

## ENVIRONMENT NEWS – March 2017

*Dr Roz Jessop, Environment Manager and the Environment team*

### PEST PLANTS

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#### Park-wide Weed Management

During February (361 hours) of weed control was undertaken by Environment Rangers. Over half of the hours (187) were at Cape Woolamai on Marram Grass removal from the dunes.

Follow-up continued on Red hot Pokers, Agapanthus, Serrated Tussock, Sicilian Sea Lavender, Gorse and Boxthorn.

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

### REVEGETATION/VOLUNTEERS

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The nursery is full of seedlings ready to be fed up and planted come winter.

15,000 grass land mix have been put down for Cape Woolamai and another 10,000 for other areas including Berry Beach and Summerland Peninsula.

A group of dedicated Parade Rangers came in to help the Nature Parks research and environment staff with penguin habitat restoration. 50 penguin boxes were either replaced or established in the Penguin Parade area. Many of them already have penguins living in them!!



We have had our second group of university volunteers for the year and they have participated in a range of activities. They also helped with some penguin box installation within the Penguin Parade area. They also helped with trimming back penguin paths, spinach propagation, seed collection and weed removal.

School groups have started coming through and they have been aiding with seed collection.

Surf Beach Sunderland Bay Coastcare Group unfortunately got cancelled this month due to bad weather. However some dedicated volunteers still managed to brave the weather and do a beach clean.

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**

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### **Foxes**

Monitoring continues using detection dogs, infra-red cameras and night surveys on Phillip Island while work on adjoining mainland to create a buffer zone will aim to reduce the likelihood of migration.

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

### **Cats**

Cat trapping on the coastline near Rhyll as part of the Ramsar Protection Program, together with targeted trapping around Berry Beach have been occurring. To date in 2016/17 a total of 79 feral cats have been removed from Phillip Island.



*Photo of feral cat at Cape Woolamai.*

### **Rabbits**

A new strain of Calicivirus (RHDV1 K5) was released on Phillip Island on 6th March and monitoring of the population will be occurring over the next month to measure its impact. This new strain will hopefully overcome calici-resistance in the rabbit population and will allow land managers and the community to integrate other control methods to further reduce the impacts of rabbits. A workshop was held recently with the Rhyll Coast Action Group on how to use the Rabbitscan app for mapping areas of rabbit activity, recording control measures and disease such as Calici and myxomatosis in the rabbit population. Further training sessions for other community groups are planned in the near future.

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

There has been a late rally in breeding activity and success for Hooded Plovers on Phillip island thanks to the hard work of Hooded Plover Watch volunteers and a run of warm settled weather.

Hoodie update to 10<sup>th</sup> March 2017:

- There have been 33 nests so far – there is 1 active nest at Anzac west with 3 eggs.
- 75 eggs
- 11 fledged so far
- 29 chicks from 12 nests. Below are the chicks at 10/03/17
  - 1 Surf Beach (Park St), banded and flagged YLF '31' on 23/01/17 (fledged)
  - 1 Justice Rd YLF 34 (fledged)
  - 2 Bella Vista Rd YLF 32 and YLF 33 (fledged)
  - 1 Colonnades YLF 35 (fledged)
  - 1 Silverleaves YLF 41 (fledged)
  - 2 Elizabeth Cove YLF 39, YLF 40 (fledged)
  - 3 Hutchison Beach YLF 36, YLF 37, YLF 38 (fledged)
  - 1 Woolamai SLSC (week old chick)



Ranger Dan Lees and Lauren Jones banding YLF 35 at Colonnades 14/02/17. The chick was seen during the Community Open Day event on 05/03/17 but must have quickly left the island as Steve Johnson saw YLF 35 near Wonthaggi at the Desal Beach just 3 days later on 08/03/17.



Nice view!! The Anzac west nest is high up in the dunes, just a few metres from the informal track. Hopefully they will have low disturbance there although a few magpies were patrolling the beach and there were ravens in the dunes.

Daniel Lees – Hooded Plover Ranger along with monitoring nests, maintaining refuges, inducting volunteers, building shelters, banding chicks and entering data has also been updating refuge signage. There are new nest progress signs that are much clearer and easier to update, and a season summary sign to let locals

know how breeding went on their beach.

**The Next Hooded Plover and Gull Count:** Monday 10/04/2017 meet at 10:00am at Enviro/Research (Penguin Parade) contact Dan Lees if you are interested in coming along [dlees@penguins.org.au](mailto:dlees@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**

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Work programmes at the Koala Conservation Centre tend to cycle with the time of year. The holiday period is traditionally a busy time with increased visitor numbers and increased koala activity generally leading to more injuries and illnesses being cared for by KCC rangers.

This year however, no koalas from the free ranging Phillip Island population were admitted into care at the KCC. On the surface this might seem like a good result, but it most likely is a reflection of the low number of koalas that still call the island home (last year's koala count suggested the island population is less than 30 excluding the KCC koalas). Nonetheless, Environment Rangers had their hands full dealing with a couple of KCC koalas that required medical attention and some protracted treatments. This is in addition to the koalas around the boardwalks for which supplementary browse needs to be cut each day.

The end of the holiday period has us back in the plantations preparing for 100s of eucalypts to be planted to ensure an ongoing supply of browse for the koalas. Other activities included a successful feral cat trapping programme, and the mulching of sections of the koala boardwalk by volunteers.

***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**

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The Wildlife Rehabilitation Rangers have been caring for a range of sick or injured wildlife during the month of February, such as: Cape Barren Geese, Brush-tail and Ring-tail Possums, Rainbow Lorikeets, Silver Gulls, Swamp Wallabies, Short-tailed Shearwaters, Purple Swamp-hens, Masked Lapwings, Echidnas, Kookaburras, a Little wattlebird, Fluttering Shearwaters, and an Australasian Gannet.

Nature Parks' Rangers responded to approx. 75 calls to the wildlife hotline during February, several of these regarding seals.

Over 30 Little Penguins have been cared for in the rehab centre during this time. Some of the penguins have had long journeys to get here, being transported from places such as Wilsons Promontory and Venus Bay.

Rangers responded to an entangled seal at Ventnor during February, cutting the balloon ribbon that was cutting into the weanling's neck. Luckily the injuries were not too severe and the seal was able to be released soon after capture, free of the entanglement.

Zoos Victoria and the Nature Parks have joined forces to become part of a real solution to a very real problem for our marine wildlife – **BALLOONS & MARINE DEBRIS**

[www.penguins.org.au/balloons](http://www.penguins.org.au/balloons)



Currently there are seven Little penguins, two Rainbow lorikeets, four Ringtail possums and an Australian Magpie in care at the Wildlife Clinic.

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#### **SHORT-TAILED SHEARWATER DEPARTURE TIMES**

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The annual Short-tailed Shearwater rescue program, for the fledglings, will begin on the 18<sup>th</sup> April this year and will run for approximately three weeks. Behind the scenes preparation has been ongoing, and we aim to have all the equipment, volunteer register, media alerts and education leaflets out in the community within the next four weeks. The Environment Rangers will be out on the roads in the early mornings and again at night during the fledging season.

#### **COASTAL/WETLAND MANAGEMENT**

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##### **Sunderland Bay/Surf Beach Coastcare Group**

SBSB was cancelled in February due to inclement weather. We will continue in March with erosion control measures at Sunderland Bay.

##### **Dune Restoration Project/Cape Woolamai**

We are excited at the prospect of a Marram Grass expert coming down to advise and inform us about this invasive species. Therese Konlechner is a lecturer at Melbourne University and her experience includes Marram grass control projects both internationally and in Australia. Therese will be giving a talk to the staff so we all look forward to that.



### **Fishers Wetland**

Recent Tall Wheat grass weed control has taken place at Fishers wetland by spray contractors. This is a summer growing grass and spraying prior to seed set is the optimal time due to the dry conditions on the perimeter of the wetland. Larger areas have been sprayed and then will be slashed to make way for more revegetation on the 'Ranch' side of the wetland. Thanks to Trevor at Churchill Island. More works will continue around the wetland in the year ahead.

### **Rhyll Tip**

There has been some earth moving works going on at the tip to prevent further erosion and construction of exclusion coups adjacent to the Cowes- Rhyll Road.



***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**

We have had a somewhat smooth fire season so far with fourteen illegal small fires or evidence of fires that Rangers have detected from daily patrols.

Terramatrix has completed the Nature Parks' Fire Management Plan 2016-2021, which is a strategic level document, and updated the 'Planned Burn Procedures'. This document reflects current practices, policies and protocols in relation to planned burning. Several actions and recommendations have been identified with staff following up on recommendations.

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/>

With the recent tree risk remediation works now completed, we are now completing twelve-monthly audits followed up by carrying out the works needed. We have just awarded a contractor the job of completing the 2017 audit for trees along tracks in Oswin Roberts and Conservation Hill.

Contractors are currently working on the last section of the west boundary fence at Ventnor Koala Reserve and then to complete the adjacent boundary fence on the Rhyll cricket club.

We have had decaying bollards removed and replaced with new ones in the south car park of Oswin Roberts and also installed several new bench seats, as seen in photos below. Fence line maintenance has occurred on the south of the park along Harbison Road.



Several staff have sprayed a large area of kikuyu grass in Five Ways Reserve in preparation for upcoming volunteer programs, and several existing coops have been hand weeded by volunteers and staff.

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## SUMMER VISITOR MANAGEMENT

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Over this summer period the Nature Parks rangers have been patrolling the beaches on Phillip Island. According to the data collected on these patrols there was a total of 391 dogs recorded in the park over summer with 103 of them in breach of the regulations. Preparations for Easter visitor management are underway with patrol and car park management shifts to rostered.

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## GRANTS AND PROJECTS

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- **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.
- **Penguin Foundation 2016/17** – We have received funding to assist the Shearwater Rescue program in 2017. The Penguin Foundation also contributed funding towards the employment of a full-time Environment Ranger for six months over the summer period to assist with the Hooded Plover Protection Program – see Hooded Plover report.
- **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. Training sessions will be held on May 9, 10 and 11 (one day courses). Please email [info@penguins.org.au](mailto:info@penguins.org.au) if interested in participating on one of these dates.

## Media

The Nature Parks featured heavily on both TV and radio on 20<sup>th</sup> March with significant coverage of our targeted focus on cat control on the island, in conjunction with Bass Coast Shire.

Following on from Richard Faulkner's (Vertebrate Pest Program Ranger) attendance at the Feral Cat Taskforce in Canberra, and subsequent mention by the Threatened Species Commissioner, the Herald Sun ran a story in 19<sup>th</sup> March paper covering this issue.

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/phillip-island-penguins-clamp-on-cats-to-make-island-pestfree/news-story/d1d76badaa976bca4ac811356547c742>

Both Richard and Stuart Murphy conducted a total of 3 radio interviews on ABC 774, ABC Gippsland and 3AW, as well as hosting a crew from Channel 7 News which is featured in the below link.

<https://au.news.yahoo.com/video/watch/34723280/phillip-island-in-danger-of-being-overrun-by-feral-cats/>

The coverage was all very positive on what can be a very emotive issue, and is a fantastic start to this control program.

## CONTACT US:

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