



FOFI News



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

June 2017

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 non-islanders usually catch the 4.00 pm ferry back to the mainland. 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.

NEW FERRY SERVICE: Western Port Ferries, a wholly owned subsidiary of Searoad Ferries, has been announced as the new operator between Stony Point, Tankerton and Cowes. From 1 July until late September an interim service with the "Island Explorer" will run on the same timetable and fares as previously. From late September a new, purpose-built catamaran ferry will take over the route. We are sorry to say goodbye to the crew on Inter Island Ferries, but hope that the new operator will be able to provide a more reliable service.

Note: Tickets can now be booked online or purchased onboard the vessel rather than at the Stony Point Kiosk. Seniors Card holders continue to travel for free on weekends. FOFI has a number of tickets to help pay for members under 60, generously provided by Parks Victoria. For more information see: <http://westernportferries.com.au/>

Saturday 1 July: Western Port Wader Survey

The roosting sites visited on the day will depend on the number of sturdy souls willing to brave the wintery weather, as well as on the available transport and the tides, but we hope to include Tortoise Head, Rams Island, Fairhaven and Chilcott Rocks. Please book in with Martin O'Brien, who is coordinating the activity on behalf of BirdLife Australia: Martin.O'Brien@delwp.vic.gov.au

Saturday 15 July: Balnarring Walk and Meeting

An additional off-island activity to enjoy Western Port from a different angle. Meet at the Balnarring General Store at 10 am (Melway map 193 D9) for a coastal walk. We will then savour homemade soup and bread at the home of Meg Macmillan in Balnarring

before a **special meeting** of members to discuss transport options on French Island into the future (see "Troopy" below). All welcome.

Saturday 26 August: Landcare Planting Day

FOFI is pleased to participate once again in French Island Landcare's annual planting day. This year's planting will be at "The Slipway" on the south coast. Please bring gardening gloves. Lunch provided: soup, rolls, tea and coffee.

Saturday 16 September: Sea-eagle Monitoring

Details to be advised.

GOODBYE "TROOPY"

We are saddened to learn that the lease on Park Victoria's "Troopy" has expired and the vehicle will be leaving the island and not replaced. The Troopcarrier accommodates nine passengers (and their gear) and has taken FOFI all over the island for many years. We will still have ranger support and a standard Parks Victoria four-wheel drive, for which we are grateful, but will be dependant on the generosity of islanders for additional transport. For this reason we have called a special meeting on 15 July (see above) to discuss our options.



Goodbye "Troopy"

Meredith Sherlock

ARE YOU A MEMBER?

Membership of just \$10 per household per year is vital to our survival. Please see our website for how to join or renew.

ACTIVITIES REPORTS

18 March: Marine invertebrates at Albions and Spit Point

Present: Andrew Browne, Chris Chandler, Barbara Hall, Meg Macmillan, David Nicholls, Meredith Sherlock, Jim Walker, and Pete Grenfell.

We were delighted to spend the day with Barbara Hall from the Marine Research Group of the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria and her friend Jim Walker. The aim of the MRG is "to increase knowledge about the diversity, distribution and ecology of Victorian inter-tidal marine invertebrates", and French Island did not disappoint!

As we headed out along Causeway Track, our ranger Pete stopped to remove a single Ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*) that had been spotted earlier. Fortunately this major pasture weed has not gained a foothold on the island.

We spent the morning at Albions looking for molluscs and crustaceans out on the mudflats. Barbara had brought along a stuffed toy amphipod to demonstrate the structure of these cold-blooded, shrimp-like creatures: an external skeleton, segmented body, two pairs of antennae and jointed limbs.



Mangrove coastline at Albions

Jim Walker

After lunch we walked through the beautiful North Coast Forest to Spit Point, where we enjoyed a late-summer swim. Thank you Pete for transport and for allowing us to return on the later ferry.

Barbara's list for the day (all live specimens): There were lots of mollusc egg jellies and one small predatory sea snail, *Conuber sordidus*. Conubers as a genus lay gelatinous egg sausages. Crustaceans were colourful and varied: there were some small barnacles, but none were taken to help identify the species. Alpheidae: we heard lots of lovely pops made by snapping shrimp. Mictyridae: pink and purple soldier crabs (*Mictyris platycheles*) were common. Heloeciidae: 2 semaphore crabs with stalk eyes (*Heloecius cordiformis*) were seen. In the Varunidae family, Barbara identified 1 smooth shore crab with "hairy armpits" (*Cyclograpsus audouinii*), 1 fine red-spotted shore crab (*Paragrapsus gaimardii*) and 1 little shore crab (*Brachynotus spinosus*). The

mangrove burrowing crab (*Helograpsus haswellianus*), the mottled shore crab (*Paragrapsus laevis*) and the red-handed marsh crab with orange-tipped claws (*Parasesarma erythroactyla*) were also common. At the end of the day, a 6mm sea louse (family Cirolanidae) made itself known to Barbara at Spit Point by biting her on the wrist while she was swimming in the shallows! and has been tentatively identified as belonging to the genus *Pseudolana*. Volunteers are now needed at Spit Point to attract more sea lice so that more specimens can be collected!



Sea louse,
Cirolanidae

courtesy of
Barbara Hall

Jim and Barbara were able to stay overnight on the island and walk from Fairhaven to Tankerton on the Sunday morning. The highlight was 1 soldier crab of a different species (*Mictyris longicarpus*), sky blue with white sides. This may be the most westerly sighting of this pretty little crab in Victoria, as the MRG has recorded it only as far as Sandy Point, west of the Prom.* The pink and purple soldier crabs, mottled shore crabs and small barnacles were again abundant, and sea snails, mostly small ones, were common. There were several small brown sea anemones (*Anthopleura aureoradiata*) and 2 or 3 of another anemone species (*Aulactinia veratra*) at Chilcott Rocks. One polychaete worm (*Galeolaria hystrix*) was added to the list. Other molluscs included: a few black snails with a black door/operculum (*Nerita atramentosa*), several pale blue periwinkles on rocks (*Austrolittorina unifasciata*), 2 *Afrolittorina praetermissa*, a few *Bembecium nanum*, *B. melanostomum* and *B. auratum*, several *Salinator fragilis*, 1 *Anadara trapezia*, 1 *Barbatia pistachia*, 1 *Mysella donaciformis* (a little bivalve that lives in sand) and 1 *Notoacmea flammea* (a limpet found on the underside of rocks at low tide). One snapping shrimp (*Alpheus richardsoni*) was discovered under a rock, and 6 smooth pebble crabs (*Bellidelia laevis*) rounded off an excellent morning's work.

* Barbara would be very pleased to hear of any more sightings of blue soldier crabs in Western Port!



This was FOFI's first project day to focus on the rich marine life of the shoreline, and we hope there will be many more. Our warmest thanks go to Barbara for sharing her knowledge with us. Meredith Sherlock



Red-handed marsh crab

Jim Walker

Friday 14 – Monday 17 April: Easter Camp

See Marnie Fitzsimon's report below.

Saturday 13 May: FOFI at the Zoo

Five FOFI members, plus our friends from Daangean, joined many other Friends groups for Parks Victoria's annual Volunteer Recognition Day, this year held at Melbourne Zoo.



FOFI at the Zoo

Marnie Fitzsimons

There were presentations on Parks Victoria's new ParkConnect website, which has been designed to help Friends groups attract new members from a wider community, connect with other like-minded groups, and streamline administrative tasks. FOFI has registered and will soon be "ParkConnect"ed: see parkconnect.vic.gov.au

Saturday 20 May: North-east Ferns Revisited

Present: Chris Chandler, Meg Macmillan, Meredith Sherlock, and Scott Coutts

Following on from the discovery of Soft Tree Ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*) on the Easter camp, FOFI returned to the "new" tree fern area on 20 May to show it to ranger Scott and to record more details, including photos. After our tangle with the dense undergrowth of Sword-sedge (*Gahnia sieberiana*), we drove to Gartside's old barge-landing site for lunch. This is a gap cut through the dense mangrove forest of the north coast where Ken and Bill Gartside ran a barge to Tooradin from the 1940s. We also

noted the channel banks, dams and other earthworks from the 1880s' saltworks.

Chris Chandler



Soft Tree Ferns

Chris Chandler

Saturday 17 June: Blue Gums to Long Point

Present: Chris Chandler, Darren Edwards, Meredith Sherlock, Pauline Wilkinson, and Pete Grenfell.

After admiring the new roof on "Blue Gums" that will prevent further weather damage to the interior of the heritage house (though much more restoration work still needs to be done), we followed a track that Clive and Fay Gordes had made along the western edge of the forest. Chris was able to identify many of the understorey plants, creepers and grasses beneath the Messmate canopy. Lunch was in a sunny clearing overlooking Elizabeth Island, and then we walked along the coast to Long Point, where some Sea-spurge (*Euphorbia paralias*) was removed by hand and bagged. We have since learned that French Island Landcare has received a Community Grant of \$500 from the Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority that will enable them to eradicate the rest of the Sea-spurge along the coast, among other projects. We also photographed some large Spiky Rush (*Juncus acuta*) plants, a terrible weed that spreads with the tide.



Sea-spurge at Long Point

Chris Chandler

EASTERN BARRED BANDICOOT UPDATE

While the proposal to introduce EBBs to French Island remains subject to further research, captive-bred EBBs will be released on Phillip Island later this year, following the successful trial on Churchill Island. You can read more in [Warron](#), the newsletter of the EBB Recovery Team.

A "FIRM" ARRANGEMENT

In March this year, FOFI agreed to sponsor French Islanders Researching Muttonbirds (FIRM) to enable them to apply for a Coastcare Victoria Community Grant. Their application was successful, and on 14 June \$5,278 was received from DELWP and paid into FOFI's bank account. Congratulations, FIRM!

The project, coordinated by Dr David Nicholls, is to continue the monitoring and rehabilitation work done by David and his students from Chisholm TAFE at Tortoise Head over almost twenty years, with the aim of conserving the breeding population of Short-tailed Shearwaters, or Muttonbirds (*Ardenna tenuirostris* or *Puffinus tenuirostris*), a migratory and internationally protected species (see the December 2016 issue of *FOFI News*).

Parks Victoria has recently removed some of the larger Boxthorn bushes at Tortoise Head, and there are plans to follow up with further controls in August (hopefully before the Shearwaters return to their burrows). FOFI will liaise with FIRM to provide support as needed in 2018 (i.e. after the end of this year's breeding season), for example by removing small Boxthorn infestations and other weeds and collecting beach rubbish.

PEACOCK LAND SALE

Four blocks of 50 acres of undisturbed bush in the upper Mosquito Creek catchment, east of Mount Wellington Road, were auctioned on 22 April. They are accessible via a dirt track called Scotchman's Lane. The land is mostly wet heath and Swamp Paperbark, an east-facing valley that was recognised as an area of botanical significance in 1982 for its species diversity and for the fact that it had not been burnt for an estimated 70 years (*Sites of Botanical Significance in Western Port*, page 253). This land was purchased by Cecil Peacock in 1923, but nobody on the island had ever heard of him. In the 1980s, Cecil Duscher told me that French Islanders did not think that the land had ever been fenced, cleared or burnt.

The application of the Fire Service Levy to French Island in 2013, and a title search of private property by the government agency administering the levy, resulted in several 'sleeping' properties being awakened. It turns out that Mr Peacock had died in 1955 and the land had since been owned by four of his grandsons, each of them elderly. When I spoke to one of the grandsons from south-west Queensland in 2013, he said, "Where the hell is French Island?"!

After several unsuccessful attempts to negotiate with Parks Victoria and Trust for Nature to sell the land for addition to the National Park, the family decided to auction the land as a "deceased estate".

At the auction, a most remarkable thing happened ... There was the usual collection of retired farmers, looking for a bush block to "mess about on" in their spare time – which usually involves burning the bush, illegally clearing it and running a few cows – plus a

few young folk who were hoping for some cheap land to start their lives on, as well as some smartly dressed "city slickers" who had us all wondering, "What are they doing here?".

There was lively bidding for the first two blocks, which sold for a price that was two to three times what many of us had expected. The bidders were the smartly dressed folk from town. The tall man in the corner bought the first two blocks and fought a vigorous bidding war for the third block, which was finally won by a lady from town. The tall man then bought the fourth block without contest. The buyers who were competing for the blocks were all conservationists! This is the first time such a thing has happened on the island. Three of the four blocks were bought by a director and principal ecologist of Ecology & Heritage Partners P/L, one of the biggest environmental consultancy companies in Australia. It seems he was buying these bush blocks for "environmental offsets", indicating that it has finally been recognised that natural vegetation on the island has economic value – by being preserved!! This is very encouraging, and we hope it marks the beginning of a new trend.

Chris Chandler

KOALA MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

At the end of the Autumn program, 993 koalas had been caught and health-checked. 723 of these were translocated: 435 to Kinglake National Park and 288 to Tallarook State Forest. All of the females have been implanted. 68 animals had to be euthanised because of poor health, while the remainder were returned to their capture site because of various health issues, young age, or pregnancy. Koalas are moving into "hot spots" as these become available, allowing capture rates to remain high. The importance of the program is evident in the poor body condition of the koalas that have been moving in from non-preferred habitat. A Spring program is planned.

NO MORE PLASTIC BAGS

FIGS (French Island General Store) has announced that it will no longer be using plastic bags, and asks its customers to bring reusable bags to the store. This is excellent news for our marine life. Well done!



Anthopleura aureoradiata
on French
Island west
coast

*courtesy of
Barbara Hall*

This issue of FOFI News was compiled by Meredith Sherlock with contributions from Chris Chandler, Marnie Fitzsimons, Barbara Hall and David Nicholls.

French Island Camp Easter 2017

Stony Point, prior to ferry time on Good Friday, was enveloped in drizzle, likewise Tankerton when Tamara, Meg, Chris and I arrived. Most of our copious gear wasn't under cover and a big stripy bag containing my bedding fell apart at the seams.

Many willing hands assisted with the loading and unloading of our stuff. Tamara and I thought we were travelling light but compared with Meg our collection rivalled that of a well-known hardware business. Chris provided the transport for us and our stuff at Tankerton; Tamara lolled in the back with it. So nothing, including Tamara would fall out I went to close the door but there wasn't one. At his residence Chris provided me with another bag for my bedding and a pillow as mine was wet. Here Chris's van was swapped for a ute with a trailer and water tank, so all the gear was re-packed.

It was around 1.30pm when we reached the intended campsite at Gartside's within the FI National Park. It was bleak, exposed, on the side of a hill, windy and with knee-high wet grass, although the view was nice. It was lunchtime with everything out of



Tamara & the ute of stuff

the ute, tables set up, gas stove fired up for tea making etc. when it was decided to decamp to the protection of the trees below. Back into the ute went everything and unloaded again at the new site. The throne on the hill remained though now the walk to it was longer. My sandwiches were a tad squashed when retrieved from my backpack; I don't know what the others had for lunch however, we all ate and felt much better after a cuppa.



Meg & Tamara on the saltmarsh

After tent erecting along the track, the only place with flat, clear ground, the four of us went on a Chris navigated walk to ex-Cheetham salt harvesting site where the mozzies ate us alive, and where remnant swan nest sites were visible amid saltmarsh vegetation. Later, towards evening, 26 Blue-winged Parrots flew from the saltmarsh to roost in the melaleucas.

Night fell swiftly and became cold enough to don another layer of clothes. Tea cooked on the gas stoves worked well but a campfire would've been perfect. As night progressed and became colder the mozzies that plagued the day disappeared. The moon at 91%, once it rose

above the clouds, illuminated the landscape and when higher during the night lit Tamara's and my tent. Meg, down the track, went to bed early; Chris, Tamara and I retired about 9.30pm. I



Moon at 91%

wasn't very warm in my bed and the dampness caused my side of the tent to sag in on me. In the morning the tent floor was wet. The forthcoming day was warm enough to dry everything and all was right with the world.

The camp companions were: red bullants, jump jackers, flies and mozzies and not that it was anything to do with them the trailer tipped up causing the water tank to slide down. It was too heavy to lift back so it was left, dribbling its water from the leaking tap.

After Saturday brekky it was off on another flora

and fauna observation walk. Not far from camp deer pugging was obvious at a small rush-filled dam where the animals had browsed. Tamara hunted and gathered blackberries here too. I believe the track we were on was a fire-track; it was well defined and easy walking. However, in due course Chris left us to it on another fire-track that was well grown with interesting vegetation and not particularly easy walking. He was returning to camp for the ute and we were to meet him at the entry gate where another two campers, Jarryn and Simone, were expected to join us. Everyone converged on the gate where the PV ranger was ready for a yarn prior to him starting repair work where someone had wrecked the fence to gain entry to the park.

Jarryn had a vehicle with greater carrying capacity then the ute so after lunch, with Chris



S, J, C, M & T with Tassel Chord-rush

navigating we drove to the saltmarsh to show them the Cheetham site, though this time the visit was further along. On the way back we stopped at an obscure track to Gartside's Swamp to see the Tassel Chord-rushes (*Balaskion tetraphyllum*), which were discovered by botanist Cliff Beaglehole in 1971 who estimated them to be 300-400 years old. They were beautiful and I wanted to fall into one and make a bed in it.

After tea in the dark, Meg took to her bed and we took to the track,

attempting to quietly past Meg's abode. The quietness was equal to a possum on the roof! Chris, Simone and Jarryn wore headlamps while Tamara and I shared a torch. Feral tom scats and wolf spiders were numerous on the track. Wolf spider eyes shine in torchlight it seems, not that I saw any as my torch was too bright, however, Chris kept diving earthward interrupting meal hopes of wolf spiders lurking at their doorways. The purpose of the night walk was two-fold; fauna observation and to send us to bed warm.

Easter Sunday was greeted with choc eggs from Tamara and a Bilby presentation to Chris for organizing the camp. This morning the trailer was righted with assistance from two extra bodies and less water in the tank, however, with a log of wood under the trailer's rear in case it tried pulling the same stunt. Then it was off to investigate a shiny fern discovered on Friday arvo at a gahnia and paperbark site with potential.

Meg and I wandered on ahead where we watched bullants going about their business at their nest. One we called the undertaker carted a body away from the nest and no obstacle in its way was going to deter it from the job at hand (or jaw as it really was). The others reported seeing a Joe Blake, which Meg and I must've passed without seeing.

Jarryn and Chris looked closely at the shiny fern without being able to identify it. A foray



Shiny Fern

growing on a log a possible epiphytic fern. Simone's arms were smothered in red welts from gahnia attack as she beat her way through it; she was so excited she didn't notice. Later in the day she was presented with the Frond Award for Fern Discovery.

All too soon it was time to pack up. The tents had dried and lunchtime saw us trying to devour as much surplus food as possible so it didn't have to be carried out. Our gear may not have weighed as much but bulk-wise it was still enormous when laid out on Tankerton Jetty. At least the weather this day was fine.

Jarryn and Meg carried their stuff from the ferry at Stony Point, and as Simone was travelling with us in my car we had extra to fit in. The man at the store lent me his swipe card that opened the boom gate so I could drive down the jetty otherwise it would've been a big job to carry it to the car.

The camping gang was Chris Chandler, Tamara Hicks, Meg McMillan, Simone Merret, Jarryn Van Dyk and Marnie Fitzsimons.

Night time Boobooks called and daytime callers were Rufus Whistlers, Golden Whistlers, Yellow Robins and Spinebills.

Thanks to Rod for the use of the ute.

Marnie Fitzsimons

into the paperbark gloom soon revealed another shiny fern plus Coral Fern. Simone, a veritable human wombat surged toward a tree fern that was recognised as a Soft Tree-fern (*Dicksonia antarctica*), then Rough tree-ferns (*Cyathea australis*) were seen with it. Tamara, Meg and I remained behind while Chris, Simone and Jarryn forged ahead for further discoveries, which turned out to be 17 Rough Tree-ferns, and 30 Soft Tree-ferns. Also growing in there was Ground-fern (*Hypolepis*). Tamara found a small leafed fern specimen, and discovered



Simone with discovered tree-fern 1