



FriendsNET

Newsletter of the Victorian Environment Friends Network

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See our web site <https://www.friendsvic.org/> .

Message from VEFN's Convenor

Hi colleagues

Since the end of last year, COVID has unexpectedly constrained many of our groups' field activities. Nonetheless many Friends - as individuals and groups - have continued to care for and visit our special places and thrilled to the sights and sounds of our precious wildlife.

The VEFN Committee has been hard at work behind the scenes. For those working on Parks Victoria land, you will know of the changes recently introduced in the new **Parks Victoria** volunteer manual. The VEFN, steered by Deputy Convenor Paul Strickland and our Parks Victoria subcommittee, have convened several meetings of affected groups. In accordance with their interests, we have requested changes to what many view as impractical and onerous requirements, in particular the mandatory possession of Working with Children' checks when no children are present. Please contact friendsvic@hotmail.com or go onto our website <https://www.friendsvic.org/> to hear about or request participation in our activities on this front.

The VEFN has been a foundational partner in supporting environmental volunteer groups and agencies in Victoria's Central West to form a regional network, EVAN – the Environmental Volunteer & Agency Network (Central West as depicted in the [EVAN tree](#). EVAN's purpose is to sustainably enable volunteer group-group, community-group and agency-group action to achieve the shared goal of caring for nature. EVAN has offered various workshops and forums over 2021, including a Meet the Land Manager [Forum](#) and Community Nature College. If you would like to get involved or find out more please email: evancentralwest@gmail.com.

Vale Don Marsh 1934 - 2021

Don was apprenticed at age 16 as a draughtsman to the State Electricity Commission, remaining there for his working life, designing equipment for coal power stations and transmission towers. At 20 he took up long distance cycling with the Footscray Club, then bushwalking, out of which developed an interest in growing native plants and bird-observing. In his 30s Don joined the Society for Growing Australian Plants, learning to propagate native plants and was an early member of the VNPA.

In 1969 with two friends Don formed the Maribyrnong Valley Committee, lobbying politicians for protection of land in the west of Melbourne, which had almost none – Brimbank, Mt Gellibrand, Williamstown Rifle Range, Cherry Lake, Cheetham, You Yangs, Brisbane Ranges, Werribee Gorge, Taylors Lakes, eventually narrowing his focus to the Maribyrnong valley.

In this edition

- Win for Altona's Ajax road grassland.
- Friends of Cornish Hill I care for Landcare event.
- New VEAC inquiry and more.
- Loose ends: Electric vehicles; solar panels and e-waste and deep ocean mining

Suggestions for articles for FriendsNET are welcome. Please email to ecosystems@bigpond.com . If you want to include photos, please send as separate files in jpeg format, preferably in landscape.

Disclaimer: Content in this newsletter does not necessarily represent the views of the VEFN committee. Articles are the responsibility of authors as named. All other content is the responsibility of the editor, Stephen Derrick.

Continued page 3

Message from VEFN's Convenor continued

The VEFN recently agreed to collaborate with **Nature Stewards** in their upcoming activities. This may involve showcasing local Friends groups for Nature Steward trainees to join. Trainees are generally younger audiences interested in developing their stewardship skills and learning about environmental volunteering opportunities. Watch out for coming news.

VEFN's 30th anniversary **Best Friends Awards** will be celebrated soon. Thank you to all who submitted applications. This year's event was to be held at Government House on September 10 in conjunction with the Victorian Landcare Awards. Due to COVID this in-person event has now been cancelled. We will provide information as soon as we find out when and how a digital awards celebration will be held.

Ellie Walker has recently started with the VEFN in a **work experience** placement to consolidate and develop our databases and processes to better service our members and stakeholders. She is making great progress and we hope you experience the results soon.

Recently we were delighted and grateful to receive an **anonymous donation** for our **first (part-time) Administration/Sustainability Officer** through the middle of next year. We anticipate having this position start by the end of August. This role will put foundational administrative infrastructure in place to support the strategic development and sustainability of the VEFN. She/he will help with grant writing and fundraising, member recruitment, promotions, advocacy, and the planning and delivery of regional networking events.

The VEFN submitted two grants for funding to the DELWP **Community Grants 2021** funding round and expect to hear results very soon. If we are successful, we look forward to rolling out on-line and in-person events and infrastructure to support Friends groups and their engagement with community, particularly younger generations.

VEFN's **AGM will be held on Saturday 27 November 2021**. Please mark this date in your diaries. We look forward to your contributing to our planning and joining either the Committee or one of our various working groups and sub-Committees. If you are interested, please get in touch with us via FriendsVic@hotmail.com.

In closing, please remain in touch and stay safe in your collective endeavours. We look forward to those of you who are members, to continue to work with us and for

those who are not yet, to join our network and strengthen our collective voice. **Membership information** and applications can be found on our website <https://www.friendsvic.org/>.

Kind regards,
Laura Mumaw
Convenor

Vale Don Marsh continued

When the Organ Pipes NP was gazetted in 1972, Don and his committee devoted their lives to the restoration of this very damaged area, forming one of Australia's first volunteer conservation groups, Friends of Organ Pipes (FOOP). Two other groups were formed roughly at the same time – in Brisbane Ranges (1971) and Warrigal Conservation Society (Heidelberg, 1971). Don became friends for life with its first ranger, Jack Lyale, and began organising working bees to clear mounds of farm rubbish and car bodies, remove Boxthorn and Artichoke Thistle and start planting, around the car park and on the flats by Jackson's Creek in 1973.

Don was a tireless letter-writer, to senior bureaucrats and politicians about protection of the park and its surrounds. Most of the photos of the early days, used in park audio-visuals, were from his slides – ever a keen photographer.

For many years there were fortnightly working bees, but Don was there at least weekly. He and Barry Kemp did much research into early reports of the flora and fauna of the area, researched local remnant sites, and collected seed. The group slowly grew, with Don and Barry developing plans for areas to be reclaimed and working out techniques for restoring degraded land and halting erosion.

In those days the real expertise in bush regeneration was in volunteer groups rather than in the state bureaucracy. There were no models to guide the relationship between volunteer groups and parks public service, or to restoration of damaged areas. Don, Barry and Jack, and close friends, worked out what has become the standard model for operation of volunteer conservation groups, of which there are now over 1,000 in Victoria and many in other states.

Don was a fine teacher - many now-experienced conservation volunteers learned their craft from him. He always attended VNPA conferences as the Friends group network steadily expanded, and involved scouts, Men of the Trees and other groups in developing a workforce to

keep the Organ Pipes project going, and still took a keen interest in other protected land out west.

In 1989, cycling home from work, Don was knocked off his bicycle by a passing truck, cracked his head on a concrete kerb and suffered considerable brain damage. Despite contrary predictions, he survived, walked, and talked and lived on another 32 years, always deeply interested in the Organ Pipes and its friends group.

Don received the first VEFN Best Friends Award in 1991 in recognition of his life-long efforts to the environment, Friends movement, and Organ Pipes Park. Indeed, the Best Friend Award was created to honour his great contribution to conservation volunteering.

Friends of Organ Pipes NP is still growing strong and celebrates 50 years from its founding next year. It has been through several generations of leadership, most of whom earned their conservation credentials under the supervision and mentoring of Don Marsh.

Robert Bender

Editor's note:

Friends of Organ Pipes is probably the oldest Friends group. In 2012 FoOP celebrated their 40th anniversary. Seen below is Don March receiving a Lifetime Achievement Award from Victoria's then Environment Minister Ryan Smith.



VEAC inquiry and more

New VEAC inquiry announced

Minister for Energy, Environment & Climate Change Lily D'Ambrosio has announced a new Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) inquiry covering 96,000 hectares of state forests now protected from timber harvesting for recreation and tourism.

VEAC will undertake a scientific assessment of environmental, biodiversity and other values in areas identified as Immediate Protection Areas (IPA).

The IPAs are located in Mirboo North, Strathbogie Ranges, Central Highlands and East Gippsland.

There will also be a newly established Eminent Panel for Community Engagement which will work alongside VEAC. VEAC will also have a formal representation on the Panel.

The Panel will provide recommendations and a timeline for the government to reclassify each of the IPAs.

The Panel will consult with the community to seek their views on VEAC's final Assessment of the IPAs in Mirboo North and Strathbogie Ranges starting later this year, while consultation on the VEAC's Assessment of the IPAs in the Central Highlands and East Gippsland, will take place over a longer period starting in 2022.

The Panel will present its report and recommendations to the Government on the Mirboo North and Strathbogie Ranges IPAs in early to mid-2022, with the report on remaining IPAs to be received towards the end of 2022.

Victoria Nature Festival 11 – 26 September

Check out the upcoming Victoria Nature Festival. With more than 80 events and experiences, the Victoria Nature Festival returns for its second year full of creative ways to connect with and act for nature. See

<https://www.together.vic.gov.au/victoria-nature-festival> .

Wimmera Biodiversity Seminar – commencing 2nd September

The 24th Wimmera Biodiversity Seminar will focus on the role of farmers in preservation and restoration of biodiversity in the region.

You can view the full program here

<https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/farming-and-biodiversity-tickets-165635262529?fbclid=IwAR0wJ9jXDnBGo0x4llgDaDxZRhacxGLQBprGDI4jxKJQiY0qLB0HaGT47gM>

Altona's Ajax Road grassland, ESOs and the fight for a vision

For those who don't know us, the Grassy Plains Network comprises land management professionals, academics, ecologists and community concerned about the ongoing decline of grassy ecosystems across Melbourne and its surrounds. We advocate for improved grassland protection and management, write submissions to local, state and federal government, push for a better deal for grasslands in whatever ways we can. You'll see us around at community days too.



Top left: The grassland is adjacent Truganina Swamp – a Biosite of State Significance – as well as the Laverton Creek and Kayes Drain waterways, which provide much-needed ecological connectivity.

Bottom left: Ajax Road Grassland is a rare, Kangaroo Grass dominated grassland in the Altona industrial precinct.

Right: The grassland has a sense of wildness, industry massing like hills in the distance.

Protecting grasslands can be a hard business. Many people think they are brown, derelict, snake-filled fire traps. We spend a lot of time communicating how rare and important they are – only 2% left, critically endangered, unique ecosystems full of amazing species, the poem's "land of sweeping plains", where the first bread was baked, managed by Traditional Owners for countless millennia.

Recently, we've been concentrating quite a bit of effort on the grasslands in Hobsons Bay. That focus came about because a developer wanted to clear native vegetation from Ajax Road Grassland, which is a large (35 ha) grassland in the Altona industrial precinct, framed by petrochemical industry, rail, Laverton Creek, Kayes Drain, Truganina Swamp – a Biosite of State Significance – with residential development along one edge. It's a grassland thick with Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda triandra*) and with a large population of almost 500 critically endangered Spiny Rice-flowers (*Pimelea spinescens*) as well as Arching Flax Lily (*Dianella amoena*). The grassland has intact rocky substrate that is likely to be home to Striped Legless Lizards (*Delma impar*). Unusual salt-tolerant *Themeda* occurs where the grassland grades into brackish wetland.



**Top left: Saw-sedge and pigface and the undisturbed rocky substrate that makes for great Striped Legless Lizard habitat.
 Mid left: Striped legless lizard. Top right: Samphire and brackish wetland grade into grassland.
 Mid right: Spiny Rice-flower. Bottom: Arching Flax-lily**

Along with about 100 residents, GPN’s objection to the planned subdivision and clearing was successful. Councillors Matt Tyler, Peter Hemphill and Pamela Sutton-Legaud stood up for the environment, local values and sustainable development when they unanimously voted down the planning application. We’ll see what move the developer makes next.

Ajax Road Grassland is in many ways typical of the large grassland patches that remain in private hands across Melbourne’s west and north. Unprotected, development imminent, with years of neglect taking their toll, weeds

encroaching, subject to dumping – in Ajax Road’s case a dozen hectares lost to soil from the construction of Crown Casino in the early 1990s.

GPN argues that the best way to help protect sites like Ajax Road is to ensure they have Environmental Significance Overlays (ESOs). ESOs are a local planning provision that adds an extra layer of significance. It means planning applications can’t simply default to the inadequate state vegetation clearing provisions but must consider the stated significance of the protected land. A higher standard is set. And that can also mean better oversight of the vegetation surveys that the developers put forward, often produced using less-than-best-practice scientific methods by that most contemptible creature, the developer-friendly environmental consultant.

Getting ESOs can be a slow and expensive process. They require a sound understanding of the biodiversity values across an area, and often additional surveys need to be undertaken to fill knowledge gaps. And then the argy-bargy of balancing environmental values against competing areas of interest. Change can be a blessing or a curse, and the Hobsons Bay industrial precinct is changing. The petrochemical industry is moving away. Melbourne’s new freight and ports strategies mean the big distribution centres might move too. And the residential population is gentrifying. Hobsons Bay has a great Biodiversity Strategy which recommends ESOs and which is built on a good evidence base. So we are hopeful.

We are also advocating for direct purchase of these privately held parcels of grassland. This will probably require the State to step in. But there may be other means, such as raising funds from development contributions from elsewhere in the industrial precinct, of using these grasslands as offset sites.

From our perspective, getting ESOs, or other protections, happening in Hobsons Bay means educating councillors, engaging the community through grassland family days, encouraging strategic planners to meet with the biodiversity team, and doing the hard yards of pulling together all the info out there on the state of the grasslands across Hobsons Bay. It means mapping biolinks inland so people can understand how useful these large grassland places will be when sea-level starts to encroach on RAMSAR-listed wetlands. It means putting it all in a Hobsons Bay-wide context, and a broader regional context.

It means presenting a vision. Showing what a good grassland can look like. Showing what care looks like. Showing what reintroducing all the beautiful flowering plants looks like. What a good fence, some interpretive signage, a well-constructed path, a sculpture, that bench and table where you can have your lunch, the links to the bike paths and the walk inland along the creek – showing how all of that can transform a place from apparent wasteland to a place of community, pride, engagement, love.

All you need is love my friends, all you need is love.

Adrian Marshall

Facilitator Grassy Plains Network

Friends of Cornish Hill: I care for Landcare event

In April this year after a few hiccups due to COVID, 45 students from Bullarto and Yandoit Primary schools plus the Dharma schools attended “I care for Landcare” event on the Hill. The Friends were delighted to welcome the students back to the Hill and had worked diligently to provide a workshop which would not only be engaging but would provide real educational opportunities for all who attended.

John Caldw from Bug Blitz provided a wonderful hands-on session for the students where they were able to learn more about some fascinating spiders and ‘bugs’. John shared his love of these creatures by first introducing Teddy, the Mountain Huntsman, followed by other spiders, a scorpion and leaf insects. Students had an opportunity to hold many of the bugs and observe them closely.



Top left: A variety of skulls were brought to the vent by Louise Caldw. Bottom left: Digital microscopes were provided by Ema Coro from Fungimap. Top right: John Caldw leading the session and introducing Teddy the Mountain Huntsman. Bottom right: Students using photographs of a variety of fungi create their own with guidance from ceramicists Ann Ferguson and Kaori Fujimoto.

Louis Caldw also from Bugblitz had brought a selection of animal skulls, pointing out the individual characteristics. Students had to decide on whether they were marsupial, feral or domesticated, predator or prey, carnivore, herbivore or omnivore, common, stable, threatened or extinct. Louis was such an enthusiastic source of information and the children were all engrossed with the subject also having an opportunity to share some of their own animal encounters. Louis' has inherited his father's flare for working and engaging with kids in biodiversity education.

A fun hands-on and informative learning session about Fungi was led by Ema Coro of Fungi map and well supported by Gayle Osborne from Wombat Forest care. Each session was spent examining a variety of wild fungi, slime mould and

lichen through digital microscopes provided by Fungi map with Ema and Gayle explaining the different parts of the fungus (mycelium, fruiting body, spores, etc) and the role these play in the environment.

Ceramic Art has been a feature of these workshops with noted ceramicist Ann Ferguson and Kaori Fujimoto leading the way. Using coloured photographs to demonstrate the parts, shapes and construction of a variety of fungi, the students then spent some time examining real specimens brought for the event, after which they then constructed their own model to be fired and exhibited in the local Bendigo Community Bank before being returned to each school.

Using the CSIRO produced book “The Forest in The Tree – How Fungi Shape the Earth”, Nicole Howie led the students on a journey of discovery with stops along the way to dramatise, illustrate, classify, experiment and reflect. Students took the roles of the various microbes and learned how they symbiotically cooperated with the trees. This proved to be a fascinating session for the students linking in very well and balancing well with the Fungi rotation.

Landcare Victoria has been a loyal supporter of the Friends over the past 5 years and the Friends are grateful for their belief in the work they do with local schools.

To quote from John Caldow: “From my way of thinking – our society should consider providing environmental education events as a form of ‘direct’ action for our environment’s future sustainability. We are helping to collectively build our students and teachers ecological literacy. Those kids received a fantastic, engaging and memorable range of learning experiences.”

Margie Thomas

<https://www.cornishhilldaylesford.com.au>

Loose ends – Electric vehicles; solar panels and deep ocean mining

Electric vehicles

Robert Bender writes

Your story (FriendsNET 113 may 2021) about problems with over-size electric vehicles and the huge amount of embedded energy going into electric SUVs was all very valid. But there are other problems equally large as downsides to the expected major shift away from petrol-driven vehicles.

One is the problem of the short battery life, currently about 10 years, and the very large cost (\$5,000 to \$15,000) of replacing the battery, about the same price (or more) as a possible second-hand vehicle at 10 years old. This means that anybody who gets rid of an EV after 7 or 8 years leaves a vehicle with a very short remaining lifespan, and nobody would buy one, so the entire second-hand vehicle market will collapse.

At present vehicles remain on the road, as new or used, for 20-25 years, so the entire vehicle fleet gets replaced about 4 times a century. If EVs have a lifespan of 10 years, the entire fleet will need to be replaced 10 times a century, and the embedded energy in making all those vehicles and batteries will increase by a very large amount, quite possibly involving more energy (and greenhouse gases) than are saved by no longer powering them with petrol.

Another is the problem of recycling batteries, at present very expensive and effective only for the small quantity of high-value metals in the batteries, so most of their bulk will end in landfill.

<https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2021/05/millions-electric-cars-are-coming-what-happens-all-dead-batteries>

Getting rid of cars entirely is really not possible as all modern cities are designed to depend on private transport around a road system in personal vehicles. So some sort of vehicle will be needed for many decades to come, and the trade-off between petrol and electric vehicles is still very unclear.

Finally, our tax system strongly favours large petrol-guzzlers over small relatively efficient vehicles, largely driven by the farm lobby and the tax concessions for SUVs won by farmers, although most SUVs are driven by city-based car owners. Modifying the tax system to shift demand towards smaller vehicles would do a lot to reduce the GHGs from the transport sector.

Something a friend sent recently:

This is a boneyard near Paris, France with hundreds of electric-powered cars. Mind you, these are only cars used by the City of Paris and not personal vehicles. All of these have the same issue: the battery storage cells have

given out and need to be replaced. Why not just replace them, you ask? Well, two reasons.



First the battery storage cells cost almost double what the vehicle cost new, and second no landfill or disposals will allow the batteries to be disposed of there. So these green fairytale electric cars are all sitting in vacant lots while their batteries drain toxins into the ground.



Editor's note.

Solar panels

Batteries in electric vehicles are not the only significant e-waste problem emerging. A recent study by Sustainability Victoria estimated that more than 100,000 tonnes of solar panels will enter Australia's waste stream by 2035. While the aluminium frames and junction boxes can be recycled relatively easily, these components comprise only around 17% of the weight of the panels. The remaining 83% of a solar panel's materials (including glass, silicon and polymer back sheeting) are not currently recyclable in Australia said Sustainability Victoria.

Read the Sustainability Victoria report here

<https://www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/research-data-and->

[insights/research/recycling-and-reducing-waste/national-approach-to-manage-solar-panel-inverter-and-battery-lifecycles](#) .

Guardian Australia reported on this issue recently <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/aug/22/going-to-e-waste-australias-recycling-failures-and-the-challenge-of-solar> .

On a related issue the International Energy Agency assessed how the rapid deployment of clean energy technologies means there is significant increase in demand for many minerals and rare earths. The IEA report *The Role of Critical Minerals in Clean Energy Transitions* highlights how availability of these could become a bottleneck to deployment of clean energy technologies and much more effort needs to be made to recycle materials.

You can read about the IEA's report here <https://www.iea.org/reports/the-role-of-critical-minerals-in-clean-energy-transitions> .

Deep ocean mining

Helen Rosenbaum, Campaign Coordinator for the Deep Sea Mining Campaign highlights how some major corporations and governments are working to mine the deep sea floor.

The targets for mining are particularly very large tonnages of polymetallic nodules that primarily consist of precipitated iron oxyhydroxides and manganese oxides which also contain metals such as nickel, cobalt, copper, titanium and rare earth elements.

Mining the deep sea floor poses significant environmental risks to our oceans which are already under stress from over fishing, pollution particularly from plastic waste and climate change.

Enticed by minerals, a handful of companies and governments are driving the development of regulations by the [International Seabed Authority \(ISA\)](#) that would permit the mining of the deep-sea floor. To date, the ISA has [issued 30 licences](#) for mineral exploration covering millions of square kilometres, typically at depths greater than 3 kilometres.

You can read the article by Helen Rosenbaum here <https://chinadialogueocean.net/17116-concerns-deep-sea-mining-corporate-spin-doctors-get-busy/>.