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Friends of Morwell National Park Inc.

Newsletter August 2002

Website: <http://morwellnp.pangaeon.net>

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Welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter. The newsletter is early this month to allow for the AGM on the first weekend in August.

News Items and Correspondence

We have received three items of correspondence:

1. The Autumn 2002 issue of the Friends of Tarra Bulga National Park newsletter. Forthcoming activities of interest include the Lyrebird Count on August 17 and a Ranger guided walk on November 17.
2. A note from Mr Mark Waller thanking Jane Sultana for information on Morwell National Park and our Friends Group, and expressing an intention to attend our activities before the end of the year.
3. A notice confirming receipt of our application for grant money from Envirofund and the Natural Heritage Trust.

While on the subject of grants, news from Rob confirms that Grand Ridge Plantations are very interested in removing the feral pines from the Jumbuk Road area of the Park. Opinion is that the exercise would be financially viable in its own right, regardless of whether we are successful with our grant applications. Rob has also spied the advertisements in the Latrobe Valley Express from Latrobe City inviting applications for community grants including minor capital works, so we might be able to score a bridge or some other items on our wish list. Rob to follow up.

Would those members who have access to e-mail please consider receiving their newsletters via cyberspace. This would greatly assist both myself, by streamlining the process, and Rob, who has to find the time and money to post them all out. If you are interested, please let me know by e-mail to beamish@vic.australis.com.au, by phone to (03) 5169 6543, or by post to PO Box 112, Boolarra, 3870.

How to turn a hillside into a Cemetery

We were fashionably late again. I don't know why, but it seems to take an inordinate amount of time to yell at one's family early on a Sunday morning. Even so, we still managed to get to Junction Road before Ken and Jane. Perhaps I am a more efficient yeller than some, after all. But not as efficient as Rob, Wendy, Dorothy and Danny, who were all patiently waiting for the less efficient to arrive.

After a brief chinwag to tell everyone the latest, we loaded up the vehicles and headed off to the first planting zone a short distance up Billy Creek. Here we proceeded to fill in the gaps left by our failures of a year or two ago. Admittedly, at that time we were using the last stunted and scrawny remnants of our seedlings, and we probably didn't knock the Kikuyu back as far as we should have. Still, not many survived. This time, however, we were using gloriously healthy seedlings from this year's bumper crop and we took the time to hoe out the Kikuyu and place jute mats around the seedlings in such a manner that even if the wombats decided to play with them, our trees will hopefully remain in the ground. An hour of concerted effort and brilliant teamwork saw us knock over this area and the next small one so we could hop back into the vehicles and slip and slide our way up the track to the main planting zone for the day around the proposed Billy Creek carpark.

We arrived at our destination to be greeted by the sight of a wombat trundling around the grassy paddock. Closer inspection revealed a sorry sight, indeed. Mange had made a terrible mess of the beastie, which was apparently blind and deaf and covered in horrendous weeping sores. The smell was not pleasant, adding to my consternation later in the day when the animal decided on a scratch on the underside of my car. Much debate ensued as to what could be done for the poor beggar, with the general consensus being that if treatment was not an option, then euthanasia should be provided. Meanwhile, the wombat continued trundling throughout the afternoon, munching on the Kikuyu (it is good for something, then) and that was how we left him.

Back to the tree planting: we proceeded to continue with our great teamwork on the upper slopes of the carpark paddock, with one or two hacking away the Kikuyu, another following along with the Hamilton Planter hole digger, the next lot planting the trees and erecting the guards and the last lot pounding in the stakes. At 12.30 Rob called lunch (not before time), tools were dropped at light speed and we headed to the flat ground for a well-earned break. It seemed that we'd only just gotten comfortable when Rob and Ken were up and back into it, perhaps the sandwiches were off? We grumbled and groaned, but eventually they shamed us back into it and we put a great effort in until we finished the section at about 2.15. We were all pretty weary by this stage, but it was still earlyish and there was more we could do, so we bit the bullet, had a good whinge to get it out of our system, and put in another solid hour or so to finish of the area. All in all, we planted out 531 trees, mainly Blackwood and Manna Gum with a few Silver Wattle, Swamp Gum and Hazel Pomaderris thrown in. Looking back at the hillside afterwards, there was a striking resemblance to a cemetery, with treeguards standing up like headstones all over. Morbid, aren't I? Pray that this doesn't mean death to our seedlings!

There is not much else to report, other than the comedy that transpired on the trip out. The youngsters all piled into my car, trying to ignore the wombat pong and we headed back down the track to Junction Road. Halfway there, on top of the steep part of the track, we decided to wait for the oldies in Rob's truck as he was towing the trailer out. Waiting, waiting, waiting. Eventually we go back to see whether they were stuck or not, but of course they had gone out the other way, up to Braniff's Road. Back we went to meet them coming back in to see whether we had gotten stuck. After meting out the appropriate abuse we all managed to get back to Junction Road with no futher dramas. See you all at the AGM.

Scavenging Beetles

by Ken Harris

In the May 2002 newsletter, Jane reported that while walking down Blue Gum Hill after sowing clayballs, we came on the body of a dead wombat. While everyone else hurried away from the horrific smell, I stopped to look for beetles.



A couple of years earlier, I had found a dead Koala just above the weir in Billys Creek and was interested then to see a number of two different sorts of beetles, all over the corpse.

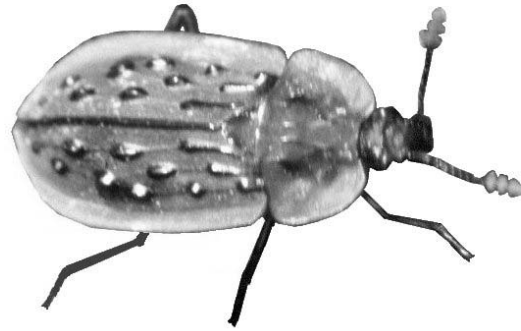
I was interested to find that the dead wombat, had a large number of beetles of the same two species and I took the opportunity to get photographs of them both.

The first species is *Creophilus erythrocephala*, known as the Devil's Coach-horse. It is a member of the family Staphylinidae, known as rove beetles. Most beetles have the fore wings hardened and forming a protective covering over the back of the animal and its wings. These are known as elytra. Only the back wings are used for flying. In the rove beetles, the elytra are much shorter and only cover about half of the beetle's abdomen, so that they look almost like larvae rather than adult beetles. Nevertheless, there are still neatly folded wings underneath these elytra (I saw them

momentarily opened by one that I was trying to photograph) and these beetles can still fly when they choose.

The generic name gives away their somewhat unpleasant life style. *Creophilus*, means lover of flesh. The species name, *erythrocephalus* is descriptive of the beetle. It means red-headed, and this beetle is distinctive for having a bright scarlet head, on an otherwise black body. It is regularly found on the bodies of dead animals, but does not apparently feed directly on the body, but feeds on the maggots, with which a recently dead animal becomes quickly infested.

The second species is more easily recognized as a beetle. It has flattened, light brown elytra, covering the whole body, each with a number of black bumps and ridges on them. The name of this beetle is *Ptomaphila lacrymosa* and again the generic name, gives away its life style. *Ptomaphila* means lover of corpses. I could not find a common name for this species, but it is in the same family, Silphidae, as an English beetle known as the Sexton Beetle – *Nicrophorus humator*, from its habit of not only feeding on dead animals, but actually burying them, by excavating the ground away from under the body. A sexton in an English church was responsible for digging graves. The genus name, *Nicrophorus* means eater of the dead! The Sexton Beetle has bright orange tips to it's antennae and shares this feature with *Ptomaphila lacrymosa*, which has the outer segments of each antenna, bright orange. These beetles, like the Devil's Coach-horse, are believed to feed primarily on the maggots that infest the corpses of dead animals. Unlike the Sexton Beetle, they do not bury the corpses on which they feed. It would be a pretty impressive beetle that could bury a dead wombat!



To see these beetles in colour, look for them on the Morwell National Park website:
morwellnp.pangaeian.net
on the pages:

[http://morwellnp.pangaeian.net/
cgi-bin/show_species.cgi?find_this=Creophilus%20erythrocephalus&image_size=0](http://morwellnp.pangaeian.net/cgi-bin/show_species.cgi?find_this=Creophilus%20erythrocephalus&image_size=0)

and

[http://morwellnp.pangaeian.net/
cgi-bin/show_species.cgi?find_this=Ptomaphila%20lacrymosa&image_size=0](http://morwellnp.pangaeian.net/cgi-bin/show_species.cgi?find_this=Ptomaphila%20lacrymosa&image_size=0)

August Activity

Our next activity is scheduled for Sunday, August 18. Our last tree planting of the season will commence at the Braniff's Road entrance to the Park at 10.00am. As always, appropriate clothing, footwear and refreshments should be brought with you.

Annual General Meeting

Please attend at the residence of Ken Harris, RMB 4318 Haverbrack Crescent, Hazelwood South via Churchill, on Sunday, August 4, at 1.30pm. The more members in attendance, the merrier, and the better we can manage the Friends Group to meet your needs and concerns, and plan for the future. A plate of goodies for afternoon tea would be appreciated. See the mud map below for directions.

