

PO Box 19  
Churchill  
3842



# Friends of Morwell National Park Inc.

## *Newsletter – June 2026*

Website: <https://friendsofmorwellnp.com.au/>  
Official contact of FMNP - [contact@friendsofmorwellnp.com.au](mailto:contact@friendsofmorwellnp.com.au)  
A0016319X

### May Activity Report

The main activity for May was a lunch to celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Friends of Morwell National Park.

At the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration we had most of our current members including Caitilin, Mike & Cathy, Ken, Matt, Anita, Beryl, Graeme, Tamara, Peter, Gordon, Sharon, Rachel, Wendy, John, Jay, Joelle, Rose, Wayne & Darren. We were joined by many past members and friends of the group. Two current rangers and a past ranger also joined us.

The celebration was held at Budgeree Hall, a wonderful venue for our event. Catering was done by the Budgeree Hall committee, and there was a wonderful array of soups, sandwiches, pies, sausage rolls, quiche and later sweets to be eaten. The delicious lunch was eaten while people watched a photo display from the last 40 years in the park. Around the room a number of artifacts had been collected and displayed for browsing. Early maps of the park, original handwritten plant lists collated before the park opened, old newsletters and an event list were all part of the materials on display. It is planned for some of the old records to be digitized to be included in the history sections of the web site.



Friends of Morwell National Park Inc: PO Box 19, Churchill, 3842, <https://friendsofmorwellnp.com.au/>

Official contact of FMNP - [contact@friendsofmorwellnp.com.au](mailto:contact@friendsofmorwellnp.com.au)

**President:** Caitilin Punshon

**Vice-President:** Anita Pither

**Secretary & Public Officer:** Cathy Beamish

**Treasurer:** Mike Beamish

**Publicity:** Tamara Leitch

**Newsletter Editor:** Darren Hodgson, [darren.hodgson@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:darren.hodgson@education.vic.gov.au)

**Other members:** John Arkinstall, Beasley family, Eulalie Brewster, Graeme Busch, Matt & Kerry Campbell, Misja Carbo, Olga van Cauwenberghe, Joelle Champert, Wendy Davies, Dodd family, Gordon Duncan, Jay Duncan, Peter Earl, Ken Harris, Kuan-Yu Lin, Tom Mabin, Rose Mildenhall, Beryl Nelson, Wayne Pengelly, Alex Raymond, Chris Sikkema, Joan Sikkema, Holli Smith & Sandra Walker.

A cake for the event was created by Cathy and Anita. Past important celebrations have been celebrated with cakes, and this one was decorated with elements found in the park including koalas, goanna, gum leaves, ferns, fungi and wattle.



When people had caught up with old acquaintances, met new people and browsed the displays, Caitilin welcomed everybody. She conducted an entertaining quiz based on some aspects of the history of the Friends group. The quiz both challenged and helped to recognize some of the achievements of the group.

She thanked the Budgerie Hall committee for their support and help, the Field Naturalists for the data projector, Cathy and Anita for the wonderful cake and Beryl, Anita, Cathy and herself who organized every aspect of the event.

Stories were shared about the incredible work accomplished over the years, including revegetation projects, storm clean-up efforts, flora and fauna surveys, track maintenance, and the creation of publications that help showcase and protect the Park. The most recent publication has been the Birds of Morwell National Park.

The gathering was a wonderful chance to share stories and memories from our time with the group. Caitilin thanked everyone who came along to celebrate this wonderful milestone and the community that has helped make it possible over the past 40 years.

The cake was cut by five of the seven past and present presidents of the group.



After cake, everyone assembled on the veranda for a group photo.



Earlier in the week, Ken and Matt met with Paddy Naughtin and some members of the Parks Victoria communications team to speak about the park and the Friends group. The result is a great article that has been published on the Parks Victoria website and promoted on their Facebook page. Matt also spoke with Tracy Neilsen, one of Parks Victoria's information and education officers in this area. She's been speaking about the parks and biodiversity in this area with local schools.

Parks Victoria have recently published an article on their website about the FMNP celebrating 40 years of volunteering. This article appears at the end of the newsletter.

### **June Activity**

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

The group will meet in the Kerry Road car park to conduct a fungi and lichen walk and undertake some track maintenance. You will need to bring your lunch along with clothing and footwear suitable for the weather conditions on the day.

## Friends of Morwell National Park celebrate 40 years of volunteering

Monday 18 May, 2026

For 40 years, the [Friends of Morwell National Park](#) have quietly worked to protect one of Gippsland's hidden natural treasures that according to volunteers “punches well above its weight”.

Through countless volunteer hours the group has helped care for the park's rich forests, wildlife and unique biodiversity – building a legacy that stretches across generations.

Morwell National Park is home to an extraordinary amount of biodiversity.

The park provides important habitat for Strzelecki koalas, a genetically significant population which hasn't been affected by inbreeding, while the sound of superb lyrebirds, whose remarkable mimicry echoes through the gullies and dense fern understory, is never far away.

Protecting that habitat has been the major focus for the Friends of Morwell National Park over the decades.

Ken Harris is one of the volunteer group's founding members and has spent the past 40 years inspecting almost every corner of Morwell National Park, documenting the extraordinary life found within its forests.



*Photo: Ken Harris is one of the founding members of the Friends of Morwell National Park.*

Ken, who grew up in England, became infatuated with Morwell National Park on his very first weekend in Victoria back in 1985.

“I was lent a car, and I thought ‘right, *Wilsons Prom is high on my list, let's go*’,” Ken said.

“I didn't know the way, so when I saw a sign that said Morwell National Park, I thought I'd stop and check it out. I was lured by the scent of the Pittosporums and set out on the Fosters Gully Walk where I found quite a few species of orchids.”

“When I got back to the carpark I met the local ranger, Ian Roche, who took me back into the park to show me another orchid, and gave me a [list of the plants and animals](#) that had been recorded here – I've been connected with Morwell National Park ever since.”



The abundance of tall eucalyptus trees make Morwell National Park a good spot for koala sightings.



The lush fern gullies are a feature of Morwell National Park.



The dense, damp understory of Morwell National Park makes it a great spot for all sorts of fungi.



Victoria's floral emblem, Common Heath, can be found in the park.

Through Ian and his wife Gail, Ken found a small community of like-minded people who were keen to care for the park. In May 1986, the Friends of Morwell National Park was formed.

Since then, the volunteer group has helped with weed control, habitat restoration, community education, annual koala surveys, and guided orchid walks, among a host of other activities.

For Ken, a highlight of the past 40 years has been watching the revegetation of Billys Creek take place. The Billys Creek section of the national park was added much later than the original portion and had been completely cleared of trees apart from next to the creek itself.

Since the 1990s the Friends of Morwell National Park have planted thousands of trees, shrubs and grasses along Billys Creek, to the point where the Eucalypts now tower above walkers setting out on the Grand Strzelecki Track.

“We collected the original seed from the park, then propagated, planned and planted what has now become a well-established forest,” Ken said.

Those plantings have helped create healthier habitat corridors for birds, insects, koalas and other small mammals, including gliders.



Morwell National Park is home to a population of the genetically-important Strzelecki koalas.



Superb Lyrebirds can often be seen scratching around the bush.

But it's not just the tall trees that Ken enjoys though – he has a fascination with some of the park's smallest organisms.

Ken and other members of the Friends group have recorded 835 identified moth species in the park (an astonishing number that highlights just how biodiverse the area is, with many more to be documented, according to Ken), as well as painstakingly recording the many different types of moss and lichen found with the national park's boundaries.

The painstaking work of recording these species has helped build a deeper understanding of Morwell National Park and created valuable records for future conservation efforts.

For Ken though, one particular plant grabs his attention more than any other – the Butterfly Orchid.



*Photo: Butterfly Orchids are just one of many beautiful orchids found within Morwell National Park. Credit: Matt Campbell.*

“Morwell National Park has an amazing population of rare Butterfly Orchids – they’re the *raison d’être* for the park,” Ken said.

Butterfly Orchids are a small, semi-pendulous orchid found in cool, damp rainforests, with fragrant white flowers. It is one of just three epiphytic orchids found in Victoria – meaning it grows on other trees and shrubs, with its long roots creeping along branches.

“It’s not a parasite - it doesn’t take anything from the host, apart from a place in the sun. It’s a beautiful plant,” Ken said.

Matt Campbell is another of the passionate local volunteers, having been directly involved with the Friends group for the past 15 years, but with a connection to the park itself stretching back to childhood.



*Photo: Matt Campbell has been visiting Morwell National Park since he was a child.*

“I grew up locally and used to play in the park all the time. These days it’s literally my backyard as my property backs onto the park,” Matt said.

Matt got involved with the Friends after a chance encounter where he met Ken in the park late one night. Seeing a strange light in the dark, Matt pulled over to investigate.

“I came across this old boy with a sheet and a light, and I’m thinking what’s he doing out here?”

In fact, Ken was in the park counting moth species that had landed on his illuminated sheet.

“We got chatting, and he invited me to join him, and now I couldn’t tell you how many nights I spend outside with a light sheet at home,” Matt said.

For many members, including Ken and Matt, volunteering is about more than conservation. It is also about connection.



*Photo: Ken and Matt are just two of the many dedicated volunteers that make the Friends of Morwell National Park.*

Working side-by-side on planting days, surveys and park projects has helped build lasting friendships and a strong sense of community among volunteers. Members come from all walks of life, united by a shared passion for nature and the outdoors.

“People join for different reasons,” Matt said.

“Some want to learn more about the environment, some want to give back, and others are just looking to meet people with similar interests. Before long, they feel part of something bigger.”

“The thing with Morwell National Park is that it’s not that well known – even locally. It’s one of the oldest national parks in the state being created in 1967. At the time it was the smallest national park in Victoria.”

“But it really punches above its weight - the amount of biodiversity here is just incredible,” Matt said.

Forty years after the group first formed, the Friends of Morwell National Park are still turning up with the same passion and curiosity that sparked the organisation all those years ago – helping ensure the park’s rich biodiversity is protected for generations to come.