



# The Penguin

Newsletter of Phillip Island Conservation Society - Second Quarter, June 2003



Newsletter

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## Dates for your Diary

**Saturday 5 July: General Meeting 8 p.m.** Heritage Centre. Guest Speaker: **Chris Smyth**, Victorian National Parks Association, campaign officer for the **Point Nepean** campaign. An up-to-date report on issues and activities on this valuable and substantial natural and built environment.

**Sunday 6 July: Red Rocks Working Bee**, 10 a.m. BYO Gloves, tools, lunch

**Tuesday 8 July: Koala Count, K.C.C.** 10 a.m.

**Friday 11 July: Friends of Koalas G.M.** 8 p.m. at Heritage Centre.

**Saturday 16 August: PICS Seasonal Walk** 1.30p.m. Meet at Kilcunda foreshore car park next to caravan park for a tour led by Kilcunda local Heather Mabilia of the new tracks and sights in the area.

Don't forget **Habitat Day** first Saturday in every month (contact ph 5952 2407 for venue)

**Koala Conservation Centre Count** second Tuesday in every month.

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Members,

Today, Friday 13<sup>th</sup>, may have been a date to be feared by the superstitious, but it's been a great day for conservation on Phillip Island! This afternoon, at Newhaven Yacht Club, Greg Hunt, MLA, officially 'launched' the latest Green Corps, and Cr Loretta Leslie launched the latest weed book, *Common Weeds of Bass Coast*. This new book is the child of *Weeds of Bass Coast* published in 2000, and the grandchild of our very own *Atlas of Environmental Weeds of Phillip Island* published in 1993.

I well remember the editorial committee arguing about which weeds should be included in the 1993 publication - we could afford only 14 colour photographs! *Weeds of Bass Coast* extended the total to 24, and the latest book has over 70. Please use the new book, show it to your neighbours, and, if you need new copies, they are available at the Customer Service Centre in Cowes.

On another positive note, the Smiths-Beachcomber Association has published a useful leaflet listing plants for coastal areas. All the plants listed are available from the Barb Martin Bush Bank.

Last Monday all the environment groups combined for an *Environment Expo* on the foreshore at San Remo - interesting displays, weather that was 'just right', a pleasing flow of people, and an amazing assortment of well behaved dogs.

A fortnight ago, a combined Foreshore Committees meeting was held at Kilcunda. We were taken on a tour of the Newhaven Coast Action project, saw the pelicans being fed at San Remo (and learned about the associated car parking problems), visited both ends of the proposed Griffiths Point to Punch Bowl Road walking tract, and found out about the amazing work being done at Kilcunda and the mouth of the Powlett. After lunch at the Kilcunda Hall, we had a positive discussion about foreshore problems and possible solutions.

I hope that you will be able to come to the General Meeting on Saturday July 5<sup>th</sup>. We are beset with various subdivision proposals - some good, some bad, and two very big ones between Settlement Road and Ventnor Road. We will also be able to learn from the guest speaker, Chris Smyth. Chris is from the Victorian National Parks Association and is doing a great job as Campaign Officer for the Point Nepean campaign.

The following day we will have a Working Bee at Red Rocks,

and we should be able to do some more planting, so BYO tools, energy and lunch.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Hancock, President

P.S. If you haven't been to Ventnor recently, go and see the 'Burke's Back Yard' plantings - lots of successes.

P.P.S. Happy sailing to Sandy Shively and Tim Patkin who are off to the Whitsundays!

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### **35 YEARS ON - BUT WHERE ARE THE MEMBERS?**

PICS was formed in 1968 and, as you all know, has remained extremely active and effective since. In order to achieve what we have, we have needed strong committees and supportive members. However, so far this year we have only had 72 membership renewals for a total of \$1400, plus an extra \$520 donations. We are spending money every month for normal operations, and the newsletter (our largest operating expense) gets bigger and bigger! Any extras such as VCAT hearing expenses put great pressure on our funds.

PICS would therefore benefit greatly from two things:

1. For members to pay their subscriptions on time, and
2. For a PICS member to take on the role of 'membership officer', to do such jobs as maintain the membership list, print labels, and conduct membership drives. These essential tasks are currently the job of the Treasurer, which is hardly fair or appropriate.

If your subscription remains unpaid for this year, please renew as soon as possible. Membership fees are: Single \$15; Family \$25; Concession \$10; Supporting \$30+

Please mail cheque made out to 'Phillip Island Conservation Society' to PO Box 548, COWES, 3922.

If you would like to help PICS by becoming Membership Officer, please contact Margaret Hancock on Ph 5952 2557, or email our Treasurer Gillian Collins on [gicron@waterfront.net.au](mailto:gicron@waterfront.net.au)

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### **EMAILED NEWSLETTER?**

If you would prefer your PICS quarterly newsletter to be emailed to you rather than posted as paper copy, could you please let newsletter editor Christine Grayden know. We will

start emailing as of the Spring newsletter if you would like this method of receipt. Christine can be contacted at [cgrayden@waterfront.net.au](mailto:cgrayden@waterfront.net.au)

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## 'BETSY BIOSPHERE' A HIT!

'Betsy Biosphere' made her debut at the Queen's Birthday Environmental Expo at San Remo. Created by Gillian Collins of PICS, Betsy contained the answers to a trivia quiz about the human body that attracted 25 enthusiastic entrants. Councillor Loretta Leslie of Bass Coast Shire Council assisted with the first UNESCO Biosphere Eastern Round Table effort to bring the Biosphere designation to the attention of the public, and provide a \$25 gift certificate for indigenous plants to the winner of a draw of all of Betsy's entrants.

The quiz asked such questions as: "How many miles of nerves are there in the human body?" And "Which muscle in the human body is the strongest?" Parents of the mostly young participants were enthusiastic in their efforts to assist with the quiz, and finding the correct answer under a number on Betsy's body proved to be half the fun of entering!

Young Cameron Attard of Melbourne was the winner of the indigenous plants gift voucher. Bass Coast Shire and the Phillip Island Nature Park were the sponsors of the Expo - and, by the way, '47' and 'the tongue' are the answers to the questions!

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## SEAL ROCKS VICTORIA BUILDING AT POINT GRANT

As we go to press, the news is that there is NO NEWS about the future of the building.

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## SHOPPING BAGS SAVE THE ENVIRONMENT

The Phillip Island Red Cross is busy manufacturing fabric shopping bags compatible with supermarket bag dispensing/packing set-ups. Of course they are washable, strong and fold up into small units for your handbag. They cost \$5 (all proceeds go to Red Cross work) and are made from fabric donated by members and local fabric/craft shop *Cotton Onto Craft*. The bags are available from IGA Everyday ('Mini-Mart') and Angel's Health Foods. PICS is very impressed with the Red Cross initiative and hard work, and has awarded the local Red Cross a **Conservation Award** 'In recognition of designing and sewing reusable carry/shopping bags to reduce the use of plastic bags'.

The larger IGA supermarket has recently been sold to the

Coles chain, and it is to be hoped they continue the practice there of providing cardboard cartons to customers to stack their goods into, and for delivering orders. (I get a banana box and automatically take it with me on each shopping expedition to the supermarket. These boxes last a year of such use before needing to be recycled. I was told 2 years ago (i.e. *before* the expansion) that plastic bags cost the supermarket around \$80,000 per year! C.G.)

(Based on an article in the *Phillip Island and San Remo Advertiser*)

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## **PICS SEASONAL WALK: VENTNOR KOALA RESERVE**

Have you often driven past the Ventnor Koala Reserve and wondered about its existence? I have, and the autumn seasonal walk through the Reserve seemed an ideal opportunity to satisfy this curiosity. Koala kindred spirit Patsy Hunt led the walk, and in her usual organized fashion, brought along some interesting historical information in the form of copies of the 1969-81 Phillip Island Koala Reserve Committee of Management AGM Minutes.

This Committee oversaw the management of the Reserve for 43 years and the land area they looked after included 254 hectares of Crown Land, including six reserves. This large area included Five Ways, CA 15 (Rowell's Swamp), Rhyll Swamp, Oswin Roberts Reserve, Dave Forrest Reserve, and the Ventnor Koala Reserve. These land parcels were acquired through government reservation, purchase, and donation (including a donation of \$345 from PICS in 1969/70).

The stated aims of the Committee of Management were to protect and maintain the land as habitat for koalas, bird populations, and for tourism. The Committee employed Fred Pickersgill as its first Ranger, and he served in this capacity for 15 years. He was followed by Ken Pound, Jack Oswin, and finally Alan Cleeland became a full-time Ranger in 1973. Activities included fire protection, weed control, plantings and in 1974-75 the dams were built. Over the years many community groups were involved with the Reserve, including Young Farmers, local Scout Troops, and Scotch College camp. This would account for the inclusion of pines as a windbreak, and various native but non-indigenous plantings.

In 1981 the Minister for Conservation advised the Committee that it would follow the Land Conservation Council recommendation that the state government take control of the land, and the Committee was disbanded. Many of the names of Committee members can be recognized as community-spirited citizens from Phillip Island's history; this was another area where they gave a great deal of their time and energy. In

this case, to the efficient management of the Koala Reserves on Phillip Island.

After our historic introduction to the Ventnor Koala Reserve, we headed out to inspect the dam area, which was quite large but the water level was, as expected, low. Walking was not difficult through the treed areas, and we met up with a track which led us to the northern fence. There is an infestation of Bridal Creeper which will need to be attended to before it spreads further. Patsy has since alerted Ashley Reed, the Ranger in charge of the Reserve, about this problem. It is on the Phillip Island Nature Park extensive list of weed eradication 'jobs to do'.

Another highlight of the walk was that we were accompanied by Karen Marsh, a PhD Botany student from the Australian National University. She has been working on the Island for three months, studying koala eating habits. She was trying to determine which trees' leaves they like to eat, which they prefer determined by the time of the year, and why they choose one tree over another, even of the same species. The hypothesis is that the koalas can detect the levels of toxins in leaves, probably through their sense of smell. We were all pleased to see a koala in a tree along the track. It was the first that Karen had seen in that reserve. We also saw a rather shy swamp wallaby. Karen, who had met Patsy on her reconnaissance walk the day before, was a great asset to have along for tree identification. She will be returning to the Island to continue her field study later in the year.

We continued walking along the perimeter of the Reserve and Penny Manning began writing a bird list, which accompanies this article. The Reserve is not open to the public and we had to obtain special permission for our walk from the Nature Park. WESBOC (Westernport Bird Observers Club) conducts occasional bird counts in the reserve so if you would like their bird list for the area, please contact Bessie Tyers (Ph 5956 9401) or Sophie Madigan (Ph 5956 9582). For more historical information, contact Patsy Hunt (Ph 5952 2407). Thanks to Patsy for organizing the outing.

### **Bird List for Ventnor Koala Reserve, 17.5.03**

|                           |                        |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| White-plumed Honeyeater   | White-eared Honeyeater |
| New Holland Honeyeater    | Brown Thornbill        |
| Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike | Welcome Swallow        |
| Red Wattlebird            | Blue Wren              |
| White-faced Heron         | Willy Wagtail          |
| Grey Fantail              | Eastern Rosella        |
|                           |                        |

|                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Blackbird                         |  |
| Mammals: koala, swamp wallaby     |  |
| <b>Subsequent visit – 24.5.03</b> |  |
| Yellow-faced Honeyeater           |  |
| Koala                             |  |

From Sandy Shively

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## HOODED PLOVER UPDATE



Phillip Island Nature Park was host to the combined meeting of the Mornington Peninsula *Friends of the Hooded Plover*, Inverloch's *Hoodie-watchers* and Phillip Island's *Hooded Plover Watch*. This was the first time volunteers for these three important breeding areas have got together to swap information and ideas. Thirty-eight volunteers attended.

The day started with an inspection of the Woolamai breeding area, where a pair of Hoodies had two 17-day-old chicks, viewable through telescopes. To highlight the relevance of the meeting, one of the adult birds had been banded as a juvenile on 18.3.98 at Rye Back Beach on the Mornington Peninsula. The group then moved to the Nobbies to view seals, Crested Terns and Sooty Oystercatchers, followed by a talk on penguin research at the Penguin Parade. Each 'Hoodie watch' group then gave a report on their area.

There is a great deal of statistical information about Hooded Plovers in these areas. If you are interested, you can contact Margaret Hancock for a mailed/faxed printed copy (Ph: 5952 2557). In brief summary, this Phillip Island season of 26 nests, 58 eggs were laid, 22 chicks hatched and 6 fledged, with more success for the western part of the island than the east. Volunteers spent 234 hours protecting nests and chicks

between 31.12.02 and 6.4.03, with other individuals contributing more. Rangers have been active in controlling sea spurge, foxes and cats and erecting temporary beach closures and patrols. Dogs have been less of a problem though there were increasing numbers towards the end of the season. Fox prints were often associated with losses. Ravens, ibis, gull and magpie were also suspected on a number of occasions.

Some of the volunteers have also been able to help out with island-wide counts four times per year since April 2001, and we now have enough people with telescopes to record most of the colour band combinations to add greatly to our knowledge on movement, survival and breeding biology. With record data available from 1992, we can say there has been an increase of 60% in hatching success and of 120% in the number of fledges. This is still below the sustainable reproduction level @ 0.7 per clutch (penguins @ 1 fledged per clutch). Whilst dogs are now responsible for 4% of losses (down from 20% in 1992-97), foxes, cats and natural predators are suspected, and improved breeding success on Phillip Island is certainly dependant on the ultimate elimination of foxes here.

From: *Hooded Plover Volunteers End of Season Meeting Notes, 27.3.03.*

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## **YOUR PICS COMMITTEE**

The PICS Committee, elected at the last AGM, meets once a month to discuss issues of immediate concern to conservation on Phillip Island. These meetings are very informative and challenging. Members are welcome to attend at 8 pm on the first Friday of each month in either the Heritage Centre or Cultural Centre, Cowes.

### **The elected committee for 2003 is:**

|                              |                                                                                  |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>President</b>             | Margaret Hancock (Ph/Fax 5952-2557)                                              |
| <b>Senior Vice President</b> | Rose Thomas                                                                      |
| <b>Secretary</b>             | Margaret Johnson                                                                 |
| <b>Minutes Secretary</b>     | Bruce Howe                                                                       |
| <b>Treasurer</b>             | Gillian Collins (Ph 5956 8840)                                                   |
| <b>Other Members</b>         | Anne Davie, Penny Manning, Greg Johnson, John Jansson, Julie Box, Pauline Taylor |

### Other PICS Responsibilities:

|                                            |                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Newsletter</b>                          | Christine Grayden/John Eddy (Ph 5956 8501; Fax 5956 8314; <a href="mailto:cgrayden@waterfront.net.au">cgrayden@waterfront.net.au</a> ) |
| <b>Meeting notices and publicity</b>       | Rose Thomas                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Ventnor Public Land Committee</b>       | Gillian Collins                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Red Rocks Coast Action Project</b>      | Gillian Collins                                                                                                                        |
| <b>South Coast Walking Track</b>           | Penny Manning                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Bike Paths</b>                          | Penny Manning                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Friends of Churchill Island Liaison</b> | Julie Box                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Barb Martin Bushbank Liaison</b>        | Anne Davie                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Landcare Liaison</b>                    | Morag Mackay                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Landcare Salinity Committee</b>         | John Jansson                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Website Manager</b>                     | Diane Baird ( <a href="mailto:dianeбайд@yahoo.com">dianeбайд@yahoo.com</a> )                                                           |
| <b>Grant Investigation</b>                 | Tim Patkin                                                                                                                             |

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## And also

Thank you to our newsletter sponsor **Kevron Plastics** (Tel 03 9387 9811), Australia's Leading Manufacturer of Plastic

## Identification Products.

The hard copy of our newsletter contains some items that are not included in the online version. The PICS newsletter is available at the Phillip Island Library.

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