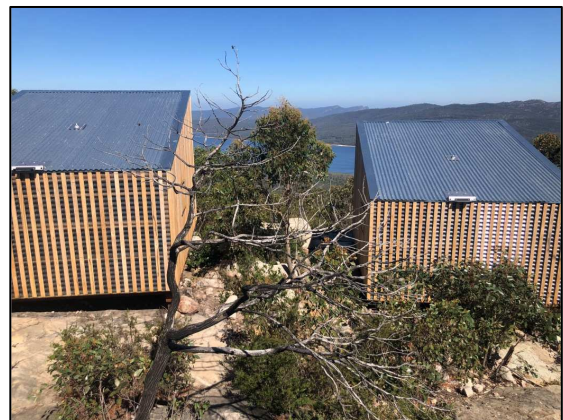
Plants of Grampians Trigger-plant, many showing damage from the track construction (Photo: Neil)

We soon came to the Werdug Camp, the site unfortunately visible in all directions due to the shiny galvanised water tank beside the camp shelter. The camp itself comprises two discreet areas, one where timber tent platforms cluster around the shelter and toilet, and the other further west near two “camp huts” that can be booked for exclusive, luxury indoor ‘camping’. Sadly, these two quite high units are set on the edge of the escarpment, visible from miles away, jutting up into the skyline. There is a large clearing around an open campfire site, while 2 fixed recliner

chairs have all the obstructing native vegetation in front cleared away for the sublime views out over Lake Werdug. Each site is where former wilderness bushland habitat existed, no doubt resulting in destruction of hundreds of vulnerable and/or endemic plants!



Clearing for the “deck chairs” overlooking Werdug
(Photo: Neil)



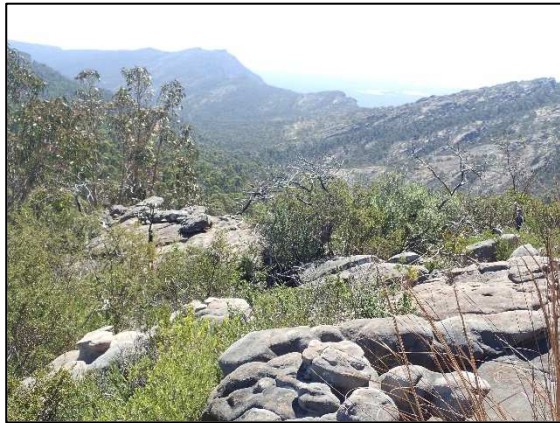
How much wilderness bushland was cleared for these two units on the edge of the escarpment?

How was commercial development like this allowed in the middle of a national park?

(Photo: Neil)

From Werdug Camp we headed back to the main Peaks Trail and turned south travelling over a series of low rocky ridges bedecked with the most beautiful native plants. In this area, Fairy Waxflower or Bendigo Wax *Philotheca verrucosus* is dominant, and the masses of developing flower buds promised a beautiful show in early spring. This plant is quite uncommon in the Grampians and mostly confined to the Mt Difficult range. It is more common

in Victoria's central Goldfield's region, hence its common name of Bendigo Wax.



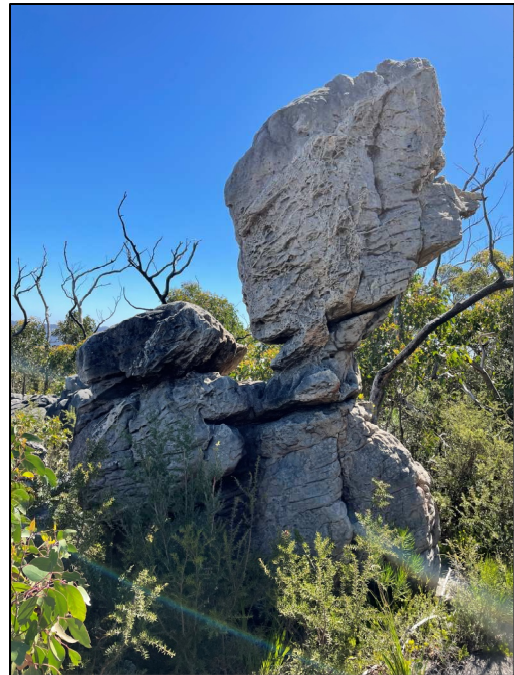
View north to Briggs Bluff (Photo: ben)

An exciting feature along this section was the frequent, but brief sightings of a flash of colour when the elusive Chestnut-rumped Heathwren dashed across the track either in front of us, or more often behind us when we imitated its beautiful high pitched reeling song. Neil Macumber spent quite a bit of time desperately trying to photograph this beautiful, seldom seen species.

Not far further on is "Lake Wartook Lookout" where we are treated to a magnificent panorama in all directions. I thought this was originally called "Four Lakes Lookout" as from it you can see Lake Werdug to the west, Lake Bellfield to the south, Fyans to the southeast and Lonsdale to the east! As far as I know this would have to be the only place in the entire Grampians where all four lakes can be seen from the one site. Nearby is another amazing piece of Nature's wonderful sculpting – a huge rock kept up from its surrounds on a small base that makes you wonder how it survives! Truly remarkable!

Leaving the ridgetop we headed south, along an incredible path - skilfully laid massive rocks create a gentle descent down to the carpark at Mt Difficult Rd. Here one car drove back to the starting point to retrieve the rest of our cars before we all relaxed in the sun with a well-earned cuppa! A big thank you to ben

Gunn for organising the walk, in this wonderful part of the Grampians.



Amazing natural sculpture along the track (Photo: Neil)



Margo leads the group back to our cars (Photo: Neil)

Astronomy – Gariwerd Sky

9th April

CANCELLED due to cloud cover.

Aboriginal Art site visit

12th May

Two views:

Chris Sitka

A damp and slightly drizzly day saw a small posse of FOGGS members, and one visitor who joined up on the day, set off on Ben Gunn's latest tour of Aboriginal Art sites on May 12th. Having come up from Melbourne specially to participate, I was hoping the inclement weather would not cause it to be cancelled. After we had none-the-less gathered at Buandik picnic ground we were all asked if we were up for a scramble, rather than the alternative proposed, which was a couple of more sedate walks to Billimina and Manja Shelters.

While two of our number chose to visit Billimina and the falls, we declared ourselves fit and eager for the adventure we piled into vehicles for the bumpy ride up the Goat Track. Noting, to our dismay, that just before the creek crossing, some 4WD hooners had ploughed themselves a sandy adventure track out of the bush.

Once out of the vehicles, to the surprise of a couple members who had never been bush-bashing before, Ben took off into the thick scrub and over the creek bed. As the scrub thinned there were plenty of wet rock-faces to carefully cross and a very steep uphill scramble. Enough to demand a few rest and recover stops.

When we reached our destination, the rock shelter (Boorpeck 1) we walked into took our breath away. It was magnificent and quite large. Ben gave us a spiel about the art there and then invited us to go a bit further.

As we rounded the corner of the escarpment, we all exclaimed in delight. The cathedral like size of the cave, Boorpeck 2, took our breath away. Wow. What a site!



The way to Boorpeck (Photo: Chris)

What did we learn? There were hand stencils from men, women and an infant – indicating that this had likely been a family dwelling site, despite how remote and hard to get to it might seem to us. There were several different people who had made their mark here, with one repeating an unusual hand shape a number of times.



The two Boorpeck art sites (Photo: Ben)

These sites are two of dozens of re-found art sites since the devastating bushfires. The most notable being one recently found by Parks staff on an isolated column of rock that has almost no protective overhang. This means that the number of art sites in Gariwerd could be much larger than is currently known – as

up till now researchers have only looked for them in rock shelters or at least under overhangs. So Gariwerd continues to surprise us.

We had brought our packed lunches and happily sat in the cathedral like cave while we ruminated on why stencil art had occurred before painting in Australia, and commented on the signs of visitors in the sandy floor e.g. goats, antechinus, and the remains of an old whitefella campfire.

We slithered down the slope back to the cars, well satisfied that the scramble had been worth it. Thanks, ben, for once again for sharing your vast knowledge of this topic, and for getting permission from the Traditional Owners to take us on this small journey into the indigenous history of Gariwerd. Only the day before he had been on a survey of a new found site. So possibly more adventures to come.



The crew in Boorpeck 2 (Photo: Wendy)

Wendy Bedggood

We met at Buandik picnic ground with the weather overcast and almost raining. Two of the party opted to stay at the picnic ground and do a short walk up a made track to Billimina shelter. The rest of us hopped into a couple of 4-wheel drive vehicles and headed up the Goat Track; definitely not suitable for 2-wheel drives. Ben's inbuilt GPS guided us to the spot

where we parked on the side of the track. From here we bush-bashed and scrambled up a rocky ridge where we came to a large, rock overhang. This was Boorpeck 1, the first of the art sites. Some of the art was quite faint and only visible after Ben had pointed it out. Other art work was easily seen. There were some stick figures and several hand stencils. Ben told us there is a program you can get for your iPad which uses coloured filters and assists with seeing very faint and old art work, hardly visible to the eye, however, Ben forgot his iPad so we could not see it in action. Ben explained the different styles of the artwork at this site compared to other nearby sites as well as those found in Northern Australia especially Kakadu and the Kimberly.



Section of the Boorpeck art panel (Drawing: ben)

From here we walked further around the escarpment to a very large balloon cave: Boorpeck 2. The cave in itself was interesting with its honeycomb formations caused by salt erosion. This cave had less art than the first site.

These rock art sites were recorded after the fires in 2014. Several new rock art sites have been found since the fires as various areas were easier to access with the lack of vegetation and surveying for the Peaks Trail track. Following the recording of the first Aboriginal art site in Gariwerd in 1896, few further sites were located until the 1960s. By 1981 there were 56 art sites documented, and today there are now 166

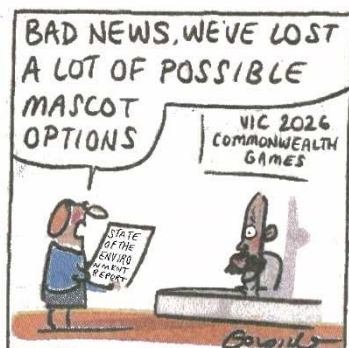
recorded sites with the number still set to increase.

We scrambled back down through the bush to our cars. The vegetation we went through had an odd splash of colour from *Correa reflexa* but not much else was in flower. When we were nearly at the track we found a leafless current plant with some very small fruit on it, a new plant for some of our party. Back at Buandik picnic ground we ate lunch and the weather held off for us.



One of the Boorpeck hand stencils (Photo: Wendy)

Plibersek vows to act on Environment in response to the dire state of native animal populations and ecosystems



The Age 20 July

Environmental Monitoring at Stawell Gold Mines

17th June

Geoff Strum

Our June activity was an excellent presentation at the Parks Office on the environmental monitoring undertaken by the Stawell Gold Mines (SGM). Cameron Hope, Environment and Community Superintendent at Stawell Gold Mines, delivered the presentation during which he exuded a passion for retaining the integrity of the environment while supporting the extractive industry of gold mining.

Cameron has a Bachelor Biological Science from La Trobe University and has worked in natural resource management since 2007, being employed at SGM for 3.5 years. Given the proximity of the SGM to the Grampians it was good to be assured that not only was SGM monitoring and preventing any impacts to the environment it was also rehabilitating impacts created pre current mine ownership.



Cameron and Strum (photo: Leigh)

A short history of mining in the area described discovery of gold in Pleasant Creek in 1853, heralding a gold rush mining the alluvial resources, which however all but petered out by the end of the decade. This activity was mostly to the south and West of the current Stawell

Town. Into the 1860's quartz reefs were begun to be mined on the area we now know as the Big Hill and through the 1870's great prosperity was built on the gold resources and Stawell was born. Since that time numerous mines have come and gone and currently, we have only SGM.

SGM is a major industry for Stawell with currently 229 employees (FTE 206) and has 62 Contractors engaged (FTE 57) with North Stawell Minerals (an exploration company) employing 10 staff and with 17 Contractors engaged.

Monitoring of the environmental impacts of the mine is in some cases mandated by Government but SGM has a commitment to be aware of its impacts and eliminate any that may be a negative. Cameron outlined how monitoring occurred under 7 categories;

Air Quality

SGM operates four real time DustTrak units that provide real time air quality information in areas of potential operational impact. These allow immediate alerts to air quality events which may be a result of mine activity or background events. One background monitor away from the area of potential operational influence is maintained so that the mine is aware of background air quality. Alert systems are set up for environmental limits which alert staff of events or of the failure of a unit. An online dashboard in the office allows for proactive steps to be taken immediately.

Units record both PM10 and PM2.5

PM10 can be an irritant. Coarser. "dust".

PM2.5 can get into lungs, result in health issues. Much finer. Not always noticeable.

PM10 Limit 60µg/m3 per day.

PM2.5 limit 36µg/m3 per day.

TSF2 or the tailings area has a Dust Management Plan in operation for summer

months. This plan has a day weather forecasting tool which highlights risk of a potential dust issue. Dedicated staff monitor both the environment with real time monitors including cameras and have access to equipment to respond as necessary i.e. water carts.

SGM also maintains 11 depositional dust gauges in areas of potential operational impact and three others away from the area of potential operational influence. These gauges are emptied once a month and the contents assessed by a third-party laboratory. Cameron highlighted that these gauges were a reactive tool that didn't allow real time responses. The standard for these gauges is a limit of 4g/m2/month which SGM continues to meet.



Real time monitoring station (photo SGM)

Ground Water

SGM maintains approximately 120 ground water monitoring points both onsite and offsite. These monitors are interested in both the depth of ground water and the chemistry of that ground water. SGM also have bores which extract water which is returned to the tailings dam with some of it treated before return to the dam. Depending on the location, bores may be monitored either monthly, quarterly, six monthly, annually or three-yearly.

Currently an EPA notice relating to offsite thiocyanate detection at a location

downslope from the tailings dam is in place. Cyanide is a chemical used in the extraction of gold from the milled ore which is mostly recycled with only low levels making their way to the tailings dam.

SGM operates a hydraulic containment system to extract groundwater which forms a depression in the water table which prevents further spread. The extracted water is either returned to the tailing dam or some is treated to dissipate the cyanide. Working with university collaborators, naturally occurring organisms from the tailings area have been identified that breakdown the thiocyanate. Water extracted from containment bores is treated using these organisms so that the treated water is returned to the tailings dam without thiocyanate impurity.

Monitoring of ground water is required to be submitted in reports to the EPA annually and these reports are checked off by an EPA accredited auditor. There has been no recent offsite detections downslope of the tailing dam which indicates the system is working effectively.

Surface Water

SGM maintains four offsite monitoring locations of surface water, all are downstream of the mine footprint. One is from a farm dam and another from Concongella creek. These are monitored during the winter spring months with the main objective of monitoring water chemistry to ensure no impacts from site operations.

Results do indicate high levels of some elements but these are naturally occurring and to date no mine site contamination has been detected.

Blast Vibration

Blasting is required to access the ore bodies and to extract the gold bearing ore. These are known as development tunnels and production stopes respectively. Development firing is carried out with lesser charges and these occur after every

shift change, extracting about 300t of rock. Production stopes are a majority of ore and are significantly larger extracting 000's t of rock. These are fired between 5:30 and 6:30pm several times a week.



Rainfall monitoring (photo SGM)

A text message service is available where notice of impending blasting is communicated so that those who might feel a minor impact of the blast are not surprised by the blast.

The level of vibration created by blasting is monitored by units in strategic locations around Stawell. These units accurately measure surface vibration which, by regulation, must be no more than 10mm/sec and 95% of firings must be below 5mm/sec. Cameron was able to show via a graph of hundreds of recordings, from the first three months of 2022, that all firings were below the 5mm/sec vibration level or minimal disturbance to neighbours.

Noise

Noise emitted from the mine is monitored to ensure no untoward impacts on neighbours. Noise monitoring is reported quarterly from recordings taken across three periods: day 0700 to 1800, evening 1800 to 2200 and night 2200 to 0700 and, four locations with four step-out locations (moving further away from the mine site four times).

Total noise levels are recorded which is variously impacted by background noise such as wind, animals, birds, vehicles etc. Some surface operations are discontinued during the evening/night period to ensure no disturbance to neighbours. Decibel limits are set for noise during the three periods with lower levels targeted at night. Cameron was able to demonstrate via tabulated data that only during the night time some exceedances occurred but it is also a time when background noise impacts the recordings.

When nuisance noise is detected, the elevated readings trigger a process where remedial action occurs (perhaps a noisy bearing replaced) as well as neighbours are contacted to gain their reaction to the noise recorded.

Flora and Fauna

Using aerial photography Cameron was able to demonstrate that the mine footprint contained a significant area of natural vegetation which has for many years been largely undisturbed. Indigenous plants are encouraged and protected which provides a habitat for a wide range of native species. Wallabies, kangaroos, echidnas, many bird species, reptiles etc either live within or traverse the mine footprint and they are actively protected

Rehabilitation

SGM has an objective to return disturbed land back to an original or otherwise agreed end land use such as bushland, farm land, industrial use or whatever. This objective requires the creation of a stable and non-polluting environment which, once established and independently proven to be successful, can be handed on to new custodians. This process is exhaustive and generally takes more than ten years of work, scientific monitoring and independent reports.

Again with the aid of aerial images Cameron demonstrated how a tailings facility from past mining activities had been progressively rehabilitated and now

held substantial vegetation including well established trees.

Currently SGM is undertaking rehabilitation on a past open cut mine known as the Davis Pit, which was created long before the current ownership of SGM took control. Again, using aerial images, Cameron demonstrated how rock from underground operations had been deposited to almost the topography prior to mining. Clay stockpiled from other mining activity has then been spread and levelled to the original topography. The next steps will be ensuring the stability of the area by perhaps the growing of pioneer species to commence the process of getting organic matter into the soil surface with successive plantings towards establishing local endemic flora. Once completed the area will return to the crown and may be managed by local government for recreation purposes.

Cameron was questioned about the risk of a miner walking away from rehabilitation but he was able to reassure us that before a licence is granted SGM had to establish a bond (in the \$M's) which could be used to fund rehabilitation should it renege on responsibilities.

Community Grants

In thanking the group for the opportunity to present the monitoring work of SGM Cameron made us aware of a community grants scheme funded by SGM. It can be applied for by local community groups and is targeted at Educational, Environment, Recreation or General activities. Applications for the next round open in November 2022, further information and to apply visit;

stawellgoldminescommunityhub.com.au/

Strum

Bird watching at Lake Lonsdale
Sat. 9 July
ben Gunn



Green Hole (Photo: ben)

After a number of rather cool mornings, it was pleasant to begin our 9am bird excursion without a frost ... there was however a rather cold, but not dispiriting, southerly. Neil greeted us at the Green Hole car park with a brief chat about birds, bird books and bird apps, before he trotted us down the track to see the roosting Nankeen Night herons (3 adults, one immature). Back at Green Hole itself we spent a good time observing for any bird that moved or called (see list below). The waterhole itself was the 'ground' of a disappearing darter, cormorant and grebe.



Grebe?? where? (Photo: ben)



Pied Darter, Green Hole (Photo: Neil)

Moving up to the dam wall we found the lake very low indeed, but still with a good range of species, although seeing some of them required the use of Neil's tripod-based telescope, and it took some time before we were sure that there were swans and pelicans near the other side of the lake. As the wind picked up, so did we, driving around to the boat ramp, where we had the @ @ @



Jackie Winter (Photo: Neil)

Hoping for something different (birds that is), we then drove into the Conservation Reserve on the north of the Sandbar Road. Despite the variety around the water, the bush was amazingly quiet and while we did pick up a few more species, the number of birds was very low. The bird that piqued Neil's interest here was the Black-chinned Honeyeater that we could hear but not see.

We knocked off at 11.30; all of us very pleased with the outing, the weather, and most of all with Neil's invaluable knowledge of our birds. Thanks Neil.

ben

BIRD LISTS

At Green Hole

Mudlark, Choughs, Night heron, White-faced heron, Brown treecreeper, Red wattlebird, Red-rumped parrot, Whistling kite, Dusky moorhen, Magpie, Musk lorikeet, White-plumed honeyeater, Galah, Australian raven, Crimson rosella, Willy wagtail, Blue wren, and Kookaburra.

On the Lake

Yellow spoonbill, Great Egret, Grey teal, Black swan, Shell-duck, Masked lapwing, Black-faced dotterel, Silver gull, Pelican, Common Starling, Corella, Musk duck, and an antechinus up close and very personal: have you ever seen an antechinus wag its tail?

At the Reserve

Noisy miner, Welcome swallow, Musk lorikeet, Black-chinned honeyeater, Striped pardalote, Jacky winter, Red wattlebird and Willy wagtail (again).

Study shows **logged forests** burn at greater severity than intact forests. David Lindenmayer says that VicForests has been provided with the information, but has chosen to ignore it, thus fuelling Victoria's bushfire risk.

The Age 16 July

Golton Gorge Picnic Area re-opened

PV press release

The Grampians Walking Track Support Group and Parks Victoria have 'finally' celebrated the long-awaited re-opening of the Golton Gorge Picnic area and walking track in Grampians National Park (Gariwerd) this week (Friday April 1st), after heatwaves and COVID impacts cancelled multiple celebration dates throughout the past two years.

Golton Gorge is an impressive seasonal waterfall located 28km north of Halls Gap on the Mt Difficult Range. An old walking track used to pass up the northern side of the gorge and return on the south, crossing the creek in a number of places and climbing through the gorge to the top of the range. Sadly, the walking track and picnic area were badly damaged in the 2014 Northern Grampians bushfire and were closed shortly after. Challenges with the reinstatement of the northern alignment through the steep sections of the gorge and the need to protect newly discovered cultural heritage, meant a new alignment was required, which at the time was unachievable.

However, community members from both sides of the Grampians ranges rallied together to ensure the popular visitor site was not closed permanently. Passionate locals worked closely with Parks Victoria to design a return walk on the southern side of the gorge.

A proposal was readily accepted by Parks Victoria in late 2016 and planning and approvals were sought for the project to proceed. The Walking Track Support Group attracted the interest of locals and a few bushwalkers from elsewhere, and the project began on ground in June 2018.

After 18 months and 21 working bees of enthusiastic "pick and shovel" work the task was finished. A contractor was engaged to remodel the entrance road and car park, and Parks Victoria had put finishing touches with fencing and signage.

Members of the Grampians Walking Track Support Group, local bushwalking clubs and Parks Victoria Celebrated on Friday with a BBQ lunch, ribbon cutting, plaque unveiling and cake. Members of the group also took a stroll along the walk to revisit the works they had completed over 18 months ago.



The plaque (Photo: Parks Vic)

This walk is an attractive addition to the many great experiences to be had in our National Park, at any time of year, but especially so when there is a good flow of water over the falls. Golton Gorge is located 28 km north of Halls Gap on Mt Zero Rd.



The cake (Photo: Parks Vic)

David Witham President Grampians Walking Track Support Group

It is a real cause for celebration that a number of motivated members of the community can come together to achieve such a worthy objective. They have

forged a new 350m track, largely along a steep hillside then up beside a series of three waterfalls, to a platform with a magnificent outlook at the base of a fourth one.

Tammy Schoo, Ranger Team Leader, Parks Victoria:

After multiple cancellations due to hot weather and COVID restrictions, it is fantastic to finally come together with community to celebrate the passion for this project and reflect on the hard work and many volunteer hours that went into its reconstruction. The walking track group members should feel proud of their efforts and we thank them for their patience in waiting for this special celebration to occur.

Summary of Advisory Group meetings (Dec 2021 – June 2022)

Margo Sietsma

Much discussion and news as the new Greater Gariwerd Management plan is about to be released. We were told that the management plan will be an example now for other parks. “Greater Gariwerd” means the Grampians National Park plus the nearby smaller State Reserves.

Gariwerd is a living cultural landscape:

The vision of the plan is that the land it is a cultural landscape, which will be culturally renewed and strengthened. Key strategies include supporting Traditional Owners to make decisions, to use where possible traditional owners’ names for places, to make Brambuk a key hub and to support Traditional Owner groups in their connection with visitors.

Following community feedback more information was included about non-aboriginal history was included in the plan and the value of community and volunteer knowledge was recognised.

The renaming of sites will be gradual, with consideration being given to the need

for awareness of where the sites are in case of an emergency.

Gariwerd will be healthy country: Key strategies include: protecting the environment by reducing pest species, visitor impacts, increased knowledge of traditional owners' land management practices, protecting water ecosystems in a drying climate, re-introducing species, minimise noise and light pollution. Community feedback resulted in the re-introduction of dingoes being postponed but discussion will continue.

Improving visitor experience: Strategies include improving the Halls Gap–Wartook corridor; possibly reintroducing camping at Zumsteins; improving McKenzie Falls area; encouraging Aboriginal tours and talks at Peaks Trail (GPT) sites; introduce a **free rock-climbing permit** in order to educate rock climbers to be more careful; new rules for rock climbing (there are over 100 rock climbing sites and 13 bouldering sites); no change to bushwalking rules; all cultural sites currently open to the public will remain open; and camping will now only be allowed at designated sites.

Community feedback included: maybe PV should ban wood fires between 1st Dec1 and 31st March; the need for more vehicle-based camping sites; and investigating hang gliding operation. Feedback re rock climbing included the need for conditions on bouldering and the need to ban sites if there were problems; the need to find an extra all-abilities site in addition to the one at Summer Day valley; and the need to have extra areas.

Caring for Country together: Strategies include supporting Traditional Owners to partner with the community; more work with adjoining property owners; engage the broader community through the AG and other methods; engagement with volunteer groups; work with research partners to better co-ordinate applying and

promoting research; and identifying knowledge gaps.

Cost of implementing the plan: In 2020 the cost was planned to be \$18,5 million. (Brambuk renewal, McKenzie Falls, GPT). Now \$??

Discussion: some on climbing; quite a bit of concern about the lack of staff and staff funding.

April 2022

Jamey Staples led the meeting as Rhonda is still working with Northern Parks (expected to return July 1st 2022), and Tammy, who is acting in her absence, has Covid. So Ballarat and Melbourne staff are stepping in, Jamey introduced himself as fairly new to PV and responsible for several diverse parks and reserves. Some Reserves have Advisory Groups (AG), some not (e.g. Arapiles has quite an active AG). He felt PV was not emphasising the role of AGs enough (e.g. Would the rock-climbing issue be better off if the AGs had more say?). Covid has proved a real problem, staff challenges etc. Connor Smith has been appointed to Mike Steven's role temporarily. Dunkeld residents are having a meeting next week to protest their opposition to any re-introduction of dingoes. The decision was made to make sure we did have meetings, that members who can't come physically could attend via zoom.

May 2022

Convened by Jamey and Tammy. Tammy is now acting chief ranger.

Proposed Tourism Infrastructure updates from Liz Roder. There is a budget of \$5m for the GPT trailheads, \$7.7m for various things at McKenzie falls and \$6.2m for work at Brambuk (two parts, the building and the grounds).

GPT Trailheads: Importance of conveying Aboriginal cultural values. Will be starting talk with groups in Halls Gap on welcoming and educating GPT walkers.

McKenzie falls work: Need to inform about both indigenous and European heritage, safety issues, sense of arrival, site capacity, commercial opportunities.

Brambuk: Working on engaging with traditional owner groups on developing a governance model, then a business and master planning model – infrastructure needs, visitor activities. Hoping to soon do some minor repairs to re-open, then more work on building upgrade, landscape work, events.

Fire and emergency report: It was a quiet season this year with only 11 very small fires, all caused by lightning, and all out quickly. As is the case every year, new recruits were appointed for the fire season. The GPT use adds a complication to planned burns, will try to do more winter burns. Experimenting with using drones to both light and monitor burns,

Brambuk: current situation update: Cafe has re-opened, the gift shop has benefited from this, staff handle park information, campground bookings, rock climbing permits.

Environmental programmes: Connor Smith is acting in the role left vacant when Mike left (but after this meeting was appointed to this role). Funding comes in 3 ways: recurrent, tied (currently sallow wattle, goats, rabbits, deer, cats and Grampians ark), and grants for specific projects. Some useful lessons have come out of the sallow wattle work, Work on deer control resulted in the removal of 57 deer over 49 nights. No progress on cat removal, waiting on gaining permits. Is this something the AG could help with? Art site signage needs work.

Visitor and Community engagement report. Darcy has temporarily replaced Hannah in the role of community engagement. Two rangers have been appointed to assist with walking track work, plus a temporary worker. People encouraged to use the ‘snap-send-solve’ app to report issues on tracks to PV.

Budget and Resources: Funding is changing rapidly (e.g. funding for the GPT is separate from funding of local staff, but there is no allowance for all the hours local staff inevitably need to put in). More staff are reporting to managers in Ballarat, Horsham, Melbourne. The recent State budget was not good for DELWP or PV, but just a little loss for this office, so far. So no loss of local staff but costs are rocketing up. Hoping to get 3 more staff on the GPT team. Short term contracts are a problem.

General:

1. A query was raised re car parking near Mt Sturgeon and the Picaninny.
2. Damage caused to quite a few gates which had been closed by PV, so that people’s vehicles could enter.
3. 165 people attended a meeting held in Dunkeld about dingoes in the GNP, showing the level of concern in that community – including the local politician. Any action from the AG needed?
4. What are the priorities now for the AG with the new management plan?
5. Note that many ex-goldmining sites are now the responsibility of the GNP manager.
6. Important that we work well with Traditional Owner groups.

June 2022

1. Poisoning of cats has not started due to some unexpected problems, but trapping and killing of cats and foxes is proceeding.

2. Carparking issues: People are parking at Mt Sturgeon and blocking access to a

neighbour's drive. The carparking area is not actually PV but VicRoads. Parks need to get a sign on the drive gate. Here, and also at the Picanniny, people are needing to cross the road. A pedestrian crossing or at least a reduction in the speed limit is required. If AG members hear of a near accident please report to VicRoads.

Carparking is also limited at Mt Zero. Gil offered to show some unused roads in the area that could easily be converted to parking areas.

3. Compliance issues: There is still a very expensive problem with people demolishing gates closing off roads. Not only the damage to the gates, but then to the roads which were closed for a reason. It is not just this park, Mt Arapiles has had the same problem, which their AG helped with by talking to the local 4wd clubs, etc. Other problems are people taking dogs into the National Park. This is complex as dogs are allowed on the VicRoads roads, but not allowed on walking tracks).

Also, illegal timber harvesting in the smaller parks is taking advantage of the absence of rangers and of concerned folk. There was also an incident of hooners at Mt Christabel.

PV has decided to spend \$50,000 so staff can be trained to become Authorised Officers and so can charge offenders. They will be able to wear body cameras. But it will be quite daunting and they will need support as they start. Installing cameras at the sites where gates are damaged or wood is taken requires a huge amount of paperwork.

4. Other issues: Maps of where climbing is permitted or forbidden are not good enough and better labelling of tracks is needed. FOGG could perhaps help with, and pay for, better signage at art sites, (Tammy please to know this, but again paper work is a nuisance. She'll look into it.).

Staffing is a real problem at the moment, several positions remain unfilled.

Hannah was due back here, so Darcy finished, but now Hannah has been delayed in her temporary job, so no-one is in the role of volunteer coordinator.

Connor Smith, who has been appointed to the position Mike Stevens had, was away doing training to be an authorised officer,

5. Future of the AG: All the current members terms will finish this year. How do we get new people? There should be better representation of younger people, Traditional Owners and migrants. All of us to work on this before the next meeting.

6. Discussion re the new management plan: To go on the agenda for our next meeting in August and we agreed to have further meetings in September and October.

Margo had a further meeting with PV head office staff, NG Shire reps, and Robert Irvine about what signage and art works should come to HG for the GPT, and where they should be placed. More to come on this.



Bird Surveys! (Gary Larson 1982)