



# Wombat Forestcare

## Festival of Biodiversity 21 May 2011

What a fantastic event this was. Trentham was already buzzing with activities for their annual Spudfest celebration. The main street was blocked off and there was also a farmers market with many produce stalls. Best of all the weather was kind to us, sunny and mild which meant people were strolling along Main Street and happy to stop in on their way past.

Wombat Forestcare had hired the whole of the Trentham Community Centre and members spent the best part of Friday setting up. Although the official opening was 10am on Saturday, visitors were coming in from 9.30 while invited stall holders bustled to finish setting up. We were so fortunate to have the event opened by Councillor Sebastian Klein from the Hepburn Shire which was attended by 32 people. Wombat Forestcare member Gayle Osborne's



introduction explained the importance of biodiversity and that Wombat Forestcare's mission was to raise the importance of biodiversity in this area. She said that "some species were more susceptible to land clearing and loss of habitat than others such as the koala and greater glider which relied solely on eucalyptus leaves to survive." The threat to species from habitat loss is a world wide problem. The Wombat Forest has "28 flora species and 17 fauna species that are listed as threatened and so the health and protection of the Wombat Forest is of particular importance."

Councillor Klein said the community was "lucky to have such a rich forest in this area and also lucky to have organisations and groups like Wombat Forestcare who are interested in documenting and preserving those forests as much as possible." He said it was a challenging time for the planet and noted that in Australia there is an awareness of what we've lost. That we are lucky to still have a great and rich store of biodiversity to protect. "It's beautiful to see the literacy around ecology and biodiversity" he said and that "there was a need to teach people to love the world we live in, something which is close to the heart of Wombat Forestcare's modus operandi."



Opening talk - Cr. Sebastian Klein and Gayle Osborne

The centre proved a wonderful setting for the festival. Outside was a Forestcare ute with a huge biodiversity sign on it. The centre's yellow banners were fluttering in the breeze and signs on the door proclaimed the centre open. The entry was strewn with tree fern fronds and visitors were greeted by the sounds of frog and bird calls coming from a Forestcare audio visual display with images of 'Fungi of the Wombat'. There were several comments about how relaxing these sounds were and that these tiny voices proved a great reminder of why everyone was there.

One visitor commented "The displays were stunning. I met some friend's down the street and said 'You must go to the Centre and see what they're doing'."

In the foyer were displays of 'Biodiversity – I can do that' and activity 'What type of leaf is that?'. Next to this was the children's activity table filled with coloured pencils, activity sheets and puzzles. While children went straight to the activity table, adults tended to meander over to the displays before happening upon the wonderful water bug activity at the end of the foyer. This was kindly loaned to our group by the NCCMA water watch program. Two large tables had trays of water samples laid out on them with special plastic viewers and magnifiers. People could scoop up water samples and look at the bug specimens in them.



Biodiversity – I can do that

There was much laughter and squeals of delight coming from this event all day and it was particularly fascinating to children who would come in, have a look at the bugs then rush off only to return a short time later with a group of friends. At one stage while our water bug expert Miriam took a short lunch break water was spilt on the plastic floor covering. When she returned she was told about the accident and asked if there was any damage. The temporary care taker shook her head. "No, the carpet is fine."

Miriam bent down to examine the floor. "Not the carpet" she said, "I meant the bugs! Were any hurt?"



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Next to the water bug display was the group room where mini talks were held every hour during the day. Each talk attracted a small but receptive audience and lasted approximately 15 minutes except the Land for Wildlife talk which went for 45 minutes due to all the questions Elspeth was peppered with.

## The day unfolds

Devan's talk about the Adopt a Tree program for the Trentham Community Garden was really interesting. Participants loved this project and found his low key delivery style very endearing.

Juliet's presentation on biodiversity was engaging and uplifting and participants came away with many ideas on how they could help biodiversity.

Jason's talk about the Hepburn Wildlife Shelter was full of details about the shelter's services and hopefully they will get some volunteers from those who attended.



Elspeth- Land for Wildlife talk



Wombat Forestcare display boards

As visitors moved further in they were delighted to discover the big hall which was jam packed with stalls. The Wombat Forestcare stall was filled with 'Make the Wombat a State Park' brochures and membership forms. Our night vision camera display was popular with people calling it 'mesmerising' and 'like viewing a whole new world'. The Parks Victoria display had very popular 'Ranger Roo' handouts for children as well as Park brochures. Trust for Nature brochures proved popular and the Solar Cities stall had information about alternative energy and offered home owners free energy assessments. The Land for Wildlife stall was overflowing with information on frogs and planting native gardens. Many people asked for advice and some volunteered for the new owl survey.

At the adjacent Hepburn Wildlife Shelter stall people gave generously, bought cards and stickers and asked lots of questions about how to help wildlife. The Seeding Victoria stall had an extensive display of various seeds in cases and gained expressions of interest from prospective volunteers. The Wilderness Society stall had beautiful T-shirts, written materials and was able to gather over 40 signatures for their Reflex petition.

The Trentham Landcare stall had books and literature on the trees of Trentham and local species as well as a sub display for Weed Free Trentham. The middle of the hall held wonderful display boards crammed with information, colour, facts and text. Many of these were made just for our festival. People strolled along them reading the material and peering closely at the pictures. They proved great conversation starters with people gathering around a display and then discussing it with stall holders.

Typical comments "Wow!" and "I love these, aren't they great!"



Waterwatch display

There was a constant stream of visitors the whole day, many from surrounding districts and Melbourne. Attendance was put at around 200. This was a comfortable number for the facility.

Several stall holders mentioned that the intimate, unrushed atmosphere allowed them to interact with visitors, making contacts within the community and with people either new to the area or thinking of re-locating to this area. This, it was noted, was a unique opportunity. Stall holders also said that it was great to just all get together in such a festive atmosphere and that opportunities such as this were rare.

The question organisers were most asked was 'are you going to do it again next year?'



Children's activities



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## Comments from the stall holders

*"I enjoyed the enthusiasm of the organisational group. It's so heartening to have positive work for the good of our environment. It's great to make connections with local authorities in such an intimate space."* Geraldine Ryan (Wilderness Society)

*"A real delight to meet all the friendly and environmentally conscious organisations. We're in safe hands but we need more hands."* Jason Beks (Hepburn Wildlife Shelter)

*"This was a really good opportunity to meet local people interested in wildlife. We've had a number of owl records and we'll follow up on them later on. We've had some interesting discussions with prospective Land for Wildlife property holders. There was a good range of other stall holders."* Elspeth Swan (Land for Wildlife)

*"Lots of new people to Trentham or looking for land. Good opportunity to meet new owners and people who are buying land and for them to meet environmental groups. Night vision footage was a good draw card."* Barry Elliot (Trentham Landcare)

*"Worthwhile exposure for Seeding Victoria. It was good to be co-operating with other organisations. Might be a couple of new people who will volunteer."* David Millsom (Seeding Victoria)



Hepburn Wildlife Shelter stall



Land for Wildlife stall



Seeding Victoria display



Trentham Landcare stall



The Wilderness Society stall



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## Thanks

A huge thank you to all the stall holders who participated and made our festival come alive. DSE Land for Wildlife, Trust for Nature, Solar Cities, Hepburn Wildlife Shelter, the Wilderness Society, Tretham Landcare, Weed Free Trentham and Seeding Victoria.

Thank you to our mini talk speakers Elspeth Swan, Land for Wildlife - 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (happy Anniversary LFW!), Jason Beks, Hepburn Wildlife Shelter – Wombat survey, Devan, Trentham Community Garden – Adopt a Tree Program and Juliet, Wombat Forestcare – Biodiversity I can do that.

Our heartfelt thanks to the members of Wombat Forestcare who gave so generously of their time and without whom this festival would not have happened, in particular Gayle, Angela, Judy, Juliet, Miles, Miriam, Nerrida, Dave, Alison, Ron and Linda. Thank you to organisations that gave us materials or assistance that made this event such a success: Trentham Neighbourhood Community Centre, North Central Catchment Management Authority Water Watch, Parks Victoria, Hepburn Shire.

Finally thank you to all the people and Wombat Forestcare members who turned up on the day to make this a fantastic Festival of Biodiversity.



Solar Cities stall

