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Friends of Morwell National Park Inc.

Newsletter – January 2009

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

A0016319X

G'day everyone and welcome to the first issue of your newsletter for 2009. We hope you all had an enjoyable festive season and the batteries are recharged for some more big efforts in the Park over the coming months.

There are a few items of news to convey;

- In the post-box, we received the latest issues of the Friends Network Newsletter (no.65) and the Friends of Coolart newsletter (4/08).
- The property adjacent to the top of Blue Gum Hill is for sale, which means that there will not be a land swap between the bare block on the top of the hill for the partially vegetated block on the upper reaches of Side Creek. It also means that we can now make plans for revegetation of the bare block and have another attempt at getting the fences repaired to keep the local sheep out of the Park.
- Parks Victoria (with Grand Ridge Plantations) are hopeful of reaching agreement with Latrobe City and local residents to allow restricted use of Jumbuk Road to permit the pine plantation in the top corner of the Park to be logged and harvested. If all goes well, work may commence in late January.

January Activity

Our calendar indicates that we will be continuing our war on weeds in the Billys Creek section of the Park over the next couple of months. We will meet at the Junction Road gate at 10am on Sunday, January 18, ready for the car shuttle up to the weir, where we will commence our work. As always, bring along your own lunch and refreshments and wear clothing and footwear suitable for wading in the creek and dealing with the local pricklies and bities. A copy of the calendar is included at the end of this issue.

Nest-boxes, Venison & Cheesecake **December Activity Report**

Cathy and I arrived at Kerry Road just before the appointed time to find the car park deserted! The doubts immediately set in that we were in the wrong place, but our minds were soon put to rest when Rob, Ken, Wendy, Darren, Reg, Beryl and Peter all wandered in, in their own good time. Once we decided that no one else was going to front up, we organised a ladder and headed over to Billys Creek to have a closer look at the nest boxes that we had stumbled across a few months back, just to fill in some time before we settled in for our Christmas BBQ later in the day.

We knew the location of 4 boxes, but from Rob's memory, there were supposed to be 6, put up as part of a local school's project, probably more than a decade ago and not looked at since. But despite some intensive searching, we couldn't find any others, so we concluded that we were looking in the wrong places or the boxes have been removed or disintegrated. The 4 remaining boxes are still in reasonable condition, so we don't think they would have fallen apart.

Anyway, while we were searching we did find a few other things, some good, some bad. Plenty of pittosporums were found away from the creek and removed (our philosophy with pittosporums, due to the continuing debate as to whether they are indigenous or not, is to remove any found away from their normal habitat in sheltered gullies), along with a substantial Banana Passionfruit plant and a few unlucky nightshades, thistles and ragworts that were in our paths. Down by the creek, Wendy found a patch of 4 beautiful Cinnamon Bell orchids (*Gastrodia procera*, Tall Potato Orchid) that were up to 1m tall and covered with flowers. Ken informed us that he had flushed a pair of quail out of the shrubbery, but didn't get a good enough look to identify them.



Back to the nest boxes. The first (NW) box was a large open-fronted unit, probably intended for Kookaburras or other large hollow-dwellers, but not large enough to be useful and mounted in a very exposed situation that was unlikely to appeal to any prospective occupants. There was no sign the box had ever been used. The second box (SW) was designed for medium-sized birds with a 2" hole, but we couldn't get the lid open to inspect the contents. Cathy and I had seen a bird exit the box a couple of months ago, without being able to identify it. Shining a torch through the hole, Ken was able to see nesting material without detecting an occupant. The third box (SE) was successfully opened with one of our keys and was half full of leafy material that must have been carried in, although there were no occupants that we could see. The fourth box (NE) was also $\frac{3}{4}$ full of leaf litter that had been taken over



by ants. When Ken disturbed the leaves, a number of observers saw a small mammal with a longish snout appear at the entry hole! Success! See Ken's notes later on for the rest of the story.

We were overdue for lunch, so we called a halt to the nest-box research and made our way back to Kerry Road and commenced making merry. Fay soon joined us, but there was no sign of Eulalie or Dorothy, who we were hoping would attend for presentation of their Honorary Life Membership certificates. Rob had excelled, with the provision of some venison (courtesy of feral animal control shoots at Mt Worth) along with the standard snags and burgers. A terrific variety of salads and sweets appeared on the table, courtesy of our members, so we got stuck right in, accompanied by the resident Lewin Honeyeater, Crimson Rosellas and Kookaburras. A raptor that Ken guessed might be a Brown Goshawk wafted over us at one stage, upsetting the other birdlife in the area.



Eulalie Brewster arrived with her daughters Jean and Alison, just in time to sample some of the excellent fare on offer. It was all top stuff, but I have to make special mention of Beryl's lemon cheesecake, it was just superb, light, creamy, just the right amount of tartness in flavour. I would have loved to have more than the 2 bits I had, but just couldn't fit any more in and was devastated when the leftovers ended up on the deck when the bottom fell out of the pan as Beryl was packing up to leave for her work commitments!

The formal part of the afternoon followed, with the presentation of Life Membership to Eulalie and a few words said by Rob and Ken. Cathy acted as official photographer for the occasion. We then hopped into the vehicles and made our way back to Junction Road to give Eulalie, Jean and Alison a tour of the Billys Creek section of the Park, highlighting our tree planting and weed control efforts and ending up at the weir, where trout were occasionally jumping in an attempt to continue their travel upstream. A thoroughly enjoyable finish to the year.

The Critter in the Box **Emails from Ken Harris**

21/12/08:- Being greatly interested in the little critter we found in the last nest box today, I went back at 8.15 this evening and set up my camera on a tripod pointing at the nest box entrance hole and sat on a chair behind the camera. At 8.42 (= sunset in Melbourne today) I saw a little animal come out of the nest, and turned a light on in time to see it run across the box, up the side of the box and vanish behind the top of the box. I turned on the camera and pointed a light near the entrance hole and in a very short time a second little face appeared at the entrance. I managed to get 4 pictures, although none were very sharp. I had to use maximum aperture with the flash to get a picture and I relied on focusing once on the entrance hole and hoping that the setting didn't change while I sat there. Nevertheless the pictures give quite a good idea of its appearance although I am a long way from being able to identify it. I have sent all 4 pictures to Rolf Willig at Parks and maybe he will be able to tell us what it is.

22/12/08:- I got a quick reply from Rolf Willig and it appears that our little nest-box dwellers are the Agile Antechinus - *Antechinus agilis*. Rolf says:

"Based on the photos, the one inch hole and the description of a slender tail, sounds and looks to me like you've got an Agile Antechinus *Antechinus agilis*. (Used to be known as Brown Antechinus *A. stuartii* but this species has been divided into Brown and Agile, the former now referring to the NSW and Qld animals.). This species is the smallest Victorian Antechinus and also the most arboreal. Given the time of year, you may have come across a family just prior to dispersal of the young. Although they are relatively common, it is nevertheless good to see them still in an area and successfully breeding."

Dorothy Reinkowsky

Since our BBQ on 21/12/08, where we were disappointed that Dorothy was not in attendance, we have since discovered that Dot's health has taken a turn for the worst. Although Dot was looking forward to coming to the BBQ, she suffered some setbacks a few days beforehand and was admitted to hospital. Dot has since been diagnosed with a terminal illness. Ken, Wendy, Cathy and I paid Dot a visit on Saturday 10/1/09, hoping that Dot would be well enough to accept our presentation of her certificate for Lifetime Membership of the Friends of Morwell National Park, but sadly Dot was not well enough to recognise our presence. We have left the certificate with her in the hope that she will be able to appreciate it in due course. We extend our sympathies to Dot's family and friends and hope for a speedy conclusion to her journey, as were her wishes.

Friends of Morwell National Park Inc: PO Box 19, Churchill, 3842, <http://morwellnp.pangaeon.net>.

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Calendar 2009

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Activities are scheduled for the third Sunday of each month, with extra days scheduled as required.

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Activity:</u>	<u>Venue and Time:</u>
January 18	Weir Walk Weed Removal	Junction Rd, 10.00am
February 15	Weir Walk Weed Removal	Junction Rd, 10.00am
March 15	Track Maintenance- Muttonwood	Kerry Rd, 10.00am
April 19	Weed Removal	Junction Rd, 10.00am
May 17	To be advised	To be advised, 10.00am
June 21	Tree Planting- Gaps	Junction Rd, 10.00am
July 19	Tree Planting- Coprosma Track	Junction Rd, 10.00am
August 2	AGM	To be advised, 1.30pm
August 16	A Walk in the Park	To be advised, 10.00am
September 20	Spring Excursion- Tyers Park?	To be advised, 10.00am
October 18	Koala Count	Kerry Road, 1.30pm
November 15	Orchid Survey / Odd Jobs	Kerry Road, 10.00am
December 20	Christmas Function	To be advised.

For all activities, it is BYO food, drinks, suitable clothing and footwear, and other personal items, unless otherwise indicated in the newsletter. Up to date details of each forthcoming activity are provided in the monthly newsletter, which is mailed to members and available to the public on the website.