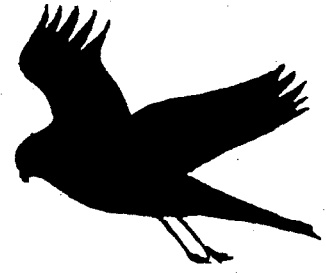




FOFI News



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

July 2018

FRIENDS OF FRENCH ISLAND NATIONAL PARK

President: Andrew Browne 0423 831 758

Secretary: Meredith Sherlock 0438 077 329

Email: secretary@fofi.org.au

Website: www.fofi.org.au

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 18 August: Rams Island Working Bee

Rams Island is a significant nesting site of the Fairy Tern, listed as "Endangered" in Victoria. In collaboration with BirdLife Australia's Fairy Tern Project, FOFI will build up selected sites with shellgrit in an attempt to improve breeding success. Please bring gloves and sturdy shoes. Beach walk after lunch.



Martin O'Brien checking a camera on Rams Island in December 2016
Jethro Sallmann

Saturday 15 September: Sea-Eagle Monitoring

We will spend the day searching for the nests of two pairs of White-bellied Sea-Eagle on the south coast.

Saturday 20 October: Spring Wildflower Walk

French Island is renowned for its native orchids and profusion of spring colours. Numbers limited.

ACTIVITIES REPORTS

Saturday 21 April: Redbill Creek Walk

Present: Andrew Browne, Aija Dowling, Meg Macmillan, Bette Mitchell, Meredith Sherlock.

The last-minute cancellation of ranger availability meant we were unable to get out to Blue Gums to tackle Pittosporum as planned. Instead, we took the opportunity to walk the Redbill Creek Circuit – the outing that had been cancelled in March – on a beautiful autumn day.



Meg Macmillan and a Small Grass-tree
(Xanthorrhoea minor)

Andrew Browne

9 & 10 May: Koala Management Program

Present: Marnie Fitzsimons, Tiffany Scott (Wednesday); Andrew Browne, Meg Macmillan, Meredith Sherlock (Thursday).

It was a privilege to spend the day with Viv Amenta and her team from DELWP and Parks Victoria as they located, caught, checked, implanted and then released female koalas (a couple with young in the pouch). Vet Christina Chang and nurse Ellen Richmond worked with calm and cheerful professionalism as each animal was brought to the clinic at the Parks Office in a sack and quickly sedated. FOFI volunteers helped to locate and catch koalas in the field and assisted with data entry.



The day was also an opportunity to discover some private properties on the island as we searched for koalas, and to meet some terrific young rangers brought in from other areas to help out.



Returning a female to the same tree she was found. Note the orange ear-tag and the red-painted bottom (temporary) to indicate that the female has been treated.

Almost 700 koalas were translocated to Kinglake and Tallarook last year (where they are apparently thriving), and this year the average body weight of the French Island koalas has risen and there is a marked increase in their overall health as well as fewer signs of overbrowsing. More funding is now sought to continue the Management Program in 2019.

Saturday 19 May: Redbill Creek Walk (repeat)

Present: Aija Dowling, Terry Martin, Ron Ricketts, Meredith Sherlock, Jarryn Van Dyk, and Scott Coutts.

Ranger Scott led us from Mini Inlet along the coast north to a track that linked with the Redbill Circuit walk. With koalas fresh in our minds, we counted nine animals, including a massive brown male in a Tea-tree thicket – still too many for the ideal ratio of one koala per hectare. As we walked, Scott pointed out the tags fixed to certain trees as part of past koala research in this Manna Gum forest.¹ There were few birds about, but otherwise it was an excellent day. Thanks to Scott and Terry for transport.



A very large pile of koala droppings!

Jarryn Van Dyk

¹ Peter John Mitchell, "The Social Organization of Koalas", PhD thesis, Monash University, 1989; Richard H. Loyn, Kym Saunders and David G. Nicholls, *Koalas on French Island: A Snapshot of their Distribution and Abundance*, Arthur Rylah Institute in association with Chisholm Institute, 2002.

Saturday 2 June: Landcare Planting Day

Present: Caroline Durré, Marnie Fitzsimons, Jean Knowles, Rod Knowles, Meredith Sherlock, and French Island Landcare.

It was a bright sunny morning for French Island Landcare's annual planting day, this year at Chateau Baudin on Barge Access Road. Young and old got more than 300 plants in the ground before lunch, comprising Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*), Messmate (*Eucalyptus obliqua*), Prickly Moses (*Acacia verticillata*), Prickly Tea-tree (*Leptospermum continentale*), Swamp Sheoak (*Allocasuarina paludosa*), and Sweet Wattle (*Acacia suaveolens*), all grown in the Landcare nursery.

Lunch was a feast of homemade pumpkin soup, bread and muffins, cauliflower au gratin and gourmet desserts under the trees in the camping area looking out towards the South Gippsland hills.

A big thank you to Anya and David Simms, to Landcare for their excellent organisation as always, and to weekenders Jarrod and Kirsti for help with transport to and from the ferry.



Landcare planting day

Marnie Fitzsimons

Saturday 30 June: Western Port Wader Survey

Present: Andrew Browne, Troy Bryant, Karen Collard, Dom D'Argenio, Lois Dobson, Ken Harris, Denise Jackson, Suze Keppert, Kevin Miller, Martin O'Brien, Des Palmer, Meredith Sherlock, Kuniko Yamada, and Scott Coutts.

A challenging day greeted 13 Friends members and other volunteers for the second wader count of the year. The forecast high winds and showers meant the tides were so high that many wader roosts had almost no beach for birds to sit out the tidal cycle.

Cognisant of the wet Tortoise Head saltmarsh and exposed conditions, most volunteers joined FOFI member and French Island wader count coordinator Martin and ranger Scott for the Rams Island and west coast roost sites, leaving a smaller (and more intrepid!) team to do the Tortoise Head spit.

Muddy roads, westerly winds and showers were the theme of the day, but we still managed to record a suite of interesting birds. Rams Island had the "usual" pair of **Cape Barren Geese** (+nest with 3 eggs) plus **Black Swan**, ***Caspian Tern** (2), **Grey Teal** (23), **Little Pied Cormorant**, **Silver** and **Pacific Gulls** (2). Our only waders at this site were a small flock of **Double-banded Plover** (18), with most of the island's birds keeping out of the turbulent conditions. Behind Long Point beach we observed a single **Whistling Kite** masterly flying into the strong winds, and heard **Grey Shrike-Thrush** (1) plus **New Holland Honey-eaters**, which were keeping to the dense cover of (now tall) shrubland, planted by FOFI members years ago.

Conscious that the day's high tide was most likely going to be earlier than 1500hrs we agreed to go to the Parks depot on Bayview Road for an early lunch and warming hot drinks – a well-chosen stop, as we experienced short breaks of sunshine.

Our next sites for the day were all west coast roosts ... however the strong westerly winds and choppy bay conditions combined with the pending high tide meant all these locations had little or no beach for resting birds. We also struggled with managing our binoculars

and spotting scopes against the high winds and spray. After some brief discussions between Scott and Martin it was agreed to check some of the coastal (inland) wetland sites in the hope of finding waders sheltering from the winds.

Along Coast Road, away from the western channel, we did indeed encounter some shorebirds. On private property (De La Haye Park) we spied a number of large birds sitting on a small island in a shallow dam – ***Caspian Terns**, 6 adults and two first-year birds. As we panned with our binoculars a single **Avocet** was also seen, the first for many years of FOFI surveys. Other birds were **Eastern Rosella** (3), **Welcome Swallow** (2), **White-fronted Chat** (2), **Australian Shelduck**, **Grey Teal** (22), **Masked Lapwing** (7) and **Australasian Grebe** (2).

With time in our favour Scott recommended a visit to Bullock Swamp, further north along the west coast. As we proceeded along Bullock Road we observed **Domestic Geese**, and while approaching the park entry gates the familiar **peacocks** were encountered; this time two of the four males seen were entirely white birds. We understand that French Island is the only Australian location where one can observe free ranging/wild peacocks.¹



Looking for birds at Bullock "Dry" Swamp Andrew Browne

As anticipated Bullock Swamp was dry, but a number of water and other birds were present. Both **Black Swan** and **Cape Barren Geese** were observed on nests ... surrounded by open ground (maybe the birds felt safe due to the lack of foxes?). Other birds were **Welcome Swallow** (24), **Australian Shelduck** (6), **Pied Currawong** (5) and **Grey Fantail** (4). To the west we could see a flock of very white birds sheltering on the ground adjacent to a house. This comprised over 55 **Royal Spoonbills** and at least one **Yellow-billed Spoonbill**. Nearby were a few **Australian White Ibis** (5).

On the road out from the swamp a flash of red caught our eye – a **Scarlet Robin** and what appeared to be a single **Yellow Thornbill** next to it on a fence wire. In the roadside bush a **Golden Whistler** was heard and

our **peacocks** were again on the road in front of the vehicle, giving good views as they ran along through the puddles and mud.

Hoping that the abating winds (!) might allow the waders to access their roost sites we checked the north end of Mini Inlet. Luckily a number of birds were sheltering behind mangroves here and could be counted with the aid of a spotting scope. **Black Swan** (~100), **Masked Lapwing** (2), **Chestnut Teal**, **Pied Oystercatcher** (~80) and **Red-capped Plover** (10) were the only waders observed. High in the sky to the north of Mini Inlet a single ***White-bellied Sea-Eagle** was detected with its distinctive outline and flight pattern.



Inundated West Coast

Martin O'Brien

Next were the Fairhaven and Chilcott Rocks sites, but the sea and wind conditions had still not abated so no wading birds were seen. With the anticipated 4.30 pm ferry time approaching we finished up and headed back to Tankerton, only to find that service had been cancelled due to the rough conditions. With the arrival of the Tortoise Head team we agreed to go the Tankerton Store for a cuppa and the warm fire ... eventually catching a late ferry (via Phillip Island!) that got us home safely.

Thanks again to all the volunteers for persevering on one of the most difficult wader count days I've ever experienced on the island, and to Scott for arranging transport and keeping a lookout for us in the wintry weather.

Martin O'Brien

* = threatened species

¹ Martin O'Brien and Geoff Lacey, "Birds of French Island forest, woodland, heath and grassland", *Australian Field Ornithology*, 35, 2018, pp. 57–71. (Copies of this landmark paper will be available on FOFI outings.)



A hot chocolate and a rainbow at the French Island General Store

Martin O'Brien

The forecast for Saturday 30 June had been for sunny conditions, but by Thursday that was amended to be fairly bleak, and bleak it was. The south-westerly squalls were relentless, with perhaps 15-minute intervals between them. However, the other four dedicated souls who braved these conditions (two of them over 70 years of age) I found quite inspiring, their cheery faces lifting my spirit when I felt like turning back to the refuge of Tankerton.

The tide was predicted to be a very high tide, and it was later confirmed that they don't get any higher. After Ken Harris found us a lunch spot up on the escarpment above Tortoise Head behind a Melaleuca which shielded us from the wind and rain, we dropped back down to the roost site at 1.00 pm for our official count. It was if the weather gods had conspired against us because the wind and sleet took it up another notch, so much so that Ken and I could hardly hold our scopes to get a wader count. With great difficulty we recorded 10 **Red-capped Plover**, 20 **Red-necked Stints**, 24 **Pied Oystercatchers**, 3 **Caspian Terns**, 3 **Little Pied Cormorants** and 2 **Pacific Gulls**. These poor birds were really looking unhappy, with not much dry land left to stand on, and the spray of salt water covering them every now and again. At this point we saw 3 **Eastern Curlews** above us, struggling to make headway into the driving wind before changing their minds and heading back towards Tankerton.

Other birds of note we encountered were a flock of 32 **White-faced Heron** on the saltmarsh between Tankerton and Tortoise Head, and a **White-bellied Sea-Eagle** over the saltmarsh in the same spot on the way back. Birds of prey were quite scarce, with a lone **Australian Kestrel** and 2 **Swamp Harriers** the only other raptors observed. The return route from Tortoise Head saw us having to walk through 200 metres of knee-high freezing water from the resultant high tide inundating the saltmarsh, but Ken, Dom, Kevin and Karen (our designated scribe for the day) all seemed to take it in their stride, as though this new challenge just added to the day's enjoyment.

Des Palmer

A NEW EUCALYPT FOR FRENCH ISLAND!

Chris Chandler has submitted to Kevin Rule, an authority on *Eucalyptus* taxonomy, specimens of what appears to be an outlier of the very rare *Eucalyptus carolaniae*, a rough-barked gum known previously only from a single population in Mount Martha. *E. carolaniae* shares features with *E. cypellocarpa* (Mountain Grey Gum) and *E. goniocalyx* (Long-leaved Box or Bundy) but has been confirmed as a distinct species rather than a hybrid.



French Island "Bundy" fruits

Chris Chandler

The five trees on French Island are all in the National Park – one on McLeod Road (a mature tree with a clean, straight trunk) and the other four at Rain Point (one half-grown, an older, spreading tree, and two saplings). While we wait on formal identification, FOFI could play an important role in searching the area for more specimens of this exciting new French Island "floral enigma".

ASSISTANT TREASURER WANTED

FOFI is calling for an Assistant Treasurer to help with electronic banking transactions. The duties are not onerous, and after an initial committee meeting to approve the position and a visit to a Bank Australia branch to sign on as a FOFI signatory, there will only be occasional email requests to "second sign" an electronic transfer from FOFI's account. Please contact the Secretary if this is for you.



French Island "Bundy", c.7 metres tall

Chris Chandler

MEMBERS NEWS

Congratulations to **Jarryn Van Dyk** and **Des Palmer**, who have completed the two-day course *Drive and Recover a 4WD Vehicle* with PNL 4WDiving Pty Ltd. The courses were funded by a DELWP Community Skills Development Grant to allow FOFI members to drive a Parks Victoria vehicle. "I had a great time and learnt so much" (Jarryn). "It was absolutely fantastic, had a ball, Nyrie is a great instructor" (Des).

We also congratulate **Martin O'Brien** on his forthcoming retirement from DELWP, where he has had a distinguished career as Executive Officer of the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act* Scientific Advisory Committee – an advisory, scientific and technical support role for the Committee, which advises the Minister for the Environment on threatened species and related matters. Since 1997 Martin has helped to assess 300+ nominations for listing under the *FFG Act*, leading to the formal addition of most of these items to the "Threatened List" of the *Act*. Many of these items are birds, but the list also covers the suite of native plants, animals, ecological communities and threatened processes within Victoria.

Martin describes himself as “the ‘front person’ the public goes to when seeking advice and guidance on all matters to do with identifying and preserving our wonderful natural history and all its habitats”, and writes that “Working in a semi-independent role (as the EO) with some of Australia’s best and most dedicated biologists has probably been my career highlight, but with a great network of other biologists (mainly departmental) over the years maybe just as good”.



Martin at Long Point, December 2016 Walter Mitchell

We have been fortunate indeed to have had Martin as a dedicated member of FOFI ever since he and his partner Kaye joined in 1999. Most importantly, Martin has submitted all French Island observations of plants and animals to the *Victorian Biodiversity Atlas*, an online database that allows users (with login) to search and map species,¹ and to DELWP’s species records mapping system, NatureKit.² He has also carried out long-term monitoring of four threatened species in Western Port (King Quail, Fairy Tern, Caspian Tern and White-bellied Sea-Eagle) and for the past couple of years has coordinated the French Island teams for the Western Port Wader Surveys.

We wish Martin a restful retirement that gives him more opportunity to enjoy his other interests, though we know his expertise will continue to be much in demand. We hope that keeping in touch with his FOFI friends and visits to French Island will remain high on his “to do” list.

¹ <https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/biodiversity/victorian-biodiversity-atlas>

² <http://maps.biodiversity.vic.gov.au/viewer/?viewer=NatureKit>

We were shocked to learn of the death of **David Leslie** on 4 July at the age of 57. David and his wife Janet Towns invited FOFI to explore their property at the foot of Mt Wellington in April 2016, and generously shared their love of the island with us. The website of the Doherty Institute, where David worked as a medical

microbiologist, records his “keen intellect” and, “commitment”; he “was greatly respected and valued” by his colleagues. The tribute also notes: “In his personal life, David was an avid bird watcher and lover of nature; in later years spending much time on his property on French Island. [...] [He] was generally a private man but happy to express an opinion on topics he was passionate about like microbiology, politics and the environment.” We offer our sincere condolences to Janet and David’s family.



Grassy forest on David and Janet’s property in 2016 Geoff Lacey

New Member. We extend a warm welcome to **Karen Collard**.

CHILD SAFE STANDARDS

New Child Safe Standards were introduced by the Victorian Government in 2016, and all organisations in Victoria that provide services or facilities involving children are required to comply with these seven Standards. We are frankly astonished that Parks Victoria is still to produce its own version of the Standards after two years, and in this vacuum FOFI has taken the initiative to prepare its own. While children do not often attend our activities (although they are always welcome), we see our Standards as part of our overall commitment to ensure that all actions carried out in FOFI’s name are undertaken with transparency and total respect for our volunteers and the environment. The Standards were prepared by Aija Dowling and Andrew Browne and can be accessed on our website (under About Us).

In summary, on any FOFI project day where a child (a person under 18 years of age) is present:

- the child must be accompanied by a parent or guardian
- the child will not be left alone with an adult who is not the parent or guardian
- a Child Safety Officer will attend any activity when a child is present
- the President, Secretary and Child Safety Officers will have a current *Working With Children Check*
- The *Child Safe Code of Conduct* will be a condition of FOFI membership.

EASTERN BARRED BANDICOOT UPDATE: FRENCH ISLAND RELEASE DELAYED

Amy Coetsee of the EBB Recovery Program reported on 4 June: "Trapping in April at Woodlands Historic Park [north of Melbourne Airport] revealed that the population has declined further. The habitat is in very poor condition due to overgrazing by over abundant herbivores and a dry summer. If the habitat doesn't improve over winter it is possible we will lose this population. The Recovery Team needs to weigh up how best to manage all populations of EBBs. To give Woodlands the best chance of recovery, we cannot collect any animals for translocation until the population starts to increase. Unfortunately, this means we are unable to source enough animals for a release to French Island this year. As a result, the French Island EBB release is delayed until 2019."

Frog Discovery Day



Extra FOFI day in October. Information session and field trip, supported by Melbourne Water. Details soon.

SAVE WESTERNPORT ~ NO AGL GAS

SAVE WESTERNPORT is a community campaign to stop AGL installing a Floating Storage and Regasification Unit (FSRU) at Crib Point. This giant structure of 290 metres x 49 metres would be moored permanently at Woolleys Beach and would be visible from French Island. Up to 40 enormous ships would bring liquid natural gas into Westernport from overseas each year to be converted to gas at the FSRU and then piped 55 km to Pakenham through prime farmland. Damage to the fragile mangroves and other species in Western Port's Ramsar-listed wetland, noise and light pollution, vegetation removal, risks of explosion, negative impacts on the local economy – including the fishing and tourism industries, an irresponsible failure to invest in renewable energy sources, and the absurd economics that have led to a gas "shortage" in the first place are all issues discussed in more detail on the group's website and Facebook page

"Remediation works" have already commenced at the southern end of Crib Point Jetty in preparation for the project.

JLT Specialty Group, a leading insurance broker in the UK, states on its website:

FSRUs are complex operations that require a combination of shipping and energy technologies, marine operating experience and commercial skills. However, this complexity also means that FSRU operators are exposed to a wide range of risks, ranging from operational to environmental, geographical to geopolitical and technological to physical.

AGL plans to submit its application to Richard Wynne, State Minister for Planning, **before the end of July**. The Minister will then probably make a decision **within 20 days** regarding whether or not an Environmental Effects Statement (EES) is required.

Meanwhile AGL has commissioned APA, a separate company, to build the pipeline to Pakenham. According to Mark Wakeham from Environment Victoria, "AGL is referring the pipeline and the gas terminal separately to try and avoid meeting the thresholds for undertaking a full environmental effects statement". Minister Wynne is on record as saying, "If received, the government expects a combined EES referral, so we can understand their cumulative impact".¹

¹ "Call to put AGL gas plant proposal under environmental microscope", *The Age*, 26 July 2018.

What can you do?

It is imperative that the Minister is made aware of the strong community feeling about this project. Please write to the Minister as soon as possible demanding a full EES that properly considers all of the cumulative, long-term impacts.

The Hon. Richard Wynne MP, Minister for Planning
Level 16, 8 Nicholson Street, East Melbourne 3002
richard.wynne@minstaff.vic.gov.au

Also send letters/emails to the Premier, calling on him to be fully briefed on the proposal, to other State and Federal Members, and to the EPA (contact details on our website under News and Events).

See <https://www.savewesternport.org/> for details of the project.

Keep up-to-date on Facebook: [Save Westernport ~ No AGL Gas](#)

See also <https://www.agl.com.au/cribpoint>

Tip: Mainlanders are encouraged to switch their AGL electricity and gas accounts to another provider. This will generate a flurry of text messages, phone calls and letters from AGL and you will have the opportunity to state clearly why you are leaving them.

"The Famous Goose"

*Well as you know Cape Barren Geese are breeding up like flies,
It started off with only twelve, and now they fill the skies!
They mow down all the pasture grass that's meant for cows and sheep,
And poo all over everything, about a metre deep;
But fortunately help's at hand, to stop these dreaded birds
From smothering the Island with accumulating turds:
The answer lies in whisky, so me father-in-law said,
You feed them pre-soaked raisins, and it goes straight to their head;
"It's what we do in Scotland, with the Pheasant, Grouse or Quail,
Just dose them up on whisky and they fall head over tail."
Then you walk around and grab them, while they're rolling on the ground,
Neck 'em, pluck their feathers and they're each worth half a pound!
So I bought a pack of raisins, and a pint of Famous Grouse,
Then left the mixture soaking in the cellar under the house.
Next Saturday I took one out, to have a sample taste
(And had a sip of whisky, so it wouldn't go to waste);
Then Malcolm tried another, and we had a couple more,
They tasted quite delicious, so we both had three or four.
And then we thought we'd better give a couple to me wife,
She'd never tasted anything so good in all her life!
It didn't take much longer till we'd finished off the lot:
The geese would have to wait until we'd brewed another pot.
Then we polished off the whisky, flavoured full with raisin juice,
And we raised our empty tumblers to the Island's "Famous Goose".*

Mike Cleeland

(Mike Cleeland is President of Phillip Island Landcare, a palaeontologist and active member of the Dinosaur Dreaming dig team at Inverloch, and a bush poet.)



Cape Barren Geese are taking over French Island's paddocks, dams, and now the roads!

Chris Chandler

This issue of FOFI News was written and compiled by Meredith Sherlock with contributions from Chris Chandler, Mike Cleeland, Amy Coetsee, Martin O'Brien and Des Palmer. Information on the AGL submission forwarded by Marnie Fitzsimons and Alison Hoelzer.