

ENVIRONMENT NEWS – June 2017

Dr Roz Jessop, Environment Manager and the Environment team

PEST PLANTS

Park-wide Weed Management

During May, Environment rangers completed 165 hours of weed control. Since February, 280 hours has been spent removing Marram Grass at Cape Woolamai with Newhaven College. The other major weed projects have been: Horehound, Inkweed, and Apple of Sodom on the Summerland Peninsula, Berrys Beach and Cape Woolamai. In addition, Ecoblade contractor John Baulch spent a week up at Cape Woolamai on woody weed follow-up and continued the trial on the effectiveness of Ecoblade on Kikuyu and Buffalo Grass (see pictures below). There was also park-wide follow up on Kikuyu especially in Shearwater habitat. For the Ramsar project area, there was continued Polygala and Pittosporum removal at Observation Point.



Ecoblade: Senior Ranger Mark Merryfull & John Baulch



Ecoblade can reduce the biomass of kikuyu while applying herbicide without drift.



Panorama of a large infestation of Kikuyu treated by Ecoblade. (photos Jon Fallaw)

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

REVEGETATION/GREEN ARMY/VOLUNTEERS

With the first rains of winter the planting season has started, with a focus on trees early this season.

Friends of Scenic Estate Reserve (FOSER) have had a planting day enhancing the Moonah woodland along the foreshore. We managed to put 33 Moonahs in, along with a few trial plots of direct seeding.

National Australia Bank volunteers helped plant out at the KCC plantations with close to 100 gum trees including the koala's favorites of Manna gums and Blue gums.

Nature Parks' Penguin Parade Rangers have once again given their own time as volunteers to help establish sustainable habitat for those penguins being relocated out of the construction zone for the new Penguin Parade Visitor Centre. So far we have put in 30 penguin homes and over 1000 sedges and trees. We are trialling a few different management strategies to reduce the kikuyu and replace it with penguin friendly natives. A huge thank you to those dedicated staff.

We have also started planting out the Beacon on the Summerland Peninsula. Many school groups and Green Army have helped us with this site. It's an area that has been taken over by annual grasses, so we aim to reduce them and out-compete them, creating native grassland suitable for penguins and shearwaters. This will become one of Green Army's main sites.

We had another successful planting day with RACV workers and members. This partnership is working wonders, and close to 3000 plants were put in at the Beacon and at Berrys Beach ecological burn site (removal of kikuyu to promote shearwater habitat). We look forward to the next one in October.



The Green Army team has just started with us and will be working around the Nature Parks and for the San Remo Foreshore Management Committee for the next 20 weeks. They will be assisting Nature Parks' Rangers through revegetation and weed control of the Summerlands Peninsula, Cape Woolamai and Churchill Island/ Fishers Wetland. Revegetation works will also be undertaken at San Remo.

We have had a lot of interest in the upcoming volunteer weeks outlined below. These volunteers will be assisting with revegetation and weed control around the Nature Parks.

- 26th June – 7th July
- 24th July – 28th July
- 25th September – 29th September

Surf Beach Sunderland Bay Coastcare Group has been busy working on reducing vegetation destruction on the south coast. Their planting season will start next week.

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

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

Friends of Koalas had a successful day removing rubbish and cleaning the Harbison and Coghlan roadsides as part of Clean Up Australia Day in March.

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

PEST ANIMALS

Foxes

In May a fox sighting was reported by a community member and initiated an investigation from program staff with detection dogs, night-time surveillance and infra-red cameras however no further indication has been found to date. Monitoring continues in outlying areas.

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

Feral Cats

Feral cats have been implicated in 28 of the last 29 native animal extinctions in Australia and they have the potential to impact local species on Phillip Island such as Short-tailed Shearwaters, Hooded Plovers, bush birds and reptiles. Feral cats have also been known to transmit diseases such as toxoplasmosis to pet cats, native mammals and humans.

Feral cat trapping is occurring on the Summerland Peninsula and at Fishers Wetland near Churchill Island (as part of the Western Port Ramsar Protection Project). To date in 2016/17 a total of 104 feral cats have been removed from Phillip Island.

Rabbits

The release of the new strain of Calicivirus (RHDV1 K5) occurred in March and initial monitoring at the release site indicates a 50% reduction in rabbit numbers. This compares to around an average 36% reduction at other Victorian release sites and a 42% average reduction at release sites Australia wide.

As the virus is transmitted by flies it is anticipated it will continue to spread to other parts of the island as the weather warms up later this year. This new strain of calicivirus will hopefully overcome resistance in the rabbit population and will achieve a knockdown in the population to allow land managers and the community to integrate other control methods such as warren destruction and baiting on larger properties to further reduce the impacts of rabbits on Phillip Island.

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

HOODED PLOVER (EASTERN) *Thinornis cucullatus cucullatus* (EPBC listed as Vulnerable)

Despite not having any fledglings produced before the New Year period, the Phillip Island Hooded Plovers have rallied to achieve the Island's second most successful breeding season on record.

Hoodie summary for the 2016/17 breeding season:

- There were 33 nest recorded on the Islands containing 75 eggs.
- 13 nests hatched (39.4%), producing 32 chicks.
- 13 of these 32 chicks (40.6%) made it to fledge.

Below are the fledgling locations:

- 1 Surf Beach (Park St), banded and flagged YLF '31'
- 1 Justice Rd YLF 34
- 2 Bella Vista Rd YLF 32 and YLF 33
- 1 Colonnades YLF 35
- 1 Silverleaves YLF 41
- 2 Elizabeth Cove YLF 39, YLF 40
- 3 Hutchison Beach YLF 36, YLF 37, YLF 38
- 1 Woolamai SLSC YLF 42
- 1 Anzacs West YLF 43



YLF 42 at Woolamai SLSC West, not long after fledging (photo Dan Lees).

Beach-nesting Bird conference:

From the 26th to the 28th of May Jon Fallaw and Daniel Lees travelled to Willunga, South Australia to attend the Biennial Beach-nesting Birds conference and present Phillip Island Nature Parks 2016/17 success (poster presentation). The conference was well attended with over 150 attendees and boasted the largest turn out of any previous conference. The topics covered were diverse and included: a nation-wide summary of Hooded Plover breeding, the ecological trap created by humans on much of Australia's coastline, kelp harvesting on South Australian beaches and the fight to

minimise its impact on Beach-nesting Birds and, the lessons learned from radio-tracking Hooded Plover chicks.

The second day of the conference kicked off in style with everybody's favourite bloke Kev Collister running a condensed PEACE training workshop. Following Kev, further small workshops were run including: volunteer recruitment/engagement, shorebird identification, communication with beach users and beach-nesting bird behaviour. Jon and Daniel were privileged to also be invited to the conference's 3rd day; only regional coordinators were invited to the 'National Recovery Meeting' to discuss the future of the Beach-nesting Birds program and the mitigation of continuing and developing threats. Overall the conference was a lot of fun, very informative and made us contemplate how lucky Phillip Island is in having: good conservation resources, being almost fox free, and; being without vehicles, commercial horse training or commercial kelp harvesting on our beaches.



Daniel Lees, Maureen Christie (Shorebirds Southeast) and Jon Fallaw attending the National Recovery Meeting (3rd day of the conference).

The Next Hooded Plover and Gull Count: Thursday 06/07/2017; meet at 09:00am at Enviro/Research (Penguin Parade) contact Jon Fallaw if you are interested in coming along jfallaw@penguins.org.au

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

KOALAS

In May the Koala Conservation Centre admitted one wild female koala in to care after it was rescued in the main street of Cowes. Kept for observation overnight she was released in to the eucalypt trees surrounding the KCC wetland. It was refreshing to see a healthy, wild koala surviving outside the confines of the KCC considering there are likely to be less than 30 left on the island.

Works continue in the plantations to clear and mulch areas where rangers are preparing to plant several hundred Eucalypts with the help of volunteers over the coming months. These trees will provide a future source of supplementary feed for the koalas in the pens and boardwalks. Planting of a mixture of ground covers and shrubs is soon to begin in the KCC wetland and surrounds also.

One of the KCC koalas, Lorien, was euthanized recently after suffering several seizures. She was the only KCC koala to test positive to retro virus (KoRV) during last year's health checks. KoRV is uncommon in southern koalas and is linked to lymphoma and leukaemia. It is not known whether her positive status contributed to her death.

Dan Kallstrom and Ashley Reed recently attended the second National Koala Conference in Port Macquarie. There were just under 250 delegates present for the 3 day conference. Interesting presentations included medication issues in koalas, retrovirus updates, impact of global warming on koala habitat, food tree choices and issues, and over browsing of food trees by koalas.

Weed works around the KCC are continually ongoing and the cat trapping program is now focusing on the South Coast.

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

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

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

WILDLIFE REHABILITATION AND ANIMAL WELFARE

Wildlife Rehabilitation Rangers were busy during the Short-tailed Shearwater (STSW) fledging season, responding to many calls for assistance and information about these birds. Over the months of autumn, rangers were also called out to rescue and care for a range of orphaned, sick or injured wildlife. Apart from the many STSW rescued and cared for over this period, other species included Little Penguins, Cape Barren Geese, Brush-tail and Ring-tail Possums, Swamp Wallabies, Purple Swamp-hens, Masked Lapwings, Echidnas, Kookaburras, a Wattle bat, an Eastern Rosella, Pelicans, a Crested Tern, Seals, Galahs, Magpies, Black Swans, a Long-necked Tortoise, and a White headed Petrel.

Nature Parks' Rangers responded to approximately 265 calls to the wildlife hotline during the months of March, April and May, including about 85 calls regarding Short-tailed Shearwaters alone. There were also many calls (approx.25) regarding a large Australian fur seal hauled out under the

Phillip Island Bridge at Newhaven. The seal had an old wound on its lower back that was slowly healing, and rangers were checking up on it regularly. New seal update signage was installed nearby and members of the public advised to leave it alone to rest and recover.



Over 50 Little Penguins have been cared for in the Wildlife Clinic during this time. Penguins have been treated for a range of injuries or conditions including head trauma, leg injuries, open wounds and malnourishment.

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

SHORT-TAILED SHEARWATER RESCUE PROGRAM

The annual Short-tailed Shearwater rescue program ran from 18th April for approx. 3 weeks. 534 Short-tailed shearwaters were rescued from the roads during this years' fledging season. It was a great effort from all the staff and the wonderful volunteers that assisted the patrols again this year. Two patrols ran most evenings until about 10.30pm, and one patrol each morning starting at 5.30am. Almost 200 staff hours were devoted to the rescue program, and there has been great positive feedback from the community about the professionalism and presence of the Nature Parks Environment Rangers and volunteers. The interpretive leaflets that are handed out prior to the season were well received, along with the beach signage. The lights on the bridge were again turned off during the peak fledging time to reduce the number of deaths.



COASTAL/WETLAND MANAGEMENT

Sunderland Bay/Surf Beach Coastcare Group

SBSB have been busy with laying Jutemesh at the blow out near the Surfies Point blow- out. The Jute-mesh is able to slow the movement of water across the ground and trap native seed to assist with the revegetation process.



Dune Restoration Project/Cape Woolamai



We have undertaken a partnership with the University of Melbourne to monitor dunal changes after the removal of marram grass (introduced in the 1970s for dune stabilization). A drone was used by the Nature Parks Research Department to get some baseline data and record changes in dune profile. This was flown by Ross Holmberg (PINP) ably assisted by Dr Andre Chiaradia (PINP) and Dr Theresa Konlechner from the University of Melbourne, who is collaborating on this project. This is an exciting new direction for the Nature Parks.

National Surfing Reserve and Woolamai Surf Life Saving Club members and the general public are invited to attend another Dune Restoration morning on June 25th, meeting at the Cape Woolamai Club house at 10.00am.

Phillip Island hosted the Bi annual CoastCare Forum at the Nobbies. CoastCare engages volunteers and land managers along the Victorian Coast. The Forum was run over two days with many speakers, information sharing and site visits to keep the 80 volunteers interested and inspired.

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

FIRE AND WOODLANDS

FIRE

Two staff attended a Parks Victoria heathland planned burn in Wonthaggi. The Rangers were involved with working alongside the Parks staff igniting the burn, keeping an eye on the burnt edge and as the burn progressed, moved into a mop up role blacking out anything hot on the edge.



Photo: Taken at Wonthaggi heathlands planned burn by Environment Ranger Roger.

Contractors have started implementing Asset Protection Zone clearance works behind residential properties on Broadbeach Road in Cape Woolamai. This work follows the recommendations from the Cape Woolamai Fire Management Plan. They involve thinning over-dominant vegetation and removing weeds, and burning this vegetation in several small burn piles.

Berry's Beach burn plan has been completed, reviewed and endorsed by partner agencies (DELWP, CFA). Preparation works have been completed (kikuyu sprayed) however the ecological burn is unlikely to take place until after winter due to wet conditions and high fuel moisture. We are currently working on several burn pile plans around the Nature Park.

Currently working on the Nature Parks Fire Operations Plan 2018 – 2020

WOODLANDS

The Nature Parks Fire Operations Plan 2017 – 2019 is available at the following link: <http://www.penguins.org.au/conservation/environment/conservation-programs/fire-management/>



Photo: Dumped truck load of conifer mulch with Yuccas in south car park at Oswin Roberts Reserve

Several areas in woodland reserves are under surveillance due to the spike in felled trees and the possible removal of wood for fire wood.

An audit of trees along walking tracks in the Nature Parks is nearing completion. The audit will report on the state of health for trees along tracks in Oswin Roberts, Conservation Hill, Swan Lake and KCC.

Contractors have completed the west boundary fence at Ventnor Koala Reserve. The next stage is to obtain a quote on rabbit proofing the reserve on existing older sections. Contractors are still to complete the boundary fence where the Rhyll cricket club abuts Conservation Hill.

Several volunteers have been undertaking weed works, e.g. The Monash Biological Society did cutting and pasting of sweet pittosporum in Rowell Swamp and hand pulling Polygala at Observation Point. In May the Friends of Koalas volunteers planted *Vimulais*, *Lomandras* and *Carex* in Oswin Roberts.

Staff have been removing woody weeds in Ventnor Koala Reserve and continue with maintenance of spraying tracks and infrastructure in Oswin Roberts and Conservation Hill.

Meeting the Nature Parks strategic directions - 2.1 Strengthen the protection of natural assets, 2.5 Build conservation criteria into decision making and 2.6 Raise awareness and encourage shared responsibility for conservation

VISITOR MANAGEMENT

Visitation was again high over the Queen's Birthday long weekend. Preparations are being made to improve car parking now that capacity of paved areas is reached on these public holidays.

Meeting the Nature Parks strategic directions - 2.1 Strengthen the protection of natural assets, 2.5 Build conservation criteria into decision making and 2.6 Raise awareness and encourage shared responsibility for conservation

PENGUIN PARADE VISITOR CENTRE DEVELOPMENT

The Penguin Parade Visitor Centre Development is progressing nicely, and the project team has developed a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) as part of this process. The CEMP sets out protocols and timelines to ensure that we mitigate impacts of the development on environmental values, such as vegetation, penguins, and other wildlife.

Construction is due to commence in February 2018, however in order to mitigate impacts to wildlife and vegetation, and avoid penguins and other wildlife nesting and breeding in the construction site, we are conducting the following works over the next few months:

1. Erect a penguin proof fence around the existing car parks and where the future car parks are going to be constructed
2. Relocate any penguin burrows from the car parks to outside the penguin proof fence as per acquired permits
3. Clear vegetation as per Flora and Fauna Assessment report, CEMP and acquired permits

The timeline for the project is as follows:

- Currently in detailed design phase
- Design completion – September 2017
- Expression of Interest for the Principal Builder advertised 12th May 2017
- Construction to begin February 2018
- Building open November 2019

Meeting the Nature Parks strategic directions - 2.1 Strengthen the protection of natural assets, 2.5 Build conservation criteria into decision making and 2.6 Raise awareness and encourage shared responsibility for conservation

GRANTS AND PROJECTS

- **Melbourne Water 2017-18** – We have received a grant for \$20,675 to be used in 2017-18 for works on four wetlands. Works will include the ongoing Bridal Creeper control and cut and painting of woody weeds by contractors. Spraying of Tall wheat grass will occur over the warmer/drier months. Staff and volunteers will be planting and direct seeding wetland/grassland species as our in-kind contribution to the grant at Fishers wetland.
- **Port Phillip and Western Port Catchment Management Authority (Caring for our Country, Ramsar Grant)** – Weed and vermin control along the Phillip Island Ramsar coastline (from Fishers Wetland to Observation Point) has continued as part of this grant to address the threats to flora and fauna communities along this coast. Discussions are also being held with BCSC on Stage 2 of the Scenic Estate Conservation Park upgrade.
- **Penguin Foundation 2015/16** – Funding from the Penguin Foundation is being used to conduct a research project on the post-release survival of hand-raised possums from the Wildlife Clinic. This project is ongoing.
- **Penguin Foundation 2016/17** – We have received funding to assist the Shearwater Rescue program in 2017. This project is now complete – see above. Funding was also received to support the Hooded Plover breeding season – now complete – see report above.
- **Penguin Foundation 2017/18** – Funding has been received to assist the employment of a Ground Nesting Bird Ranger over 2017/18. This will allow further development of the Hooded Plover program to take in other species such as Red-capped Plovers, migratory shorebirds and terns.
- **DELWP Wildlife Rehabilitation Grants 2016/17** – We have received \$23,000 (+GST) from DELWP for improvements to the wildlife clinic and contributions towards volunteer training.

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