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Friends of Morwell National Park Inc.

Newsletter – March 2012

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

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Hello everyone and welcome to this month's newsletter. Now we are at the end of summer, but I think we will have a few hot days ahead of us. This summer has not been as hot as previous summers. The risk of bushfires has been greatly reduced this summer.

In news, Ken reported that the Grand Strzelecki Track is 90% complete and on track for an opening on May 6th. The part of the track where work still needs to occur is in the southern part of our park and from there south to Road 4. On May 6th the track will be opened and can be walked. To support the walkers there will be some buses available between different sections of the walk. It will be a great opportunity to explore this new track.

This month we have the usual activity report and a special report from Ken about a snake discovered during the February activity.

February Activity Report Sunday 19th February

At this month's activity had Wendy, John, Margaret, Ken, Peter, Emma, Rod, Darren and another Wendy in attendance. Wendy is a local living near the park and she was along for her first activity. Emma and Rod were along for the second time. New people are always welcome and everybody can do something to help.

Ken and Peter went to collect the waders and poisons while the rest of us organized ourselves. The group drove to Potato Flat where we donned waders. Wendy, Wendy, Margaret and Darren worked upstream from the second creek crossing while Peter, John, Emma and Rod worked downstream from Billy's Weir. Ken stayed on dry ground and removed weeds along the bank. Both groups found many Tutsan plants, with the downstream group finding many advanced plants in fruit and flower while the upstream group found many smaller plants. Many bags of flowers and berries were collected.

While the groups came together for lunch, Ken located a snake. His report follows. Over lunch we found that Ken had removed 3 small seedlings, but had managed to stay clean and not fall into any holes. Over lunch the group discussed which people were to undertake poisons and chainsaw

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training. At the end of the activity Wendy was happy to locate some tree guards to remove. These are currently at the top of Potato Flat.



The above photos show the group kitted out ready for the creek. The photos below show a few advanced Tutsan plants. Tutsan is a problem weed since it spreads quickly by seed or root runners. Many grow them in their home gardens for the pretty yellow flowers and red and black berries. Tutsan is an erect shrub, commonly about 1 m high where it occurs on damp, shaded sites and forest edges. Tutsan infestations spread rapidly and often form dense closed stands.



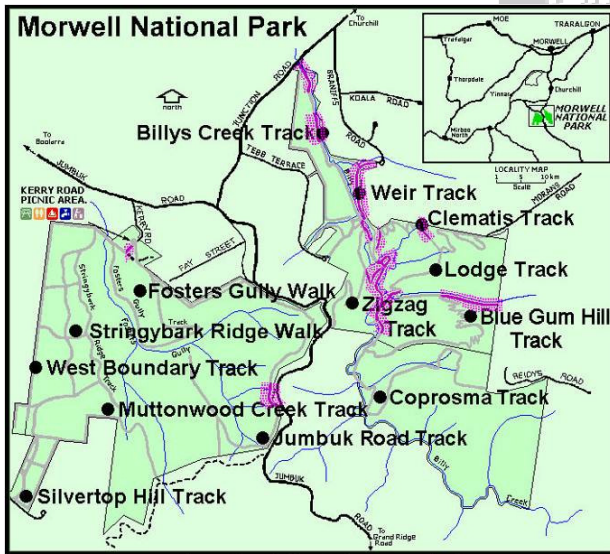
Snakes in Morwell National Park by Ken Harris

During our February working bee pulling Tutsan out of Billy's Creek, we gathered together for lunch at the top side of the Potato Flat. John drew my attention to a snake basking in the grass behind the Blackwoods. I went across immediately and got some photos of the snake, first with my telephoto lens and then got closer and used the macro lens. It was a very dark snake, but proved to be a Copperhead.

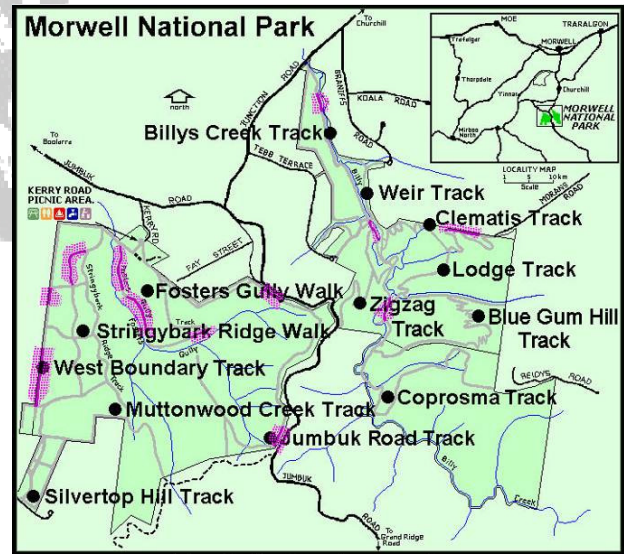


The Copperhead (*Austrelaps superbus*) is the commonest snake to be seen in Morwell National Park. It is a fairly common snake in SE Australia and its bite is poisonous like most Australian snakes. It is not considered as dangerous as

the Tiger Snake however and is generally considered not to be aggressive. When I tried to get one more close photograph it slithered away into thick grass. I have 19 records of copperheads in the park and I was interested to see how they are distributed through the park.



Copperhead (*Austrelaps superbus*)



Tiger Snake (*Notechis scutatis*)

The distribution is interesting in that nearly all the records are close to Billys Creek and only two are from the Fosters Gully side of the park. The other snake often seen in the park is the Tiger Snake (*Notechis scutatis*), so I had a look at its distribution as well. There are slightly fewer records, I have 12 records from the park, but there are a lot more from the Fosters Gully side. Generally the Tiger Snake sightings are more widely scattered through the park than are the Copperheads. All snakes within the park should be treated with extreme caution.

Here is a picture of a Tiger Snake taken on the Western Boundary of the park in May last year.



There are two other snakes recorded from the park. One is the Red-bellied Black Snake. I have accepted one record, but I am not sure that this snake is really in the park. Very dark copperheads like the one we saw on the working bee are often misreported as Red-bellied Blacks. The other snake in the park is the White-lipped Snake (*Drysdalia*

coronata). This is a much smaller snake, although still poisonous. We know of only one sighting in the park. Sometime in the 1990's, we were planting trees just below the top stretch of the Zigzag Track, close to Jumbuk Road. I dug a hole for a tree and saw what I thought was a very fat worm in the hole. Thinking of giant earthworms, I grabbed hold of it, only to quickly realise my mistake. I didn't let go however, I quickly slid my hand up to hold it just behind its head and then realised that it was a White-lipped Snake. I called out to other tree planters to come and look and half of them did, but the rest moved as far away as they could instead!

March Activity

10.00am Sunday 18th March

The group will meet at 10.00am at the Junction Road car park to complete some track maintenance along Billy's Creek. We will need Craig (if he is working this weekend) to bring the waders and weed spray. If you have your own waders or gumboots bring them along for the walk in the creek looking for Tutsan. You will need to bring your lunch and clothing suitable for the weather conditions on the day.