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Friends of Morwell National Park Inc.

Newsletter – May 2008

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

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G'day everyone and welcome to the latest edition of your newsletter. A nice drop of rain lately has greened up the countryside, although the accompanying reduction in temperatures has taken a little effort to get used to. Our new heater is now installed at home, so it is a little bit easier to ward off the overnight chills. Thanks to Cathy for writing all about last month's activity and to Ken for providing another sterling article on more features of our Park, another easy month of editing for me!

May Activity

Once again my calendar says 'to be advised' and since I haven't been, I'm assuming that we will be attempting to finish off the latest round of weed removal along Billys Creek. I reckon there's probably a short day's work getting down to Junction Road from the point that we finished off in March, so let's meet at the Junction Road gate at 10am on Sunday, May 18, all fired up to wreak havoc on anything that shouldn't be there. Hopefully, the weather will be conducive to strolling in a stream, but, as always, come prepared with the appropriate clothing and footwear for the environment and weather conditions on the day.

Tree Guard Removal April Activity Report

Last month we finally managed to get around to removing the very old wire tree guards that were at the top of Lodge Track. Rob tells us that they had been used in the early 1990's and we had been planning to remove them for a while but circumstances, generally the weather, usually got in the way. We met as usual in the Jumbuk Rd carpark at 10am. All the regulars were there with the exception of Mike, who was working and Reg, who should have been washing his caravan down at Loch Sport!

We had all piled into the 4WD's by 10.15am. As I had left mine at home this month, (it had an extremely heavy hearth in the back of it that wasn't being moved again until our new heater turned up!) Rob asked Peter if he would take his up to the top of Lodge Track. The track was overgrown and I cringed at the scratches the plants would have been putting on Peter's very clean and shiny vehicle! Rob towed the trailer to Lodge Track and then left it at the top of the hill before we drove down to just above where the wire tree guards were. It was steep country to work in and it didn't take long for unfit people (namely me!) to tire out.

Rob had given us wire cutters and we were all very busy for a while cutting and eventually removing the wire from around the trees. Peter and Darren then began to carry the stockpiled guards back up the hill to the 4WD where Rob then squished them down and put them into the back of the vehicle. By about 12.45pm we thought we had found most of them and decided it was time for lunch. To be expected, Wendy was the last back as she kept finding guards that we had missed!

After relaxing and eating lunch, we walked down to where we had put green tree guards a few years ago, while Rob drove back up to the trailer to put the wire guards into it. I had forgotten exactly how steep it was in this part of the park but I hadn't forgotten our 4WD sliding backwards out of control the last time we were there! Ken had worked his way down to the green guards before lunch and had started removing them so we continued on from where he had left off. By the time we had removed three quarters of the

guards, I ran out of puff. I had a short break with Wendy and Ken and then passed the collected guards up to Rob in the back of the 4WD. I am afraid that I wasn't very efficient after that!

Thank goodness for the very efficient Peter and Darren. I lost count how many times they went backwards and forwards removing and collecting the guards. Mind you, Wendy and Beryl also did very well and managed to keep going after I stopped. All the guards were removed by about 3.30pm. Rob drove us back to the top with the exception of Darren who walked uphill all the way back to Peter's car! When we got back to the trailer I was amazed to see that the wire guards three-quarters filled the trailer. I hadn't realised that there were so many. We also collected enough green guards to fill the back of the 4WD and that was when they were flattened out!

The only wildlife that I remember anyone finding was a green spider which Ken photographed. Overall we had a very effective day. Everyone worked very hard and because of that our goal for the day was achieved. Well done everyone!

Brief Committee Meeting:

Before we commenced our working day, we had a brief committee meeting and on advice we from Wendy, we decided to close our investment account at the Bendigo Bank and put it in an investment account at the Commonwealth (where the everyday account is) as we would be able to get 8% interest on the balance that we were able to invest. We also decided to apply for another grant for the removal of more weeds from the park. We are hoping to have more Blackberry, Tutsan and thistles poisoned by the contractors.

Fungi in Morwell National Park

By Ken Harris

What are fungi?

Everyone is familiar with the mushrooms that are sold in the greengrocers and most of us enjoy eating them as well. The edible mushroom is just one of a very large number of different fungi. Fungi are quite different to plants, because they lack chlorophyll and so can only exist by gaining nutrients from other organisms. Substrates that fungi utilise include a wide variety of plant or animal matter, dead or alive. They used to be classified as an offshoot of the plant kingdom, but are now classified in a kingdom of their own, the **Fungi**.

Fungi are the big recyclers of life on the earth, breaking down the remnants of plants and animals. Even tree trunks can eventually be broken down by fungi. Some fungi are also vitally important partners of many trees and shrubs through mycorrhizas (literally 'fungus-roots'), which mutually benefit plant and fungus through exchange of nutrients.

The fungi that we see, including the familiar mushrooms, are in fact only the fruiting bodies of the fungus, produced only when it is ready to reproduce, usually in a wet season as in our autumn. The fungus itself consists of a network of thread-like filaments called **hyphae**. These form a web-like mass called the **mycelium** which spreads through the soil or plant or animal that the fungus is growing in. When the fungus is mature and the conditions are right, it produces its fruiting body and these, such as the mushroom, can appear very quickly. The fruiting bodies are the means to disperse the minute spores, which enable the fungus to reproduce. Spores may be carried a long way on the wind, but some species use vectors such as flies to help to disperse their spores.

Quite a number of fungi will grow in rings ("fairy rings"). This comes about because the mycelium starts to grow at a central point and when ready to produce its fruiting bodies, they all appear on the outer periphery of the expanding mycelium. In succeeding years, the mycelium continues to grow outwards, so that each fruiting season, the mushrooms appear in a wider and wider ring.

Fungi in Morwell National Park

Morwell National Park is located on the edge of the Latrobe Valley and has quite a wealth of visible fungi at the right time of year. There are some fungi visible at all times, but the peak period for most fungi is in the autumn, particularly March and April. There are some fungi in even quite dry habitats, but the greatest

variety grow in the moister sites, including wet sclerophyll forests such as along Fosters Gully in Morwell National Park.

There are some better sites for fungi in the region, especially the rainforest of Tarra Bulga National Park on the ridge of the Strezleckis and further West, the Mountain Ash forest of Mount Worth State Park. Nevertheless there is a considerable variety to be found in Morwell National Park and so far some 127 different fungi have been identified in the park and I am sure there are many more still to be discovered.

Most familiar are the mushrooms. A few species of edible mushrooms are found in the park, but not in great numbers. Other fungi are known to be poisonous or at least unpleasant to eat. Fungi with the typical form of the mushroom, with a stalk, a domed cap and gills on the underside of the cap are among the most frequently seen.

For example, one fungus often seen in the autumn is **Russula persanguinea**. This has a bright red cap and pure white gills and stem (the spores are also white). Its bright colour makes it easily visible, but it is not one for eating. A close cousin is **Russula emetica**, whose very name warns that it will make you sick.



Another pretty gilled fungus that is found all over the park is the Vermilion Grisette - **Amanita xanthocephala**. This is small bright orange toadstool, with a yellow stem. It also has white gills and white spores and it is definitely not edible. The genus Amanita includes the most poisonous of all fungi, the Death Cap – **Amanita phalloides**. The Death Cap is not native to Australia, but has been accidentally introduced and is not uncommon in the Melbourne area, where it is mostly found underneath oak trees.

Closely related to the Vermilion Grisette is a familiar fungus often in illustrations as a fairy's stool. This is the Fly Agaric – **Amanita muscaria**. The Fly Agaric is very pretty with its bright red cap with white spots (remnants of the veil) , but it is poisonous like most of its family. It is one of the few introduced species of fungus and it has a close liking for Pine trees and in the Park is only found in the remnant pine plantation at the edge of Jumbuk Rd.

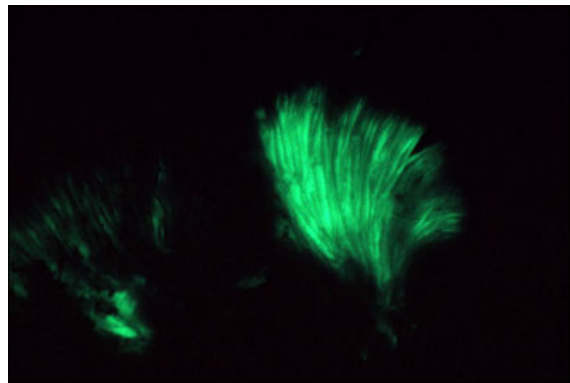


There are other brightly coloured fungi, but green is not a common colour in the world of fungi. One green toadstool does grow in the park, the Green Skinhead - **Dermocybe austroveneta**. This is one of a large family of fungi called cortinars. A cortina is a thin cobwebby veil that covers the gills when the fungus first emerges, although by the time we mostly see it all that remains are a few wispy fragments on the cap edge and the stem.

Another colourful fungus in the park is the Pixies Parasol - **Mycena interrupta**. This is a tiny little fungus, bright blue in colour and can be found in the wetter forests growing in groups on dead branches on the forest floor. This is one of the fungi that helps to break down the litter in the forest.



Another rather larger gilled fungus is the Ghost Fungus - **Omphalotus nidiformis**. This can be found growing in clusters at the base of old tree stumps and sometimes even living trees. This is not a colourful fungus by day, but it earns its name from the fact that it is luminous at night. The luminosity is mainly from the gill surface, which gives off a



greenish glow in the dark. This picture of a ghost fungus from the park was taken by its own light. The light is very dim, and the photograph needed an exposure of 1.5 hours with the aperture at its widest f3.5.

All the fungi shown so far are harmless (unless eaten), but some fungi can be quite destructive. The Honey Fungus - **Armillaria luteobubalina** is one such. It grows in dense clusters at the base of living eucalyptus trees and is one of the causes of die-back in eucalypt forests where it can kill trees. It has been found once in the park, but fortunately does not seem to have spread and any damage has so far been minimal.



All the fungi looked at so far have gills. One group of fungi, the boletes, have the same form as the gilled fungi, but the spores are released from a cluster of tubes, so that the underside of the cap is a mass of pores, giving it a spongy appearance. The boletes include one of the best eating fungi, the Cep - **Boletus edulis**, but this is a European species and it does not grow in Australia. One colourful native species is the Rhubarb Bolete - **Boletellus obscureicoccineus**, with a red cap, pink stalk and yellow spore surface. This occurs above Fosters Gully in the park, but is NOT considered edible.

To be continued in the June issue