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Friends of Morwell National Park Inc.

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November's Activity.

We had a very successful day last month even though the weather was quite cool with lots of showers. The day's activity revolved around making clay balls. The clay balls were about 1cm diameter and contained a mixture of seeds. They are to be dried out and dispersed later by hand, once the appropriate area has been fenced off.

The procedure for making the clay balls was quite simple. You needed the seeds off plants that grow in the area that is to be re-vegetated, some good quality, finely ground red clay, humus from the local area, water and people power.

Rob, the ranger, boiled the seeds first to soften up the seed casings, then added them and the humus to the appropriate amount of clay. He then slowly added water to make a workable consistency – sometimes easier said than done! The workers then broke off small amounts of the seeded clay, rolled it into small flat balls and put them aside to dry. In all it is estimated that we made somewhere around 3600 clay balls for the day. A great effort by everyone involved.

The seeds that were in the clay balls were predominantly Blue Gum (*Eucalyptus globulus*) and Varnish Wattle (*Acacia verniciflua*), with Prickly Moses (*Acacia verticillata*), Hazel Pomaderris (*Pomaderris aspera*), Prickly Currant-bush (*Coprosma quadrifida*), and Snowy Daisy-bush (*Olearia lirata*).

Whilst the majority of us were making clay balls, Ed and Rob also managed to plant five trays of seeds. They planted Swamp Gum, Manna Gum, Blackwood, Silver Wattle and Hazel Pomaderris, one tray of each.

December's Activity – Christmas Break-up

Our last activity for the year will be on the 16th of December. It sounds way too soon to be the end of year! Before our break-up tea, we will be meeting in the Kerry Road carpark at 1.30pm, all piling into 4WD's and then heading off to do some seed collecting. At 6pm we will be having the spit roast tea in the car park as we did last year. Again people from other Friends groups will be invited. You will only need to bring a chair, maybe a fold up table and your drinks. Everything else is to be provided. I hope everyone can come along and help make it as successful as last year's break-up.

ORCHID COUNT

On Saturday 24th November, I bravely volunteered to help Ken Harris with his annual count of the Butterfly Orchid (*Sarcochilus australis*) that is found in Foster's Gully. Michael had to work (much to his disgust!).

Much to my surprise, I had a very enjoyable day. I wasn't convinced that I would be able to keep up with Ken when it came to scrambling down to the creek, but after a few near misses, a bit of mud sliding and a close encounter with a very potent stinging nettle, I made it!

For the past thirteen years or so, Ken has been checking his marked plots along Foster's Gully. He now has five different areas pegged out, all of them chosen at random. The plots average an area of 7x10m.

To check the plots, Ken has to first interpret his computerised drawing of the area. This means finding the appropriate tree (or sometimes a dead tree) and then locating the position of any orchids on the tree. Once found, the orchid then has to be matched up with what was recorded as being present last year. All the orchids are given a number relevant to the area, and all the details have been recorded on a spreadsheet. So, as Ken found the appropriate tree, we would both look for orchids and then try and match them with what had been recorded as being there last year. Sometimes this was a breeze to do and other times, it was a nightmare. You would not believe the problems one tree falling into another can cause!

Ken has been recording the size of the plant found, the number of flowers it has and the type of tree it grows on. As we sorted out which was which, I was amending the details on the spreadsheet for Ken to later update on his computer.

I believe that overall the days count was quite successful. The main disappointment of the day was the missing plants in the first plot. They had been recorded as being quite large with flowers but we were unable to find any trace of them. We can only hope that their disappearance was caused by natural causes. We did find a few broken branches on the ground in other areas, these had the remains of orchids on them, but the records showed that they had been growing on dead twigs, so they were expected to eventually fall off. I should also note that we also found quite a few new or unrecorded plants.

As the last few years have been quite dry, Ken had found the climb down to the creek quite slippery on the dry leaves but this year we had the opposite problem. Mud! I wouldn't say that I climbed down to the creek, more like slid or slithered. The kids (if they had been there) would have had a ball!

A highlight of the day was the sighting of the Rufous Fantail down near the creek. Ken tells me that you don't see them very often. We also saw the Red-tailed Cockatoos flying over and then landing in the gum trees. (This is interesting, as Red-tailed Black Cockatoos are not generally found in this area, being mainly found in northern and western Australia. They may have been Glossy Black Cockatoos, which

are considered uncommon along the east coast with this area as their western extremity. ED)

Michael made an unexpected appearance when we were about half way through the fourth plot. He had heard us from the track. When he found us I was taking it easy yelling details down to Ken who was struggling along the side of the incline down to the creek. I just had to record the details that Ken yelled back up to me.

Mike stayed with us to help with the last plot. I am grateful that he did as it was very muddy and slippery and trying to look up into the trees, read the spreadsheet and stay upright was a distinct challenge! Mike wasn't exactly dressed for the occasion, but that didn't seem to bother him too much.

Overall I think the day was a success and that Ken was grateful for some help. It must have been very awkward over the years trying to read his map and spreadsheet and to not lose anything, let alone find all the orchids and record all the details. He is a very dedicated man to continue with all the recording of the various flora and fauna that is found in the park. My congratulations go out to him for all the work he has done over the years.

Michael and I would like to take this chance to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a very happy New Year and we look forward to seeing you all next year and receiving lots of articles for us to print.