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# Friends of Morwell National Park Inc.

## *Newsletter – July 2024*

Website: <http://morwellnp.pangaeaan.net>  
Official Address of FMNP - [contactfmnp@gmail.com](mailto:contactfmnp@gmail.com)  
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Welcome to this month's newsletter.

The group met in the Kerry Road picnic area on a cold but dry morning.

For the activity we had Mike, Cathy, Gordon, Ken, Matt, Jay, Joelle, Graeme, Anita, Caitilin and Darren. We had apologies from Rose, Beryl and Tamara.

The day was started earlier for the group working upon the bird book. They met before the activity and they now have finished all the write ups on each bird and the book is ready for the scientific and cultural reviews.

Related to the works on the repairs and replacements around the park, approvals have been gained from most of the related groups and the approvals have been gained for the Kerry Road replacement and repairs (including Stringybark bridge) and the replacement of bridges across Billy's Creek. The contracts are being made for the new signage and works on the Kerry Road section could be completed over the next two months. Ken and Matt have continued searching through old photos and have found a photo showing two picnic tables to the left of the barbeque in the Kerry Road picnic area (photographic evidence that there were three picnic tables original in the Kerry Road picnic area) and a photo of the Muttonwood Creek bridge.

With a bird book for sale later in the year, the question was raised about the group's tax status. The tax rules in relation to community groups changed earlier this year and now any community group that earns over \$416 pa will be taxed on at 33% on monies over \$416. If a group is registered as a charity these tax limits are different. There was concern that the money raised for the book and other book sales could be partly lost to tax, rather than to the benefit of the group and the park.

**Motion:** The Friends of Morwell National Park should investigate and work through the steps to become a registered charity.

**Moved:** Jay

**Seconded:** Joelle

Passed

A committee of Caitilin, Jay, Joelle and Mike will follow up the steps required to register as a charity.

With the new signage which will go up at the main entrances, a QR code will be added to each sign that can link to a FMNP website. The maximise this opportunity the group will need to register a new domain name

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**President:** Ken Harris

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**Secretary & Public Officer:** Beryl Nelson

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and make a new website. It was decided to register a domain name of FriendsofMorwellNP and register for a Wordpress account for making the website. The related costs were approved by the group.

Over the week Matt had collected five nesting boxes from Latrobe City. There were 3 smaller boxes suitable for sugar gliders and 2 larger boxes, good for ringtail possums. Since our stockpile of extra boxes had been used it is great to have these extra boxes to replace future broken or missing boxes. We could receive more nesting boxes via Latrobe Council in the future.

After the long meeting it was time to warm up and get moving. The plan was to locate the Butterfly Orchid plots and place colourful star picket stakes at each corner to make each site easier to locate in future surveys. Some in the group went for a walk around Fosters Gully while others went searching for the survey plots.

One plot was done last month so the first task was to locate the second plot along Fosters Gully track. Without the instructions of where each site was located finding each of the sites became very difficult. The second plot was difficult to find with a few attempts made to find it. Firstly, two of the corner posts were found but the other two were difficult to find with us first looking in the wrong direction. The next plot was even harder to find, with us searching and searching and not comfortably finding it. We will need to leave the remain three sites to be done on another occasion.



The group returned to the picnic area to have lunch and share some cake. While having lunch Ranger Mark and Renee called in and ate lunch with us. Renee is the ranger handling the repairs and replacements to the park so it was good to catch up with her and exchange more photos.

Caitilin doing the day and more recently took some more cool fungi photos. They are on the next page:



A few months ago, Caitilin randomly met a reporter and photographer from the Age newspaper and then took them on a tour around the park. The Age article related to this tour appeared in the Age this week. A copy of article appears below:

# ‘Show them to me’: Victoria accused of vastly exaggerating koala counts



By [Bianca Hall](#)

June 19, 2024 — 5.00am

THE AGE  
INDEPENDENT. ALWAYS.

On a crisp morning in Morwell National Park – an isolated oasis south of Hazelwood – Susie Zent is scanning the skies or, more precisely, the trees.

It takes nearly an hour, but she finally spots him: a fat-bottomed koala who squints down from his perch in the canopy of a mountain grey gum.



Friends of Gippsland Bush secretary Susie Zent says it's getting harder and harder to find koalas in the Strzelecki Ranges. *CREDIT: JUSTIN MCMANUS*

For 50 years Zent – who lives near the national park and serves as secretary of Friends of Gippsland Bush – has watched as paper mills and plantations changed the face of this landscape, creating ecological monocultures and driving koalas into ever-decreasing parcels of native forest.

“We have definitely observed a decline in the numbers, absolutely,” she says. We’ve been trying to get the importance of the wild population highlighted, and the animal protected, for 28 years.”

New research from the Australian Koala Foundation suggests the situation confronting Victorian koalas could be as serious as in NSW, Queensland and the ACT, where koalas were reclassified from vulnerable to endangered in 2022.

The foundation believes official koala counts in Victoria are vastly overinflated – potentially by more than 20 times – and there could be as few as 18,500 koalas surviving in the state.



Koalas are listed as endangered in NSW, the ACT and Queensland. *CREDIT: DEAN SEWELL*

In contrast, the Victorian government's [Koala Management Strategy](#), released last year, describes koalas as being "overabundant". It estimates a healthy population of more than 450,000 koalas around the state, based on a [report](#) commissioned by the Environment Department in 2020.

Australia's national science body, the CSIRO, said last year that its "[best available estimate](#)" for koalas in Victoria and South Australia combined was between 170,780 and 383,570. In March, it [revised this down to between](#) 129,000 and 286,000 koalas across both states.

But in its new paper, the Australian Koala Foundation argues the true size of Victoria's koala population – not including those which have found homes in privately owned blue-gum plantations – is between 18,538 and 28,825.

It says the "implausible" figures arrived at in the paper commissioned by the Environment Department were based on "strong regional biases", and the quality of the data was impeded by koala numbers being counted in highly populated areas and extrapolated to other parts of the state.

Foundation chair Deborah Tabart believes both the government and the CSIRO have their numbers wrong.

"Show them to me," she said of the koalas estimated by both bodies. "I've driven those landscapes for 35 years. I've been to every single forest in those places. They're just wrong. It's a desktop [figure]."

The foundation based its own assessment of koala numbers on the capacity of varying landscapes to support koalas, known as "carrying capacity", as well as counts done by citizen scientists and wildlife carers.

After the Black Summer bushfires of 2019-20, which destroyed 5.52 million hectares of bush and private land (including 1.5 million in Victoria), the Commonwealth listed koalas as endangered in the ACT, NSW and Queensland.



Deborah Tabart, chief executive of the Australian Koala Foundation.

Tabart said inaccurate perceptions that koala populations were secure had persisted in Victoria.

Her organisation has for years been calling for a national Koala Protection Act, and claims the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act is incapable of protecting koalas.

"I believe koalas are functionally extinct," Tabart said. "To me, that means a koala in this landscape today might have a joey, and [that joey] might have a joey, but that's the end of them; in three generations, they're gone. And we see nothing in our country to stop that happening."

“I don’t think there’s one koala in our country that’s safe right now, because the laws are inadequate.”



Strzelecki koalas, like this one pictured in the Morwell National Park, are thought to be the last genetically diverse koala population in Victoria.

*CREDIT: JUSTIN MCMANUS*

Susie Zent acknowledges there is overpopulation in some parts of the state, particularly in western Victoria. But she stresses it’s a different picture in eastern Gippsland, where Strzelecki koalas can be found.

Strzelecki koalas are perhaps the state’s most important group of koalas: they’re the only genetically diverse population left in Victoria and South Australia, and are under great threat from land clearing, climate change and disease.

The state’s remaining koalas are genetically compromised, having descended from a smaller group of koalas moved to French Island for breeding between 1923 and 1994, and returned to the mainland.

“The Strzelecki bioregion has the least amount of area [of habitat] set aside in permanent reserves and forested areas in Victoria,” Zent said.

Friends of the Earth’s Anthony Amis, who spent three years surveying Strzelecki koalas in the Mullungdung State Forest between Sale and Yarram, said he believed the government’s estimates of koala numbers in Mullungdung were about 10 times too high.

“It doesn’t take anything away from the fact that we’ve got this really important population in Gippsland that’s had most of its habitat privatised [by timber plantations],” he said.

The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action did not respond to a request for comment.

### **July Activity**

Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> July 10am

The group will meet at Junction Road car park to complete some track maintenance and work upon the post markers on the Butterfly Orchid plots. You will need to bring your lunch along with clothing and footwear suitable for the weather conditions on the day.