



# FOFI News



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

November 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 24 November: Western Port Wader Survey

This will be BirdLife Australia's third and final survey for the year. Please book with our French Island coordinator Martin O'Brien, [m.ob5@icloud.com](mailto:m.ob5@icloud.com).

**N.B. Victorian State Election Day!**

### Saturday 15 December: Blackberry Removal

We will continue our efforts to improve Muttonwood regeneration in the coastal forest at Freeman Point by clearing dense blackberry canes. Sturdy gloves and footwear, a sunhat and mosquito repellent are essential. Please also bring small secateurs if you have them. Funding from Parks Victoria has enabled us to purchase dabber herbicide applicators for the blackberry stumps.

### ACTIVITIES REPORTS

#### Saturday 18 August: Rams Island Working Bee

Present: Andrew Browne, Geoff Lacey, Meg Macmillan, Bette Mitchell, Kirk Moore, Meredith Sherlock, Jarryn van Dyk, and Scott Coutts.

It was a somewhat windy day for our working bee on Rams Island, where we created two small trial plots as potential nesting sites for Fairy Terns. Fresh shellgrit was collected in buckets at Long Point Beach and carried out to the selected areas. Andrew worked on a site on the south-west slope a little below the rim of the island (site 1). He first loosened the compacted

shellgrit adjacent to the *Hemichroa* along a seven-metre contour strip, and afterwards spread a layer of fresh shellgrit along the strip. Meanwhile, Scott weeded a two-metre-diameter patch on top of the rim nearby (site 2), and then spread shellgrit there. Dry seagrass and coarse sticks were placed at the two locations to provide cover for the nesting birds and the chicks.



Site 1 completed

Geoff Lacey



Scott admiring his landscaping skills! (Site 2) Geoff Lacey

**Fairy Terns** are listed as a threatened species in Victoria. They typically nest between November and January and prefer a nest substrate of fresh shellgrit that is free of ants and not too dry. These small terns have bred successfully on Rams Island in the past, but over the past decade there has been a significant decline. Increased human traffic, visitation by feral cats and uncontrolled dogs, and weed ingress may be largely to blame.

### Fairy Terns (cont.)

A metal sign will soon be erected on the causeway by Parks Victoria and BirdLife Australia advising that Rams Island is not accessible to the public between 1 November and 1 March to minimise disturbance of nesting terns. Corflute signs will be affixed to the gate and stile. A surveillance camera will also be set up on the island. While we would have preferred Long Point Beach to be closed as well, we are pleased that this long-overdue initiative is in place at last.

In addition, Andrew Browne, on behalf of FOFI, has designed and printed an information leaflet on Fairy Terns to be distributed widely to island residents and visitors. The leaflets have been placed in a new weather-proof holder on the stile as well as in the box outside our FOFI "office" at Tankerton. Information on the Fairy Terns has also been posted on Facebook's [French Island Ecology](#) page (1 November). Well done, Andrew! FOFI members will be monitoring Rams Island regularly over the summer months.



Fairy Tern nest on Rams Island, 25 November 2016  
Chris Chandler

Birds seen on Rams Island on 18 August included 22 White Ibis, with signs that they may be trying to nest in the *Atriplex*, as well as 3 Pacific Gull, a mixed flock (c.50) of Double-banded Plovers and other waders, 2 Caspian Tern and 10 Swan.

After lunch we headed east on the gentle coastal track through Hattons' property, where many Tree Martins and Welcome Swallows delighted us with their incessant swooping and darting for insects.

*From notes by Andrew Browne and Geoff Lacey*

### Saturday 15 September: Sea-Eagle Monitoring

Unfortunately this day had to be cancelled as the ferry was not running in the windy conditions. We have since heard from the barge operator, however, that the White-bellied Sea-Eagle pair is still active on the south coast and may be nesting to the west and south of their previous location.

### Saturday 20 October: Spring Wildflower Walk

Present: Geoff Lacey, Richard Millar, Bette Mitchell, Walter Mitchell, Martin O'Brien, David Paonetti, Glenys Ralph, Ron Ricketts, Alan Selby, Barbara Selby, Heather Selby, Meredith Sherlock, Kaye Trainor, and Scott Coutts.

We needed plenty of mosquito repellent (or "French

Island aftershave", as Scott calls it!) for our visits to the start of the Ridge Track, McLeod Corner and the northern end of Mt Wellington Road. The dry winter had caused some species to finish earlier than last year, but several Small and Plain-lip Spider-orchids, Cinnamon Bells, Tall Leek-orchids, Onion-orchids, Copper Beard-orchids, and a Twisted Sun-orchid waiting for a sunny day were noted. Colourful Button Everlastings and Spear-grasses carpeted the cleared edges of the tracks, while Screw Ferns, native violets, Cranberry Heath, Milkmaids and much more rewarded those prepared to get closer to the ground.

The highlight was undoubtedly the three French Island Spider-orchids (*Caladenia insularis*) at our last stop. This species is "highly variable in colour and size" (Kuitert), and a striking example of this variation was the pale form of one plant that was with the other two which shared the more common pink form.



French Island Spider-orchid (pale form) Ron Ricketts



French Island Spider-orchid (pink form) Walter Mitchell

### ORCHID BOOKS FOR OUR LIBRARY

FOFI has recently bought two copies of *Orchids of Western Port & Surround* by Rudie Kuitert (3rd edition, 2013), an excellent field guide with hundreds of photos, and we encourage members to borrow these or use them on day visits to the island. Rudie also generously gave us a copy of his *Orchid Pollinators of Victoria*, supplement (2015), with its fascinating observations of the vital role played by wasps, bees and flies in orchid pollination.

### AN HONOUR FOR MARTIN O'BRIEN

Martin's retirement, after 21 years with the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act Scientific Advisory Committee, was marked with a farewell luncheon at the Royal Society to celebrate his achievements. As a mark of appreciation for his dedication to conservation, Martin was accorded the honour of having a plant named after him by SAC member and botanist Dr Michele Casanova: *Nitella martinii* sp. nov. *Nitella* are submerged plants that grow in a variety of wetland and estuarine habitats. Congratulations, Martin!

Although officially retired, Martin is already back at DELWP as a contractor, undertaking conservation assessments for the International Union for Conservation of Nature. And, of course, continuing his valuable monitoring and recording of French Island's threatened species.



Martin O'Brien & Kaye Trainor

Walter Mitchell

### POSSIBLE NEW EUCALYPT UPDATE

Seeds of what is possibly the very rare *Eucalyptus carolaniae*, discovered recently on French Island and reported in the last *FOFI News*, are currently being propagated in the National Herbarium of Victoria so that the juvenile leaves can help with a definitive identification.

### BOXTHORN REMOVAL AT TORTOISE HEAD

Raf Heale from Bush ReGen spent three weeks in August at Tortoise Head removing Boxthorn (*Lycium ferocissimum*) as part of the Coastcare Victoria Community Grant managed by Dr David Nicholls and sponsored by FOFI. This work was a follow-up to Boxthorn removal in July–September 2017, and Raf was pleased to report that not only was there no re-shooting on the stumps treated last year, but also healthy recolonising and restabilising of the treated sites by Seaberry Saltbush (*Rhagodia candolleana*) and Coast Saltbush (*Atriplex cinerea*).



Regeneration at Tortoise Head

Rafael Heale

The only mature Boxthorns that remain are on hard-to-reach vertical slopes, and their removal will require ropes, handsaws and ladders. A priority will be long-term follow-up of soil-stored seed recruitment.



A challenging Boxthorn!

Rafael Heale

## UPDATE ON AGL (AND MORE)

Following a concerted letter-writing campaign by many individuals and groups (including FOFI), the Hon. Richard Wynne MP, Minister for Planning, announced on 9 October that an Environmental Effects Statement *would* be required for AGL's Gas Import Jetty Facility at Crib Point and APA's Gas Pipeline to Pakenham as a single project. There was brief rejoicing, but then the letter writers got busy again with submissions to the Federal Department of the Environment and Energy calling on Melissa Price, the new Federal Environment Minister, to rigorously assess the proposal under the protections set out in the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act*. At Environment Victoria's AGM on 31 October, the Save Westernport group received a Community Environment Award as one of "six remarkable community groups from across Victoria" who "have led gutsy and persistent grass-roots campaigns to protect nature and stand up for the places they love, often with very limited resources". Well-deserved congratulations!

And then the bad news. On 25 October, just a day after EPBC submissions closed, it was reported in *The Age* that Richard Wynne had "intervened to push forward a contentious project to convert the Latrobe Valley's vast brown coal reserves into liquid hydrogen and export it to Japan". Minister Wynne took "the rare step of calling in a key part of the energy project, the construction of a terminal at Hastings, bypassing local government planning rules on the basis that it is of state significance". Both the State and Federal governments have committed \$50 million to the pilot project. Any goodwill the Andrews government may have garnered from green groups following the announcement of the AGL EES was immediately lost by this fast-tracking of a new coal project. In addition to the broader issue of ongoing reliance on fossil fuels, the proposal by a consortium that includes Kawasaki Heavy Industries and AGL represents another serious threat to Western Port. Richard Wynne holds his inner-city seat of Richmond by only 1.9 per cent. Take note!



A snake in the grass!

Bette Mitchell

## PARKS VICTORIA ACT 2018

On 12 September 2018 Parks Victoria was declared an independent statutory authority in new legislation that replaces the *Parks Victoria Act 1998*. The majority of land management powers previously held by DELWP will now be the direct responsibility of Parks Victoria. PV will receive most of its funding from the State Government and report to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change.

## NEW MEMBERS

We extend a warm welcome to Michelle Love, Richard Millar, Ron Ricketts and Kathryn Woods.

## KATHLEEN CHANDLER (1934–2018)

We were very saddened to learn that Kath Chandler had slipped away from this life on 19 September. Kath was a founding member of FOFI in 1984, and even though she had a busy household to run, she often joined us on our project days, pulling up weeds or carrying shellgrit out to Rams Island, as well as baking wonderful scones for our morning tea, and sometimes driving the bus to get us to and from our destinations. Kath was also a founding member of French Island Landcare.



Kath Chandler driving the bus on a FOFI day in 1995

Meredith Sherlock

After Kath and Allan moved to Crib Point, Kath was active in the Community Garden as well as making a beautiful garden at home, but she always enjoyed the occasional return visit to French Island, and it was no surprise that a number of islanders were among the more than 200 people who attended her funeral.

Our deepest sympathy goes to Allan, Chris and the other members of Kath's family. We shall miss this "gentle lady" with the laughing eyes, whose kindness, generosity and humility inspired many of us to live better lives.

*This issue of FOFI News was written and compiled by Meredith Sherlock with contributions from Andrew Browne, Scott Coutts, Raf Heale, Geoff Lacey and Martin O'Brien.*