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Friends of Morwell National Park Inc.

Newsletter November 2002

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

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Welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter.

What's Happening?

Congratulations and farewells go to Ed Steenbergen and family, who are off to New Zealand following Ed's success in obtaining a position to work (play?) around the glaciers on the west coast of the South Island. As such, Ed has resigned from his position as Vice President of Friends of Morwell National Park. We thank Ed for his efforts and contribution over the years, and wish him and his family all the best in their new endeavours.

Ken reports that every newsletter he can find is now accessible on the website. This includes all newsletters dating back to 1988. Apparently, there should be newsletters going back to 1986, but we have yet to track these down. Anybody who has an idea where they might be, please let Ken or myself know.

Ken also reports that on a recent walk along the proposed Coprosma Track he has found a sizeable population of Swamp Crassula (*Crassula helmsii*), which otherwise is uncommon in the Park. On the same walk he sighted a Sugar Glider scrambling about in broad daylight, and what he believes was a Rose Robin.

Ray and Reg took a day trip down to the Royal Botanic Gardens at Cranbourne, where they happened to meet one of the local Friends Group members. It was suggested that we may consider organising a trip to Cranbourne as one of our activities next year, where we could undertake a guided tour of the facilities and check out what other Friends Groups get up to.

Correspondence this month includes newsletters from Coolart (3/02) and The Friends Network (No. 41), as well as a flyer advertising the availability of the "Linking People and Spaces" strategy for Melbourne's open space network on the Parks Victoria website. Anyone who wants a gander, let me know.

November Activity

We are pencilled in for a day of odd jobs, starting at 10am on Sunday, November 17, 2002 at the propagation shed via Kerry Road. We're not sure yet exactly what needs doing, but it may include seed collection or sowing, clayball manufacture and general maintenance and cleaning jobs. It is sure to include many jokes made in bad taste, some personal insults and a certain amount of general hilarity. Anyone who is available for a certain vacant VP position will definitely be harassed mercilessly. Hope to see you all there.

The Counting of the Koalas

First miracle: we weren't late. Second miracle: we were half an hour early. Even so, we were flat out getting a car parking space, as Wendy, Dorothy and the CGOARN crew had spread themselves out and were looking extremely comfortable. What a turn out! Apart from the Friends and CGOARN, we also had several family groups arrive, most of who had seen the excellent headline and article in the LV Express. I managed to get 34 monikers in the book, but I'm sure I missed a few. We had enough people to do 4 tracks: Rob and Ken did the east boundary and firebreak, Cathy and Ray supervised Fosters Gully, Ed, Denis and Jane wandered the slopes of Stringybark Ridge, while Reg and I undertook the inaugural expedition across the southern boundary and into the top of Stringybark from the south gate. The only brave souls to accompany us were Michael and Jed, a couple of young blokes from Traralgon, and Jan-Helge, their unpronounceable exchange student from Germany, whose mission was to sight his first wild koala. All the other wimps took the easy tracks.

Apart from some initial geographical uncertainty (do we take the high road or the low road?) we were off and into our stride quickly. Well-graded tracks, nice weather, open woodland with plenty of big, juicy Blue Gums to chew on, but no koalas. No nothing, actually. No birds, no snakes, no wildflowers, we didn't see anything to catch our attention except for a few bolls or clumps of bark, which we tried desperately to imagine into koalas. We had walked the full length of the southern boundary, through the south gate and down the steep ridgeline without opening our account. A quick glimpse of Swamp Wallaby as it dashed across the track further down the hillside was the only sign of life to keep us inspired. We had reached the saddle at the bottom of the hill and started up the last hundred yards to the Stringybark track junction, the end of our designated section, before we finally found our first (and only) koala curled into the lowest fork of a Mountain Grey Gum. Our German companion was treated to a great display as the koala woke up to our presence and promptly uncurled, stretched and proceeded to climb straight up the branch into the very top of the tree and out of sight.

We broke out onto the Stringybark Ridge track just in time to see Ed's group disappearing into the distance, so we ignored them and headed off back to the picnic ground, tonguing for a billy tea and damper. Apparently, we were blind to the two koalas that had been sighted in that area. It's hard to see koalas when you're head down, bum up and fanging it to the food. I did manage to point out to the young blokes some of the local orchids, but they didn't seem overly impressed. There were Waxlips (*Glossodia major*), Musky Caladenia (*Caladenia gracilis*), Pink Fingers (*Caladenia carnea*) and Common Bird Orchids (*Chiloglottis valida*) scattered in various spots all the way down the ridge, as well as a few Sun Orchids that were not displaying their identities in the cool weather. Crossing Fosters Gully, I also pointed out a Butterfly Orchid hanging off a tree trunk, but again I got the feeling that it was just another boring green thing.

Billy tea and damper production was in full swing, as the Fosters Gully group and half the east boundary group had already returned. Only one koala was seen in Fosters Gully as well, compared to six last year, but Cathy pointed out that her group all sprinted around and left the searching to her and Ray. Four were counted along the east boundary, despite Ken concentrating as usual on what was on the ground rather than in the trees. Incidentally, Rob and Ken did eventually make it back to base well after most had departed; Ken had spent considerable time photographing some Wallflower Orchids (*Diuris orientis*) growing in the firebreak. Ed's group wandered back in, also having sighted four koalas, making a total of ten all up.