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Friends of Morwell National Park Inc.

Newsletter – February 2012

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

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Hello everyone and welcome to this month's newsletter. I return to this newsletter after 5 weeks in the US. The weather was excellent (only one day of rain in a northern winter) but still in the range of 0-10⁰C. It is noticeably warmer here in Australia. The highlights of the trip were the grandeur of the Grand Canyon and Monument Valley.

We are well and truly into the New Year and we are now feeling the effects of the summer season. It is strange at this time of the year to still see green grass in paddocks but that is slowly dying off now. The Park is similar with a lot of green grass still growing and requiring maintenance. It is good to see that the summer crews have been in the Park and the grass is low around the car parks and walking tracks. The summer crew has done a great job in cleaning up the Billy's Creek car park since the grass was 4-5 foot tall and seedlings in a 6 inch tree guard were difficult to spot.

The photos and information in the notice board at the Kerry Road car park has been updated. New 2012 FMNP calendars have also been placed at both Kerry Road and Billy's Creek. Remember that anybody is welcome to come along and help out (however they are able) with any of the activities.

That is enough news for now. Included in this newsletter are reports from both the December and January activities. Thank you to Ken, who was good enough to write a report for each activity.

February Activity

10.00am Sunday 19th February

The group will meet at 10.00am at the Junction Road car park to complete some track maintenance along Billy's Creek. We will need Craig to bring the waders and weed spray. If you have your own waders or gumboots bring them along for the walk in the creek looking for Tutsan. You will need to bring your lunch and clothing suitable for the weather conditions on the day.

Friends of Morwell National Park Inc: PO Box 19, Churchill, 3842, <http://morwellnp.pangaean.net>.

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December and January Activity Reports

Nest Box checking, 18th December 2011 and 15th January 2012

by Ken Harris

This report covers two working bees. Our December activity saw us spend the morning, checking 22 of the 66 nest boxes along the Billy's Creek flats. In January we completed the task with the remaining 44 boxes being checked.

We started near the car park, equipped with ladder, screw-driver, electronic spy glass and GPS Unit, to look at the first of 8 bat boxes. No sign of anything in the bat box, but we got off to a good start with an adjacent box that contained at least 4 Sugar Gliders.

We then moved to the furthest boxes and commenced working back towards the car park. One box with a small hole proved especially interesting. Observers up the ladder had a brief sight of a small animal with the appearance of a brushy tail. It was suggested that it might have been a Feathertail Glider. Soon after, we were checking a bat box. It also had no evidence of use by bats, but several of us saw another little brushy-tailed mammal and the similarity in appearance to a Feathertail Glider was even clearer. It was interesting to see that the slot in the bottom (designed for entry by bats), had been closed off with leaves for most of its length, just leaving a small opening at one end. I returned that evening with my camera and sat by the box at sunset in the hope of its emerging and giving me the proof that it was a Feathertail, but nothing emerged from the box. I tried again on two other nights, but had no success, so we are left with a strong belief that we have Feathertails in the Park, but cannot confirm it.

Further checking led us to see 4 more Sugar Gliders and 1 Ringtail Possum in the boxes, but the bat boxes showed no other sign of use. We then headed off to our Christmas barbecue at John and Margaret Barker's home in Churchill.

Returning in January, we moved to where we left off and continued working back towards the car park. There was lots of evidence of the use of the boxes by small mammals and we found another Ringtail Possum and another 16 Sugar Gliders. The bat boxes have not attracted bats at all so far, but one more was like the one in December, with the slot on the bottom three-quarters closed off with leaves and we speculated that this one also was being used by feathertails. The two tiny boxes frequented by the Agile Antechinus, remained packed full of dry leaves, but this time we did not see any of the occupants. Perhaps the best find on this day was a box containing 6 Sugar Gliders, one or more of which was certainly a less than half-grown baby.

We also found several boxes with lids off (some missing) and one box, was beneath a fallen tree, but was retrieved and reattached to an adjacent tree. One box was missing altogether, possibly under one of several trees which had fallen in the area where it was sited.

The grand total for the two working bees was 24 Sugar Gliders, 2 Ringtail Possums and possibly 2 Feathertail Gliders. It is great to see that this totally revegetated area is proving so popular with native mammals, especially the Sugar Gliders.



The table below shows the mammals using the boxes over 4 seasons of checking.

	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012
Boxes	6	41	41	66
Agile Antechinus	1		3	
Sugar Glider		1	10	24
Ringtail Possum		1	1	2
Feathertail Glider				2?

Finally, here is a map of the area showing the nest-boxes that contained Sugar Gliders or Ringtail Possums in December and January. The box numbers are in white on black, and the number of animals in the box is shown in black on a coloured background, yellow for Sugar Gliders and Red for Ringtail Possums. There may have been even more Sugar Gliders, because on each occasion one of the boxes had a Sugar Glider looking out of the entrance and we tried not to disturb it and therefore don't know how many companions it may have had.

