



Handing over the batten for the Barwon River walk to Barrabool Hills Landcare.

Barrabool Hills Landcare Newsletter

June 2015

Forthcoming events.

June 17th 7.30 Wed. Sustainable Management of Land - grazing horses. Karen O'Keefe. Barrabool Hills Uniting Church. For those who are currently battling weeds in paddocks housing horses, this is a must attend. More details are provided later in the newsletter. **Don't miss out!!!!**

August 19th Wed. The AGM – A Rabbitty Affair. Plans are now under way for our AGM on August 19th, which will be our 21st Birthday! A key feature of the event, and also to mark our ongoing battle in the Barrabool Hills with the “feral-devil”, the rabbit, we will be launching a collectors edition of a cookery book with a difference. Rabbit recipes!

If you would like to be part of the team putting this together, please let me know. All contributions will be gratefully received!

Start collecting recipes for cooking wild rabbit- send to Kaye.

So put this date in your diary. There will be a keynote speaker, talking about rabbit control and also yummy refreshments, of course!

October 21st Wed. Sustainable Farm Management. More details in next newsletter

Flora of the “Hills”

The third in the series of Stephen Murphy's articles about the flora of the Barrabool Hills follows. Stephen, from Treehome Nursery, Teesdale, has been a nurseryman for 30 years and is the author of 'Recreating the Country' A *blueprint for the design of sustainable landscapes*.

In this instance Stephen discusses our understory acacias.

Don't forget that we are keen to hear from anyone who knows of tree and shrub remnants in the Barrabool Hills so they can be recorded. If the landholder is interested, funding can be sourced to protect them and help them regenerate.

Indigenous plants of the Barrabool Hills.

Part 3 – Understorey Acacias

Christmas is a time of giving and it's a time when nature often provides gifts in abundance. Wattle trees are one of the most generous bearers of gifts and occasionally around Christmas the harvest is nothing less than a windfall. I remember collecting Silver Wattle (*Acacia dealbata*) seed pods on a very hot and dry afternoon beside the Pollocksford Bridge and I could have filled the back of the ute in 30 minutes. The year before there was no Silver



Silver Wattle

Wattle seed to be found anywhere. An added unexpected Christmas bonus while collecting this seed was a feast of perfectly ripened juicy apricots from a wild tree about a kilometre further up the Barwon River beyond the Silver Wattles.

Acacias in the Barrabool Hills are diverse, varying in size from small shrubs to tall trees. The tallest of the wattle species is the Blackwood (*A. melanoxylon*) and like the Silver Wattle they can be found along river Banks and are a notable feature of the Barwon River.



Blackwood

Taking over 100 years to reach a full height of over 15

meters locally and up to 30 meters in the Otway Ranges they are a well loved hardwood timber tree, used for making high quality furniture. The leaves are the feature that distinguish these two river edge wattles, the mature Blackwoods having a simple dark green leaf with veins (not a true leaf, called a phyllode) and the Silver Wattles having a more primitive dark green-grey 'fern-like' leaf (called bipinnate foliage). This bipinnate leaf form was a feature of the first wattles to evolve on the

Australian continent and can be seen in all species when they are seedlings in the nursery. The Blackwood and many other familiar wattles have evolved beyond this primitive leaf stage.

Away from waterways on the slopes and hill tops there are two understorey wattles that are dry country specialists, the Black Wattle (*A. mearnsii*) and the Lightwood (*A. implexa*).



Black Wattle

which looks like the Silver Wattle without any grey in the leaves, is one of the fastest growing of the

indigenous trees reaching heights between 2-3 m in twelve months. Unfortunately like many pioneer plants that are fast growing, the Black Wattle may only thrive for 15 years, though sometimes they will live beyond 25 years. Whether short or long lived it produces very hot burning firewood that is easy to split and perfect for cooking a pizza in a wood stove. The Lightwood is a beautiful hardy small tree very like a Blackwood in appearance but with **greener**



Lightwood

sickle shaped leaves. The distinction between these two wattles becomes clear when they are setting seed

as the seed on the Lightwood lacks the distinctively orange aril (connects the seed to the pod) of the Blackwood seed. The Lightwood can live beyond 50 years and still survives on roadsides and stony barriers, though it is becoming rarer.

Small birds benefit from the dense shelter provided by all these larger Wattles and importantly they are a source of food for arboreal mammals like the Sugar and Feather Gliders. These animals scratch the trunk and lick the protein and carbohydrate rich sap that oozes from the wound. These beautiful marsupials place their own personal scent on the wattle trunks to inform other gliders that are not

immediate family members that they should move on and find their own wattle trees.



Golden Wattle

The list of tough local acacias wouldn't be complete without Australia's floral emblem, the short lived Golden Wattle (*A. pycnantha*) and the maligned Hedge/Prickly Wattle (*A. paradoxa*). Both are quick growing and provide beautiful displays of pollen rich golden flowers in spring.



Hedge Wattle

The Hedge Wattle is hard to match as a fortress like shelter from feral animals for small birds like the Superb Fairy Wrens that we love to see and hear in our gardens.



Wattle Seed - clockwise from front: Blackwood, Black Wattle, Lightwood

NEXT MEETING – 17TH June 7.30pm

Barrabool Hills Uniting Church Hall, Barrabool Rd, Gnarwarre.

Over the years we have had many inquiries from our community members about how to manage their horse properties sustainably. Weeds seem to take off, and feed costs skyrocket as pasture cover dwindles.

We have answered your call and have invited Karen O'Keefe to attend our next meeting as our guest speaker, to talk about how to achieve healthy land, healthy horses and happy horse owners.

Karen has had a lifelong involvement with horses and the land. She holds a Bachelor of Applied Science in Environmental Management and is actively involved in the Quarter Horse industry. Karen competes with her own horses, is on the committee of her two local horse clubs and is an accredited judge with the Australian Quarter Horse Association, officiating events throughout Australia and New Zealand. For the past 10 years Karen has been working for Landcare in the Corangamite region and is currently based in Colac as the Regional Landcare Facilitator. Karen has also worked as a sessional agriculture and conservation and land management teacher for Federation University and is a recent graduate of the Australian Rural Leadership Program.

Over the last 5 years Karen has been involved in developing a program in the Corangamite region for sustainable management of horse properties.

Below is a snap shot of what Karen will be covering on the evening....

Managing horse properties to maintain pasture and ground cover can be a tricky exercise. As horses are introduced, hard hooved, large grazing animals they need to be managed well in order to maintain pastures and minimize environmental degradation.

Overgrazing of pastures along with soil compaction and soil erosion are common issues on horse properties, particularly small horse properties. Paddocks that are 'set stocked' and constantly grazed by horses end up 'horse sick' with overgrazed 'lawn' areas and ungrazed 'roughs' where manure, rank grass and weeds build up. Over time, without management, the grazing area gets smaller and the unpalatable grass and weedy areas get larger. There are a number of things that horse property owners can

do to increase groundcover and the amount of palatable grass available to horses. These include property planning and design, grazing management and manure management.

Property planning and design plays an important role on the health of the land, and subsequently the health of horses. Strategically utilizing surfaced areas such as holding yards, arena's and laneways can improve paddock condition and horse health by reducing mud, dust and weeds. Surfaces can include things like gravel, sand, woodchips.

To see how Landcare has worked with horse owners in Corangamite watch this short clip: ['Saddle up with Landcare'](#).

Please bring a plate for supper

Rabbit Warren Destruction and Harbour removal – Group Project

In the last newsletter we reported that the Barrabool Hills Landcare Group executive had approved a group bid for funding from the Geelong Landcare Network/Surf Coast and Inland Plains Network to provide a 50% subsidy for the destruction of rabbit harbour and ripping of rabbit warrens.

The time lines for the submission were very short and it was only possible to use our email membership circulation to call for expressions of interest to be part of this program (**this is a timely reminder for all members to make sure we have your email contact details!**)

We received 9 expressions of interest from members and submitted a bid of \$5000 for the 9 project sites with an estimated total works cost of \$10,000. We were successful in obtaining around \$4000, which considering the total pool was only \$14,000 across the two landcare network areas, was terrific. The executive have agreed to allocate some of our own funds to make up the difference.

The project has now commenced and is scheduled to be complete by the end of June.

“Remember that annual baiting of rabbits is only a small part of the process to control these feral animals in the long term. To prevent immigrant rabbits from moving into the old warrens it is best to rip the warrens or fill them in, preferably soon after the last baiting. It is also best to manage any sites that provide harbour for rabbits above the ground, such as wood piles, low growing trees and shrubs and stone heaps.

Those who have been part of the program for a number of years will know that the only way to really eradicate rabbits on your property is to maintain a year-round vigil and, where possible, enlist your neighbours to do the same”.

Film night highlights

The last meeting of the group on 15th April was a “packed house” in all sense of the words.

The film night at Ric and Sheila Walters’ private “woolshed cinema” was a terrific evening. The film, *The Healing*, depicted a true life story of how a group of low security Victorian prison inmates were physically and mentally rehabilitated through an innovative program linked to caring for injured birds, primarily a wedge tailed eagle.

The photography and music were superb, but the evening would not have quite been the same without an introduction from Martin Scuffins and his barn owl!

The film preview played on the screen behind as Martin spoke, with the eagle, wings outstretched, screaming hauntingly, I am sure the small barn owl cringed on Martin’s arm!



As the owl repeatedly flew across the stage from his perch to Martin’s outstretched arm, we heard about the everyday man made threats to these majestic animals and their cousins, eagles and falcons, including high tension wires, motor vehicles and barbed wire fences. Martin also talked about his Leigh Valley Hawk and Owl Sanctuary and the business of caring for and rehabilitating raptors, even reforming quills to repair damaged wings.

We had a great social evening topped off with a delicious supper. Thank you everyone who came and a big thank you too to Ric and Sheila for their hospitality and Martin Scuffins for a wonderful presentation.

WALK THE BARWON - SECOND LEG, APRIL 2015

Peter Greig – Upper Barwon Landcare Network President

The first leg took us from steep wet forests to wide flat floodplain; the second from floodplain to steep-sided valleys carved out of rolling volcanic plain. As each landscape morphed dramatically into the next, we walked, looked, listened and talked about the Barwon River's story as it unfolded before us. And we came away feeling we'd learnt a lot about the river, and each other.

It's a story of mankind's interactions with nature, both ancient and modern, and luckily, we had some wonderful storytellers:

- **Fiona East** recounted with words and a movie the extraordinary story of **William Buckley** and his **Wathaurong** friends in the Barwon valley;
- **Josh Griffiths** gave an expert account of the life and times of **platypus** in the Barwon and elsewhere;
- **Roger Blake** explained the **geology** underlying the river's changing landforms;
- **Susan Harris** helped us identify local **flora**, both big and small;
- **Sophie Naylor Jennifer Morrow, Janet Gordon** and others made sure that all **bird sightings** were recorded;
- **Mick O'Mara** told us of the early **stonemasons'** craft;
- **Stewart Mathison** summarized the changing patterns of **agriculture** and property ownership, as well as the results of years of **Landcare** effort; and
- **Lachie Gordon** reminded us of the varying **water condition** in the river, and causes.

(Several self-proclaimed experts failed to locate a **bunyip**, but there were credible accounts of the famous **Otways Black Panther**.)

Last year's walk covered 43 kilometres from the headwaters to Birregurra over three days and 22 properties, with 20 walkers (Greig, 2014). This one went from Birregurra to Inverleigh over four days (April 15-19), across nearly 50 properties, involving a total of 43 walkers, and a distance of approx 62 kilometres. The idea appears to be gathering momentum – a bit like the river itself.

Also evident were three examples of baton-passing. First, we were lucky to have **Lynda Murray** on the walk, who had been part of an earlier exercise along

the **Hopkins River**, from Warrnambool to Lake Boga. This inspired Jennifer to try the idea here.

As well, we had **Kaye Rodden** and **Geoff and Joan Anson**, from the **Barrabool Hills** Landcare group and **Maxine Campbell** from Geelong Landcare Network, all with properties on the Barwon downstream, and aiming to help with the third leg.

And thirdly – importantly – we had four teenagers, the youngest at 13 (**Alice Phillips and Annabelle Naylor**). At the other end of the scale we had the redoubtable **Pat Gilbert** who turned 75 at the start of the first leg).

The original aims of walking the Barwon River from its headwaters to the sea were to re-connect its beneficiaries to each other and their natural environment, the condition of which is often seen in the rivers.

The second leg of the walk has clearly achieved these aims. Numbers of walkers and helpers have multiplied since the first leg; restorative actions in the valley have been stimulated; and there is no sign that enthusiasm for the next leg is waning. Quite the contrary.

An enormous debt is owed to Jennifer Morrow, who brought the idea to us from the Hopkins River walk, and enthused enough people to turn the idea into reality along the Barwon. The planning committee put in countless hours of work including reconnaissance walks and contacting all the landholders on this stretch of the Barwon. Members are Richard and Pat Gilbert, Jill and Andrew Stewart, Mandy Baker, Claire Cotton, Stewart Mathison, Lachie and Janet Gordon and of course Jennifer Morrow .

For practical help on the walk, grateful acknowledgements are due to the Barwon Rivercare Group (particularly Rod Stone and Jim Lidgerwood) and Neil McInnes for helping with mobile toilets, tents and lights, not to mention ferrying walkers' gear between campsites.

In a small way, this walk has made the world a better place.

The full version of this article including Bird Survey results along the way, can be found at www.ubln.org.au

In 2016 Barrabool Hills Landcare Group will be hosting the continuation of this fascinating walk along our section of the Barwon. More information to come.



At the East property in River red country – walkers with arms outstretched to see how many it took to surround one of the biggest trees there. It took 9, indicating an 18metre circumference and many years of age.... (Alan Dow)

Female Rufous Whistler (Felicity Spears)



Geelong Landcare Network update

The Geelong Landcare Network is the umbrella organisation for landcare groups in our region. Ian Kelly and Geoff Anson are our representatives on the group. Activities over the last few months have included:

- Wrote to Minister Pulford regarding concerns about how serrated tussock is being managed, with an invitation for the Minister to visit and see what is happening on the ground.
- Monitoring grant opportunities that may be relevant to Landcare groups in the region and potential changes during 2015 in the way grant money is allocated.
- Working with businesses, schools and Gordon TAFE (*below -TAFE students visiting the Anson's revegetation site*) on training, research and environmental improvement activities.



- Managing the rabbit harbor removal program (see previous article)
- Preparation of a brochure designed to encourage greater involvement in Landcare activities in the region
- Working with the Serrated Tussock Working Party Extension Officer to identify ways to assist this work

Member services

Trees are available to Barrabool Hills Landcare members at Barwon Community Nursery, contact Jim Seager 0409935700. Preference will be given to those who helped with propagation.

The Barrabool Hills Landcare spray unit is available for hire, contact Neville Trotter 0428811009

Diary of budding agroforesters – site preparation.

In previous notes we outlined the thinking that went behind the decision to convert two fairly ordinary paddocks over to productive bushland for logging, seed production and environmental enhancement. The planning phase is almost over and we are now preparing the site and organising the planting.

Preparing the site

Experience with the paddocks over several years has shown that they dry out very quickly in early summer and that this becomes a challenge to the growing of anything other than weeds. Our response has been to give the new trees the maximum possible support when they are planted, but then leave them to fend for themselves once they are in the ground so that they toughen up for the long haul.

The paddocks have been ripped at 1 ½ metre intervals. This allows water to penetrate, but more importantly it cracks the soil/rock below the surface and helps the tree roots to establish themselves. Ripping was a challenge for our small vineyard tractor due to the limestone that sits just under the surface. However, after a few attempts we are reasonably happy with the ripping – following contour lines to provide a more natural appearance and to reduce the chance of erosion, and ripping to a depth of 30 or 40 cm. We will drive over the rip lines with the tractor to flatten the ripping ridges so that the area is easier to manage in the future. Roadways have been left so that the electricity transformer and gates can be reached.

After the ripping and a small amount of rain to germinate the weeds, the area has been sprayed with Roundup (to kill the new weeds) and Simazine (to stop new weeds germinating). Spraying of 1 ½ metre circles has been done at approximately 3 metre centres. Simazine requires rainfall and/or time to bind with the soil before it is safe to plant trees, so we are allowing a month between spraying and planting.

We have a serious problem with a deep rooted perennial weed (Port Lincoln Rocket) and so to manage this between the areas sprayed for the trees the whole of the paddocks will be sprayed with MCPA before planting.

We had a visit from students from the Diploma in Conservation and Land Management, Gordon TAFE.

Master Tree Growers

Joan and I have just finished the Master Tree Grower course organized through the Otway Agroforestry network. (www.oan.org.au) Over 8 stimulating days we have learnt about how trees grow, bush foods, firewood, integrating agroforestry into farms and the economics of timber. On top of this we have had the privilege of meeting a group of like minded people and visiting many inspirational farms. The course has given us more confidence in what we are doing, and has opened up our thinking about our next projects (like bush food production). We recommend the course to anyone who wants to better manage their land, and to help identify the opportunities available for integrating trees into your property.

Next steps

Over late June and early July we will be planting the trees. Some of the jobs will be:

- Making sure everything is ready in time for planting – plants, guards, tree planters, helpers
- planting out the eucalypts across the paddocks before our volunteers come in to plant the mid and small size plants, so that the long term structure of the site will be clear to planters
- organizing friends and volunteers for community tree planting days. Tentatively on 21st and 28th June. *If you would like to be involved in planting let us know.*

Geoff and Joan Anson



Joan spraying after ripping.

Farm planning check list
June 2015

Planning for the months ahead can help prevent some problems while ensuring those important jobs aren't left to the last minute or forgotten.

Livestock

- Annual 6 in 1 vaccination and pre-lambing Drench.
- monitor ewe condition scores to ensure ewes are in good condition prior to lambing but not to fat. Heavily pregnant ewes can get cast especially in full wool.
- pregnancy testing breeding stock will help identify dry stock which can be sold earlier.
- Check sheep for lice and foot problems as these are best treated before ewes have lambs at foot.
- Lamb ewes in sheltered paddocks to reduce chill factor which can kill new born lambs.
- Feeding good quality hay to cows with calves at foot will prevent losses in cold weather and improve conception rates for cows joined for autumn calving.
- With uncertainty over spring rains this year, sell off excess livestock and ensure all stock have NLIS ear tags prior to sale.

Pastures

- Spreading Fertilizer, maintaining a healthy pasture will improve productivity and prevent weed invasion.
- Soil testing can help determine fertilizer requirements. Alternatively leaf tissue testing can pick up deficiencies in your pasture which can effect livestock production.
- Noxious weed control; check paddocks for Serrated Tussock and Chilean Needle Grass, spray or remove now and plan to check paddocks again in early spring.
- Monitor new and other pastures for Red legged earth mite, slugs etc and treat if required to prevent the risk of clover damage.
- Pasture spraying requirements, eg broadleaf and grass weeds. Getting on to weeds early will require less chemical and allow desirable plants to establish.

Remove problem weeds this season if planning to re-sow pastures in 2016.

- Make sure you check chemical labels and record all chemical use on your farm. Date of application, paddock, why you were spraying and rates.
- Keep a farm diary of all events and contacts for the farm as this will help with planning and allow you to keep all the information in the one place.
- Check Gorse control areas and treat as required to prevent re-establishment.

General

- Destroy rabbit warrens and harbour such as Boxthorns & Gorse to prevent a build up of rabbits in the spring.
- Spray sites for tree planting, good preparation will conserve moisture and reduce weed competition. Check 2014 plantings, fix guards, overspray smaller trees and replace dead ones.
- Now is a good time to service wind mills and other water pumps to prevent break down in summer.
- Check buildings for leaks and clean out gutters.
- Consider attending a field day, workshop or farm tour to improve your management skills.

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Let your fellow members know what is happening in the Barrabool Hills. Contributions to the newsletter are welcomed. Send articles and photos to geoffanson@mac.com.

Members are able to advertise their Barrabool Hills business in the newsletter @ \$30 per issue (space allowing). Adds are approximately 50 mm x 70 mm, and will be printed provided there is space after all articles are included.

The newsletter is printed through the generosity of Andrew Katos, State Member for South Barwon and is distributed through the efforts of the Leigh family.