



FOFI News



The newsletter of the Friends of French Island National Park Inc.

April 2018

FRIENDS OF FRENCH ISLAND NATIONAL PARK

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PROJECT DAYS

The ferry departs from Stony Point at 10.00 am on Saturdays and Sundays and returns at 4.00 pm. In summer we may catch a later ferry back and in winter an earlier one. If you plan to come on a project day, **please contact the Secretary well in advance** to give us time to organise transport on the island.

Ferry tickets. FOFI has a number of tickets to help pay for members under 60, generously provided by Parks Victoria. Seniors Card holders travel for free on weekends. For more information see:

<http://westernportferries.com.au/>

Saturday 21 April: Pittosporum at Blue Gums

Sweet Pittosporum (*Pittosporum undulatum*) is a serious invasive weed throughout much of Victoria. It spreads quickly, and its dense canopy and leaf chemicals starve indigenous plants and animals of nutrients, water and sunlight. There are a number of Pittosporum "hot spots" on French Island, including the Blue Gums forest on the south coast. Park rangers have asked us to give this infestation priority over the next couple of years.

Small plants can be removed by hand, but larger ones are lopped at ground level and the stump treated with poison. Please bring sturdy gloves and eye protection for this task. Other tools provided.

After lunch we will enjoy a walk along Blue Gums Track to see how the forest is recovering from the extended dry spell.



Sweet Pittosporum at Devilbend (Daangean).

The Friends of Daangean are working tirelessly to eradicate this species throughout their reserve.

Hansi Wegner

9 & 10 May: Koala Management Program

Parks Victoria and DELWP are continuing their French Island management program that will keep the koala population in good health and within sustainable limits. This involves capturing koalas on both public and private land, checking the health of the animals, and implanting females with a long-term contraceptive. Other tasks include updating information on koala density and canopy conditions. It is not planned to take more koalas off the island at this stage.

Volunteers are sought to help with the program on Wednesday 9 and Thursday 10 May (7.50 am ferry over, 4.30 pm return). Please contact us if you would like to be involved. Membership of FOFI is requested.



Walter Mitchell

Saturday 19 May: Redbill Creek Walk

A walk along Redbill Creek Track was planned as our March activity but had to be cancelled when it was declared a day of total fire ban. Discover the remnant Manna Gum woodland in this north-west corner of the island on a gentle 3 km walk and learn about the koala research project carried out in the 1980s.

Saturday 2 June: Landcare Planting Day

FOFI members always look forward to this combined activity with French Island Landcare. This year's planting will be on private property off the Barge Access Road. Tools provided; kneeling mats can be useful. Homemade soup and rolls, tea and coffee will be generously supplied for lunch by Landcare.

PROJECT DAYS (cont.)

Saturday 30 June: Western Port Wader Survey

This will be BirdLife Australia's second survey for the year. Martin O'Brien has again offered to co-ordinate the French Island teams, which will aim to cover the main high-tide roosts. If you are planning to come, please book in with Martin.O'Brien@delwp.vic.gov.au.



Eastern Curlews, October 2017

Andrew Browne

VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION DAY

Saturday 26 May 9.30 am – 3.00 pm

This year Parks Victoria is hosting its annual thank-you picnic for volunteers on Herring Island. A punt will run every ten minutes from 10.00 am to transport guests from the Parks office in Burnley (Melway 2H C12). Boat trips along the Yarra will depart from Herring Island at 10.15 am, 11.45 am and 1.45 pm (bookings essential). There will also be tours of the 3.2 hectare island by the local Friends group, and a 2.2 km loop walk along the Yarra from Burnley at 11.00 am and 1.45 pm. A picnic lunch will be served at the Island pavilion at 12.30 pm. The day is always a fun way to meet other Friends, talk to Parks staff, and discover other parks – in this case another island! Please RSVP by Monday 18 May: <https://Event2018.eventbrite.com.au>. Enquiries 8427 3089.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING REPORT

At our AGM on 17 February we were pleased to elect Andrew Browne as our new President. Andrew is a passionate and articulate conservationist and outstanding bird photographer who brings a new energy to the group. Meredith Sherlock continues as Secretary, and Margaret Medley takes on Treasurer for another term, assisted this year by Jethro Sallmann. Geoff Lacey, Meg Macmillan and Bette Mitchell make up the rest of the new committee. We also welcome French Island resident Linda Bowden as our local liaison member.

It was with the greatest regret that we accepted the resignation of Chris Chandler from the committee. Chris has stepped down for personal reasons but remains an invaluable FOFI member and a vital link to all aspects of French Island. We thank him for his exceptional knowledge, energy and generosity as President over the past two years and congratulate him on his new position as President of the Westernport and Peninsula Protection Council Inc.

ACTIVITIES REPORTS

Saturday 20 January: Beach Rubbish Removal

Present: Linda Bowden, Chris Chandler, Aija Dowling, Marnie Fitzsimons, Meg Macmillan, Sky Murphy, Meredith Sherlock, Pauline Wilkinson, and Scott Coutts.

First-Time Experience of FOFI

I saw, walked on, and learnt so much about French Island: its plants, animals, geology, history and our connected humankind past and present. Everyone was amazing in knowledge, interests, and friendship. Incredible to walk all that way over the peaty saltmarsh with no track, beach, then 'an isthmus of mangroves' that connects to the beach of (formerly an island) Tortoise Head! Over 6 km there and back.

In the far distance we saw a Peregrine Falcon pair with two young gracefully flying high. We also saw Terns, lots of Muttonbird burrows, intact bones of birds some with feathers,¹ one large, partially collapsed egg, small spiders, large horse flies or marsh flies, various animal tracks,² plants and weeds I can't remember the names of, rock types, a newly formed sandspit and lava layers.



Rakali "highway" in the muddy saltmarsh

Chris Chandler

Lunch ended with a special and educational BUSH TUCKER dessert Chris provided: the fruit of Pigface (which I later identified as *Carpobrotus glaucescens*, a salt-tolerant pioneer species with yellow-centred purplish-pink flowers).

We must have collected some 50+ kg of rubbish – we dragged about 8 large bags, each weighing maybe 7 kg. We had to leave them for the rangers, who will send a boat out to collect them. Most were SOFT DRINK BOTTLES! Quite a bit of tangled ropes and other PLASTIC. Some glass bottles and cans. 1 larger metal can. Tyres we couldn't carry. Pieces of broken glass and 1 lure with multiple hooks. 1 boat fender.³



A small sample of the beach rubbish collected. All of this material will have been washed in with the tides.

Linda Bowden

Personally I also cherished the many fascinating forms and awesome colours of seashells (*yes, I put them back*). And ... the ferry rides! This shall remain a lasting memory – a day of fun and positive action. Thank you all.

Sky Murphy

¹ A Rainbow Lorikeet carcass was found at the base of the cliffs at Tortoise Head. This species is a rare visitor to French Island. Perhaps taken by a raptor on Phillip Island?

² Including those of the native water-rat (rakali), a semi-aquatic nocturnal animal with thick waterproof fur like a platypus.

³ Sky has drawn our attention to the Tangaroa Blue Foundation and its Australian Marine Debris Initiative (www.tangaroablue.org). AMDI is a network of volunteers, communities and organisations working to control the worldwide environmental disaster that sees 8 million tons of plastic enter the oceans each year. FOFI is keen to participate in this initiative by sorting any future beach rubbish collections into categories and then completing and submitting data sheets to AMDI. We will also endeavour to follow through more thoroughly on our clean-up days by assisting recycling efforts at the French Island tip.

And as we go to press, the Tangaroa Blue data is the lead story in today's *Guardian Australia* ("The great Australian garbage map", 18 April 2018).

Saturday 3 February: Western Port Wader Survey

Present: Geoff Lacey, Debbie Lustig, Sky Murphy, Martin O'Brien, Adrienne Palmer, Des Palmer, Meredith Sherlock, and Russell Tilley.

Des, Adrienne, Meredith and Geoff went to Tortoise Head. It was fairly easy walking in the dry saltmarsh. When crossing the coastal dune we observed the way that young mangroves are growing up and increasing their coverage of the shallow water. We had lunch on the shore facing the rocky spit (the wader roost).

We then walked along the beach and rocks (Meredith through the water) to the steep basalt cliffs at the south end of the head and around the corner. Many mature Drooping Sheoaks are growing on the cliff face and on top of it – a beautiful sight.

We returned to the wader roost area to count all the waterbirds. The count was low because we had to leave the site well before high tide (4.00 pm) and not all the birds had arrived. For example, we counted only 50 Eastern Curlews and 45 Pied Oystercatchers. However, a pleasant surprise was a Black-faced Cormorant.

It was a good day for raptors: 2 Swamp Harriers (one of them quite dark) over the saltmarsh; a Sea-Eagle and 2 Nankeen Kestrels over the shore; a Black-shouldered Kite perched in a dead tree in front of Tortoise Head hill; and a pair of Peregrine Falcons and a Whistling Kite flying above the hill.

Geoff Lacey

The second team reported 3 Red-capped Plover and about 10 Red-necked Stint at Rams Island. 2 Whistling Kites were seen overhead at Long Point. 23 Common Greenshank were counted at Mini Inlet south, but there were no waders at all at Chilcott Rocks. As usual, Black Swan was the species with the highest numbers (186), with Pied Oystercatchers in second place (54) and Silver Gull third (53).



© Andrew Browne

Peregrine Falcon, October 2017

Andrew Browne

The big surprise for the day was about 30 White-throated Needletail at Mini Inlet north and another 4 at Tortoise Head. These Swifts have not been seen on the island for several years.



Lunchtime: Martin O'Brien, Debbie Lustig & Russell Tilley (Is the dot above Martin's head a Needletail?) Sky Murphy

Thank you to Russell Tilley for transport and cheerful company, and thank you also to Georgia Kerr for changing the roster at the last minute to accommodate us.

COMMUNITY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT GRANT

FOFI has been the lucky recipient of a 2018 Community Skills Development Grant funded by DELWP. The grant allows for three FOFI members to undertake a 4WD training course, which will qualify them to drive Parks vehicles on the island. This will help FOFI to transport members and tools to work sites when no ranger is available, or when a second vehicle is required. We are grateful to Bernice Dowling, Volunteer Programs Coordinator with Parks

Victoria for her support and assistance with our application.

EASTERN BARRED BANDICOOTS UPDATE

While the bandicoots released on Summerland Peninsula, Phillip Island, appear to be thriving, not everything in the EBB Recovery Project is good news. On 11 March, Amy Coetsee wrote: "My recent population monitoring at Woodlands Historic Park, a fenced reserve near Melbourne Airport, has revealed a dramatic decline in the EBB population. As a result, we can no longer source EBBs from this population for a French Island release. If we can't source enough EBBs from other sites, we may need to delay the French Island release until 2019. This is an unfortunate, unexpected event that highlights the fragility of EBB populations."

AGL PROPOSAL FOR CRIB POINT

FOFI is deeply concerned about AGL's plan to build an on-water gas terminal at Woolley's Beach. This project would see about one million tonnes of imported liquid natural gas brought in annually on giant tankers and converted to gas to then be piped ashore to Pakenham for local consumption.

The negative aspects of this proposal are many, but our immediate concern is the continuous flow of colder water (6° cooler than seawater) that will be released into the bay and flow between Woolley's Beach and French Island. This has the potential to harm the delicate marine ecology of Western Port, particularly the rare Grey Mangrove and the intertidal invertebrates which form the main food source for migratory waders.



Phlebotus marginatus

Meredith Sherlock

FIRM UPDATE

As part of the Coastcare Victoria Community Grant awarded to French Islanders Researching Muttonbirds and managed by FOFI, blackberry removal works around the old homestead site were carried out by Bush Regeneration Services in February utilising spraying and cut-and-paint techniques with Roundup.

Meanwhile, project coordinator David Nicholls writes:

"We have a set of four satellite tracks of breeding shearwater flying to Antarctica. The scientific objective is to explain the flights in relation to the winds. The hypothesis is that above a minimum wind speed and below excessive wind speeds, the birds fly faster with stronger winds. Winds on the hind quarter provide optimal flights; winds from other directions cause the birds to fly slower or change direction. We recognise three phases to the flight: south-bound commuting to offshore Antarctica, west-bound foraging along the ice edge, and home-bound commuting.

There was a set of wind speed and direction for the 600 bird locations obtained from the Bureau of Meteorology at the time of the flights. Caroline Dias Gabani, a postgraduate from Brazil, has extracted the archived winds from a NOAA database¹ and demonstrated that these two wind datasets match almost exactly. We are now using the NOAA dataset and Caroline has developed R scripts mapping these winds at daily intervals with the bird's flight.

The archive wind data will allow us to examine where the bird flew in relation to the full potential of flight paths; where the bird did fly and where it did not. We will, first at 6-hourly intervals, step the bird flight through the wind field, measuring bird and wind speeds and directions, as pioneered by Murray, Nicholls et al.² We expect to derive rules on how the bird flies; defining a relationship between wind speed and bird ground speed, the relationship between the bird's direction, wind direction and the perceived destination for the bird.

The significance of this work is that the weight of the chicks has declined over the last two decades of monitoring. It is hypothesised that climate change has altered the wind systems to adversely affect the parental feeding of their chicks.

I am very impressed with Caroline's analytical and computing skills and much encouraged with our progress."

¹ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (US).

² Murray, M. D.; Nicholls, D. G.; Butcher, E. C.; Moors, P. (2002). "How Wandering Albatrosses use weather systems to fly long distances. 1. An analytical method and its application to flights in the Tasman Sea". *EMU* 102: 377–385.

THANK YOU. A big thank you to John Rechter for repairing the notices holder on our Tankerton "office"!

This issue of FOFI News was written and compiled by Meredith Sherlock with contributions from Geoff Lacey, Sky Murphy, David Nicholls, Martin O'Brien, Candy van Rood & Amie Sands, and the Westernport and Peninsula Protection Council.