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Friends of Morwell National Park Inc.

Newsletter – July 2004

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

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Welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter.

In the Mailbox

Received in the last month were:

- Information and an invitation to register interest in involvement with formulating a strategy to guide development of coal resources over the next century, titled "Latrobe Valley 2100 Coal Resources Project". This is perhaps a bit outside our scope as a Friends Group, but if any members wish to participate personally, let me know and I'll send the information out to you.
- An update newsletter for April and May 2004, from EcoRecycle Victoria.
- A flyer from EcoRecycle Victoria advising that the Household Chemical Collection Program will be operating at the Latrobe Council depot, in Driffield Road, Morwell, on September 4, between 1 and 4pm.
- An invitation to attend the Regional Achievers Awards on May 31.
- An updated draft of the Latrobe City Community Plan, specifically including the Neighbourhood Environment Improvement Plan (N.E.I.P). See more information on this in Jane Sultana's article below.
- A thank you letter from the Churchill Festival committee for our participation in the Festival on May 15.

A letter was submitted to the Alpine Grazing Taskforce (at short notice), stating the committee's opinion of cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park. Hopefully, members will support this opinion, if not, our apologies.

Items of Interest

Following on from last month's report, I did manage to write a short page on European Wasps for the FriendsNet newsletter, which I have sent off to Geoff Durham, the Friends Network Coordinator. Apparently, it was still too long, but no doubt an edited version will appear in a future edition. I didn't have time to provide feedback on the draft Latrobe City Community Plan by their deadline, but since then Jane Sultana has been involved with the N.E.I.P. component of the plan. See her report below.

In the Latrobe Valley Express in late May was a short article on the expansion of Morwell and Tarra-Bulga National Parks due to legislation introduced before parliament. According to Rob, this is the next step pending amendment proposals in the September session of parliament, for the addition of the land on Blue Gum Hill into the Park.

Ken Harris and Jane Sultana attended the Greening Latrobe forum on Thursday, June 17. Jane reports it was heartening to see such a large number of people (100 or so) representing about fifty different groups who have been involved in planting native vegetation within the Latrobe Valley. Each group received a certificate of appreciation. A large map was marked to indicate the areas that had been worked on and to indicate areas that participants would like to see revegetated in the future. The long term aim is to create corridors of native vegetation stretching across the Latrobe Valley linking the larger areas, such as parks and reserves.

July Activity

Our activity this month is a continuation of our tree planting project. Weather permitting, we will again attempt to plant on the heights of the Lodge Track, with Peel's Block as the alternative site. We will meet at Braniff's Road carpark on Sunday, July 18, at 10am. Be prepared with warm clothing and sturdy footwear, lunch and refreshments.

Tree Planting No. 1 **June Activity Report**

The weather was atrocious as we approached the Braniff's Road carpark; cold, wet and windy, very uninspiring for outdoor work. We expected to be the only people silly enough to front up for some tree planting, but Rob was already there, waiting and hoping that no-one else would come. Reg, Ken and Wendy all arrived before too long, and all keen enough to brave the elements, so the decision was made to go ahead with our plans, not up at the top of the Lodge Track, but at our back-up site on Peel's Block on the western edge of the Park. We waited a short while in vain for more intrepid souls to appear, but none arrived, so off we went to the propagation shed to collect the required gear. We left the bulk of the cars parked at the shed and made the trip out along Stringybark Ridge in Rob's ute and my Pajero, an uneventful exercise considering the dampness of the tracks.

Our first location for planting was the far south-west corner of Peel's Block, right down at the bottom next to the creek, where we had a nice grassy clearing to fill up. It was too cool to stand still for too long, so we were right into it, quickly organising ourselves into an efficient planting team. Ken and Rob had the job of distributing the correct ratio of trees to their positions, while Cathy, Wendy and I distributed the tree guards and stakes, and Reg commenced hoeing a clear patch for each plant. Then the girls began planting while I followed along, planting a tree here and there, but mainly hammering the stakes in, only pausing to shed a couple of layers of clothing as we warmed up, and to watch the progress of the pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles wafting around overhead. Rob and Ken joined in when they had finished their floral arrangements. About a hundred and twenty trees later, we had filled the clearing to capacity, and decided on a slightly early lunch before moving up the hill to the next planting location.

After a nice hot cuppa and a couple of sandwiches and a chat with the previous owner of the block and his friendly Golden Retriever, we transferred our activities about a hundred metres up the hillside and commenced planting into the gaps in the existing regrowth vegetation. We grumbled and moaned about the gradient of the hillside, the slipperiness of the wet grass, the thickness of the bracken, the vagaries of the weather and anything else that we could think of, but it was all talk and we stuck to our chosen tasks until we had planted our quota for the day. Rob was entertained by an Eastern Spinebill, which was determined to feast on the Common Heath within an arm span of his position, and Ken became very interested in a large frog unearthed by Reg, probably an Eastern Banjo Frog (or Pobblebonk). In all, the six of us planted 240 trees, a mixture of Mountain Grey Gum, Apple Box, Silver Wattle and Blackwood, in about 3 hours of leisurely labour.

The story does not end there, though! After trundling, with the occasional slip and slide, back along Stringybark Ridge, down across Foster's Gully and back up to the propagation shed, we were all about to go our various ways when Wendy announced that her car keys were comfortably locked in her car. A plan to deliver her home to fetch the spares came unstuck when she realised that her house keys were also locked in the car and there was no way, short of breaking and entering, to get into the house anyway. We did have a coathanger which we could have used to unlock the car, but we didn't have anyone who knew how to do it. There was nothing for it but to call the RACV, who had no idea where Morwell National Park was. Directions were given and we left Wendy and Rob patiently awaiting the arrival of the yellow van.

Neighbourhood Environment Improvement Plan (NEIP)

From Jane Sultana

On June 1st I attended a meeting at the Traralgon South Hall regarding the proposed development of a 'Neighbourhood Environment Improvement Plan' (NEIP) for the Traralgon Creek Catchment. A NEIP is an action plan devised by community members to improve aspects of their environment. Surveys and workshops conducted by a 'Community Environment Reference Group' revealed that the health of local

waterways was of particular concern to residents of the Latrobe Valley. That is why the Traralgon Creek was chosen as the proposed focus of a NEIP. It is envisaged that the NEIP will be evolving so that in the future the other tributaries and the Latrobe River will be incorporated.

The following is a list of issues raised by community and stakeholders as key issues of concern:

- **Declining numbers of fish**
- **Barriers to fish passage**
- **Loss of biodiversity**
- **Changed flow regimes**
- **Contamination of water from poor management practices and spills, including litter and chemicals**
- **Stormwater management**
- **Septic tank run-off**
- **Destabilisation of river beds and banks**
- **High concentrations of nutrients and suspended solids**
- **Inappropriate maintenance**
- **Introduced plants and animals**
- **Land clearing**
- **Soil erosion**
- **Timber harvesting**
- **Impacts from industry**
- **Amenity**

The 'Community Environment Reference Group' developed the following vision for the whole of the Latrobe City:

A stronger, harmonious and visually attractive clean, green city; committed to social, environmental and economic sustainability; where environmental values are respected and protected; and where urban and rural neighbourhoods, the community, industry and landholders all work together.

A range of individuals and organisations have expressed an interest in becoming involved in the development of a NEIP plan for the Traralgon Creek Catchment. These include Latrobe City, EPA, West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, Edison Mission, Gippsland Water, Landcare, Waterwatch, Friends of Gippsland Bush, Victorian Farmers Federation and Grand Ridge Plantations. The next step in the development of a NEIP is to form a steering committee. The steering committee will include representatives of major industries, agencies and community groups plus interested individuals from the community. The steering committee will consider the issues that are of concern to the community and develop strategies to deal with those issues. Some funding will come from council but government grants and donations from business will also be sought. It is thought that funding will be easier to obtain (for each individual project) when viewed as part of a coordinated approach within the catchment.

If you are interested in learning more about the NEIP, contact Kevin Roberts, Manager, Sustainability and Environment City Strategy at Latrobe City Council. I have a copy of a document titled 'Draft Neighbourhood Environment Improvement Plan Proposal For The Traralgon Creek Catchment'. Anyone interested may borrow it from me or obtain your own copy through Kevin Roberts. Over the coming weeks further information sessions at other venues will be held. Try to get along to one of them to learn more about the NEIP first hand.

History of a Butterfly Orchid (*Sarcochilus australis*)

by Ken Harris

On 11th April 2004, I completed the season's survey of the Butterfly Orchids by going back over the plots checking for seed pods.

The season was a fairly poor one for flowers, and the orchid plots continue to lose plants without any sign of fresh plants appearing to replace them. The seed pod survey however revealed this as one of the best recent years for seed set. On the four original plots, I found 4 seed pods (the previous highest

count was 3 back in the 1992/93 season). There were also 2 pods on Plot E, the extra plot added in 2001.

Each season since 1990, I have also done a count of all seed pods (on or off the plots) seen as I walk back through the bush parallel to the main track. This year I counted 9 pods out of 201 plants that I spotted. This makes it a good year for seed, though not approaching the best years in 1990 and 1995.

Here is a table showing the counts over previous years:

Year	'90	'91	'92	'93	'94	'95	'96	'98	'99	'00	'01	'02	'03
Pods	15	13	6	8	7	16	7	1	2	10	3	1	9
Plants	-	-	-	227	286	245	266	267	116	162	222	172	201

I was interested to note one seed pod on the first plot, on a plant that I know well. It is the only plant on the original plots growing on a Muttonwood, *Rapanea howittiana*. It is on the main trunk of the tree about 1.7 metres from the ground. The plant was a good size when I first recorded it. I use a scale from 1 to 5 to record the plant size and it was size 3, which means more than 2 full size leaves. I have a complete history of this plant since 1987. Over that period I have recorded a total of 173 flowers on this plant, but it wasn't until this year that I found a seed pod for the first time. Over that period the plant has had a varied history. It has grown, but in between it has had two major setbacks. I was away in 1997 and no survey was completed. The following year the plant was no more than size 2 (2 fully developed leaves) and for the first time it had no flowers at all. It recovered well the next year, with 12 flowers on 3 stems, but when I checked for seed pods the following April, the plant itself looked almost dead. It had no live leaves and only the roots still looked healthy. To my surprise, it was back the next flowering season, with two well-developed leaves (though no flowers). Since then it has gone from strength to strength, flowering well in 2001 and 2002. In 2003 it was for the first time recorded in my highest category as size 5. It had three flower spikes with 9, 9 and 6 flowers respectively, a total of 24 flowers, the most it has ever borne and finally it produced its first seed pod.

Here is the completely history of Plant 14 on Plot A:

Date	Size	Flower Stems	Flowers per stem	Total Flowers	Seed pods	
15/3/87	3	Initial setting out of plots, in non-flowering season				
13/12/87	3	1	4	4		
13/11/88	4	2	7,4	11		
19/11/89	4	1	13	13		
18/11/90	4	1	3	3		
17/11/91	4	2	6,11	17		
15/11/92	4	1	13	13		
4/12/93	4	2	11,8	19		
26/11/94	4	1	13	13		
2/12/95	4	1	13	13		
8/12/96	4	1	13	13		
1997	No survey in 1997					
30/11/98	2	0		0		
15/11/99	2	3	3,4,5	12		
8/4/00	0	When surveying for seed pods, plant almost dead, with no visible leaves				
26/11/00	2	0		0		Recovering, with two well-developed leaves
24/11/01	4	4	4,2,1,1	8		
17/11/02	4	4	3,5,6,6	20		
16/11/03	5	3	9,9,6	24	1	