



The Penguin

Newsletter of Phillip Island Conservation Society - Fourth Quarter,
December 2005



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Dates for your Diary

Sat 7 January, Children's Environment Morning: "What Scuba Divers See" with Mat Coburn. Meeting Room, Heritage Centre. Suits kinder - grade 6 children. See article.

Sat 14 January, 8p.m. **AGM**, Meeting Room, Heritage Centre, Thompson Ave Cowes, 8.00 p.m.

Sun 15 January, Working bee - Red Rocks (see article)

Sat 4 February, Children's Environment Morning

Sat 18 February, Seasonal Walk: Patsy Hunt (FOK Pres) will guide us through Oswin Roberts Reserve and tell us about the years of habitat restoration FOK have undertaken there. Meet at Harbison Rd car park, 2 p.m.

Sat 4 March, Children's Environment Morning

Sat 18 March, General Meeting

Sat 19 March, Working Bee

Sat 1 April, Children's Environment Morning

Sat 6 May, Children's Environment Morning (Final for 05-06 season)

Sat 20 May, Seasonal Walk, 2 p.m. TBA

Sat 24 June, General Meeting

Sun 25 June, Working Bee

Sat 19 August, Seasonal Walk

Sat 23 September, General Meeting

Sun 24 September, Working Bee

Sat 18 November, Seasonal Walk

Sat 13 January 2007, PICS AGM

Friends of Koalas (FOK)Habitat Days: First Sat of every month at 10 am. Contact Patsy Hunt ph 5952 2407

Koala Count at the Koala Conservation Centre, second Thursday of every month at 10 am. Contact Patsy Hunt ph 5952 2407

Biosphere - Bass Coast Round Table meets at San Remo on the third Friday of every month at 8 pm. Contact Neil Beddoe, ph 5952 1575.

Friends of Churchill Island (FOCIS): General Meetings: 28.1.06; 25.3.06; 27.5.06. 1 p.m., Conference Room, Visitors' Centre. Phone Sec Jill Fitzroy-Kelly: 5672 5235, or email: jillfk@dcsi.net.au

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Members,

December already! What did happen to 2005? As far as I can tell, every PICS member seems to be always on the tear from one thing to another, so perhaps, now, we can begin to slow down as the yearly round of events and meetings comes to an end. The last PICS meeting was "Meet the Candidates" for the Bass Coast Shire Council elections on November 4th. We had a good roll-up of candidates and audience, and the Cowes Cultural Centre proved to be a comfortable venue, with the microphone in working order. The most urgent environmental question for Phillip Island at the moment is the proposed golf course and associated large housing development adjacent to the Racing Circuit. In response to my question about the large housing development, all the candidates, except one, said "NO".

Since then the Shire Council election has come and gone. Of the "Island Councillors" Neville Goodwin and Kelly Simrajh retained their seats, and new councillors Gareth Barlow and

Peter Paul were elected. I would like to place on record, thanks from PICS to Loretta Leslie for her six years' work as a Councillor. Loretta has often been the lone voice speaking out for the environment and for due process in planning issues.

During January watch out for various Planning Scheme Amendments which just might come on exhibition. When last heard of, the proposed Vegetation Protection Overlay was such a watered down version of the existing one as to be useless! Virtually, just sharpen your chain saw and go ahead!! So please be diligent, read the Public Notices in the local papers - and put in your submission.

With best wishes for a happy and peaceful Christmas, and oodles of energy for 2006.

Margaret Hancock, President.

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RED ROCKS COAST ACTION

Thanks to Margaret, John, Mike, Diane and Christine who worked happily away at our last Red Rocks working bee to clear a large patch of soft weeds surrounding growing understorey north of the car park on the foreshore. This area's rehabilitation is well on the way, but the young plants needed some 'breathing space' to spread out and grow vigorously to in turn keep the herbaceous weeds down.

These working bees are productive, sociable times, with each volunteer working at his or her own pace. Everyone is welcome to join us. Our next RRCA working bee will be on Sunday 15 January 2006 at 10 a.m. Tools are provided.

The Co-ordinator's position is currently vacant. See advert below.

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NATIONAL TRUST

The National Trust Bass Coast Branch was launched at a meeting held in the Kilcunda Hall on Sat 8th October. Richard Prentice, who is the Branch Officer with the National Trust, led the meeting. Representatives from the Mornington Peninsula Branch reported on their particular interests and activities. Dr Juliet Bird, chairwoman of the Landscape Committee gave an inspiring talk on protecting landscapes, and explained the process which must be followed BEFORE a landscape may be classified. Margaret Hancock spoke about various local landscapes which are greatly loved, but which have absolutely

no protection.

Since October, a Steering Committee has met twice and the first formal meeting will be held probably in March 06. Watch local papers for details. The Steering Committee will also be involved in a "Landscape Workshop" in the near future.

Margaret Hancock

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AMENDMENT C43

Planning Panels Victoria appointed Helen Weston to chair the Hearing of this Amendment on November 24th and 25th at Cowes. The Amendment's purpose is to rezone from rural to residential the land east of the Industrial Estate, bounded by the Cowes-Rhyll, Coghlan and Settlement Roads. This rezoning is one of the recommendations of the Phillip Island and San Remo Design Framework.

Although giving general support to the rezoning, PICS was concerned about the increase in runoff to the Rhyll Inlet, and the density of the proposed residential lots along Rhyll Rd. We also argued for greater protection for the newly planted vegetation Buffer Zone along the western boundary.

An interesting aspect of this residential development is that it includes the creation of the "Cowes East Home Owners' Association", which is in many ways similar to a Body Corporate. All the members, in addition to their Shire Rates, pay for the upkeep of the Public Open Space on the estate and also for a community-meeting place. This is a new concept for Phillip Island, but apparently it works well in other places.

Margaret Hancock

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September G.M. Speaker: Thierry Roland, Parks Victoria, San Remo

"Westernport's 3 Marine National Parks"

Amongst other jobs, Parks Victoria manages Westernport's three Marine National Parks: Churchill Island from the Bridge to all of Swan Bay; one near French Island, and Yarringa, above the Hastings Marina. These protect saltmarsh, seagrass, or mangrove habitat. They are three of 13 MNPs in Victoria, plus 11 Marine Sanctuaries, which are smaller areas. This represents 5% of Victoria's total marine habitats, which are

extremely diverse with a huge number of species, many unique – this compares with the Great Barrier Reef, where only 25% of the species are unique.

The CI MNP features a huge tidal range, with mainly mud at low tide. This is extremely good for waders, and over 30 resident and migratory species are found there. Some breed in Siberia, coming to Australia in our summer to rest and feed to put on weight to return to breed in Siberia's summer. Any disturbance of their habitat could destroy the crustaceans, etc, they depend on. Other marine creatures found there include pipe fish, tube worms, sponge, feather stars, Brachiopods, hermit crabs, sea hare, Nudibranchs (some of the 60-70 species found in WP), flathead, octopus, skate, many shell beds. Thierry showed a short video of these creatures.

The three main habitat types protected in Western Port (WP) are each important for various reasons. Mangroves have extensive root systems with air breathing roots as well. WP is one of the most southerly locations for mangroves. They are excellent shelters for young fish at high tide. Sea grass meadows are also good nursery habitat. Unfortunately there has been a great deal of seagrass dieback in WP since 1980, but some areas are now recovering well. The decline is possibly due to sediment, but the many studies that have taken place have been inconclusive as to key factors. Saltmarsh acts like a sponge, absorbing nutrients before they enter the bay. The endangered Orange-bellied parrots are known to feed on certain saltmarsh plants.

A Management Plan and advisory group from the community manage the WP MNPs. No infringement notices are issued; people caught disobeying the law regarding MNPs receive a summons to court. MNPs are marked by orange triangles on piles or buoys. The education of the public is no problem at CI MNP, but is sometimes a problem for the French Island MNP, as several deep channels within the park are traditionally popular fishing spots. Boating can do much damage – e.g. increasing water turbidity and creating deep furrows which stay for years and do not readily fill in, caused by propellers. However, jet skis are allowed in MNPs as they actually cause less damage than propeller-powered boats. More sedate activities such as birdwatching and canoeing are preferred though!

John Eddy

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SPRING SEASONAL WALK

Bett Robertson's Low Energy House, Cowes-Rhyll Road 19.11.05

The 13 people who attended Bett's 80 acre property for our last seasonal walk were fortunate enough to have a lovely Spring day to show off her newly-shorn sheep, rolling grasslands, lovely rose-strewn garden, magnificent old manna gums and prolific orchard – a perfect setting for her timber low-energy house and wool shed. When Bett first arrived over 20 years ago, however, the scene was vastly different. The farmland was severely degraded, with gorse, thistles, no decent fences, rocks strewn everywhere; and “that white stuff on the flat” turned out to be Australia's great enemy: salt. Bett, who had originally only wanted five acres but couldn't find any, was regarded by many as “the eccentric old lady camped behind the cemetery” for some time until all her efforts started to bear fruit.

Originally thinking in fairly conventional terms, Bett's ideas quickly changed once she was quoted \$16,000 just to run the power line from the road to the house site. Friends gave other suggestions, and Kevin Taylor, an environmental landscape planner responsible for the Cranbourne Botanic Gardens amongst other things, planned her a house to get the most from the sun. Thus the house is built in an E shape, featuring both sunny and sheltered areas, with slats on the north verandah to increase winter sun and decrease summer sun entering the house; further enhanced by the planting of deciduous trees near the north facing walls. The house is also designed to get the afternoon sea breeze from the south, whilst its 'natural draught' ensures that leaving the glass door open from living to sleeping areas heats the latter in winter and cools it in summer.

At that stage Bett had enough money to build it to lock-up. She became the “builders' laborer, painter, contractor”, and worked side by side with them, whilst living in the wool shed, all the while collecting into a neat pile the rocks sticking up in the paddocks, and a few other sources. These became the rock feature walls in kitchen and living room, their mass retaining the warmth generated by the wood fires in each of those areas. In fact, the rock chimney wall is so effective that in winter Bett often lets the fire go out by 11 a.m.

Bett's energy needs – including hosting numerous family, friends and community group meetings and functions – are met in a variety of ways, the bulwark of the system being a bank of 240 volt batteries feeding off solar panels and being boosted for about ½ hour per day by a 5 kva Honda generator, housed adjacent to the shearing shed, and also powering the shearing shed. This also pumps water from two large storage

tanks receiving all the water from house and shed roofs, to a header tank on a tower near the house. Boosting of the batteries is mostly unnecessary during summer months. This system powers appliances such as washing machine, dishwasher, iron, a 12-volt refrigerator and over 30 lights, and includes gas bottles for backup; though Bett only uses about 1½ bottles per year. (The system also powered Bett's TV, but now that lives in a cupboard since it's not worth watching any more!)

Pivotal to Bett's life on the hill is her beloved wood fired stove. This serves numerous purposes, apart from regular stove-top cooking: a 6-slice toaster, an oven, keeping kettles simmering, warming the house, clothes drying, automatically ironing wrinkles out of clothes, and, most importantly, reviving lambs!

Our tour of the house environs concluded with an amble in Bett's beautiful garden - accompanied by several White-eared Honeyeaters, Yellow-rumped Thornbills, Scrub Wrens, Swallows and an Eastern Yellow Robin – followed by a real shearers' afternoon tea! Bett told us that with all of the energy factors

she has put in place in that 20+ years, she STILL hasn't spent anything like the \$16,000 she was originally quoted to get the mains power from road to house!

Our summer seasonal walk will be at Oswin Roberts Reserve, and our guide will be Patsy Hunt, President of FOK, and stalwart of many, many years of habitat restoration in this wonderful reserve. Meet at the Harbison Rd car park at 2 p.m. on Saturday, 18th February 2006. A pleasant and extremely interesting afternoon is guaranteed!

Christine Grayden

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CHILDREN'S ENVIRONMENT MORNINGS

So far we have had three CEMs for this season: firstly, run by PICS ♦ John Eddy, on ♦ Pond Life ♦, with 16 children, then, with PINP/PICS ♦ Peter Dann, on ♦ Penguins ♦ with 8 children, and thirdly on ♦ Shells ♦ with John and speaker Jack Austin and 14 children. These sessions continue to be very successful, and enjoyable for both the children and the adults who are required to stay with their child. Thanks to Coast Action for funding.

Our January 7 CEM will feature highly experienced scuba diver/instructor, scientist, teacher Mat Coburn, and has been advertised in the ♦ Sun, Surf and Sand ♦ booklet. This should be quite a busy session, and All PICS members are welcome

to come along and help out, or just see the sessions in operation.

Contact Christine Grayden for more details: ph 5956 8501 or email cgrayden@waterfront.net.au

Christine Grayden

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SITUATIONS VACANT

With our AGM approaching it is time for members to consider how they can best contribute to PICS's continuing existence, at a time when we are needed as much as ever. Two positions have been vacant for some months and the other is newly vacant - all must be filled urgently:

1. TREASURER: You will be trained to use our bookkeeping software and will need your own computer. Apart from normal expenses control, you will need to keep track of grant money, money designated for special purposes, and our Public Fund. You will report monthly to the committee and present an audited statement to the AGM in January. (We have a separate Membership Officer) You will be unflappable!

2. RED ROCKS COAST ACTION CO-ORDINATOR: With back-up from Derek Hibbert from Bass Coast Shire, you will meet with him several times per year to determine funding needs (Landcare writes the submissions), advertise working bees, collect trees, tools, bags, etc, from Derek prior to working bees and summon the volunteers. With so much excellent work done by 3 previous co-ordinators, your job will be a breeze; but necessary nevertheless. Living near Red Rocks is *not* necessary.

3. MINUTES SECRETARY: Our M.S. of many years, Bruce Howe, must retire, so we need someone who is able to attend General, AGM and Committee Meetings to take our minutes and distribute them as needed. Could be job-shared by 2 people. Meetings are quite orderly, so the task is not so difficult.

Anyone who thinks they would like to tackle any of these positions is asked to contact Margaret Hancock ph/fax 5052 2557, or Christine Grayden ph 5956 8501; email: cgrayden@waterfront.net.au as soon as possible.

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VERN JOHNSON REMEMBERED

When Vern and Nora Johnson commenced Kingston Gardens

Zoo and Picnic Park (now the Phillip Island Wildlife Park) in 1967, quite a few people wondered about their sanity. After all, the public went to a zoo to see elephants and tigers, not kangaroos and wombats, and zoological gardens contained magnificent specimens of trees and flowers from other continents, not gum trees and wattles.

In order to get the public to come to Kingston Gardens, Vern and Nora put in the miles for Phillip Island's tourism, especially in setting up promotions in Melbourne's growing number of large shopping centres, and offering prizes of package deal holidays – another innovation at the time. Vern died at his home in Beaconsfield of complications from mesothelioma on September 15, but he leaves a legacy on Phillip Island that the Phillip Island Conservation Society (PICS) wishes to acknowledge.

In 1968 the Jaycees organisation marked – The Year of Conservation –, and on Phillip Island this coincided with the release of plans to turn Rhyll Inlet (then known as – The Nits –) into a massive marina development. With encouragement from local conservationists, the Jaycees convened a meeting to form a local conservation society, and PICS was formed on May 11, 1968, with Vern Johnson amongst the Committee members. Vern became President in 1971 for two years. This was a tumultuous period in the history of the conservation movement, both locally and nationally.

In common with most parts of Australia, Phillip Island was at that time quite primitive in regard to conservation, with many locals openly hostile to conservationists. The PICS committee faced many hurdles, even after The Nits development proposal was knocked on the head. During Vern's presidency there were many common practices which would be heartily condemned today, such as frequent fires at the Shire tip (which PICS asked then to be moved away from the coast as a matter of priority), unauthorized shooting in reserves, unlimited and destructive access to foreshores and wildlife habitat, removal of rocks from the beach and removal of – unsightly scrub – from roadsides and foreshores. At one stage Vern had a showdown with council and the then extremely powerful Crawford Productions team when they placed a film set on top of penguins at Cat Bay!

Vern was active in PICS when the Victorian Conservation Council (now Environment Victoria) was established, and extended the PICS network through support of the many regional conservation bodies that sprang up at the time. As a Phillip Island councillor he and fellow PICS member and councillor Bill Hopkins, brought the state of Phillip Island's foreshores, and especially Red Rocks, to the attention of the council. He sought roadside wildlife warning signs, voiced PICS's horror at the mass shooting of Silver Gulls at the shire tip and raised the issue of foxes and feral cats killing wildlife,

calling for measures with a view to exterminating foxes on Crown Lands in the Shire of Phillip Island. These were all revolutionary concepts at the time.

Vern was also a prime mover for the establishment of a Phillip Island Information Centre, and instigated car rallies and annual Easter festivals to encourage Victorians to visit Phillip Island. He also represented PICS on the committee formed at the time to try to buy Churchill Island for the general public.

After leaving Phillip Island he and Nora travelled extensively overseas, visiting Europe, the Pacific islands, Assam and Mount Everest among other places. They finally settled on 170 acres in the Strathbogie Ranges and set about combining cattle farming with the restoration and enhancement of the wildflower and forest habitat on their farm. At the age of 78 years, Vern became Chairman of the Strathbogie Landcare Group.

At his funeral service, where PICS was represented by current President Margaret Hancock and myself, Vern was described as patient, passionate, hard working, enormously proud of his three children, devoted to Nora, and also proud of his service to his country during the Second World War. He had many talents: as an actor, dancer, pianist, teacher, amateur veterinarian, farmer, small arms expert and crack shot. Through all of this he remained a gentleman, with a ready smile, a dedication to his community, and a great love of his family and nature. Phillip Island is richer for the years Vern spent here.

Christine Grayden

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From PICS General Meeting 24.9.05

Planning Issues Update

8.1 Three level houses at Linton Court. PICS lodged an objection to the Bass Coast Shire Council. We understand that BCSC failed to make a decision within the statutory time and that the proponent will likely take the matter to VCAT.

8.2 Boomerang Caravan Park redevelopment for supermarket, apartments and specialty shops. At its meeting on 16.11.05 this application was approved, with amendment by the Councillors. PICS has lodged an objection with VCAT.

General Business

9.1 Cutting of roadside vegetation: representatives from PICS, FOK, WESBOC and the Phillip Island Nature Park have met with an officer from VicRoads to discuss this problem. We are

hopeful that in future the necessary works will be carried out in a much more caring manner (no hacking!) and that weeds such as Coprosma, blackberry, watsonia and Pittosporum will be removed  not pruned!

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A New Baddie on the Scene:

Chilean Needle Grass

This tussock closely resembles many native Spear Grasses, so if you suspect its somewhere near you its best to call in an expert to identify it properly. The main difference is the presence of a corona where the seed attaches to the stem.

More information on this grass, which has invaded many parts of Australia and is now present in patches on Phillip Island, can be found on the Internet. The Victorian Department of Primary Industry has a fact sheet on their website:

www.dpi.vic.gov.au then select Agriculture and Food, go to weeds page, and click on Chilean Needle Grass in the alphabetical listing of Victorian weeds.

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Environment Protection & Biodiversity Conservation Act

Margaret Hancock and Robin Dyall recently attended a workshop for PICS on the topic of this Commonwealth government act, which concerns Westernport due to its coverage of the Ramsar Agreement and migratory species. Margaret has several guidebooks available for members to borrow: Conservationists Field Guide, Guide for Planners and Guide for Conservationists. Contact her phone/fax on 5952 2557.

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PHILLIP ISLAND CONSERVATION SOCIETY INC PUBLIC FUND

YES! I want to support the PICS Public Fund with a tax deductible donation:

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AGM and PICS Membership Renewal 2006

The AGM will be held on Saturday, January 14 2006 at 8.00 pm in the Meeting Room, Heritage Centre, Thompson Ave, Cowes. [Minutes](#) of the January 2005 meeting are available online.

At the AGM, all positions on the PICS Committee are elected for 2006. Please consider joining the Committee to continue the work of PICS.

You can download the [Committee Nomination Form](#). All nomination forms must be in the hands of the PICS Secretary 7 days before the AGM (by 7th January 2006). Please post forms to The Secretary, PICS, PO Box 548, COWES, 3922.

It is time to renew your membership (or begin a new one) for 2006. PICS relies on the support of its membership to continue its work. Download the [Membership Renewal Form](#) and send it in today!

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PICS CONTACTS

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