



FOFI News



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

October 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.

Ferry 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 21 October: Spring Wildflower Walk

With almost 600 indigenous plant species, including more than 100 species of native orchid, some of them endemic, French Island is bursting with colour and fragrance in Spring! Please bring your lunch, water and mosquito repellent as we explore the forested areas in the eastern half of the island.

Saturday 18 November: Western Port Wader Survey

This will be BirdLife Australia's third survey for the year, and once again Martin O'Brien has offered to co-ordinate the French Island team. Please let Martin know if you are planning to come by contacting Martin.O'Brien@delwp.vic.gov.au.

Saturday 16 December: Blackberry Removal

We return to the damp coastal forest at Freeman Point to cut and poison large blackberry canes, following up our efforts at this site in October last year. Bring sturdy gardening gloves and secateurs if you have them. Moquito repellent essential.



Pied Oystercatchers

Mick Douglas

ACTIVITIES REPORTS

8 July: Western Port Wader Survey

Present: Chris Chandler, Debbie Lustig, Martin O'Brien, Pauline Wilkinson, and Scott Coutts.

A cold but mostly clear July day seemed to affect the availability of our usual volunteer counters, and just four people plus ranger Scott turned out for the second wader count of the year. With new ferry operators the day started well. A double-hulled diving boat made for a more interesting, social and faster trip across to Tankerton, with very professional ferry staff adding to our enjoyment of the ride.



The "Island Explorer"

Meredith Sherlock

Chris and Pauline offered to do the Tortoise Head run while Debbie, Scott and I did the remainder.

The very cold wind meant being outside was challenging, and this included the birds as well, with few waders recorded at all sites. They were possibly at Stockyard Point on the north side of Western Port where a Little Stint and South Island Pied Oystercatcher had been recorded the week before (... along with gangs of birdwatchers, no doubt). The early high tide meant we had to view **Rams Island** from Long Point beach where we could see Black Swan and Cape Barren Geese apparently on nests, with our resident pair of Caspian Terns sitting together and a banded Pied Oystercatcher (no. 15). The only waders we could see were 8 or so Double-banded Plovers sitting with 11 Little Pied Cormorants hunkered down on the lee side of this small island. In addition to a passing single Crested Tern, Masked Lapwing, Pacific Gull (4) and a mob of Grey Teal (18) off **Long Point** there was little else to record ...

leaving us wondering if the south side of Rams Island held other waders such as Ruddy Turnstones.



Debbie Lustig and Martin O'Brien at Long Point

Scott Coultts

With much of the day left Scott suggested we visit **Bullock Swamp** in the NW of the island. As we approached the eastern end of Bullock Road we flushed 4 male Peafowl resplendent in full colouring ... this pest species is free-living and flourishing in this part of the island. Bullock Swamp was essentially dry but still damp enough to attract a suite of the larger waterbirds that were feeding on low vegetation. Black Swan (40), Cape Barren Geese (14), White Ibis (6+18 in flight) and Australian Shelduck (13) made up the waterbirds, with a pair each of the swan and geese appearing to be on nests. From our commanding position above the wetland we also detected a single Swamp Harrier and 2 Wedge-tailed Eagles, while the ringing calls of Grey Currawongs could be heard in the background. As we drove out along the bush track a young male Sambar Deer was disturbed and trotted off into the bush. The animal stopped not far away and we observed it trying hard to pick up our scent by tossing its head backwards and breathing in strongly through its nostrils.

Scott suggested we take the opportunity to check **Mini Inlet** on our return along the west coast, and this turned out to be a key decision on the day, even though very fresh prints in the sand indicated recent disturbance by a dog and its owner and explained why the lapwings, swans and oystercatchers seemed quite nervous. The tide was still high but on the turn. Here we could see herons and cormorants sitting in partly submerged mangroves. On the foreshore not far from our feet were 9 Red-capped Plover holding tight in the cold onshore wind while a few mangrove patches off the beach held 8 White-faced Herons and 2 Little Egrets (a threatened species in Victoria). The choppy waters still made refuge for 50 Grey Teal and 50 Black Swan while on the nearby beach a big mob of Masked Lapwings (~50) kept watch on us. Pied Oystercatchers (5) and 2 passing Caspian Terns (another threatened species) added to our highlights here.

Chilcott Rocks was our next regular wader roost site and on the way there Scott observed a pair of adult

Sea-Eagles in the distance. FOFI monitors the species in Western Port so it was a treat to observe this pair seeming to enjoy gliding into the strong onshore wind. We later heard that Chris and Pauline also observed a Sea-Eagle pair down at the south west of the island.

Our drive back towards Tankerton picked up the odd New Holland and White-eared Honeyeaters in the roadside heath on Coast Road ... but little else. We retired to the warmth of the French Island store to discuss the day's survey and warm up for the ferry trip back to Stony Point.

Thanks to Scott for rearranging his work schedule to transport us to sites and to/from the ferry.

Martin O'Brien

The day started out sunny, which seemed to be a good omen. Pauline and I cheated a bit and decided to take the "short cut" from The Anchorage. Passing the huge White-bellied Sea-Eagle's nest, there was no sign of activity, however an adult Sea-Eagle flew past us a bit further on. Later we saw a magnificent pair of these eagles along the western cliff of Tortoise Head.

We sloshed across the flooded saltmarsh, admiring Shelducks in breeding mode. One Cape Barren Goose appeared to be sitting on a nest on a small island in the middle of a lagoon in the saltmarsh.

There were very few waders at the Tortoise Head roost. Two Far Eastern Curlew and just one Red-necked Stint made up the northern hemisphere migrants. The highlight was 101 Pied Oystercatchers and two Sootys! Also 45 Grey Teal, 27 Little Pied Cormorants, 4 Red-capped Plovers (3 M 1 F) and a few terns and gulls. There was also a flock of about 20 Silvereyes on top of the Head, which we identified as the Tasmanian race *lateralis* with the chestnut-coloured flanks.

We also came across a dead seal pup at Tortoise Head. There is a colony of Australian Fur Seals (*Arctocephalus pusillus doriferus*) on Seal Rocks, about 15 km south-west Tortoise Head. The pups are born in summer and there is a high mortality rate in their first year of life, especially when they begin to wander from the colony at 6–7 months old.

Chris Chandler



Dead seal pup at Tortoise Head

Chris Chandler

26 August: Landcare Planting Day

Present: Andrew Browne, Chris Chandler, Meg Macmillan, Martin O'Brien, Daniel Randazzo, Nelani Scott, Tiffany Scott, Meredith Sherlock, Kaye Trainor, and FI Landcare.

This year's planting was on the south coast adjacent to The Slipway at the end of Ten Chain Road and continued previous plantings in 2012 (by Landcare/FOFI) and 2016 (by Growing Connections contractors). The ground had been prepared in advance by slashing the kikuyu grass and laying out the plants, and the soil was rich and soft, all of which made our job easy and enjoyable. A mixture of Prickly Moses (*Acacia verticillata*), Black Wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*), Drooping Sheoak (*Allocasuarina verticillata*), Tall Sedge (*Carex appressa*), Spiny-headed Mat-rush (*Lomandra longifolia*) and Coastal Tussock-grass (*Poa poiformis*) made up the almost 400 plants got into the ground by lunchtime.



Ready for planting ...



Planting ...



Planted! The flourishing planting from 2012 is visible in the distance.
Meredith Sherlock

Hearty homemade soups and rolls were then on offer at the Community Hall, and some delicious cakes to celebrate several birthdays. We then took our first-time visitors on a short walk along the firebreak east of Clump Road, where Martin spotted numerous Red-beak orchid rosettes (*Pyrorchis nigricans*) on the track.

Our thanks to Terri Coulson and Glenys Ralph for coordinating the planting, and to the fabulous Landcare Team for their generous hospitality.

16 September: Sea-Eagle Monitoring

Present: Andrew Browne, Chris Chandler, Aija Dowling, Geoff Lacey, Meg Macmillan, Martin O'Brien, Adrienne Palmer, Des Palmer, Steve Ross, and Scott Coutts.

A cool but at times sunny day greeted FOFI members and others on our end-of-year Sea-Eagle nest monitoring. Following some prior sleuthing work by Chris it was agreed that we target the north-west nest site, especially as the Barge Landing and Tortoise Head sites were both difficult to access or locate this year.

Our first (brief) stop was the eastern side of Bullock Swamp, however a new track installed by Parks Victoria staff meant we were able to continue onto the northern saltmarsh where a walk provided access to the general nesting area. To aid in future navigation to the nest site landscape photographs were taken while group members kept an eye on the sky for Sea-Eagles. As with previous trips to the area we had already been detected by the birds and a male was quickly above, checking the "intruders". Initial discussion by the group centred on whether there would be another Sea-Eagle present as we could not see any bird on the nest. Unknown to us at the time was the fact that the female had apparently "hunkered down" in response to the male's behaviour and thus could not be observed from below. It wasn't long before the larger female was observed quietly dropping off the back of the nest and flying out to also circle the group. Andrew captured a number of useful images of these flying birds which helped us confirm an attendant pair at this active nest. We could not hear young birds in the nest but were pleased that this pair was well into the breeding cycle. Conscious of the impact our presence was having we soon departed and travelled back to Bullock Swamp where we recorded wetland and other birds while having lunch.

Bullock Swamp now had some water and hence a greater diversity of birdlife than the previous trip to this site in July for the wader count. Some breeding was evident, especially for swans and geese.

Bullock Swamp (containing some water)

69 Black Swan (+2 active nests), 14 Cape Barren Goose (+3 clutches of 4, 5 & 6 chicks), 1 Swamp Harrier, 2 Wood Duck, 2 Black Duck, 5 Greenshank, 1 Masked Lapwing, 50+ Royal Spoonbill (western shore), 8 Mudlark, 30 Welcome Swallow, 3 Goldfinch, 1 Galah.



Bullock Swamp

Andrew Browne

After leaving the swamp we saw that “Tony Rowe’s” wetlands had waterbirds, so stopped briefly to record the species present. More goose chicks were observed here.

Rowe’s North Swamp: 96 Grey Teal, 20 Chestnut Teal, 5 Masked Lapwing, 2 Swan, 2 Pied Oystercatcher, 2 Cape Barren Goose (+one brood of 5 medium downy chicks).

Rowe’s South Swamp: 15 White-faced Heron, 2 Masked Lapwing, 10 mixed Grey and Chestnut Teal.

Leaving these wetlands Scott commented on the status of eucalypts that grew near the road. Mature Manna Gums along Coast Road (north) were in good condition. However, further south, at Linley’s Swamp (now dry), koala browsing had killed a large number of these gums (especially on private property). It was noted that some hundreds of koalas were removed from French Island this year.

Scott recommended that it would be worth visiting Gartside’s area as this remote coastline could have Sea-Eagles. After arriving at the northern end of The Causeway the group stopped and spent some brief time scanning the area for Sea-Eagles and also examining the vegetation, some of which was in flower.

Viewing spot, off Causeway Road: The group looked down across the eastern part of the northern salt-marsh from the top of an old “dune”. Two Sea-Eagles were observed circling over the Duck Splash in the far distance (towards Palmer Point). We wondered – could this be another nest site? We were very pleased that a further Sea-Eagle pair had been detected. This gave us some confidence that these birds continue to do well in Western Port and how important our regular monitoring work is.

Geoff noted that the woodland at this location had many heathy shrubs in flower, including Pink Beard-heath (*Leucopogon ericoides*). We were surprised to find the small tree Stinkwood (*Zieria arborescens*) at the site. This plant is common on parts of the south-east coast of French Island and is a remnant of forest vegetation in a time of higher rainfall.

As there was some time left we returned to Tankerton and had a refreshment stop at the Tankerton Store before heading back to the little ferry and eventually Stony Point.

Geoff Lacey & Martin O’Brien



White-bellied Sea-Eagle nest

Andrew Browne

ISLAND TRANSPORT

We are pleased to announce that Parks Victoria will support a select number of Friends to undertake an approved 4WD training course so that they can drive a Parks vehicle on the island. This is great news! as it gives us more options for getting to our project sites once Troopy is gone. We have applied for a DELWP Community Skills Development Grant to cover the cost of the course.

REPORT FROM THE FIRM

On Sunday 13 August, David Nicholls and his colleague Samantha Ibbetson visited Tortoise Head for the French Islanders Researching Muttonbirds project to map and record the Boxthorn bushes that persist on the headland following the extensive removal program undertaken by Parks Victoria earlier this year. They were on site just prior to the annual arrival of the Mutton Birds (Short-tailed Shearwaters).

With two exceptions the Boxthorn were all single small bushes, less than one metre in height. The difficult bushes were in a cluster of points on the cliff face south of the spit, and these were very substantial at 2.5 m height and 3 m diameter. There were also 10–20 smallish pine trees in the same location. David recommends lopping the smaller bushes and removing both the larger ones and the pines with a chainsaw. Bridal creeper (*Asparagus asparagoides* – a weed of national significance), in

scattered clumps, was extensive over the headland, but Common Tussock-grass (*Poa labillardieri*) and Weeping Grass (*Microlaena stipoides*) continue to recolonise.



Coast Spear-grass (*Stipa stipoides*) on Tortoise Head
Chris Chandler

FOFI ON FLICKR!

Over the years FOFI has collected hundreds of photos taken by our many talented photographers. We now have a Flickr page to archive these, which will continue to grow as new photos are taken and old prints are scanned. A couple of videos have also been uploaded, for example footage of Tortoise Head taken with FOFI's own Panasonic.

Use this link to find Friends of French Island National Park and then click on Albums.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/147837584@N05/>

We hope you enjoy exploring our Flickr albums, which will complement the French Island Ecology Facebook page. If you would like any of your photos uploaded or can contribute information about the images, please contact the Secretary.

BEST FRIEND AWARD 2017

The Victorian Environment Friends Network Best Friend Award will be handed out on Saturday 14 October at the Darebin Environment Centre (eastern end of Separation Street, Alphington, Melway 31C9). Lily D'Ambrosio, Minister for Energy, Environment & Climate Change will again attend the ceremony and present the awards. The event commences at 11 am and the awards will be presented at approximately 12.15 pm. A light lunch and refreshments will be provided. Please register your attendance by email at friendsvic@hotmail.org or call or text the Secretary, Stephen Derrick on 0417 326 860.

EBB UPDATE

On Saturday 9 September, Amy Coetsee and her team from Zoos Victoria hosted *An Evening with Eastern Barred Bandicoots* on Churchill Island for almost 90 French Islanders and a couple of lucky FOFI members. The "Kasey Lee" departed Tankerton at 4.30 pm and travelled to Churchill Island via Rhyll. Two South Coast buses then transported the group to Churchill Island where friendly staff from Port Phillip Nature Parks were waiting to show us around the grounds of the old homestead and give a short presentation. After a complimentary dinner it was

time to look for EBBs – and it was just too easy! The bandicoots with their beautiful striped rumps were scampering on the lawns outside the Information Centre, and two were even caught in the spotlight enjoying an intimate moment! These small nocturnal marsupials, extinct in the wild on the mainland, are now thriving on Churchill Island, but all the research indicates they will self-regulate their population (unlike koalas) and not create environmental problems.

An opinion poll conducted on the night found that 72% of adult residents/landowners were "very comfortable" with an EBB release on French Island and a further 28% "somewhat comfortable". This gives the Recovery Team the confidence to continue with preparations for a possible future release knowing they have islander support.

ART TERRY (14/8/1923–1/9/2017)

We were saddened to learn that Art Terry passed away on 1 September at the age of 94. Art joined FOFI in 1999 and attended out project days regularly until quite recently. We are grateful to his friend Bill Martin for preparing this obituary for *FOFI News*.



Art Terry on
Tankerton Jetty
in 2009

Walter Mitchell

Art was a super-fit person (the Tom Hafey type). Daily exercise, good diet and clean living was his regime. His 20/20 vision was due (he said) to his daily eye exercises.

Art's mother died when he was six years old and he was reared by his father Charlie who, according to Art, was well ahead of his time regarding good diet. Consequently this rubbed off onto Art. Charlie was cared for in his latter years by Art and he lived to 96. Longevity obviously in their genes!

Art joined Melbourne Bushwalkers in 1965. He soon realised that good navigation was required so he obtained a book on the subject by the British Army, bought a compass and went out on his own (not advised) and practised until he became proficient.

He started to lead walks in 1966 and led well over 100 walks with the club, including many overnight and multi-day walks. His ability to light a fire in rain or snow was a great asset. Utilising trains, a regular weekend walk from Broadford to Yea railway stations led Art to devise the Broadford to Yea marathon run. The 45 km cross-country run between the two

stations was completed in approximately six hours, with Mt Marianne and Mt Jimmy two of the many hills climbed. After regularly running this marathon for many years, he retired from it at the age of 68.

Art led many club bike rides, mostly by van to the start when some of the seats were removed to accommodate the bikes. The direction of the ride was decided on the day so that the riders had the benefit of a tailwind. He was made a life member of the Melbourne Bushies in 1993.

Art created a bike tour from Sale to Bairnsdale, Smiths Creek, Omeo to the Alpine National Park. There he stayed for four days at Wilkinson's Lodge (Wilkie) near the Rocky Valley dam and did daily walks in the alpine country. Wilkie was a small hut originally built for the surveyor of the Kiewa Hydro Scheme and was maintained and used by the Melbourne Bushies. From there he rode to Mt Beauty, Beechworth, Wangaratta, and then train home. Distance over 500 km. This was an annual ride and when Art turned 80 he had ridden it 25 times. His mate Ken had joined him 17 times and later Bill joined them on six occasions. Sadly, that ride ended when Wilkie was accidentally burnt down in 2009.



A younger Art and his partner Alwyn

Bill Martin

After that, Art, Ken and Bill did various annual tours. A few of these were:

(1) From Wangaratta, over the Warbie Ranges to Shepparton, Nagambie, Heathcote, Castlemaine,

Maryborough, Beaufort, Lake Bolac, Hamilton to Portland (approx. 630 km).

(2) From Bairnsdale to Stratford via Glenaladale, Traralgon, Balook, Toora, Leongatha, Cowes, then ferry to Stony Point and back to Melbourne (approx. 500 km).

(3) From Wangaratta, Howlong, Mulwala, Cobram, Barmah, Echuca, Elmore to Bendigo then train home (approx. 420 km).

Art, Ken and Peter (another friend) also did an annual two-week paddling adventure, either from Barmah, where they camped and did trips along the Murray and tributaries, or if conditions were right, at the Hattah Lakes.

Being active with the Bird Observers Club and with Friends of French Island as well, it must be apparent that it was difficult to catch Art at home. Like no other person that I know, he lived life to the full. His kind and helpful nature endeared him to many people. To these he will be very missed.

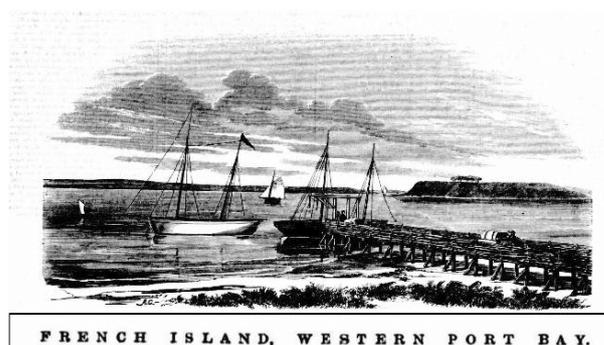
He forfeited his driver's licence approximately eight years ago and used his bicycle for shopping right up until days before his death.

R.I.P. my friend.

Bill Martin

A BIT OF HISTORY

The following illustration appeared in the *Australian News for Home Readers* on 23 February 1866 (p. 5). Note that the jetty is not at Tankerton but on the south coast. Ruth Gooch, in *Frontier French Island*, writes (p. 39) that the drawing is by Alfred Clint, a young Sydney artist.



This issue of FOFI News was written and compiled by Meredith Sherlock with contributions from Chris Chandler, Geoff Lacey, Bill Martin, David Nicholls and Martin O'Brien.

STOP PRESS. The wildflower walk on 21 October is now FULLY BOOKED. Please contact us if you are interested in joining us on a future occasion.