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Friends of Morwell National Park Inc.

Newsletter – May 2004

Website: <http://morwellnp.pangaean.net>

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Welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter. A good drop of rain lately, with 66mm falling in Boolarra on the Anzac Day weekend, and a nice follow-up of 33mm on April 30 and May 1, with more falling as I write (May 4). Rob tells me the Park received much the same; 70mm and 26mm. Let's hope it continues!

Contrary to what I wrote last month about not having any mail to report, I did have some hidden away in my piles of paperwork that escaped my attention. Apologies to Ken and Wendy, who handed me these goodies at the March gathering and were no doubt wondering what I was on about. We received:-

- Membership application brochures from the Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA). Anyone who would like one, let me know.
- FriendsNet Number 46, February 2004.
- Friends of Coolart newsletter 1-04.
- A complimentary copy of "Guide to Victoria's Parks, Reserves and Waterways" from Parks Victoria.

This month we received:-

- Parks Victoria 2004 Group Grant application forms.
- Canopy No. 22, Parks Victoria newsletter for March 2004.
- Under Control No.26, Department of Primary Industries newsletter for February 2004.
- Friends of Tarra-Bulga NP newsletter for Autumn 2004, along with brochures and membership application forms for those who may be interested in joining the group.

May Activity

Our next activity is a little different from our normal gatherings. We have agreed to take part in the Churchill Festival on Saturday, May 15, using equipment provided by Parks Victoria. We would like as many Friends as possible to be available at some time during the day to help man the display and deal with any inquiries from the public. This is an excellent opportunity to gain some exposure for our group and hopefully attract some new members. The festival will be held at Glendonald Park, near Hazelwood House, accessed via Canterbury Way East from the main road, with public attendance from 10am to 3pm. We will need some Friends there at 8.30am to assist with setting up a marquee and some display tables and to stay beyond 3pm to clean up. Please let Rob know if and when you can assist.

Willows, Wasps and Tree Guards

April Activity Report

Cathy and I were early for a change, only beaten into the carpark by Reg and Rob. Wendy, Ken, Denis, Jane and Aaron were all on time, so after a bit of a chat to catch up on the gossip, we sorted out our plan of attack. Most of us would start tree de-guarding on the spot and slowly work our way upstream, while a couple of us would brave the creek itself and attempt to eliminate whatever willows remained in the lower section not covered back in February. We were a ragged bunch to begin with, haphazardly wandering about the place as we determined what needed to be done, where it needed to be done and who felt like doing it. The majority got stuck into their chosen pursuit and made steady progress along the track, extracting tree guards wherever they were found to be past their usefulness in guarding trees, either because the trees had grown out the top, or the guards themselves were in pieces. Meanwhile, Rob had the willow destruction kit in hand, Ken was off in the wilds searching for willows to destroy, and I did a good impression of a lost sheep as I tried to make up my mind what to do with myself.

Eventually, after plucking unenthusiastically at a few stray tree guards, I decided poisoning willows seemed like the best option, so I went in search of Rob. I found him just as he found the first European Wasp nest, a steady stream of the bitey beasties plying the airways from a nice, thick patch of Kikuyu that would be oh so easy to walk through without noticing them until they were very upset. Back to the vehicles we went, to get the wasp nest marking tape, so that Rob would be able to find it on the next wasp eradication evening. Ken had found a large *Prunus* tree next to the old river level gauge, so the chainsaw was brought into service to sort it out. I then went bush looking for willows and lost contact with the rest of the gang for a while, until I found Wendy on her own, having fun with a patch of the old plastic mesh guards. I pitched in and helped her finish off that small area, then found Rob glaring balefully at a substantial willow that he couldn't get at because of another wasp nest near its base, next to the creek in the open easement underneath the powerline. More tape required.

The rest of the gang were located plucking off tree guards in the plantation just beyond the powerline, so off I wandered to join in. I hadn't gone more than 10 feet from the track before discovering another batch of plastic mesh guards, so I then spent the next half hour working along the edge of the easement removing these, in the process stumbling on to another wasp nest at the base of a tree, right next to a guard that I was about to try and remove. I quickly backed off and decided to miss that one. I occasionally spied Wendy off through the trees, as we worked through the sections of our choice, but only saw the others when I returned to the vehicles to offload an armful of guards. At one stage, I almost walked onto yet another wasp nest, a perfectly formed vertical hole in the soil, while travelling from one guard to the next. Again, I quickly backed off, deciding that I would report to Rob and pause for lunch.

After lunch, it was back to the grind, locating and removing the mesh guards in the overgrown grassy patch in the middle of the plantation. A lot of the guards couldn't be seen directly, lying hidden in the grass, so it was a matter of examining a likely looking clump of grass for signs of the cane sticks used to support the guards and then attempting to extract the mesh from the entangling vegetation; a back-breaking and

time consuming operation. Yet another wasp nest was found, only a few metres from where we had lunch, while searching for more guards. An hour or so of this and I had had enough, so at my next visit to the vehicles, I was only too happy to join Rob and Ken on a drive up Side Creek to remove the willow found last month. While en route, a convenient burst of sunlight highlighted much insect activity in one particular spot, leading to the discovery of wasp nest number 6(?). More tape dispensed. Just for something different, a cow was wandering along the eastern side of the creek, opposite the Braniff's Road ford.

We had no trouble getting to and dispensing with the willow, despite some initial concerns of water depth and nettle density. We noted no wasp activity at the base of the Blue Gum Hill track, unlike what we had experienced last month. On the way back, we paused at the ford to try and guide the offending cow to return to its paddock, with absolutely no success. There were no obvious access points along the fenceline and the grass was apparently greener, more to the liking of cattle, inside the park. We did, however, find wasp nests 7 and 8, within a metre of each other at the top of the track batter, at the edge of the firebreak along the fenceline. So much for territorial insects, although I suppose they could have been dual entrances to the same nest. On return to the workers, Reg and Cathy (Denis, Jane and Aaron had left at lunchtime, Wendy at 1.30pm) had decided that they had also had enough, so we packed our gear and called it a day.

More News

On Monday, May 3, a Committee Meeting was held at Wendy's residence, primarily to discuss what to do with this year's grant application. Minutes from this meeting will be in next month's newsletter.

The wasp nests mentioned in the above activity report, as well as others found on the day, were dealt with by contractor during the following week. According to Rob, the contractor uses a probe and blower system, whereby the probe is driven into the nest and powder blown in to coat the occupants. Then the paper nest is dug out by mattock and treated again to destroy all larvae. Of course, during all this, the contractor is covered in dozens of angry wasps and relies heavily on his protective suit. Rob doubts that he could be paid enough to undertake this type of work, and I thoroughly agree with him!

On Thursday, April 22, on the same day as the large Jeeralang West fire, another arson attempt took place in the Foster's Gully section of the Park, just in from the main firebreak running down the hill past the Park Office to the start of the Foster's Gully Track. Witnessed by 2 people and promptly reported, a helicopter and a truck were diverted from the main fire to limit the damage to an area of roughly 25m². A description of the arsonist has been given to the Police.

Some roadworks have been undertaken in the Park, to improve the rough, wet patch in the Billy Creek Track just upstream of the junction with the Zig Zag Track. Vehicle access to the weir area should be greatly improved during the wetter months.

Rob informs us that a Powerful Owl was sighted recently in the patch of scrub adjacent to the Junction Road carpark. A photo attempt was not successful.

The Regional Forest Agreement which effects the addition of adjacent Crown Land into the NP, minus the bare block at the end of Reidy's Road which might be subject to a land swap, was due to be considered in the autumn session of State Parliament. Hopefully, some progress will result before too much longer.

Mary Jackson, a group member of FMNP via APS Latrobe Valley, reports that she overheard a segment on local ABC radio at about 6.30am on 10/5/04. A very complimentary member of the public was singing the praises of Morwell National Park to the Breakfast show host, Jo Spargo (hope I've spelled that correctly), after thoroughly enjoying a walk in our Park on the previous weekend. Mary suggests that perhaps we should take advantage of such positive exposure to promote our group. Any suggestions on how to do this?

New Skink in Morwell National Park

Ken Harris - 19th April 2004

At yesterday's working bee, Mike Beamish found a baby skink (about 4cm long), which proved to be a species not previously recorded in the park, the Delicate Skink, *Lampropholis delicata*. It is quite a common species in the area. I find them regularly in my garden and I have been expecting to find one in the park before long.

I have added the Delicate Skink to the web site, with a photograph (not taken in the Park).

That brings the total list of skinks for the park to 10:

Family: Scincidae – Skinks

<i>Egernia saxatilis</i>	Black rock skink
<i>Eulamprus tympanum</i>	Southern water skink
<i>Lampropholis delicata</i>	Delicate skink
<i>Lampropholis guichenoti</i>	Garden skink
<i>Nannoscincus maccoyi</i>	Maccoy's skink
<i>Pseudemoia entrecasteauxii</i>	D'entrecasteaux's skink
<i>Pseudemoia metallica</i>	Metallic skink
<i>Pseudemoia rawlinsonii</i>	Rawlinson's skink
<i>Saproscincus mustelina</i>	Weasel skink
<i>Tiliqua nigrolutea</i>	Blotched blue-tongue

and with the Lace monitor – *Varanus varius*, there are 11 different lizard species known to be found in the Park,