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Friends of Morwell National Park Inc. *Newsletter – October 2020*

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Hello everyone and welcome to this month's newsletter. We are now well into spring and we have had good winter and spring rains. The park is lush and La Nina (cooler and wetter than normal weather conditions) has been declared for Australia in 2020/2021.

Corona Virus (Covid 19) continues to be a worldwide problem with a second wave of infections being a major concern overseas. In Australia, the rest of Australia has avoided a second wave and in Victoria we are now getting towards the end of the second wave. At its peak there were 700 new cases a day and now we are down to single figures. The strict Melbourne restriction of nightly curfews has been removed. Melbourne restrictions to only going to work with a permit, not being able to travel more than 5 kilometers from home, face coverings when outside the home and limited reasons to leave home continue.

In Victoria there has been over 20,000 cases of Corona virus with almost 800 deaths. Across Australia there have been over 27,000 cases and 875 deaths. Worldwide there have been over 33 million people contract Corona virus and over 1 million have died.

Regional Victoria has had few cases, so some of the restrictions have been removed. Currently outside gatherings are restricted to 10 people. Parks Victoria currently allows outdoor activities of up to 10 people in regional Victoria (not allowed when our September activity was to run). If these same rules apply on October 18, we may have trouble running our October activities. We will need to wait and see what rules allow then and Parks may approve it because they are ongoing long term activities.

Last month, I reported on the growth in the test plots on Blue Gum Hill. These test plots were a trial of direct seeding with the Yinnar Yinnar South Landcare group. The Yinnar Yinnar South Landcare are using this technique on their other sites including the one further up Billy's Creek. Jay was happy to see the progress on Blue Gum Hill and has provide us with a report about the Yinnar Yinnar South Landcare group's progress on their current projects. Big thanks to Jay. It is good to know that in this year of a pandemic, when most activities have been stopped, that they have still made progress.

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

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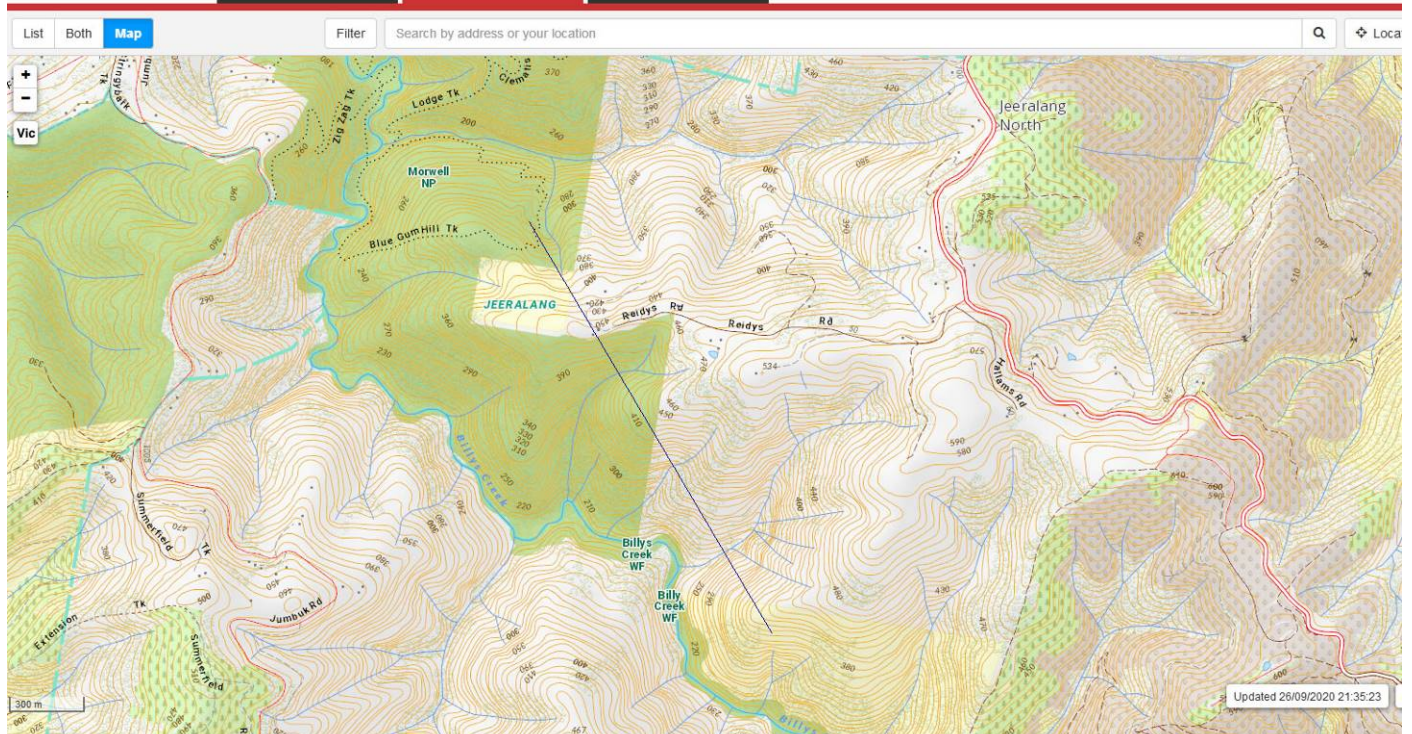
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More direct seeding adventures with Yinnar, Yinnar South Landcare Group

Since we did the trial site seeding on Blue Gum Hill with Friends of Morwell National Park in August 2019, Yinnar Yinnar South Landcare Group has been forging ahead with our adventures in direct seeding.

At the time when we worked on Blue Gum Hill with Friends of the Park, we knew we had a large planting site further up Billy's Creek, and we'd already had one go at broadcasting seed into dead blackberries along the creek.



This map shows our block in relation to the Blue Gum Hill site. The re-veg block is about 3km away and 100m higher in altitude. Our block is shaded pale yellow. The map is from the Vic Emergency website.

When we seeded Blue Gum Hill, we had very little fresh seed available, as the policy was to only use seed collected inside the National Park boundary. The Eucalypt seed that we used was recently collected as was perhaps some Varnish Wattle. Other seed varied from old to very old.

The Acacia seedlings found coming up haven't yet developed adult leaves, so it's too early for us to see what they are. Wattle seed is supposed to remain viable for many years. Other understorey species that had been stored refrigerated in the Park shed haven't yet been found growing on the trial site. They also didn't come up in a test planting in our Landcare Group's greenhouse.

Canopy trees alone on the Blue Gum Hill site will increase biodiversity once they are big enough to shade out weeds and attract birds that can deposit seeds of other species.

On our Landcare Group's Billy's Creek site we've been trying to hurry up the process by aiming for a "maximum diversity"* approach. So far our seed mixes have contained up to 26 species of local plants that we expect will grow from seed. We've also put in limited numbers of tubestock with species that don't grow readily from seed.

Along with our seed of locally occurring wet forest and warm temperate rainforest canopy trees, we've been planting a variety of fast growing understorey plants to try and quickly cover the ground and compete with re-emerging blackberries.

We've also planted species thought to act as browser deterrents. These include Fireweeds, Prickly Currant Bush and Kangaroo Apple. We've collected most of the seed used at the block ourselves, and bought what we've been unable to collect.

This year we got access to a much faster access route to our site through an adjacent property. This gave us a chance to go more often and to plant different species in autumn and spring according to when they germinate most readily.

Since our group had our 2019 AGM talk by Bronwyn Teesdale and helped to plant Blue Gum Hill last August, we've held a number of field days and events to help us learn our craft as seed collectors and planters.

In October last year, we had a plant identification (and pizza) day at Jeeralang North Hall where Ken and Tamara and others from Gippsland Intrepid Landcare Group and Latrobe Valley Field Naturalists Club came along to help us locate flowering plants in the nearby forest that we could harvest seed from later.



Plant hunters at Jeeralang North in October 2019

Early this year, we ran four seed collecting field days with Jenny Wolswinkel from *Seeds of Gippsland*. We had more practice in using our pole pruner, and greatly increased the efficiency of our collecting efforts. We also located species that we otherwise might have missed. We're gradually getting the hang of collecting a genetically diverse seed sample, and have managed to collect seed from large patches of each species and make sure we collect from at least eleven unrelated parent plants for each species.

In 2019 our group also got some unexpected funding. This has allowed us to direct seed a 2ha site adjacent to where a previous koala corridor project was burned in the Yinnar South 2019 bushfire.

This site was more accessible by vehicle than either Blue Gum Hill or our Billy's Creek block, so we invested in some additional site preparation. The land owner was able to deep rip the site. Then, two weeks before planting, we had a contractor spray 1m square patches to kill the grass.

When it came to planting, we divided the species to be sown between the creek side and higher up the slope. Then we split our seed mixes between heavy and light seeds to plant on different patches. The heavier seed was covered with soil, and the light seed mix was broadcast on to the surface of the soil. Crimson Rosellas and other parrots were observed later spending a lot of time on the ground, so it'll be interesting to see what comes up! By May next year this site will get to its 12 month anniversary, and it'll be good to see how it compares with Blue Gum Hill at the same milestone.



Group members and contractors working on our direct seeding koala corridor site at Budgerie in May this year.

There ends the good news. The bad news is that at Billy's Creek, and also along Middle Creek at Yinnar South where we have another big planting site, browsing of our young plants by deer is a big problem. At Billy's Creek, as at Blue Gum Hill, we've also seen sheep and Hereford cows.

Last year we saw a mob of about ten cows and the [fresh] cow pats extended all the way back along the Grand Strzelecki Track to the Braniff's Road entrance of the National Park. We understand that the rangers may have been able to act on this. Unfortunately, recently we again saw a cow on our block trampling a big patch of our revegetation efforts. So wandering stock is still a big problem needing our urgent attention.

As well as wrecking our young plants, deer are also making a mess of the remnant bush that we walk through to get to the site. They are making wallows, browsing emergent vegetation, eating bark and pulling down tree limbs and old growth vines.

We have licensed shooters associated with our group who are willing to try and control them on private property where it's now legal to shoot deer at any time. If anyone owns a property or knows someone who would agree to deer control measures on their place – please contact Larry Moss on 0420 310 743.

Yinnar, Yinnar South Landcare Group looks forward to doing more projects in future with the Friends of Morwell National Park. We felt that our groups working on Blue Gum Hill together was/ is great for learning and for mutual encouragement and support.

There's more about our group's projects on our website. It's at the following link, or easily found by searching for *Yinnar Landcare*.

<https://www.landcarevic.org.au/groups/westgippsland/yinnar-south/>

* *A Rainforest Restoration Manual for South Eastern Australia* by Bill Peel has been our inspiration for this.

NEXT! here it is folks...our 2021 direct seeding site at Billy's Creek.



October Activities (If we are allowed to have an activity)

Sunday 18th October

Activity 1 – Orchid Walk

10.00am

The first activity will be a walk of around Fosters Gully or Stringybark Track to search for the orchids which can be found at this time of the year. You will need to bring clothing suitable for the weather conditions on the day.

If you are staying for the koala count you will need to bring your lunch, which can be eaten in the Kerry Road picnic area between the activities.

Activity 2 - Koala Count

1.30pm

The Friends of Morwell National Park will be carrying out the annual 'Koala Count in the Park'. Willing participants are requested to meet at the Kerry Road - Fosters Gully car park at 1.30pm to commence the Koala count.

The 'Koala Count in the Park' event is part of the long term strategy to document the numbers and measure the general health of the koalas within Morwell National Park.

Bring your family and friends and enjoy a pleasant stroll in the park while simultaneously helping the team in spotting the resident koalas that may be found in the park.

Participants are advised to bring suitable clothing and footwear applicable for the weather conditions, and if possible, bring a pair of binoculars as it certainly makes it easier to spot the koalas.